

**THE SIXTH SENSE :  
SYNAESTHESIA AND BRITISH AESTHETICISM 1860-1900**

**Margaux Lynn Rosa Poueymirou**

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THE SIXTH SENSE:  
SYNAESTHESIA AND BRITISH AESTHETICISM 1860-1900

Margaux Lynn Rosa Poueymirou

A thesis presented for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of St. Andrews  
School of English

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I, Margaux Lynn Rosa Poueymirou hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 85,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 2004 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in July, 2005; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2005 and 2009.

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## ABSTRACT

“The Sixth Sense: Synaesthesia and British Aestheticism 1860-1900” is an interdisciplinary examination of the emergence of synaesthesia conceptually and rhetorically within the ‘art for art’s sake’ movement in mid-to-late Victorian Britain.

Chapter One investigates Swinburne’s focal role as both theorist and literary spokesman for the nascent British Aesthetic movement. I argue that Swinburne was the first to practice what Pater meant by ‘aesthetic criticism’ and that synaesthesia played a decisive role in ‘Aestheticising’ critical discourse.

Chapter Two examines Whistler’s varied motivations for using synaesthetic metaphor, the way that synaesthesia informed his identity as an aesthete, and the way that critical reactions to his work played a formative role in linking synaesthesia with Aestheticism in the popular imagination of Victorian England.

Chapter Three explores Pater’s methods and style as an ‘aesthetic critic.’ Even more than Swinburne, Pater blurred the distinction between criticism and creation. I use ‘synaesthesia’ to contextualise Pater’s theory of “Anders-streben” and to further contribute to our understanding of his infamous musical paradigm as a linguistic ideal, which governed his own approach to critical language.

Chapter Four considers Wilde’s decadent redevelopment of synaesthetic metaphor. I use ‘synaesthesia’ to locate Wilde’s style and theory of style within the context of decadence; or, to put it another way, to locate decadence within the context of Wilde.

Each chapter examines the highly nuanced claim that art should exist for its own sake and the ways in which artists in the mid-to-late Victorian period attempted to realise this desire on theoretical and rhetorical levels.

For M[u]m.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite this unwavering exuberance, I take full responsibility for any and all mistakes.

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## Introduction.

### THE SIXTH SENSE

#### SYNAESTHESIA AND BRITISH AESTHETICISM 1860-1900

The term ‘synaesthesia’ derives from the Greek prefix, ‘syn’: ‘joint,’ ‘together’, and the stem, ‘aesthesia’: to feel and perceive, from which ‘aesthetic’ and ‘aesthete’ are also derived. This intimate etymological relationship—‘synaesthesia’ *encloses* ‘aesthetic’—could be interpreted as a metaphor for synaesthesia’s role within Aestheticism or the ‘art for art’s sake’ movement in mid-to-late Victorian Britain.<sup>1</sup> For this, too, was an intimate, dynamic and ‘enclosed’ relationship. This thesis examines the role and representation of synaesthesia in the work and critical reception of four individuals who were identified as representatives of the Aesthetic movement. However, Algernon Charles Swinburne, James McNeill Whistler, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde—Britain’s principal aesthetes, and the principal figures of this study—never likely heard of the term ‘synaesthesia.’ This thesis, on the other hand, grants ‘synaesthesia’ a seminal role in their aesthetic theories and practices. Before examining the terms ‘Aestheticism’ and ‘art for art’ more fully, therefore, the use of ‘synaesthesia’ in this thesis will be explained.<sup>2</sup>

Just as ‘synaesthesia’ is itself a microcosm of metaphor, the word is employed metaphorically throughout this thesis when used in relation to art.<sup>3</sup> In this text,

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<sup>1</sup> See Kevin Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 21. It is important to note the term’s different spellings: in Britain, ‘synaesthesia’ (which I have adopted), and in America, ‘synesthesia.’

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Freedman’s (among others) persuasive argument against the ‘reductive’ substitution of these terms. Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence E. Marks, *The Unity of the Senses: Interrelations among the Modalities* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 222. Jules Millet is credited with being the first to use ‘synaesthesia’ in a literary or artistic sense in his 1892 thesis *L’Audition Colorée*, Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (eds.), *The New Princeton*

‘synaesthesia’ refers to *intersensory* aesthetic theories and practices that first emerged in Britain in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, predominantly within the works of individuals associated with Aestheticism and later decadence.<sup>4</sup> These theories and practices include Swinburne’s ideal of aesthetic excellence as forged through “[interfusions] of art with art”, and Pater’s theory of “*Anders-streben*.”<sup>5</sup> Both concepts posited that the greatest artworks—or those with a “special hold”—evoked the sensorial qualities or virtues of a rival medium.<sup>6</sup> The synergistic notion of evocation (*inter-sensory*) as opposed to combination (*multi-sensory*) is vitally important here. Swinburne and Pater persistently cautioned against combining the arts: both discouraged sculpture that was painted on and yet applauded sculpture that ‘had’ colour in it, as well as ‘music’ and ‘perfume.’ Therefore, I do not use the term ‘synaesthesia’ in relation to early multimedia experiments and Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* (as many have), nor in relation to *ekphrasis*, which was common during the period, although I recognise the close relationship of each.<sup>7</sup>

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*Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993), 1259-60. See also J.A. Cuddon (ed.), *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 889.

<sup>4</sup> Ideas prefiguring synaesthesia’s unique nineteenth-century emergence include: theories concerned with correlations between the arts; examinations of the ‘innate’ analogous relationships between the senses; efforts to systemise and classify the arts; and innovations in intersensory art. It would be impossible to sketch even a brief historical survey here. See, instead: Richard Cytowic, *The Man Who Tasted Shapes*; John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993); Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, 1-17; Erika von Erhardt-Siebold, “Harmony of the Senses in English, German, and French Romanticism”, *PMLA* 47:2 (1932), 577-92; and Glenn O’Malley, “Literary Synaesthesia”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 156:4 (1957), 391-411.

<sup>5</sup> A.C. Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon: Notes on his ‘Vision of Love’ and other studies”, *The Dark Blue* vol. 1 (July 1871), 569. Pater’s formulated his theory of ‘*Anders-streben*’ in his pivotal essay “The School of Giorgione” (1877), which I explore in detail in my chapter on the writer.

<sup>6</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 569.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* is frequently discussed as an example—indeed, a prime example—of nineteenth-century innovations in synaesthetic art by contemporary critics of the period. While the *Gesamtkunstwerk* aimed to stimulate a polysensory aesthetic experience, there is an important difference between combining the arts into a single, all-encompassing work, versus using one aesthetic medium in such a way that it acquires or generates the additional, particular effects of another form. And yet, clearly Wagner’s formative influence at the end of the nineteenth century contributed to the popularity of intersensory aesthetic approaches and theories. As Nordau himself asserted: “We have seen that the French

This thesis examines the emergence and popularisation of synaesthesia in relation to the arts when the term came into being during the Victorian *fin de siècle*; in this period, it gathered psychological, linguistic and aesthetic weight. The term never appeared in any edition of Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), still regarded as authoritative prior to the publication of the first volume of the *OED* in 1884; the *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* (1863) boasts the adjective "synaesthétique", defined there as a "terme de physiologie", but it was not until the *Century Dictionary* of 1891, published in six volumes in America, that 'synaesthesia' properly entered the English language.<sup>8</sup> Synaesthesia's salient presence in psychological studies and scientific symposiums during the *fin de siècle* likely contributed to its official acknowledgement by English-language lexicographers. If the term most readily connoted a psychological condition within which an individual experiences involuntary sense perceptions—colour is heard, sound is seen, taste is experienced as touch—synaesthesia's relationship to the arts and to language was also frequently debated within scientific studies of the condition during the period. This occurred, in part, because the experience of involuntary sense perceptions had not yet acquired a definitive physiological explanation, and because synaesthetic manifestations in the arts—as this dissertation proposes—were pervasive and acknowledged

Appearing in studies ranging from criminology, sexology, psychology and physiology, synaesthesia was among the most researched psychological conditions of the

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Symbolists, with their colour-hearing, wished to degrade man to the indifferentiated sense-perceptions of the pholas or oyster. Wagner's fusion of the arts is a pendant to this notion. His *Art-Work of the Future* is the artwork of times long past. What he takes for evolution is retrogression, and a return to a primeval human, nay, to a pre-human stage", *Degeneration*, 176. Freedman's explores *ekphrasis* in relation to "temporal flux" and "timeless moments" in *Professions of Taste*, 19-24.

<sup>8</sup>Prior to this, terms relating to 'synaesthesia' including *chromesthésia*, *pseudochromesthésia* and *hyperchromesthésia*, surfaced in American and European medical journals and were then replaced with that of 'colour hearing' in 1881, after a brief report on the topic appeared in the *London Medical Record*.

period.<sup>9</sup> The number of articles published on the topic surged from none in 1830 and seventeen in 1870 to almost a hundred and twenty in 1880 and a hundred and thirty-five in 1890, the same year a committee of prominent scientists met in London for the International Congress of Physiological Psychology to advance understanding of the condition and standardize its terminology.<sup>10</sup> In 1897, Havelock Ellis and J.A. Symonds used “colour-hearing” (the most common synaesthetic experience) in *Sexual Inversion* as a means of describing homosexuality, a term their text (and Wilde’s trials of 1895) helped popularize. As Ellis and Symonds argued in their chapter, “The Theory of Sexual Inversion”:

Or we may compare inversion to such a phenomenon as colour-hearing in which there is not so much a defect, as an abnormality of nervous tracks producing new and involuntary combinations. Just as the colour-hearer instinctively associates colours with sounds, like the young Japanese lady who remarked when listening to singing, ‘that boy’s voice is red!’ so the invert has sexual sensations brought into relationship with objects that are normally without sexual appeal. And inversion, like colour-hearing, is found more commonly in young subjects, tending to become less marked, or to die out, after puberty. Colour-hearing, while an abnormal phenomenon, it must be added, cannot be called a diseased condition, and it is probably much less frequently associated with other abnormal or degenerative stigmata than is inversion. There is often a congenital element, shown by the tendency to hereditary transmission, while the associations are developed in very early life, and are too regular to be the simple result of suggestions.<sup>11</sup>

For Ellis and Symonds, individuals who preferred or desired their own sex were like “colour-hearers” who confused sound with visual perception: in essence, equivalences premised on aberrant tendencies. Unlike Max Nordau, however, who linked synaesthesia

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<sup>9</sup> Simon Baron-Cohen and John Harrison (eds.), *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997); Cretien Van Campen, “Artistic and Psychological Experiments with Synesthesia”, *Leonardo*, 32:1 (1999), 9-14. Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence E. Marks, “On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions”, *Psychological Bulletin* 82:3 (1975), 303-31.

<sup>11</sup> Their footnote to this quotation includes the actual term ‘synaesthesia’, reflecting their familiarity with the most recent studies of the condition. Havelock Ellis and J.A. Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (London, 1897), 134-5. Ellis continued to explore colour-hearing in later works including, *The World of Dreams* (1916) and *Man and Woman: A Study of Secondary and Tertiary Sexual Characteristics* (1929).

with “degenerate” brain activity in *Degeneration* (1892; English translation 1895), his broad and formative survey of nineteenth-century European art and culture and of the interrelated neurological disorders he considered peculiar to the period, they grouped synaesthetes and inverts with geniuses, encouraging sympathy and understanding for both conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Although synaesthesia was certainly included in studies of mental and physical abnormalities—Eugene Talbot, for instance, in his influential text, *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results* (1898), listed synaesthesia or “hyperaesthesia” alongside deafness, congenital blindness and anaesthesia within a chapter entitled ‘Idiot Brains’<sup>13</sup>—the majority pointed to the fact that synaesthetes were highly accomplished individuals. In Francis Galton’s *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1880), the first, most robust account of the condition in the English language, he argued that synaesthesia was a “gift”, referred to synaesthetes as “seers”, and observed that they usually married talented and wealthy individuals.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, in *Hallucinations and Perceptions: A Study of Fallacies of Perception* (1897), Edmund Parish suggested that synaesthesia or “sound-seeing” reflected a “highly complex subconscious [with] processes capable of achieving results impossible to the normal consciousness.”<sup>15</sup>

As previously stated, scientific studies of the condition also frequently examined synaesthesia’s relationship with the arts, the imagination and creativity more generally. In

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<sup>12</sup> Ellis and Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 134-6. Dann’s examination of *Sexual Inversion* is brief and problematic: he argues that Ellis and Symonds took a more negative approach to ‘colour-hearing’ than Nordau, which is not the case. Cf. Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Rosenberg (ed.), *The History of Hereditarian Thought* (New York: Garland Press, 1984), 16. *Degeneration: Its Causes, Signs and Effects* comprised Havelock Ellis’s *Contemporary Science Series*, which also included *Sexual Inversion*. A link between colour-hearing and mental disorders was also explored in Theo Hyslop, *Mental Physiology* (London: J & A Churchill, 1895).

<sup>14</sup> Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 147-8.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Parish, *Hallucinations and Perception: A Study of Fallacies of Perception* (London: W. Scott Ltd., 1897), 227.

the Second International Congress of Experimental Psychology, which met in London in 1892 and included among the most distinguished British scientists of the period, a lecture on synaesthesia or ‘L’Audition Colorée et les phénomènes similaires’ cited German and French artists including E.T.A. Hoffmann, Goethe, Father Castel and Rimbaud whose works appeared to support the notion that synaesthesia was either a by-product of the imagination or, alternatively, that artists were more likely to have the condition: this unique perceptual ability potentially enhanced creative expression.<sup>16</sup> George Henry Lewes explored these possibilities in his popular study *Problems of Life and Mind* (1879). Devoting a subsection to the phenomenon of synaesthesia—referred to here as “double perception”—Lewes noted “intense psychological interest” within the scientific community. He also speculated on synaesthesia’s potential relationship to the arts, and to metaphor in particular: “In later years, [the patient] learning that painters spoke of the tones of colour, and musicians of the colour of tones (*klang-farben*), imagined that they also had the double sensation which he noticed in himself. But he learned on inquiry that this was not so; their terms were metaphorical.”<sup>17</sup> Synaesthetic metaphors within which lexemes are transferred from one sensorial modality to another (such as ‘sharp sounds’, ‘bitter cold’ and ‘loud colour’) are familiar components of speech and writing.<sup>18</sup> The familiarity of such metaphors is suggested by the fact that Aristotle explored this particular type of metaphoric transference in *De Anima*: “The distinctions between sharp and flat sounds remains inaudible. *Sharp and flat are here metaphors*, transferred from

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<sup>16</sup> International Congress of Experimental Psychology, 17.

<sup>17</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind* (London: Trübner & Co., 1879), 281.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Williams, “Synaesthetic Adjectives: A Possible Law of Semantic Change”, *Language* 51 (1976); Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 64-5; Sean Day, “Synaesthesia and Synaesthetic Metaphors”, *Psyche* 2:32 (1996).

their proper sphere, viz. that of touch [...].”<sup>19</sup> In the context of the aesthetic practices Nordau attacked, however, synaesthetic metaphors were too pervasive and idiosyncratic to be anything other than intensely self-conscious, declarative speech acts which, in his opinion, intentionally disrupted and undermined the natural development and workings of language—the building block of culture. By the *fin de siècle*, then, synaesthetic metaphors were beginning to be perceived as immoderate or artificial rather than as normative elements of speech and writing.

Nordau was unconvinced by clinical studies of the condition. He proposed that colour and sound associations most likely depended upon “very evanescent perceptions of early childhood.”<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Nordau still considered synaesthesia’s conceptual and rhetorical manifestations in the arts indicative of a weak, degenerate mind. As he argued, “[consciousness] in its deepest substrata, neglects the differentiation of phenomena by the various senses.”<sup>21</sup> It followed, then, that cultural and individual progress hinged on the ability to ‘differentiate’, a term central to evolutionary theory and readily threatened by the notion of an intersensory aesthetic. Artworks that conflated sensorial experiences or used one medium in such a way to mimic the effects of another aesthetic form were literally counter-progressive:

In any case, it is an evidence of diseased and debilitated brain-activity, if consciousness relinquishes the advantages of the differentiated perceptions of phenomena, and carelessly confounds the reports conveyed by the particular senses. It is a retrogression to the very beginning of organic development. It is a descent from the height of human perfection to the low level of the mollusk. To raise the combination, transposition and confusion of the perceptions of sound and sight to the rank of a principle

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<sup>19</sup> Italics mine. Julian Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 669; Aristotle also discusses perceptual metaphors on pages 665, 670-3.

<sup>20</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1896), 141.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

of art, to see futurity in this principle, is to designate as progress the return from the consciousness of man to that of the oyster.<sup>22</sup> Intersensory aesthetics, Nordau argues, neither honour nor advance *natural* differences between forms. Rather, by “[combining]”, “[transposing]” or “[confusing]” sense perceptions, synaesthetic art signified a movement away from differentiated complexity (“human perfection”) towards undifferentiated formlessness—“the mollusk”: an animal that “sees, hears, feels and smells...[through] his proboscis...[which is] at once eye, ear, nose, finger, etc...[in] the *higher* animals the protoplasm is *differentiated*.”<sup>23</sup>

Nordau’s polemic operated within a politically charged rhetorical style that drew explicitly from evolutionary theory: laws applicable to human development were transferred to the arts, which, as he asserted, “have not arisen accidentally; their differentiation is the consequence of organic necessity; once they have attained independence, they will never surrender it. They can degenerate, they can die out, but they can never again shrink back into the germ from which they have sprung.”<sup>24</sup> To fuse aesthetic forms and find futurity in this aesthetic approach was to relinquish what had arisen from “organic necessity”: aesthetic or formal independence. Nordau also criticised artists who used language in a way that emulated the effects and structure of music, thereby reiterating criticism persistently directed at Britain’s aesthetes and decadents:

Sound as a means of expressing mental operations, reaches its final perfection in cultivated, grammatically articulated language, inasmuch as it can then follow exactly the intellectual working of the brain, and make it objectively perceptible in all the minutest details. To bring the word, pregnant with thought, back to the emotional sound is to renounce all the results of organic development, and to degrade man, rejoicing in the power of speech, to the level of the whirring cricket or the croaking frog.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Italics mine. Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 138.

To use discourse as a strictly formal and sensorial medium was to deny and destabilise the notion of discourse as evolved. For it signaled the return of “articulated language” back to its primitive origins: “emotional sound.”<sup>26</sup>

Just as Nordau devoted pages to the perils of mixing aesthetic media and attempting to emulate the effects of one form through the means of an alternate medium, he included—within these same pages—the latest scientific studies of “colour-hearing”:

Still more cracked is the craze of a sub-section of the Symbolists, the ‘Instrumentalists,’ whose spokesman is Rene Ghil [sic]. They connect each sound with a definite feeling of colour, and demand that the word should not only awaken musical emotion, but at the same time operate aesthetically in producing colour-harmony. This mad idea has its origin in a much-quoted sonnet by Arthur Rimbaud, *Les Voyelles* (Vowels), of which the first line runs like this: ‘A black, e white, I red, u green, o blue’... [Wiseacres] were, of course, at once to the fore, and set up a quasi-scientific theory of ‘colour-hearing.’ Sounds are said to awaken sensations of colour in many persons. According to some, this was a gift of specially finely organized nervous natures; according to others, it was due to accidental abnormal connection between the optic and acoustic brain-centres by means of nerve filaments. This anatomical explanation is entirely arbitrary, and has not been substantiated by any facts. But ‘colour-hearing’ itself is by no means confirmed.<sup>27</sup>

The interdependence of aesthetic and scientific discourses—particularly pronounced at the close of the nineteenth century and within the burgeoning field of psychology—is clearly evident in Nordau’s examination of intersensory art. His allusion to Ghil’s “cracked” and “crazed” experimentations with synaesthesia and to the formative

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<sup>26</sup> Symonds also expressed unease with treating language, and art criticism in particular, as a strictly formal medium that sought to replicate or conjure visual experiences through words and syntactical structures. In his essay “In The Key of Blue” (1892) within which he disclosed his creative process for his synaesthetic poem of the same title (his discussion modelled after Poe’s influential analysis of ‘The Raven’), he asserted: “An artist in language must feel the mockery of word-painting, though he is often seduced to attempt effects which can be adequately rendered by the palette. Word-paintings are a kind of hybrid, and purists in art criticism not irrationally look askance at the mixed species.”<sup>26</sup> While not as emphatic as Nordau’s, Symonds’ objection to “word-painting” hinged on an analogy between language and evolutionary science. The terms “hybrid” and “mixed species”—inflected with political nuance and sexual anxiety that gestured towards the “undifferentiated” symbolism of the hermaphrodite—were used to convey what was wrong with synaesthetic expression. J. A. Symonds, *In The Key Of Blue: And Other Prose Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 139-40.

influence of Rimbaud occurs simultaneously with clinical accounts of the “quasi-scientific theory” of “colour-hearing.” Synaesthesia exemplified Nordau’s hypothesis that there existed a relationship between questionable art practices and degenerate sensibilities. Furthermore, that Nordau referred to “colour-hearing” in his analysis of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and linked intersensory art to degeneration, attests to synaesthesia’s topicality during the period as both an aesthetic and scientific phenomenon that encouraged and sustained interdisciplinary dialogue. *Degeneration* also confirms the central focus of this dissertation, namely, that the emergence of intersensory aesthetic theories and practices was intimately and radically linked to the theory of ‘art for art’s sake.’

In addition to using the term ‘synaesthesia’ in relation to Swinburne and Pater’s theories of aesthetic excellence, I also use ‘synaesthesia’ to frame and explore Swinburne’s own (and Pater’s and Wilde’s) “interfused” style as critics and writers. Indeed, I argue that synaesthetic metaphor played a vital role—conceptually and rhetorically—in relation to what Pater referred to as “aesthetic criticism.” His emphasis on *aesthetic* distinguished the genre from popular and scientific critical approaches, and qualified this distinction on etymological grounds. For the “aesthetic critic” was a ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’ participant who articulated his acute sensitivity to the forces and pleasurable sensations of art within an equally ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’ language.<sup>28</sup> Because I also argue that “aesthetic criticism” represents a significant aspect of what made the aesthetes somewhat of a movement in the first place, synaesthesia becomes central to our sense of their loose collectivity.

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<sup>28</sup> Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 2, 32 n.

Britain's leading aesthetes were notorious "aesthetic critics" (Whistler excluded) and notoriously critical of other forms of criticism (Whistler above all). Kate Flint suggests that common reactions to critics unwilling to take art as art "united, at least on one level, those who otherwise were implacably at odds."<sup>29</sup> To champion the notion that art was without social, moral and cultural obligations, and to do this by locating 'meaning' at the site of form (thereby qualifying 'meaning' as a subjective experience of formal properties) was intrinsically to threaten the genre—let alone the institution—of criticism. To critique is to evaluate, and to express these judgments within a discursive structure that aims to educate its readers: 'meaning' is thus both "extractable" and "narratable."<sup>30</sup> This posed an obvious conundrum to followers of 'art for art', which is one reason why critical discourse provides a particularly rich context for exploring Aestheticism. As the aesthetes granted primacy to formal properties whilst persistently emphasising the 'untranslatability' of form, critical discourse was futile unless the objectives of the medium were redefined—indeed, unless the very claim of 'objectivity' was removed.

Synaesthetic metaphor programmed nuance, arbitrariness and subjectivity, an almost endless possibility for interpretation, and both 'opacity' and 'opalescence' (precisely what Pound found problematic) into Aesthetic discourse.<sup>31</sup> For example, in Pater's essay "Two Early French Stories" in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1888), he uses synaesthesia to contrast the "lighter matter" of a poem ("tinged with humour") with instances of "an intenser [sic] sentiment", which he qualifies as "morsels

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<sup>29</sup> Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 169.

<sup>30</sup> Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2008). This notion of 'extractability' is drawn from Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> K.K. Ruthven, *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), 118-19.

of deeper colour” that must be “[gathered] up” to understand “the motive which really unites together the fragments of this little composition.”<sup>32</sup> Pater infuses his critique with the sensation of taste (“morsel”), which encompasses a visual perception (“colour”) that is spatial (“deeper”) and tactile (“gather up”). Consequently, he subverts the very presence of text: the act of reading is converted into ‘gathering’; textual experience appears to activate the whole body; and knowledge is definably sensuous. This rhetorical complexity shifts the reader’s attention from the subject of praise to the mode of praise itself.<sup>33</sup> Although, Pater’s critique is still evaluative, impressions eclipse judgment, authority derives from a particular kind of temperament, and critical language is ‘uncritical’ insofar as Pater’s assessments can be overturned or elaborated. As Freedman states, “Pater asserts without asserting, defines without defining. Definitions hover suggestively on the threshold of logical discourse.”<sup>34</sup> Within ‘aesthetic criticism’, art was no longer a container of meaning as much as an occasion for experience, the nature of which depended upon the spectator.

Synaesthetic metaphor ensured that different meanings could be taken up by different readers, thereby contributing to the subjectivity and indeterminacy that, most definitions agree, is central to Aestheticism. Freedman explores how the innate contradictoriness of Aestheticism—its resistance to definition and embrace of contraries—is vital to its meaning.<sup>35</sup> David Weir extends this analysis to decadence: “Ultimately, we shall see that the very elusiveness of the notion of decadence is

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<sup>32</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1888), 24. I will be using the third edition (1888) of *The Renaissance* throughout this thesis. For a justification of this edition, see p. 146, 1n.

<sup>33</sup> Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> See Freedman’s chapter “Aestheticism” in *Professions of Taste*, 1-71.

significant; that is, elusiveness signifies meaning.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to the temporal and conceptual difficulties with defining Aestheticism (and decadence), many have objected to the word ‘movement.’<sup>37</sup> As Pearson observed in his study of Wilde, “The so-called movement was in the air, never in committee.”<sup>38</sup> This sentiment was also expressed by Walter Hamilton in his pioneering, pseudo-historical study, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882).<sup>39</sup> Retaining the phrase and even the idea of an ‘Aesthetic movement’, however, is not without its utility.<sup>40</sup> While the aesthetes did not have a common signature and manifesto like the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne and Whistler, Pater and Wilde did have common interests in art and literature, a common intellectual inheritance and certainly, common grievances—both theirs, and the ones they provoked. Furthermore, each subscribed to the idea of ‘art for art’, albeit in different ways and for different reasons, and were widely identified as representatives of Aestheticism by their contemporaries and by recent critics.

Although my chronology adheres to a relatively conventional, phallo-centric trajectory, it is one that originated in the nineteenth century. However, as Talia Schaffer argues in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* (2000), this trajectory of Aestheticism was shaped by the fact that the first historians of Aesthetic culture were men who participated in the circle, their narrative of the movement including their own and their friends’

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<sup>36</sup> David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 10; See Weir’s chapter “The Definition of Decadence”, 1-21. On the ‘mutability’ of the term ‘decadence’, see Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford UP), 24-7.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Ruth Z. Temple, “Truth in Labelling: Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, Decadence, Fin de Siècle”, *English Language in Transition*, 17:4 (1974), 218-19.

<sup>38</sup> Hesketh Pearson, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), 38. Incidentally, Walter Hamilton also made this observation in his pioneering study, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 141.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1882), 141.

<sup>40</sup> Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, 4.

achievements; and this skewed image of Aestheticism was then perpetuated in subsequent scholarship.<sup>41</sup> One need only consider Ian Small's anthology, *The Aesthetes: A Sourcebook* (1979), which included poetry, prose, and Aesthetic and anti-Aesthetic criticism, and yet failed to acknowledge a host of women writers from 'Ouida' (Marie Louie de la Ramee) to 'Michael Field' (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper) to 'Vernon Lee' (Violet Page). The works of these and other female aesthetes were as definably and complicatedly 'Aesthetic' as their male peers, in both stylistic and conceptual terms. Indeed, for numerous reasons, Aestheticism proved to be a particularly rich space for the New Woman writer whose exploration of gender as a construct and performance rather than, simply, biological and anatomical potentially overlapped with Wilde's and others' gender ideas, even if motivated by a different reality.<sup>42</sup> And clearly, the addition of women's writing to the corpus of Aestheticist work has redefined and rejuvenated our sense of the movement's parameters on temporal and conceptual grounds.<sup>43</sup>

There are two significant reasons why this thesis, which pursues a similar trajectory as Small's, is nonetheless *not* guilty of perpetuating an outdated, inaccurate and exclusionary-male conception of Aestheticism. In the first instance, the absence of women writers is largely a result of the genre that occupies this thesis, namely, critical discourse, which ranges from art journalism to art and literary criticism. By and large, Britain's female aesthetes were novelists and poets with important exceptions, most notably, Pater's only acknowledged protégé Vernon Lee, who published essay-collections of art and literary criticism during the *fin de siècle* including *Studies of the*

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<sup>41</sup> Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (eds.), *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 1-22.

*Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880) and *Belcaro, Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (1883); and Alice Meynell, Lucy Baxter ('Leader Scott'), Mary Elizabeth Haweis and Lucy Crane, who contributed to several of the leading periodicals during the period or wrote and gave instructional lectures on 'Aesthetic' topics such as Crane's, *Art and the Formation of Taste: Six Lectures* (1882).<sup>44</sup> However, even progressively liberal periodicals such as the *Fortnightly Review* and later, the *Nineteenth Century*—both of which showcased among the most significant Aesthetic works, Swinburne's, Pater's and Wilde's included—explicitly or implicitly excluded women from contributing and were even, to an extent, ambivalent about publishing works that focused on women writers and 'feminine' genres such as the novel. In the 1860s, for instance, amidst increasing calls for women's suffrage<sup>45</sup>, there was a noticeable absence of women contributors to the *Fortnightly* under George H. Lewes' reign as editor (May 1865–November 1866): of the 131 contributors, only four are identified as women by the *Wellesley Index* amounting to seven contributions in total. This number increased under the editorship of John Morley (1867–1882), Lewes' successor, but only marginally.<sup>46</sup> Morley did, however, ensure that

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<sup>44</sup> Lucy Crane, *Art and the Formation of Taste: Six Lectures* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882). Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 2–3, 76. As Meaghan Clarke demonstrates in *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880–1905* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), the rise of women art critics and journalists occurred concurrently with the rise of the New Woman and New Journalism in the 1880s, and with the growth of periodicals by and (or) for women including Wilde's own *Women's World*, which he edited for two years. By the 1880s, "over 30 different women writers were contributing signed articles to specialized publications such as the *Art Journal*, as well as more popular journals such as the *Illustrated London News*", and by the 1890s, a career in journalism was among the more popular options for women, 1–3, 5.

<sup>45</sup> In response to the Women's Suffrage Bill of 1889, however, the *Fortnightly*, operating under Frank Harris' editorship, published a petition in support of female suffrage, whereas John Knowles' *Nineteenth Century* published a petition against it. Laurel Brake, "Writing Women's History: 'the sex' debates of 1889" in Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham (eds.), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture 1880–1930* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Mark W. Turner, "Hybrid Journalism: Women and the Progressive *Fortnightly*" in Kate Campbell, *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: Hazlitt to Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), 72–4, 79. It should be noted, however, that within forums that pursued a policy of anonymity—unlike the *Academy*, *Fortnightly* and the *Nineteenth Century*, where the signed article was a critical indication of their

in nearly every issue there were articles pertaining to aspects of cultural life that included women and were thus aimed at educated women readers.<sup>47</sup>

In the second instance, in Schaffer and Psomiades' edition, *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999), one finds a chronological definition of Aestheticism that loosely spans the 1850s to the 1930s. This thesis, on the other hand, which begins in the 1860s and ends in 1900, culminates in an exploration of the differences between Aestheticism and decadence through an examination of the contrasting role and representation of synaesthesia in Pater and Wilde's works. As such, it locates a significant transformation in the way that 'art for art' manifested itself throughout the mid-to-late nineteenth century and within the context of a variety of modes of textual production. Keeping in mind the importance of mapping out alternative trajectories of Aestheticism, as well as the difficulty in pinpointing the shift from Aestheticism into decadence—in part because there never was, and never is, a 'point' as such—Wilde's theoretical development of synaesthesia was, by and large, a redevelopment of Pater's with significant Swinburnian overtures. And, indeed, much writing of the 1890s actively sought to disassociate itself from its predecessors via appropriation, parody and otherwise. Decadence was largely understood as a style, and the role of synaesthesia within decadent (as opposed to Aesthetic) writing contributed to the qualities identified then and now as decadent. If Britain's female aesthetes are absent from this thesis, gender is, nonetheless, a recurrent theme.

As previously noted, this thesis uses the terms 'art for art' and 'Aestheticism'

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progressivism—it is possible that some of the anonymous reviews considered in this thesis, particularly in my chapter on Whistler, were indeed composed by women.

<sup>47</sup>Laurel Brake, "Walter Pater and Greek Studies" in Campbell (ed.), *Journalism, Literature and Modernity*, 131.

synonymously until the chapter on Wilde. By the 1870s, the ‘art for art’ slogan was gradually replaced with ‘Aestheticism.’<sup>48</sup> Yet, just as Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that there is a historical reason for retaining the word ‘Aestheticism’ (it highlights the indebtedness of Britain’s aesthetes to German aesthetic philosophy)<sup>49</sup>, ‘art for art’ reflects the aesthetes’ collective interest in French theory and writers including Gautier (the first to use the phrase *l’art pour l’art* in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834)) and, perhaps more importantly, Baudelaire. Furthermore, this inheritance was well recognised by their peers and played a significant role in the perception of their supposed subversiveness: followers of ‘art for art’ were either ‘too French’, or at least not British enough in their sensibilities. Freedman’s compelling reluctance to substitute or “confuse” ‘Aestheticism’ and ‘art for art’ derives from the fact that critics, by and large, have failed to recognise that “when aestheticist writers like Swinburne and Pater deployed the slogan of ‘art for art,’ they did so as part of a larger argument or dialectic that is trivialized when compacted into so simple and rigid a notion.”<sup>50</sup> Keeping this larger argument always in view (and hopefully contributing to it), I find the phrase ‘art for art’ *the* best choice here—in part because, as Adorno signalled, it is the opposite of what it claims to be, and thus encapsulates precisely “irresolution” and “contradictoriness.”<sup>51</sup>

‘Art for art’ was not simply about renouncing the societal role of aesthetics as much as it was a critique of this role, an attempt to refocus and reclaim it. There was of course an underlying elitism: ‘art for art’ frequently veered towards ‘art for artists’ and

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<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn (ed.), *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), 1-5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 5; when ‘Aesthetic’ replaced the entry for ‘Beauty’ in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1875), its meaning revealed the impact of German idealism during the period. Stephen Regan (ed.), *The Politics of Pleasure: Aesthetics and Cultural Theory* (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1992), 5.

<sup>50</sup> Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, xx.

only certain ones to be sure. On the other hand, the principal figures of this thesis were collectively devoted to protecting the autonomy of the aesthetic realm from censors, critics and consumers rather than, simply, stripping art of social implication. As will become particularly evident in the analysis of Whistler and Wilde, ‘art for art’ manifests itself as an evaluation of the role of aesthetics within bourgeois society as well as an idealisation of what it should be. Synaesthesia’s emphasis on formal properties and corporeal aesthetic experience—antagonistic in Whistler’s hands and artificial in Wilde’s style, sensuous for Pater and spiritual for Swinburne—fed into and reflected the complications of ‘art for art.’ By examining the varied manifestations of synaesthesia during the period, Adorno’s characterisation of the movement (and slogan) is further elucidated.

Synaesthesia’s seminal role within Aestheticism and decadence, and during this period more generally, has been widely acknowledged. Even *Grove’s* notes that “Not until the turn of the nineteenth century did writers use verbal metaphors linking colour and music to express the new spirit of the times, with music promoted to the top of the artistic hierarchy.”<sup>52</sup> This thesis is, however, the first to explore such claims - which were, significantly, first promulgated in the nineteenth century – in detail. When Wilde journeyed to America in 1882 to lecture on art and home-decoration, he defined “aestheticism” as “a search after the signs of the beautiful. It is the science of the beautiful through which men seek the correlation of the arts. It is, to speak more exactly, the search after the secret life.”<sup>53</sup> In 1882 as well, Hamilton argued in his study of the Aesthetic movement that a belief in correlations between the arts was consummately

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<sup>52</sup> From their entry ‘Colour and Music’ in the subsection, ‘Synaesthesia’ in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 24, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Oxford: Oxford UP 2001), 850.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Press, 1988), 151-2.

‘Aesthetic’, citing the works of Swinburne, Whistler and Wilde as evidence of this impulse (Pater is an audible omission). And, of course, *Degeneration* is a powerful indication of the perceived relationship between synaesthetic practices and theories and the ideology of ‘art for art.’ Furthermore, Whistler’s radical titular practices engendered debates concerning the supposed relationships between the arts (and the senses) and the viability and consequences of highly formal, intersensory aesthetic practices. His critical reception is among the most salient examples of how the popular perception of Aestheticism was inextricably connected with the notion of synaesthesia. It also, of course, greatly contributed to this viewpoint.

More recent critics have also recognised what Sutton refers to as “extensive nineteenth-century interest in synaesthesia.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, ‘synaesthesia’ is a term or idea that frequently crops up in studies of the period, sometimes under the guise of other terms (such as Karl Beckson’s phrase “*transposition d’art*”)<sup>55</sup> and concepts (interrelationships and correlations between the arts or, in Carl Woodring’s Swinburnian words, “interfusions of the arts”).<sup>56</sup> But synaesthesia’s importance is practically taken for granted: it is an accepted and unexamined characteristic of Aesthetic and decadent thought and style. Consider Elaine Showalter’s introduction to George du Maurier’s novel *Trilby* (1894): “In his appearance, his mild dandyism, his originality, his

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<sup>54</sup> Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 173; Michael J. O’Neal argues that decadent poets increasingly drew parallels between the arts and that among their primary verbal strategies was manipulating language or verbal art so that it emulated the affect of non-verbal art (i.e. music) in “English Decadence and the Concept of Visual Perspective”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23:3 (1983), 245; Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York: W W Norton & Co. Ltd., 1992), 36.

<sup>55</sup>As Beckson states, “To preserve artistic purity and autonomy, Gautier employed what the Romantics had called *transposition d’art*, by which poetry, for example, attempted to suggest the effects produced by the other arts. Sonnets were called pastels; and pastels sonnets”, *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Prose and Poetry* (Chicago: Academy of Chicago Publishers, 1966), xxiv.

<sup>56</sup> Woodring briefly discusses aesthetic ‘interchange’ and ‘interfusion’, which he links to Wagner and Baudelaire and interprets as indicative of the aesthetes’ highly self-conscious art practices in *Nature into Art: Cultural Transformations in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 244-6.

synaesthesia, his dreaminess, and his ‘quick, prehensile, aesthetic eye’, Little Billie is an aesthete.”<sup>57</sup> Synaesthesia is central to Showalter’s classification of Little Billie as an aesthete. But she does not qualify what she means by “his synaesthesia.” Consequently, if we examine Du Maurier’s satirical construction of Little Billie, who has “an over-aesthetic eye, too much enamoured of mere form!”<sup>58</sup>, and “inarticulate, intuitive perceptions...[which] strove to pierce the veil of deeper mysteries in impetus and dogmatic boyish scorn of all received interpretations”<sup>59</sup>, one can assume that by “his synaesthesia”, Showalter is referring to Little Billie’s trenchant, perceptual sensitivity to aesthetic objects and form. This certainly relates to synaesthesia, but it is not synaesthesia proper.

Beckson astutely characterises Whistler’s musical titles as an “attempt to suggest the artifice and autonomy of art.” Yet, his definition of this ‘attempt’ as “not synaesthetic, but ideological”<sup>60</sup>, is clearly problematic. Synaesthesia was incisively ideological or, at least, at the service of ideology. In Colleen Denney’s *At The Temple of Art* (2000), Watts, Whistler and Moore’s “more pure aestheticism that tied them to the Aesthetic Movement” is attributed to “their preoccupation with synaesthesia, the unification of the arts of poetry, painting and music.”<sup>61</sup> Denney’s link between aesthetic purity and synaesthesia is important. However, the term ‘unification’ is nebulous: it implies ‘combination’ more than ‘evocation.’ In *Resistible Theatres* (1972), John Stokes argues that:

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<sup>57</sup> Elaine Showalter (intro.) and Dennis Denisoff (ed.), *George du Maurier: Trilby* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), xvi.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 35

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 34

<sup>60</sup> Beckson, *London in the 1890s*, 259.

<sup>61</sup> Colleen Denney, *At The Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery 1877-1890* (Pennsylvania: FDU Press 2000), 75.

In the course of the nineteenth century, several different versions of synaesthesia were developed: an aesthetic that evoked equivalences between one area of sensation with another—for Baudelaire music and poetry, for Rimbaud word and colour; Wagner’s belief that total expression could only be achieved by a bringing together of media, each of which would be but a component; and finally a search for natural laws that link the perceptions of various stimuli.<sup>62</sup> Stokes’ examination of synaesthesia concerns itself with “the practical experiments of scientists and pseudo-scientists”, rather than “the central and most fertile path, the notion of correspondences”, which is the ‘path’ this dissertation explores.<sup>63</sup> Yet, I hesitate to adopt the term ‘correspondences’, a word (and theory) closely associated with Baudelaire, and thus loaded with ontological significance. While Swinburne’s appropriation of synaesthesia was highly Baudelairian, conforming to a more mimetic theory of art, Whistler’s development of synaesthesia was used explicitly to deny the notion of art as mimetic. In Whistler’s trial against Ruskin in 1878, he asserted that the public had misunderstood his use of synaesthesia: “it having been supposed that I intended some way or other to show a connection between the two arts, whereas I had no intention.” Rather, “By using the word ‘nocturne’ I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest which might have been otherwise attached to it.”<sup>64</sup> Synaesthesia was used to subvert critical narration whilst accentuating Whistler’s role as creator rather than imitator. This is why his ‘nocturnes’ are considered so Modern: they register the movement away from conceiving of art as something that represents, towards an idea of art as something that simply *is*—or, in

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<sup>62</sup> John Stokes, *Resistible Theatres: Enterprise and experiment in the late nineteenth century* (London: Paul Elek, 1972), 94.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-110.

<sup>64</sup> Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 144.

Bürger's terms, "art [that] wants to be nothing other than art."<sup>65</sup> Synaesthesia's increasingly well-acknowledged role within Modernist abstraction will invariably benefit from a greater understanding of its emergence in 'art for art.'<sup>66</sup>

In Chapter One, I argue that Swinburne was the first to practice what Pater meant by 'aesthetic criticism.' Examining Swinburne's preoccupation with the limitations of critical discourse, I explore how this leads him to adopt a highly poetic, allusive style of criticism, which relies heavily on an equally poetic and allusive trope: synaesthetic metaphor. In Chapter Two, I link Whistler's development of synaesthesia to his performance as an aesthete. Examining Whistler's relationship with his critics, and the way that synaesthesia attempted to baffle and provoke, I demonstrate how the frequently volatile reactions to Whistler's formalism circulated around his titular use of synaesthesia particularly in light of his radical approaches to colour. Even more than Swinburne, Pater blurred the distinction between criticism and creation: the object focused on is rarely in focus. In Chapter Three, I contextualise Pater's methods and style as an 'aesthetic critic' in relation to his theory of '*Anders-streben*', which, I argue, was as much about the nature of art as it was about the nature of criticism. I also examine how Pater's musical paradigm was a linguistic ideal that governed his approach to critical language and, more specifically, his reliance on synaesthetic metaphor. Finally, if Pater wrote creative

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (trans.) Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), 26-7. Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For articles that explore Whistler's 'Modern' use of synaesthesia, see: Judith Zilczer, "'Color Music': Synaesthesia and Nineteenth-Century Source for Abstract Art", 101-26; see, as well, Zilczer's "Synaesthesia and Popular Culture: Arthur Dove, George Gershwin, and the 'Rhapsody in Blue'", *Art Journal*, 44:4 (Winter, 1984), 361-6; Howard Risatti, "Music and the Development of Abstraction in America: the Decade Surrounding the Armory Show", *Art Journal* (Fall 1979), 8-13; and Clive Cazeaux's excellent analysis of the 'modernity' of intersensory aesthetics in "Synaesthesia and Epistemology in Abstract Painting", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39:3 (1999), 241-52.

<sup>66</sup> Synaesthesia's role in Modernism has commanded increasing scholarship in recent years, a topic I briefly explore in my Afterword.

criticism, Wilde defined ‘aesthetic criticism’ as “a creation from a creation”, and argued that the genre’s true aim was to see an object as in itself it was not.<sup>67</sup> In Chapter Four, I consider Wilde’s style and theory of style within the context of decadence—or, to put it another way, decadence within the context of Wilde. I show how synaesthetic metaphor registers differences between Aesthetic and decadent discourse: Swinburne’s observations of the melodious colours and perfumes of poetry sharply contrast with Moore’s sardonic and unbelievable “garlicky andantes”—a contrast that feeds into Dowling’s characterisation of decadent literature as a “counterpoetics of disruption and parody and stylistic derangement.”<sup>68</sup> Over all, each of these chapters explores the highly nuanced claim that art should exist for its own sake and the ways in which a particular group of artists in the mid-to-late Victorian period attempted to realise this desire on theoretical and rhetorical levels.

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<sup>67</sup> From “The Critic as Artist” in Linda Dowling (ed.), *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 240.

<sup>68</sup> George Moore, *A Drama in Muslin: A Realistic Novel* (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1886), 173. Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1986), x.

Chapter I.  
‘A SENSE BEYOND THE SENSES’:  
SWINBURNE, SYNAESTHESIA AND THE EMERGENCE OF  
‘AESTHETIC CRITICISM’

I. Introduction

Algernon Charles Swinburne occupies a privileged position in my doctoral thesis: an analysis of his development of synaesthesia within the context of British Aestheticism constitutes the opening chapter of my own examination of synaesthesia’s role in the ‘art for art’ movement in the mid-to-late Victorian period. That Swinburne opens this thesis, then, suggests that Swinburne also opened or introduced Aestheticism to Britain. Indeed, Swinburne was the first British artist to publicly champion ‘art for art’ in Britain. Thus, this chapter aims to demonstrate not only Swinburne’s focal role as both theorist and literary spokesman for the nascent British Aesthetic movement, but also, and more importantly, synaesthesia’s role in relation to Swinburne’s interest in, and advocacy of ‘art for art.’ If synaesthesia was an Aesthetic metaphor, it was also a metaphor that was employed to characterise Aestheticism, and Swinburne’s works both initiated and confirmed this inextricability.

Before examining two seminal nineteenth-century accounts of the Aesthetic movement, which vividly illustrate the interlinking perception of Swinburne, ‘art for art’ and intersensory theories and approaches to art, it is worth noting several, more recent studies that have, to varying degrees, addressed this topic. For Swinburne’s

interest in synaesthesia has been well acknowledged.<sup>1</sup> Most important to my examination is Jerome J. McGann's dialogic study, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (1972). Referring to Swinburne as a "famous...synaesthetic artist", McGann suggests that synaesthesia "is no mere poetic device for [the writer] but an absolute necessity of existence."<sup>2</sup> He argues that Swinburne's development of synaesthesia derived from and reflected his Baudelairian belief that reality was governed by an underlying system of infinite correspondences. Intersensory metaphor was a highly formal rhetorical trope that emphasised the subjective role of 'perception' and 'sensation' in the realm of art; but it was also, and equally, a method of revelation. In the third section of this chapter, 'Synaesthesia as Mimesis: The Existentialism of Intersensory Aesthetics', I explore how these two manifestations of synaesthesia interact with, and complicate, our understanding of Swinburne's representation of 'art for art.' Furthermore, I consider the specific ways that Baudelaire shaped the more ontological nuances of Swinburne's construction of the concept.

McGann's study is further significant for the connection he draws between synaesthesia and the "vigorously suggestive and connotative style" of "impressionistic prose" or 'aesthetic criticism.'<sup>3</sup> As explored in my Introduction, my analysis situates the emergence of Aestheticism in relation to, and largely *within* the context of critical discourse on the arts, and, more specifically, 'aesthetic criticism.' Pater was the first to examine thoroughly the methodologies and style of this new literary genre. But Swinburne was the first to *practice* what Pater meant by 'aesthetic criticism'—and what Wilde would later defend as the purest art form in "The Critic as

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the texts explored in this introduction, see the following: June E Downey, "Literary Synaesthesia", *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 9:18 (1912), 491; Erhardt-Siebold, "Harmony of the Senses", 592; L. M. Findlay, *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Selected Poems* (New York: Carcanet Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

Artist” (1890/91)—in his art and literary criticism of the 1860s; Swinburne’s approach to criticism played a formative role in shaping both writers’ relationship to critical discourse and to their careers as critics. McGann’s work is unique for exploring the conceptual and stylistic function of synaesthesia in Swinburne’s critical essays. By and large, scholars have concentrated on the synaesthetic aspects of Swinburne’s poetry despite the fact that Swinburne employed synaesthesia far more as a literary and art critic. For this reason, and others, my examination is confined almost solely to Swinburne’s critical writing and reviews of the 1860s and 1870s, when his interest in ‘art for art’ was most robust. This material includes, in particular, Swinburne’s contributions to the *Spectator* in 1862, his study, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1866), his appraisal of Simeon Solomon’s prose-poem *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* for the short-lived Oxford magazine, *The Dark Blue* (1871), and his collection *Essays and Studies* (1875), comprised almost entirely of works first appearing within the *Fortnightly Review* between 1867 and 1873, during John Morley’s tenure as editor.<sup>4</sup>

Although Swinburne’s advocacy of ‘art for art’ was strongest during the 1860s and 70s, his writing career is frequently—and misleadingly—separated into ‘Aesthetic’ and ‘political’ categories. The obvious problem with this distinction is that it presupposes an apolitical notion of ‘art for art.’ In *Swinburne’s Theory of Poetry*

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<sup>4</sup> The only work to not first appear within the *Fortnightly Review*, nor within a periodical context, was Swinburne’s closing essay “Notes on Some Pictures of 1868”, which I explore in detail at the close of this chapter. This work was adapted from Swinburne’s contribution to “Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868” (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868). A pamphlet publication, it opened with an essay by William Rossetti. Swinburne made only three minor omissions to this work before including it in *Essays and Studies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875). His long Preface to the essay-collection was entirely new, and is significant insofar as it illuminates his views on the role of the critic and the function of criticism whilst informing his readers of the nature of his revisions in the text. Unlike Pater and Wilde, whose critical writings (many of which also first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*) were, to varying degrees, extensively revised for their essay-collections, Swinburne’s revisions were slight: he added footnotes and minor addenda and selectively omitted some material. Although I focus on Swinburne’s essays as they appeared in *Essays and Studies*, I have included the works’ original publication dates within the *Fortnightly Review*. It is also worth noting that Swinburne’s essays on Hugo, Arnold, Rossetti and Shelley for the *Fortnightly Review* (included in *Essays and Studies*) were apparently published unedited in the periodical; Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 12.

(1964), Thomas Connolly argues that Swinburne's "Aesthetic period" was an interlude or departure from his more serious preoccupation as a writer of political poetry. After the 1870s, he relinquished Baudelaire as his mentor and returned to Victor Hugo.<sup>5</sup> McGann similarly divides Swinburne's work into 'Aesthetic' and 'political' spheres that follow Connolly's chronology. Certainly, as Swinburne matured, his work became more explicitly and fervently political and patriotic. His response to Whistler's 'Ten O'clock' lecture for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1888—which I explore at the close of this chapter—saliently registers how far Swinburne had strayed from the Aesthetic principles that he and Whistler had once championed together. And, importantly—though with notable exceptions—his critical language became less poetic, tangential and intersensory. What this indicates, however, is the intimate relationship between synaesthesia and 'art for art.' Although McGann explores Swinburne's reliance on synaesthesia as an 'aesthetic critic', he does not directly extend this relationship into the broader context of Aestheticism. As a consequence, Swinburne's development of synaesthesia becomes somewhat extricable from his belief in 'art for art', when, in fact, it was absolutely central to it.

Additional relevant texts that have examined to varying extents Swinburne's development of synaesthesia include Catherine Maxwell's, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (2001). Attributing Swinburne's interest in synaesthesia to Shelley, she argues that throughout Swinburne's works, synaesthesia is not "the negation or diminution of vision nor...a substitute for it but a supplement in so far as synaesthetic experience is understood through imagery and occurs as a form of phantasmata...[making] visible sense perceptions which are otherwise

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Connolly, *Swinburne's Theory of Poetry* (Albany: State University of New York, 1964), 3-4.

invisible.”<sup>6</sup> Like McGann, Maxwell interprets Swinburne’s development of synaesthesia in ontological terms.<sup>7</sup> Margot K. Louis also suggests in *Swinburne and his Gods* (1990) that Swinburne’s use of “synaesthetic effects” was learned entirely from Shelley and Keats.<sup>8</sup> Swinburne’s development of synaesthesia is seen to continue the well-acknowledged Romantic tradition of “sensory fusion”, which validated the primacy of imagination in human cognition whilst ratifying the original wholeness of immediate experience.<sup>9</sup> Both poets (Shelley in particular) did influence the more spiritual or pantheistic components of Swinburne’s development of synaesthesia; though, clearly, and as we shall see, Baudelaire played a far more formative role here. In Robert Peters’ *The Crowns of Apollo* (1965), he devotes a brief chapter to the role of synaesthesia in Swinburne’s works.<sup>10</sup> Exploring how synaesthesia was used “to convey the precise flavor, or *virtue*, of a writer or of a particular work”, Peters’ examination is, nonetheless, largely synoptic.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, he fails to consider the pivotal relationship between Swinburne’s development of synaesthesia and his interest in ‘art for art.’ Robin Spencer, however, does explore this connection in his essay, “Whistler, Swinburne and art for art’s sake” (1999). Examining the formative role that Swinburne played in fostering Whistler’s interest in

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* (Manchester: Manchester UP 2001), 180, 195.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 197. Shelley’s Romantic develop of synaesthesia has been the focus of its own study, Glenn, O’Malley, *Shelley and Synesthesia* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964)

<sup>8</sup> Margot K. Louis, *Swinburne and his Gods: The Roots and Growth of Agnostic Poetry* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, ix; See, as well, Stephen de Ullmann, ‘Romanticism and Synaesthesia: A Comparative Study of Sense Transfer in Keats and Byron’, *PMLA* 60:3 (1945), 811-27.

<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Peters, *Swinburne’s Principles of Literature and Art: The Crowns of Apollo, a Study in Victorian Criticism and Aesthetics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 95-107.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 96

intersensory aesthetics, Spencer locates both artists' development of synaesthesia firmly within the context of Aestheticism.<sup>12</sup>

With the exception of Spencer, then, it is noticeable how contemporary scholars—attuned to the pervasiveness of synaesthesia in Swinburne's works—have nonetheless largely interpreted his interest in intersensory metaphor as somehow peripheral to his faith in 'art for art.' This is all the more fascinating given that Swinburne's contemporaries—who positioned him at the forefront of the movement—were quick to seize on a connection between intersensory aesthetics and Aestheticism. My examination begins with an exploration of how this connection was forged.

## II. 'Aesthetic' versus 'Fleshly'

In Hamilton's study *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), he asserted: "There are probably few literary men who would hesitate for a moment in assigning to Swinburne the title of King of the Aesthetic poets...in 1860, long before the movement was fashionable [...]." <sup>13</sup> In his chapter on "Aesthetic culture", Hamilton defined the prominent features and general characteristics of the 'fashionable' Aesthetic movement. The term 'Aesthetic' connoted class, place and dress: the aesthetes, if not aristocrats, were certainly among the cultured elite; they had an affinity for the type of art promoted by the notorious Grosvenor Gallery; and they were deeply invested in their appearances. To be 'Aesthetic' also signified particular musical tastes including Liszt, Wagner and Rubinstein, composers whose works were considered unorthodox, radical and, particularly in the case of Wagner, over-

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<sup>12</sup> Robin Spencer, "Whistler, Swinburne and art for art" in Prettejohn (ed.), *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, 59-89.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 61.

stimulating.<sup>14</sup> Exploring the popular manifestations of the movement—changes in fashion and home decorating—and linking this to the work of artists, Hamilton expressed a crucial feature of Aestheticism: its fluctuation between “high-art” and “consumer culture.”<sup>15</sup>

To be ‘Aesthetic’ also signified a delight in “sensual descriptions” and “an affinity for hyperbolic metaphors”: “[They] are constantly yearning for the intense, the language of the Aesthetes is tinged with somewhat exaggerated metaphor, and their adjectives are usually superlative—as supreme, consummate, utter, quite too preciously sublime, &c.”<sup>16</sup> Hamilton’s description of ‘Aesthetic’ style as excessively sensual characterises the critical reception and popular perception of Aestheticism, and later, and increasingly, decadence. Both schools appeared to privilege the body (the sensual, sensorial, sexual) over the mind (the rational, intellectual)—an implicitly gendered binary that became increasingly explicit and complicated as the century advanced. And, importantly, this subversive inversion resonated within, and appeared to account for, their unusual approach to language.

Hamilton’s remarks are significant for several reasons. He identifies Swinburne as Britain’s first Aesthete poet. He also encourages the view that Aestheticism can be identified and defined by a particular type of language (androgynous, sensual, formal, excessive, elite). In doing so, he links Swinburne directly to this emerging stylistic approach. And though Hamilton, unsurprisingly, never mentions the term ‘synaesthesia’, he talks about it and around it. His characterisation of ‘Aesthetic’ language as replete with “hyperbolic metaphor” gestures towards the intersensory. Furthermore, Hamilton repeatedly suggests that a

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<sup>14</sup> Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*.

<sup>15</sup> Schaffer and Psomiades (eds.), *Women and British Aestheticism*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 36.

belief in correlations between the arts and, implicitly, the senses, is consummately ‘Aesthetic’:

One of the first principles of Aestheticism is that all the fine arts are intimately related to one another; hence we see that their poets have been painters, whilst their artists have largely availed themselves of the creations of the poets as topics for their principal pictures and statues.<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton’s astute conclusion that Aestheticism conceived of the fine arts as “intimately related” illuminates how the popular perception of Aestheticism was closely connected with an interest in intersensory art. Rossetti constituted “a true Aesthete developed to the fullest extent” because one found “that union of the artistic faculties” and, thus, he was among the foremost members “of a school which relies upon the correlation of the arts.”<sup>18</sup> In Whistler’s case, the painter’s “affected titles” were seen to carry “to an absurd extent”, “the Aesthetic idea of the correlation of the arts.”<sup>19</sup> Even though Swinburne was not a painter *and* a poet, his verse had either inspired or been inspired by visual artists. Burne-Jones’ painting ‘Laus Veneris’ was titled after Swinburne’s erotic poem of the same name. And Swinburne’s poem ‘Before the Mirror: Verses Written Under A Picture’ was composed for “the eccentric artist, J.M. Whistler”<sup>20</sup>, who affixed it to the frame of ‘Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl’ for its first public exhibition, an early example of multimedia collaboration.

Also, and perhaps most importantly, Swinburne’s poetry appeared to be guided solely by its sound, such that discourse emulated the non-representational qualities of music (later one of Nordau’s central qualms about degenerate art):

There is much that is obscure, almost unintelligible indeed; one critic epigrammatically remarked ‘there is so much sound in Swinburne’s songs, there is no room for sense, yet the sound alone is beautiful;’ his

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 28-29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 61.

verses are polished, and highly musical, either with a somewhat feverish entrain, or else deeply tinged with melancholy and despair.<sup>21</sup> The idea that Swinburne's verse contained more "sound" (form) than "sense" (content) emerges throughout the critical reception of his highly contested first verse collection *Poems and Ballads* (1866). There are two ways, then, to locate or define the intersensory nature of Swinburne's poetry: his use of synaesthetic tropes ("the sounds that shine", "thy voice as an odour", "a perfume of songs")<sup>22</sup>; and his use of language as sound or song. Swinburne's excessive alliteration and repetition of words and images appeared to push the semblance out of his work: his 'music' was vertiginously dangerous. Thus, both the poems' content—lesbianism, flagellation, sadomasochism—and their form collectively revelled in the pleasures of sensorial experience above all else. As Cambridge students chanted lines from 'Dolores', among Swinburne's most contested poems, and Swinburne became a literary sensation, critics vitiated both the poetry and the poet, and the tone and content of their reviews are worth briefly examining.<sup>23</sup>

Reactions to *Poems and Ballads* demonstrate how the senses themselves, were a highly politicised topic, embroiled in debates concerning national identity, masculinity and civic life, religion and sexuality. And this is central to understanding how the aesthetes' development of synaesthesia, beginning with Swinburne, contributed to the perception of the movement as highly and unapologetically subversive. Among the most damning reviews was John Morley's for the deeply conservative and influential weekly *Saturday Review*. In his opinion, Swinburne's verse reflected an "attitude of revolt against the current notions of decency and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>22</sup> The first quotation is taken from 'The Triumph of Time' and the last two from 'Hesperia' in Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads*, first series (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), 34, 173-4.

<sup>23</sup> Edmund Gosse recalled a friend's exuberant response: "It simply swept us off our legs with rapture. At Cambridge, the young men joined hands and marched along shouting 'Dolores' or 'A Song in Time of Revolution'", *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1917), 160-1.

dignity and social duty.” It was not that the poet rebelled against “fat-headed Philistines and poor-blooded Puritans who insist that all poetry should be such as may be wisely placed in the hands of girls of eighteen”; it was that he accomplished this “by trying to set up the pleasures of sense in the seat of reason.” To exalt sensorial experience over the intellect was to “glorify bestial delights”: Swinburne was “on the animal side of human nature.”<sup>24</sup>

If Swinburne had inverted the equation of mind over body, an accusation laden with the language of evolutionary science, this had been achieved on formal grounds as well. As Morley stated in his review:

Mr. Swinburne riots in the profusion of colour of the most garish and heated kind. He is like a composer who should fill his orchestra with trumpets, or a painter who should exclude every colour but a blaring red, and a green as of sour fruit...fascinated as everybody must be by the music of his verse, it is doubtful whether part of the effect may not be traced to something like a trick of words and letters [...].<sup>25</sup>

Characterising Swinburne’s poetry as immoderate through analogies with other art forms and sensorial experiences (his observation quickly shifts from music to painting to “sour fruit”), Morley repeated his perception of Swinburne’s “music” as a “trick”: “the beauty of [Swinburne’s] melody” had the ability “to blind us to the absence of judgement and reason.”<sup>26</sup> When Morley alluded to the cloying “music of [Swinburne’s] verse”, he was referring, specifically, to its non-semantic properties, which enveloped the reader in a rapturous, emotive experience that was, simultaneously, a ruse.<sup>27</sup> His poetry made its appeal to the body rather than the intellect. The notion of discourse as encoded, and of Swinburne’s style as an

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<sup>24</sup> John Morley, “Mr. Swinburne’s New Poems”, *Saturday Review* 13 (1866), 145–7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>27</sup> John Hollander, “The Music of Poetry”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15:2 (1956), 232. This type of aesthetic experience was also implicitly gendered given the widely held perception of feminine style as emotional. In “Characteristics of Women’s Poetry”, for instance, which appeared in the Oxford monthly magazine *The Dark Blue* (Dec 1871), the author argued: “We too often have verses which, although written to [excite our pity], entirely fail in attaining their object—which appeal to the ear more than the mind—and in which all feeling is made to give way to rhythm”, 486.

intentionally, dangerously encoded approach to language underscores Morley's objection to Swinburne's formalism.

The emergence of a Victorian standard of public discourse, which suppressed immoral, obscene and even idiosyncratic language—'Aesthetic' style, "hyperbolic metaphor"—stands in relation to the philological developments of the period.<sup>28</sup> In Linda Dowling's pivotal text, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1986), she demonstrates how anxieties over the vulgarisation of language were interlinked with concerns over cultural degeneration. As linguistic science valorised the idea of discourse as a totality of sounds, the perception of language as somehow autonomous to humankind emerged. This, in turn, radically undermined Coleridge's notion of the literary *lingua communis* within which literature operated as *logos*: an ideal expression and preservation of culture. As Dowling shows, the Victorians fervently adopted Coleridge's equation between literature and civilization, which underscored their conception of language as a moral and cultural force:

High Victorian culture, with its distinctive ethos of earnestness and energy and supreme cultural confidence is founded, as upon a rock, on Coleridge's identification of literature and civilization, that interanimating synthesis of outward expression and inward essence.<sup>29</sup>

Swinburne's valorisation of "sound" over "sense" (or 'sense' over 'semblance') similarly threatened the idea of literature as *logos*. Rather than an "interanimating" relationship between "outward" and "inward", Swinburne's musical style was too formal to cultivate such a "synthesis", in part, because it appeared to deny the very presence of an "inward essence." Furthermore, its musicality connoted an aesthetic sensibility that was alien to Britain. As one anonymous reviewer of *Poems and Ballads* asserted in the *London Review*: "This kind of writing is so alien to the spirit of our country that it can obtain no root in the national soil. Men may wonder at it for

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<sup>28</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

a time, they will cast it out and forget it in the end.”<sup>30</sup> Swinburne’s poetry was neither ‘British’ nor memorable: indeed, it was *forgettable*.

Arthur Waugh also made this point in his essay “Reticence in Literature” (published in the *The Yellow Book* in 1894), which assessed the durability of several aesthetic and decadent writers:

Is this the sort of poetry that will survive the trouble of the ages? It cannot survive. The time will come (it must) when some newer singer discovers melodies as yet unknown, melodies which surpass in their modulations and varieties those poems and ballads of twenty-eight years ago.<sup>31</sup>

Two important, interlinking perceptions underscore Waugh’s “reticence”: his belief in writing as a cultural memento; and, his sense of living within a “troubled age” which needed a permanent, *written* record of its self. For written language, as Carlyle proposed, was the very condition of civilization because it represented a surviving keepsake or relic of vanished precursor civilizations and because writing made historicity possible.<sup>32</sup> To be guided by “melody” was to forsake, simultaneously, history (the past) and posterity (the future): Swinburne’s work would eventually fall on deaf ears. The aesthetes’ adulation of the senses undercut art’s ability to act as a cultural memory. And their aesthetic religiosity—or supposed collective *worship* of sensorial pleasure—was precisely what grounded Robert Buchanan’s notorious attack on “the Fleshly school.”

Entirely different in tone, Buchanan’s polemical pamphlet *The Fleshly School of Poetry: And Other Phenomena of the Day* (1872) nonetheless contains interesting parallels with Hamilton’s study. Focusing primarily on the “sickliness and

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<sup>30</sup> Unsigned review, *London Review* (4 August 1866), 131. Swinburne explicitly addressed this review in his pamphlet, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), written in defence of *Poems and Ballads* specifically, and ‘art for art’ more broadly. Swinburne’s argument is significant for forging a distinction between author and authored (text and creator) for he urges his readers to disavow the notion that art is “the deliberate outcome and result of the writer’s conviction”, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Waugh, “Reticence in Literature”, *The Yellow Book* 1 (1894), 215.

<sup>32</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence*, 36-8.

effeminacy” of the works of Rossetti, Swinburne and, to a lesser degree, William Morris, Buchanan argued that these artists failed to uphold and further the specifically (masculine) English literary tradition.<sup>33</sup> The essay was an enlarged version of Buchanan’s earlier, damning critique of Rossetti’s *Poems* (1870), which appeared in the respectable monthly *The Contemporary Review* in 1871 under James Knowles’ editorship, generating considerable controversy. In the review, published under the pseudonym ‘Thomas Maitland’, Buchanan briefly alluded to *Poems and Ballads*. In the enlarged essay, however, Buchanan devoted an entire chapter not just to Swinburne but, far more importantly, to Swinburne *and* Baudelaire. Buchanan argued that the French writer—“the godfather...of the modern Fleshly school”—was entirely responsible for corrupting his younger, English counterpart.<sup>34</sup> His chapter, “Charles Baudelaire and A.C. Swinburne” focused primarily on Baudelaire’s works.<sup>35</sup>

That Buchanan substituted the term ‘Aesthetic’ with ‘Fleshly’—“relating to the body, enjoyment and pleasures of the body, not focused on spiritual matters”—illuminates how the early perception of Aestheticism unfolded in interlinked sensorial and secular terms.<sup>36</sup> Swinburne celebrated “the shriek of atheism” in a “falsetto” (a notably emasculating description of his voice). To privilege the materiality of the sensations was to profess a disbelief in the immaterial. Furthermore, sensorial pleasure was positioned against the values of “true English life.” National identity—

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Buchanan, *The Fleshly School of Poetry: And Other Phenomena of the Day* (London: Strahan and Co., 1872), 70. Thaïs E. Morgan interprets Buchanan’s use of the term ‘effeminacy’ as an attempt to revive the traditional politico-moral ideology of civic-masculinity: “it verges on and lends itself to the formation of the discourse of sexual dissidence which has informed it since the 1890s” in “Victorian Effeminacies” in Richard Dellamora (ed.), *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 109.

<sup>34</sup> Buchanan, *The Fleshly School*, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Rossetti ultimately suppressed his response, “The Stealthy School of Criticism”, after various friends argued that it would cause more harm than good. Swinburne, on the other hand, responded to Buchanan by publishing a pamphlet entitled *Under the Microscope* (London: David White, 1872), his attack couched within the context of “comparative entomology.” Likening critics to insects, Swinburne explored the role of the critic and the function of criticism, defended the principals of ‘art for art’ and made a rallying cry against anonymity in the periodical press; Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 4-6.

<sup>36</sup> “Fleshly”, OED, 1989 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1043-4.

or, more specifically, the notion of ‘Britishness’ in *contradistinction* to French aesthetic sensibility—forms a prominent counter-narrative in the work. As Richard Sieburth explores in “Poetry and Obscenity: Baudelaire and Swinburne” (1984), Buchanan (among others) “insistently referred to notions of impurity and uncleanness which accompanied frequent imputations of foreign pollution when appraising Swinburne’s work and the Aesthetic movement more generally.”<sup>37</sup> For Buchanan interpreted “sensualism” as an artistic fad of non-English origins:

This is our double misfortune—to have a nuisance, and to have it second hand. We might have been more tolerant to an unclean thing, if it had been in some sense a product of the soil. We have never been foolish purists here in England...But to be overrun with the brood of an inferior French sonneteer, whose only originality was his hideousness of subject, whose only merit was in his nasal appreciation of foul odours, surely that is far too much: it would have been a little too much twenty years ago, when the Empire began creating its viper’s nest in the heart of France; it is a hundred times too much now, when the unclean place has been burnt with avenging fires.<sup>38</sup>

To adopt Baudelaire as a poetic mentor was—among other things—unpatriotic, and dangerously so, given France’s recent revolutionary history.<sup>39</sup> Baudelaire’s “appreciation of foul odours”, was returned to elsewhere in the essay: “Indeed, throughout all his writing there is a parade of the olfactory faculty, which awakens the suspicion that Baudelaire, like Fabullus, had one day, after smelling some choice unguent, prayed to God to ‘make him all nose.’”<sup>40</sup> Like Baudelaire, Swinburne also privileged the sense of smell in his poetry. In a letter to Rossetti in 1869, he linked his affinity for scent to the French writer: “I felt of course the patent objection to the word ‘smell’—and I know that I myself, like Baudelaire, am especially and

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Sieburth, “Poetry and Obscenity: Baudelaire and Swinburne”, *Comparative Literature* 36:4 (1984), 344.

<sup>38</sup> Buchanan, *The Fleshly School*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Art for Art’s Sake and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped to Shape the Ideology and Culture of Aestheticism 1790-1990* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1996), 57-96.

<sup>40</sup> Buchanan, *The Fleshly School*, 29.

extravagantly fond of that sense and susceptible to it.”<sup>41</sup> Swinburne’s attention to olfaction (which frequently unfolded within a synaesthetic and mnemonic context in his and Baudelaire’s poetry) could thus be traced to French aesthetic sensibility.

Although Buchanan lamented the fact that Swinburne’s “unclean” poetry had originated in France, he later contradicted himself, expressing satisfaction that Britain had not cultivated such morally reprehensible verse:

And we may well rejoice, meanwhile, that our contemporary blasphemy, as well as so much of our contemporary bestiality, is no home product, but an importation transplanted from the French Scrofulous School, and conveyed, with no explanation of its origins, second hand.<sup>42</sup>

Gillian Beer demonstrates in *Darwin’s Plots* (2000), that one of Darwin’s greatest effects on “the growth of language” was the proliferation in evolutionary and organic metaphors, which Buchanan’s simile “like a cancer” reflects.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Buchanan poses as a “physician” in the essay, who must find the “sore” that conflicts with the very foundations of “true English life.”<sup>44</sup> “Sensualism” is repetitively likened to disease, thereby acquiring a physiological premise. Further, it is defined in relation to several, interrelated perceptions: an individual who lives for sensorial pleasure is a sensualist; a person without religion or faith is a sensualist; so, too, and importantly, is the individual who “[accents] the last syllable in words which in ordinary speech are accented on the penultimate.”<sup>45</sup> Like Hamilton, then, Buchanan’s definition of Aestheticism or “fleshliness” unfolded in relation to language used “unnaturally.” His fear of sensualism infecting and debilitating culture forges a connection between degeneracy and sensuality that became more acute and overt as

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<sup>41</sup> Cecil Y Lang (ed.), *The Swinburne Letters* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Buchanan, *The Fleishy School*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). In particular, see Beer’s chapter “Darwinian Myths.”

<sup>44</sup> Thais E. Morgan, “Victorian Effeminacies”, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Buchanan, *The Fleishy School*, 6-7, 48-9.

the century progressed. The tone and content of the critique saliently foreshadows *fin-de-siècle* anxieties over degenerate literature, explored in my Introduction and in my examination of the critical reception of Wilde's works in my final chapter.

Unlike Hamilton, Buchanan did not discuss "correlation between the arts" extensively, but he did address this "Fleshly" tendency:

The thing would have been almost too much in the shape of a picture, though the workmanship might have made amends. The truth is, that literature and more particularly poetry, is in a very bad way when one art gets hold of another, and imposes its conditions and limitations. In the first few verses of the 'Damozel' we have the subject, or part of the subject of a picture, and the inventor should either have painted it or left it alone altogether; and, had he done the latter, the world would have lost nothing. Poetry is something more than painting; and an idea will not become a poem because it is too smudgy for a picture.<sup>46</sup>

Buchanan's attention to the sensorial nature of Aestheticism is nonetheless indirectly and acutely *about* synaesthesia. For synaesthetic metaphor, with its emphasis on the joining of sensations, represents the very apex of what Buchanan found problematic with the movement. Buchanan converts 'art for art's sake' into 'sensations for sensation's sake.' Describing "fleshly poetry" as that which "[stifles] the senses with overpowering sickliness, as of too much civet"<sup>47</sup> (a perfume obtained from carnivorous cats found largely in Africa and India and thus, also of non-English origins), 'Aesthetic' writing appeared to have the ability to make people physically sick (just as Swinburne's musical poetry could "blind" and "trick").<sup>48</sup> This nauseating

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Buchanan's criticism contains interesting parallels with the early, critical reception of 'sensation fiction.' As Mrs. Oliphant observed in her pioneering essay, "Sensation Novels" (1862), which focused on Wilkie Collins, the primary defect of this budding literary genre was its inherent ability (and intention) to overwhelm its readers in physical terms, an effect it "invariably attained by violent and illegitimate means, as fantastic in themselves as they are contradictory to actual life", Norman Page (ed.), *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995). Nicholas Daly explores the links between the critical receptions of 'sensation fiction' and railway travel. As technological innovations "modernised the senses", 'sensation fiction' encapsulated the experience of modernity by relying on structural narratives designed to stimulate readers. Sensation fiction was hyper-stimulating and seen to possess a corporeal as opposed to cerebral significance. By 1867, one critic remarked, "all our minor novelists, almost without exception, are of the school called sensation." Daly argues that, "the heated response to both ... suggests difficulties in accommodating a specifically modern form of

aesthetic sensibility was traced directly to Baudelaire whose corrosive influence was most acutely registered in Swinburne's works. Swinburne's adulation of Baudelaire was, of course, public knowledge prior to Buchanan's essay. Buchanan's construction of Baudelaire's tutelage highlighted the dangerousness of the French writer's aesthetic views. However, the public's perception of Baudelaire's radicalism was something that Swinburne himself first promulgated.

### III. Swinburne and the *Spectator*:

Swinburne's position as laureate of a new, "fleshly" impulse within the arts was fully established after the publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866, and *William Blake: A Critical Essay* in 1868. The first stirrings of Aestheticism, however, occurred earlier in the decade and, importantly, within a periodical. In 1862, Swinburne was introduced to Richard Holt Hutton, the judicious part-editor and part-proprietor of the *Spectator*, a leading literary weekly.<sup>49</sup> Between April and September of that year, Hutton commissioned several works from Swinburne including seven poems, a review of Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Swinburne's critical appraisal of the expunged version of *Les Fleurs du mal*.<sup>50</sup> In addition to this, the *Spectator* printed Swinburne's long letter in defence of George Meredith's contested sonnet-sequence *Modern Love* (1862). The letter is significant for advocating a clear division between aesthetics and ethics: "[The] business of verse writing is hardly to express convictions; and if some poetry, not without merit of its kind, has at times dealt with dogmatic morality, it is all

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sensory experience", *Literature, Technology and Modernity 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2004), 111, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Harold Nicholson, *Swinburne* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), 32.

<sup>50</sup> Swinburne probably never read the original version of *Les Fleurs du mal* before his *Spectator* review, but the 1861 2<sup>nd</sup> edition within which 'Les Epaves' were omitted; for he fails to refer to any of the cancelled works in his review. Edmund Gosse (ed. and intro), *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Les Fleurs du mal* reprint (New York: AMS Press, 1985), 4.

the worse and all the weaker for it.”<sup>51</sup> Swinburne developed this idea further in his appraisal of Baudelaire. His decision to pioneer Baudelaire’s work in Britain activated the troubling perception of Aestheticism as a Francophile movement. For when he reviewed *Les Fleurs du mal*, Swinburne declared a conceptual allegiance with France and with a poet whose sexually lascivious verse resulted in judicial condemnation in 1857, following a hostile review in *Le Figaro*.

Clyde K. Hyder interprets Swinburne’s review of Baudelaire as an indication of his antagonism to accepted literary conventions<sup>52</sup>, a sentiment echoed by Edmund Gosse in his edition of Swinburne’s critical works:

This was the earliest excursion into serious prose criticism which Swinburne made, and it marks his earliest discovery. It required great intellectual courage in 1862 to champion in an English periodical the merits of any new volume of French verse, not to speak of such a volume as the *Fleurs du mal*...[there] was hardly a critic of authority who ventured to advance the claims of French poetry.<sup>53</sup>

It is significant that Gosse defined Swinburne’s “brave” critique as his “earliest excursion into serious prose criticism.” By this, one can assume that Gosse was referring to impressionistic or ‘aesthetic criticism.’ For “*prose* criticism” (rather than, for instance, *literary* criticism), highlights the perception of Swinburne’s critical writing, beginning with “*Les Fleurs du mal*”, as a wholly more creative, artistic or Aesthetic endeavour.

The first critical appraisal of Baudelaire in the English language was also the first instance in which a British artist publicly championed the French notion of ‘art for art.’ As Swinburne argued in the review:

[A] poet’s business is presumably to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remould society. No other form of art is so pestered with this impotent appetite for meddling in quite extraneous matters; but the mass of readers seem actually to think that a poem is the better for containing a moral lesson or assisting in a

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<sup>51</sup> A.C. Swinburne, letter, *Spectator* (June 7 1862), 632-3; reprinted in Lang, *Letters*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> Hyder (ed.), *A.C. Swinburne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), xiii

<sup>53</sup> Gosse (ed.), *Les Fleurs du mal*, ix.

tangible and material good work. The courage and sense of a man who at such a time ventures to profess and act on the conviction that the art of poetry has absolutely nothing to do with didactic matter at all, are proof enough of the wise and serious manner in which he is likely to handle the materials of his art. From a critic who has put forward the just and sane view of this matter with a consistent eloquence, one may well expect to get as perfect and as careful a poetry as he can give.<sup>54</sup>

By contesting the notion of the poet-artist as a cultural reformer whilst simultaneously identifying “the mass of readers” as his antagonist, Swinburne articulates a critical and persistent characteristic of ‘art for art’: for something to be ‘Aesthetic’, it must appeal to a sensibility or temperament not possessed by the public and thus, outside the reach of public consumption. A poet’s “business” is not a “business” at all. Rather, Swinburne’s construction of the brave or *great* artist in this review relies upon a polarized binary in which high art exists in inverse relation to public appreciation and consumerism. Furthermore, his representation of his belief in ‘art for art’ connects to his sycophantic identification with Baudelaire: both are critics and poets, and both renounce “didactic matter” in art. Baudelaire’s formative role in shaping Swinburne’s aesthetic beliefs into a “just and sane view” is equally undeniable. For Swinburne to open his appraisal by professing and explaining the “courageous” conviction of ‘art for art’ (he does not use the slogan until *Blake*), contextualises and legitimates the critical and stylistic approach then applied to Baudelaire’s verse; and, crucially, Swinburne’s language relies enthusiastically on synaesthetic metaphor.

Furthermore, the first public declaration of ‘art for art’ in Britain unfolds within a discourse nourished on intersensory metaphor. Swinburne likens *Les Fleurs du mal* to “a complicated set of tunes.” He asserts that the poems have a “quality of *drawing*” and are “figure paintings.”<sup>55</sup> He also argues that the collection’s excellence derives from the “colour” and “perfume” of its sound:

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<sup>54</sup> A.C. Swinburne, “Charles Baudelaire: Les Fleurs Du Mal”, *Spectator* (6 Sept 1862), 998.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 999.

He has more delicate power of verse than almost any man living...[The] sound of his metres suggests colour and perfume...it has the languid lurid beauty of close and threatening weather—a heavy heated temperature, with dangerous hothouse scents in it, thick shadow of cloud about it, and the fire of molten light...failure and sorrow, next to physical beauty and perfection of sound of scent, seem to have an infinite attraction for him...the style is sensuous and weighty.<sup>56</sup>

Swinburne's style is similarly "sensuous and weighty." Rather than contextualising or historicising, his highly evocative critical observations remain allusive, and firmly circumscribed within a self-referential realm of art. Baudelaire's poems are "drawings", "songs" and "figure paintings", the sound of his metres suggests alternate sensorial experiences, and this is precisely what constitutes his verse's excellence. Synaesthetic metaphor unravels the sense of Baudelaire's poetry as a *textual* experience. His verse appears to provoke an *aesthetic* experience in the fullest etymological sense of the term: to appreciate it, is to *feel* it; this involves a variety of the senses. Furthermore, as readers we are forcibly reminded of Swinburne's presence as writer—a key characteristic of 'aesthetic criticism' (particularly Pater's)—because of his use of synaesthetic metaphor. Aesthetic appreciation becomes a highly intimate and engaged form of spectatorship and readership. And by emphasising the formal properties and powers of Baudelaire's work through a series of intersensory tropes, Swinburne's critique parallels the formalism of Baudelaire's verse, with its "heated temperature" and "sound of scent." At its very inception, then, the subversive nature of British Aestheticism unfolded within related theoretical and linguistic realms. Or, rather, the theory that art should exist for its own sake necessarily required a linguistic style that pursued similar autonomy.

Swinburne's poem 'August', which also appeared in this issue of the *Spectator*, would have further illuminated Swinburne's burgeoning interest in intersensory aesthetics, and Baudelaire's formative role in fostering this impulse. In

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

fact, and as Maxwell indicates, “The juxtaposition of these works is no accident, for ‘August’ reminds us of the synaesthetic effects Baudelaire had explored in his famous sonnet ‘Correspondences.’”<sup>57</sup> The poem, which involves two timescales—seasonal and diurnal—conveys the complexity of a tree through a variety of alternating and interlinking sense-impressions. The reader moves from the colour of its leaves, and fruit that “soothed me like a tune”, to the sensations of taste, touch and smell which is “warm.” Swinburne’s use of music is notably sensual and tactile: “A sense of heavy harmonies/Grew on the growth of patient night/More sweet than shapen music is.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, his repeating colour variations exert pressure on the readers’ perceptual faculties, adding a distinct musicality to the poem, that is, simultaneously, visual. Swinburne’s formalism registers Baudelaire’s influence in a very particular way. The tree is progressively perceived in all its complexity through multiple sensory impressions that interact. In order to *know* the tree, one must sense it from all angles. And these sensations do not exist in isolation but in correspondence.

#### IV. Synaesthesia as Mimesis: The Existentialism of Intersensory Aesthetics

If Swinburne identified with Baudelaire’s radical views on art, he was also greatly influenced by the writer’s development of synaesthesia. Thus, a brief examination of Baudelaire’s development of synaesthesia is vital to understanding the more existential nuances of Swinburne’s redevelopment of the concept. Contemporary discourses on the history of synaesthesia frequently identify Baudelaire as the greatest

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<sup>57</sup> Maxwell, *The Female Sublime*, 197-8; Anne Walder concurs with this interpretation in her doctoral thesis, which explores Baudelaire’s influence on *Poems and Ballads*; *Swinburne’s Flowers of Evil*, diss. U of Uppsala, 1976, 42-5.

<sup>58</sup> Swinburne included ‘August’ in *Poems and Ballads*, 248-9.

innovator of the concept in the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> This reflects the extent to which synaesthesia's role within British Aestheticism has been largely overlooked; yet, clearly, Baudelaire's interest in synaesthesia extended well beyond that of a general interest or casual usage. It was a defining aspect of his aesthetic, emerging throughout his criticism and poetry on stylistic and conceptual grounds. His popularisation of the concept was two-fold. Both his work and his influence on French Symbolist poets and Britain's aesthetes contributed to the pervasiveness of synaesthesia in the arts in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and Swinburne was, undeniably, Baudelaire's greatest British disciple.

Baudelaire's most explicit defense of synaesthesia occurred in his single work of music criticism, his essay "Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* a Paris" (1861). He sent this work to Swinburne in 1863, to thank him for his laudatory review of *Les Fleurs du mal* in the *Spectator*. Thus, at least by 1863, Swinburne was acutely aware of Baudelaire's existential belief in synaesthesia as it unfolded in "*Tannhäuser*":

The reader knows the aim we are pursuing, namely to show that true music suggests similar ideas in different minds. Moreover, *a priori* reasoning, without further analysis and without comparisons, would not be ridiculous in this context; for the only really surprising thing would be that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not give the idea of melody, and that both sound and colour together were unsuitable as media for ideas; since all things always have been expressed by reciprocal analogies, ever since the day when God created the world as a complex indivisible totality.<sup>60</sup>

Synaesthesia was axiomatic because reality was governed by an underlying infinite system of correspondences.<sup>61</sup> Intersensory metaphor confirmed the polysensory, ambiguous singularity that lay beneath visible existence, an idea comparable to

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<sup>59</sup> Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 330-1

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed discussion of Baudelaire's 'theory of correspondences', see F.W. Leakey, *Baudelaire and Nature* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1969), 195-230.

Herder's notion of a "*sensorium commune*"<sup>62</sup> (in itself, an extension of Aristotle's "*sensus communis*"). The profundity of aesthetic experience was such that it enveloped the spectator in the revelation of this singularity. Furthermore, whilst the poet was seer, artistic creation was still highly mimetic, an idea that also underscores Swinburne's development of synaesthesia. What was mimicked, however, was underlying, transcendental and immaterial.

In Gautier's biography of Baudelaire, he argued that the French writer had been unfairly accused of "materialism." On the contrary, Baudelaire's work reflected a profound investment in spiritual life. He possessed "the power of *correspondence*": an ability "to discover by secret intuition the unexpressed feelings of others, and...to approach them, by those unexpected analogies that only the far sighted are able to seize upon."<sup>63</sup> As we shall see, Swinburne's construction of the "compound genius" in his essay on Solomon similarly pivoted on the notion of "secret intuition" or gifted perception. Baudelaire's ability to intuitively *sense* "correspondences" was a power the French writer also conferred on Gautier: "[he had] a profound and innate understanding of universal correspondence and symbolism."<sup>64</sup> Baudelaire located the capacity for this "secret intuition" in the imagination: "a virtually divine faculty that apprehends immediately...the intimate and secret relations of things, the correspondences and analogies."<sup>65</sup> The imagination's innate ability for "synthesis" (and here Baudelaire was influenced by Kant) led him to exalt analogies and metaphors: "Imagination is analysis, imagination is synthesis...it is imagination that has taught man the moral significance of colour, contour, sound and scent. In the

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<sup>62</sup> In Herder's formative essay on the origin of human language, *Ursprung der Sprache* (1770), he argued that there existed a single sensation within which all the others were blended. F.M. Barnard (ed. and trans.), *J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 144-8.

<sup>63</sup> Théophile Gautier and Guy Thorne, *Charles Baudelaire: His Life* (London: Greening & Co., 1915), 37-8.

<sup>64</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 272.

<sup>65</sup> From "Further Notes of Edgar Allan Poe", *Ibid*, 199.

beginning of things, imagination created analogy and metaphor.”<sup>66</sup> For Baudelaire, these rhetorical tropes revealed keen perceptive abilities: they re-enacted within discourse the truth of the natural world. Paradoxically, then, his construction of the imagination did not supplant the idea of art as mimesis (and artist as imitator) as much as refocus this relationship within the immaterial.<sup>67</sup>

Synaesthesia operated from the premise that it was exposing latent but real corollaries, making visible what was unseen. And this, of course, is characteristic of metaphor (and analogy) in itself. As Aristotle asserted in *Poetics*: “But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblance.”<sup>68</sup> The foundation for every syllogism began with intuition, for intuitive perception signalled a rare ability to *know* reality. Swinburne echoes this sentiment in his essay on Hugo’s *Dieu*: “It is always more interesting and always more profitable, to find instances of likeness than to find instances of contrast to the world of a poem and the speculation of a thinker.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, by insisting on underlying similarities, metaphors and analogies tend to support the idea of an orderly universe. As Beer states, “Once a single order is proposed—whether it be that of God the Designer, community of descent, or a ‘single physical basis of life’—analogy can stabilise...[and works] best when at the service of universalist world views in which all the phenomena are and can be shown to be interrelated.”<sup>70</sup> And, indeed, in earlier

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<sup>66</sup> From “The Salon of 1859”, *Ibid*, 300.

<sup>67</sup> Sara Pappas, “Managing Imitation: Translation and Baudelaire’s Art Criticism”, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 33:3-4 (2005), 320-42.

<sup>68</sup> S.H. Butcher (ed. and trans.), *Aristotle: Poetics*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 47.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Hyder (ed.), *Swinburne as Critic*, 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

periods, particularly the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept of universal analogy was vital to a theological ordering of the visible world.<sup>71</sup>

That metaphors were moments of spiritual revelation for Baudelaire is evident in his article on Hugo:

Everything, form, movement, number, colour, smell, in the *spiritual* as well as the *material* world, is significant, reciprocal, converse, *correspondent*... We know that symbols are obscure only relatively, that is to say according to the purity, the responsiveness or the inborn clarity of vision of each individual soul. And what is a poet... but a translator, a decipherer? Among outstanding poets, all metaphors, comparisons or epithets are mathematically precise and fit the particular circumstance, because those metaphors, comparisons and epithets are taken from the inexhaustible fund of universal analogy, and could not have been found elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

Poets “translate” and “decipher” through metaphors (and other comparative linguistic strategies), thereby bridging two planes of reality. Paul De Man argues in “The Double Aspect of Symbolism” (1988) that Baudelaire’s ‘theory of mimesis’ conveys a Neoplatonic notion of existence within which a full, ordered universe, a unified totality, becomes an aesthetic vision through the practice of literary or symbolic invention.<sup>73</sup> Poetry is a form of incantation, or, in Baudelaire’s words: “evocative witchcraft.”<sup>74</sup> Only then, can “colour speak, like a deep and vibrant voice... and scent provoke its corresponding thoughts.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, intersensory art was the stamp of aesthetic excellence, an idea that Swinburne adopted and expanded.

Unlike Whistler, whose development of synaesthesia denied the notion of art as mimetic, and Wilde, whose interest in intersensory aesthetics honoured and advanced the idea of art as artifice, Swinburne’s development of synaesthesia was far more in keeping with Baudelaire’s. It conformed to a somewhat more conventional,

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<sup>71</sup> Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 76.

<sup>72</sup> Translated by De Man in his essay, “The Double Aspect of Symbolism”, *Yale French Studies* 74 (1988), 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Charvet (ed.), Charles Baudelaire, 272; Frank Lentricchia, “Four Types of Nineteenth Century Poetic”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26:3 (1968), 360.

<sup>75</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 272.

Romantic theory mimesis. Or, rather, it straddled synaesthesia's more spiritual presence in British Romanticism and Baudelaire's works, with its more formal, secular and subversive role in British Aestheticism.<sup>76</sup> For Swinburne, intersensory metaphor was also a revelation of an underlying polysensual reality. Art *must* represent, but what it should reveal was that ambiguous singularity that lay beneath the surface.

In a characteristically provocative passage in *Blake*, Swinburne's exaltation of the artist reveals Swinburne's Baudelairian belief in an underlying system of infinite correspondences:

To him the veil of outer things seemed always to tremble with some breath behind it...all the void of earth and air seemed to quiver with the passage of sentient wings and palpitate under the pressure of conscious feet. Flowers and weeds, stars and stones, spoke with articulate lips and gazed with living eyes. Hands were stretched out towards him from beyond the darkness of material nature...His hardest facts were the vaguest allegories of other men. To him all symbolic things were literal, all literal things symbolic. About his path and about his bed, around his ears and under his eyes, an infinite play of spiritual life seethed and swarmed or shone and sang. Spirits imprisoned in the husk and shell of earth consoled him or menaced him. Every leaf bore a growth of angels; the pulse of every minute sounded as the falling foot of God; under the rank raiment of weeds, in the drifting down of thistles, strange faces frowned and white hair fluttered; tempters and allies, wraiths of the living and phantoms of the dead, crowded and made populous the winds that blew about him, the fields and hills over which he gazed.<sup>77</sup>

In *Blake*, great art is visionary because reality is governed by a seemingly imperceptible system of interrelationships. Or, rather, reality is ruled by a system of interrelationships perceptible to only the select few: artists, and just certain artists—Blake, Rossetti, Solomon, Shelley, Hugo, at times, Whistler. Their ability to perceive and capture 'correspondences' in their works is additionally significant, simply because in doing so, they help maintain this underlying superstructure. The profundity

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<sup>76</sup> Nordau classed Swinburne with the "mystic" rather than the aesthete and decadents, whilst attributing Swinburne's "degenerative mysticism" to Baudelaire's influence on the writer. Nordau, *Degeneration*, 317.

<sup>77</sup> Swinburne, *William Blake*, 41.

of Blake's art derives from his sense of the "trembling", "quivering" life that imbues "the veil of outer things", an idea Swinburne also explored in his appraisal of Solomon's *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*. His description of Solomon's aesthetic gifts likewise pivoted on the painter's ability to capture and connect "corresponsive details": "There is perceptible the same profound suggestion of unity between opposites, the same recognition of the identity of contraries."<sup>78</sup> And, indeed, Swinburne returned to this notion throughout the essay, frequently correlating Solomon's artistic powers to the painter-poet's ability to perceive sameness where others see difference.

Swinburne's metaphor of the veil in *Blake* poignantly contrasts with Wilde's well-known mantra of the veil. Both men suggest that surface is depth. But Wilde paradoxically denies the existence of anything beyond the artificial: all is surface (veil, mask, lie), hence, surface is all. Swinburne, on the other hand, and throughout his works, consistently points to—yearningly—a higher, transcendental realm. His striking image of hands reaching out towards Blake "from beyond the darkness of material nature" suggests the existence of an immaterial world filled with lightness. And Blake's works—and, the essay suggests, the works of all genius-artists—are exceptional for their permeating, effusive and ebullient sense of "light", as well as "colour", "odour" and "sound": the building blocks of a synaesthetic metaphor.

As the following chapters will suggest, the presence of something eternal circulates throughout Pater's works, but never as a belief, only a desire. Art initiates a temporal continuity throughout time—connecting age with age, and individual with individual—because of beauty's ability to remain meaningful, irrespective of age and individual. While all else fluctuates (evolves, modifies, adapts, becomes extinct) and

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<sup>78</sup> Swinburne, "Simeon Solomon", 569.

is thus, culturally relative (in a profoundly Darwinian way), beauty is a stabilising constant. Despite Pater's tendency to historicise, aesthetic excellence ultimately resists historicist interpretation. At no point does Pater's development of synaesthesia—or Whistler's or Wilde's—appear to derive from an existential conception of reality. For Swinburne, on the other hand, poetic creation continually mimics a greater creative source.

By destabilising the singularity of perceptual experience, synaesthesia reveals the true nature of reality as inextricably interrelated. Swinburne's "binary vision", which Freedman connects to his tendency to use "contraries", further suggests the idea that all things (objects, senses, experiences) are ultimately interconnected.<sup>79</sup> McGann describes the rhetorical function of synaesthesia in Swinburne's writing "in relation to a device used by Shelley, referred to as the image-anthology technique...[which] consists simply in pouring out a succession of images as analogues or facets of a single subject of perception."<sup>80</sup> When Swinburne moves from impression to impression in *Blake*—from "flowers", "weeds", "stars" and "stones" that "articulate" and "gaze", to leaves that reveal the presence of angels—this flood of alternating sense-impressions manifests itself as "glimpsed fractions of a vast order of universal relations."<sup>81</sup> Thus, although Swinburne champions 'art for art' to protect the autonomy of the aesthetic realm from censors, critics and competing explanations of art's value, *Blake* also contends that only by freeing art from didactic constraints can it capture and transmit a higher vision.

In "Simeon Solomon", for instance, Swinburne perceives a connection between aesthetic formalism and a greater law of form: "But even in cloud there is some law of form, some continuous harmony of line and mass, that only dissolves and

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<sup>79</sup> Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, 6-7.

<sup>80</sup> McGann, *Swinburne*, 73.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

changes ‘as a tune into a tune.’”<sup>82</sup> This relationship re-emerges in Swinburne’s essay “John Ford” for the *Fortnightly* (1871): “In the verse of neither [Ford and Byron] is there that instant and sensible melody which comes only of a secret and sovereign harmony of the whole nature, and which comes of it inevitably and unmistakably.”<sup>83</sup> A poem’s “melody” derives from its “harmony” with nature and from the harmony *within* nature, which is only perceptible to certain artists. These musical terms are imbued with non-musical or semantic and mystical significance. As Connolly asserts in “Swinburne on ‘The Music of Poetry’”:

*Harmony* is a term that goes beyond either “external” or “inner” music. When thoughts, words, deeds sing together, when “external” and “inner” music blend, the result is harmony. Harmony, however, is more than the mere blending of the two types of music. *Harmony* is a key word, a unifying word, in Swinburne’s theory. It is the word in which the other words such as *imagination*, *passion*, *external music* and *inner music* find their resolution and their proper meaning.<sup>84</sup>

In one of Swinburne’s earliest and longest essays for the *Fortnightly*, “Mr. Arnold’s New Poems” (1867), one finds him building a critical lexicon from musical terms such that music is used to describe versification, aesthetic qualities and narrate relationships between poems. And, indeed, “melody” and “harmony” (as well as, less frequently, “interlude”, “symphony” and “antiphony”) are commonly, and with fecundity, employed by Swinburne throughout *Essays and Studies* to both exalt and deride works of art.<sup>85</sup>

In “Notes on the Text of Shelley” for the *Fortnightly* (1869), Swinburne argued that Shelley “Ousang all poets on record but some two or three throughout all time; his depths of *inner* and *outer* music are as divine as nature’s and not sooner

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<sup>82</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 570.

<sup>83</sup> A.C. Swinburne, “John Ford”, *Fortnightly Review* 10 (1871), 42-63; reprinted in *Essays and Studies*, 304.

<sup>84</sup> Connolly, “Swinburne on ‘The Music of Poetry’”, 685.

<sup>85</sup> In certain instances, artists, themselves, also possessed musical qualities: Swinburne describes Blake’s face as having “an abundance of melody in the features, melody rather than harmony”, *William Blake*, 2.

exhaustible.”<sup>86</sup> His distinction between “inner” and “outer” music, which he maintained throughout his critical career, further illustrates how his rhetoric of music was interlinked with a more ontological conception of a musically governed cosmos.<sup>87</sup> “Outer” music generally referred to prosodic elements: rhyme, meter, assonance and so on.<sup>88</sup> It was “outer” music, for instance, that propelled Swinburne’s criticism of Whitman (and free verse) in *Under the Microscope* (1872): “It is when he is thinking the part, of the duties and properties of a representative poet, an official democrat, that the strength forsakes his hand and the music ceases at his lips.”<sup>89</sup> “Inner” music, on the other hand, signified the “more elusive spiritual qualities of a poem”, which were derived from nature; and whilst available to all artists, few had “inner” music.<sup>90</sup>

In *Blake*, an artist’s ability for “musical expression”, no matter their medium, invariably constitutes excellence:

This intense and eager pleasure in the freshness of things, this sharp relish of beauty in all the senses, which must needs over and lapse into sudden musical expression, will recall the passages in Shelley’s letters where some delight of sound or sight suddenly felt or remembered forces its way into speech, and makes music of the subservient words.<sup>91</sup>

Applauding and encouraging the subservience of words to song much in the way that his critics renounced this impulse, “music” is constructed as naturally or innately synaesthetic insofar as it appears to hold the “beauty in all the senses.” Synaesthesia is used to describe aesthetic “delight”, and this “delight” resists sensorial and textual boundaries, for sound and sight convert, or “force” words into pure music.

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<sup>86</sup> Italics mine. A.C. Swinburne, “Notes on the Text of Shelley”, *Fortnightly Review* 10 (1869), 42-63; reprinted in *Essays and Studies*, 187.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Connolly, “Swinburne on ‘The Music of Poetry’”, *PMLA* 72:4 (1957), 680.

<sup>88</sup> Swinburne’s construction of ‘outer’ or ‘external’ music is frequently inconsistent, however, *ibid*, 681.

<sup>89</sup> Swinburne, *Under the Microscope*, 49.

<sup>90</sup> Connolly, “Swinburne on ‘The Music of Poetry’”, 682.

<sup>91</sup> Swinburne, *William Blake*, 33.

Swinburne's praise of Rossetti's poem 'The Sea Limits' in his *Fortnightly* essay "The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" (1870) illustrates the corresponding relationship between the music of poetry and the music of nature:

The very note of that world-old harmony is caught and cast into words.

“Consider the sea's listless chime:  
Time's self it is, made audible:  
The murmur of the earth's own shell.”

This little verse also has the

“Secret continuance sublime”

which “is the sea's end;” it too is a living thing with an echo beyond reach of sense, its chords of sound one part of the multiform unity of mutual inclusion in which all things rest and mix [...].<sup>92</sup>

The shell that holds the sea's “chime” (a “song” which is “time” itself, time being music's unique formal limitation), becomes an extended metaphor for poetry that echoes and reverberates with “sublime” nature and artistic creation more generally. “Echoing” is of fundamental importance to Swinburne. McGann suggests that, “Swinburne's ideal was a poetry that echoed, that caught the music of reality and sent it on to be transmitted across indefinite ages. For him, the echoes of history were merely the analogues of a permanent law of the musical universe in which all things correspond.”<sup>93</sup> One could interpret Swinburne's frequent use of refrain as an *echo*. Baudelaire's influence is also commanding here: Swinburne speaks of multiform unity and mutual inclusion; Baudelaire alludes to infinite, unbreakable totalities in “Wagner”, articulating the composer's genius in terms of his ability to capture and transmit ‘music’ through alternate, non-musical mediums. This conception of excellence underscored Swinburne's admiration for Solomon in his laudatory essay on the artist whose words contained “melodious beauty”, and designs “[made] music...in the dumb show of lines and colour.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> A.C. Swinburne “The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti”, *Fortnightly Review* 7 (1870), 551-79; reprinted in *Essays and Studies*, 70.

<sup>93</sup> McGann, *Swinburne*, 133.

<sup>94</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 575.

#### IV. Swinburne, Solomon and the Ideal of a “Compound Genius”

Swinburne’s seminal essay “Simeon Solomon: Notes on his ‘Vision of Love’ and Other Studies” appeared in the *Dark Blue* in 1871, the same year that Solomon published his homoerotic prose-poem *A Vision of Love as Revealed in Sleep* together with some designs. In Swinburne’s view, Solomon’s gifted perceptive skills constituted his genius as an artist. While not a synaesthete, Solomon possessed a keen ability to sense the fluidity of “boundaries” on sensorial and perceptual, sexual and cultural grounds, another way of characterising “the Aesthetic gaze.”<sup>95</sup> Swinburne’s construction of the “compound genius” thus related to both perception and the amorphousness of boundaries: two features of synaesthetic metaphor. Like Pater’s “Giorgione”, the essay represents Swinburne’s most explicit *theoretical* development of synaesthesia. Incidentally, in addition to the “certain German critics” Pater credited with his theory of “*Anders-streben*”, “Simeon Solomon” also appears influential.<sup>96</sup> The similarities between these essays are indeed extensive. Both writers advance synaesthetic theories of art, privilege music as the ultimate art form, praise the innate musicality of their artists’ works, and rhetorically incorporate music into their critiques. Swinburne’s detailed description of Solomon’s designs as “music made visible” parallels Pater’s description of Giorgione and his followers.<sup>97</sup>

Gosse connects “Simeon Solomon” directly to Swinburne’s review of *Les Fleurs du mal*. He suggests that the essay “expresses more fully than any other portion of Swinburne’s prose, the effect of Baudelaire’s example upon his

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<sup>95</sup> And thus, ‘the Aesthetic gaze’ is not just “disinterested, disembodied, autonomous and only present in the reception of the artwork”, Tony Bennett et al., *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 341. Rather, it is also profoundly interested and *embodied*.

<sup>96</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 139.

<sup>97</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 574.

temperament.”<sup>98</sup> Certainly, Swinburne’s synaesthetic construction of both aesthetic excellence and artistic genius is immensely Baudelairean. Swinburne also explicitly pairs himself with Baudelaire in the essay when he suggests that Solomon’s work would have “drawn forth praise and sympathy from Baudelaire, most loving of all students of strange beauty and abnormal refinement, of painful pleasures of soul and inverted raptures of sense.”<sup>99</sup> There is an additional connection, however: Swinburne’s decision to praise Solomon’s work was also a radical and brave gesture. The scandalous, well-publicised trial of Earnest Boulton and Frederick Park—arrested for dressing as women and conspiring to commit sodomy in public—had only recently concluded. And the trial, attended by Solomon, raised numerous issues regarding standards of civic masculinity, many of which circulate throughout Buchanan’s attack on “the Fleshly School.”<sup>100</sup>

The critical reception of Solomon’s sexualised representations of the male body suggest “increasing public awareness of, and homophobia in response to, male-male eroticism and sexuality as highlighted by recent medical discourse and scandals such as Boulton and Park.”<sup>101</sup> As Thaïs E. Morgan asserts, “*A Vision of Love* is testimony to the increasing presence of an all male monoculture...more specifically, [it] should be interpreted in the context of writers and thinkers at Oxford engaged in the project of relating male beauty and male-male desire to the history, philosophy and art of classical Greece.”<sup>102</sup> To formulate a theory of aesthetic interrelationships within the radical context of Solomon’s work was to implicate synaesthesia within the

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<sup>98</sup> Gosse (ed.), *Les Fleurs du mal*, xvii.

<sup>99</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 575.

<sup>100</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.

<sup>101</sup> Thaïs E. Morgan, “Victorian Effeminacies”, 116-17.

<sup>102</sup> Thaïs E. Morgan, “Perverse Male Bodies: Simeon Solomon and Algernon Charles Swinburne” in Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (eds.), *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996), 61-85, 78.

gender politics of the age. The amorphousness of perceptual boundaries became an androgynous ambiguity as well:

Upon men in whom there is, so to speak, a *compound* genius, an *intermixture* of spiritual forces, a *confluence* of separate yet *conspiring* influences, diverse in source yet *congruous* in result—upon men in whose eyes the boundary lines of the several *conterminous* arts appear less as lines of mere distinction than as lines of mutual alliance—the impression of the mystery of beauty, and in all defects that fall short of it, and in all excesses that overbear it, is likely to have a special hold. The subtle *interfusion* of art with art, of sound with form, or vocal words with silent colours, is as perceptible to the sense and as inexplicable to the understanding of such men as the interfusion of spirit with flesh is to all men in common; and in fact when perceived of no less significance than this, but rather a part and complement of the same truth.<sup>103</sup>

Solomon is a “compound genius” because he perceives “boundary lines” as “mutual alliances.” A prose-poet (already a hybrid genre which Baudelaire popularised in *Paris Spleen*) as well as a painter, throughout Solomon’s works there is an “interfusion of art with art.” Swinburne’s praise for Solomon, which is couched in musical terms throughout the essay, suggests that his art is *penetrated* by music: “The ‘unheard melodies’ which Keats, with a sense beyond senses, perceived and enjoyed in the forms of a Grecian urn, vibrate in the forms of this artist’s handiwork; and all their lines and colours”; “Throughout the whole there is as it were a suffusion of music, a transpiration of light and sound, very delicately and surely sustained”; “The style is soft, fluent, genuinely melodious”; “All the sorrow of the senses is incarnate in the mournful and melodious beauty”; “In pictures where no one figures as making music, the same inevitably sense of song makes melodies of vocal colour and symphonies of painted cadence”; and finally, “The colours have speech in them, a noble and solemn speech... full of large strong harmonies.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Italics mine. Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 568.

<sup>104</sup> Italics mine. Ibid, 568-77.

Importantly, aesthetic interrelationships or “interfusions” are evoked and suggested. Solomon’s text and designs are mutually melodious, harmonies, soft, colourful and symphonic. As Peters notes, “Swinburne freely interchanged critical observations about the poems with those of the designs and was among the few critics to see specific connections between...[the] two media.”<sup>105</sup> Swinburne’s sensitivity to the relationship between Solomon’s prose-poem and his visual images further reveals the evocative nature of these interrelationships. In F.S. Ellis’ review of *A Vision of Love*, he praised Solomon for providing “a key to the meaning of his drawings.”<sup>106</sup> Swinburne, however, does not characterise Solomon’s text as a verbal illustration of visual meaning. Rather, when taken together, “the fluctuating twilight of this rhapsody” attains “translucency” due to “the light of his designs.”<sup>107</sup>

In “Rossetti”, Swinburne discussed the mutually evocatively relationship between ‘text’ and ‘image’:

But here, where both sister powers serve in the temple of one mind and impel the world of one hand, their manner of service is smooth, harmonious, perfect; the splendid quality of painting and the subtle faculty of verse gain glory without taking, reign side by side with no division of empire, yet no confusion of claims, with no invasion of rights.<sup>108</sup>

Swinburne’s language—which is overtly political—reveals a keen sensitivity to the balance between ‘text’ and ‘image’, and to the ability of these media to evoke each other reciprocally. He appears to be drawing a distinction between popular illustrated books and narrative paintings from books, which witnessed an explosive growth during the period, and *Aesthetic* books.<sup>109</sup> Rather than ekphratic narrations of

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<sup>105</sup> Peters, *Crowns of Apollo*, 96.

<sup>106</sup> F.S. Ellis, “A Vision of Love”, *Academy* (1871), 287.

<sup>107</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 570.

<sup>108</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 57-8; See Curtis’s chapter “The Hieroglyphic Image” on the emergence of textual/visual amalgamations in the mid-Victorian period, be it through illustrated books, graphic novels and the highly popular ‘paintings from the novel’, 58-102.

paintings, the relationship between ‘image’ and ‘text’ in an Aesthetic book is far more allusive. One does not “take” from the other (an emphasis Pater later adopts in “Giorgione”) but “gains glory.”

The terms italicised in the passage from “Simeon Solomon”—“compound”, “intermixture”, “confluence”, “conspiring”, “congruous”, “conterminous”—show Swinburne using a series of cognates related to combining, conflation and conciliation. The prefix “con” or “com” means “together”, which resembles “syn”: to join and, by extension, “harmony” from the Greek “harmonia”: joining sounds. The terms “interfusion”, “interwoven” and “infusion” (which Swinburne uses repetitively and which Pater later adopts in “Giorgione”) further reveal his attraction to “boundaries” and to the methods and limits of categorization. The “compound genius”, in perceiving the inherent connections between the arts and making them visible, is also ultimately engaged in the subversion of “boundaries” through the creation of “alliances” that are articulated in terms of sensorial pluralities. To this extent, the concept of synaesthesia closely resembles Beer’s construction of metaphor: “[it] depends upon species and upon categorisation. It cannot inhabit an entirely promiscuous world. It is polymorphic, but its energy needs the barriers which it seeks to break down.”<sup>110</sup> David Lodge, distinguishing between metaphor and simile, suggests that similes assert likeness, metaphors assert identity and their radical strategy of separation tends to be disruptive.<sup>111</sup> At times, this “disruption” is cultural: “interfusion” signals Solomon’s ability to wed east with west or Hebraic traditions with Christian and Greek allegory.<sup>112</sup> “Interfusion” also relates to a union between

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<sup>110</sup> Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 94.

<sup>111</sup> David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnolds, 1977), 17.

<sup>112</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 572.

“spirit” and “flesh”, thereby paralleling music’s metaphoric appeal. But these perceptual abilities and artistic alliances also carry distinct sexual connotations.

When Swinburne champions Blake, Rossetti and Solomon as “compound geniuses”, there is an underlying and unmistakable sexual significance to his choice. Each of these men were visual and literary artists who produced “illustrated books”, and each pioneered and promoted the androgynous image in the nineteenth century. Swinburne directly addresses the luxurious androgyny of Solomon’s designs: “Many of these, as the figure bearing the eucharist of love, have a supersexual beauty, in which the lineaments of woman and of man seem blended as the lines of sky and landscape melt in burning mist of heat and light.”<sup>113</sup> The hermaphrodite destabilises sexual difference; synaesthesia threatens perceptual singularities. The fact that Swinburne is the greatest male champion of Sappho in the nineteenth century and has a clear interest in lesbianism—in addition to ‘Hermaphroditus’, ‘Anactoria’ and ‘Sapphics’ explore homosexual love between women—further illuminates his attraction to concepts and symbols that signify unification but only through defiance.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, “compound” begins to enclose new meanings, referring to the amalgamation of the arts and of culture as well as to sexuality and the mutability of gender constructions. Keeping in mind the prominence of the hermaphroditic symbol in France in the early part of the nineteenth century as well as its later significance in Britain, this becomes even further politicised. At first emblematic of universal man, serving as an image for solidarity, fraternity and even liberal equality, by the *fin-de-siècle*, the hermaphrodite and the androgyne had become symbols of vice,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 574.

<sup>114</sup> For Sappho’s symbolism in the nineteenth century see Kate Flint’s essay “As A Rule, I does not mean ‘I’: Personal Identity and the Victorian Woman Poet” in Ray Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1997), 156-66.

homosexuality, sadism and masochism.<sup>115</sup> The critical reception of Swinburne's poem 'Hermaphroditus', which revels in androgynous love and by extension, sexual ambiguity, foreshadows this later significance. Singled out by numerous reviewers for being inappropriate, the poem was explicitly defended by Swinburne in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866):

There is nothing lovelier, as there is nothing more famous, in later Hellenic art, than the statue of Hermaphroditus...a creature (the critic, his critics) dull enough to extract from a sight so lovely, from a thing so noble, the faintest, the most fleeting idea of impurity, must be, and must remain, below comprehension and below remark. It is incredible that the meanest of men should derive from it any other than the sense of high and grateful pleasure. Odour and colour and music are not more tender or more pure. How favourite and frequent a vision among the Greeks was this of the union of sexes in one body of perfect beauty, none need be told.<sup>116</sup>

The idea of "blending" the sexes to create a "perfect", "supersexual beauty", is comparable to "interfusing" aesthetic forms to create artworks that have "a special hold", and perhaps even to combining the visual and textual within an Aesthetic book. In *The Artist as Critic* (1995), Lorraine Janzen Kooistra links bitextuality to bisexuality, arguing that image/text relations during the period were "sexually coded": "Like the hermaphrodite, the illustrated book is a hybrid form combining the characteristics of two bodies: pictures and words."<sup>117</sup> Above all, interfusions of the sexes and the arts elicited "grateful pleasure" which was "pure." And, importantly, Swinburne's description of this purity unfolded in relation to "odour", "colour" and "music."

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<sup>115</sup> A.J.L. Busst, "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century" in Ian Small (ed.), *Romantic Mythologies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 11, 39.

<sup>116</sup> A.C. Swinburne, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), 18.

<sup>117</sup> Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 10-11.

## V. 'Aesthetic Criticism' as Poetry as Antiphony:

If synaesthetic metaphor revealed gifted perceptual abilities, it was also used to overcome the textual boundaries of critical discourse whilst protecting art's autonomy within a genre whose objectives appeared intrinsically threatening. For what better forum than critical discourse to cultivate and apply didactic criteria to the arts? By the end of the 1860s, in the wake of the controversy surrounding *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne would have been extremely, personally aware of the role critics played in disseminating values concerning the moral, cultural, historical usefulness of art. As the aesthetes preserved the 'purity' of the aesthetic realm by localising meaning at the site of form (or as a *fusion* between form and content), the relevance of art criticism became, necessarily, a pressing debate. Since formal properties were 'untranslatable', and as Swinburne and his fellow aesthetes granted primacy to the role of spectatorship and subjectivity in the realm of art, aesthetic meaning invariably escaped critical and linguistic analysis. What then was the role of the art critic? And what were the objectives of art criticism?

These questions haunt Swinburne's critical writings of the 1860s and 70s, as well as, to a lesser degree, his essay-collection *Miscellanies* (1886), comprised of works culled from a variety of forums including the *Fortnightly Review*, *Nineteenth Century*, the *Examiner* and the *Athenaeum*. Throughout *Essays and Studies*—in particular, in Swinburne's essays on Arnold and Rossetti—his analysis of a text or painting frequently swerves into a tangential and self-conscious rumination on the ability, or inability, of critical discourse to account for aesthetic objects. In these critical writings, one encounters a persistent and profound awareness of 'meaning' as something not just 'untranslatable' but frequently indefinable and inexplicable. This is

evident in Swinburne's essay "Wordsworth and Byron", published in two parts in 1884 in James Knowles' *Nineteenth Century*, a periodical that actively pursued divergent positions across a range of disciplines:

When the highest intelligence enlisted in the service of the highest criticism has done all it can ever aim at doing in exposition of the highest things in art, there remains always something unspoken and something undone which never in any way can be done or spoken.<sup>118</sup>

Swinburne's recognition of this "inexplicability" underscores his gravitation towards synaesthetic metaphor. To demonstrate the inseparability between form and content, he elevates his critical style to a level with that of its content. As McGann states, "Only by making style part of its content—would a writer begin to explain how essentially inseparable the two always had to be."<sup>119</sup> Swinburne's reliance on intersensory tropes as a critic, then, can be read as an attempt to ensure that his style conformed to, and advanced his aesthetic views.

The aim of this burgeoning literary genre was not, in Arnold's words, "to see the object as in itself it really is" and to articulate this knowledge. Rather, the genre's objectives were best defined by Pater's explicit response to Arnold in his "Preface" to *The Renaissance*: "In aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is."<sup>120</sup> The language of "impressionism" adhered to the term's multiple connotations: to bring about a lasting effect, to provide a mental image, to impact, imprint, and impersonate.<sup>121</sup> By pushing critical discourse closer to the realm of 'the aesthetic', the genre adopted creative standards and a creative feel. Synaesthetic metaphor played a decisive role in *Aestheticising* critical discourse. It denied the importance of context (history, literature, biography, event) by emphasising the focal role of subjective experience in

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<sup>118</sup> A.C. Swinburne, "Wordsworth and Byron", *Nineteenth Century* (April and May 1884), 583-609, 764-90, reprinted in Swinburne, *Miscellanies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1886), 125.

<sup>119</sup> McGann, *Swinburne*, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, x.

<sup>121</sup> "Impression" and "Impressionism", *OED*, 740-2.

the realm of art. Consequently, Swinburne was neither ‘middleman’, ‘narrator’, ‘contextualiser’ or ‘historicist.’ Rather, he was a ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’ participant. His ‘criticism for criticism’s sake’ called out to his fellow artists in poetic dialogue.

Thus, there are two important aspects of Swinburne’s stylistic development of synaesthesia as a critic. On the one hand, synaesthetic metaphor distilled ‘context’ from criticism and was, to this extent, a highly politicised stylistic approach. But synaesthetic metaphor was also used to connote and renegotiate textual boundaries by mediating between sensorial experiences and by translating the ‘sensations’ of aesthetic excellence. Swinburne frequently alludes to the futility of critical analysis in *Essays and Studies*: whilst a critic can discern what makes a work of art good, greatness is, invariably, irreducible (to analysis, linguistic narration and even, as we shall see, to any expressive, communicative form except other works of art and metaphor). In *Under the Microscope*, Swinburne defines the true test of great art by its resilience to “analysis” and “anatomy”: “Thus tried as in the fire and decomposed as in a crucible it comes out after all renewed and reattested [sic] in perfection of all its parts, in solid and flawless unity, whole and indissoluble.”<sup>122</sup> Rallying against scientific approaches to criticism as Pater does in “Giorgione”, aesthetic excellence cannot be scrutinised or “decomposed” because it is inextricably connected to the perceptual, sensorial limitations of forms and to their reception.<sup>123</sup>

Swinburne’s description of great art as a “flawless unity” that is “indissoluble” resonates with his existential metaphor of harmony. Indeed, ‘music’ defines precisely what the critic cannot grasp (the thing “unspoken” and “undone”). And this, of course, constitutes a significant aspect of music’s paradigmatic allure for Swinburne. In “Wordsworth and Byron”, he uses synaesthesia to express this idea:

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<sup>122</sup> Swinburne, *Under the Microscope*, 33.

<sup>123</sup> Pater later revised this notion in his essay “Style” (1888) which I discuss in my chapter on the writer.

If all its properties can easily or can ever be gauged and named by their admirers, it is not poetry—above all, it is not *lyric* poetry—of the first water. There must be something in the mere progress and resonance of the words, some secret in the very motion and cadence of the lines, inexplicable by the most sympathetic acuteness of criticism. Analysis may be able to explain how the colours of this flower or poetry are created and combined, but never by what process its odour is produced.<sup>124</sup>

To suggest that lyrical poetry possesses “colour” and “odour” (as a “flower” does) is to rely on alternate sensorial fields to represent heightened forms and feelings of beauty that cannot be “gauged”, “named” or, simply, *critiqued*. This inability to “name”—to find words that can capture the “secret” “motion” of “cadence”, which is pure form—gestures towards an even greater issue regarding what appears to be an innately conflicted relationship between text and non-text. In “Coleridge”, Swinburne similarly imbues lyricism (or music) with visual and olfactory significance: “The spirit, the odour in it, the cloven tongue of fire that rests upon its forehead...is a thing neither explicable or communicable.”<sup>125</sup> Synaesthetic metaphor registers what is ‘untranslatable.’ At the same time, it provides linguistic leverage for translating the inexplicable. “Odour”—a sensorial experience not immediately associated with, nor produced by a poem—records textual boundaries whilst, simultaneously, subverting them.

In *Blake*, the intrinsic music of great (lyrical) poetry escapes critical analysis simply because lyricism is, by its very nature, without a linguistic equivalent: “We shall hardly find words to suit our sense of...beauty.”<sup>126</sup> Swinburne returns to this idea in “Rossetti”, when he argues that the artist’s “rare and ineffable...supreme singing power...[is] too subtle for solution in any crucible of analysis.”<sup>127</sup> And yet, if

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<sup>124</sup> Swinburne, *Miscellanies*, 126-7.

<sup>125</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 266. “Coleridge” was taken from Swinburne’s introduction to his edition, *Christabel and the Lyrical Imaginative Poems of S.T. Coleridge* (London: Sampson Low, 1869).

<sup>126</sup> Swinburne, *William Blake*, 9.

<sup>127</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 104.

Swinburne rejects “analysis” he does so to make room for the importance of the subjective response and for a particular kind of sensibility that is intuitively susceptible to beauty. For he concedes in the essay that “Its presence and absence be patent at a first trial to all who have a sense of taste.”<sup>128</sup> To *know* great art, then, is to *sense* it: beauty is a *privileged* feeling or taste. Nonetheless, Rossetti’s ‘song’ cannot be captured in speech. Nor can Rossetti, himself, in his translations of Sappho, possess and retransmit her music with its indelible echoes:

But though the sweet life and colour be saved and renewed, no man can give again in full that ineffable glory and grace of present godhead, that subtle breath and bloom of very heaven itself, that dignity of divinity which informs the most passionate and piteous notes of the approachable poetess with such grandeur as would seem impossible to such passion. Here is a delicious and living music, but here is not—what can be nowhere—the echo of that unimaginable song, with its pauses and redoubled notes and returns and falls of sound, as of honey dropping from heaven[...].<sup>129</sup>

On the other hand, if great art cannot be described but only felt, it also leaves one speechless: “The chief thing remains unsaid, and unspeakable. There is a charm upon these poems which can only be *felt* in silent submission of wonder.”<sup>130</sup> Swinburne asserts this in “Coleridge”: “More utterly companionless, more incomparable with others, than any of his kind.”<sup>131</sup> To describe Coleridge’s magisterial presence, he relies on visual and aural juxtapositions: “[‘Lewti’] has admirable melody and tender colour”; ‘Ode on Dejection’ contains “vaguer harmonies and sunset colours”; and ‘Lapolya’ is “one of the brightest bits of music” because it is without “patches of imperial purple sewn on.”<sup>132</sup> Textual experience is rendered through non-textual sensations. His commentary on ‘Lapolya’ in particular, converts the poem into a textile, a thing to be sewn. When discussing ‘Kubla Khan’, Swinburne registers its

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 261, 258, 268.

power as a synaesthetic experience: “In reading it we seem rapt into that paradise revealed to Swedenborg, where music and colour and perfume were one, where you could hear the hues and see the harmonies of heaven.”<sup>133</sup> Swinburne’s allusion to the senses converging invokes Baudelaire’s influential Swedenborgian sonnet ‘Correspondences.’ As Baudelaire states in the infamous final line of the second quatrain: “Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.”<sup>134</sup> To “hear the hues” and “see the harmonies” completely de-categorises the sense-impressions: a visual phenomenon is heard, an auditory appeal is seen, and this accounts for the reader’s rapture, which can only be *felt*.

Swinburne repeatedly constructs beauty as a sensation to be experienced rather than an object to be defined. Consequently, critical analysis is not just futile but *violent*, as Swinburne indicates in “Matthew Arnold’s New Poems”: “For the absolute loveliness of sound and colour in this and the next song there are no adequate words that would not seem violent; and violence is too far from this poetry to invade even the outlying province of commentary.”<sup>135</sup> Swinburne’s description of Arnold’s poems as “songs” of “sound” and “colour”, honours and preserves the notion of art as a particular kind of ‘polysensual’ feeling. His tendency to interchange terms relating to colour and sound (perhaps learned from Baudelaire), suggests that these properties are somehow innately linked. The perceptual unity provoked by Arnold’s verse, which accounts for its pleasure, is threatened by discourse’s intrinsic need to separate and define. As McGann suggests:

Swinburne shares with Pater the belief that aesthetic communication is more perfect than philosophical discourse. Both men write impressionistic prose to dramatise this attitude because it aggressively supports the superiority of symbolic to discursive form, even if it uses

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>134</sup> F.W. Leakey (ed. and trans.), *Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du mal* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 37.

<sup>135</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 141.

the primary materials of all discourse. One is forced to read their prose aesthetically, the way one reads poetry...[thus] the most perfect act of aesthetic criticism could only be another work of art.<sup>136</sup>

Or, as Baudelaire asserted in his impassioned analysis of criticism in “The Salon of 1846”: “The best account of a picture may well be a sonnet or an elegy.”<sup>137</sup>

Swinburne’s poem ‘Before the Mirror’ can be interpreted as both verse inspired by a painting as well as an attempt to account for Whistler’s ‘Symphony’ in the manner that Baudelaire urged. In “Coleridge”, Swinburne echoes Baudelaire’s suggestion:

Of his flight and his song when in the fit element, it is hard to speak at all, hopeless to speak adequately...natural that his poetry at its highest should be, as it is, beyond all praise and all words of men. He who can define it could “unweave a rainbow;” he who could praise it aright would be such another as the poet.<sup>138</sup>

Aesthetic excellence thwarts one’s ability to “define.” When a “song” is “in the fit element” or “at its highest”, it is a force that words cannot circumscribe. And yet, Swinburne does concede that if Coleridge’s genius was matched, his work could be praised without being “unwoven” or “decomposed.” Consequently, adequate speech might occur between poets and, presumably, only within a medium that abides by, and is amenable to, the laws of poetry. The idea that only art can respond to or account for another work of art is addressed in Swinburne’s analysis of Whistler’s *The Six Projects* in “Notes on Some Pictures of 1868”:

Of three slighter works lately painted I may set down a few rapid notes; but no task is harder than this of translation from colour into speech, when the speech must be so hoarse and feeble, when the colour is so subtle and sublime...music or verse might strike some string accordant in sound to such painting.<sup>139</sup>

Swinburne explicitly defines the difficulties of writing about art as a problem of intersensory translation: the rendering of “colour” into “speech”, the movement of one perceptual and sensorial experience into another. His emphasis on the “sublime” nature of colour and the “hoarse” and “feeble” perimeters of discourse underscores his

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<sup>136</sup> McGann, *Swinburne*, 23.

<sup>137</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 50.

<sup>138</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 262-3.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 373.

perception of a relational incompatibility between language and painting, image and text. Indeed, he (like Whistler) intimates the same questions posed by Louis Marin in *To Destroy Painting* (1994), namely: “Is a discourse on painting possible?” “Can there be a verbal metalanguage for the language of painting?” And finally, “What is the relationship between language and painting if in speaking of a painting we undermine the *délectation* or *jouissance* that is its end?”<sup>140</sup> Marin’s final question encloses a significant presupposition: the ‘end’ or aim of art is pleasure and moreover, a quality of pleasure that arises from a work’s formal attributes. And thus, like Swinburne, Marin probes the very viability of criticism *as* translation.

Yet, synaesthetic metaphor clearly manifests itself as a method of translation, only what is translated is not the object but its experience. McGann characterises “impressionistic criticism” as highly self-reflexive and constantly aware of its textual, sensorial boundaries, its rhetoric aiming to convince us that experience is more important than ideas. The poetic form that Swinburne adopts ensures that his perceptions are presented as experiences rather than categories.<sup>141</sup> As in Swinburne’s review of *The Six Projects*, within which the futility of speech is reconciled with art’s ability to critique art, in *Blake* Swinburne’s recognition of “feeble” speech is reconciled with synaesthetic metaphor:

There is something rough and hard, too faint and formless, in any critical language yet devised, to pay tribute with the proper grace and sufficiency to the best works of lyrical art. One can say, indeed, that some of these earliest songs of Blake’s have the scent and sound of Elizabethan times upon them.<sup>142</sup>

Swinburne’s suggestive allusion to “any critical language yet devised” implies that such a discourse could be created. Furthermore, Swinburne appears to be positioning his critical style against the “rough” and “hard”, “faint” and “formless” language of

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<sup>140</sup> Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, (trans.) Mette Hjort (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>141</sup> McGann, *Swinburne*, 15.

<sup>142</sup> Swinburne, *William Blake*, 9.

other critics. His linguistic expression is too lyrical, poetic and connotative to fit this characterisation of critical language. Furthermore, if not yet devised, what is there to say? Yet, Swinburne continues to “speak.” The first part of the passage honours the untranslatable and inexplicable nature of art as a resistance to critical analysis. The second part, however, literally moves the reader out from this silence with the phrase, “One can say, indeed.” And, importantly, what one can say is that Blake’s “songs” have the “scent” and “sound” of past times. The merit of Blake’s work unfolds in qualitative and affective terms.

In “Rossetti”, Swinburne used the term “transfusion” instead of ‘translation’ to define interrelationships between texts and non-texts or the creation of a linguistic equivalent to a visual experience. As Swinburne suggested in the essay:

The miraculous faculty of *transfusion* which enables the cupbearer to pour this wine of verse from the golden to the silver cup without spilling was never before given to man...[This] is the kind of test which stamps the supremacy of an artist, answering in poetry to the subtlest successes of the same hand in painting [...].<sup>143</sup>

Significantly, then, it was the ability to “transfuse” mediums that constituted artistic genius: synaesthesia was the stamp of aesthetic excellence. The term ‘transfusion’—to permeate or infuse medically speaking and otherwise—derives from the Latin ‘transfundere’: “to pour from one container into another.”<sup>144</sup> Swinburne is clearly guided by its etymological reference: in both “Rossetti”, and, as we shall see, his critique of *The Six Projects*, the sensual image of a chalice or cup spilling art into art is employed.<sup>145</sup> With the term “interfusion”, there is a greater sense of mixing or fusing mediums and of using language to test and renegotiate its own formal boundaries. The Latin preposition ‘inter’: to go between, among or in the midst of, is

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<sup>143</sup> Italics mine. Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 76-7.

<sup>144</sup> “Transfusion”, *OED*, 402.

<sup>145</sup> He returns again to the image of a cup when describing Rossetti’s translation of Dante in “Rossetti”: “here the divine verses seems actually to fall of itself into a new mould, the exact shape and size of the first—to be poured from one cup into another without spilling one drop of nectar”, Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 92.

subtly different than ‘trans’: to move across and beyond. Nonetheless, both words saliently describe the role of synaesthetic metaphor in Swinburne’s criticism: it transfuses and interfuses his observations with varieties of sensorial juxtapositions. In doing so, it registers Swinburne’s susceptibility to aesthetic influence, the physical delight of his spectatorship. And this, in turn, offers and insists upon a salient alternative to re-conceiving the critic’s task and the role of criticism vis-à-vis a particular approach to style.

In *Blake*, Swinburne praises the *Poetical Sketches* (1783) for possessing synaesthetic attributes:

They have a fragrance of sound, a melody of colour, in a time when the best verses produced had merely the arid perfume of powder, the twang of dry wood and adjusted strings; when here the painting was laid on in patches, and there the music meted out by precedent; colour and sound never mixed together into the perfect scheme of poetry. The texture of these songs has the softness of flowers; the touch of them has nothing metallic or mechanical, such as one feels in much excellent and elaborate verse of this day as well as that. The sound of many verses of Blake cleaves to the sense long after conscious thought of meaning has passed one: a sound like running water or ringing or bells in a long lull of wind. Like all very good lyrical verse, they grow in pleasurable effect upon the memory the longer it holds them—  
increase in relish the longer they dwell upon the taste.<sup>146</sup>

Blake’s *Poetical Sketches* smell like music and sound like colour, which defines both their excellence and *uniqueness*. For the poetry of Blake’s contemporaries is neither fragrant nor melodic, but smells like “powder” and sounds sharp. The *Poetical Sketches* are also “mixed” from colour and sound (rather than written). The “songs” are softly textured or soft to the touch.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, the critique is immensely tactile. Blake’s work appears to engage the hands more than the eyes. His contemporaries, however, write so floridly that their work feels “metallic” or “mechanical” and should thus not be touched. Blake’s poetry—able to be touched, smelled, seen and heard—

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<sup>146</sup> Swinburne, *William Blake*, 9-10.

<sup>147</sup> Swinburne is either speaking metaphorically or referring specifically to the series of poems entitled ‘song’ in the collection.

rewards his readers with a variety of sensorial pleasures, its meaning echoing the longer that one savours its “taste.” Swinburne’s critique concludes on the tongue.

By asking his readers to negotiate language through its tactility, imagery and sound, Swinburne enlarges our perceptual resources.<sup>148</sup> In Swinburne’s description of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)—Blake’s “most faultless song” and “most imperfect rhapsody”—its brilliance is not musical but music in itself (Like Solomon’s *A Vision of Love*): “At one time we have mere music, chains of ringing names, scattered jewels of sound without a thread, tortuous network of harmonies without a clue; and again we have passages, not always unworthy of an Aeschylean chorus, full of fate.”<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, this “stately music, shrill now as laughter and again as sonorous as a psalm”<sup>150</sup> is “hard to catch and hold...down to any form or plan.”<sup>151</sup> If Swinburne’s description of Blake’s work transforms poetry into an aural experience, his representation of Blake’s “spirit” converts the text into an equally spirited entity. For it has a “body” that is never “deformed”, a “surface” that is never “sung”, it “swarms with heresies and eccentricities” and “every sentence bristles with some paradox, every page seethes with blind foam and surf of stormy doctrine.”<sup>152</sup> Swinburne’s verbs (“swarm”, “seethe”, “bristle”) translate Blake’s work into a kinetic, tactile, bodily ‘object’ such that “the actual page seems to take life, to assume colour and sound, under the hands that turn it and the lips that read it.”<sup>153</sup> Synaesthesia completely subverts the presence of text and the act of reading. His description in *Blake* envelops the reader within ‘inverted’ sensory theatrics: “This whole myth of Leutha is splendid for colour, and not too subtle to be thought out: the

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<sup>148</sup> Jerome McGann & Charles L. Sligh (eds.), *Major Poems and Selected Prose: Algernon Charles Swinburne* (New Haven, 2004), xxv.

<sup>149</sup> Swinburne, *William Blake*, 216.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

imaginative action of the poem plays like fire and palpitates like blood upon every line, as the lips of caressing flame and the tongues of cleaving light in which the text is set form and flash about the margins.”<sup>154</sup> In this instance, the text as an object, a book subsumed in “fire” and “light”, illuminates the creative licence that Swinburne takes as a critic. By substituting poetic interpretation for “analysis”, the critic as artist emerges. And it was no doubt Swinburne, Pater and others whom Wilde had in mind when he explored the aesthetics of critique in “The Critic as Artist.”

In “Morris’s ‘Life and Death of Jason’” (1867), Swinburne’s first contribution to the *Fortnightly Review*, music absorbs alternate sensorial qualities:

All this song of a nymph to Hylas is full of the melody which involves colour and odour, but the two lines marked have in them the marvel and the music of a dream. Nor is any passage in the poem pitched in a higher and clearer key than the first hymn of Orpheus as Argo takes the sea.<sup>155</sup>

To speak of melody as “involving” “odour” and ‘colour’ not only destabilises the textual boundaries of Morris’ work, but also, the semantic boundaries of the term “melody” in itself. Swinburne broadens its significance by imbuing the term with visual and olfactory relevance. Baudelaire also does this, particularly with colour, which is comprised of music’s “harmony, melody and counterpoint”<sup>156</sup>:

Harmony is the basis of the theory of colour. Melody means unity of colour, in other words, of a colour scheme. A melody needs to be resolved, in other words, it needs a conclusion, which all the individual effects combine to produce. By this means a melody leaves an unforgettable memory in the mind. Most of our young colourists lack melody. The right way of knowing whether a picture is melodious is to look at it from far enough away to make it impossible for us to see what it is about or appreciate its lines. If it is melodious, it already has a meaning, and has already taken a place in our collection of memories.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 295.

<sup>155</sup> A.C. Swinburne, “Morris’s ‘Life and Death of Jason’”, *Fortnightly Review* 2 (1867), 19-28, reprinted in Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 119.

<sup>156</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 55.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 57.

Baudelaire converts colour into a visual and aural experience by incorporating musical terms and properties into its very definition. To define colour, musically, is to circumscribe the meaning of colour within a musical context.<sup>158</sup> As J.A. Hiddleston states: “There can be no doubt that for Baudelaire colour is not merely documentary, but a language of signs, which, far from being arbitrary and idiosyncratic, is essential to the meaning of a work.”<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, Baudelaire imbues colour with temporal dimension: our perception of melody requires the passing of time. For Swinburne, music is imbued with all of the senses. The “melody” of Morris’ work can be heard, smelled and seen. Or, rather, the experience of ‘hearing’ it encompasses additional sense perceptions.

Swinburne uses colour to register fluctuations of meaning within poems or, “cadences of colour.” In “Rossetti”, he urges his readers to “Observe the glorious change of note from the delicate colour of the second stanza [of Rossetti’s poem ‘The Monochord’] to the passionate colour of the third; the passage from the soft bright symbols to the actual fire of vision and burning remembrance.”<sup>160</sup> Rossetti’s text is evoked as a visual sensation: one is reading and beholding at the same time, and colour registers its climax. When describing the profundity of the first stanza of Rossetti’s poem ‘Sudden Light’ in relation to the weaker second and third stanzas, Swinburne suggests that, “The touches of colour and odour and sound in it are almost too fine in their harmony to be matched with any later. There is not a more delicate note of magic nature in these poems.”<sup>161</sup> Sensorial coalescence accounts for the first

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<sup>158</sup> In all likelihood, Baudelaire was at least acquainted with Chevreul’s work on colour-theory and the laws of colour-contrast within which Chevreul drew analogies between colour and music. J.A. Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 14.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>160</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 68-9.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

stanza's excellence. It also reflects Rossetti's ability to capture nature's "magic", which returns us to Swinburne's existentially nuanced conception of form.

In "Rossetti", great poetry is also something one tastes: " 'A Little While' is heavy with all the honey of foretasted sorrow, sweeter in its aftertaste than the joy resigned, with a murmur beyond music in speech."<sup>162</sup> Swinburne's critique swerves from the tactile (heavy) to the oral (taste of honey) and to its aftertaste, which is aural and verbal ("murmur", "music", "speech"). Furthermore, if synaesthesia highlighted and defined aesthetic excellence, it also signalled artistic weakness. Rarely did Jonson's plays obtain "that singing power which answers in verse to the odour of a blossom, to the colouring of a picture, to the flavour of a fruit."<sup>163</sup> The absence of a vigorous interplay of the senses underscores Swinburne's perception in *A Study of Ben Jonson* (1889) that Jonson's work lacks pathos, imagination, and tragic passion. They have "form" and "vigour" but are wanting in "fragrance."<sup>164</sup> In "Short Notes on English Poets", Swinburne's regrets Spenser's tendency to convert "clearness" into "cloudiness" through his use of "perfumed metaphors." In this instance, the sensation of taste registers the problematic aesthetic experience of Spenser's work:

Add to this cloying sweetness of the Spenserian metre, with all 'its treasures of fluidity and sweet ease'...which leaves at least some readers, after a dose of a few pages, overgorged with a sense that they have been eating a whole hive's harvest of thick pressed honey by great spoonfuls, without one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sweet stuff; and it is easy to determine why the attraction of his noble poet, for all his luminous colour and lovely melody...is perhaps less potent than it should be over minds first nurtured on the stronger fare of Greek or Latin or Italian Song.<sup>165</sup>

Again, Swinburne's use of synaesthesia reconstructs the aesthetic experience of a text into something that can be swallowed, eaten and thus, into something that is non-textual.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>163</sup> Swinburne, *A Study of Ben Jonson* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1889), 4.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Swinburne, *Miscellanies*, 8.

Intersensory metaphor plays a dynamic role in Swinburne's essay, "Notes on Some Pictures of 1868", his response to a group exhibition at the Royal Academy and to a series of unfinished paintings by Whistler. Swinburne commences by explicating and defending his *subjective* critical approach: the essay is comprised of a series of "random...*impressions*" that have "no weight or value" but merely reflect a "sincere and studious love of the art"; for, as Swinburne concludes, "To pass judgement or tender counsel is beyond my aim or desire."<sup>166</sup> Swinburne's essay is thus presented as an intimate dialogue between critic and object, which invites the reader to partake in an additionally subjective and intimate exchange. As Swinburne makes clear, the value of his review is simply the ability to witness an individual's loving response to beautiful things. Swinburne draws his critical authority from his perceptive impressions thereby revoking the notion of expertise that is derived from an institutionalised or professionalised framework.

Focusing first on George Frederick Watts' painting 'Wife of Pygmalion', his remarks significantly prefigure those made in "Simeon Solomon":

In this "translation" of a Greek statue into an English picture, no less than in the bust of Clytie, we see how in the hands of a great artist painting and sculpture may become as sister arts indeed, yet without invasion or confusion; how, without any forced alliance of form and colour, a picture may share the gracious grandeur of a statue, a statue may catch something of the subtle bloom of beauty proper to a picture.<sup>167</sup>

Swinburne's language is explicitly political and implicitly sexual. Rather than "forced alliances", these "interfusions" are mutual or shared. Watts is a "compound genius": both a sculptor and a painter, his ability to "translate" between mediums indicates gifted perceptive abilities. By enclosing the term 'translation' within quotation marks, Swinburne suggestively emphasises its metaphoric significance. The qualities

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<sup>166</sup> Italics mine. Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 359.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 360.

particular to painting—colour and spatial composition—“catch” or “share” the “grandeur” of spatial dimension and vice-versa. Consequently, Watts’s work has “impressed” itself on Swinburne’s “memory more deeply and distinctly than the rest.”<sup>168</sup> It has “a special hold” due to its heightened affectivity, which Swinburne associates with two art forms. Furthermore, what was “Greek” has been “translated” into something “English”, reflecting the amorphousness of national distinctions. That Swinburne is exalting Watts’s ability to *evoke* the “subtle bloom” of one art through another aesthetic form is evident in his praise of the artist’s marble bust of Clytie: “Sculpture such as this has actual colour enough without need to borrow of an alien art.”<sup>169</sup> The term “actual” is, paradoxically, not actual at all. Without borrowing from an “alien art”, Watts has evoked the beauty or affect of colour. Importantly, then, when one “borrows”, the arts are not “sisters”; only when aesthetic forms “share” or *evoke* other forms, is their “sister” status secured.

Throughout the essay, Swinburne draws comparisons between artists working in different mediums: “[Albert Moore’s] painting is to artists what the verse of Théophile Gautier is to poets”<sup>170</sup>; whereas Leighton’s “picture of Acme and Septimius is excellently illustrative of Mr. Theodore Martin’s verse.”<sup>171</sup> Swinburne acknowledges his use of comparison as well:

I have compared Albert Moore to Théophile Gautier; I am tempted to compare Mr. Leslie to Hegesippe Moreau. The low melodious notes of his painting have the soft reserve of tone and still sweetness of touch which belong to the idyllic poet of the Voulzie. Sometimes he almost attains the gentle grace of the other’s best verse—though I hardly remember a picture of his as exquisite for music and meaning as the “Etrennes a la Fermiere.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 364.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 306.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 361.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 365.

Swinburne also uses this strategy in “Simeon Solomon”: “There is not, for instance, more of the painter’s art in the verse of Keats than of the musician’s in Solomon’s designs.”<sup>173</sup> This comparative approach intimates a commonality between the arts that is perceptible only to certain artists including, clearly, Swinburne. His use of comparison protects the autonomy of the aesthetic realm in part, by fostering an aesthetic community, a tactic Wilde self-consciously exploited in his critical writings largely through his use of synaesthesia. Furthermore, despite Swinburne’s assertion that it is neither his desire nor aim to judge, these comparative strategies do assign qualitative value to Moore and Gautier, Leslie and Moreau. The nature of Swinburne’s aesthetic judgements in these texts, however, is intentionally allusive and open to interpretation. Thus, ‘meaning’ remains indeterminate and self-referential.

Swinburne’s appraisal of Whistler’s *The Six Projects* is among the most theatrical uses of synaesthetic metaphor in his oeuvre. After Swinburne suggests that music and verse can “strike some string accordant in sound to painting”, he then embarks on a series of poetically allusive impressions of Whistler’s works, “interfused” with musical and colour terminologies. Once he recognises the feeble and hoarse nature of speech (and critical language in particular), he abandons the discursive for the poetic:

The great picture which Mr. Whistler has now in hand is not yet finished enough for any critical detail to be possible; it shows already promise of a more majestic and excellent beauty of form than his earlier studies, and of the old delicacy and melody of ineffable colour...[In] all of these the main strings touched are certain varying chords of blue and white, not without interludes of the bright and tender tones of floral purple or red. In two of the studies the keynote is an effect of sea; in one, a sketch for the great picture, the soft brilliant floor-work and wall-work of a garden balcony serve in its stead to set forth the flowers and figures of flowerlike women. In a second, we have again a gathering of women in a balcony; from the unseen flower-land below tall almond-trees shoot up their topmost crowns of

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<sup>173</sup> Swinburne, “Simeon Solomon”, 568.

tender blossom; beyond and far out to west and south the warm and solemn sea spreads wide and soft without wrinkle of wind. The dim floor-work in front, delicate as a summer cloud in colour, is antiphonal to the wealth of water beyond: and between these the fair clusters of almond-blossom make divine division. Again the symphony or (if you will) the antiphony is sustained by the fervid or the fainter colours of the women's raiment as they lean out one against another, looking far oversea in that quiet depth of pleasure without words when spirit and sense are filled full of beautiful things, till it seems that at a mere breath the charmed vessels of pleasure would break or overflow, the brimming chalices of the senses would spill this wine of their delight.<sup>174</sup>

When Swinburne claims that Whistler's unfinished paintings have a "melody of ineffable colour", "melody" may refer to colour schemes, but it may also signify that the affect of these "ineffable colours" is "melodious" or pleasing or even, that colour and music are somehow inextricably connected. Swinburne is giving us a choice: synaesthetic metaphor both invites and requires the reader to be an active participator. And this choice emphasises the perception of Whistler's works as occasions for experience rather than containers of meaning.

Swinburne's "interfusion" of musical terminology is so pronounced that Whistler's paintings adopt the characteristics of instruments. The terms "strings" followed by "chords" of colour cultivate an overt link between paintings and instruments which "interludes" of "floral purple and red" further emphasises. "Interlude" signifies both a short-break between the acts of a play or opera, between items of music or a short piece of music in itself.<sup>175</sup> Like "melody", then, it imposes a temporal dimension on spatial perception. As Angela Leighton suggests, to talk about music or through music is to talk mainly about time.<sup>176</sup> Swinburne's use of "antiphonal" and "antiphony" (derived from the Greek 'antiphōnon': "against the 'voice', sounding in response, corresponding sound")<sup>177</sup> similarly evokes a sense of

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<sup>174</sup> Italics mine, *ibid*, 373-4

<sup>175</sup> "Interlude", *OED*, 114.

<sup>176</sup> Angela Leighton, "Pater's Music", *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 14:2 (2005), 72.

<sup>177</sup> "Antiphony", *OED*, 530.

temporality. When Swinburne refers to the “dim-floor work” of the balcony as “antiphonal to the wealth of water beyond”, time is manifested spatially. In the other instance, Swinburne draws attention to his linguistic theatrics—indeed, precisely to his use of synaesthesia—through his elaboration of “if you will” in parenthesis: “The symphony or (if you will) the antiphony is sustained by the fervid colours of the women’s raiment.” He is explicitly asking his readers to grant him poetic licence as Baudelaire does in “Delacroix” when he urges his readers to forgive him for “these linguistic subterfuges to express what are highly subtle ideas.”<sup>178</sup>

Reflecting on his own creative, critical endeavours, Swinburne reminds his reader that they are experiencing *his* own experience, the subjectivity of *his* impressions. The term “antiphony”, however, also highlights the self-referential, dialogic nature of ‘aesthetic criticism’ as a call and response between artists, mediums and sense perceptions. Furthermore, it implicitly defines this dialogue as male-to-male. References to ‘antiphons’ in ancient Greek literature alluded to the simultaneous singing of men and boys and not mixed-sex choirs.<sup>179</sup> Like “transfusion” and “interfusion”, which richly describe the function of synaesthetic metaphor in Swinburne’s criticisms, “antiphony” frames the relationship between aesthetic critic and aesthetic object.

When Swinburne states, “In two of the studies the keynote is an effect of sea”, the musical resonance of “keynote” encompasses sound but refers to colour and the *effect* of water: not the sea itself, but its experience as captured within paint. One could extend this to Swinburne’s approach to criticism, for he, too, writes not the

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<sup>178</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 137.

<sup>179</sup> The verb ‘antiphoneo’ means ‘reply’, ‘answer’ and ‘contradict’ and, significantly, parallels ‘sunecheo’: co-echoing. In Christian liturgy, ‘antiphonal’ refers to a hymn or psalm sung in alternate verses by a semi-independent choir. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler (eds.), *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions* (New Haven: Yale UP 2003) 170-1.

‘thing’ but the feeling of the ‘thing.’ Synaesthetic metaphor not only captures the ‘musicality’ of Whistler’s paintings—the vibrating sensation of their colour—it also transcribes Swinburne’s experience of these works, emphasising his stance as a critic engaging with art. That is to say, that synaesthetic metaphor makes Swinburne’s subjectivity explicit by accentuating the intimate and corporeal nature of spectatorship, which art alone affords.

Neither ‘middleman’ nor ‘expert’, Swinburne’s “antiphony” to Whistler’s unfinished paintings uses art to make art. In Greek, the poet as singer (*‘aoidos*) predates the poet as maker (*‘poietes*).<sup>180</sup> Swinburne’s reconstruction of criticism pushes the genre closer to this earlier notion of the poetic. The term “antiphony” illuminates Swinburne’s role not as ‘transcriber’ but as fellow singer whilst underscoring the dialogic and poetic properties of ‘aesthetic criticism.’ In this instance, his “antiphony” to Whistler was also a form of puffing, a keen reflection of their closeness during the period. In 1888, however, Swinburne publicly renounced the painter’s ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture and the Aesthetic principles it advanced in an article for the *Fortnightly*.

Applauding Whistler’s first argument regarding the “principle of independence”—the artist’s first obligation is to their own work—Swinburne swiftly proceeded to ridicule the notion that the greatest works of art should (and can) appeal *only* to the senses:

If Japanese art is right in confining itself to what can be ‘broidered on a fan’...then the sculpture which appeals indeed first of all to our beauty of perception, to the delight of the sense...but which in every possible instance appeals also to far other intuitions and far other sympathies than these, is as absolutely wrong...as any picture or carving which may be so degenerate and so debased as to concern

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<sup>180</sup> See James Anderson Winn’s chapter “The Poet as Singer: The Ancient World” in *Unexpected Eloquence: A History of the Relations between Poetry and Music* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981).

itself with a story or subject. Assuredly, Phidias thought of other things than ‘arrangements’ in marble—<sup>181</sup>  
And so, too, had Whistler, whose “venerable mother” and portrait of Carlyle “[appealed] to the intelligence and the emotions, to the mind and heart of the spectator.”<sup>182</sup> As Spencer notes, to accept Whistler’s theory of the “principle of artistic limitation” was to condemn high art such as Velasquez, Raphael and Titian as their works undeniably appealed to the intellect and were concerned with narrative.<sup>183</sup> Whistler found himself within “the synagogue of the anaesthetic” amongst the “venomous or fangless duncery.”<sup>184</sup> Swinburne never denied the right of art to appeal to the intellect. But the tone of his critique reveals a lack of empathy for Whistler’s artistic views, which his swipe at Whistler’s use of synaesthesia (“arrangement”) poignantly signals. If Swinburne activated the perception of intersensory aesthetics as a characteristic of ‘art for art’, the following chapter examines Whistler’s formative role in furthering this viewpoint, and vastly augmenting it.

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<sup>181</sup> A.C. Swinburne, “Mr. Whistler’s Lecture on Art”, *Fortnightly Review* 49 (1888), 746.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Spencer, “Whistler, Swinburne and art for art’s sake”, 78-81.

<sup>184</sup> Swinburne, “Mr. Whistler’s Lecture on Art”, 748.

Chapter II.  
JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER  
AND THE GENTLE ART OF SYNAESTHESIA

Amongst Londoners of the 'eighties' [Whistler] is a bright figure, as much alone almost in his knowledge of what art is, as in his power of creating it: and it is this that gives a peculiar point and poignance to all his quips and quarrels. There is dignity in his impudence...he is a lonely artist, standing up hitting below the belt for art...Not only did he suffer the grossness and malice of the most insensitive pack of butchers that ever scrambled into the seat of authority; he had also to know that not one of them could by any means be made to understand one word that he spoke in seriousness. Overhaul the English art criticism of that time...and you will hardly find a sentence that gives ground for supposing that the writer so much as guessed what art is...And ill-mannered, ill-tempered, and almost alone, he was defending art, while they were flattering all that was vilest in Victorianism.<sup>1</sup>

I. Introduction:

In Clive Bell's theatrical characterisation of Whistler and his milieu, the painter plays the role of the "suffering" and misunderstood "lonely artist" who has to "hit below the belt for art." The Victorians and, more specifically, the English art critics, signify the stifling traditionalism of the period. If they are "butchers" blind to Whistler's earnestness as an artist, they are also completely ignorant of "what art is." Within this battlefield, sympathy inevitably extends to Whistler. He emerges as the victim of (and victor against) "all that was vilest in Victorianism." Bell's depiction of Victorianism on the other hand, remains uncomplicatedly and deliberately conventional. Consequently, our sense of Whistler's radicalism and modernity is augmented, the 'purity' of his artistic vision contingent, then, upon the contrasting

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<sup>1</sup> Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1913), 189.

“grossness” of that time. Whistler himself subscribed to, manufactured and propagated this dialectical polarity—which was as much fiction as it was fact. And as this chapter aims to demonstrate, his development of synaesthesia was not only central to his performance as an aesthete and advocator of ‘art for art’, but also played a formative role in shaping the perception of British Aestheticism as an anti-commercial, anti-bourgeois and anti-didactic artistic endeavour.

The metaphor of a battlefield crops up throughout Whistler’s writings. In his vitriolic and satirical pamphlet, *Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics* (1878), published just after and in response to his trial with Ruskin, Whistler described his feud with Ruskin as a “war...between the brush and the pen.”<sup>2</sup> In 1890, his collection of negative press-clippings, provocative letters, pamphlets and interviews was published as *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), the title alone an indication of the significance Whistler attached to the image of the alienated artist-genius. Frequently evoking simplified, warring terms to define his role within—or, rather, outside—Victorian society, whilst, at the same time, inviting these very insiders (critics, journalists, ‘the public’) to aid him in this quest, Whistler’s carefully cultivated identity as an ‘eccentric’, ‘aesthete’ and ‘outsider’ was inextricably connected to his development of synaesthesia. Self-consciously using synaesthetic metaphors to express and publicize his Aestheticism, Whistler’s critics also identified and described the painter’s radical allegiance to ‘art for art’ through his innovations in intersensory aesthetics. And they frequently characterised his theory of art as governed by a colour-music analogy.

The metaphor of synaesthesia became, simultaneously, an emblem of Whistler’s Aestheticism. Used to subvert popular, commercial interests and to deny

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<sup>2</sup> James McNeill Whistler, “Whistler v Ruskin: Art and Art Critics” (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), 2.

didactic, anecdotal, narrative readings, Whistler's reliance on musical nomenclature for painting titles "[diverted] attention from the subject of his picture, the picture as mimesis, to its existence in itself, as a harmoniously constructed object."<sup>3</sup> But synaesthesia also, as we shall see, augmented his works' marketability, a fact the painter was aware of and guided by. Whistler's development of synaesthesia proved poignantly paradoxical: it was as irritating as it was fashionable, as 'pure' as it was commercially advantageous.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, synaesthesia's role in Whistler's aesthetic practices cogently illustrates a defining feature of Aestheticism, namely, its constant negotiation of the line between high and low art.

Like Swinburne, Whistler's innovations with intersensory art have been well acknowledged by recent scholars of the period.<sup>5</sup> His varied motivations for using synaesthetic metaphor, the way that synaesthesia informed his identity as an aesthete, and the way that critical reactions to his work played a formative role in linking synaesthesia with Aestheticism in the popular imagination of Victorian England have not, however, been explored. What will become evident is how Whistler's unique popularisation of the concept of synaesthesia largely derived from the controversy he courted in the media. Whistler was, perhaps, the most vocal defender of 'art for art'

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1949), 179.

<sup>4</sup> My sense of Whistler's development of synaesthesia as 'paradoxical' is greatly indebted to Regenia Gagnier's pioneering study, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (England: Scholar Press, 1987). Gagnier's work plays a particularly formative role in my final chapter "Oscar Wilde and the Decadence of Synaesthesia." However, her argument on the 'doubleness' of Wilde's linguistic style as '[constituting] his response to the modern bourgeois artist's dilemma between private art and the need for a public' (19) saliently applies to Whistler's development of synaesthesia and his relationship with his critics.

<sup>5</sup> The Whistlerian scholar, Robin Spencer, uses the term 'synaesthesia' frequently in his work on the painter. See for instance, "Whistler's 'The White Girl': Poetry, Painting and Meaning", *The Burlington Magazine* 140:1142 (1998), 300-1; "Whistler, Swinburne and art for art's sake" in Elizabeth Prettejohn (ed.) *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), 59-89; and, *James McNeill Whistler* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003); Whistler's use of synaesthesia was also the focus of a recent PhD thesis: Jo Sager, "Whistler's application of Musical Terminology to his Paintings: The Search for a Synaesthetic Response", diss. U of Ohio, 2004. The thesis, however, is poorly researched and punctuated with historical inaccuracies. It fails to address synaesthesia's importance to Whistler's critical reception and thus, Whistler's role in popularising the perception of synaesthesia as a characteristic of British Aestheticism.

within British Aestheticism and his position was unique simply because he was not British, but an American with Scottish ancestry and English relations, who left the United States in 1855 initially to study painting in Paris. He never returned to America, adopting both Paris and London as homes and, in the case of the latter, his muse. His identity as an American, however, and by that token, an ex-patriot ‘outsider’, played a formative role in his life and in his works’ reception. Furthermore, unlike Swinburne, Pater and Wilde, who were, collectively, writers (of prose and poetry, drama and ‘aesthetic criticism’), Whistler was a painter and a committed critic of ‘writings on art.’ If he was not British Aestheticism’s sole visual artist, certainly he was its most significant one. He is also the only visual artist examined at length in this dissertation. Yet, I predominantly concentrate on his writings, critical reception and trial with Ruskin.

For though Whistler was a painter first and foremost, he was also a prolific writer. His correspondence, which includes nearly 10,000 letters, many addressed to important artist-friends of the period, extends our understanding of the formation of his aesthetic philosophies and role within Aestheticism. His dialogue with the French painter Henri Fantin-Latour during the 1860s, for instance, saliently documents his movement away from the “odious” influence of the French Realist painter Gustave Courbet towards the principles of ‘art for art.’<sup>6</sup> Whistler’s visual works during this transitional period also register his conceptual upheaval, as he begins to break with narrative form and give precedence to colour. But it is his letters to Fantin-Latour in particular, which art-historians more frequently use to indicate Whistler’s retreat from Realism. His communication with Swinburne, on the other hand, attests not just to their closeness (and later, to the acrimonious end of their friendship), but also

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<sup>6</sup> Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, 30 September-22 November 1868 (Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division [hereafter LCMS], Pennell-Whistler Collection).

augments our sense of Swinburne's formative intellectual influence on the painter, including his interest in synaesthesia.

Whistler also wrote numerous letters to the press. Like Wilde, and certainly *unlike* Pater, he cultivated his public persona, using the media advantageously, as a form of self-advertisement and as a vehicle for disseminating his aesthetic principles, even characterising his trial with Ruskin as an "advertisement."<sup>7</sup> Synaesthesia's appeal for Whistler arose in part from his awareness of the market, the media and public opinion in the increasingly commercialised art world. Indeed, whilst this chapter begins with a brief analysis of Whistler's burgeoning Aestheticism, including a survey of nineteenth-century innovations in colour-theory and their impact on the painter, the second and larger section, 'Whistler and His Critics', explores the decisive role Whistler's critical reception played in shaping his views and artistic style. I also examine the way his critics solidified the popular perception of intersensory art as a seminal characteristic of 'art for art.'

Whistler's statements about the role of the art critic and the function of art criticism are also discussed in this section, particularly in the context of his trial with Ruskin, an event regarded as a watershed in the history of art for bringing into focus among the most contentious issues in Victorian art: narrative content versus aesthetic value, and labour and craft versus artistic effect.<sup>8</sup> As Linda Merrill asserts, it was Aestheticism or the theory of 'art for art' that was largely on trial.<sup>9</sup> So too, however, and by extension, was the concept and *practice* of synaesthesia and, in relation to this, the very legitimacy of art criticism as a genre. Indeed, Whistler's views on art

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<sup>7</sup> Whistler to James Anderson Rose, 6 December 1878, *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Patricia de Montfort "The 'Atlas' and the Butterfly: James McNeill Whistler, Edmund Yates and the *World*" in Brake and Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 161. Hereafter, "Whistler, Edmund Yates and the *World*."

<sup>9</sup> Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

criticism significantly broaden our understanding of his gravitation towards synaesthesia whilst providing among the most persuasive contexts for realising how the emergence of intersensory aesthetics during the mid-to-late-Victorian period was not just fashionable, but also, and more crucially, strategic, subversive and interrogative.

The antiquated perception of British Aestheticism as an apolitical and culturally disinterested movement largely emerged from the importance the aesthetes awarded to ‘form’ on conceptual, rhetorical and visual levels. The elevation of form ‘over’ content or subject matter, however, is always a misleading one. For it begins with a highly precarious premise, namely, that form is without substance, content or matter in itself. As Angela Leighton develops in *On Form* (2007), the term ‘form’ is underscored by an “old soul-body dualism in which ‘form’, without its shaping partner, might be so disembodied as to mean nothing at all...[but] that suggestion...is complicated by the fact that form...can also mean body, shape, or matter.”<sup>10</sup> Particularly in the nineteenth century, as colour became increasingly discussed in psychological, physiological and symbolic terms (as well as, importantly, musical ones)<sup>11</sup>, the sense of “form’s matter” begins truly to take root.

Furthermore, it was not so much that form was completely without matter, as it was the perception that the ‘meaning’ possessed by formal properties was, by and large, culturally irrelevant in itself—a grievance that critics clearly levied against Swinburne’s musical poetry as well. Throughout Whistler’s critical reception his use of colour is applauded and critics are frequently willing to grant aesthetic value to his

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<sup>10</sup> Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 2; see, in particular, her introductory chapter “Form’s Matter.”

<sup>11</sup> As John Gage argues, “But the course of the nineteenth-century developments in the physiology of the nervous system, in experimental aesthetics, as well as in the understanding of painting as less related to direct representation, increased the tendency to detach colour-expression from association, and to see colour as evoking immediate physical and mental responses”, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1999), 262.

paintings solely due to his skills as a colourist. But it is also and equally clear how there was something disarming about the vague emotions colour provoked, particularly when coupled with music: an art-form that was paradigmatic of these nebulous, non-representational, powerfully emotional and thus, implicitly ‘feminine’, affects.<sup>12</sup>

It is not coincidental that ‘aesthetic criticism’ emerged concurrently with Whistler’s developing formalism. A critical language nourished on metaphors, analogies and impressions, and alliterative to the extent of being ‘musical’, complimented a theory and approach to art in which aesthetic meaning was equivalent to aesthetic experience. Whistler’s ‘nocturnes’ and ‘harmonies’ deliberately referred inwards rather out: the glories of the British empire, the beauty of nature or even a literary anecdote celebrating a canonical work—such as Millais’ painting ‘Ferdinand Lured by Ariel’ (1849-50) illustrating a scene from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—did not inhabit the meaning or experience of a ‘nocturne.’ And critics, attuned to this, spoke of Whistler’s works in increasingly physiological, psychological terms. A viewer could be ‘moved’, ‘moulded’ and ‘influenced’ by a ‘nocturne’ (terms used by Pater, Swinburne and Wilde throughout their art and literary criticism), but certainly not educated. Aesthetic value was radically redistributed, determined more by the body and senses than the mind; and the nature and importance of spectatorship was pitted against intellectual authority and expertise. In this regard, the type of spectatorship that Whistler aimed to foster through his use of colour and synaesthetic

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<sup>12</sup> For essays exploring the metaphor of music in the late-nineteenth century, see Phyllis Weliver (ed.), *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), in particular, Emma Sutton’s essay “The Music Spoke for Us”: Music and Sexuality in *fin-de-siècle* Poetry.” See, as well, Sutton’s chapter “The Pathology of Pleasure: Decadent Sensibility and Affective Art” in *Aubrey Beardsley*. For a theoretical discussion of the relationship between music and painting in the nineteenth century and the way this relationship supplanted the more classical connection between painting and poetry as intrinsic sister-arts, see Roy Park, “‘*Ut Pictura Poesis*’: The Nineteenth-Century Aftermath,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28: 2 (1969), 155-64.

titles is analogous to the type of reading that ‘aesthetic criticism’ encouraged. In both instances, a new model of subjectivity was being pursued. Yet, the self-referential nature of Whistler’s formalism, which attains its pinnacle expression within an intersensory context of art referring to art and sense referring to sense was as culturally disinterested on the surface, as it was an acute demonstration of cultural engagement. The great irony is that whilst Whistler refuted ‘political’ art, his ‘musical’ works were produced as a form of protest and are, then, profoundly political.

Through Whistler, the sense of form as *embodied* truly emerges. Whistler was, after all, the most strident, vocal and persistent defender of ‘art for art’ in Britain until the decadent Nineties when artists such as Wilde, Beardsley and Beerbohm pushed formalism to an even further extreme, rhetorically, conceptually and visually. Swinburne eventually disassociated himself from Aestheticism, as indicated by his response to Whistler’s lecture in 1888. And though Pater and Wilde often asserted that art was without didactic obligations, they also acknowledged that art was a moral and social force: their faith in ‘art for art’ was contradictory and immensely nuanced. Yet Whistler, throughout his life, in both public and private, never wavered from the idea that aesthetic integrity depended upon its complete freedom from moral, social, cultural and commercial obligations, even if his need to make a living complicated his art for the sake of art.

## II. *Whistler and Colour: The Making of an Aesthete*

In strategic preparation for his trial with Ruskin, an interview or “conversation” with Whistler appeared in the innovative and successful ‘Celebrities at

Home' section of the *World: A Journal for Men and Women* (May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1878).<sup>13</sup> The intentions of "Mr. Whistler at Cheyne Walk" were clear: the painter wanted to familiarise the public (and potentially his patrons) with the aesthetic philosophies he would soon defend in court; he also, characteristically, wanted to be provocative. Like the *Pall Mall Gazette* and Labouchere's *Truth*, the *World* was a weekly society paper. It relied upon a personalised and entertaining approach to news that was palatably crafted for its readership, the aesthetic tastes of which were reflected in the advertisements for Japanese screens and exhibitions at the Grosvenor Gallery tucked within its pages.<sup>14</sup> E.C. Grenville Murray and Edmund Hodgson Yates, an acquaintance and collector of Whistler's and the self-proclaimed inventor of "personal journalism", had co-founded the *World* in 1874, although Yates quickly assumed the role of sole editor-proprietor.<sup>15</sup> In Yates's memoirs, he described his vision for paper:

I never for one moment thought that frivolous chatter of the kind I have indicated, however well done, was sufficient in itself to constitute a newspaper...but my opinion was that all the light and gossipy news of the day, properly winnowed and attractively set forth, backed by good political and social articles, written in a bolder, freer and less turgid style than that in which such topics were commonly handled, with first-rate dramatic, literary and musical criticism, all laid on different lines from those then existing, would form a journalistic amalgam which would probably hit the public taste."<sup>16</sup>

And it was "the public taste" that the *World* pursued and fostered that Whistler was eager to reach when he appeared as "Celebrity no. 92" six months shy of his trial with Ruskin.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Celebrities at Home no. XC11: Mr. James McNeill Whistler at Cheyne Walk', *World* (22 May 1878), 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> de Montfort, "Whistler, Edmund Yates and the *World*", 165.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 162. Richard Salmon "A Simulacrum of Power": Intimacy and Abstraction in the Rhetoric of the New Journalism" in Brake et al (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Yates, *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences*, vol 2. (London: Richard Bentley and Son., 1884), 308.

In addition to being featured in ‘Celebrities at Home’, the painter’s social events and Sunday brunches were regularly chronicled in Yates’s popular ‘What the World Says’ gossip column. Additionally, Yates made considerable allowances for Whistler’s witty, provocative letters, and as Patricia de Montfort argues in “The ‘Atlas’ and the Butterfly: James McNeill Whistler, Edmund Yates and the *World*” (2005), Whistler’s posturing in the press and in the *World* in particular played a decisive role in his approach to *The Gentle Art*, ultimately augmenting the work’s commercial success.<sup>17</sup> “The Red Rag”, as he later re-titled “Mr. Whistler at Cheyne Walk” for inclusion in *The Gentle Art*, is a manifesto of Whistler’s Aestheticism, indeed, a declaration of his faith in the doctrine of ‘art for art.’ It is also and equally Whistler’s defence of synaesthesia, or, as he stated, “why I insist on calling my works ‘arrangements’ and ‘harmonies.’”<sup>18</sup> To put it another way, then, his defence of synaesthesia represents one of his earliest, finer and most explicit defences of ‘art for art’, thereby illuminating both synaesthesia’s centrality to Whistler’s identity as an aesthete and Whistler’s role in forging a link between intersensory art and Aestheticism in the ‘popular’ imagination of Victorian Britain.

The revisions Whistler made to the piece before including it in *The Gentle Art* are illuminating. Although he retained the passages that most explicitly focused on his aesthetic beliefs and practices, he silenced the critic or interviewer by transforming a conversation into a monologue, eradicating the text’s chatty content and tone. In doing so, he codified the image of the alienated artist-genius whose aesthetic sensibility differed from the very readers courted by the *World*, *Truth* and other society papers. What began as a personal chronicle that included details about Whistler’s house was transformed into a nuanced and commanding diatribe by a bold,

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<sup>17</sup> de Montfort, “Whistler, Yates and the *World*”, 163.

<sup>18</sup> James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: John W. Lovell Co., 1890), 126.

visionary and frustrated artist with an implied antagonist – “the English public.” The points raised by Whistler in “The Red Rag”, salvaged from the initial interview, provide an essential outline to the issues that will be examined in this chapter. For this reason “The Red Rag” has been quoted almost in its entirety:

Why should I not call my works “symphonies,” “arrangements,” “harmonies” and “nocturnes”? I know that many good people think my nomenclature funny and myself “eccentric.” Yes, “eccentric” is the adjective they find for me.

The vast majority of English folk cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell.

My picture of a “Harmony in Grey and Gold” is an illustration of my meaning—a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture. Now this is precisely what my friends cannot grasp.

They say, “Why not call it ‘Trotty Veck,’ and sell it for a round harmony of golden guineas?”—naively acknowledging that, without baptism, there is no...market!

But even commercially this stocking of your shop with the goods of another would be indecent—custom alone has made it dignified...I should hold it a vulgar and meretricious trick to excite people about Trotty Veck when, if they really could care for pictorial art at all, they would know that the picture should have its own merit, and not depend upon dramatic, or legendary, or local interest.

As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of colour.

The great musicians knew this. Beethoven and the rest wrote music—simply music; symphony in this key, concerto or sonata in that.

On F or G they constructed celestial harmonies—as harmonies—as combinations, evolved from chords of F or G and their minor correlatives.

This is pure music as distinguished from airs—commonplace and vulgar in themselves, but interesting from their associations, as, for instance, “Yankee Doodle.” Or “Partant pour la Syrie.”

Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye and ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it, and that is why I insist on calling my works “arrangements” and “harmonies.”

[...]

The Imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer. It is for the artist to do

something beyond this...in arrangements of colours to treat a flower as his key, not as his model.<sup>19</sup>

In “The Red Rag” Whistler draws attention to the distinct, “eccentric” sensibilities that set his artistic vision apart from “the English public” that he was nonetheless wooing when the text first appeared in the *World*. His employment of musical nomenclature for painting titles underscores this distinction. Attuned to the way that titles modify a work’s perceptual content, Whistler’s satirical reference to “Trotty Veck”, a character in Dickens’ Christmas novella, *The Chimes* (1844), serves to illustrate his contention that “the English public” derive aesthetic and commercial value from storytelling and literary reference or “clap-trap” (“without a baptism, there is no...*market!*”).<sup>20</sup> Synaesthesia both cultivates and mirrors an immense conceptual distance between Whistler’s contrasting notions of ‘Aesthetic’ and ‘bourgeois’ sensitivities to art even if, ironically, his decision to broadcast these views in a society paper undermined this very distinction. At the same time, “The Red Rag” illuminates a fundamental transformation in the perception of the painter’s relationship to nature, which Whistler equates with the emergence of photography (“it is for the artist to do something *beyond* this” [emphasis added]). Like Baudelaire, whose influence is commanding here, Whistler’s rejection of photography and of Realism derives from his conception of both as negations of the imagination. Rather than transcribing one’s perceptions, one must *translate* their impressions: Whistler is directly challenging the notion of mimesis. It is not just the artist’s right but his *duty* to generalise, idealise, interpret, modify and rearrange nature in accordance with his own temperament: nature is simply a starting-point.

The comparison Whistler cultivates between painting and music derives from his perception of Beethoven’s music (as distinguished from “airs”) as an intrinsically

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<sup>19</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 126-8.

<sup>20</sup> F. David Martin, “Naming Paintings”, *Art Journal* 25:3 (1966), 252-6.

“pure” art form and thus, a perfect paradigm for his visual art—and by “pure”, Whistler is clearly differentiating between both high and low art, and “common place” and elite sensibilities. If Beethoven composed “celestial harmonies...from chords...and their minor correlatives”, uncompromised by “associative” values (“devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like”), this privilege should extend to the painter. Thus, the purity of Beethoven’s music unfolded in relation to it being non-representational or self-referential, its meaning and beauty inextricably governed by its form and effect. Whistler’s attraction to music, then, derived from a more fundamental belief, namely, that the meaning or value of art resided in its bodily, sensorial experience. Subsequently, the greater the effect (or *affect*), the greater or more “celestial” the art-work. One can see how an intersensory approach to art within this context more than satisfied such an equation and furthermore, why synaesthetic theories of art proved popular and prevalent in France and Britain during the period. For if effect was equivalent to excellence, then an intersensory aesthetic experience (promulgated either through analogy, metaphor, allusion or through a particular approach to colour) represented the apex of this ideal.

Yet, as the following discussion aims to demonstrate, that Whistler considered the affective properties of music potentially analogous to those of colour was symptomatic of a pervasive tendency in the nineteenth century—notably pronounced in France—to establish connections between these formal properties. Even the notion of the painter’s palette as a piano keyboard or other musical instrument was commonplace during the period.<sup>21</sup> While conceptual relationships between colour and sound have existed since the time of the Greeks, this perception underwent significant

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<sup>21</sup> Whistler once characterised his own palette, arranged in two scales from red to black and from yellow to blue, as: “the instrument on which the painter plays his harmony, it must be beautiful always, as the tenderly cared-for violin of the great musician is kept in condition worthy of his music”, quoted in Gage, *Colour and Culture*, 185.

redefinition in the nineteenth century, such that it is virtually impossible to find discussions of colour that do not consider or explore its interrelationship with sound on subjective, physiological, psychological and symbolic levels. Moreover, it was not just that there existed a supposed relationship between colour and sound, but rather, and more importantly, an interrelationship between colour and *music*, which took precedence in these debates. And whilst there is little concrete evidence on which to draw a direct link between the French debates on colour and Whistler's own formulation of his aesthetic, it seems highly improbable that he was not at least partially influenced by them.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it is far more likely that his development of synaesthesia was shaped by changing innovations in colour-theory (and, more broadly, physiological aesthetics), and that this influence derived from a variety of sources including, in particular, Baudelaire whom Whistler knew personally and whom Swinburne, Whistler's intimate friend during the 1860s and 70s—precisely when the painter (and writer) began to experiment with synaesthesia—clearly admired.<sup>23</sup> For Baudelaire's critical works not only indicate a strong familiarity with these innovations but also helped to promulgate them.

Arriving in Paris in 1855 in time for the *Exposition Universelle* where thirty-five canvases of Eugene Delacroix and forty canvases of his rival Jean-Dominique Ingres were on display in the French Pavilion, the young, impressionable Whistler would have become immediately familiarised with the significant role that colour played in defining and differentiating these two leading schools of art.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup> Victoria A.W. Walsh, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler 1860-1878*, diss. Oxford Brookes University, 1995, 129-30.

<sup>23</sup> Whistler appears to have had a cordial relationship with Baudelaire who reviewed the painter's etchings at the Martinet Gallery in 1862. Jonathan Mayne (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire: Art in Paris 1845-1862* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965), 220.

<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Gustave Courbet, whose work had been rejected by the Exposition committee that year, responded by hosting his own one-man show 'REALISM. G. Courbet: Exhibition of forty of his pictures.' It is likely that Whistler attended this show. Championed by Baudelaire, whose essay "On the Heroism of Modern Life" (1846) called on the new generation of artists to abandon glorifying the past

substance of the debate between colour and drawing followed on from Goethe's seminal three-part study *Farbenlehre* or *Theory of Colours* (1810), which had been translated into English in 1840. *Theory of Colours* was immensely influential, greatly affecting the science of the physiology of perception. Rather than a quantitative, objective basis from which to study light and colour as Newton had suggested in *Opticks* (1704) and which had, up until this point, dominated theories of colour, Goethe contended that the eye or 'perception' was a sufficient tool for analysis. In legitimising 'the eye' within this context, Goethe was aspiring towards a theory of knowledge that gave primacy to the subjective response. Exploring colour symbolism, including its moral associations and the aesthetic influences arising from them, Goethe also suggested that colour, in provoking a wide spectrum of emotional responses and psychological effects, operated as a language. This idea would gain currency in the writings of Baudelaire, Swinburne, Pater, and Wilde, and in Whistler's visual work.

Comprised of a series of aphoristic observations, *Theory of Colours* included a subsection entitled "Relation to the Theory of Music", which, along with Goethe's thoughts on "Genuine Tone", explored the similarities between colour and sound:

That a certain relation exists between [colour and sound], has always been felt; this is proved by the frequent comparisons we meet with...[However], colour and sound do not admit of being directly compared together in any way, but both are referable to a higher formula, both are derivable, although each for itself, from this higher law. They are like two rivers which have their source in one and the same mountain, but subsequently pursue their way under totally different conditions in two totally different regions...acting according to the general law of separation and tendency to union, of undulation and oscillation, yet acting thus in wholly different provinces, in different modes, on different elementary mediums, for different senses.<sup>25</sup>

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and nature in favour of the modern age, Courbet's influence on Whistler's early work and artistic conceptions was significant.

<sup>25</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, (trans.) Charles Eastlake (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970), 298.

Goethe's belief that colour and sound derived from "a higher formula" lent itself to the notion of a transcendental meta-language accessed through art, an idea that proved instrumental to Baudelaire's 'theory of correspondences.' Goethe's work greatly contributed to the notion that colour, like sound, possessed aesthetic value in itself. And by the mid-nineteenth century, these ideas had become absorbed into the French "literature of art" including, most significantly, the work of Michel Eugène Chevreul and Charles Blanc.<sup>26</sup>

Chevreul's analysis of the subjective effect of optical mixtures or the "laws of simultaneous contrast", was first published in 1828 as an article and later expanded into his pivotal text *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colour, and their Application to the Arts* (1857). Mainly concerned with optical theory, a topic Whistler was familiar with due to his West Point Academy education, Chevreul dedicated a section in his conclusion to the "Comparison of Sound and Colour":

Hearing is the sense which passes as having the greatest affinity with sight; for every one knows the comparison that has been instituted between sounds and colour, not only when considered as sensations, but also when it has been sought to explain their propagation by the wave theory.<sup>27</sup>

Concluding that he had been unable to establish an adequate connection between colour and sound, he nonetheless anticipated that in the future this relationship would be secured. His text is further significant for its reference to the work of the French Jesuit Louis Bertrand Castel, whose ocular harpsichord and ideas of colour harmony represent attempts in the seventeenth century to establish synaesthetic relationships

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<sup>26</sup> I am greatly indebted to John Gage's pioneering work on colour and, more specifically, to the links he draws between nineteenth century colour-debates and synaesthesia. See, in particular, his chapters, "Colours of the Mind: Goethe's Legacy" and "The Sound of Colour" in *Colour and Culture*; and chapters, "A Psychological Background for Early Modern Colour" and "Making Sense of Colour: The Synaesthetic Dimension" in *Colour and Meaning*.

<sup>27</sup> M.E. Chevreul, *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours, and their Application to the Arts* (London, 1854), 47.

between colour and sound.<sup>28</sup> Chevreul also conceded that the pleasure one obtains from a succession of colours paralleled the melodious succession of sounds (an idea that critics frequently discussed in relation to Whistler's paintings):

If we consider the simultaneous view of colours assorted conformably to the rules of contrast, it is evident, from what has been said, that it will be the case of the greatest analogy between colour and sounds, because in fact, in the pleasure by colours happily associated there is something comparable to what we call a concord of harmonious sounds.<sup>29</sup>

The notion that the pleasure derived from colour-contrast paralleled that of sound was further developed in Blanc's text *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, published in 1867 after first appearing in the popular art-journal *Gazette des beaux-arts*, founded by Blanc in 1859. The most important work on the topic during the second half of the nineteenth century in France, Blanc's essay challenged the traditional view that colour (unlike drawing) could not be taught as it adhered to mathematical rules that Delacroix had mastered. By arguing that colour was governed by mathematical laws, Blanc inadvertently pushed colour-theory closer to the field of music given the well-established relationship between sound and mathematics. Blanc and Chevreul's work contributed to the idea of colour as a language of sensation, which *affected* its audience in a way comparable to music. It was this aspect of their work in particular which formatively influenced Baudelaire's views on the supposed relationship between colour and melody (and between the arts more generally), confirmed by his essay on Wagner. Seeing that Baudelaire sent this work to Swinburne in 1863, it is more than likely that Whistler was familiar with Baudelaire's statements about synaesthesia. Furthermore, and as Whistler's self-appointed biographers the Pennells argue (with reference to Poe):

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<sup>28</sup> Wilton Mason, "Father Castel and his Color Clavecin", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17:1 (1958), 103-16.

<sup>29</sup> Chevreul, *The Principles of Harmony*, 417.

The convictions, the preferences, the prejudices he kept to the end were formed during those early years. His lifelong admiration for Poe, who as a West Point man would in any case have commanded his regard, was no doubt strengthened by the hold Poe had taken on the imagination of French men of letters. His disdain of Nature, his contempt for anecdote in art as a concession to an ignorant public, his translation of painting into musical terms— this, and much else so often charged against him as deliberate eccentricity or pose, can be traced by the curious to Baudelaire.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it appears not coincidental that the year in which Blanc published *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, establishing the evocative power of colour in relation to musical qualities and the work of Delacroix—an artist Whistler admired—Whistler chose to adopt his first musical title ‘Symphony in White No.111.’<sup>31</sup>

To conflate sound and colour literally or through analogy or to use colour in a way that mimicked that of music was to intentionally create artworks that appealed to the senses and were thus produced for the sole sensation of *effect*. In “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), perhaps Poe’s most influential critical work (which Whistler was undoubtedly familiar with), he exalted the use of the refrain or unvaried repetition in lyrical poetry, considering this rhetorical strategy instrumental in accentuating the musicality of discourse.<sup>32</sup> Poe’s formalism derived from his perception of music as an ideally affective art form. If art aspired towards the condition of music (to borrow Pater’s axiom), it aspired towards the condition of effect, for as Poe asserted in the work: “When, indeed, men speak of beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect.”<sup>33</sup>

In a letter to George A. Lucas in 1873 in which Whistler urged the art-dealer to view his works on display at Durand-Ruel’s Gallery in Paris, he described his

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<sup>30</sup> E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 1 (London: William Heinemann, 1909), 66

<sup>31</sup> Walsh makes this astute observation in *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler*, 207

<sup>32</sup> Leonard Cassuto (ed.), *Edgar Allan Poe: Literary Theory and Criticism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 104. Poe continued his ‘theory of effect’ in “The Poetic Principle” (1850). Whistler painted ‘Annabel Lee,’ inspired by Poe’s story of the same name, at the end of the 1860s. Significantly, it is his only painting based directly on a literary figure.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 103

theory of art as one of “the science of colour and ‘*picture pattern*.’”<sup>34</sup> Whistler’s use of the term “science”, strongly suggests that debates over the physiological nature of colour influenced his developing views of colour in the 1860s, which culminated in *The Six Projects* (1868).<sup>35</sup> These works register Whistler’s break with narrative form—the sensation of colour and line moving outside of a semantic field.<sup>36</sup> Spencer argues that the paintings are based on the experience of synaesthesia and, like Swinburne’s poem ‘Ave Atque Vale’, were composed in memorial to Baudelaire, a viable interpretation given Swinburne’s pervasive use of synaesthesia in his ‘antiphony’ to them.<sup>37</sup>

Whistler’s reference to “*picture pattern*”, a theory comparable to Poe’s idea of the refrain (as well as to Wagner’s *leitmotif*), parallels a description given in a letter to Fantin-Latour in 1868 in which he likened colour to embroidery:

The colours should be so to speak *embroidered* on it—in other words the same colour reappearing continually here and there like the same thread in an embroidery—and so on with the others—more or less according to their importance—the whole forming in this way an *harmonious* pattern—Look how the Japanese understood this!—They never search for contrast, but on the contrary for repetition—<sup>38</sup>

Whistler reiterates Blanc and Chevreul’s work on colour. His attention to the effects of “repetition” also suggests that his approach to colour-composition was at least partially inspired by musical techniques, signifying his effort to push colour closer to the non-representational, self-referential ‘purity’ of music. As the Pennells note,

[Whistler] chafed over the time he had lost before discovering for himself that art is not the exact reproduction of Nature, but its

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<sup>34</sup> Reprinted in Nigel Thorpe (ed.), *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1994), 48.

<sup>35</sup> *The Six Projects* refers specifically to a series of unfinished oil paintings by Whistler: ‘Venus,’ ‘Symphony in Blue and Pink,’ ‘Symphony in White and Red,’ ‘Variations in Blue and Green,’ ‘The White Symphony: Three Girls,’ ‘Symphony in Green and Violet.’

<sup>36</sup> David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler: At the Freer Gallery of Art* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 107.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Spencer, “Whistler, Swinburne and art for art’s sake”, 72. See my analysis of Swinburne’s appraisal of *The Six Projects* in my opening chapter on Swinburne, 44-7.

<sup>38</sup> Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, 30 September—22 November 1868 (LCMS, Pennell-Whistler Collection).

interpretation, and that the artist must seek his motives in Nature, and then weave from them a beautiful pattern on his canvas. Pattern, harmony, repetition are words ever recurring in his letters as the same tone or colour recurs in his design, and was compared by him to the thread of silk running through a piece of embroidery.<sup>39</sup>

Whistler's Peacock Room in which the repetition of "BLUE ON GOLD" and "GOLD ON BLUE", "a pattern, invented from the Eye of the Peacock...and repeated throughout the room", further suggests that his novel approach to decorative art (or to the ambiguity between decoration and art) was informed by his belief that by borrowing from music one could increase colour's affectivity.<sup>40</sup> This conception also appears to have guided Whistler approach to 'harmonising' his gallery spaces. In a review of the painter's first solo-exhibition at the Flemish Gallery in London in 1874 in *The Pictorial World*, the reviewer described the experience as akin to stepping inside a symphony:

The Visitor is struck, on entering the gallery, with a curious sense of harmony and fitness pervading it, and is more interested perhaps, in the general effect than in any one work. The gallery and its contents are altogether in harmony—a symphony of colour, carried out in every detail, even the colour of the matted floor, the blue pots and flowering plants, the delicate tints of the walls, and, above all, in the juxtaposition of the pictures...If anyone wishes to realise what is meant by true feeling for colour and harmony—born of the Japanese—let him sit down here some morning...<sup>41</sup>

Not only did a viewer enter "a symphony of colour", they entered the temperament of the artist: Whistler's works neither began nor ended with the frame. Instead, emphasis was placed on the particular experience of spectatorship that the gallery space (rather than "any one work") afforded.

Whistler's retreat from Realism (as documented in his letter to Fantin-Latour in 1868) occurred precisely when he began to experiment with colour-harmonies and synaesthetic approaches to art on conceptual, visual and rhetorical levels. This

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<sup>39</sup> E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 1, 147.

<sup>40</sup> Thorpe (ed.), *Whistler on Art*, 49. For a detailed analysis of the issues surrounding Whistler's 'decorative' art, see Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Henry Blackburn, "'A Symphony' in Pall Mall", *The Pictorial World* (13 June 1874), 11.

demonstrates how his movement away from Courbet's tutelage was galvanised by his movement towards an approach to art that granted primacy to colour as a valuable aesthetic experience in itself, aided and accentuated by music's companionship. Walsh notes that, "By 1867 Whistler's name was synonymous with his use of colour, and whilst previously reviewers had identified it as the most striking feature of his art, many were now prepared to discuss it explicitly as the artist's sole motivation in painting."<sup>42</sup> Whistler's sensitivity and approach to colour was always recognised by his critics. In his British debut at the Royal Academy, reviews of 'At the Piano' (1860) centred on and applauded his provocative use of colour. Four years later, when Whistler showed 'Wapping' and 'Die Lange Leizen of the Six Marks' at the Academy, the *Daily Telegraph* praised Whistler's colour: "They have a truth of relative tone in the colouring which seems almost perfect, and this truth has been gained, not by elaborate handling, but at once."<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the *Athenaeum* stated, "[the] Piano Picture, despite a recklessly bold manner and sketchiness of the wildest and roughest kind, [has] a genuine feeling for colour and a splendid power of composition and design, which evince a just appreciation of nature rare among artists."<sup>44</sup>

In 1867, however, Whistler's use of colour was seen to possess an altogether different, more complex and provocative significance. Reviews of his works now began to interpret his experiments with colour as somehow representative of his theory of art. This was because, in 1867, he exhibited his first painting with a synaesthetic title: 'Symphony in White No. 3.' In this gesture, Whistler declared himself an aesthete, whose theory and practice of art was guided by a formalism that was more 'French' than 'English' and which equated aesthetic meaning with aesthetic

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<sup>42</sup> Walsh, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Walsh, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

experience. As Whistler's lawyer asserted in his opening statement in the Ruskin trial: "Mr. Whistler occupies a somewhat independent position in art...it might be that his theory of painting is, in the estimation of some, eccentric; but his great object is to produce the utmost effect which color will enable him to do, and to bring about a harmony in color and arrangement in his pictures."<sup>45</sup> As we shall see, Whistler's "independent" use of colour was unsettling and radical, and it was synaesthetic metaphor which attuned critics to this new direction in art and which came to represent Whistler's Aestheticism.

### III. *Whistler and His Critics*

In the autumn of 1877, John Hollingshead's burlesque, three-act farce, *The Grasshopper*, adapted from Meilhac and Halévy's *La Cigale*, was in production at the Gaiety Theatre in London where Hollingshead served as manager.<sup>46</sup> Whistler, who had supplied Hollingshead with fodder for the character of "Pygmalion Flippit"—"an Artist of the Future" and the play's protagonist—attended and approved the final rehearsal.<sup>47</sup> As he stated in a letter to Hollingshead, he "was delighted to do anything—that might conduce to the general completeness of your piece."<sup>48</sup> In the play's original version, Edgar Degas and French Impressionism were the focus of the writers' parody. Hollingshead's decision to replace Degas with Whistler suggests that the painter was at the forefront of all that was considered 'modern' in art in Britain at the time. His public image was large enough to sustain lampooning in what critics have referred to as "the golden age" of English parody, the aesthetes proving

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<sup>45</sup> Merrill, *A Pot of Paint*, 138

<sup>46</sup> The play premiered at the Gaiety Theatre on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1877. John Hollingshead, *The Grasshopper, A Drama in Three Acts* (London, 1877).

<sup>47</sup> Stanley Weintraub, *Whistler: A Biography* (New York: De Capo Press, 2001), 193.

<sup>48</sup> John Hollingshead, *Gaiety Chronicles* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1898).

particularly vulnerable to this type of irony.<sup>49</sup> Given the inherently self-reflexive nature of parody, the character of Flippit captured Whistler's perceived eccentricities whilst reflecting the cultural norms he apparently transgressed.<sup>50</sup> Synaesthesia plays prominently in this satirical construction, illustrating Whistler's formative role in both cultivating and popularizing the perception of a link between intersensory art and Aestheticism during the period:

What are you?  
A harmonist!  
I beg your pardon  
Harmonist in Colours— black and white for example  
Oh! I understand now!— What they call a *Christy Minstrel!*  
No! No! My lord! You mistake me! I am an artist. We used to call ourselves painters, and our work painting, but feeling that we were often confounded with house decorators and workmen even of a lower stamp, we now call ourselves harmonists, and our work harmonies or symphonies, according to colour.  
Ah! I begin to see now  
Like my great master, Whistler, I see things in a peculiar way, and I paint them as I see them. For instance, I see you a violet colour, and if I painted your portrait now I should paint it violet. Shall I paint your portrait?<sup>51</sup>

Throughout Whistler's critical reception and in his trial with Ruskin, the following themes emerged: the perception of Aestheticism as an elite group of artists (not to be "confounded" with common workers or even painters); the sense of the aesthetes' need to break with convention and make things new (they are "harmonists" not "painters", they paint "symphonies" not "paintings"); the importance they invested in interrelationships between music and colour and, more generally, in the formal, sensorial properties of art; the idea that the aesthetes perceived things in "peculiar" or uncommon ways which, while augmenting the perception of their elitism, also underscored a fundamental re-evaluation of both painter's role and the function of

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<sup>49</sup> Terry Caesar, "I Quite Forget What—Say a Daffodilly: Victorian Parody", *ELH* 51:4 (1984), 796.

<sup>50</sup> Michele Hanoosh, "The Reflexive Function of Parody", *Comparative Literature* 41:2 (1989), 113-27.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Ronald Anderson & Anne Koval (eds.), *James McNeill Whistler: Beyond the Myth* (New York: Carroll & Graf ed., 1995), 213.

painting in society; and, finally, the fact that Whistler was the “great master” of these budding artistic trends. Synaesthesia thus became an expression of Whistler’s ‘modernity’ and a symbol of Aestheticism in itself.

Whistler’s role within the production of *The Grasshopper* is also significant, revealing his skills in self-publicity. As Hollingshead recollected:

There was much ‘chaff’ in the piece about the ‘Impressionist’ school of painting, and Mr. Gordon Thomson and Sig. Pellegrini, the great caricaturist, gave this clever artistic form. A comic portrait of ‘Jim’ Whistler was painted by Pellegrini with the celebrated artist’s consent, but this consent not being generally known, I was accused of bad taste in exhibiting caricatures of living people as if no such thing existed as caricature journalism!<sup>52</sup>

That Whistler not only approved but also encouraged his own parody and that this fact was kept from the general public thereby leading to strident criticism of the play (and thus, free advertisement), illuminates Whistler’s sensitivity to the increasing and varied importance of the media in an artist’s career. Writing frequent and provocative letters to the press (outlets also used to conduct and publicise feuds with other artists or critics such as Wilde), giving interviews and inviting journalists to his exhibitions and studio, publishing pamphlets, lecturing, and taking part in several high-profile legal disputes, Whistler actively courted the media. He was also immensely aware of the importance of titles with regards both to publicity and to expressing his artistic views, evidenced by his contribution to the *World’s* ‘Celebrities at Home’ column as well as, and nearly a decade and half earlier than this, the controversy surrounding his painting ‘The White Girl.’<sup>53</sup>

Whistler exhibited this work at the Matthew Morton’s Gallery in London in 1862 after it was rejected by the Royal Academy that year, a fact the painter insisted

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<sup>52</sup> Hollingshead, *Gaiety Chronicles*, 376-7.

<sup>53</sup> Catherine Carter Goebel, “The Brush and the Baton: Influences on Whistler’s Choice of Musical Terms for his Titles”, in Nigel Thorpe (ed.), *The Whistler Review: Studies on James McNeill Whistler and Nineteenth-Century Art* 1 (1999), 27.

on including in the Gallery's exhibition catalogue.<sup>54</sup> The painting was also shown in the inaugural 'Salon des Refusés' in Paris and, along with Manet's 'Dejeuner sur l'herbe' attracted considerable press. In Britain, critics referred to the work as "The Woman in White", the name of Wilkie Collins' popular sensation novel that had run serially in the periodical *All the Year Round* (Nov 1859-Aug 1860). In July of 1862, in Whistler's first letter to the press, addressed to William Hepworth Dixon, the editor of the popular weekly *Athenaeum*, he disassociated his painting from this literary allusion:

May I beg to correct an erroneous impression...the Proprietors of the Berners Street Gallery have, without my sanction, called my picture "The Woman in White." I had no intention whatsoever of illustrating Mr. Wilkie Collins's novel; it so happens, indeed, that I have never read it. My painting represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain.<sup>55</sup>

If Whistler publicly expressed disapproval, evidence suggests to the contrary that he was pleased with this literary association. As Aileen Tsui signals, Whistler allowed 'The White Girl' to be called 'The Woman in White' in London. He then changed the title to 'La Dame Blanche' in France (an allusion to Boïeldieu's and Scribe's popular opera 'Dame Blanche').<sup>56</sup> Whistler's tactical use of titles, which became increasingly strategic once he adopted musical terms, is a clear indication of his skills in manipulating the media. His outlandish outfits and carefully orchestrated gallery exhibitions, beginning with the Flemish Gallery show in 1874 for which the interior space, invitations, picture frames and gallery workers were colour-coordinated or 'harmonised', further contributed to his celebrity status and to the public's perception of him as an 'eccentric', 'aesthete' and 'dandy.' Because his notoriety as a radical

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<sup>54</sup> Whistler later renamed this work "Symphony in White, No. 1."

<sup>55</sup> James McNeill Whistler, letter, *Athenaeum* (5 July 1862), 23.

<sup>56</sup> Aileen Tsui, "The Phantasm of Aesthetic Autonomy in Whistler's works: Titling *The White Girl*", *Art History*, 29:3 (2006), 452.

artist largely came through his ‘musical’ works, synaesthetic metaphors significantly inhabited these perceptions and constructs.

Whistler was as uncompromising as he was aware of the financial gain one could garner from good, and perhaps more importantly, *bad* publicity. That he included a section in *The Gentle Art* documenting the most negative and acerbic reviews of his works, the majority of which focusing on his use of synaesthetic metaphor, further attests to the important role Whistler’s critical reception played in his artistic career. His failure to acknowledge positive reviews of his exhibitions which were, indeed, abundant, illustrates how the perception of Whistler as a misunderstood genius, or, as Bell phrased it, “a lonely artist” was, by and large, a mythos that suited the painter’s agenda.<sup>57</sup> For, as Goebel develops, in order for Whistler’s “bohemian” image to emerge, it required something to emerge *against*. In Whistler’s case, this would become not just the English public but also the English critic and the entire institution of art criticism in itself.<sup>58</sup>

Whistler employed a press-clipping agency to monitor his critical reception from the late-1860s onwards (which was later arranged in volumes), and his letters reveal the extent to which he was attentive to his public image, frequently asking friends to send any details surrounding his exhibitions whilst informing them of the latest gossip he had heard about his own work.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, Whistler’s contrived performativity as an *aesthete* artist was most comparable to Wilde’s: both were immensely aware of the advantageousness of media-attention to their art. Indeed, and ironically, inasmuch as they shunned bourgeois art appreciation to champion the notion of a “pure” aesthetic unfettered by popular opinion and didactic standards,

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<sup>57</sup> See Patricia de Montfort, “*The Gentle Art - An Artistic Autobiography?*”, *The Whistler Review* (1999).

<sup>58</sup> Catherine Carter Goebel, *Arrangement in Black and White: The Making of a Whistler Legend*, diss., Northwestern University, 1988, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Goebel, “The Brush and the Baton”, 27.

commercial and popular interests played a formative role in the development of their Aestheticism and gravitation towards synaesthesia. Both artists saliently contributed to the fecund contradictoriness that Freedman and others associate with ‘art for art’, for high culture and mass consumer appeal—as Whistler’s appearance in ‘Celebrities at Home’ attests—were intimately interlinked. To add to this irony, Ruskin’s objection to Whistler appears to have been motivated less by the painter’s allegiance to ‘art for art’ (which, in his own way, Ruskin also subscribed to), and triggered more by Whistler’s persistent pandering to commercial interests and manipulation of the art markets.

As previously stated, Whistler’s development of synaesthesia was saliently paradoxical: the ‘purity’ of synaesthetic metaphor was tempered by an awareness of the beneficial attention this aesthetic performance could construe. Whistler’s use of synaesthesia attempted to reconstitute the role of spectatorship or the relationship between viewer and object in aesthetic appreciation. It did this in part by subverting the critic’s ability to narrate his paintings conventionally. In a review of Whistler’s works at the Dudley Gallery (1871) for the well-circulated, prestigious pictorial the *Graphic*, the reviewer highlighted and praised the difficulty that Whistler’s paintings posed to the critic: “It is a pleasure of no common order to rest sight upon the two *colour-studies* of Mr. Whistler, respecting which especially the second, we can only advise our readers to see them and judge for themselves.”<sup>60</sup> Unable or unwilling to describe or narrate Whistler’s “colour-studies”, readers were urged to behold and evaluate for themselves. This, in turn, destabilised the critic’s role in assigning aesthetic and commercial value, which is precisely what Whistler claimed to be after in *Whistler v Ruskin* and his ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture.

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<sup>60</sup> “The Dudley Gallery”, *The Graphic* (4 November 1871), 443.

As Tsui demonstrates, mid-nineteenth-century art markets continued to reward more conventional, academic approaches to art such that radical artists increasingly came to regard artistic value as existing in inverse relation to economic value. That Whistler subscribed to, in Tsui's terms, "a simplified polarity" in which 'pure' (or, in Whistler's case, 'synaesthetic') art possessed high aesthetic value because it had low commercial interest is reflected throughout his rhetoric even if this was not the reality.<sup>61</sup> In 1872, for instance, in a telling letter to Fredrick Leyland, one of Whistler's earliest, most important patrons, the painter remarked:

I say I can't thank you too much for the name 'Nocturne' as a title for my moonlights! You have no idea what an irritation it proves to the critics and consequent pleasure to me - besides it is really so charming and does so poetically say all I want to say and no more than I wish!<sup>62</sup>

The pleasure Whistler derived from the pure poeticism of musical terms was balanced by the pleasing "irritation" it proved to his critics. And yet, whilst it irritated his critics, it also wooed them, strengthening his works' marketability. As Otto Scholderer informed Fantin-Latour in 1876: "harmonies, symphonies a la Whistler are all the rage at the moment...every imbecile talks about harmonies, colour symphonies in white or other colours or thinks himself very advanced in modern art."<sup>63</sup> Scholderer's sentiments reverberate throughout Whistler's critical reception where one finds his interest in synaesthesia described as both modern and fashionable and subsequently, praised or parodied depending upon the nature of the periodical (and the sensibility of the critic or reviewer). Thus, although Whistler persistently argued that the press and the public were incapable of understanding and appreciating his use of musical terms for painting titles and his radical elevation of colour over content, a survey of his critical reception reveals a very different reality.

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<sup>61</sup> Tsui, "The Phantasm of Aesthetic Autonomy", 450.

<sup>62</sup> Whistler to Frederick R. Leyland, 2/9 November 1872 (LCMS, Pennell-Whistler Collection).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Andrew Stephenson, "Refashioning modern masculinity: Whistler, aestheticism and national identity" in David Peter Corbett and Lara Perry (eds.), *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity* (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2001), 137.

This section aims to show how Whistler's career as an *aesthete* artist was intimately related to his development of synaesthesia and that indeed throughout his critical reception, his use of synaesthetic metaphor emerged as among the primary vehicles used both to delineate and characterise his Aestheticism. That Whistler retrospectively re-titled his earlier paintings to conform to his musical nomenclature for his first solo show (and 'harmonised' exhibition) at the Flemish Gallery in London in 1874, reflects the extent to which he himself considered synaesthesia central to the 'making' and 'performing' of his Aestheticism. As Spenser notes, in renaming his previous works synaesthetically, Whistler was encouraging the belief that his art had always aspired towards the criteria he would later and most eloquently defend in his 'Ten O'clock' lecture.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, whilst Linda Merrill argues that the self-referentiality of Whistler's 'musical' works deprived his reviewers of a sufficient critical lexicon and that it was their inability to narrate his paintings which underscored many of their grievances, by the time of his trial with Ruskin in 1878, there was indeed a substantial critical vocabulary in existence in which to articulate and analyze his art.<sup>65</sup> By 1864, for instance, the term 'harmony' pervaded French and British criticism and 'symphony' had already been suggested in France and 'arrangement' in England.<sup>66</sup> As Goebel demonstrates in "The Brush and the Baton" (1999), "Not only did many of Whistler's critics understand this 'eccentric' nomenclature...some of them may even have helped to develop it."<sup>67</sup> This point is confirmed by the Pennells in their discussion of his motivations for using the term 'symphony':

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<sup>64</sup> Spenser, "Whistler's 'The White Girl'", 300.

<sup>65</sup> Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint*, 232; See, in particular, Merrill's chapter "Figures of Speech." Walsh, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M Whistler*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Goebel, "The Brush and the Baton", 29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

Baudelaire had already given him the hint, and Gautier had already written symphonies in verse. One of Murger's Bohemians had already composed a *Symphonie sur influence du bleu dans les arts*. In 1863 Paul Mantz had described *The White Girl* as a 'Symphony in White.' There can be no doubt that from these things Whistler got the name that in the *Academy* passed for a deliberate affectation, an insult to the people's intelligence.<sup>68</sup>

As we shall see, not only were reviewers sensitive to Whistler's aesthetic prerogatives including (but not limited to) the motivations behind his development of synaesthesia, they frequently relied on synaesthesia to describe, praise and parody his works, whilst scrutinizing the very notion of intersensory art as an authentic and viable approach to painting in their reviews. Focusing primarily on the critical reception of four exhibitions—The Royal Academy (1867), The Dudley Gallery (1871) and The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions of 1877 and 1878—this survey follows with an analysis of the role of synaesthesia in Whistler's trial with Ruskin and in relation to Whistler's views on art criticism.

*The Royal Academy (1867):*

In 1867, Whistler exhibited his first painting with a musical title: 'Symphony in White, No. 3', at The Royal Academy, the bastion of English art. Predictably, the work attracted considerable and varied critical attention much of which addressed the painter's use of synaesthesia. Whistler's 'symphony' shows two young women in white dresses: one lies languidly across a white couch while the other sits along the floor, her arm outstretched on a cushion, a fan resting on the folds of her dress. In the foreground, along the right-hand corner beside the frame, blue and white flowers are arranged in a Japanese style. And certainly, the painting is significant both for its Japanese influenced composition (further accentuated by the fan) and for its title,

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<sup>68</sup> E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 1, 144.

which critics commonly interpreted as a sign of Whistler's originality as an artist. An anonymous reviewer for the fine-art monthly *Art-Journal* referred to the painter as an anomaly and to his 'symphony', "as one of the most alarming, and yet admired eccentricities in the exhibition" which had "little difficulty in keeping to the key note; it preserves all but an unvaried monotone."<sup>69</sup> Framing Whistler's painting within musical terms, the reviewer ultimately concluded that the work's colour scheme fulfilled its title's connotation. Meanwhile, in the *Athenaeum*, which eschewed politics, devoting itself to literature, visual art, music, science and drama and, like the *World*, "literary gossip", accolades were bestowed on Whistler and on his use of synaesthesia in particular, which came to characterise his "welcomed" eccentricity as an artist.<sup>70</sup> For it was Whistler's use of a colour-music metaphor, the reviewer argued, that illuminated the "stupidly-blundering abuse from those who regard pictures as representations of something after their own minds":

By way, as we suppose, of introducing a gleam of light to the minds of the latter, and giving a glimpse of his purpose...this artist calls his beautiful study in grades of white, pale rose tints, and grey, *Symphony in White, no. 3*...and, by borrowing a musical phrase, doubtless casts reflected light upon former studies or "symphonies" of the same kind...there can be nothing but thanks due to a painter who endeavors [sic] by any means to show what he really aims at, and to get observers to understand that he produces pictures for the sake of ineffable Art itself, not as mere illustrations of "subjects," or the previous conceptions of other minds.<sup>71</sup>

This review, in particular, illustrates the extent to which Whistler's (and, for that matter, Bell's) characterisations of his critics as completely deaf to his artistic prerogatives and to the motivations behind his allusive, synaesthetic titles were a contrived inaccuracy, a fabrication that served to contrast the projected purity of his art. For the *Athenaeum* not only astutely linked the painter's use of synaesthesia to

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<sup>69</sup> "The Royal Academy", *Art-Journal* (June 1867), 143.

<sup>70</sup> Laurel Brake, "Writing, Cultural Production, and the Periodical Press in the Nineteenth Century" in J.B. Bullen (ed.), *Writing and Victorianism* (London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 62.

<sup>71</sup> "Fine Arts: The Royal Academy", *Athenaeum* (18 May 1867), 667.

his belief in ‘art for art’ but also applauded this achievement, the accolades they bestowed on Whistler, a reflection, perhaps, of the weekly’s interest in the arts and fashion and thus, in itself an indication of the fashionability of Aestheticism.

In William Rossetti’s review for the *Chronicle*, he referred to the ‘symphony’ as “Mr. Whistler’s figure-picture of the year” arguing that it was, ultimately, a study “of harmony in various tinges and affinities of white” and from this point of view, “simply delicious.” He also, however, acknowledged that Whistler’s paintings formed “a dangerous precedent”, since, for the ‘average’ person, they were incomprehensible:

Most people are devoid of this sense of intrinsic art and [are] proportionately dull to the signs of it; [and] the pictures are painted in a key very different from that of the works which surround them, and with a neglect or rejection of many of those executive qualities which are commonly—and in some instances—rightly understood [...]<sup>72</sup>

The ability to appreciate Whistler’s works appeared to indicate a particular aesthetic sensibility not possessed by the general public and, perhaps more crucially, the general *British* public. For Rossetti ultimately concluded that Whistler’s gifts were “better expressible in French.”<sup>73</sup> Significantly, then, Whistler’s ‘French’ approach to art was both identified and framed by his interest in synaesthesia. Additionally, and in relation to this, Whistler’s use of synaesthesia appeared to underscore just as it helped to cultivate the popular perception of Aestheticism as an elite coterie of artists who delighted in their incomprehensibility. For Whistler’s aesthetic elitism propelled the corollary assumption that true or pure art would baffle or antagonise the public.<sup>74</sup>

In *The Evening Star*, Whistler’s inclusion of his title within the painting itself was mocked: “[We protest] in the strongest manner against the affectation of Mr. Whistler’s ‘Symphony in White, No. 3’ (233)—(could not Mr. Whistler put a little more writing in the corners of his pictures—his address, say, and the name of his

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<sup>72</sup> W.M. Rossetti, “Royal Academy Exhibition”, *Chronicle* (25 May 1867), 210.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Tsui, “The Phantasm of Aesthetic”, 449.

colourman [sic]?).”<sup>75</sup> By placing the title within the work, he was suggesting that it was an integral component to the work—a point he also extended to his frames—thereby challenging aesthetic and gallery conventions during the period.<sup>76</sup> As Merrill states, “In making [his frames] extensions of his paintings, Whistler undermined the illusion of the frame as a window on a fictive world, asserting the self-sufficiency of painting as an object.”<sup>77</sup> That this was Whistler’s intention is clear. For in his letter to George Lucas in 1873 (within which he also spoke of “the science of colour and *picture pattern*”) the painter asserted:

They are not merely canvasses having interest in themselves alone, but are intended to indicate slightly to “those whom it may concern” something of my theory in art...you will notice and perhaps meet with opposition that my frames I have designed as carefully as my pictures—and thus they form as important a part as any of the rest of the work—carrying on the particular harmony throughout—This is of course entirely original with me and has never been done before...and I wish this to be also clearly stated in Paris that I am the inventor of all this kind of decoration in color in the frames; that I may not have a lot of clever little Frenchmen trespassing on my ground—By the names of the pictures also I point out something of what I mean in my theory of painting.<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, Whistler linked his “original” frames to his titular innovations, and both aspects, when taken together, were seen to illustrate his “theory of painting.” Significant, too, is Whistler expressed desire that he (rather than a “Frenchman”) be known for originating these developments. For in Britain, it was precisely these components that marked his work out as ‘French’ not ‘English.’ Furthermore, in the nineteenth century, as titles increasingly functioned as direct linguistic translations of representation in order to aid the advent of exhibition catalogues (by making it easier

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<sup>75</sup> “The Exhibition of the Royal Academy: East Room”, *The Evening Star* (4 May 1867), 7.

<sup>76</sup> For a detailed analysis concerning Whistler’s polemical titular inventions see “James McNeill Whistler: The Elaboration and Contraction of the Title” in John C. Welchman, *Invisible Colors: A Visual History of Titles* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997); see, as well, Tsui’s article, “The Phantasm of Aesthetic Autonomy.”

<sup>77</sup> Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 55.

<sup>78</sup> Thorpe (ed.), *Whistler on Art*, 47-8; Whistler’s fascinating letters to Lucas are documented in John A. Mahey, “The Letters of James McNeill Whistler to George A. Lucas”, *The Art Bulletin* 49:3 (1967), 247-57.

to identify works), Whistler's titling methods directly flouted these emerging capitalist conventions.<sup>79</sup>

A review in the upmarket, weekly magazine the *Illustrated London News*, opening with praise for Whistler, closed with condemnation:

The artist's primary aim is colour; to this (as, indeed, indicated by the title of the first-named picture) everything is subordinated, everything else is rendered indefinite in order to concentrate attention upon this. In favour of this quality, the painter proposes to attain abstract art, as exclusively addressed to the eye as a symphony independent of words is addressed to the ear. The first picture, representing a lady in white reclining on a couch, is remarkable for beautiful chromatic harmonies of white and greys, the second [Battersea] for the exquisite truth with which the general aspect of the Thames shining under grey daylight is rendered. Yet in this direction, also, Mr. Whistler goes to extremes. We protest against any elevation of sensuous colour above intellectual form, and against a conception of art which would deprive it of means (not possessed by music) for reaching the mind and heart.<sup>80</sup>

Whistler's extremity—his lack of self-control—was linked to his development of synaesthesia, in itself, seen to constitute a more “abstract” approach to art. For the reviewer implied that Whistler's use of colour was modelled on the non-representational properties of absolute music. Colour was “sensuous”, and form “intellectual” (and by ‘form’, the reviewer was referring to content and narrative structure). This framed colour within a gendered binary system: Whistler's works appeared to elevate ‘body’ over ‘mind’ and (‘feminine’) emotion over (‘masculine’) rationality. To use colour in such a way that its effect was analogous to music (an accusation paralleling those directed at Swinburne's ‘musical’ poetry) was to redefine the function and merit of painting in corporeal terms. A painting “independent of words” (like absolute music) was incapable of performing any conventional social or didactic function in part because it was incapable of eliciting a critical or linguistic

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<sup>79</sup> As Walsh explores, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, titles enabled one to identify which work would be exhibited; in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, titles begin to perform the function of differentiating various genres (i.e. historical, landscape and so on); and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the expansion of the art world, there is a radical change in the function of the title as it becomes a linguistic device for literally representing the work, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler*, 192.

<sup>80</sup> “Fine Arts: Exhibition of the Royal Academy”, *Illustrated London News* (25 May 1867), 479.

response. In contrast to the ‘masculine’, ‘English’ pictorial works of the period (such as William Frith’s historical genre paintings that glorified the British empire and industry), Whistler’s work revelled in the sensuality of its form, of colour and (through analogy) music, “as, indeed, *indicated* by the title.”<sup>81</sup>

P.G. Hamerton, in his review of the exhibition for the *Saturday Review*, a powerful, weekly newspaper that had championed the Pre-Raphaelites and was committed to the English tradition in art, he asserted: “If the object of art is beauty, this cannot be art; but if we grant to painting the wider function of awakening or reviving impressions of any kind, and by any means in its power, then such a work as this is not only art, but art entirely fulfilling its duty to the world.”<sup>82</sup> Like W. Rossetti, Hamerton was among the new generation of critics writing in the wake of Ruskin, and from 1866 to 1868, was responsible for the majority of the *Saturday Review*’s art criticism. By and large, he held progressive views on art, reflected in his appreciation of French theory and interest in colour-sound analogies, topics he explored, however, in the pages of the *Fortnightly*.<sup>83</sup> Honing in on how Whistler’s painting appeared to be guided by its desire to affect (it cultivated a particular kind of aesthetic experience which, if not beautiful, was “powerful” and wholly valid simply for this point), Hamerton suggested that this was Whistler’s objective. His account of Whistler’s work testifies to how the painter deliberately challenged more conventional attitudes

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<sup>81</sup> For a fascinating discussion of competing tropings of artistic masculinity in relation to national identity in Whistler’s works and throughout his critical reception and within the context of emerging international art markets, see Stephenson, “Refashioning Modern Masculinity: Whistler, Aestheticism and National Identity”, 133-39. Frith testified on Ruskin’s behalf during Ruskin’s trial with Whistler.

<sup>82</sup> P.G. Hamerton, “Pictures of the Year”, *Saturday Review* (1 June 1867), 691. Merle Mowbray Bevington, *The Saturday Review 1855-1868: Representative Educative Opinion in Victorian England* (New York: Columbia UP, 1941), 289-98.

<sup>83</sup> In “The Place of Landscape Painting Amongst the Fine Arts” for the *Fortnightly Review* (1866), Hamerton investigated the analogous effects of music and landscape painting on the emotions whilst challenging the idea that music was without communicative power. His arguments suggest a strong familiarity with Baudelaire’s work, in particular, Baudelaire’s essay on Delacroix. Furthermore, Walsh argues that Hamerton was a forerunner in linking colour and sound (music and painting) in his art criticism, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler*, 209.

concerning the function of painting. For to appreciate Whistler's "symphony", Hamerton argued, one had to "grant to painting [a] wider function."<sup>84</sup> By this, one can assume that Hamerton was making allowances for the possibility of formal properties to convey meaning in and of themselves.

Despite Hamerton's moderate progressivism, he mildly rebuked Whistler's use of synaesthetic metaphor: "So in the 'Symphony in White, No. III there are many dainty varieties of tint, but it is not precisely a symphony in white. One lady has a yellowish dress and brown hair and a bit of blue ribbon, the other has a red fan, and there are flowers and green leaves."<sup>85</sup> Hamerton's problem related to the title's lack of literality, a point the painter ridiculed in his response to the critic: "And does he then in his astounding consequence, believe that a symphony in F contains no other note, but shall be a continued repetition of F, F, F? . . . Fool!"<sup>86</sup> Whistler's reaction completely failed to acknowledge Hamerton's initial praise of his work. It also revealed the intrinsic problem with making a metaphor accountable to a single meaning, as it was precisely the flexibility, subjectivity and innate poeticism of this rhetorical trope that appealed to Whistler.

In a telling review in the *Sunday Times*, the reviewer argued that Whistler's innovations with intersensory art redefined the role and significance of spectatorship. Echoing Hamerton's sentiments, the reviewer suggested that to find merit in Whistler's works one must be willing to part with a more traditional notion of how a painting could be meaningful:

Mr. Whistler views art from quite another standpoint, as our American cousins say, and the first thing he exacts from the spectator is imagination. He declines to enter in the prosy details of his art, objects to being read off like an almanack [sic], and regards articulate sounds with a holy abomination. If you are to translate his works, he seems to

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<sup>84</sup> Hamerton, "Pictures of the Year", 690.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 691.

<sup>86</sup> Whistler later included both Hamerton's review and his response in *The Gentle Art*, 44-5.

say, into any sister art, let it be into that of song and the songs be without words. Agree to this, and he will furnish you with the key note, in incident or colour, and peradventure discourse to you a few bars of tender melody, not unaccompanied with harmonies subdued and full, and most in a minor and melancholy key, but once having given you the theme the artist expects you to play the piece out yourself.<sup>87</sup>

Relying on musical terminology (“tender melody”, “minor key” “harmonies subdued”) to frame Whistler’s artistic vision, the critic suggested that as long as one reduced aesthetic meaning to aesthetic experience or to the effect of the formal (i.e. perceptual, sensorial) attributes of an artwork, pleasure could be derived from Whistler’s painting. Ultimately, however, this was a dangerous compromise. If Whistler supplied his viewers with a “melancholy key”, the meaning of his ‘symphony’ depended entirely on who “played the piece out.” Because his painting was without ‘content’—its meaning resting on the surface of its form—Whistler’s work heralded in an unsettling subjectivism. Alert to the inability of translating Whistler’s ‘symphony’ into a “prosy”, linguistic equivalent, the critic argued that only pure instrumental music could sustain an appropriate translation, representing another instance in which Whistler’s intentional subversion of narrative strategies through synaesthesia threatened the very act and genre of art criticism in itself.

*The Dudley Gallery:*

In 1871, Whistler exhibited ‘Harmony in Blue Green—Moonlight’ (later re-titled ‘Nocturne in Blue and Silver—Chelsea’) and ‘Variations in Violet and Green’ in a mixed-dealers’ show at the Dudley Gallery in London. Reviews focused on his continuing use of synaesthetic metaphor with increasing scrutiny. The perception of Whistler’s dangerous formalism also unfolded in relation to his obvious brushstrokes. The *Art-Journal*, acknowledging Whistler’s unique abilities to create “subtle gradations of colour”, nonetheless found his “touches of the brush...rudely and

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<sup>87</sup> “Notes on Art: The Royal Academy—5<sup>th</sup> Notice”, *Sunday Times* (23 June 1867), 7.

raggedly visible” and, essentially, “audacious.”<sup>88</sup> This was a common grievance amongst Whistler’s critics who argued that his paintings looked ‘unfinished’, ‘incomplete’ and ‘formless’ (terms with added significance in the wake of Darwin). Like Whistler’s synaesthetic titles, his visible brushstrokes drew attention to the formal properties of his work, testing and renegotiating the relationship between painting and representation. Whistler was asserting his role as creator whilst challenging the very notion of mimesis. Interestingly, his correspondence to Fantin-Latour in 1864 registers this on a *rhetorical* level as he gradually begins to describe his “pictures” as “*effects of fog*” rather than as “pictures of fog.”<sup>89</sup> This descriptive change illuminates the extent to which his development of synaesthesia mirrored a fundamental re-evaluation in the way Whistler was interpreting his role as a painter in relation to the Western pictorial tradition.

W.B. Scott, in his review for the *Academy*, stated:

The names of his subjects, too, are slightly irritating; Mr. Whistler being desirous to point out the analogy to music to be found in his pictures, he calls one of them which is exclusively painted in one colour (frame and all), “A Harmony in Blue-Green.” Now melody is the musical relation of co-instantaneous notes, like many colours present in a picture, and Mr. Whistler’s work being in one colour may be much more properly called a melody; but perhaps the artist repudiates the correct use of words as he repudiates meaning, his productions being purely decorative.<sup>90</sup>

Scott’s understanding and application of the terms ‘melody’ and ‘harmony’ is admittedly confusing in part because he attempts literally to translate Whistler’s colour-schemes into language and musical terms (and does so, counter-intuitively). Finding Whistler’s use of synaesthesia irritating because it was incorrect (non-literal) or catachrestic, the painter’s repudiation of the “correct use of words” was seen to parallel his repudiation of aesthetic meaning in itself. And thus, his works were not

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<sup>88</sup> “The Dudley Gallery: Fourth Winter Exhibition”, *Art-Journal* (1 December 1871), 285.

<sup>89</sup> Whistler to Fantin-Latour 4 January—3 February 1864 (LCMS, Pennell-Whistler Collection).

<sup>90</sup> W.B. Scott, “Dudley Gallery Winter Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures in Oil”, *Academy* (2 November 1871).

paintings as much as “decorations”, a point the weekly *Examiner* concurred with: “[his paintings are] simply attempts to represent the abstract elements of colour-effects.”<sup>91</sup> Whistler had completely transgressed the normative boundaries of what makes a painting, a painting. In the *Illustrated London News*, a reviewer, finding Whistler’s individualism “peculiar” and “errant”, asserted:

We know not how to describe them, for pictures they are not, and it would be unfair to the artist to so designate them: they are devoid of composition, subject in the ordinary sense, and almost of form and effect...and these titles indicate that the artist’s intention was limited to the production of certain chromatic effects...Mr. Whistler no more aims at objective representation than a Chinaman in painting a fan or a dish...to, however, willfully reduce art to this, its very simplest infantile expression, approaches the extreme limit of absurdity.<sup>92</sup>

The inability to distill Whistler’s works into verbal transcriptions (“We know not how to describe them” [emphasis added]) is precisely what constituted the reviewer’s reticence in designating them “pictures” or art. This link was grounded in both the ambiguities of the works’ content—a review in *The Architect* characterized them as “pieces of indefinite nothings”<sup>93</sup>— and, in relation to this, that their subject matter was entirely subordinate to “certain chromatic effects” as indicated by their synaesthetic titles. Whistler’s intention to reduce art to this “absurdity”, then, was interlinked with his use of synaesthetic metaphor, which emblemized his works’ subversive qualities. The reviewer was also clearly attuned to how Whistler’s development of synaesthesia strategically undermined one’s ability to provide a socio-cultural context to his work. This opinion partially derived from the perception that formal properties were, in themselves, without substance: when a work was *about* its form, it was about nothing.

The *Athenaeum*, frequently sensitive and laudatory of the painter, considered ‘Harmony in Blue Green—Moonlight’,

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<sup>91</sup> “The Dudley Gallery”, *Examiner* (28 October 1871), 168.

<sup>92</sup> “Fine Arts: Oil Pictures at the Dudley Gallery”, *Illustrated London News* (28 October 1871) 406.

<sup>93</sup> “Dudley Gallery Winter Exhibition”, *The Architect* (28 October 1871), 213.

One of the pictures which exasperate uneducated critics. Yet even the British mind, —accustomed to seek nothing in a picture but its subject, —must feel the influence of its exquisite harmony in chromatics, although the subject be the Thames at Putney and the factory encumbered shore.<sup>94</sup>

The reviewer's use of the term "influence" to describe the nature of spectatorship in relation to a Whistler painting is significant. It accentuates the perception of Whistler's works as meaningful on a corporeal level, the term 'influence' relating to effect and affect. Arguing that "even the British mind" could succumb to this "influence" implicitly suggests that Whistler's works appeared to be more readily appreciable by others (presumably, a French audience).

In the *Saturday Review*, Whistler's use of musical terms was parodied:

...The phenomena of the Exhibition are two drawings by Mr. Whistler...Several of our artists have indulged in like freaks of the palette. Mr. Albert Moore played variations in monotone; Mr. Armstrong and others evoked melodies in undertones and minor keys; and Mr. Whistler himself led the fashion four years ago by "Symphony in White"..."Harmony in Blue-green" may be likened to strains of the Aeolian harp, or to the sighing of the wind through a cracked casement. At best such pictorial melodies are as the pipes of Pan; thus they remain at a wide distance from orchestral compositions by Beethoven. As pictures they are a dream of cloud, vapour, smoke, and so little subject have they that they are just as comprehensible when turned upside down. That the goodly sum of 2101 [sic] should be asked for the [harmony] is rather startling seeing that much the same sort of thing can be got for less than as many farthings in the form of a Japanese fan.<sup>95</sup>

Attributing the "phenomena" of synaesthetic metaphor in the arts to Whistler, who "led the fashion", the perception of Aestheticism as a movement of "uncontrolled excess" is apparent throughout this review and crucially linked to the aesthetes' interest in intersensory art. Whistler has "indulged" in "freakish" colour-schemes, the term 'indulged' in itself an indication of excess. That his "pictorial melodies" "sound" more like the "Aeolian harp" (or music created by the wind and thus absent of human agency) as well as "the pipes of Pan", the Roman god of wine and pleasure

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<sup>94</sup> "Fine Arts: Winter Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures in Oil", *Athenaeum* (28 October 1871), 565.

<sup>95</sup> "Winter Exhibitions", *Saturday Review* (28 October 1871), 559

(rather than that of Beethoven, an exemplar of the Western canonical tradition) reflects the extent to which Whistler's accentuation of formal properties suggested non-normative and excessive sexual proclivities (both with regards to the artist and to his appreciators). The idea that one could turn a Whistler painting upside down (which was parodied in *The Grasshopper* and which occurred by mistake in Whistler's trial with Ruskin), was meant to illustrate the flimsy nature of Whistler's art.<sup>96</sup> So, too, was the allusion to the Japanese fan. This was augmented by the fact that Whistler's works were entirely free of "comprehensible" or substantial things, which underlined the "absurdity" of the price tag. Instead, the painter fixed on all that was ephemeral and dreamlike ("cloud", "vapour", "smoke") or, in Pater's words, "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent."<sup>97</sup> Indeed, several of Whistler's 'nocturnes' and 'harmonies' operate as visual equivalents to Pater's existential, post-Darwinian vision of the world within which everything is continually "vanishing" and "unweaving [sic]."<sup>98</sup>

In a particularly sensitive review in *The Times*, the very essence of Whistler's Aestheticism was attributed to the connection Whistler cultivated between colour and music:

[The paintings] are illustrations of the theory, not confined to this painter, but most conspicuously and ably worked out by him, that painting is so closely akin to music that the colours of the one may and should be used, like the ordered sounds of the other, as means and influences of vague emotion; that painting should not aim at expressing dramatic emotions, depicting incidents of history, or recording facts of nature, but should be content with moulding out moods and stirring our imaginations, by subtle combinations of colour, through which all that painting has to say to us can be said, and beyond which painting has no valuable or true speech whatever. These pictures are illustrations of this theory. They contain the least possible of

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<sup>96</sup> Stanley Weintraub, *Whistler: A Biography*, 193

<sup>97</sup> Taken from Pater's "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, 248-9.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. One is also reminded of Baudelaire's definition of 'modernity' in "The Painter of Modern Life," as "the transient, the fleeting" in Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 403.

objects, nothing, in fact, beyond the faintest indications of river surface  
under moonlight...<sup>99</sup>

Noting a clear departure from didactic and mimetic conceptions of painting, the critic used Whistler's development of synaesthesia ("painting is so closely akin to music") to "illustrate" or frame the painter's Aestheticism. Rather than "depicting" or "recording" "history" and the "facts of nature", Whistler's works were evaluated in bodily (implicitly gendered) terms: for his pictures "[moulded]", "[influenced]" and "[stirred]" the spectators' "moods" and "imagination."

Furthermore, Whistler's colour-music analogies, in operating outside history also moved outside of language or "true speech." As Brad Bucknell demonstrates in *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* (2001): "Music ostensibly joins in the figuration of art's self exile from the horizons of social and political contention—indeed, even from the realm of time and history as such."<sup>100</sup> Arguably, synaesthesia represents the pinnacle of this sense of exile. One can firmly contextualise Whistler's work within the industrial expansion occurring within Britain at the time.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, the perception of Whistler's formalism as an attempt to exile art from all spheres of culture and reference was an accusation that would increasingly emerge throughout his critical reception and significantly underscore Ruskin's attack on both Whistler and his 'nocturne.'

*The Grosvenor Gallery (1877/1878):*

By the time of the Grosvenor Gallery's inaugural exhibition of 1877, which included four 'nocturnes' and three portraits (two 'arrangements' and a 'harmony') and which led to Whistler's libel suit against Ruskin, Whistler's use of synaesthetic metaphor was well-known and largely seen to have originated with the painter. That Whistler shared and was protective of this viewpoint is clear. In a letter to his pupil

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<sup>99</sup> "Dudley Gallery—Cabinet Pictures in Oil", *The Times* (14 November 1871), 4.

<sup>100</sup> Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 37.

<sup>101</sup> Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 49-50.

Walter Greaves, he warned him not to “wander into my symphony in blue”, whilst crediting himself entirely with these innovations:

You know how I continually invent - and invention you know is the cream of the whole affair and so easy to destroy the freshness of it - And you know that all the whole system of arrangements and harmonies which I most certainly invented, I brought you up in... Now look, suppose you were to see any other fellows doing my moonlights - how vexed you would be - You see I invented them - Never in the history of art had they been done.<sup>102</sup>

Characteristically histrionic, it is nonetheless true that by the time of this exhibition, no visual artist working in Britain was as readily linked to ‘art for art’ as Whistler. Furthermore, Aestheticism was increasingly being discussed in the context of the importance the aesthetes vested in form—and Whistler’s interest in intersensory metaphor was among the more vibrant and dynamic expressions of his formalism.

In W. Rossetti’s review for the *Academy*, he referred to the painter’s titular approach as “Whistlerian nomenclature.” Questioning whether or not the title for Whistler’s painting ‘Harmony in Amber and Black’ had been confused with another work (seeing that it was without amber colour), Rossetti conceded: “what Mr. Whistler regards as amber and black appears to the unpurged [sic] popular eye more like brown.”<sup>103</sup> Whistler’s use of synaesthesia appeared to suggest that he possessed unique (or elite) perceptive abilities. For the ‘Aesthetic gaze’ connoted a way of seeing and feeling that was, characteristically, uncommon or gifted. As Ian Small demonstrates, part of the authorial premise of Aestheticism derived from the very notion that the aesthetes possessed an uncommon mode of perception and were indeed more able than others to create and critique art.<sup>104</sup> Throughout reviews of Whistler’s works, the idea that Whistler perceived things differently from the viewing public was scrutinised and satirised—the underlying elitism of such a notion was

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<sup>102</sup> Whistler to Greaves (1871/1876) LCMS, Pennell-Whistler Collection.

<sup>103</sup> W.M. Rossetti, “The Grosvenor Gallery, Second Notice”, *The Academy* (26 May 1877), 467.

<sup>104</sup> Small, *Conditions for Criticism*, 6.

abundantly clear. Indeed, while the *Art-Journal* applauded Whistler's "art-instincts", his "performances" as an artist were described as "simple conundrums" used to gratuitously stupefy his audiences.<sup>105</sup> Just as Swinburne's 'musical' language was characterized as a blinding ruse, *The Builder* described Whistler's musical titles as "tricks", whereas *The Daily Telegraph*, who had praised Whistler's paintings in the early 1860s, now regarded them as "weird productions—enigmas sometimes so occult that Oedipus might be puzzled to solve them."<sup>106</sup>

Among the more significant critiques of Whistler's works was Sidney Colvin's for the *Fortnightly*. It commenced with an examination of the differences between the type of art promoted by the Grosvenor Gallery versus the Royal Academy, whose commitment to upholding an English tradition, Colvin argued, accounted for its stifling and frequently unsuccessful exhibitions. By siding with the Grosvenor Gallery—although, as we shall see, with one significant exception—Colvin was indicating a more progressive aesthetic sensibility, which suited the *Fortnightly's* style, audience and editor at the time (John Morley). Arguing that the majority of art produced in Britain in the past fifty years satisfied "popular demand" and thus failed to "[strike] a single chord", Colvin made an exception for the Pre-Raphaelites and more so, their successors, or "men" who had "reinforced" this "historic" school and within whom, a "true instinct" had been awakened.<sup>107</sup>

Reserving his greatest praise for Millais and Burne-Jones, who would later testify against Whistler in the Ruskin trial, Colvin's treatment of Whistler and of the "school" the painter was seen to represent is illuminating. For Colvin suggested that in the wake of the Pre-Raphaelites, two approaches to painting—and to *aesthetics*

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<sup>105</sup> "The Grosvenor Gallery", *Art-Journal* (August 1877), 244.

<sup>106</sup> "The Grosvenor Gallery", *The Builder* (5 May 1877), 440. "The Grosvenor Gallery", *The Daily Telegraph* (1 May 1877), 5.

<sup>107</sup> Sidney Colvin "The Grosvenor Gallery", *Fortnightly Review* (June 1877), 820-1.

more generally—had emerged in Britain, a distinction that characterised Whistler’s dispute with Ruskin. On the one hand, painters like Burne-Jones produced work “in which the subjects represented are represented and realised for their own sakes and not merely for the arrangements of lines and colours which can be made out of them.”<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, and in Whistler’s case in particular, a painting was “the be-all and end-all.” That is to say that in Colvin’s opinion, Whistler’s agenda was “not to invite the mind to consider the thing represented but only the representation.” And the synaesthetic qualities of Whistler’s paintings or his “affected titles”, “visible brushstrokes” and “affected frames” were used by Colvin to illustrate his argument. As Colvin further elucidated, “His aim is, not to represent reality, but to make a pattern, and he is careful to warn us as much, by naming his pictures in large letters ‘arrangements’ in black, brown and grey, and mentioning the subject, if at all, only subordinately in small type.”<sup>109</sup> The movement away from conceiving painting as something that represents to something that simply is (i.e. a representation of representation), was thus articulated in relation to the synaesthetic elements of Whistler’s work. And arguably, this is precisely what accounts for the perceived modernity of Whistler whose ‘nocturnes’ clearly prefigure twentieth-century abstraction.<sup>110</sup>

Even Whistler’s portraits failed to satisfy this pictorial requirement with their shadowy colour, lack of arms and legs, and ‘strange’ titles. “One thing, at all events, is certain”, declared *The Morning Post*, “and it is this—either Mr. Whistler or nature must be wrong...[for] men and women are made of flesh and blood as our vision

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 830.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 831-2.

<sup>110</sup> Clive Cazeaux reiterated this statement in his essay “Synaesthesia and Epistemology in Abstract Painting”: Modern art begins at the moment when it becomes possible to make mimetic representations of nature mechanically of technologically...conventional or mimetic images show their form of representation, [while] an image with synaesthetic properties...represents its form that is *represents representation*” in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*: 39 (1999), 243.

would lead us to believe or brickdust [sic] and pitch”, as Whistler’s works purported. Furthermore, the critic found Whistler’s use of human-subjects egregious, since they were merely vehicles for sustaining colour-harmonies: “but in the name of gallantry, and for the honour of the sex, we must protect against a lady being called under any circumstances an ‘arrangement.’”<sup>111</sup> Whistler’s ‘arrangement’ of his mother, proved particularly provocative. As Henry James asserted in the *Galaxy* (reflecting his early pictorial conventionalism), “It may be a narrow point of view, but to be interesting it seems to me that a picture should have some relation to life as well as to painting. Mr. Whistler’s experiments have no relation whatever to life; they have only a relation to painting.”<sup>112</sup> Synaesthetic metaphor thus, and again, became equated with Whistler’s radical reconstitution of the painter’s relationship to nature or external reality, his disavowal that as a painter his role was to mimic.

In the conservative *London*, two reviews of the exhibition appeared: the first written in direct response to Whistler’s works in the Grosvenor and the second, “Whistler: A Fantasia in Criticism”, a more general response to the show composed in light of the painter’s pending trial with Ruskin. Both are significant for the attention paid to synaesthesia and are quoted at length:

It is the pet-folly of the *Affected* school to confound music with painting, and to transpose the terminology of the two arts, and no doubt the adorers of Mr. Whistler and his fellows think they know what he means, and that he means something fine when he calls a misty sketch of fireworks at the crystal palace a ‘Nocturne in Black and Gold,’ and a bit of river bank with the gas-lamps lighted a ‘Nocturne in Blue and Silver.’ It is, of course, simply nonsense, but it takes and it pays. It is another side of the fashionable folly which wastes thousands upon a peacock room.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> “The Grosvenor Gallery: Fire Notice”, *The Morning Post* (1 May 1877), 6.

<sup>112</sup> Henry James, “The Picture Season in London”, *Galaxy* (August 1877); and for an earlier version of the review, “The Grosvenor Gallery and the Royal Academy”, *Nation* 24 (31 May 1877), 320-1. For a discussion of the differences between Whistler and James, see Adam Parkes, “A Sense of Justice: Whistler, Ruskin, James, Impressionism”, *Victorian Studies* 42:4 (1999-2000), 593-629.

<sup>113</sup> “The Grosvenor Gallery”, *London* (5 May 1877), 328.

Just as Buchanan substituted the term ‘Aesthetic’ with “Fleshly” in his criticism of Swinburne, the term “Affected” was a highly nuanced and calculated word-choice, potentially even, a pun. ‘Affected’ connotes a particular kind of behaviour that is pretentious, artificial and unnatural.<sup>114</sup> To be a ‘dandy’ was to be ‘affected’: it was a performance or pose that was seen to stray from ‘natural’ or normative constructs of masculinity towards an ‘effete’ femininity. And yet, to be ‘affected’ is to be influenced by something or someone or to be moved emotionally, which is precisely what defined the aesthetic value—or lack thereof—of Whistler’s works. That it was “the pet-folly of the Affected school” to confuse music and painting and to transpose their respective terminologies (a clear reference to synaesthetic metaphor) so that discourse was used *unnaturally*—for the sake of effect and affect or, simply, as a formal entity—demonstrates the intimate link between intersensory art and Aestheticism and of Whistler’s formative role within it. It also shows how Whistler’s radicalism was largely derived from his disregard for both visual and linguistic conventions. This was “simply nonsense” and yet, also, “fashionable” and commercially beneficial: “it takes, but it *pays*.”

In the latter review in *London*, the painter’s development of synaesthesia was scrutinized with increasing vociferousness and irony. Whistler commanded the “budding school of symphonies” within which “some very young artists...had decided to go for Whistlerian fantasias in various colours”:

We must not forget that to him we owe the added charm of appropriated nomenclature. The ancient anarchy of painting is changed into a far-reaching dependence on, and sympathy with, every art known or yet to be known; for by a judicious use of foreign terms, Mr. Whistler finds that he can enhance the value of the simplest paintings, surround them with the glamour of another art, and the charm of sensations not hitherto produced by them. It is impossible to

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<sup>114</sup> James A.H. Murray (ed.), *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol 1 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1888), 152.

reverence overmuch the mind that by a simple phrase enlarges the scope of art, so that it connects naturally and inevitably with others. For observe, if music may be called on to assist painting by the aid of its nomenclature then practically endless fields are opened up...for if music may be made tribary [sic] to painting, why not rhetoric, cookery and perfumery as well? Looking into the far future, we can imagine a descendent of the present Antipodean Saxon making a pilgrimage over the land of his ancestors, looking through his tears at some quaint antique “Whistler,” and meditating on the wondrous and beautiful things that have been gradually evolved down to his own day, from that primitive time when as yet one art alone supplied its terms to elevate and explain the Whistleristic picture. We can imagine him wandering through the half-ruined galleries and forsaken domiciles, decorated with the later development of the Whistler types in every stage of preservation and decay. Now under the dust of centuries, he has found “A Pungency in Payne’s Grey and Mustard Yellow,” alongside of it “A Chorus in Cochineal and Chrome.” Anon he has uncovered “A Perfume in Hooker’s Green and Gamboge.” He has been startled by the lurid power of “A Sonata in Sulphur and Blue”[...]<sup>115</sup>

The review eventually concludes—after continuing to parody Whistler’s titles—by asserting that Whistler’s “brave attempts to enlighten the Britishers [sic]” is a decisively “American” trait and that this type of aesthetic expression could have only originated in America. While France was the usual suspect here, what is important is how critics almost always discussed Whistler’s radicalism as an outgrowth of his Francophile tendencies, ‘continental’ sensibilities and foreign birth. The aesthetic climate and conventions within Britain were not seen to nourish this type of artistic expression. To be able to appreciate “a Whistler” reflected a different kind of sensibility. Explicitly interwoven with a narrative of degeneration, Whistler’s art led to a bleak future. For if aesthetic greatness was determined by cultural progression and preservation, a world dominated by Whistlerian aesthetics would eventually lead to a world of “half-ruined galleries.” Like Swinburne’s ‘musical’ poetry, his ‘musical’ paintings lacked posterity: “In the ages to come, when the citizens look back on our time, and wish to say what most strongly characterised it, this is what they will

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<sup>115</sup> “Whistler: A Fantasia in Criticism”, *London* (18 August 1877), 62-4, 63.

declare: ‘In that age appeared for the first time The Pigmental Symphony.’”<sup>116</sup> The collision of Darwinism and Aestheticism was localized at, and critiqued from the site of, intersensory metaphor. Even the idea of enhancing “simple paintings” with sensations particular to other art forms unfolded in evolutionary terms and within a distinctly retrogressive framework.

Meanwhile, the *Spectator* scrutinized the analogies Whistler appeared to be drawing between music and painting, ultimately concluding that by naming his works after musical terms, the painter was suggesting that his pieces were “intended to arouse a similar feeling in the spectator to that which a piece of music of the same name would excite” (the term ‘arouse’ subtly yet clearly imbued with a sexual nuance). Expanding on this point, whilst, in essence, analysing the authenticity of intersensory art (or the *actual* ability of colour to effect and affect in a way comparable to sound) the reviewer asserted,

And we further imagine that, according to this theory of Mr. Whistler’s there is some property in the harmonious arrangement of colours themselves which will produce upon the sensuous organism a similar effect to that which harmonious arrangements of notes produce. We imagine that the subject of Mr. Whistler’s pictures is to the treatment of it in a precisely similar relation to that which the melody of a piece of music occupies in relation to his harmony...Now whether the affinity between sound and colour be as great as Mr. Whistler supposes, and whether the colour can be so used as to produce an analogous effect to sound, independent, or so nearly, of the subject-matter of the painting, we would not presume to say, but one thing appears clear to us...save in the case of some few exceptionally gifted souls, the great mass of the picture-loving public will remain deaf and blind to these colour-strains.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, it was the synaesthetic attributes of Whistler’s works, which informed his entire theory of art, that accounted for “the public’s rejection of them.”<sup>118</sup> The elevation of formal properties ‘over’ content and, more than this, the idea that colour-harmonies could potentially exist analogically to sound-harmonies (depending on artistic abilities

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>117</sup> “Art: The Grosvenor Gallery Concluding Notes”, *Spectator* (2 June 1877) 695-6.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 695.

and audience temperament), is precisely what constituted the public's inability to appreciate Whistler's agenda readily. Furthermore, one can sense the reviewer was unconvinced that colour and sound were indeed comparable properties.<sup>119</sup>

Before turning to Ruskin's notorious condemnation of Whistler's 'Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket', a brief survey of the painter's critical reception during the Grosvenor Gallery Exhibition of 1878 is worthwhile. For Whistler's use of synaesthesia came under attack in a more voluble and cutting manner. *The Builder* opened its review by stating "...we must come back again to the *unreal* with Mr. Whistler' whilst beseeching the painter to give up his "fantastic titles"<sup>120</sup>; *The City Press* called Whistler's works "curious and incomprehensible" and not worth viewing<sup>121</sup>; *The Daily News* linked his eccentricities to his "desire to be talked about"<sup>122</sup>; whilst *The Daily Telegraph* asserted, "When...we enter the realms of Fancy pure and simple we are at once bound to make acquaintance with Mr. Whistler, who appears at the Grosvenor Gallery this year in full and triumphant puissance of Chromatic Nihilism and the Harping Symphonies of the Invisible."<sup>123</sup> As Walsh suggests:

Ruskin had come to represent not only the practice of art criticism but also the cultural and national status of English critical literature in general. In this light, Whistler's dare to contest the validity of Ruskin's critical appraisal of his work, and his chosen form of expression, was

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<sup>119</sup> And yet, in a review of Whistler's 1874 solo-show at the Flemish Gallery, the *Daily Telegraph* took an altogether different view on the supposed affinities between sound and colour: "And that there is a subtle, deeply-felt connection between sight and sound is not only proved by physical philosophy, which refers them both to colorations, but is well-illustrated by the old comparison of the sound of a trumpet to scarlet. When Mr. Whistler, in Pall Mall, shows us a 'symphony in peach-colours and pink' or a 'harmony in grey and green', he is not employing a language merely fantastic. The blind, if they could look up from their music and see the delicate Beethoven-like combinations of his genius artist would perfectly understand him; and the deaf, if they could hear, would agree that sight and sound are not so far apart as is believed." The allusion to the trumpet, reiterates Locke's sentiments in *Essays on Human Understanding* (1690), frequently included in surveys concerned with the history of synaesthesia. Locke's assertion, however, was less concerned with the phenomenon of colour-sound relationships than it was a reflection of his theory of epistemology.

<sup>120</sup> "The Grosvenor Gallery", *The Builder* (4 May 1878), 448.

<sup>121</sup> "The Grosvenor Gallery", *The City Press* (8 May 1878), 2.

<sup>122</sup> "The Grosvenor Gallery", *The Daily News* (1 May 1878), 6.

<sup>123</sup> "The Grosvenor Gallery", *The Daily Telegraph* (1 May 1878), 5

not only a challenge to and a reflection on Ruskin himself, but also on the entire activity of public critical writing.<sup>124</sup> The increasing hostility of reviews of Whistler's work suggests that his critics were keen to highlight what they perceived of as the problems with Whistler's aesthetic theories and practices (soon to be cross-examined in the trial) and, to convey where they stood on these issues. One could argue that Whistler's paintings had become a litmus test: to be sympathetic to his artistic vision including, largely, his development of synaesthesia, was an illuminating indication of one's own aesthetic progressivism. In addition to Whistler's belief in 'art for art', the function and value of art criticism also went on trial. Ruskin's supposed expertise and undeniable influence as a critic of paintings underscored Whistler's attack. For Ruskin, Whistler's elitist aesthetic views (and expensive, 'unfinished' works) constituted his own defense. However, both issues converged in relation to the painter's development of synaesthesia.

#### IV. *A War between the Pen and the Brush: Whistler vs. Ruskin*

If Ruskin presented the most influential and "compelling vision of art as an incarnation of an ideal polity" in the mid-Victorian period, as Dowling argues in *The Vulgarization of Art* (1996), then it was, precisely, Ruskin's "aesthetic liberalism", which accounted for the critic's contention with the painter.<sup>125</sup> That Ruskin's objections to Whistler were both aesthetic (or technical and formal) and ideological (on cultural, moral and economic grounds) is evident upon close examination of Ruskin's notorious response to Whistler's 'Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket', which Whistler later used as his prologue to *The Gentle Art*:

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<sup>124</sup> Walsh, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M. Whistler*, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 25. See, in particular, Dowling's chapter "Ruskin's Law of Art" for a detailed discussion of the trial.

For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.<sup>126</sup>

Ruskin begins by faulting Sir Coutts Lindsay—owner and operator of the Grosvenor Gallery along with his wife Lady Blanche Lindsay—for including Whistler in their inaugural exhibition. The Lindsays' vision for the Gallery was to offer a space for innovative, underrepresented artists to show their works. They encouraged unconventional approaches to the way the gallery space was utilised, and, in addition to Whistler, championed the Pre-Raphaelites and French painters whom they brought to Britain for their first retrospectives. The Lindsays also promoted underrepresented media such as watercolour, which was favoured by women artists. Under the auspices of Lady Lindsay, the Gallery played a decisive role in ensuring that women artists obtained shows.<sup>127</sup> Thus, the Grosvenor Gallery emerged as a radical art institution in its own right, even parodied (along with Whistler and the Aesthetic movement more generally) in Gilbert and Sullivan's popular operetta *Patience* (1881).<sup>128</sup> Ruskin, however, was not questioning Sir Lindsay's 'radicalism' as much as his professional taste. He was also implicitly challenging the increasing and problematic importance of "the purchaser" during the period, a topic he explored in 1860 in *Unto This Last*, an essay comprised of four articles first appearing in the immensely successful *Cornhill Magazine*, and which had generated considerable controversy. For there, Ruskin

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<sup>126</sup> John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 79 (18 June 1877).

<sup>127</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the radical role of the Grosvenor Gallery in the Victorian art work, see Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney (eds.), *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996); and for the Gallery's link to Aestheticism in the Victorian imagination, see Denney's chapter "High Priests and Worshippers at the Temple of Aestheticism" in *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (New Jersey: Rutgers UP 2000).

<sup>128</sup> In the play, the character of Bunthorne—part Wilde and part Whistler—is described as "greenery-yallery-Grosvenor-Gallery-foot-in-the-grave-young-man," "a reference to the opulent, saturated colours of the gallery, as well as to the sickly figures in Burne-Jones' paintings and to the cult members' morbid aesthetic posturings", Denney, *At the Temple of Art*, 263

argued that unlike the critic, the purchaser's interest in art, rather than extending from an informed, scholarly premise, appeared to be compromised by personal, financial gain. And yet, like the critic, they played a significant role in determining aesthetic value.<sup>129</sup>

Although, clearly, Ruskin considered "profit" Whistler's primary incentive as well. In the final and most frequently quoted part of Ruskin's polemic, his objection to Whistler's 'nocturne' entails three distinct yet related points. He questions the actual monetary value of the work (the considerable sum of "two hundred guineas"), thereby implicitly challenging the sincerity of Whistler's artistic motivations; he condemns the work's overtly formal style or lack of 'finish' registered through his provocative image of "a pot of paint", which destabilises Whistler's role as an artist (i.e. anyone can throw a pot of paint on a canvas)<sup>130</sup>; and also, and perhaps most importantly, he objects to this paint being "flung" in "the public's face", or Ruskin's ideal polity: the workingmen and middleclass readers of *Fors Clavigera*, within which the review first appeared.

The verb 'to fling' encapsulates Ruskin's perception of Whistler's Aestheticism as highly individualistic, propelled by a "wilful" elitism that was both agitating and dangerous. If, in the right hands, art was a unifying cultural and moral force—and here, one finds clear overtures of Schiller's 'aesthetic state'—in Whistler's case, it was divisive, anti-bourgeois and superficially confrontational. Whistler was a "coxcomb", a more derogative way of saying 'dandy.' And his

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<sup>129</sup> Ruskin explicitly addressed the conflicted interests of "the purchaser" in "Qui Judicatis Terram", the third essay of *Unto this Last: First Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons., 1881), 78-9.

<sup>130</sup> If Ruskin's issue with Whistler was an issue with the painter's use of colour or 'lack' of 'finish'—a term frequently used in the trial—than, as Craven rightly signals, this was deeply ironic given Ruskin's support for Turner. Yet, there are two, distinct ways of considering the term 'finish': it either referred to technical finish—degree of linearity in painting; or, conceptual finish—the number of external intellectual associations in a paintings, this being what Whistler had failed to satisfy. David Craven, "Ruskin vs. Whistler: The case against Capitalist Art," *Art-Journal* 37: 2 (Winter 1977-78), 139-143

Aesthetic agenda—in paint and as a media spectacle—directly affronted any beneficial relationship one might construe between art, progressivism and the social role of the artist. It also, and by extension, undercut the critic who, in Ruskin’s view, performed a vital task: by making spectators more able to appreciate art, conditions were created for widespread involvement in a larger, encompassing cultural dialogue, which formed the basis for an authentic moral community.<sup>131</sup> Whistler’s individualism, then, directly affronted Ruskin’s entire cultural endeavour.

Ruskin’s theory of mimesis, which derived from his early Evangelical faith, clearly conflicted with Whistler’s “formless”, “Nihilistic” ‘nocturnes’ and the ideas that governed them.<sup>132</sup> Underlining this difference were competing viewpoints concerning the painter’s relationship with nature and the artist’s role within culture. Thirty years earlier, in *Modern Painters* (1845), Ruskin urged artists to “go to Nature in all singleness of heart...rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing”, sentiments antithetical to those expressed by Whistler throughout his writings and particularly within his ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture within which “selection” and “omission” (terms important to Pater as well) played a significant role in determining artistic endeavour.<sup>133</sup> As Phillip Mallet demonstrates, Ruskin’s aestheticism actively failed to acknowledge subjectivism in the realm of art:

The artist is concerned with external facts, not with the workings of his own mind, still less with the rules for the composition of pictures: “the whole of his power depends on his losing sight and feeling of his own existence, and becoming a mere witness and mirror of truth, and a script of visions.” His task is to record with calm veracity what he has seen, not to seek in the natural world the echo or expression of his own experience.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Parkes, “A Sense of Justice”, 593-629.

<sup>132</sup> Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art*, 29.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in Spencer, *James McNeill Whistler*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Phillip Mallet, “John Ruskin and The Victorian Landscape” in Bullen (ed.), *Writing and Victorianism*, 223.

When Ruskin explored varieties of beauty in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846), his exaltation of what he termed, *Theoria* or “the exalting, reverent and grateful perception [of the world]” served to contrast that of *Aesthesis*, “mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness [of the world]”, a distinction saliently contextualising Ruskin’s dispute with Whistler.<sup>135</sup> For the painter’s ‘nocturne’ exemplified the animalistic, bodily and transitory whilst honouring an epistemology grounded in ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’: Whistler’s works proposed and constituted a new model of subjectivity in the realm of art. And the trial dramatised this conflict between subjective responses to art and “collective judgement, or the cognitive and moral forms within which impressions are translated into knowledge.”<sup>136</sup>

Echoing Baudelaire’s sentiments in “Delacroix”, Whistler clearly had Ruskin in mind when he asserted in his ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture, “To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken, as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit at the piano!”<sup>137</sup> As Whistler continued, “That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted—Nature is rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong [...].”<sup>138</sup> For Ruskin, the natural world was governed by immutable laws and permeated by the beauty of God. By providing a faithful account of nature, a painter was ultimately demonstrating their religious faith whilst bringing His beauty, through art, to the masses. In Whistler’s works, industrial landscapes, pleasure parks and ‘moonlight effects’ dominated. Rather than unchanging, immutable laws, Whistler’s

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>136</sup> Parkes, “A Sense of Justice”, 594.

<sup>137</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 364; Whistler’s lecture suggests a strong familiarity with Baudelaire’s critical works Whistler’s well-known description of “the evening mist [clothing] the riverside with poetry, as with a veil,” (Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, 85) is almost a word-for-word transcription from Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life” within which Baudelaire also asserts, “We can see at once that nature teaches nothing or nearly nothing”, Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 403.

<sup>138</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, 84-5.

paintings represented change, mutability and transience. As Albert Moore would testify in the painter's defence, he was among the only artists able to paint the air.<sup>139</sup>

This issue of mimesis and representation—of *Theoria* (Ruskin) versus *Aesthesis* (Whistler)—emerged in the trial in relation to Whistler's use of synaesthetic titles:

Holker: what is the subject of the Nocturne in Black and Gold?

Whistler: it is a night piece and represents the fireworks at Cremorne Gardens

H: Not a view of Cremorne?

W: If it were called 'a view of Cremorne' it would certainly bring about nothing but disappointment on the part of the beholders. (Laughter) It is an artistic arrangement. That is why I call it a 'nocturne.'

[...]

H: why do you call Mr. Irving an arrangement in black?

W: it is the picture, not Mr. Irving, who is the 'arrangement'

H: why do you arrange Mr. Irving in black?

W: I thought it was appropriate.

[...]

H: do you say that this is a correct representation of Battersea Bridge?

W: It was not my intent simply to make a copy of Battersea Bridge. The pier in the center of the picture may not be like the piers of Battersea Bridge. I did not intend to paint a portrait of the bridge, but only a painting of a moonlight scene. As to what the picture represents, that depends upon who looks at it. To some persons it may represent all that I intended; to others it may represent nothing.<sup>140</sup>

Whistler's battle with Ruskin's lawyers unfolded on rhetorical levels. When Holker asked the painter to describe the "subject" of his nocturne, Whistler resorted to intentionally vague descriptions, calling his work "a night piece" and "a *representation* of fireworks." As Whistler made clear, his artistic intentions were secondary if not superfluous to the meaning and value of his 'nocturne': "what the picture means, depends on who looks at." Within this equation, aesthetic meaning unfolded dialectically: as a relationship between viewer and object that was unmediated by text, context, critic and artist. This is precisely why Whistler refutes

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<sup>139</sup> Merrill, *A Pot of Paint*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 145-6.

the suggestion of “View of Cremorne” as a more appropriate title: to name his work this, would circumscribe its meaning within a single, fixed narrative thereby undermining the importance of aesthetic experience in the realm of art. Such a title would also suggest that Whistler’s role as a painter was to copy rather than create, transcribe rather than translate. The term ‘nocturne’, on the other hand, connoting music (and Chopin in particular) as well as the night (‘nocturnal’) maintained and encouraged subjectivism, implicating the spectator in the creation of the work’s meaning whilst destabilising the very idea that aesthetic meaning was stable and universally accessible.

‘Nocturne’ also accentuated the painting’s formal properties in part by inflecting his approach to colour with temporal significance thereby enhancing the abstraction of the subject. Albert Moore titled his paintings after what he considered to be insignificant objects within his work (such as “Apricots” or “Blossoms”), but there was still reference to real, external things.<sup>141</sup> A ‘nocturne’ in any colour, on the other hand, was not only an obvious impossibility outside the realm of metaphor but one which drew its meaning from the conflation of sensorial experiences within the realm of art. As Whistler stated in his trial:

By using the word “nocturne” I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. A nocturne is an arrangement of line, form, and color first. This picture is throughout a problem I attempt to solve. I make use of any means, any incident or object in nature that will bring about this symmetrical result...I have chosen the word ‘nocturne’ because it generalizes and simplifies the whole set of them; it is an accident that I happened upon terms used in music. Very often have I been misunderstood from this fact, it having been supposed that I intended some way or other to show a connection between the two arts, whereas I had no intention.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Martin, “Naming Paintings”, 253.

<sup>142</sup> Merrill, *A Pot of Paint*, 144; It is worth noting that the *OED* credits both Chopin and Whistler with the meaning of the term ‘nocturne’ in the realm of music and visual art respectively.

Clearly, it was not an “accident” that Whistler “happened upon” musical terms; his letter to Leyland in 1872 attests to this. Indeed, Whistler’s testimony illustrates the strategic and subversive nature of his development of synaesthesia. For synaesthesia’s seduction was underscored by its ability to highlight the purely formal, pictorial elements of Whistler’s works, and the importance of colour in its own right. For Whistler, the term ‘nocturne’ articulated his “artistic interests”, which were formal rather than “anecdotal”, and inside (subjective) rather than “outside” (objective and, by extension, ‘popular’).

Given Ruskin’s prominence, Whistler had valid reasons to believe that a negative review from the critic could potentially devastate the financial value of his work. He was also aware of the benefits of bad publicity when he sought legal action against the critic. And yet, that his conflict with Ruskin was both financial and conceptual is evidenced not only by his trial testimony but also by his letters to the press, pamphlet publications, lectures and *The Gentle Art* throughout which, the art critic and “the English public” emerge as frequently interchangeable antagonists. Whistler didn’t mind literati writing critically on books. His problem was, specifically, with *art* critics or professionalized *litterateurs*, who evaluated and ‘contextualised’ paintings for the populace but were unable to paint themselves and by that token, ignorant of the formal, pictorial properties that divided good from great visual art.

From the 1860s onwards, debates over the role of the art critic and the function of art criticism were rigorously conducted in periodicals and journals, primarily in response to the profusion of ‘writing on art’ that had run concurrent to the general expansion of the art world both nationally and internationally.<sup>143</sup> The

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<sup>143</sup> Walsh, *The Critical Reception of J.A.M Whistler*, 14.

emergence of large circulation newspapers and rapidly increasing literacy rates created a public domain for the discussion of art, which led to the rise art journalism and the critic as an individual personality; this also occurred in the wake of controversy surrounding anonymous art coverage in newspapers and the periodical press. Furthermore, and as Walsh signals,

Art critical texts are constructed out of a sense of the political audience they address...art criticism is constitutive of ideology, it does not merely reflect it...[and] as critic, Ruskin posited himself not as an impartial knowledge-broker, but as an advocate and defender of certain types of knowledge which were essential to the well being of his audience.<sup>144</sup>

Thus, just as Ruskin found Whistler's Aestheticism compromised by commercial interests, Whistler considered Ruskin compromised both by his need to communicate with an audience and by his belief that the aesthetic meaning of a visual work could even be communicated within a narrative structure.

Art critics had acquired a new and potent force within culture: by 'narrating' aesthetic meaning they dictated aesthetic value. Whistler found both sides of this equation highly problematic. On the one hand, his conflict with the genre stemmed from his disbelief in didactic aesthetic standards and from his perception of art criticism as a medium aimed at disseminating and reinforcing cultural and personal values held by the critic. Subsequently, art criticism denied or destabilised the importance of authorship and, indeed, of the author as sole creator, which the painter explicitly addressed in *Whistler v. Ruskin*:

Poor Art! What a sad state the slut is in, and these gentleman [art critics] shall help her. The artist alone, by the way, is to no purpose, and remains unconsulted; his work is explained and rectified without him, by the one who was never in it—but upon whom God, always good, though sometimes careless, has thrown away the knowledge refused to the author—poor devil.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>145</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, 29.

On the other hand, however, and in relation to this, Whistler found the genre *intrinsically* problematic as it reduced one aesthetic genre to the laws of another, thereby divesting importance from the role of ‘perception’ and ‘sensation’ within aesthetic experience. Critical discourse undermined Whistler’s entire theory of art as an aesthetic experience. If the ‘meaning’ of Whistler’s works depended upon the physiological effects of colour thereby requiring the most intimate form of spectatorship possible, the very notion of ‘writing on art’, irrespective of the critic’s sensitivities, proved antithetical to Whistler’s entire agenda. This is why the allowances Whistler extended to the literary critic in *Whistler v. Ruskin* (“That writers should destroy writings to the benefit of writing is reasonable”) were revoked for the art critic on the basis that only a painter could “decide upon painting.”<sup>146</sup> Whistler further explored this argument in his ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture: “For him [the critic], a picture is more or less a hieroglyph or symbol of story...and in his essays he deals with it, as with a novel, a history or an anecdote.”<sup>147</sup> A work’s formal attributes were rendered superfluous or peripheral if one accepted the premise that a painting’s meaning could indeed be described or retained within language. Furthermore, this reduced ‘meaning’ in itself to a particular ‘fixed’ viewpoint and one not necessarily held by the artist. If one could ‘narrate’ a painting’s meaning, then one could also (hypothetically speaking), bypass the gallery and read an ‘expert’s’ critique of an exhibition instead.

Whistler’s ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture amounts to a diatribe against the detrimental effects of consumerism in art, which he interlinks with his views on criticism. The lecture is a carefully elucidated restatement of Whistler’s faith in ‘art for art’. His mythic rendition of the first artist, who rejected or “went beyond the slovenly

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 86-87.

suggestion of Nature” to make a vase of unusual proportion and beauty, culminates in his thoughts on the ‘present’ state of British culture in the late-nineteenth century: industry and convention have ravaged the beautiful; unabashed public consumption has turned objects of awe into commonplace things; and art critics rather than artists define aesthetic meaning and value.<sup>148</sup> Whistler’s primary contention is that the cultural conditions for appreciating art in the nineteenth century have unraveled. This is due both to the tradesman who has made an industry out of the “gewgaw”, and to Ruskin and the unfettered power of the art critic who is blind to the virtues that constitute a masterpiece:

Meanwhile, the *painter’s* poetry is quite lost to him—The amazing invention that shall have put form and color into such perfect harmony that exquisiteness is the result, is without understanding...so that his praises are published, for virtues we would blush to possess—while the great qualities that distinguish the one work from the thousand, that make the masterpiece the thing of beauty that is,—have never been seen at all.<sup>149</sup>

There is a distinct tension between text, words or appreciation that can be “praised” and “published”, and the qualities that make something praiseworthy which need to be *seen* or experienced. Drawing an analogy between the painter who “picks and chooses” from nature and the musician who “gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos, glorious harmony”, the term “harmony” represents precisely what the art critic can neither see nor express (and what the middle-classes cannot appreciate).<sup>150</sup> Once again, Whistler uses synaesthesia to denote all that is best in art and Aestheticism.

The type of criticism that Whistler found problematic, however, was certainly not the type of criticism that Swinburne and Pater practiced, which gave primacy to seeing and feeling. Indeed, it is not coincidental that “Giorgione”, which underscores

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

my analysis of Pater's development of synaesthesia in the next chapter, appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in October 1877, a few months after the Grosvenor Gallery's inaugural Exhibition. Critics have argued that the essay represents Pater's coded response to the controversies relating to Whistler. I aim to explore how this 'response' was also a defence within which synaesthesia played a focal role. For the theories Pater developed within the essay were directed at visual works and occurred within the context of 'aesthetic criticism.' And whilst this genre's aims were to distinguish the great qualities of art—or the virtues of beauty—this must unfold, not in the abstract, but in the intensely concrete, particular and personal and not so much as a thing seen, but as an all-encompassing experience.

Chapter III.  
WALTER PATER'S THEORY AND PRACTICE  
OF "ANDERS-STREBEN":  
TOWARDS THE CONDITION OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

I. Introduction:

If Swinburne was Britain's first 'aesthetic critic', Walter Pater was its most prolific. During the 1870s and 1880s, he was also Britain's most identifiable—and *identified*—practitioner of this emerging critical practice within which aesthetic excellence was determined by the quality and scope of aesthetic experience, and largely derived from, and described through, synaesthesia. Pater's preoccupation with the genre of 'aesthetic criticism' was both extensive and self-conscious. Beginning in 1873 with the publication of his notorious *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, his occupation as an 'aesthetic critic' was well acknowledged. In Sidney Colvin's unsigned review of the first edition of *The Renaissance*<sup>1</sup> for the *Pall Mall Gazette*—a progressive evening newspaper launched in 1865 with the intentions of being, in Thackeray's words, "written by gentleman for gentleman"<sup>2</sup>—he argued that within "aesthetic criticism", "impressions" replaced "information", "concrete analysis" (albeit, of the impressionistic kind) eclipsed "abstract rules", and that, ultimately,

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<sup>1</sup> In response to criticism that ranged from historical inaccuracy to hedonism, Pater changed the title of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* for the second and subsequent editions of the text whilst removing his "Conclusion", which had provoked the greatest moral outrage, in the second edition of 1877. In the third edition of the text, published in 1888, he reinstated his "Conclusion" and added "The School of Giorgione." Pater retained this form for the fourth and final edition published in his lifetime in 1893, a year before his death. Although Pater revised every edition to varying degrees, the majority of his revisions were slight, particularly in the latter editions. For this thesis, and unless otherwise noted, I will be using the 1888 edition of the text because this was the first edition to include "Giorgione" and to re-include the "Conclusion", and its critical reception is significant for these reasons. I will be referring to the text as *The Renaissance* throughout this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (eds.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature* vol. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1917), 214.

“experience was everything.” Pater’s trenchant sensitivity to art, his ability to “[feel] the impressions so strongly”<sup>3</sup>, underscored and justified both his critical approach and superior style in the “essays” comprising *The Renaissance*, the majority of these works having originally appeared as unsigned and signed reviews or periodical-essays in John Chapman’s radically progressive and freethinking *Westminster Review* and Morley’s *Fortnightly*, respectively.<sup>4</sup> For Colvin defined ‘aesthetic criticism’ in relation to three central aspects: a particular kind of “temperament” that revealed a gifted mode of perception (reminiscent of Swinburne’s “compound genius”) and a “unique” conception of “the place of aesthetics in life”; a “style” that was highly personalised or “intimately [one’s] own”; and a “philosophy which accepts objects as relative.” Additionally, he linked these impulses to “modern French theorists of art for art’s sake”, reflecting the extent to which ‘aesthetic criticism’ and ‘art for art’ were

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<sup>3</sup> Sidney Colvin, unsigned review of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 March 1873), 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> From the *Westminster Review*, Pater reprinted his review, “Winckelmann” (January 1867) and used passages from “Poems by William Morris” to form his “Conclusion.” From the *Fortnightly Review*, Pater selected four periodical-essays appearing between 1869 and 1871: “Notes on Leonardo da Vinci” (November 1869); “A Fragment of Sandro Botticelli” (August 1870); “Pico della Mirandola” (October 1871); and “The Poetry of Michelangelo” (November 1871). Colvin never acknowledged in his review that the works comprising *The Renaissance* had been culled from these periodicals and then revised (Morley, on the other hand, did). It is tempting to conjecture that the phrase ‘aesthetic criticism’ is connected to the shift from ‘article’ to ‘essay’ and ‘journalist’ to ‘author’—or, as Brake asserts in “Walter Pater and Greek Studies”, “the means by which Pater’s journalism became literature, and ephemera permanent”, 121. For the phrase ‘aesthetic critic’ was a title applied to *collected* works and thus, to Pater’s identity as an essayist or author, whose works, when presented in this unified, collected form, belied the fact that they had been shaped by the matrix of textual and cultural production (i.e. editorial policies, intended audience, and the dominant discourses of the journal) particular to the periodicals they had originally been written for. Pater’s *Westminster* reviews were considerably weightier than his *Fortnightly* essays, perhaps because they were anonymous. That is to say that the *Fortnightly*’s policy of signature may account for Pater’s more moderated and cautious approach to the works for this periodical. For an extended discussion of “the juxtapositions and disjunctions of the 1873 Renaissance” in relation to periodical culture, see Laurel Brake’s chapter “Studies and the Magazines” in *Print in Transition, 1850-1910* (Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2001), 181-96. One is also tempted to read Pater’s own desire for the phrase and title of ‘aesthetic critic’ to eradicate evidence of these constraints insofar as the phrase represented a codified notion of authorship, in part due to the new model of subjectivity that his representation of ‘aesthetic criticism’ relied upon. His concern with *The Renaissance*’s appearance as an aesthetic book and with details such as the paper’s quality and binding material further reflects his desire to obfuscate his works’ journalistic origins. Ibid, 184; See as well Robert M. Seiler, *The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of Macmillan* (London and New Brunswick: Anthlone, 1999), 36.

immediately and inextricably entangled, and Pater's formative role via *The Renaissance* in forging this link.<sup>5</sup>

J.A. Symonds, in a signed review for the prestigious *Academy*, also linked Pater to "French theorists", in this instance, Gautier and Baudelaire, arguing that all three writers possessed "sympathetic [feelings] for the beauty of autumn and decay."<sup>6</sup> Like Colvin, Symonds devoted several passages of his review to examining 'aesthetic criticism' as an innovative, radical and welcomed variation on the genre of critical discourse. As Symonds commenced:

There are two kinds of criticism. The one, which may be called dogmatic, attempts to fix a standard of taste, propriety, and beauty, and judges by rule; the other, which may be called aesthetic, refers its judgement to the sensation of the individual critic, and sets up no other standard.<sup>7</sup>

In Symonds's view, Pater's critical approach in *The Renaissance* was remarkable for offering a new model of subjectivity, indeed, for insisting upon the subjective response as the only viable foundation for criticism. Although Symonds expressed some reticence about Pater's methods, arguing that 'aesthetic criticism' had the potential to be overly "indulgent" and "indifferent to common tastes and sympathies", the idea of 'aesthetic criticism' as a highly individualised and individualistic approach to critical discourse characterised Symonds's ambivalence as well as his praise. For he referred to *The Renaissance* as a "masterpiece" for making "manifest to the minds of others, the peculiar *virtue* which gives distinction to the work he [the 'aesthetic critic'] has to treat of." Prefiguring Wilde's views of criticism in "The Critic as Artist", Symonds asserted, "In this way the critic becomes himself an artist, a creator." And the movement from "critic" to "creator" (and, implicitly, 'journalism' to 'literature') was aided by Pater's "melodious" style: "He has studied his prose as

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<sup>5</sup> Colvin, unsigned review, 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> J.A. Symonds, review of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, *Academy* 4 (1873), 104.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

carefully as poets study their verses, and has treated criticism as though it were the art of music.’<sup>8</sup>

John Morley, writing for the *Fortnightly*, which published the majority of Pater’s articles of the 1870s and within which four of the works comprising *The Renaissance* had originally appeared, also focused on Pater’s innovative critical methods in his long review, “Mr. Pater’s Essays.” Placing ‘aesthetic criticism’ within the realm of “literature”, Morley considered the text “the most remarkable example of this younger movement towards a fresh and inner criticism”, and applauded Pater for being “genuine and wholly disinterested.”<sup>9</sup> By “disinterested”, Morley, like Symonds, was distinguishing between two types of critics: those who sought dogmatically to indoctrinate their readers, and those, like Pater, who use “their doctrines as an instrument, and their subject as an illustration.”<sup>10</sup> Morley’s approval here is unsurprising given how closely his characterisation of ‘aesthetic criticism’ paralleled the *Fortnightly*’s progressivism, reflected in the periodical’s non-partisanship and policy of signature. And, indeed, Pater’s “independent grounds” as a critic—a critical feature of the signed article—drew considerable praise from Morley. Celebrating Pater’s style for being “full at once of suggestion, and of explanation” (a sentiment recalling Freedman’s argument that Pater “defines without defining”), Morley, like Symonds, commended Pater for blurring the line between ‘criticism’ and ‘literature’: “And thus, too, what is in superficial appearance merely an appreciation of the production of others, is in fact tantamount to constructive production of a really original kind.”<sup>11</sup> Beginning with the first edition of *The Renaissance*, then, ‘aesthetic criticism’ was perceived as having a ‘French’ sensibility and intellectual inheritance,

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<sup>8</sup> Italics mine. Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Editor (John Morley), “Mr. Pater’s Essays”, *Fortnightly Review* 13 (1873), 470-1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 471.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and emerged to occupy an amorphous space in relation to genre, specialisation, and style. Furthermore, it was closely aligned to the theory of ‘art for art.’ As we shall see, the role of synaesthesia in Pater’s critical works played a prominent role in contributing to these perceptions.

In the opening pages of Pater’s “Preface” to *The Renaissance*, he discussed the virtues and aims of ‘aesthetic criticism’ thereby legitimating and contextualising his ensuing critical account of “that complex, many-sided movement” that stretched from the twelfth century in France to Wincklemann and the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, Pater constructed and codified his identity as an ‘aesthetic critic’, author and essayist whose temperament and style both illustrated and fulfilled the conditions that characterised ‘aesthetic criticism.’ His most robust theoretical exploration of ‘aesthetic criticism’ occurred four years later, however, in his essay, “The School of Giorgione” (1877) for the *Fortnightly*.<sup>13</sup> This piece is remembered somewhat less for what Pater says about ‘aesthetic criticism’ and more for the musical paradigm he advanced within it. Pater also formulated for the first and only time—and with great precision—a theory of art complete with its own uses and observations as well as its own name: “*Anders-streben*” or ‘striving’ (*strebe*) towards ‘otherness’ (*anders*). Arguing that through “a partial alienation of its own limitations”, an art form could acquire the “forces” of a rival medium, thereby supplementing its own particular sensorial beauty with the pleasurable qualities of another, he proposed that the emergent intersensory work was not only more suggestive and affecting but also a more salient personal and cultural expression.<sup>14</sup> Synaesthetic metaphor defined Pater’s conception of aesthetic excellence in “Giorgione” just as it aided him in his

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<sup>12</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> For the remainder of this essay, I will refer to “The School of Giorgione” as simply, “Giorgione”, and unless noted, will be using the version as it appeared in the third edition of *The Renaissance*.

<sup>14</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 139.

own aspirations towards it. Thus, and as this chapter aims to demonstrate, Pater's concept of "*Anders-streben*" was as much about the nature of art as it was about the nature of *his* art: 'aesthetic criticism.' For it is indeed significant that Pater's opening analysis of 'aesthetic criticism' in "Giorgione" leads to his theory of "*Anders-streben*" before culminating in his musical ideal. The essay urges us to consider this progression as interconnected.

As Rachel Teuklosky signals, Pater used "Giorgione" as a platform for defining this critical—or 'aesthetic'—approach against two competing models of authority: the "new Vasari", or Crowe and Cavalcaselle, whom Pater acknowledges in the essay, and whose *History of Painting in North Italy* (1871) exemplified the new scientific connoisseurship of art; and the "popular critics" (i.e. art journalists), whom Pater also acknowledges, and who he constructs as deriving aesthetic excellence from a work's narrative content rather than from its formal qualities.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Pater appears to be cautiously challenging Ruskin here, and just as cautiously siding with Whistler. For underscoring his division between these two modes of criticism is a debate about the nature and merits of formalism and, in relation to this, a coded yet clear defence of aesthetic freedom. That Pater specifically defends painting in this essay, arguing that this form has proved most vulnerable to the "popular judgments" of critics who tend to reduce "art into forms of poetry", strongly suggests that "Giorgione" represents his coded participation in the Ruskin-Whistler dispute.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, "Giorgione" can be read as a treatise on how best to approach and articulate art, which both sustains and protects its autonomy.

This unfolds simultaneously with, and is informed by, Pater's representation of the inextricable relationship between aesthetic experience and aesthetic meaning,

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<sup>15</sup> Rachel Teuklosky "The Politics of Formalist Art Criticism: Pater's 'School of Giorgione'" in Laurel Brake et al. (eds.), *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (Greensboro, N.C.: ELT Press, 2002), 152.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-64.

or, as Small states, “the nature of aesthetic experience and the relationship between this and the value of the art-object”—among the most significant issues regarding theories of art in Britain during the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> For with the emergence of specialisation, professionalisation, and institutionalisation in the universities and thus, “the collapse of the sage”<sup>18</sup>, the way that intellectual authority was invoked and legitimated became a central preoccupation for writers, particularly when competing explanations could account for the same phenomenon. In the case of the aesthetes, they drew their authority from a particular kind of gaze and temperament, a unique ability to perceive, feel and articulate fecund qualities of beauty, which Pater’s construction of the ‘aesthetic critic’ in his “Preface” and “Giorgione” poignantly confirms. More than the “Preface”, “Giorgione” illustrates a keen awareness of the impossibility of translating colour, sound and spatial dimension into words, as well as the dangers of any approach that discounted the vital importance of form. This is one reason why synaesthetic metaphor—with its emphasis on ‘perception’ and ‘sensation’—featured so pervasively in aesthetic writings, and in Pater’s in particular. To describe aesthetic excellence or the aspiration of one form towards another—music towards the pictorial, architecture towards the poetic, sculpture towards “colour, or its equivalent”<sup>19</sup>—Pater frequently relied on metaphors that conflated sensorial experiences, adding a formal, intersensory polish to his critical style. In this regard, his criticism strived towards the condition of the other arts such that his development of “*Anders-streben*” was *stylistic* as well as theoretical, a point explored in the final section of this chapter.

The structure of this chapter parallels Pater’s own development in “Giorgione”, beginning, then, with an examination of the impulse within the arts “not

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<sup>17</sup> Small, *Conditions for Criticism*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 140.

indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces.”<sup>20</sup> Although Pater theorised this idea in “Giorgione”, observations of “*Anders-streben*” are scattered throughout his critical works, many pre-dating the essay’s publication or surrounding it, and will be included in my first section, “‘*Anders-streben*’ as Theory.” Additionally, I will explore the motivations behind Pater’s musical paradigm, which has generated great critical debate and scholarship, Leighton’s study, *On Form* (2007) being the most recent and noteworthy example. Pater’s interdisciplinary presence in studies ranging from the development of Modernist aesthetics, historical surveys on the philosophy of art, and works devoted to theories and strategies of the comparative arts largely relates to his nuanced ‘musical condition.’ What makes my analysis different here, is that I focus on what could be called a *processional* relationship forged between his theory of “*Anders-streben*” and theory of music—the “object of the great ‘*Anders-streben*’”<sup>21</sup>—whilst demonstrating the focal role synaesthesia played in linking these ideas. Thus, I will examine how music’s appeal as a metaphor and paradigm for the arts derived from Pater’s perception of music as an inherently perfect model for aesthetic experience (due to its innate affectivity, its ability to elicit a profound response to art) and an intrinsically perfect emblem of literary expression, given the fact that “form” and “matter” (‘sign’ and ‘signifier’) were indistinguishable.

I use Saussurian terminology intentionally. For “the condition of music” was largely about language and communication, a desire for ‘word’ and ‘idea’ to exist in harmony and to affect harmoniously. This is implied in “Giorgione”, where the obliteration of any perceivable distinction between “form” and “matter” is constructed as the true objective of great art. Eleven years later, Pater returned to and expanded

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 140.

this idea in his essay “Style”, which appeared in the *Fortnightly* in 1888 under Frank Harris’s editorship to then be included in Pater’s eclectic essay-collection *Appreciations* (1889/1890). Arguably, “Style” is “Giorgione’s” sequel insofar as Pater explicitly readdressed and modified his musical paradigm by directly linking it to literature. That is to say that if music was constructed as a metaphor for ideal aesthetic experience in “Giorgione”, in “Style”, the metaphor of music was used to illustrate an ideal of prose as the most “characteristic art of the nineteenth century”, and thus flexible enough to express the ever-increasing varieties of ‘modern’ experience.<sup>22</sup> Richard Stein argues that Pater’s ‘condition of music’,

[To] some extent seems to imply a rationale for the quality of his own style, a justification for evocative writing. For what he means by this suggestive formula is not so much that art should provide a coherent intellectual structure for its own apprehension as that within it different kinds of effects should merge to produce a rich and satisfying confusion.<sup>23</sup>

In the final section of this chapter, “‘*Anders-streben*’ as Practice”, I examine this so-called “confusion”, exploring Pater’s *rhetorical* development of “*Anders-streben*” predominantly in the essays comprising *The Renaissance* and *Appreciations*, his first and only book of literary criticism. I argue that Pater’s radical reformulation of the methodologies of ‘aesthetic criticism’ necessarily required a language that adhered to the values of ‘art for art’, capturing his subjective impressions whilst stimulating ours. An analysis of various passages drawn from “Giorgione” and other essays will illustrate the extent to which Pater’s rhetorical development of synaesthesia aspired towards the ‘otherness’ of a spatial, visual and, ultimately, musical condition.

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Pater, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1889), 35.

<sup>23</sup> Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts As Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti and Pater* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), 218.

## II. “*Anders-streben*” as Theory

If “Giorgione” represents Pater’s coded response to the Whistler and Ruskin controversy, Pater’s unpublished manuscript “The Aesthetic Life” is his far more direct response—one that was, however, suppressed or at least never finished. Its date of composition is implied in the manuscript itself. Pater informs us that “The third quarter of the nineteenth century has developed in many phases an art which in spite of its being in some respects a reaction against the age is profoundly characteristic of it.”<sup>24</sup> Scholars have suggested that the piece cannot have been composed much later than 1875 and that Pater’s reference to specific visual artists (Whistler, Legros, and Burne-Jones) links this work to concerns that occupied Pater around “Giorgione.” Each of these painters were included in the Grosvenor Gallery’s inaugural exhibition, which opened on May 1<sup>st</sup> in 1877 and which Pater attended. In light of Pater’s sentiments in the composition, it seems highly probable that he composed this work in the wake of the controversy surrounding the exhibition.<sup>25</sup>

The composition is *uncharacteristically* Paterian: the familiarity of Pater’s meandering sentences, amorphous sense of historical periods and exaltation of sensorial experience, contrasts with his unusually frank and unambiguous response to his cultural moment—“this so tame nineteenth century.”<sup>26</sup> Rather than treading cautiously, Pater is bold and contemporaneousness. His description of “ugly London” in the throngs of industrial expansion and reference to various urban landmarks, inclusion of contemporary artists, allusions to overcrowding and the emergence of “the suburb”, coupled with frequent references to “the wreck of religious theories of

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<sup>24</sup> Walter Pater, “The Aesthetic Life”, bMS Eng 1150 (7), “By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University”, leaf 24.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, leaf 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

the unseen” and to philosophy that has “turned suicidal”<sup>27</sup>, presents a world that is uprooted, transitional—and thus, a world not unlike the one Pater created, first, in his daring, anonymous review for the *Westminster*, “Poems by William Morris” (1868) and then in his “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*, constructed out of salvaged passages from “Morris.”

In these works and others (Pater’s novel *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (1885), for instance), an almost nihilistic loss of faith in the metaphysical and immaterial, in the invisible, untouchable gods, leads to an exaltation of the senses—to the perpetually redeeming world of touch and taste, sound and sight, of sensorial experience for its own sake. For in “The Aesthetic Life”, the “queries of abstract reason” are “disturbing”, leading an individual to “distrust” and “[desert] that cheerfully lit world of sense.”<sup>28</sup> This trajectory of escape unfolds within the “Conclusion” as well, and as Brake notes, frequents Pater’s writings, contributing to the perception of his writing career as a “fight and flight from the historical and cultural ‘moment.’”<sup>29</sup> In “The Aesthetic Life”, the pretext for an individual’s inner development, both spiritual and moral, culminates in what could be termed an ‘aesthetic religiosity.’ Morley seized on this link in his review of the 1873 edition of *The Renaissance*:

But here is Mr. Pater courageously saying that the love of arts for art’s sake has most of the true wisdom that makes life full. That fact that such a saying is possible in the mouth of an able and shrewd-witted man of wide culture and knowledge, and that a serious writer should thus raise aesthetic interest to the throne lately filled by religion, only shows how void the old theologies have become.<sup>30</sup>

Morley was not alone in this view, nor critical of it, although it also explains the sometimes violent reactions to followers of ‘art for art’ in Britain. Their vivacious

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, leaf 1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, leaf 6.

<sup>29</sup> Laurel Brake, *Walter Pater* (London: Northcote House, 1994), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Morley, “Mr. Pater’s Essays”, 476.

homage to ‘form’, while ‘frivolous’ and ‘fashionable’, also appeared to be inflected with a cynical secularity. As T.S. Eliot astutely argued decades later in “The Place of Pater” (1930), “Only when religion has been partly retired and confined, when an Arnold can sternly remind us that Culture is wider than Religion, do we get ‘religious art’ and in due course ‘aesthetic religion.’”<sup>31</sup> If man had been disinherited by philosophy, religion and science, he could seek refuge in art and song, beauty and pleasure, in experiences, then, of ‘the aesthetic’, keeping in mind Pater’s broadly conceived notion of ‘the aesthetic.’ Pater was not always specific about what is and should be the influence of art. Nonetheless, underlying—and uniting to an extent—his art and literary criticism is a speculative and committed exploration of the mechanisms and effects of the reception of ‘the aesthetic.’<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the refuge that art provided was counteracted or balanced by the formative role aesthetics played in shaping an individual’s capacity for cultural engagement.

This is evident in “Wordsworth”, which first appeared in the *Fortnightly* in 1874 and later in *Appreciations*. For there, music is described as “moulding the human countenance to nobler types”<sup>33</sup>, and great poetry as something that “[withdraws] the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man’s existence.”<sup>34</sup> Pater’s mechanistic characterisation of “life” contrasts with the sublime introspection that verse affords to the individual. Again, a relationship between escape and engagement is circumscribed dialectically: for only by “withdrawing” from “life”

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<sup>31</sup> Walter De La Mare (ed.), *The Eighteen Eighties: Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1930), 102; Eliot undercuts Pater’s contributions as a writer and intellectual because he disagrees strongly with the entire premise of ‘art for art’ as he (conventionally) perceives it. For as much as this conception appears to free the artist from a variety of external constraints, in Eliot’s opinion it detrimentally obscures the spectator’s ability to ‘distill’ meaning from a work.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Wallen, “Physiology, Mesmerism and Walter Pater’s ‘Susceptibilities of Influence’” in Brake et al. (eds.), *Transparencies of Desire*, 74.

<sup>33</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

(or from a conception of “life” anchored in evolutionary and biological terms) can one begin to understand the great existential “spectacle” of “existence.” This redemptive conception of art emerges in “Aesthetic Poetry” as well, an essay that Pater also adapted from “Morris” for the 1889 edition of *Appreciations*.<sup>35</sup> For there he argues that the “incurable thirst for the sense of escape” is assuaged by the secret enjoyment of verse that “takes possession” of our “transfigured world”<sup>36</sup> and reconfigures it. The benefits and rewards of encounters with ‘the aesthetic’ in both “Wordsworth” and “Aesthetic Poetry” are described in relation to refuge and reconfiguration. Underscoring the escapist and hedonistic aspects of these texts is a profound sense that ‘the good life’ is the life of sensation.

Thus, in Hough’s pioneering study *The Last Romantics* (1950), he rightly placed the primacy of the senses as the bedrock of Pater’s thought and Aestheticism. But one must keep in mind that Pater conceived and constructed ‘sensation’ in itself—and, by extension, aesthetic experience—as a “force” imbued with its own moral code and shaping principle. As Pater developed in “The Aesthetic Life”:

In so confused a world, so confused as to the final tendency of things, it might well seem to be the part of reason, and the last word of sincere theory about them, to hold by that concerning which doubt has no standing-place, the domain of sense. It was with the sensible world, with the unsophisticated presentations of eye and ear man began, as children begin still, so delightfully, so well-satisfied: and there was an intelligence in the eye and ear. Afterwards the queries of abstract reason came to disturb him: he distrusted, little by little deserted that cheerfully lit world of sense; essayed to be beyond or below it; substituted for it his shadowy hypothesis<sup>37</sup> concerning its origin, its issue and under-side, a visionary abstract vision of his own in place of what he really saw: and now might seem, at last, amid the ruins of so much abstract and artificial theory, to have completed the circle, to stand again, again, in some respects like a little child, at the point

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<sup>35</sup> It was then replaced in the second edition of 1890 by an essay taken from the *Guardian*—an act of self-censorship that distinguishes Pater’s sensitivity to moral issues with Wilde’s bombastic luring of the media

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 213-14.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Hypothesis’ or, possibly, ‘hypotheses’.

whence he set out, acquiescing in the sensible world as the ascertained utmost limit of his horizon.

[...]

Given man's irrepressible tendency to bring all his experience under one absorbing principle, he will surely exercise his intellectual [illegible] in the construction of an "aesthetic" formula of conduct. The life of sensation suggests its own moral code, has its own conscience, dear<sup>38</sup> and near, and with no problematic assumptions. If he must live by "sight," by sense, then the sense of beauty as realised by eye and ear (in more or less immediate alliance with eye and ear) will become for him a law or ideal, a new "ethick" [sic]. The true business of his life will seem to be the conservation, the enlarging, the refinement, of the energy of ear and eye, of the audible and visible world, and, indirectly, of those apprehensions of things which ally themselves most closely to, and seem to follow the rule of sense.<sup>39</sup>

Pater's sentiments here resemble those made in the "Conclusion": in both instances, art's great escape is transitory, epiphanic, and bodily. It features *kairos*, the time of value and revelation rather than *chronos*, one thing after another.<sup>40</sup> And as Pater makes clear in "The Aesthetic Life", a life steeped in sensorial, transitory pleasure, in "the energy of eye and ear", is not without its moral code—its personal 'ethick'—and thus, is not simply about 'refuge' but also, and more so, *engagement*: culturally, historically, personally.

As Leighton signals, Pater does not speak of 'the aesthetic' (as abstract noun), but of aesthetic things such as poetry and painting: "The aesthetic, then, is not for Pater an immutable ideal, museumed out of history. Rather the opposite. He puts the aesthetic back into history, dismantles the frame, and lets intrinsic and extrinsic leak into each other."<sup>41</sup> To follow "the rule of sense" was to reinvest one's self within the concrete, the particular, the material, within what was truly *real* in life. Like the diaphanous creature in Pater's early work "Diaphaneité" (1864), whose "fine" and "precious" transparency is a metaphor of aesthetic receptivity, and as is evident in "Wordsworth" where the profound experience of beauty "moulds" and "shapes" art

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<sup>38</sup> Either 'dear' or 'clear.'

<sup>39</sup> "The Aesthetic Life", leaves 8-10.

<sup>40</sup> Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1995), 133.

<sup>41</sup> Leighton, *On Form*, 17.

was a “force” rather than an ‘object’, a sensation that acted on and within the body rather than a thing to be sensed. In this regard, and as we shall see, Pater’s development of synaesthesia through his theory of “*Anders-streben*” can be read as an attempt to maximise arts affectivity so as to *re-engage* the individual within the “sensible world.” This premise finds its clearest and lengthiest elucidation in “Giorgione.”

Upon publication of Pater’s third edition of *The Renaissance* (1888), an anonymous and perceptive reviewer writing for *Oxford Magazine* stated:

The new edition differs from its predecessors in two points. In the first place, it contains an essay on ‘The School of Giorgione,’ the opening paragraph of which embodies in a very beautiful and perfect form Mr. Pater’s philosophy of art. In the second place, it contains the conclusion, discredited for its avowal of Cyrenaicism in the first edition, discarded in the second and now reinstated and remodelled in the third. If in ‘The School of Giorgione’ Mr. Pater has given us his philosophy of art, in the conclusion he has given us his philosophy of life.<sup>42</sup>

In the case of Walter Pater, however, and the Aesthetic movement he represented, art and life did not operate in separate spheres nor elicit competing philosophies. It was an intentionally tenuous distinction. His work persistently destabilises the Kantian idea of art as an institution and thus, necessarily separate from, in Bürger’s terms, “the praxis of life.”<sup>43</sup> Rather, Pater (like Wilde, but in a very ‘unlike’ way), was attuned to the wider, social aspects and benefits of aesthetic experience. Throughout his works, Pater repeatedly argues that both ‘life’ and ‘art’ were capable of procuring analogous moments of intense sensation. Indeed, Pater collapses a distinction between these realms most poignantly in his “Preface” to *The Renaissance*: “A picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty of

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<sup>42</sup> Unsigned review, *Oxford Magazine* (16 October 1889) reprinted in R.M. Seiler (ed.), *The Critical Heritage: Walter Pater* (London: Routledge, 1995), 112.

<sup>43</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 26-7.

pleasure.”<sup>44</sup> The choice between “life *or*...a book” is unimportant insofar as Pater allows ‘the aesthetic’, to permeate everything and to exist everywhere. As Zietlow signals, “An aesthetic object [could] be seen as either a fixed form with certain attributes, and simultaneously [could] be felt as a pulse of energy.”<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, “Giorgione” and the “Conclusion” were, to use a Paterian metaphor, ‘highly crystallised’ encapsulations of Pater’s views on ‘art’ and ‘life’, and the critic was not alone in singling out and comparing these works.

A survey of Pater’s critical reception and his obituaries reveals the extent to which the perception of his aesthetic beliefs, particularly at the time of his death, had become deeply enmeshed with the theories he developed in “Giorgione.” Pater’s friend, the poet and critic Richard Le Gallienne, referred to “Giorgione” as the “famous essay” in his obituary notice of the writer, and to Pater’s musical ideal, “as one of those part truths which contribute to that whole truth which ever remains incomplete.”<sup>46</sup> Pater’s long and prodigious writing career was summed up by a single lengthy quotation, a “famous passage” from “Giorgione”, in which the merits of lyrical poetry unfolded in relation to music.<sup>47</sup> And though Oscar Wilde’s critical works are mosaics of Paterian intertextuality, given the frequency with which he invoked “Giorgione”, it is clear that the essay played a formative role in shaping his own aesthetic theories and development of synaesthesia, a point I explore in detail in my chapter on the writer.

That Pater himself considered “Giorgione” an important work is equally evident. Possibly, it was the unnamed essay Pater submitted and then withdrew from

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<sup>44</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, xi.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Zietlow, “Pater’s Impressionism Reconsidered”, *ELH* 44:1 (1997), 158.

<sup>46</sup> Reprinted in Richard Le Gallienne, *Retrospective Reviews: A Literary Log* vol 2. (London: John Lane, 1896) 140.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

the first edition of *The Renaissance* to “embody parts of it in the Preface.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in 1877 Pater contacted Alexander Macmillan to publish a new critical collection: *The School of Giorgione and other studies*.<sup>49</sup> His decision to use “Giorgione” as the title and keynote essay of the collection indicates its importance to him. That it was the only new work to be included in the third edition of *The Renaissance* is another indication. And yet, that critics considered “Giorgione” among the most poignant indication of Pater’s allegiance to ‘art for art’ is significant. His reputation as the prophetic voice of British Aestheticism had clearly been established prior to its publication, if not through his numerous reviews in the leading art and culture journals of the day, then certainly in 1873, when *The Renaissance* appeared.

In typical Paterian fashion, “The School of Giorgione” does not begin with the school of Giorgione; the road is complicated and tangential. A consideration of the Venetian painter and his movement follows only after several pages of what Pater refers to as “abstract language.”<sup>50</sup> Brake characterises “Giorgione” as “suffused with theory...it begins and ends with large chunks of explicitly theoretical material.”<sup>51</sup> Stein considers it “the theoretical center of the argument implicit throughout *The Renaissance* that the fine arts should receive no ideological interpretation”, as well as the work that most fully and eloquently realises Pater’s vision of art as transformative

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<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Evans (ed.), *Letters of Walter Pater* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1970), 8. There is, however, considerable disagreement over which essay Pater withdrew from the first edition. See, for instance, Laurel Brake, “A Commentary on ‘Arezzo’: An Unpublished Manuscript by Walter Pater”, *The Review of English Studies: New Series* 27:107 (Aug 1976), 266-76; and, Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater’s Reading: A Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Literary References, 1858-1873* vol 1. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> Laurel Brake, “Aesthetics in the Affray: Walter Pater’s *Appreciations with an Essay on Style*” in Stephen Regan (ed.), *The Politics of Pleasure: Aesthetics and Cultural Theory* (Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press 1992), 81.

<sup>50</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 140.

<sup>51</sup> Brake, *Walter Pater*, 34.

within life.<sup>52</sup> And though Pater often used an artist or an object as a platform for developing a theoretical point, “Giorgione” is notably and poignantly engaged with the conceptual.

The structure of the essay is important: what Pater explores theoretically in the opening pages he then applies to his subject. His aim is to show not what the critic but what the ‘*aesthetic* critic’ should do. This unfolds through “abstract” explanation and “concrete” illustration. Significantly, the essay begins with Pater explicitly distancing ‘aesthetic criticism’ from the methods, values and authority of “popular criticism” and, by extension, ‘popular’ viewers and readers. In doing so, he is essentially defining what is ‘Aesthetic’ about his aesthetics and this, at least implicitly, relies upon and encourages its own class superiority. Pater is initiating a particular kind of dialogue with a particular kind of reader, an individual, who, like Pater, is profoundly susceptible to beauty. David DeLaura argues that in Pater’s works there are two implied and ideal readers, one who is deeply interested in art and literature and another who is interested in participating within a male-to-male homosocial dialogue.<sup>53</sup> The feeling of an intimate dialogue in “Giorgione” is striking, augmented by Pater’s repetitious use of “you”, as well as by Pater’s choice of the Venetian painter. For as Teukolsky signals, Giorgione invented the genre picture, meant for “private” rather than “public” viewing.<sup>54</sup> As Pater commences:

It is the mistake of much popular criticism to regard poetry, music, and painting— all the various products of art—as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought, supplemented by certain technical qualities of colour, in painting; of sound, in music; of rhythmical words, in poetry. In this way the sensuous element in art, and with it almost everything in art that is essentially artistic, is made a matter of indifference; and a clear

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<sup>52</sup> Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, 218.

<sup>53</sup> David DeLaura, “Reading Inman Rereading Pater Reading: A Review Essay”, *The Pater Newsletter* 26 (1991), 9. See as well Thais E. Morgan, “Reimagining Masculinity in Victorian Criticism: Swinburne and Pater”, *Victorian Studies* 36:3 (1993), 317.

<sup>54</sup> Teukolsky, “The Politics of Formalist Art Criticism”, 155-6.

apprehension of the opposite principle—that the sensuous material of each art brings with it a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, an order of impressions distinct in kind—is the beginning of all true aesthetic criticism.<sup>55</sup> Thus, “the beginning of all true aesthetic criticism” is Pater’s tribute to both “sensuous” form and to the privileged individual capable of perceiving and articulating this “untranslatable” sensuousness. Pater’s conception of form, though, is more than just formal. Indeed, in Pater’s hands, ‘form’ is never so far from being ‘matter.’ This is particularly evident in “Style” where form is characterised as an “imaginative sense of fact”<sup>56</sup> and the representation of “fact connected with the soul.”<sup>57</sup> A work’s formal properties are presented as the loci of artistic and individual expression and achievement: a painter’s palette, a prominent vehicle for imparting one’s unique vision of things. To discount formal qualities is dangerous, then, because it discredits the personality driving them (an idea that Wilde adopted and intensified). And yet, there is an additional aspect to “the mistake of popular criticism.” To assert that a painting, poem or musical piece can express the same thing because they exist as translations of the same “fixed quantity”, would mean that colour, rhythmical words and sound are extricable from a work’s meaning or that expression is neither bound to nor defined by its mode of conveyance. As a consequence, the relationship between the ways an individual literally experiences an art object (their perceptions and sensations) and the meaning of that object, is rendered moot.

This analogy between art and translation in which differentiations between the arts were reduced to a series of competing but parallel discourses was common within aesthetics prior to and during Pater’s time. In Victor Cousin’s pivotal text, *On the True, the Beautiful, and the Good* (1836)—its popularity was such that by 1904 it had reached its twenty-ninth edition—he stated:

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<sup>55</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

All are arts only because they express the invisible...the thing to express is always the same, it is the idea, the spirit, the soul, the invisible, the infinite. But, as the question is concerning the expression of this one and the same thing, by addressing ourselves to the senses which are diverse, the difference of the senses divides art into different arts.<sup>58</sup>

Pater's "translations of the same fixed quantity" in "Giorgione" is comparable to Cousin's construction of art as an "expression" of the "invisible" or "infinite", an aesthetic conception that Baudelaire clearly held and which was instrumental to his own theoretical development of synaesthesia and to its existential grounding. In Cousin's estimation, "this one and the same thing", in addressing different senses, necessarily resulted in the creation of different arts. Differences in perception, however, were superficial as variations in translation were still derived from the same "fixed" thing, the blueprint of infinity. Thus, aesthetic experience—or the intimate relationship between artefact and viewer—was peripheral to aesthetic meaning.

Pater does not entirely discard the analogy between art and translation; he just subverts the relationship.<sup>59</sup> The "beginning of all true aesthetic criticism" becomes an ability to discern and differentiate the "untranslatable", which is "the sensuous element in art": "to note in a picture that true pictorial charm...to define in a poem that true poetical quality...the element of song in the singing; to note in music the musical charm, that essential music which presents no words, no matter of sentiment or thought separable from the special form in which it is conveyed to us."<sup>60</sup> As Pater moves from noun ("picture", "poem", "music") to adjective ("pictorial", "poetical",

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<sup>58</sup> From *Cours de philosophie professé à la Faculté des Lettres pendant l'année 1818 sur le fondement des idées absolues du vrai, du beau et du bien* (Paris 1836) in Peter le Huray and James Day (eds.), *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 314.

<sup>59</sup> Despite Pater's pursuit of the 'untranslatable,' the idea of translation also features in his aesthetics. In "Style", he states that "all language involves translation from inner to outer", such that translation becomes a metaphor of discourse in itself, *Appreciations*, 31. And, indeed, Pater often uses the act of translation as a means for describing the outward expression of an internal feeling. To this extent, he retains the analogy between art and translation; only, what is translated, rather than being 'infinite' is entirely finite: it is the artist's temperament and their unique sense of the world.

<sup>60</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 136.

“musical”), the essence of each genre is defined by the particular quality of its effect, which the ‘aesthetic critic’ must be able to distinguish. Differentiation is thus vital to Pater’s construction of the ‘aesthetic critic’<sup>61</sup>; the opening paragraphs of the “Preface” to *The Renaissance*, “Giorgione” and “Style”, commence with similar emphasis on the importance of defining the ‘otherness’ in a work of art.

This is because perceptual differences not only divide the arts, but also sustain their own forums for the creation of meaning and the experience of beauty, which Pater makes clear in “Giorgione”: “There are differences of kind in aesthetic beauty, corresponding to the differences in kind of the gifts of sense themselves.”<sup>62</sup> By emphasising “untranslatability”, Pater imbues formal properties—colour, sound, and rhythmical words—with meanings in themselves. Thus, when Pater later embarks on his theory of “*Anders-streben*” within which *synaesthetic* experience is given primacy, it is because art’s affectivity is augmented when an object takes on the “forces” of an alternate medium whilst retaining its own particular virtues. Pater’s frequent use of the term ‘colour’ throughout his criticisms adds a visual nuance to his writing that pursues a pictorial or imagistic end. However, it also suggests a conception of colour as being more than just a property of an object. Embodied with its own meaning or effect, it is the initiator of its own pleasurable, aesthetic experience. And, indeed, in “Giorgione” the “untranslatable” boundaries of form as well as their contingent sensorial experiences are precisely what is “artistic.” Consequently, the idea of ‘untranslatability’ absorbs ‘object’ and ‘spectator’ and the intimacy of their ‘sensuous’ dialogue.

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<sup>61</sup> Small points to an interesting overlap between Pater’s emphasis on differentiating between impressions and Bain’s development of consciousness in *The Emotions and the Will* (1859). As Small discusses, “consciousness became defined as a series of impressions which were differentiated from each other by novelty or by what he called ‘surprise.’ The greater the difference or discrimination between the impressions, the more ‘conscious’ the recipient of those impressions necessarily had to be such as this ability was the basis of all brain activity”; Small, *Conditions for Criticism*, 76.

<sup>62</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 134-5.

Pater's investment in the inability to translate the "sensuousness" particular to each of the arts reflects, then, a more primary belief: the way we engage and perceive art is fundamental to the meaning of art. This idea contributes to the shift in terms (and methodologies) from art to 'aesthetic critic.' If meaning was no longer an 'object' to be defined, but an effect to be experienced—the effectiveness of the work depending in large part upon the participation of the spectator<sup>63</sup>—then the critic's role was to translate their impressions of this sensuousness: in Swinburnian terms, "the effect of the thing rather than the thing itself."<sup>64</sup> In Pater's "Preface" to *The Renaissance* he asserts that, "The aesthetic critic...regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations."<sup>65</sup> He also makes this point in "Wordsworth" when he asks *us* to ask ourselves, "What are the peculiarities of this residue? What special sense does Wordsworth exercise, and what instincts does he satisfy?"<sup>66</sup> This is a triangulated dialogue: Pater nourishes a conversation that involves himself, his readers and his object of critique. Aesthetic excellence is thus reduced to the scope and quality of aesthetic response. Although again, the distinction between 'art' and 'life' remains, as ever, amorphous. The realm of 'the aesthetic' dramatically encompasses any person, place, thing, or idea that produces a particular type of feeling for a particular type of individual. The greater and more varied our feelings and sensations—or the more profound our responses—the more excellent this encounter.

Pater's re-evaluation of art as indistinct from 'effect', which underscores his theoretical development of synaesthesia, illuminates the formative role of

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<sup>63</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 10.

<sup>64</sup> Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 219.

<sup>65</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, xi.

<sup>66</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 41.

physiological psychology on aesthetic theories in the mid-to-late Victorian period and within ‘art for art’ in particular. As Small demonstrates, the concepts, terminologies and critical methods Pater advocates for the ‘aesthetic critic’ absorbed and utilised the framework and language of psychology and the social sciences.<sup>67</sup> Because the term ‘aesthetic’ referred to a mode of perception, art appeared to be amenable to psychological and physiological investigation, and all the major theorists of the period, including Darwin and Spenser, Grant Allen and Alexander Bain, examined the concept of ‘aesthetic response’ in their works, which they included in their general conceptions of human behaviour.<sup>68</sup>

In Grant Allen’s *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877), one finds fecund conceptual overlap between his and Pater’s definition of aesthetic phenomenon. For Allen argued that “The aesthetically beautiful is that which affords the Maximum of Stimulation with the Minimum of Fatigue or Waste.”<sup>69</sup> And in his section ‘Harmony and Discord of Colour’, he explored links between colour and music based on supposedly comparable aesthetic experiences:

We have seen in the last section that certain masses of colour are in themselves, apart from any effect of combination, pleasurable stimulants of the optic nerve. They may thus be regarded as the analogues of musical tones, which we saw to be similarly gratifying in isolation, because they aroused normal amounts of action in fully-nurtured and under-worked nervous systems.<sup>70</sup>

Like Pater, Allen speaks of colour and music as things that “arouse” and “pleasurably stimulate.” Furthermore, this observation is expanded into the realm of discourse: “It may, however, be mentioned that words denoting varieties of sounds are frequently

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<sup>67</sup> I am greatly indebted to Small’s examination of the conceptual and rhetorical overlap between ‘aesthetic criticism’ and physiological psychology in *Conditions for Criticism*. See, in particular, Small’s introduction as well as his chapter “Aesthetics, Psychology, and Biology”; See, also, Ian Small, “The Vocabulary of Pater’s Criticism and the Psychology of Aesthetics”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 18 (1978), 81-7.

<sup>68</sup> Small, *Conditions for Criticism*, 68-9.

<sup>69</sup> Grant Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877) reprinted in Ian Fletcher & John Stokes (eds.), *The Decadent Consciousness: A Hidden Archive of Late Victorian Literature* (New York: Garland Press, 1977), 39.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

transferred from other senses, and so carry with them much of the associated feeling which is gained in their original sphere.”<sup>71</sup> Even if not using the term ‘synaesthesia’, Allen is explicitly discussing not just linguistic tendencies towards synaesthetic metaphor, but also, the effect or role of these metaphors within discourse and on readers. In Allen’s estimation, the transference of sensorial terms (characteristic of Pater’s critical style and ‘aesthetic criticism’s’ more generally) appeared to generate a variety of feelings or effects “associated” with alternate sensorial realms. When language seized on (or regenerated) these feelings, its affectivity increased.

Spencer also explored the relationship between art and pleasure in *Principles of Psychology* (1855), ultimately concluding that the greatest artworks were those productive of the most intense and varied experiences (i.e. sensorial, emotional). Contextualising his beliefs within an evolutionary narrative, he argued that actions and experiences either bettered an organism or, in art’s case, existed for their own sake. Within the realm of physiological aesthetics, then, the concept of ‘art for art’ fermented. As Small summarises,

The more superfluous an action to the basic biological needs of an organism...the more pleasure it had necessarily to yield, simply to be valuable to the organism in question. This was Spencer’s central concept. An experience (and in terms of art, Spencer did not distinguish between creating works of art and responding to one) was aesthetic if it could be said to possess no ulterior purpose other than its own execution—if it was, physiologically speaking, superfluous; if it existed, that is, simply for its own sake and for no other end. And moreover, the *quality* of that experience was determined solely by the *quantity* or yield of pleasure which the experience was capable of providing for the individual concerned. The greatest art therefore axiomatically became that which was capable of exercising the greatest variety and volume of pleasurable emotion or sensation in its audience.<sup>72</sup>

That Pater frequently defines art as a pleasurable force that moulds and influences the individual—terms such as ‘impressions,’ ‘sensations’ and ‘pleasure’, largely forming

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 252.

<sup>72</sup> Small, *Conditions for Criticism*, 71.

a lexical set<sup>73</sup>—suggests that he was influenced by this area of scientific inquiry. Where Pater differs, perhaps, is in how he defines the role of this influence and the type of individual who might succumb to it.

Furthermore, since the experience of colour and sound are not only intrinsically different from each other but also differ from person to person, Pater's emphasis on 'aesthetic response' highlights and encourages the role of subjectivity in critical discourses whilst destabilising the very notion of aesthetic meaning as fixed or universal. Rather, meaning is always cultural, historical, temporal, subjective and porous and thus, constantly reconfigured. The 'aesthetic critic' is equally the subjective critic, the questions he asks, being: "What is this song or picture...to *me*? What effect does it really produce on *me*? Does it give *me* pleasure?"<sup>74</sup> As we shall see, Pater's use of intersensory metaphor enhanced the perception of his work as 'impressionistic', a series of subjective responses to art forms, whilst helping to foster an *aesthetic* experience of his *critical* discourse.

The 'aesthetic critic', then, sensitive to the sensuous element in art, to that which is "untranslatable", is thus able to define the 'otherness' of an artwork and estimate the degree to which it has fulfilled its responsibility to its material. And yet, at the same time, they have the unique ability to perceive the transfiguration of difference. Pater's theory of "*Anders-streben*" is about supplementation and expansion, about striving towards 'otherness' so as to evoke it, rather than transforming into 'the other.' The idea is not that a painting 'becomes' a work of music but that the visual experience of colour 'takes on', re-enacts or regenerates the additional sensorial quality of sound, thereby eliciting a profounder, more varied aesthetic response. As Pater states:

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>74</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, x.

But although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an “*Anders-streben*”—a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces.<sup>75</sup>

Who these “German critics” are, is unclear. Donald L. Hill has been unable to locate the term outside of Pater’s work and believes that he most likely invented it.<sup>76</sup> Inman concurs with Hill, in his remarkably detailed annotation of Pater’s works and library borrowings.<sup>77</sup> However, as both critics note, the idea of “*Anders-streben*” as well as the language Pater uses to describe it, do suggest the influence of “German critics”, and three in particular: Goethe, Schiller and Hegel, each of whom Pater began to read in the early 1860s, after learning German and immersing himself in German Idealist philosophy. By understanding the somewhat acknowledged legacy of Pater’s “*Anders-streben*”, the way that he revived it becomes clearer.<sup>78</sup>

In Goethe’s introduction to *Propyläen* (1798), he stated, “The arts themselves...as well as their varieties, are related to one another, they have a certain proneness to join one another, indeed to lose themselves in one another...It has been noticed that all plastic art strives [strebe] toward painting, all poetry towards drama.” Ultimately, however, Goethe concluded that, “one of the best signs of the decline of art is the mingling of the different kinds”<sup>79</sup>, a sentiment foreshadowing the critical reception of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the general reception to synaesthetic trends in the arts in both French Symbolism and British Decadence during the *fin de*

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>76</sup> Donald L. Hill (ed.), *Walter Pater’s The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 388.

<sup>77</sup> Inman, *Walter Pater’s Reading*, 527.

<sup>78</sup> Both Hill’s and Inman’s work proved invaluable to my understanding of the intellectual inheritance of Pater’s theory of ‘*Anders-streben*.’

<sup>79</sup> Hill (ed.), *Walter Pater’s The Renaissance*, 388.

*siècle* in particular. In 1865, Pater borrowed Schiller's *Werkes* from the library. Although (as Inman notes) it is difficult to ascertain Schiller's direct influence on Pater, primarily because the philosopher's views are in keeping with those of Kant's, Hegel's and Fichte's<sup>80</sup>, Schiller's twenty-second letter in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), does appear to have directly influenced Pater's theory of "*Anders-streben*":

Nevertheless, the greater degree of excellence attained by a work in any of these three arts, the more these particular affinities will disappear; and it is an inevitable and natural consequence of their approach to perfection that the various arts, without any displacement of their objective frontiers, tend to become even more like each other in their effect upon the psyche... This, precisely, is the mark of perfect style in each and every art: that it is able to remove the specific limitations of the art in question without thereby destroying its specific qualities, and through a wise use of its individual peculiarities, is able to confer upon it a more general character.<sup>81</sup>

Significantly, while Pater's theory of "*Anders-streben*" incorporates the notion of "objective frontiers" (i.e. limitations that cannot be transgressed), '*Anders-strebing*' clearly reaps a different reward. In Schiller's case, as the arts "become even more like each other" they attain a "more general character" and thus, a broader more popular appeal. To a certain extent, Pater concedes this as well. In his unpublished manuscript "*Arezzo*", for instance, most likely composed in August 1872<sup>82</sup>, he writes,

It was worthy of those subtle masters, who engrafted on their own native French finesse, the finesse of Italy begetting thereby a certain arachnean cunning of hand and eye, thus to choose their work within the narrow limits where two arts of wholly different function and method mingle without destroying the properties of each other, to apprehend these limits clearly and never transgress them.<sup>83</sup>

The advantage of this particular "mingling" is such that the "finesse" of one culture incorporates or absorbs another. This type of assimilation also features in "Style" in relation to Pater's theory of a personalised vocabulary that borrows from Anglo-

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<sup>80</sup> Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, (eds. and trans.) Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), 155.

<sup>82</sup> Brake, "A Commentary on '*Arezzo*'", 266.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted by Brake, *Ibid*, 272.

Saxon and Latin. The resultant artwork (or style) is not only more ‘affective’ but also, in cultural terms, “more general in character.”

Perhaps the clearest inspiration for Pater’s theory of “*Anders-streben*” is Baudelaire, who remarked in his essay “The Life and Work of Eugene Delacroix”, which first appeared in *L’Opinion nationale* in 1863: “It is one element in the diagnosis of the spiritual climate of our age, be it added, that the arts *strive*, if not to substitute for one another, at least to lend each other new power and strength, by the help of their own.”<sup>84</sup> Germain d’Hangest considers Pater’s development of “*Anders-streben*”, “The earliest direct evidence in Pater’s works, of his acquaintance with Baudelaire”, and argues that Pater’s aesthetic views derived from a mixture of Baudelaire and Hegel.<sup>85</sup> Although if Pater’s theoretical development of “*Anders-streben*” appears to be most directly inspired by Baudelaire, his observations of artworks ‘Anders-strebing’ is most notably Hegelian.

In *Ästhetik* (1835), a text Inman considers unrivalled in its influence on Pater<sup>86</sup>, Hegel argued: “Precisely as sculpture in the further development of reliefs begins to approach painting, so painting in the pure *sfumato* [gradation, shading] and magic of its tones of colour and their contrast, and the fusion and play of their harmony, begins to swing over to music.”<sup>87</sup> The sense of artworks approaching, striving or “swinging” towards alternate mediums—of difference and dissolution sustained within a dialectic relationship—parallels Pater’s description of ‘Ander-strebing’ in “Giorgione”:

Thus, some of the most delightful music seems to be always approaching to figure, to pictorial definition. Architecture, again, though it has its own laws—laws esoteric enough, as the true architect

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<sup>84</sup> Charvet (ed.), *Charles Baudelaire*, 361.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Hill (ed.), *Walter Pater’s The Renaissance*, 388.

<sup>86</sup> Inman, *Walter Pater’s Reading*, 50; William Shuter, “History as Palingenesis in Pater and Hegel”, *PMLA* 86:3 (May 1971), 411-21.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Hill (ed.), *Walter Pater’s The Renaissance*, 389.

knows only too well—yet sometimes aims at fulfilling the conditions of a picture...or of sculpture...and often finds a true poetry, as in those strangely twisted staircases of the *châteaux* of the country of the Loire...Thus, again, sculpture aspires out of the hard limitation of pure form towards colour, or its equivalent; poetry also, in many ways, finding guidance from the other arts, the analogy between a Greek tragedy and a work of Greek sculpture, between a sonnet and a relief, of French poetry generally with the art of engraving, being more than mere figures of speech.<sup>88</sup>

Pater builds a protean and interrelated theory of art that nonetheless recognises the boundaries or limits of all the arts. His description of artworks ‘Anders-strebing’ is dynamically synergistic. The essence of the original forms is not eradicated but supplemented when music approaches to “figure” (a term that could simultaneously signify the pictorial, rhetorical or sculptural) and architecture aspires towards “a true poetry.” Furthermore, these “approachings” and “aspirations” (kinaesthetic terms that fail to indicate fulfilment) are “more than mere figures of speech.” It is significant that Pater alludes to the figurative in this passage. He appears to be justifying his style as an ‘aesthetic critic’ who has, himself, received “guidance from the other arts.” His concept of “*Anders-streben*” encapsulates what Carolyn Williams identifies as two incompatible forms of incoherence in Pater’s works: atomism and inextricable interrelation, differentiation versus coalescence.<sup>89</sup> The impulse within every aesthetic form to borrow from, or lend forces to, other mediums, maintains aesthetic difference. In doing so, it ensures that one form can obtain the qualities of another, thereby redoubling its beauty. Difference is thus constantly refigured and expanded.

In “Wordsworth”, ‘evocation’ rather than ‘combination’ is used by Pater to articulate aesthetic excellence. Employing a politicised language to highlight the poet’s weaknesses, Pater cautions against the “intrusion” of the “prosaic” (which is

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<sup>88</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 139-40.

<sup>89</sup> Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater’s Aesthetic Historicism* (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1989), 17.

“an alien element”) into the realm of the prosodic.<sup>90</sup> Nearly a decade and a half later in “Style”, he continues to examine the relationship between these linguistic genres, in this instance, urging a “poetic” presence within prose. Indeed, he cautions his readers against “emphatically” separating prose and verse, arguing, “how wholesome! how delightful! as to identify in prose what we call poetry, the imaginative power, not treating it as out of place and a kind of vagrant intruder, but by way of an estimate of its rights, that is, of its achieved powers, there.”<sup>91</sup> That “Style” culminates in an homage to “prose literature”, which is celebrated throughout the essay for its innate capacity to articulate the variety and scope of modern experience, may account for Pater’s looser allowances here. Just as prose should acquire the “imaginative power” of poetry, in “Giorgione”, Pater (like Swinburne) urges sculpture to produce the feeling of colour: “Thus, again, sculpture aspires out of the hard limitation of pure form towards colour, or its equivalent”<sup>92</sup>, an observation of ‘Anders-strebing’ that rhetorically parallels Pater’s musical paradigm with its emphasis on aspiration and continual modification.

Pater’s description of ‘Anders-strebing’ in these works is noticeably political, and one also finds a distinct Darwinian subtext in his narrative strategies. In “Luca della Robbia”—among the four essays Pater composed specifically for *The Renaissance*—a Darwinian struggle re-enacted within the confines of artistic creation is indeed notable:

Against this tendency to the hard presentment of mere form trying vainly to compete with the reality of nature itself, all noble sculpture constantly struggles; each great system of sculpture resisting it in its own way, etherealising, spiritualising, relieving, its stiffness, its heaviness, and death. The use of colour in sculpture is but an unskillful [sic] contrivance to effect, by borrowing from another art, what the nobler sculpture effects by strictly appropriate means. To get

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<sup>90</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 38-9.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>92</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 139.

not colour but the equivalent of colour; to secure the expression and the play of life; to expand the too firmly fixed individuality of pure, unrelieved, uncoloured form:— this is the problem which the three great styles in sculpture have solved in three different ways.<sup>93</sup>

Pater reconstructs sculpture anthropomorphically, as a number of conscious entities “trying vainly to compete with the reality of nature itself”, a reality that had only recently been revealed to Pater and his contemporaries when Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The impact of Darwin on Pater (existentially and stylistically) is particularly notable in his first publication, his long review “Coleridge’s Writing” (1866) for the *Westminster*, which he later included in *Appreciations*:

To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions. The philosophical conception of the relative has been developed in modern times through the influence of the science of observation. Those sciences reveal types of life evanescent into each other by inexpressible refinements of change. Things pass into their opposite by accumulation of undefinable [sic] quantities...[The] faculty for truth is recognised as a power of distinguishing and fixing delicate and fugitive detail.<sup>94</sup>

And certainly, the language of evolutionary science is woven throughout Pater’s observations of “*Anders-streben*”, just as it underscores his construction of the ‘aesthetic critic’ in the “Preface”, “Giorgione” and “Style.” For, it is “selection” and “modification” (two modes of differentiation) that enable the critic to transmit or transcribe, not the world, but their sense of it.

Pater’s theory of “*Anders-streben*” is at least subtly inflected with Darwin’s notion of ‘survival of the fittest’, with its emphasis on struggle and variation, differentiation and accretion, where random mutations occurring within an organism result in a more optimal relationship with the environment. For the process of “*Anders-streben*” entails that the arts “pass into the condition” of other forms due to an innate drive to “strive” and “aspire.” The artist (or human agency) is notably

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>94</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 65.

absent from Pater's description (he uses no pronouns). Rather, the relationship between mediums is constructed as an incessant struggle to obtain the particular virtues possessed by their rivals. And in "Luca della Robbia", these bodies are "resisting" and "constantly struggling" to *survive*, to be relieved from "stiffness", "heaviness" and "death." The circumvention of "death" occurs when a sculpted three-dimensional material obtains "the equivalent of colour" which is "the play of life", a particular kind of effect, then, or quality of beauty. The use of colour in sculpture, on the other hand, "is but an unskilful contrivance to effect, by borrowing from another art, what the nobler sculpture effects by strictly appropriate means."<sup>95</sup> Pater also asserts this in "The Poetry of Michelangelo" (1871): "Well! That incompleteness is Michelangelo's equivalent for colour in sculpture; it is his way of etherealising pure form, of relieving its stiff realism, and communicating to it breath, pulsation, the effect of life."<sup>96</sup> And this struggle is also present in relation to the great "*Andersstreben*": "yet the arts may be represented as continually struggling after the law or principle of music, to a condition which music alone completely realises."<sup>97</sup>

In "Giorgione" Pater anchors his construction of "the condition of music" within the realm of metaphor (later, in "Style", his construction becomes a reflection of the power of metaphor). As he asserts: "*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it."<sup>98</sup> For a man remembered for his paradigmatic views of music, he left not a single critique of a musical performance, composition or composer. His references to musicians throughout his critical works

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<sup>95</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 68.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

and journalism are scant, five in total.<sup>99</sup> And his allusions to musical subjects are always passing allusions. If it is clear that Pater enthusiastically appreciated painting, sculpture, architecture and, clearly, literature, he leaves us with almost no impression as to whether he even listened to or liked music. And yet, “the condition of music” in “Giorgione” had little to do with music, just as it was not *only* about art: “And this principle [of music] holds good of all things that partake in any degree of artistic qualities, of the furniture of our houses, and of dress, for instance, of life itself, of gesture and speech, and the details of daily intercourse.”<sup>100</sup> A decade later, in “Style”, Pater shuts out “dress” and “furniture”, reorienting his musical principle to “speech” only, and more specifically, textual discourse—the written rather than the spoken. In “Giorgione”, however, “this principle of music holds good” for all things with which ‘aesthetic criticism’ deals.

Firmly circumscribed within the boundaries of metaphor—“It is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal...[it is] the true type or *measure* of perfected art”<sup>101</sup>—Pater’s musical paradigm derived, as previously noted, from his perception of music as an intrinsic, all-encompassing emblem of excellence because “form” and “matter”, ‘sign’ and ‘signifier’, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ were naturally, perfectly unified. Since it was “the constant effort of art to obliterate this distinction”, then music, insofar as it was an intrinsically perfect language or system, was also an intrinsically ideal emblem of this perfection. Throughout Pater’s works, the interfusion or “obliteration” of ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ always emerges in relation to ‘perfection’ and in “Style”, in relation to perfect linguistic expression in particular. For Pater frequently speaks of blending, mergence, coalescence, fusion and

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<sup>99</sup> Samuel Wright, *An Informative Index to the Writings of Walter H. Pater* (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1987), 282-4.

<sup>100</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 143.

<sup>101</sup> Italics mine. Ibid, 144.

transparency: terms honouring the notion of synthesis or the resolution of opposites, reflecting again Hegel's immense influence on the writer. The idea of welding 'inner' and 'outer' is among Pater's greatest preoccupations as a critic, and the most common and consistent image in his writings. In "Diaphaneité", for instance, Pater's ideal diaphanous character is one whose "entire transparency of nature...[let] through unconsciously all that is really lifegiving [sic] in the established order of things."<sup>102</sup> This is why he beckons his readers to seek out "transparency": "The artist and he who has treated life in the spirit of art desires only to be shown to the world as he really is; as he comes nearer and nearer to perfection, the veil of an outer life not simply expressive of the inward becomes thinner and thinner."<sup>103</sup> And this notion of 'unity' is, after all, precisely what accounts for Pater's tribute to the Renaissance within which there was "an outbreak of the human spirit" and every artist and philosopher "[caught] light and heat from each other's thoughts."<sup>104</sup> For the fullness of life, underscored by a profound *interconnectedness*, had found an adequate *expression*.

Yet, whilst 'the condition of music' was inflected with existential and cultural meaning, such that a discussion of this would warrant its own chapter, it was also an ideal *aesthetic* condition—"the object of the great '*Anders-streben*.'" This was not only because music was a perfect emblem of expression, a system, then, to model language after, but also because, and in relation to this, it was the most characteristically *affective* art form. Pater's familiarity with German Idealism (and ancient Greek philosophy and Baudelaire) would have introduced him to the perception of music as the most penetrative and emotionally direct of the arts. Kant's devaluation of music was derived precisely from this viewpoint. Schiller, on the other

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<sup>102</sup> Walter Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1920), 251.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>104</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, xiii.

hand, drew aesthetic excellence from the power of any art medium to make “form consume...material.” The most sublime works of art “must become sheer form and affect us with the serene power of antiquity.” Because “form” and “matter” were naturally indistinguishable or “consume[d]” within music, the plastic arts and poetry, at their best, moved us with their sensuous presence, as music did, and should thus, aspire towards a musical condition.<sup>105</sup> Music dictated its own terms of understanding. Music, and presumably Pater’s consummate musical moments were purely instrumental or ‘absolute’, “exemplified by the symphonies, chamber works and sonatas of Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms”<sup>106</sup>, was unburdened by narrative, its meaning inextricably related to its affect or experience. Again, Pater draws inspiration from Hegel:

Accompanimental [sic] music exists to express something outside of itself. Its expression relates to something that does not belong to music as such but to an alien art: poetry. Now if music is intended to be purely musical, it must eschew and eradicate this alien element. Only then can it fully liberate itself from the constraints of verbal precision.<sup>107</sup>

The perception of music as the most affective art form also gained scientific validity during the mid-to-late Victorian period as studies of aesthetic responses to music (which confirmed this viewpoint) began to circulate widely. By modelling the arts on music in “Giorgione”, “music being the typical or ideally consummate art”<sup>108</sup>, Pater was, above all, emphasising the importance of aesthetic experience in art appreciation and qualifying this importance in corporeal rather than intellectual terms and within a self-referential framework. If art aspired towards the condition of music, it aspired towards the condition of effect and thus, towards itself, not nature. Pater’s musical

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<sup>105</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 155.

<sup>106</sup> Patricia Herzog, “The Condition to which All Art Aspires: Reflections on Pater on Music”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36:2 (1996), 122-33. It should be noted, however, that many of Beethoven’s symphonies are programmatic (i.e. narrative)

<sup>107</sup> le Huray and Day (eds.), *Music and Aesthetics*, 351.

<sup>108</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 145.

paradigm rebukes Ruskin whilst defending Whistler.<sup>109</sup> As we shall see in the following chapter, Wilde's adaptation of Pater's 'musical condition' made this rebuke explicit.

That Pater idealised the metaphor of music rather than music itself is something he explicitly and persistently emphasised in "Giorgione." And while, at the start of "Giorgione", the 'aesthetic critic's' role was to discern the formal boundaries of the arts, Pater digresses so that "the chief function of aesthetic criticism...is to estimate the degree in which each of those products [of art] approaches, in this sense, to musical law."<sup>110</sup> The dynamic, internal aspiration of the arts towards "musical law" was determined by their ability to 'other-strive.' If music represented 'pure' effect ("colour, or its equivalent"), the more intersensory an artwork or the more successful its "*Anders-streben*", the closer it came towards Pater's musical ideal in "Giorgione." However, to understand what Pater meant by "the condition of music", the standards he set for aesthetic excellence and the way this was articulated—how he described the profundity of the masterpiece and its affect on him—are significant. In the opening of "The Poetry of Michelangelo", Pater discusses what constitutes artistic excellence:

A certain strangeness, something of the blossoming of aloe, is indeed an element in all true works of art: that they shall excite or surprise us is indispensable. But that they shall give pleasure and exert a charm over us is indispensable too; and this strangeness must be sweet also—a lovely strangeness...sweetness and strength, pleasure with surprise, an energy of conception which seems at every moment about to break through all the conditions of comely form, recovering touch by touch, a loveliness found usually only in the simplest natural things.<sup>111</sup>

"The condition of music" signifies "excitation", "surprise" and "pleasure", an ability to mould and be moulded—"to exert a charm" and to be susceptible to charm—qualities or effects that are "indispensable." This occurs in "Wordsworth" as well

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<sup>109</sup> Lesley Higgins, "Walter Pater: Painting the Nineteenth Century", *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 50:4 (2007), 432.

<sup>110</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 145.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

where excellent art absorbs spectator, artist and art object: “And so he [Wordsworth] has much for those who value the highly concentrated presentment of passion, who appraise men and women by their susceptibility to it, and art and poetry as they afford the spectacle of it.”<sup>112</sup> And, indeed, this observation galvanises Pater’s most direct (and Swinburnian) declarations of ‘art for art’: “The office of the poet is not that of the moralist, and the first aim of Wordsworth’s poetry is to give the reader a peculiar kind of sensation.”<sup>113</sup>

“The condition of music” is persistently constructed as relational in these works, for aesthetic value is largely contingent upon the spectator who has, as Pater develops in the “Preface” when constructing his trope of the ‘aesthetic critic’, “a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects.”<sup>114</sup> Meaning is assembled within what Wolfgang Iser terms “a re-creative dialectic.”<sup>115</sup> If the New Critics seized on Pater’s formalist approach to criticism and if Pater’s works prefigure phenomenological approaches to art, Pater’s “condition of music” saliently anticipates conceptions of ‘aesthetic response’, as explored in particular, in Iser’s pioneering work *The Act of Reading* (1978). Indeed, Pater is an unexpected omission in this text.<sup>116</sup> For “the condition of music” encapsulates Iser’s attention to the German term ‘*Wirkung*’ (which signifies both ‘effect’ and ‘response’), in that it cannot exist without a receiver, a spectator, a ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’ individual. ‘Effect’ requires ‘affect’: Pater’s musical ideal connotes an ideal viewer as well, in part because music can only fully exist in performance.

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<sup>112</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 50.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>114</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, xii.

<sup>115</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), ix.

<sup>116</sup> Particularly in light of Iser’s study, *Walter Pater: The Aesthetic Moment*, (trans.) David Henry Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987).

That music did not require nor instigate a rational or intellectual response to be meaningful, and was thus, *naturally* unable to satisfy didactic aesthetic standards, also constituted its metaphoric appeal for Pater in “Giorgione”, influencing the way he crafted it into a symbol and standard for both art and aesthetic experience. In “Style”, however, it was the intellectual weight of prose, which music lacked, that Pater used to articulate the genre’s unique and appropriate capacity for conveying nineteenth-century experience. That is to say that from the time of “Giorgione” in the late 1870s to the time of “Style” a decade later, Pater’s “condition of music” underwent a significant transformation. What began as a metaphor pertaining to aesthetic excellence shifted into a specific metaphoric standard pertaining to linguistic perfection. Pater explicated this shift at the close of “Style”, which is one reason why the essay can be so neatly characterised as “Giorgione’s” sequel. For as Pater stated in a passage that implicitly glances back at “Giorgione”:

I said, thinking of books like Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, that prose literature was the *characteristic* art of the nineteenth century, as others, thinking of its triumphs since the youth of Bach, have assigned that place to music...If music be the ideal art of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic qualities in things everywhere, of all good art.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, although Pater considered music ideal, prose was the “characteristic” art of his age, capable of representing modern man and the varieties of modern experience. And synaesthetic metaphor, which pervades Pater’s art and literary criticism, registered his sensorial responses whilst attempting to forge an equally *aesthetic* reaction from us.

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<sup>117</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 35.

### III. “Anders-streben” as Practice

...The scholar will still remember that if ‘the style is the man’ it is also the age: that the nineteenth century too will be found to have had its style justified by necessity...that in literature as in other matters it is well to unite as many diverse elements as may be: that the individual writer or artist, certainly, is to be estimated by the number of graces he combines, and his power of interpenetrating them in a given work.<sup>118</sup>

The above quotation comes from “Postscript” in *Appreciations*, an essay similar to “Style” insofar as it explores (and defends) the unique, heterogeneous spirit of the English language and the (new) institution and study of English literature. Indeed, these texts saliently compliment each other in a variety of ways. “Style” commences with a discussion concerning “the achieved distinctions” of prose versus poetry; in “Postscript”, Pater begins by delineating between the terms “classical” and “romantic.”<sup>119</sup> Then these distinctions are quickly undone or modified by Pater in both essays. After insisting upon real differences and, in “Style”, linking “progress” to the ability to “differentiate”, Pater challenges the conventions of difference, or, rather, suggests that our understanding of difference (in relation to historical periods, aesthetic genres, words in themselves) is worth questioning and personalising. The complementary nature of these works is further augmented by their juxtaposition as ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ texts in an otherwise eclectic selection of essays of literary criticism spanning Pater’s writing career. Pater imposes a neat cyclical shape on what is not a neat and cyclical group of works. His desire to have *Appreciations* appear as if it was conceived in this form—as a unified text driven by the unified vision of a single author—is evidenced by numerous factors including “Postscript.” For this essay, composed around the time of “Giorgione” (and “The Aesthetic Life”)

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<sup>118</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 264.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 1, 243. Brake reaches similar conclusions in *Print in Transition*, 225-6.

originally appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1876 under the title "Romanticism." Pater's renaming of the work complements its chronological placement within *Appreciations*—more than a closure, it is an *afterthought*, as if conceived and composed at the text's end rather than a decade before its beginning. The link Pater forges between style, personality and "the age" in "Postscript" is significant, illustrating how linguistic expression is determined by individual, historical and cultural conditions. This perception unfolds in relation to the term "interpenetration", which recalls Swinburne's word "interfusion" in "Simeon Solomon." Both terms describe and applaud a similar phenomenon, namely, the creation of artworks built from "graces" that have been "combined" and "diverse elements" that have been "unified."

Pater's construction of style in "Postscript" relates to his trope of the 'aesthetic critic' as distinct from the "popular critic" and, arguably, the art critic. For this shift in terms and titles—from art to 'aesthetic critic'—was not just methodological but also, necessarily, and perhaps above all, rhetorical or *stylistic*. As Pater made clear in his "Preface" to *The Renaissance*, the 'aesthetic critic' regarded all works of art (keeping in mind Pater's broadly conceived notion of 'art') "as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar and unique kind." Their role was to observe, articulate and regenerate the gestalt of these impressions such that aesthetic experience utilised a discourse that stimulated comparable 'sensations' insofar as it was equally affective or affecting. As Stein suggests,

The simultaneous acts of reading and viewing are meant to involve a totality of response that in turn can produce a harmony of perception, all the faculties of the reader becoming attuned, if momentarily, under the joint influence of art and literature...[forcing] the reader to

experience the contemplation of art as an all-consuming act, one that can involve a fundamental reorientation of the self.<sup>120</sup> However, Pater's style extended beyond the simultaneity of "reading" and "viewing" into a more encompassing sensorial experience. If aesthetic excellence was determined by the scope and intensity of aesthetic experience, then Pater's art—'aesthetic criticism'—strove towards the 'otherness' of rival mediums via intersensory metaphors, similes and analogies that tested, renegotiated and revealed the boundaries of [critical] discourse, or the inherent limitations of Pater's medium. For his style is "interpenetrated" by "diverse forces" and "graces" that have been "combined", descriptive terms notably laden with sexual currency and a description in itself paralleling Pater's observation of an "*Anders-streben*." His language is architectural, musical, and sculptural due to his reliance on competing and colluding sensorial vocabularies.<sup>121</sup>

One could even argue that it was 'aesthetic criticism' above all else that Pater had in mind when he composed "Giorgione." For the essay, as Brake signals, immediately identifies the genre as its project.<sup>122</sup> And, indeed, the idea of an "*Anders-streben*" is one way to frame the genre of art criticism in itself in which 'text' is called on to express, translate or represent 'non-text', in which one sensorial experience attempts to account for the experience of another. Particularly in light of Pater's conception of the "untranslatable" sensuous element in art in "Giorgione", his preoccupation with formal limitations—and the ability, ultimately, to transgress

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<sup>120</sup> Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, 12. On Paterian intertextuality, see as well Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Walter Pater and Aesthetic Painting" in Prettejohn (ed.), *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, 36-58.

<sup>121</sup> Pater's description of a work created from the "interpenetration" of "graces" and "diverse elements" is not only applicable to his rhetorical development of synaesthesia but also characterises the heightened intertextuality within his writing. As Brake summarises in *Walter Pater*, "The coexistence of diverse discourses, such as theology, philosophy, and art, which Pater calls 'culture' may be seen. Throughout his work this insistent 'intertextuality'—by which is meant the co-presence and coalescence in the same work of multiple discourses and texts which enact a kind of dialogue among themselves in the new text which they form—is evident", 25.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

them—opens up the possibility that his theory of “*Anders-streben*” was largely personal, a reflection on his own endeavours as a critic.

To circumvent the formal limitations of discourse within what Pater phrased “literary production” came through a particular “handling” of language. Pater uses this term throughout *The Renaissance* and in “Giorgione” on four occasions including when he speaks of “an inventive handling of rhythmical language”<sup>123</sup> and of “the form, the spirit, of the handling” as something that “should become an end itself.”<sup>124</sup> “Handling” reconstructs discourse into an entity that can be touched or moulded, into a tactile experience and phenomenon with a subtle sexual connotation. And Pater’s language certainly feels “physical”, “bodily” or “handled.”<sup>125</sup> In “Style”, this physicality is attached to words themselves, which can be distilled into composite elements “realised as colour and light and shade.”<sup>126</sup> The primary goal of the artist-scholar is to be “a minute and constant observer of their physiognomy” so as to “[recognize] the incident, the colour, the physical elements or particles in words.”<sup>127</sup> Pater is insisting upon the primacy of the written word over speech—Wilde, on the other hand, privileged orality. And indeed, when reading Pater, it is clear that he composed “in short, not to the measure of the speaking voice, but specifically and literally for the printed page.”<sup>128</sup>

Stylistically, synaesthesia—the joining of sensations, the “combining” of “graces”—registered the subjectivity of Pater’s impressions whilst emphasising our own hermeneutic role as readers. For metaphors naturally invite interpretation, cultivating a more intimate engagement with a text. As Ted Cohen demonstrates:

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<sup>123</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 136.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>125</sup> Angela Leighton makes this point in “Pater’s Music”, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 14:2 (2005), 68.

<sup>126</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 17.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence*, 127.

There is a unique way in which the maker and the appreciator of a metaphor are drawn closer to each other. Three aspects are involved: (1) the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept the invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgement of a community.<sup>129</sup>

A brief case in point is Pater's short essay on the English critic Charles Lamb, which appeared in the *Fortnightly* in 1876 and later, in *Appreciations*. The bodily, alembicated rhythms of Pater's prose—both secular and homoerotic—starkly contrast with those of Ruskin and Arnold, the critics Pater was most intent on differentiating himself from, even if he absorbed, particularly in Arnold's case, ideas and expressions.<sup>130</sup> For Pater's description of Lamb's work, including biographical details about the critic, unfolds within a language "interpenetrated" by competing sensorial vocabularies. In Pater's reference to Lamb's childhood in London, he writes that, "We catch the *aroma* of a singular, homely *sweetness* about his first years."<sup>131</sup> Discussing Lamb's flare as a critic, he describes him as "a dramatist of genius, so sombre, so *heavily-coloured*, so macabre."<sup>132</sup> Praising Lamb's work on Shakespeare, he speaks of "the choicest savour and *perfume* of Elizabethan poetry"<sup>133</sup>, whilst using the term "morsel" to identify Lamb's ability to focus "on the good stuff of an old, forgotten writer" or to allude to the "customs" of "old life." And in his description of Lamb's prose, the 'scent' of Lamb's style acquires a musical quality: "there comes an *aroma* of old English; noticeable *echoes*, in chance turn and phrase, of the great masters of style, the old masters."<sup>134</sup> Pater's impressionistic style relies heavily on terms relating to perception, sensation and thus, to the body, activated in its entirety. Scientific terms such as 'formula', 'conditions' and 'particles', which are woven throughout

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<sup>129</sup> Ted Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy" in Sheldon Sacks (ed.), *On Metaphor* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981), 6.

<sup>130</sup> This argument is developed in David DeLaura's chapter "Arnold, Pater and the Supreme, Artistic View of Life" in *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, Pater* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

<sup>131</sup> Italics mine. Pater, *Appreciations*, 109.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 115.

Pater's writings, are sharply counteracted by those of 'colour', 'morsel', 'deliciousness', 'sweetness', 'tone', and 'music.' The condition of music—of aesthetic excellence garnered through 'other-striving'—is something one tastes, touches, sees, hears and smells. The very notion of meaning as a fixed entity—as something that one can *extract*—and of beauty as premised in abstract axioms is destabilised through Pater's use of synaesthesia. If Pater's rhetorical development of synaesthesia accelerates and emphasises the affectivity of his prose, it does so in part because of the active engagement it requires from the reader.

When Pater argues in "Giorgione" that, "Art, then, is thus always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception"<sup>135</sup>, this equally, if not more so, extends to the criticism of art. His rhetorical development of synaesthesia privileges sensuousness over rigour and is a "purely perceptive" approach to critical discourse. After all, synaesthetic metaphors are "purely perceptive" tropes. One could even argue that an "*Anders-streben*" is a synaesthetic metaphor circumscribed within the confines of a rhetorical trope: sound strives towards colour and vice-versa. That "Giorgione" participates within the very methodologies it advocates on rhetorical grounds is, in part, because in Giorgione, Pater found an artist capable of,

[Interfusing] his painted work with a high-strung sort of poetry...in the subordination of mere subject to pictorial design, to the main purpose of a picture, he is typical of that aspiration of all the arts towards music, which I have endeavoured to explain,—towards the perfect identification of matter and form.<sup>136</sup>

To describe the power and beauty of Giorgione's works, and of the "Giorgionesque", Pater uses "interfused" or synaesthetic metaphors. The "forest arabesques" of the Venetian school are "but as the notes of a music which duly accompanies the

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<sup>135</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 144.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

presence of their men and women.” Mariana’s song in Shakespeare’s *Measure to Measure* “seems to pass for a moment into an actual strain of music”, such is its “kindling force”<sup>137</sup> as a work, or, to use Swinburne’s phrase in “Simeon Solomon”, its “special hold.” Titian’s *Fête Champêtre*, which Pater wrongly attributes to the school of Giorgione, is perceived of “as characteristic, and almost as suggestive, as that of music itself.”<sup>138</sup> And the “modulated unison of landscape and persons”<sup>139</sup>—the term ‘modulation’ contextualising pictorial elements within musical terminology—defines the Venetian school’s gift for composition. In each instance, music as metaphor, simile and analogy acts as a means for registering the force of the “Giorgionesque.” Like Swinburne, Pater relies on synaesthesia to represent affectivity and aesthetic experience rhetorically in “Giorgione.” And, indeed, the term “interfuse” strongly suggests a familiarity with Swinburne’s article on Solomon. Although there is no external evidence to support this conclusion, given Pater’s admiration for Swinburne and intimate friendship with Solomon (to whom Swinburne introduced him), it seems likely that he read this article.<sup>140</sup>

Constantly testing the limitations of language, Pater’s writing aspires towards the mood of colour and music, the atmosphere of tapestry, the sculptural sense. As Donoghue states, “we are entangled in a web of associations rather than allowed to speed from subject to verb to object. We are to feel, while reading the sentence, that we are in space but not in time; or, if we insist on being in time, that we are held in a prolonged present tense.”<sup>141</sup> Pater takes us, as Leighton signals, “on a journey of

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>140</sup> Inman, *Walter Pater’s Reading*, 243.

<sup>141</sup> Donoghue, *Lover of Strange Souls*, 295.

shifting clauses, which ends up not saving but losing the thing in question.”<sup>142</sup> She argues that Pater’s unusual syntax confers a musicality to his language:

If Debussy’s piece seemed to [George] Moore the achieved musical condition of Pater’s prose, this was also because that prose was always on the way to music. An innuendo, a lilt, a delaying, erotic sonorousness, the sense of music in Pater crosses and distracts from its sense of sense. It leaves an after-effect, as of something thinned into echo and rhythm. Music, it seems, may be all that remains when his words have run out.<sup>143</sup>

And Jerome Bump asserts in “Seeing and Hearing in *Marius the Epicurean*” (1982), that Pater’s “ultimate resting point seems to be not so much that art aspires towards the condition of music but that narrative art aspires to the condition, which is to say, to the immediate impact of visual and spatial art.”<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile Dowling suggests that we have inherited our visual paradigm of literature from Pater and that he believed language ought not aspire towards the condition of paint and marble but that it should be treated with the same respect and technical knowledge as sculptors treated marble or painters paint.<sup>145</sup> Certainly, in “Style”, Pater’s focus on the relevance of craftsmanship in writing leads him to draw analogies between other mediums, his architectonic metaphor being a prime example: it is most often used in relation to composition.<sup>146</sup>

Although the parallels Pater forges between the arts are often reflections on the process of aesthetic creation, his use of intersensory metaphor extends well beyond this impulse. For as Pater develops in “Style”, the ‘aesthetic critic’ is an “artist-scholar”, “a lover of words” who “[vindicates] his liberty in the making of a

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<sup>142</sup> Leighton, *On Form*, 18

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>144</sup> Jerome Bump, “Seeing and Hearing in *Marius the Epicurean*”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37:2 (1982), 188.

<sup>145</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence*, 115.

<sup>146</sup> In “Style” Pater argues, “the architectural conception of which, which foresees the end in the beginning and never loses sight of it, and in every part is conscious of all the rest, till the last sentence does but, with undiminished vigour, unfold and justify the first”, *Appreciations*, 18. Dowling interprets Pater’s appeal to ‘the architectural sense’ as an acute reflection of his conception of language as a linear, written form, meant for the printed page above all else. Dowling, *Language and Decadence*, 127.

vocabulary, an entire system of composition, for himself, for his own true manner.”<sup>147</sup> The formation of a personalised vocabulary is augmented by a profound awareness of the life of words, their etymologies and shifting meanings which stir long “brain-waves” of associations: “Racy Saxon monosyllables, close to us as touch and sight, he will intermix readily with those long, savoursome, Latin words, rich in ‘second intention.’”<sup>148</sup> Pater also urges the “artist-scholar” “[to] be on the alert not only for obvious mixed metaphors of course, but for the metaphor that is mixed in all our speech, though a rapid use may involve no cognition of it.”<sup>149</sup> And like the “artist-scholar”, his language has been “winnowed”, “debris” and “*surplusage*” removed. Furthermore, the “artist-scholar” must not only exhibit a full awareness of the power of words, but also “from syllable to syllable, [ascertain their] precise value.”<sup>150</sup>

And thus, in “Giorgione”, when Pater speaks of the painter’s innate ability to capture “morsels of actual life”<sup>151</sup>, or in “The Poetry of Michelangelo” when he refers to a “a morsel of uncut stone”<sup>152</sup> on the crown of the head of David, one is inclined (and encouraged) to grant to “morsel” its sensorial value. Signifying a bite or mouthful, a piece of food—its presence stimulating an awareness of the sensation of taste—there is, nonetheless, a temptation to read “morsel” as synonymous with ‘fragment’—as readers we naturally pursue logicity in metaphor. Yet, Pater is clearly alert to the inner life and “second intentions” of words. Given all the possible choices pertaining to size and shape only, “morsel” appears to be guided by its sensorial and

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<sup>147</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 10.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>150</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 17. Dowling argues that Pater’s emphasis on the “syllable” reflects the influence of Muller’s theories on universal phonetic groups, *Language and Decadence*, 75-80.

<sup>151</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 146.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

sensual nuance. Furthermore, when the term is employed in *The Renaissance*, it is used to denote dynamic moments of excellence in a work.<sup>153</sup>

Pater frequently relied on colour as a means of denoting epochs, an artist's temperament, "the delightful physical quality" of a work and, paradoxically, "no mere delightful quality of natural things, but a spirit upon them by which they become expressive to the spirit."<sup>154</sup> In the opening of "Wincklemann", for instance, Pater's use of the term "colourless" as adjective, adverb (colourlessly), or noun (colourlessness) is not unique in its application but in its frequency: "[he] served a painful apprentice in the tarnished intellectual world of German...in the dusky precincts of German school, hungrily feeding off a few colourless books."<sup>155</sup> Like Baudelaire, Pater assigns semantic attributes to colour, which enhance his prose's affectivity and, in this instance, gloss biography in such a way that 'life' begins to feel like 'art', a technique used by Wilde throughout *Dorian Gray*.

In *Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures*, published by Macmillan in 1893, Pater states, "[Plato] breaks as it were visible colour into the very texture of his work: his vocabulary, the very stuff he manipulates, has its delightful aesthetic qualities."<sup>156</sup> That colour signifies something more than colour is reflected in Pater's remark about its "visibility." This presupposes that colour is not only a visual quality or property of an object but a force in itself, with its own meaning and effect. In this regard, Pater is accentuating colour's linguistic weight. The visual model acts as a rhetorical vehicle for representing Plato's style and his genius. Yet, Pater's metaphor is also spatial, exemplified by his use of the verb 'to break' and by his description of Plato's work as "textured" rather than 'textual.'

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 24, 29, 151.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>156</sup> Pater, *Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 140.

This spatial paradigm, as Bump acknowledges, is profuse in Pater's work. In "Joachim du Bellay" in *The Renaissance*, Pater describes the ingenuity of the poems of Ronsard as "delicately figured surfaces", correlating their rhyme schemes to "the traceries of the house of Jacques Coeur at Bourges, or the *Maison de Justice* at Rouen."<sup>157</sup> Later in the essay, he suggests that Du Bellay's prose is "perfectly transparent, flexible and chaste."<sup>158</sup> In *Marius*, Pater speaks of "carved ivories of speech"<sup>159</sup>, a phrase that reconstructs sound as a spatial, material entity. Each of these "purely perceptive" metaphors draws on a spatial model: Ronsard's poems can be figurative but not figured or surfaced; prose cannot be transparent or flexible; and speech is neither made of ivory nor can it be carved. These descriptions, however, speak of excellence by describing the effect of excellence. In attempting to convey the spirit and impact of a textual composition, Pater creates interrelationships between aural, spatial and visual forms. Subsequently, his use of synaesthesia confines or restricts interpretation to an intersensory, self-reflexive aesthetic realm within which art refers to art.

In "Style", Pater's description of Flaubert's writing involves a complex synaesthetic metaphor:

And the restraint of Flaubert, amid a real natural opulence, only redoubled beauty—the phrase so large and so precise at the same time, hard as bronze, in service to the more perfect adaptation of words to their matter. Afterthoughts, retouching, finish, will be of profit only so far as they too really serve to bring out the original, initiative, generative, sense in them.<sup>160</sup>

Flaubert's work has an opulent, "redoubled" beauty because he has honoured his medium's formal limitations. His phrasing is not only large but also "hard as bronze", an explicit analogy with sculpture that incorporates a tactile sensation. The sculptural

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<sup>157</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 163.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>159</sup> Pater, *Marius the Epicurean* vol. 1, 85.

<sup>160</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 33.

sense of Flaubert's style is further strengthened by the terms "retouching" and "finish" and by Pater's description of Flaubert's language as "pliant, as only obstinate, durable metal can be."<sup>161</sup> In *Plato and Platonism*, Pater's use of synaesthesia is equally individualistic and declarative. He evokes synaesthesia to characterise and delineate the brilliance of Plato's texts while simultaneously drawing acute attention to the unique formal properties of language:

To trace that thread of physical colour, entwined throughout and multiplied sometimes into large tapestried [sic] figures, is the business, the enjoyment, of the student of the Dialogues, as he reads them...to the *Charmides*, for something like the effect of sculpture in modelling a person; to the *Timaeus*, for certain brilliant chromatic effects.<sup>162</sup>

Plato's works are described "purely perceptively", in relation to various non-textual aesthetic forms as well as to the varied enjoyments of each. For the student—or 'aesthetic critic'—of *The Dialogues*, they must be able to "trace" "threads" of "physical colour" woven into "tapestried [sic] figures", an almost hallucinogenic image dependent upon the coalescence of visual and spatial fields. Again, the act of reading is all-consuming as it is reconstructed into a wholly more corporeal and intimate experience. To enjoy *The Dialogues*, is to trace or touch them. The idea of "physical colour" is comparable to Pater's notion of "visible colour", and yet more synaesthetic in that colour acquires a tactile qualifier and thus, a spatial dimension. This is further augmented by Pater's description of the text's brilliance as equivalent to the act of creating works of cut tapestries, which are, in themselves, sculptural.

In Pater's analysis of the *Charmides* and *Timaeus*, his metaphors involve not just alternate aesthetic forms but also their effects as such, illustrating the extent to which synaesthetic metaphor acts as a means for conveying the essence of the experience of a thing. Thus, the excellence of *Charmides*, Plato's dialogic work on

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>162</sup> Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 141.

‘Temperance’, is comparable to the “effect” that sculpture produces when modelling a person. In the case of *Timaeus*, within which Plato developed his idea of a musically governed cosmology, Pater’s description of its “brilliant chromatic effects” is significant given the combined musical and colour significance of the term ‘chromatic.’ It describes the running through of all the semi-tones of an octave whilst relating to colour and its associated phenomena. Pater appears to be playing off both meanings: the brilliance of the text is as absorbing and impacting as colour and music.

Frequently combining colour and music in his criticism, Pater also discusses paintings, texts and artist’s lives through analogies with music. In Pater’s semi-autobiographical work *The Child in the House* (1878)<sup>163</sup>, the protagonist Florian Deale, when nostalgically recalling the interior colours of his childhood home, describes them as having “tints more musically blent.”<sup>164</sup> In Bloom’s annotation of this essay, he links Pater’s use of music here to “Giorgione”<sup>165</sup>: music signifies a colour scheme and is employed stylistically; but it also carries an emotive, wistful significance tied in with remembrance. The sense of home and belonging is likened to music again when Pater asserts that “[the] harmony between Florian’s soul and its physical environment became, for a time at least, like perfectly played music.”<sup>166</sup> In this instance, the condition of music, in which the duality of ‘inner’ (Florian’s soul) and ‘outer’ (his physical environment) welds together harmoniously, is represented as a perfect musical performance. When Pater refers to Botticelli’s “predilection for minor tones”<sup>167</sup> or to the life of Michelangelo—“a discordant note sounds throughout

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<sup>163</sup> The text first appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in August 1878 under the title “Imaginary Portrait. The Child in the House.” It was later published in book form as part of the posthumous *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895).

<sup>164</sup> Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies*, 178.

<sup>165</sup> Harold Bloom (ed.), *Selected Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: Columbia UP, 1974), 15 n.

<sup>166</sup> Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies*, 180.

<sup>167</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 62.

which almost spoils the music”<sup>168</sup>—the link between music and emotion is revived. And the use of music *as* language emerges, paralleling Pater’s transvaluation of colour and contributing to our sense of his linguistic development of ‘other-striving.’

In “Style” Pater states, “And prose thus asserting itself as the special and privileged artistic faculty of the present day, will be, however critics may try to narrow its scope, as varied in its excellence as humanity itself reflecting on the facts of its latest experience.”<sup>169</sup> In “Giorgione”, he argues that,

The master is pre-eminent for the resolution, the ease and quickness, with which he reproduces instantaneous motion...some momentary conjunction of mirrors and polished armour and still water, by which all sides of a solid image are exhibited at once, solving that casuistical question whether painting can present an object as completely as sculpture.<sup>170</sup>

Pater’s reflection on the varied excellences of prose interacts with his ‘cubist’ description of Giorgione’s pre-eminence. The Venetian painter’s ability to capture a three-dimensional object within a two-dimensional painting is comparable to Pater’s ability as an ‘aesthetic critic’ to translate and regenerate the “untranslatable” sensuous elements of the arts and their varied enjoyments through synaesthetic metaphor. Giorgione’s clever use of reflective objects is thus equivalent to Pater’s clever use of metaphor. In honouring the formal boundaries of their respective arts—the ‘otherness’ of painting and of “prose literature” or ‘aesthetic criticism’—both artists circumvent these boundaries “by strictly appropriate means.” An instantaneous “conjunction of mirrors”, “armour” and “still water” incorporates a spatial dimension within Giorgione’s painting. Pater’s use of intersensory metaphor infuses his criticism with the prismatic sense of space, colour and music, capturing the angles of alternate mediums and their contingent sensorial experiences.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>169</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 109.

<sup>170</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 156.

That Pater was invested in the notion (as Hegel had argued) that particular aesthetic forms were best suited to particular epochs—sculpture, for instance, being the most appropriate to the classical period—is evidenced by “Winckelmann”: “But as the mind itself has had an historical development, one form of art, by the very limitations of its material, may be more adequate than another for the expression of any one phase of that development.”<sup>171</sup> Refuting “a priori” aesthetic conceptions at the opening of “Style” (a passage that recapitulates his sentiments in the “Preface” and “Giorgione” regarding the problem with “abstract” or “popular” prefigured definitions of the arts), his argument unfolds specifically in relation to the varied beauties of prose and to a particular conception of the nineteenth century as “varied” and “complex.” To presuppose a pragmatic or metaphysical (rather than intensely physical) premise to define and categorise the arts, converts prose into something “tamely and narrowly confined to mainly practical ends.”<sup>172</sup> In this instance, intersensory aesthetics are constructed as a direct affront to didactic aesthetic standards not just conceptually but also rhetorically. For as Pater observes, in a dictum framed through synaesthesia, “Prose is actually found to be a *coloured thing* with Bacon, *picturesque* with Livy and Carlyle, *musical* with Cicero and Newman.”<sup>173</sup> And so, too, is it with Pater.

If a painter’s selection of colour was the means by which to impart one’s unique vision of things, then *style*—as he made clear in “Style”—represented the apex of personal expression for the literary artist: “The writer’s aim, consciously or unconsciously, comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact, but of

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<sup>171</sup> Pater goes on to say, “Different attitudes of the imagination have a native affinity with different types of sensuous form, so that they combine together, with completeness and ease. The arts may thus be arranged in a series, which corresponds to a series of developments in the human mind itself”, *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>172</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, 2.

<sup>173</sup> Italics mine. *Ibid*.

his sense of it, [such that] he becomes an artist, his work *fine art*.”<sup>174</sup> Intersensory metaphor invested in language that crucial ability to consume a complex range of associations within a single form—a text. Prose was, in Pater’s opinion, the special and privileged artistic faculty of its day precisely because of this; a viewpoint that Wilde also advocated and which, as we shall see in the following chapter, underscored his own development of synaesthesia. If aesthetic forms were best suited to different historical periods or cultural moments, then intersensory metaphor, insofar as it “interfused” Pater’s language, could be “as varied in its excellence as humanity itself.” As well, intersensory metaphor “redoubled” the affect of Pater’s own work: a term that signifies expansion but also relates to echoing and re-echoing and thus, to both heightened affect and ongoing impact.

In Pater’s short but eloquent “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*, he contextualised his philosophy of life, not within the confines of “modern thought” but in relation to it. Of course, by beginning with a quotation from Heraclitus, (translated in *Marius* as “All things give way: nothing remaineth”), the perpetual flux of Pater’s modern age is not so modern after all. Or, rather, it has been both legitimated and facilitated by scientific progress. For the fact that our whole physical life is reducible to a combination of natural elements is modern. So, too, is the conception of existence as “the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving [sic] of ourselves.”<sup>175</sup> However, as Williams demonstrates in her detailed analysis of the “Conclusion”, Pater is not endorsing relativism or ‘modernity’ as he conceives of it, as much as seeking an alternative.<sup>176</sup> What is success in this modern life? Pater evokes an elemental metaphor: “To burn always with this hard, gem-like

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>175</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 259.

<sup>176</sup> Williams, *Transfigured World*, 12-17.

flame”, and “simply for those moments’ sake.” Asking, “How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?”<sup>177</sup> Pater asserts, through “art and song.” Art rescued one from the ennui of life by expanding “that interval...getting as many pulsations as possible into that given time” and yielding the “fruit of quickened, multiplied consciousness.” His emphasis on “vital forces uniting”, “multiple pulsations” and “multiplied consciousness”, sounds like a reflection on his theory of “*Anders-streben*”, a concept that was also wholly ‘modern.’<sup>178</sup> Pater’s theory generated the heat needed for a meaningful aesthetic life. And by “keeping within the true limits of [his] material”, Pater pursued the standard of aesthetic excellence developed in “Giorgione”, elevating his work towards the suggestiveness and impact of the other arts, in an attempt to fulfil the ultimate condition.

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<sup>177</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 250.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 252-4.

## Chapter IV.

### Oscar Wilde and the Decadence of Synaesthesia

#### I. Introduction

In 1895, months before the publication of the English translation of Nordau's *Degeneration* and as Oscar Wilde was preparing to go to trial, the painter and inventor A. Wallace Rimington unveiled his creation of a keyboard that played colour at St. James's Hall in London. While a comparatively unimportant event, the performance (attended by the decadent artist Aubrey Beardsley, among others) reflects the interest in innovations in synaesthetic art during the period.<sup>1</sup> In Rimington's lecture, "A New Art: Colour Music", he explained the impetus for his Wagnerian-titled "art of the future":

Very briefly, my aim has been to deal with Colour in a new way, and to place its production under as easy and complete control as the production of music. Until now colour to a large extent in nature, and altogether in art, has been presented to us without mobility...[in] Painting, colour has been used only as one of the elements in a picture, although perhaps the greatest source of beauty. We have not yet had pictures in which the colour there is neither form nor subject, but only pure colour. Even the most advanced impressionism has not carried us thus far.<sup>2</sup>

Although Father Castel's well-known 'colour-clavecin' (1734) prefigured Rimington's invention, what is unique about Rimington's performance is its historical moment.<sup>3</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> Beardsley briefly referenced the performance in his letters. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 124.

<sup>2</sup> A. Wallace Rimington, *A New Art "Colour Music"* (London, 1895), 3. Rimington later expanded these thoughts in *Colour-Music: the Art of Mobile Colour* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1911).

<sup>3</sup> Wilton Mason, "Father Castel and his Color Clavecin", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17:1 (1958), 103-16.

Rimington's allusion to the role of "pure colour" in the future of painting gestures poignantly towards Modernist abstraction and to an artist like Kandinsky, who incorporated synaesthesia into *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), espousing his approach to colour as guided solely by the emotive, non-representational qualities of music. Furthermore, Rimington's invention generated an aesthetic experience that paralleled accounts of 'colour-hearing', which, as I explored in my Introduction, was among the most researched psychological conditions of the period, and a topic Nordau examined in detail in his analysis of decadent art and the pathologies of decadence.<sup>4</sup>

Nordau was not alone in making this link. In Richard Le Gallienne's discussion of John Gray's verse-collection *Silverpoints* (1893), he went so far as to incorporate 'colour-hearing' into his very definition of decadence:

In what does decadence consist? In a self-conscious arrangement of 'coloured' vowels, in a fastidious distribution of accents, resulting in newer and subtler harmonies of verse—some say. In the choice for themes of disease and forbidden things generally—say others...In regard to the first, are we to say that in proportion as language becomes more and more the perfected instrument of expression, the more it develops literary means to literary ends, it is decadent?<sup>5</sup>

Le Gallienne's reference to "'coloured' vowels" cogently illustrates the centrality of synaesthesia to the perception and construction of decadent art during the period, conveying the extent to which decadence was conceived of in ways that overlapped, at least rhetorically, with scientific studies of synaesthesia. Particularly with the advent of psychology as a legitimate scientific discourse, notions of 'aesthetic effect' (as Pater and Wilde's works confirm) were increasingly understood through psychological terms, representing one of many contemporary instances of rhetorical and conceptual exchange

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<sup>4</sup> See, specifically, pp. 1-8 of my Introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, *Retrospective Reviews: A Literary Log 1893-1895*, vol. 2 (London: John Lane, 1896), 229-30.

between artists and scientists. Le Gallienne's allusion to "'coloured' vowels" would have also readily evoked Rimbaud's influential poem 'Voyelles' (singled out by Nordau and others) in which the poet matched colours with vowels. Consequently, Le Gallienne's definition of decadence was further subversive for explicitly acknowledging the unsettling influence of French symbolist aesthetics on British decadence. For Gray was clearly "a disciple of modern French poets", and his Francophilia (Le Gallienne referenced Gautier and Huysmans specifically) significantly accounted for the collection's decadent flavour.<sup>6</sup>

That decadent artistic experimentations with synaesthesia were underscored by a desire to protect aesthetic autonomy is reflected in Le Gallienne's interpretation of "a self-conscious arrangement of 'coloured' vowels": this rhetorical method aimed to rejuvenate linguistic expression by accentuating the 'literariness' of literature. His allusion to 'a fastidious distribution of accents' further confirms this viewpoint whilst reaffirming Buchanan's remarks on the unnatural emphasis placed on syllables in Fleshly writing. Like Buchanan (and Morley, in his review of *Poems and Ballads*), Le Gallienne portrayed decadent style as intentionally unnatural and effeminate or "full of affectation"<sup>7</sup>—discourse or 'text' manipulated so as to become like music or 'non-text', a transformation with a sexual coding. Yet, his emphasis on the self-consciousness of this practice augments and extends the sense of its intentionality. And this, by extension, highlights a central difference between decadence and Aestheticism. For while these schools were inextricably related—their 'members' either friends or foes, influences or competitors—the aesthetes and the decadents ultimately wrote, thought, and 'performed'

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

in different ways. Synaesthetic metaphors were used more self-referentially in decadent than in Aesthetic writing, and self-referentiality is a widely-acknowledged characteristic of decadent writing.<sup>8</sup>

During the *fin de siècle*, one encounters with increasing frequency poems (Wilde's included) featuring symphonies of colour or titled 'nocturne', 'harmony' and 'arrangement.'<sup>9</sup> But these derivative uses of synaesthetic metaphor are eclipsed by the emergence of far more idiosyncratic and exaggerated ones. Beardsley's description in *Under the Hill* (1896) of "strange flowers, heavy with perfume, dripping with odours"<sup>10</sup>, and Arthur Symons's praise of Pater's prose for its "[brooding] quiet which seems to exhale an atmosphere heavy with the odour of tropical flowers"<sup>11</sup>, illuminate how the quality of synaesthetic metaphors in decadent writing (and in this particular context, decadent periodicals like *The Savoy* that were dominated by male contributors) were frequently more exaggerated, artificial and stylized. Synaesthetic metaphor was also frequently used to satirize. A prime example of this is found in George Moore's novel, *A Drama in Muslin: A Realistic Novel* (1886):

An hour passed wearily, and in this beautiful drawing-room humanity suffered in all its natural impudence. Momentarily the air grew hotter and more silicious; the brain ached with the dusty odour of *poudre de ris*, and the many acidities of evaporating perfume; the sugary sweetness of the blondes, the salt flavours of the brunettes, and this allegro movement of odours was interrupted suddenly by the garlicky andante, deep as the pedal

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<sup>8</sup> Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Among the more notable examples: Arthur Symons, *Silhouettes* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896); John Davidson's, *In A Music Hall: And Other Poems* (London: Ward and Downey, 1891); Bernard Miall, *Nocturnes and Pastorals* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896); Theodore Wratlaw, *Orchids: Poems* (London: Arundel Street, 1896). For the popularity of the term 'nocturne' in relation to camera obscura see Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 353.

<sup>10</sup> Italics mine. From Beardsley's novella "Under the Hill", *The Savoy: An Illustrated Quarterly* 2:2 (1896), 187.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Symons, "Walter Pater: Some Characteristics", *The Savoy: An Illustrated Monthly* 2:8 (1896), 34.

notes of an organ, that the perspiring arms of a fat chaperon slowly exhaled.<sup>12</sup>

The synaesthetic qualities of this passage are confrontational and parodic. Moore's satire may even be directed at the aesthetes. Furthermore, it is not readily apparent what a 'garlicky andante' sounds like or means: his highly individualized metaphors require a far more creative approach to reading.<sup>13</sup> What is immediately obvious, however, is how Moore's reliance on synaesthesia creates a poetics of disruption and disarray, linguistic qualities persistently attributed to decadent style.

Indeed, for Le Gallienne, the danger of decadence was grounded in its *disharmony*: its blatant privileging of form or style over subject-matter representing, as he asserted in his review of *Illustrations of Tennyson* (1892), "a merely limited thinking, often insane"<sup>14</sup>: "[if] in all great vital literature, the theme, great or small, is considered in all its relation to the sum total of things, to the Infinite as we phrase it, in decadent literature the relations, the due proportions, are ignored."<sup>15</sup> Havelock Ellis repeated this observation in his own definition of decadent style in "A Note on Paul Bourget" (1889) for the *Pioneer*: "in short, [it] is an anachronistic style in which everything is sacrificed to the development of the individual parts."<sup>16</sup> While these charges had been levied against followers of 'art for art' since its inception, the idea that insane art implied an insane mind now had 'objective', scientific authority to support it. To speak of "'coloured'

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<sup>12</sup> George Moore, *A Drama in Muslin: A Realistic Novel* (London: Vizetelley & Co., 1886), 173. See as well pp. 16, 162.

<sup>13</sup> As Lawrence E. Marks observes, when metaphors are without any obvious or intuitive associations, individualism is being asserted through language: "Not all synaesthetic metaphors carry their meaning so deftly. While one can readily appreciate what is meant by 'bright cold' or 'large rumble,' it is much less apparent what is meant by 'white flavors' or 'loud stench'"', *The Unity of the Senses*, 214.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, *Retrospective Reviews: A Literary Log 1891-1893*, vol. 1 (London: John Lane, 1896), 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Views and Reviews: A Selection of Uncollected Articles* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1932), 52.

vowels” in 1893, when this particular type of synaesthetic experience dominated scientific studies of the condition, implicated synaesthetic language in the perception of decadence as a pathological and sexually perverse movement.

This chapter examines Wilde’s conceptual and rhetorical development of synaesthesia in his poetry, plays and prose, as well as his critical essays. It also analyses his critical reception, as it was in this forum where anxieties about Wilde’s sensorial, sensual and synaesthetic approach to art attained their most fecund expression. Given Wilde’s formative role in the decadent movement, the chapter endeavours to broaden our understanding of ‘decadence’ through an analysis of synaesthesia’s centrality to Wilde’s work thereby attempting to characterise the differences between Aesthetic and decadent uses of synaesthesia. An examination of Wilde’s theoretical and rhetorical development of synaesthesia will not only augment our understanding of this distinction but will also illustrate Wilde’s formative role within its making.

For, indeed, Oscar Wilde’s example bridged Aestheticism and decadence whilst articulating the differences between these two schools. Readily adopting the title of aesthete and referring to Aestheticism as a movement that he closely aligned with himself, Wilde began his career as a writer and intellectual in the mid-1870s at Oxford, under Pater and Ruskin’s tutelage. His reputation flourished, however, during the nineties, when he was identified as a decadent after the initial publication of his scandalous novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in a single issue of *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* (1890), a reputable periodical based in Philadelphia that was known for publishing modern, principally American, fiction. This was followed by a purged and expanded version the next year, the novel now including a preface of provocative

epigrams released in anticipation in the *Fortnightly*.<sup>17</sup> In May of that year, Wilde's collection of critical essays, *Intentions*, was also published, comprising what are now regarded as among his most seminal works of criticism. But all of these essays first appeared within the context of upmarket and liberal mainstream monthly magazines that offered, as Brake notes, "the widest moral parameters in the British Press of the day"<sup>18</sup>: the *Nineteenth Century*, which had a circulation of approximately 20,000 and whose editor, John Knowles, encouraged "oppositional expression"<sup>19</sup>; and the prestigious *Fortnightly Review* (operating under the editorship of Frank Harris), the first to showcase several formative Aesthetic works, Pater's essay on Giorgione and "Style" among them.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, when Arthur Symons anonymously reviewed *Intentions* for the *Speaker* in 1891, Wilde's literary production finally justified the notoriety of his personality.<sup>21</sup> And

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<sup>17</sup> For a thorough discussion of the composition, circulation and reception of the 1890 and 1891 editions of *Dorian Gray*, see Joseph Bristow's "Introduction" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray: The 1890 and 1891 Texts* in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), xi-1x. The Preface appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in January 1891.

<sup>18</sup> Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Danson, *Wilde's Intentions: The Artist in his Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 21. *Intentions* is comprised of four essays: "Pen, Pencil and Poison: A Study in Green" which first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* (January 1889) under Frank Harris' editorship; "The Truth of Masks", which was originally published in the *Nineteenth Century* as "Shakespeare and Stage Costume" (May 1885); "The Decay of Lying: An Observation", also appearing in the *Nineteenth Century* (January 1889) as "The Decay of Lying: A Protest"; and "The Critic as Artist", which was published in two parts as "The True Function and Value of Criticism With Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing: A Dialogue" in the *Nineteenth Century* (July and September 1890)." Wilde's choice of periodicals is telling: both the *Nineteenth Century* and (to a slightly lesser degree) the *Fortnightly Review* pursued heterogeneity through their mutual commitment to publishing divergent philosophical, theological and scientific views, thereby resisting "an editorial position", Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 51. His decision to craft *Intentions* solely from essays appearing in these two journals, thus excluding his numerous contributions to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Women's world*, *The Court and Society Review*, *Queen* and *The Speaker*, is further significant. As Brake asserts: "He constructs himself in *Intentions* as the irreverent and youthful upstart who takes on and displaces the ageing gurus [Arnold and Pater]", *Ibid.*, 68. Wilde revised each of the aforementioned essays to varying degrees for *Intentions*. I will be focusing on the works as they appeared in *Intentions* (London: James R. Osgood, 1891), for the remainder of the chapter unless otherwise noted.

<sup>21</sup> Additionally, by 1891, Wilde's scandalous short story "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* after the *Fortnightly* declined publishing it; and his essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism"—his defense of *Dorian Gray* specifically, and of aesthetic freedom more broadly—was published by the *Fortnightly Review*. Furthermore, his prose works "Lord Author Saville's Crimes and

his personality, in Symons's opinion, was not only best characterised by the term 'decadence', but also, and far more importantly, appeared to characterise 'decadence' in and of itself:

[Oscar Wilde] is a typical figure, alike in the art of life and the art of literature, and, if he might be supposed for a moment to represent anything but himself, he would be the perfect representative of all that is meant by the modern use of the word Decadence.<sup>22</sup>

To understand what Symons meant by 'the modern use of the word Decadence', one might consider his most explicit comments on the matter two years later, when he published his essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893) in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, an illustrated periodical published in Britain and America and unique for featuring family material aimed at women readers alongside articles like Symons's. In this familiar essay, Symons wrote: "It has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods...an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing [sic] refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity...for its very disease of form, this literature is certainly typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious...[and is] really a new and beautiful and interesting disease." As Symons remarked, "healthy we cannot call it, and healthy it does not wish to be", thus adopting and subverting the anti-decadent rhetoric of the period.<sup>23</sup> Dellamora considers this characteristic of the movement: "decadence makes most sense as a set of interpretive strategies that work by systematically reversing, inverting, and otherwise unsettling

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Other Stories" and "A House of Pomegranates" were both published in 1891 by the recently established firm, James R. Osgood, McIlvaine and Co., the publisher of *Dorian Gray* and *Intentions*.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Symons, unsigned review in the *Speaker* (4 July 1891), 27. Later included in Symons's *A Study of Oscar Wilde* (1930).

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature", *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 87 (1893), 858-9. In addition to "The Decadent Movement in Literature", Pater's article "Apollo in Picardy" was also featured in this issue of the magazine.

commonly held assumptions.”<sup>24</sup> For rather than denying or rebuking the perception of decadence as perverse and pathological, Symons both confirmed and exalted these accusations. Huysmans’s novel *À Rebours* (1884)—prized by Dorian Gray and discussed in Wilde’s trials—was praised for being “all that is delicately depraved, all that is beautifully, curiously poisonous in modern art.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Des Esseintes’s synaesthetic propensities, his ability to discern “the melodic combinations of scents...the imagined harmonies of taste”, significantly underscored Symons’ construction of decadent sensibility. The essay ends with homage to Pater’s writing, the synaesthesia of which is also evoked: “words have their color, their music, their perfume...there is ‘some strangeness in the proportion of’ every beauty.”<sup>26</sup> That Symons considered Wilde representative ‘in the art of life and in the art of literature’ of all that was meant by ‘the modern use of the word Decadence’ was due, most likely, to *Dorian Gray*, a work as quintessentially ‘decadent’ as Pater’s *The Renaissance* was ‘Aesthetic.’ And indeed, it is the relationship that Wilde initiated, shaped and sustained with Pater to which we shall now turn.

## II. Oscar Wilde and Synaesthesia’s Decadent Revival

Wilde’s intertextual relationship or ‘dialogue’ with Pater presents among the most fertile avenues for assessing synaesthesia’s distinct role within decadent discourse.<sup>27</sup> Lawrence

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Dellamora, “Productive Decadence: ‘The Queer Comradship of Outlawed Thought’: Vernon Lee, Max Nordau and Oscar Wilde”, *New Literary History* 35:4 (2004), 529.

<sup>25</sup> Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature”, 866.

<sup>26</sup> By and large, Symons focused on French writers and artists. However, the essay ended in homage to Pater whose “words have their color, their music, their perfume...there is ‘some strangeness in the proportion of’ every beauty”, *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of Paterian intertextuality within Wilde’s works see Ian Small, “Intertextuality in Pater and Wilde”, *English Language in Transition*, Special Series 4 (1990), 57-66; for Wilde and Pater’s personal and ‘textual’ relationship, particularly in relation to *Dorian Gray*, see John Paul Riquelme, “Oscar

Danson (generously) characterises this ‘dialogue’ through the terms “invocation” and “revision”<sup>28</sup>, which have been adopted throughout this chapter. Other critics have focused more on Wilde’s habitual tendency to plagiarise, which many of Wilde’s contemporaries noted and found objectionable.<sup>29</sup> A survey of Wilde’s critical reception reveals the extent to which Wilde was seen to imitate rather than originate—to steal rather than borrow—on both stylistic and conceptual grounds. Whistler notoriously accused Wilde of plagiarising his ideas on art. Their feud—like their friendship—unfolded publicly through letters to the press and was then textually re-enacted by Wilde in “The Critic as Artist” (1890).<sup>30</sup> Pater was among Wilde’s greatest influences, and he invoked, revised and plagiarised substantial passages from *The Renaissance*—his “golden book”<sup>31</sup>—throughout his works. In *De Profundis* (1897/1905), Wilde’s autobiographical prison-epistle to Lord Alfred Douglas, he alluded to “the strange influence” of Pater’s text on his life, a sentiment recalling the captivating affect of the “poisonous book”<sup>32</sup> on Dorian Gray. Pater’s essay on Giorgione was the work Wilde most frequently pillaged from and adapted; it played a central part in shaping Wilde’s aesthetic ideas. Wilde’s re-workings of Pater’s theoretical

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Wilde’s Aesthetic Gothic: Walter Pater, Dark Enlightenment, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 46:3 (2000), 609-31.

<sup>28</sup> Pater’s intertextual presence in *Intentions* is addressed at length in Danson, *Wilde’s Intentions*.

<sup>29</sup> Paul K. Saint-Amour compellingly argues that Wilde’s plagiaristic tendencies exemplify the tension between ‘literary commodity’ and ‘oral proliferation’ galvanised by newly renovated copyright laws from the 1840s onwards in Britain in “Oscar Wilde: Orality, Literary Property and Crimes of Writing”, *Nineteenth Century Literature* 55 (2000), 59-91. See as well Josephine Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde’s Profession: Writing and the Culture of Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> In the essay, the older and wiser character, Gilbert (Wilde), convinces his impressionable friend Ernest (Whistler) that his views on the role of the art critic and the function of art criticism are naive and uninformed. Wilde paraphrases from, and elaborates, Whistler’s ‘myth of the artist’ in the opening of the essay, which Whistler developed in his ‘Ten O’clock’ lecture. Indeed, the work draws substantially from their feud, underscoring several of their ideological differences on the nature of art and the relationship between text and non-text.

<sup>31</sup> From *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (1958), quoted in Danson, *Wilde’s Intentions*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 290.

views in “Giorgione” saliently reflect the extent to which synaesthesia came to be redeveloped during the *fin de siècle* as a decadent metaphor and metaphor of decadence.

In 1882, Wilde arrived in America to give a lecture tour throughout the United States and Canada in conjunction with Gilbert and Sullivan’s popular opera *Patience, or Bunthorne’s Bride* (1881). *Patience* satirised Britain’s aesthetes, whilst Wilde’s lectures, which ranged in topic from the decorative arts to women’s fashion, provided American audiences with a living example of a British dandy. Operating under the self-appointed guise of ‘Professor of Aesthetics’, Wilde looked to Pater for guidance and “Giorgione” for textual support when crafting his opening, keynote lecture, “The English Renaissance of Art” (1882).<sup>33</sup> For those familiar with *The Renaissance*, and with “Giorgione” in particular, Wilde’s ideas would have been noticeably, if not uncomfortably, familiar.<sup>34</sup> The lecture amounts to a compressed version of *The Renaissance* (with notable Swinburnian reverberations): it opens as the “Preface” opens; it closes with an almost word-for-word rendition of the “Conclusion”; and the bulk of its interior material is taken from the “abstract language” of “Giorgione.”<sup>35</sup>

If Pater focused primarily on the Italian Renaissance, Wilde turns his attention to England’s new Renaissance which, as he conceived it, began with Keats, included the Pre-Raphaelites but found its finest expression in the Aesthetic movement and thus,

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<sup>33</sup> “The English Renaissance of Art” was first given in the Chickering Hall in New York on January 9, 1882. The following day, the *New York Tribune* published excerpts from the lecture, that were later reprinted in a variety of syndicates to then appear in unauthorised editions. The version of the lecture that I am using appears in Robert Ross’s posthumous edition of Wilde’s works, *Miscellanies* (London: Methuen and Co., 1908). Ross prefaces the essay by alluding to the “corrections and additions made by the author in manuscript”, of which four manuscripts existed. As Ross states: “These have all been collated and the text here given contains, as nearly as possible, the lecture in its original form as delivered by the author during his stay in the United States”, *Miscellanies*, 242.

<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of Pater’s reception in the United States, see David Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature Against the Grain 1890-1926* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007)

<sup>35</sup> Ross (ed.), *Miscellanies*, 243, 261, 274.

presumably, in both his and Pater's works. In addition to a belief in correlations between the arts, Wilde identifies a "passion for physical beauty, [an] exclusive attention to form...[and the pursuit of] new subjects for poetry, new forms of art, new intellectual and imaginative enjoyments"<sup>36</sup>, as among the defining characteristics of England's rebirth. He then 'paraphrases' (or plagiarizes) and elucidates Pater's theory of "*Anders-streben*":

And health in art— what is that? It has nothing to do with a sane criticism of life. There is more health in Baudelaire than there is in [Kingsley]. Health is the artist's recognition of the limitations of the form in which he works. It is the honour and the homage which he gives to the material he uses—whether it be language with its glories, or marble or pigment with their glories—knowing that the true brotherhood of the arts consists not in their borrowing one another's method, but in their producing, each of them by its own individual means, each of them by keeping its objective limits, the same unique artistic delight. The delight is like that given to us by music— for music is the art in which form and matter are always one, the art whose subject cannot be separated from the method of its expression, the art which most completely realises the artistic ideal, and is the condition to which all the other arts are constantly aspiring.<sup>37</sup>

Wilde's allusion to honouring formal limitations (rather than "borrowing one another's methods") as the only appropriate means for procuring 'artistic delight' recalls precisely Pater's development of '*Anders-streben*.' It also anticipates Nordau's discussion of language becoming music in *Degeneration*. Unsurprisingly, Wilde encourages this musical impulse. For later in the lecture, he argues that what accounts for the perfection of Rossetti, Morris and Swinburne (whom he links to Gautier) is, "a perfect precision and choice of language, a style flawless and fearless, a seeking for all sweet and precious melodies and a sustaining consciousness of the musical value of each word as opposed to that value which is merely intellectual."<sup>38</sup> As with Pater, music is positioned at the top of the aesthetic hierarchy, as an aspirant condition. And Wilde's musical paradigm is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 262.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 253.

likewise derived from the perception of the inseparability of “form” and “matter”, which Wilde defines in relation to “harmony”, art’s “only” and “highest law.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, synaesthetic experimentations are positioned at the crux of this new English Renaissance.

However, these Paterian ‘invocations’ are richly balanced by Wildean ‘revisions’, most immediately, Wilde’s allusion to ‘health in art.’ Prefiguring Symons’ analysis of the decadent movement by nearly a decade, the lecture foreshadows the popular perception of the movement as pathological or “unhealthy”, confirming Dellamora’s characterisation of decadent style as subversive through its tendency rhetorically to ‘invert’ popular assumptions. It also demonstrates Wilde’s willingness to be confrontational: he steers the notion of “health” away from a didactic definition towards a wholly formal one, derived from an artist’s relationship to their materials and craft (and not from a normative conception of the spectator’s wellbeing). Equally provocative is Wilde’s emphasis on “the true *brotherhood* of the arts.” It blatantly dismisses the far more conventional phrase and theory of the sister-arts, as Lessing explored in his *Laocoon* (1766), a text Pater politely critiques in “Giorgione.”<sup>40</sup> Wilde’s re-gendering firmly circumscribes these aesthetic interrelationships within a male-to-male, homosocial dialectic. His preference for Baudelaire over Kingsley further reveals his interest in being shocking as well as contemporaneous: the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* led to a well-publicised trial in 1857; Kingsley, on the other hand, as a novelist, Reverend, educator, and by that token, symbol of ‘respectability’, represented the kind of writer Wilde spent much of his career mocking. And, indeed, Wilde’s probing engagement with his era and audience is not just a notable feature of the lecture, but a characteristic of his oeuvre and, by and large, a

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>40</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, 136. Wilde dismisses the “moralist” Lessing in “The Critic as Artist” in *Intentions*, 116.

departure from Pater, who rarely alluded to or reviewed modern artists in his essay-collections. When Pater reflected on his milieu, this was usually (safely) couched in other time periods. Furthermore, Wilde's development of synaesthesia unfolds within a lecture that is noticeably foreboding: "And we in our Renaissance are seeking to create a sovereignty that will still be England's when her yellow leopards have grown weary of wars and the rose of her shield is crimsoned no more with the blood of battle."<sup>41</sup> If Pater gazed backwards to frame the present, Wilde spoke of his modern context in relation to its uncertain and ambivalent future. Consequently, and as this chapter aims to demonstrate, Wilde's theoretical construction of synaesthesia as a *decadent* metaphor—throughout his writing career and within the various modes of textual production he pursued—stemmed from and confirmed a far more explicit preoccupation with the relationship between art and the state of British culture during the *fin de siècle*.

This is evident in "Pen, Pencil and Poison: A Study in Green" (1889), Wilde's biographical essay on Thomas Griffins Wainewright, the painter, forger, murderer, stylist and prototypical dandy, enamoured with "gems", "Persian carpets", "book-binding", and "fine clothes."<sup>42</sup> Although the essay returns to the Paterian notion of the arts borrowing from each other, it situates this impulse in direct relation to Wilde's perception of his modern age:

Were this description carefully re-written [in reference to a passage from Wainewright's work on Giulio Romano], it would be quite admirable. The conception of making a prose poem out of paint is excellent. Much of the best modern literature springs from the same aim. In a very ugly and sensible age the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ross (ed.), *Miscellanies*, 269.

<sup>42</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

That such aesthetic transactions result in greater or more affective artworks is common to Pater and Wilde. What is immediately different, however, is Wilde's emphasis on his "very ugly and sensible age", and the correlation he draws between this perception of his milieu and synaesthesia. Unlike Pater (and Baudelaire and Swinburne), Wilde is not making a generalised or axiomatic 'truth-claim' on inherent tendencies within the arts. Instead, he gives us a causal relationship: because (or if) the age is ugly, the arts borrow from each other and not from life.

This causality is both rhetorically amplified and conceptually expanded in Wilde's dialogic essay, "The Decay of Lying" (1889), its publication in the *Nineteenth Century* coinciding with that of "Pen, Pencil and Poison" in the *Fortnightly*. These monthlies shared a common readership, and the ideas developed in both works would have served as powerful counterpoints to each other. Wilde was no doubt aware that his racy profile of Wainewright would be both supplemented and augmented by the sentiments expounded in "The Decay of Lying", among his more formative critical works, and a text he himself considered central (it opens *Intentions*). For in this essay, aesthetic expression and imaginative freedom are explicitly defined as involving a *necessary* rejection of external resemblance in general terms, and Realism more specifically. Wilde's construction of duplicity serves as a surrogate for inventiveness: "What Art reveals to us is Nature's lack of design...[it] is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have no art at all."<sup>44</sup> The essay's advocacy of a highly self-referential formalism signifies Wilde's intervention in debates over the relationship between art and mimesis; Wilde is clearly challenging Ruskin here. More importantly, however, and in relation to this, one finds a powerful critique levied at

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

‘public’ sensibility. For nature’s imperfection is eclipsed by culture’s (i.e. the problematic relationship between public opinion, consumption and aesthetic freedom), which propels the suggestion—frequently repeated by Vivian (Wilde’s doppelgänger)—that, “Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself.”<sup>45</sup> This assertion subtly recasts the notion that the greatest arts reject life, and borrow from each other. Throughout the essay, synaesthesia manifests itself both as a method of critique and a mode of disassociation.

Wilde’s conception of his age as “ugly” and “sensible” persists throughout his corpus, and is crucial, then, to understanding his gravitation towards an intersensory, self-referential aesthetic. In *Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry laments the vulgarity of his time. His exaltation of Dorian’s unchanging beauty derives from his perception that Dorian has escaped the stain of the Victorian age and of age more generally. In the opening scene of Wilde’s play *A Good Woman*, later re-titled *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), Lady Windermere remarks to Lord Darlington, “I should be sorry to be on the same level as an age like this”<sup>46</sup>, a sentiment returned to time and again throughout Wilde’s Society dramas. And, certainly, “The English Renaissance of Art” repetitively parodies the British public’s vulgar, consumptive relationship to aesthetics:

If you ask nine-tenths of the British public what is the meaning of the word aesthetics, they will tell you it is the French for affectation or the German for a dado; and if you inquire about the pre-Raphaelites you will hear something about an eccentric lot of young men to whom a sort of divine crookedness and holy awkwardness in drawing were the chief objects of art. To know nothing about their great men is one of the necessary elements of English education.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the lecture, Wilde attacks the detrimental role of consumerist culture in relation to art: “For there can be no great sculpture without a beautiful national life, and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Raby (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 336.

<sup>47</sup> Ross (ed.), *Miscellanies*, 249-50.

the commercial spirit of England has killed that; no great drama without a noble national life, and the commercial spirit of England has killed that too.”<sup>48</sup> This critique continues to ventilate and ferment seven years later in “The Decay of Lying.” It is precisely the impact of the public’s consumption of art on artists that leads Wilde to characterise lying (or veiling rather than mirroring), as among the sincerest and most imaginative forms of personal expression. In these respects, Wilde’s diatribe—his argumentativeness—places him nearer to Whistler than Pater.

The sense of cultural stagnation similarly permeates Wilde’s only verse-collection *Poems* (1881). In his sonnet ‘To Milton’ he laments: “This gorgeous fiery-coloured world of ours/ seems fallen into ashes dull and grey.” England, with a “triple empire in her hand” and controlled by “ignorant demagogues” is a paradise lost.<sup>49</sup> His poem “Quantum Mutata” reinforces this view: “How comes it then that from such high estate/We have thus fallen.”<sup>50</sup> And in ‘Humanidad’, a ‘very ugly and sensible age’ so unworthy of its “great inheritance” is directly attributed to aesthetic impoverishment<sup>51</sup>:

Where is that Art which bade the Angels sing  
Through Lincoln’s lofty choir, till the air  
Seems from such marble harmonies to ring  
With sweeter song than common lips can dare  
To draw from actual reed? ah! Where is now  
The cunning hand which made the flowering hawthorn branches bow”<sup>52</sup>

Wilde’s synaesthetic metaphor of “marble harmonies”, in which music materialises through its juxtaposition with sculpture, represents what ‘common lips’ cannot bring: cultural rejuvenation. And as the poem closes, Wilde writes: “Somehow the grace, the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 263-4.

<sup>49</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Poems* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1881), 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 219.

bloom of things has flown/And of all men we are most wretched who/Must live each other's lives and not our own."<sup>53</sup>

Wilde's tendency to subvert the traditional trajectory of mimesis and to place 'aesthetics' above 'ethics' was provocative as well as humanistic. Although Wilde's antagonistic views on 'public opinion' and bourgeois sensibility as expressed in the essays comprising *Intentions* echo many of Whistler's statements, his reasons for this were in keeping with Pater's. Proposing in texts such as "The Critic as Artist" and "The Decay of Lying" that art should operate unfettered from moral or social obligations, Wilde did not discredit nor deny the role of art in guiding and shaping the individual, morally and socially (for better or worse). If art aspired towards the condition of beauty, life would follow this progression. Thus, in "The Decay of Lying" the suggestion that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life", is not simply a provocative observation, it is also a hopeful ideal. For as the essay further develops: "Art never harms itself by keeping aloof from the social problems of the day: rather, by so doing, it more completely realises for us that which we desire."<sup>54</sup> Aesthetic perfection is blatantly circumscribed within a self-referential system of art. Beauty is defined as a turning inwards to reference its own making:

Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics; and it is this, more than that vital connection between form and substance, on which Mr. Pater dwells, that makes music the type of all arts...the highest art rejects the burden of the human spirit, and gains more from a new medium or a fresh material than she does from any enthusiasm for art, or from any lofty passion, or from any great awakening of the human consciousness. She develops purely on her own lines. She is not symbolic of any age. It is the ages that are her symbols.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>54</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 43.

Again, Wilde both invokes and deviates from Pater, whose theory of “*Anders-streben*” and musical paradigm Wilde relocates *within* his own age and yet, *away* from it as well.<sup>56</sup> The essay retains Pater’s musical ideal, but repudiates its construction: its *raison d’être* is reformatted to fit the “principle of [Wilde’s] new aesthetics” or the principle of a decadent aesthetic. For Wilde suggests that it is not the vital relationship between “form” and “substance” or ‘sign’ and ‘signifier’ that makes music ideal, as Pater stipulated in “Giorgione.” Rather, what constitutes its symbolic strength is the perception that music naturally “rejects the burden of the human spirit.” The distance Wilde forges between himself and Pater is significant, in part because it is so explicit: by volubly reclaiming (or rebuking) Pater, Wilde stakes out his own decadent identity.

Asserting that the best art gains from ‘new mediums’ and ‘fresh materials’, Wilde rewords Pater’s argument in “Giorgione” concerning the arts ‘lending each other new forces.’ The advantage of an intersensory aesthetic that has ‘developed purely on her own lines’ and found its ‘own perfection within itself’, is a beauty that lingers outside of its particular time and culture. Wilde returns to this politicized notion of atemporality throughout the “The Decay of Lying”: “Art never expresses anything but itself...so far from being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history it preserves for us is the history of its own progress.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, art—or ‘the aesthetic’ as abstract noun—is not simply ahistorical, but anti-historicity; then, and only then, can art elicit any form of permanent delight. Yet, the nature of this permanency, rather than being simply ‘transcendent’ (as Swinburne often characterized it), is far more personal and, and as we shall see, in keeping with Wilde’s conception of *personality*.

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<sup>56</sup> Swinburne’s essay on Hugo’s *L’Année Terrible* is also very much present here: “Art knows nothing of time; for her there is but one tense, and all ages in her sight are alike present”, *Essays and Studies*, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 52-3.

Thus, whilst Pater observes an intrinsic impulse within the arts to pass into the conditions of other forms, Wilde localises this impulse within the artist and his era. His development of synaesthesia, embedded as it is within the context of his “ugly age”, can be read as a distancing from, and critique of, middle-class culture, or, as Holbrook Jackson observed in his pioneering study of decadence, *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913), an effort to “astonish” the mainstream.<sup>58</sup> Jackson interpreted synaesthetic innovations in the arts as among the most strategic methods used by the decadents to ‘interrogate’ and resist conformity.<sup>59</sup> Wilde’s work persistently confirms Jackson’s observation: it was the artist’s duty to craft prose-poems and sonnet-music because the age was too ‘sensible’, ‘crude’, ‘vulgar’, and ‘sordid’ to sustain or inspire an aesthetic that could in turn beautify culture. Highly contextual and reactive, Wilde’s development of synaesthesia was a volatile and culturally engaged performance: the self-referentialism of art—its turning inwards—was more like ‘a facing away from.’

The sense of decadence as a conflicted retreat from the world—socially, linguistically, theoretically, physically—is evident in “The Critic as Artist”, a ‘private’ dialogue which opens in an equally private or ‘elite’ space—“The library of a house in Piccadilly, overlooking Green Park”—thus explicitly removed from the “mediocrity” of the “English public.”<sup>60</sup> As Gilbert and Ernest converse, Wilde’s views on the role and function of ‘aesthetic criticism’ and the nature of art unfold away from, and in relation to (in Gilbert’s words) the “modern puritans”, the burgeoning institution of “modern

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<sup>58</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas and the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: M Kennerly, 1913), 88.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 143. See Jackson’s chapter “Purple Patches and Fine Phrases.”

<sup>60</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 95.

journalism” and “Public Opinion”, which united decadent artists in a common struggle.<sup>61</sup>

A year later, in Wilde’s defence of the *Lippincott’s* issue of *Dorian Gray*, in a letter to the liberal *Daily Chronicle* (30 June, 1890), he returned to the notion of Aestheticism as a rejection of “Public Opinion”:

The aesthetic movement [which] produced certain colours, subtle in their liveliness, was and is our *reaction* against the crude primaries of a doubtless more respectable but certainly less cultivated age. My story is an essay in decorative art. It reacts against the crude brutality of plain realism. It is poisonous if you like, but you cannot deny that it is also perfect, and perfection is what we artists aim at.<sup>62</sup>

In doing so, he explicitly positioned ‘art for art’ *against* the mainstream, contextualising the movement’s radicalism as an intentionally subversive gesture, as well as, simultaneously, a strategy for interrogation.

Regenia Gagnier argues in *Idylls of the Marketplace* (1987), that Wilde’s aestheticism “was an engaged protest against Victorian utility, rationality, scientific factuality, and technological progress—in fact against the whole middle class drive to conform.”<sup>63</sup> Asserting that the contradictions in Wilde’s works—paradox negating paradox—are resolved only when one considers the ways in which he pandered to his audiences, Gagnier suggests that Wilde cultivated two distinct prose styles intended for two distinct audiences. His witticisms and paradoxes reached out to the general public (in “straight” press forums such as the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Nineteenth Century*); his language of “jewelled seduction”, on the other hand, which encompassed his rhetorical development of synaesthesia, was for “likeminded” individuals.<sup>64</sup> This division is also

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<sup>61</sup> As early as “The English Renaissance of Art”, one finds Wilde articulating his aesthetic sensibilities in terms of resistance, in this instance, as “a reaction against the empty conventional workmanship, the lax execution of previous poetry and painting”, Ross (ed.), *Miscellanies*, 253.

<sup>62</sup> Wilde, ‘To the Editor of the Daily Chronicle’, 30 June 1890 in Rupert Hart-Davis and Merlin Holland (eds.), *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Henry Holt Co., 2000), 428.

<sup>63</sup> Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

evident when one considers Wilde's journalism. As Brake demonstrates, his contributions to the *Woman's World* where he served as editor between 1887-1890 were "significantly implicated in the respective discourse of which it was a part." Although, a magazine aimed for women readers, "the coding of its contents and the attraction of its space to Wilde [was] clarified by the contents of the gay press and other alternative journals."<sup>65</sup> The term 'doubleness' saliently contextualises Wilde's development of synaesthesia: his movement towards an self-referential, intersensory aesthetic accentuates the dialectic tension between 'public' and 'private' or, as Gagnier puts it, "the place of art in a consumerist society."<sup>66</sup>

Artistic constraints (i.e. "Public Opinion") propelled Wilde towards an aesthetic that resisted public taste and public reference, or, rather, towards a theory of 'the aesthetic' that existed in opposition, and as an alternative, to public sensibility. By encouraging aesthetic interrelationships that *explicitly* denied the role of history, culture, event, nature or "external resemblance" within the aesthetic realm, Wilde incorporated this very resistance into his development of synaesthesia. His highly sensorial, synaesthetic and allusive language of 'jewelled seduction' can be read, then, as an effort to craft a private discourse, encoded and charged for an equally private dialogue or audience: the term 'private', here, signifying both allusiveness and self-referentiality, qualities attributed to decadent style. It is not coincidental, for instance, that Wilde's most sensorial works, *Dorian Gray* and his play *Salomé* (1892), were also his most contested. Critics found their subject matter odious, but they also, as we shall see, objected to his

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<sup>65</sup> Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 130. See Brake's chapter "Oscar Wilde and *the Woman's World*." See as well Anya Clayworth, "The *Woman's World*: Oscar Wilde as Editor", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 30 (1997), 84-101.

<sup>66</sup> Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, 5.

style, detecting latent counter-narratives within his very language. As early as *Poems* (1881), Wilde's first major publication, one finds throughout his critical reception an uneasiness with his sensorial and sensual discourse and the perception that it was perhaps a 'pose' in itself. *Poems's* critical reception importantly illustrates how Wilde's work was *reluctantly* classified as 'Aesthetic' and more frequently seen to exemplify a new movement within art, which was yet to be named.

That Hamilton included a lengthy chapter on Wilde in his study of the Aesthetic movement testifies to Wilde's budding notoriety in the early 1880s and to the popular perception of him as a follower of 'art for art.' Yet, a closer examination of Hamilton's views on Wilde reveals a slight discomfort with placing him in the same school as Swinburne and Rossetti. Commending Wilde's style for being "classical, sad, voluptuous, and full of passages of the most exquisitely musical word painting"—the expression "musical word painting" suggestive of synaesthesia—Hamilton ultimately found it "overluscious."<sup>67</sup> This observation (inflected with sexual nuance: "juicy", "moist", "succulent") recalls the description of Bunthorne's poetry in *Patience*: "a wild, weird, fleshy thing."<sup>68</sup> Modelled after Wilde (and Whistler), Bunthorne is a melancholic, effete poet—qualities paralleling his poetry's. The terms given are non-textual, bodily and excessive: they appear to connote Bunthorne's Aesthetic or decadent sensibilities, which his prosodic style imitates.

In an unsigned review in the *Athenaeum*, which had among the largest circulations of any weekly the critic argued that, "Mr. Wilde's volume of poems may be regarded as the evangel of a new creed", and that he was "the apostle of the new

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<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> Ian Bradley (intro.), *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 273.

worship.”<sup>69</sup> Comments such as these had also been directed at Swinburne. But in Wilde’s case they suggested that his aesthetic was not quite ‘Aesthetic’, indeed, not quite Swinburnian. Oscar Browning, in his predominantly sympathetic review for the *Academy*, argued that Wilde had “rightly or wrongly been marked out as representing the newest development of academical [sic] aestheticism” and that widespread interest in *Poems* had resulted from a desire to know what this “new [teacher]” had to say. Additionally, Browning asserted that *Poems* exemplified, “the message of the new gospel” and that “England had been enriched by a new poet.” He also argued that the collection was more like an “aesthetic object” than a book, with “its brilliant binding and its luxury of type and paper”, and astutely likened its overall structure to “a cunning concert” within which “songs and ballads alternate with longer flights of melody.”<sup>70</sup>

The musical allusiveness Browning detected (and Browning spoke of its musicality frequently) was a notable feature of *Poems*. ‘Serenade’ and ‘Endymion’ were both “(for music)”; while ‘In the Gold Room: A Harmony’, relied on Whistlerian nomenclature.<sup>71</sup> Wilde’s ‘Impression’ poems, gesturing towards the type of criticism practiced and championed by the aesthetes, also distinctly referred to painting in itself and to the French Impressionists in particular, whom Wilde playfully caricatured through synaesthesia in “The Critic as Artist”: “I like them. Their keynote, with its variations in lilac, was an era in colour.”<sup>72</sup> In ‘Impression du Matin’ the poem’s synaesthetic qualities confirmed Wilde’s admiration for Whistler: “The Thames nocturne of blue and gold/ Changed to a Harmony in grey:/ A barge with ochre-coloured hay/ Dropt from the wharf:

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<sup>69</sup> Unsigned Review, *Athenaeum* (23 July 1881), 103-4. The *Athenaeum* also had a policy of anonymity.

<sup>70</sup> Oscar Browning, “Rev of Poems”, *Academy* 48 (1881), 85.

<sup>71</sup> Wilde, *Poems*, 92, 95, 148.

<sup>72</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 195. Ronald L. Burnside, “Musical Impressionism: The Early History of The Term”, *The Musical Quarterly* (1980), 522-37.

and chill and cold.”<sup>73</sup> By using music (“nocturne”, “harmony”) to speak of colour, Wilde, like Whistler, directed the spectator’s gaze away from the representational towards the abstract. His juxtaposition of diverse aesthetic forms not only created a world of art removed from the “sordid perils of existence”, but also amounted to a carefully orchestrated intertextuality that wedded radical art movements and artists in Britain and France. If Wilde’s poetry was derivative (an almost unanimous claim amongst his critics), his approach to derivation was in itself also encoded.

This is acutely evident in one of Wilde’s later poems, ‘Symphony in Yellow’, which appeared in the *Centennial Magazine: An Australian Monthly* (1888).<sup>74</sup> The title readily alludes to Gautier’s poem ‘Symphonie en Blanc Majeur’, also referenced in “The Critic as Artist” as “that flawless masterpiece of colour and music which may have suggested the type as well as the titles of many of [the Impressionist’s] best pictures.”<sup>75</sup> When Dorian encounters Gautier’s influential verse-collection *Émaux et Camées* (1852) which included this poem, Wilde returned to synaesthetic metaphor: “The mere lines looked to him like those straight lines of turquoise-blue that follow one as one pushes out to the Lido. The sudden flashes of colour reminded him of the gleam of the opal-and-iris throated birds.”<sup>76</sup> By ‘transforming’ the verse into pure, kinetic colour, synaesthesia registered the text’s aesthetic excellence as a visual effect. And Dorian’s experience with the work—its affectivity—is enhanced through Wilde’s invocation of Venice, the super-sensorial city. Opening on a bridge along the Thames and alternating yellow images throughout the three stanzas (“a yellow butterfly”, “yellow hay”, “a yellow silken scarf”

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<sup>73</sup> Wilde, *Poems*, 85.

<sup>74</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘Symphony in Yellow’, *The Centennial Magazine: An Australian Monthly* 1:1 (September 1888), 437.

<sup>75</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 195.

<sup>76</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 305.

and “yellow leaves”), ‘Symphony in Yellow’ also firmly alludes to the works comprising Whistler’s ‘nocturne period’, and by extension the Ruskin controversy. If art referred to art, artist also referred to artist. Wilde’s use of synaesthesia therefore operated on two, mutually dependent levels. His experimental juxtaposition of musical terms and colour broadened the ‘aesthetic effect’ of language. But synaesthetic metaphor also self-consciously positioned Wilde within the company of Gautier, Whistler, Swinburne and Baudelaire and, thus, firmly within the conventions of ‘art for art.’ His rhetorical development of synaesthesia manifested itself, then, as a self-announcement, a declaration of his aesthetic sensibilities and of the aesthetic community he desired to be associated with.

If Browning’s *Academy* review contained praise for England’s newest poet, this was balanced by unease and a distinct ambivalence towards Wilde’s sensorial style. For Wilde had an “audacious sensuousness”<sup>77</sup>; his work appeared to be guided more by form (music) than content (appropriate subject matter). To illustrate this point, Browning signalled out ‘Charmides’, the longest poem in the collection and the one triggering the most moral outrage: it was the only poem Wilde substantially revised in the fourth and fifth editions of the text. ‘Charmides’ tells the story of a young Greek sailor who enters Athena’s shrine and ravishes her image. In the nineteenth and twenty-third stanzas, precisely the ones Wilde cancelled from later editions, he divides his readers into ‘sinners’ and ‘innocents’ and argues that the latter are unsuitable readers of his work, thereby returning us to the notion of a ‘private’ dialogue, albeit more literally:

Those who have never known a lover’s sin  
Let them not read my ditty, it will be  
To their dull ears so musicless [sic] and thin

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<sup>77</sup> Browning, “*Poems*”, 85.

That they will have no joy of it, but ye  
To whose wan cheeks now creeps the lingering smile,  
Ye who have learned who Eros is, — O listen yet a-while

They who have never seen the daylight peer  
Into a darkened room, and drawn the curtain,  
And with dull eyes and wearied from some dear  
And worshipped body risen, they for certain  
Will never know of what I try to sing,  
How long the last kiss was, how fond and late his lingering.<sup>78</sup>

The “innocents” are “musicless”: deaf, then, to the meaning that is embedded within cadence or form alone. While Browning found ‘Charmides’ “filled with music, beauty, imagination, and power”, he considered its story “repulsive”: “Mr. Wilde has no magic to veil the hideousness of a sensuality which feeds on statues and dead bodies.”<sup>79</sup> That Browning spoke of Wilde’s inability to “veil” his “hideous sensuality” illuminates his sense of Wilde’s discourse as encoded.

While reviewers found *Poems* overly luscious, *Dorian Gray* (both versions) provoked the greatest critical backlash. Operating under the orchestrated influence of Lord Henry, Dorian’s pursuit of sensations above all else was continuously discussed in Wilde’s trials, as it had been in critical reviews of the work, reflecting the extent to which a life submerged in sensorial pleasure was dangerously unsettling. For *Dorian Gray* capitalized on the notion of ‘aesthetic effect’: among other things, the text serves as a powerful illustration of how individuals with, in Pater’s words, “the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects”<sup>80</sup> succumb to the influence of aesthetic objects and personalities—books, portraits, musical works and persons. Unsurprisingly, in the high Tory *St. James Gazette* (June 24, 1890), an anonymous critic

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<sup>78</sup> Olivier Alexis, “Two Cancelled Stanzas of ‘Charmides’ in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> editions of Wilde’s *Poems*” in *The Victorian Web*: scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/victorian/authors/wilde/alexis1.html.

<sup>79</sup> Browning, “*Poems*”, 85.

<sup>80</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, xii.

(later identified as Samuel H. Jeyes) in an article entitled “A Study in Puppydom”, grouped Wilde with the “garbage of French *Decadents*” and argued that *Dorian Gray* had been written by a “simpleton [poseur]” and would “offend the nostrils of decent persons.”<sup>81</sup> On three occasions, the critic alluded to the text as redolent or “malodorous”, thereby using terms pertaining to smell—the least developed or most ‘primitive’ of the senses—to enhance the perception of the novel’s weaknesses, a strategy also employed by Buchanan. Pursuing pleasure was also a highly gendered activity as well. For the critic linked the effeminacy of Wilde’s protagonists to their delight in sensorial experiences.

Bristow argues that it was not until after Wilde’s trial that his persona became “radically refashioned as that of a pathological being: a degraded degenerate whose effeminate bearing coincided with increasingly popularized notions of the invert who, according to some sexologists, contained a woman’s soul within his male body.”<sup>82</sup> The critical reception of the *Lippincott’s* version of *Dorian Gray* suggests otherwise. If anything, the perception of Wilde as a ‘degraded degenerate’ only became more *explicit* and refined after the trial. That Wilde’s “puppies” (the novel’s central characters) had “romantic friendship[s]” (a clear allusion to their perceived homoeroticism, further augmented by the reviewer’s reference to Grant Allen’s “licentious theory of the sexual relations”) was discussed in relation to their “delight in plucking daisies and playing with them, and sometimes by drinking ‘something with strawberry in it.’”<sup>83</sup> Dorian’s leisured lifestyle, his connoisseurship of sensorial pleasures ‘simply for their own sake’ were interpreted as ‘feminine’ and ‘effeminate’, a sign of his unmanly or ‘inverted’ interests.

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<sup>81</sup> Unsigned Review, *St. James’s Gazette* (24 June 1890), 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 5.

<sup>83</sup> Unsigned Review, *St. James’s Gazette* (24 June 1890), 3-4

Echoing the *St. James's Gazette*, a reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* (June 30, 1890) suggested that the text had been “spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents” and was an “unclean” and “poisonous book” that reeked of “mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrifaction.” *Dorian Gray* had the potential to “be horrible and fascinating but for its *effeminate* frivolity.” Furthermore, the reviewer described Lord Henry as a “half-angel and half-ape” because of Lord Henry’s unwavering endorsement of living for momentary passions. This social Darwinian reading was extended acerbically to the novel’s supposed ‘moral’: “When you feel yourself becoming too angelic you cannot do better than to rush out and make a beast of yourself.”<sup>84</sup> In an unsigned notice in the imperialist *Scots Observer* (July 5, 1890) under W.E. Henley’s editorship, it was suggested that the novel was “false art—for its interest is medico-legal” and that it “[dealt] with matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department...discreditable alike to author and editor.” The review (probably written by Henley’s assistant, Charles Whibley) concluded by saying that Wilde “can write for none but outlawed nobleman”, a pointed allusion to the Cleveland Street scandal and an ironic confirmation of Wilde’s own sentiment in the cancelled stanzas of ‘Charmides’ that only ‘sinners’ could truly appreciate his work.<sup>85</sup> For the remaining summer, “under the general banner ‘Art and Morality’, the *Scots Observer* mounted a polemical debate in which Wilde figured alongside Zola as an emblem of modern degeneracy.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Unsigned Review, *Daily Chronicle* (30 June 1890), 7.

<sup>85</sup> Unsigned Notice, *Scots Observer* (5 July 1890), 181. In July 1889, the General Post Office was closed after it was discovered that several telegraph boys were also working in a brothel on Cleveland Street which high profile figures attended. H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Cleveland Street Scandal* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1976).

<sup>86</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, xix.

The tone and content of these criticisms illuminates the extent to which decadent writing triggered and reflected a variety of cultural anxieties relating to class, degeneracy, national identity, homoeroticism and masculinity, in part, because it encouraged a ‘passionate’ life steeped in sensorial activities and because this unfolded within an excessively sensorial linguistic style. Wilde anticipated these anxieties, ingeniously addressing and incorporating them into the novel:

The worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are conscious of sharing with the less organized forms of existence. But it appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or kill them into pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic...Yes, there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely Puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be...it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.<sup>87</sup>

Paraphrasing from Pater’s “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*, Dorian represents such a misled youth. He worships the senses without consequence (experience in itself is the aim) and this pursuit is positioned in opposition to what Wilde terms “Puritanism” here, and “Public Opinion” (in all its various forms) in his critical essays of the period. The ‘new Hedonism’ encouraged by Lord Henry is characterized by excess: to worship the senses for the sense’s sake insinuates an utter lack of self-control shared by ‘less organized forms of existence.’ Rather than allowing for an analogy between sensorial pleasure and degeneracy, Dorian re-conceives of sensorial pleasure in spiritual terms

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 278-9.

within which a body-mind duality is subverted: the intellect is at the service of the senses. Dorian's theory of a successful life here parallels Wilde's aesthetic views as expressed in "The Decay of Lying" for example, in that subject-matter (depth) comes under the influence of, or is subsumed by, formal qualities (surface).

The novel's sensorial style is readily evident from the opening page: "The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink flowering-thorn." In addition to these smells, Wilde includes the smoke from Lord Henry's "innumerable cigarettes" and the "honey-sweet blossoms of a laburnum."<sup>88</sup> As Wilde draws attention to olfaction (mimicked by his critics), he also foreshadows the most surreal event in the text, an aging portrait and an un-aging man:

And now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion.<sup>89</sup>

This passage is ripe with allusion. In *À Rebours*, Des Esseintes dresses his domestic staff in outfits so that their shadows remind him of Rembrandt paintings. Like Des Esseintes, Wilde turns Lord Henry's gaze away from nature: the birds are discussed solely in relation to how their shadows procure "a kind of momentary Japanese effect" (a topic also discussed in "The Decay of Lying"). This in itself recalls "Giorgione": when Pater embarks on his theory of "*Anders-streben*", he discusses the brilliance of Japanese fan painting in which abstract colours gradually become like painted verse. Wilde's reference

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

to the intrinsic immobility of painting also alludes to Pater, it being a reflection on the medium's formal limitations: temporality—music's domain. That these Tokio painters can nonetheless convey 'swiftness and motion' in their spatial designs (and through spatial means), thereby generating alternate aesthetic effects, is because they have honoured the 'otherness' of painting. Again, Wilde's intertextuality (which draws from others as much as it draws from his own works), weaves together a selection of predominantly contemporary texts, radical in their content and style.

The infamous "poisonous book" that Lord Henry gives to Dorian, which Wilde once remarked "is one of my many unwritten works. Some day I must go through the formality of putting it to paper"<sup>90</sup>, blends Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* with *À Rebours*: both were "[novels] without a plot", and both follow men in their pursuit of sensations.<sup>91</sup> Under cross-examination in his trial, Wilde readily identified Huysmans' work as his inspiration.<sup>92</sup> When Dorian describes the language of this book, Wilde uses synaesthesia as a means of capturing both the work's integrity and its mesmeric, 'curious' psychological allure:

The style in which it was written was that curiously jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of *argot* and archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest *Symbolistes*. There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour. The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy...It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, 219 n.

<sup>91</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 274. R.D. Brown notes three additional inspirations for Wilde's 'poisonous book': Suetonius' *De Vita Caesarum*; J.A. Symonds' *Age of Despots*; and Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, identifying specific passages that Wilde took from these texts. *Modern Language Notes* 71: 4 (1956), 264.

<sup>92</sup> Stephen Calloway, "Wilde and the Dandyism of the Senses" in Peter Raby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 48-9. Nordau examined Huysmans' text at length, focusing in particular on the infamously synaesthetic aspects of the narrative: "Des Esseintes does not only hear the music of the liqueurs: he sniffs also the colour of perfumes [...]", *Degeneration*, 304, 302-8.

cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows.<sup>93</sup>

Wilde's description of the language of the "poisonous book" signifies his attempt at defining *decadent* style. If his description recalls Gautier's definition of Baudelaire's style, it also vividly elaborates on a passage from "The Decay of Lying."<sup>94</sup> The stylistic properties attributed to decadence in *Dorian Gray* are described *through* synaesthesia just as decadent language is discussed *as* synaesthetic. What makes decadent style, 'decadent', is derived, precisely, from its heightened affectivity, its synaesthetic effect. That the language is "jeweled" and its metaphors, "coloured", that it has a "heavy odour of incense" clinging to the pages and a "subtle monotony of...music", circumscribes decadent language within the boundaries of synaesthetic metaphor. Furthermore, the book is "poisonous" (significant in itself and reminiscent of Wilde's early distinction in "The English Renaissance of Art" on "healthy" and "unhealthy" art) because it has an intense smell that troubles the brain and its music lulls Dorian into a 'malady of dreaming'; this reverie is also a transgression because the act of reading has affected the entire body.

In chapter eleven (which registers the influence of *À Rebours* most acutely), Wilde most fully explicates Dorian's "search for sensations that would be at once new and

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<sup>93</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 274.

<sup>94</sup> Wilde's description reiterates Gautier's influential definition of decadent style (or of decadence *as* a style), in his 1868 'Notice' to *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "The style inadequately called decadence is nothing but art arrived at the point of extreme maturity yielded by the slanting suns of aged civilizations: an ingenious, complicated style, full of shades and of research, constantly pushing back the boundaries of speech, borrowing from all technical vocabularies taking color from all palettes and notes from all keyboards, struggling to render what is most inexpressible in thought, what is vague and most elusive in the outlines of form, listening to translate the subtle confidences of neurosis, the dying confessions of passion grown depraved, and the strange hallucinations of the obsession which is turning to madness." Gautier's reference to borrowing various sensorial terms (from 'palettes and 'keyboards') in order to challenge and redefine textual boundaries illustrates synaesthesia's vital role in his construction of 'decadent' discourse, despite his reluctance to use the term 'decadent.' I use Nordau's translation, *Degeneration*, 229.

delightful” as “one of life’s truest objectives.”<sup>95</sup> Dorian embarks on an investigation of the psychology of aesthetic response. Thus, he attempts to “elaborate a real psychology of perfume”, begins to collect “the strangest instruments that [can] be found” and performs impromptu concerts with “mad Gypsies”, “yellow-shawled Tunisians”, “grinning negroes” and “slim turbaned Indians.” Dorian’s quest for sensorial experiences leads him into stereotyped excursions with ‘the other’ to the extent that Dorian finds himself more moved by “the shrill discords of barbaric music” than by “Schubert’s grace and Chopin’s beautiful sorrows.” Eventually, however, when this sought after ‘otherness’ begins to bore him, he turns to Wagner: “[listening] in rapt pleasure to Tannhauser...seeing in the prelude of that great work of art a presentation of the tragedy of the soul.”<sup>96</sup> That Dorian and Lord Henry are both Wagnerites enhances the perception of their supposed or embedded homoeroticism given the association between Wagnerism (and music more broadly) and homosexuality during the *fin de siècle*. Wagner’s operas were frequently characterised and criticised for being *too* affecting, emotive and sexual, perceptions which initiated and sustained a link between his music and its appreciators, with ‘non-normative’, ‘pathological’ sexual proclivities.<sup>97</sup> While Dorian’s examination of the formative effects of external sensorial stimuli on his persona does not feature *intersensory* juxtapositions, his pursuit of ‘sensations for the sake of sensations’ and thus, for varieties of ‘aesthetic effects’ without any ethical or social considerations, nonetheless implicates sensorial language within a sexually subversive framework.

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<sup>95</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 280.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 281-2.

<sup>97</sup> See Sutton’s monograph, *Aubrey Beardsley*. See as well Joe Law, “The ‘perniciously homosexual art’: Music and homoerotic desire in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and other *fin-de-siècle* fiction” in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, (eds.) Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 173.

As early as “The English Renaissance of Art”, Wilde articulated aesthetic excellence in corporeal, formal and sensorial terms: “For all good work aims at a purely artistic effect”<sup>98</sup>—a statement that Pater’s musical paradigm ‘aspired’ to make in less confrontational language. When faced with antagonism over the initial version of *Dorian Gray*, Wilde returned to this idea, positioning his sensorial, musical style as the centerpiece of his aesthetic philosophy. In a letter to the editor of the *St. James’s Gazette* (26 June 1890) he asserted:

[the critic] then makes vague and *fearful* insinuations about my grammar and my erudition. Now, as regards my grammar, I hold that, in prose at any rate, correctness should always be subordinate to artistic effect and musical cadence; and any peculiarities of syntax that may occur in *Dorian Gray* are deliberately intended, and are introduced to show the value of the artistic theory in question.<sup>99</sup>

Clearly, “the artistic theory in question” refers not so much to Pater’s musical paradigm as it does to Wilde’s renovation of the concept: his emphasis on “artistic effect” and musical cadence emphasising the right of art to aspire towards (the condition of) pleasurable impact. In his response to the *Daily Chronicle* (30 June 1890) he asserted: “the real trouble I experienced in writing [*Dorian Gray*] was that of keeping the extremely obvious moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect.”<sup>100</sup> And in a letter to the *Scots Observer* (9 July 1890) Wilde claimed, “Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on his palette are to the painter. They are no more, and they are no less. He sees that by their means a certain artistic effect can be produced.”<sup>101</sup> Nor did Wilde shy away from this particular defense in his trial. As he told the jurors, ““My

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<sup>98</sup> Ross (ed.), *Miscellanies*, 275.

<sup>99</sup> Italics mine. Reprinted in Hart-Davis (ed.), *Complete Letters*, 428.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

work never aims at producing any effect but that of literature.”<sup>102</sup> If Wilde’s emphasis on ‘effect’ doubled as an alibi, this interrelated construction of the nature and purpose of art, recurring in Wilde’s works, reflected the formative influence of physiological aesthetics.<sup>103</sup>

Wilde’s controversial play *Salomé* also aimed to show the value of this artistic theory in question. His pronounced use of simile in which images such as “a dead woman”, “the moon” or “a rose”, and colours, in particular black, red and white and their variations (“ebony”, “ivory”, “scarlet”), are repeated incessantly throughout the play can be read as an attempt to borrow structurally from music, from opera in particular, and from Wagner more specifically (the leitmotif being a Wagnerian technique), in order to broaden the play’s ‘aesthetic effect.’ As Wilde himself indicated in a letter to Alfred Douglas, “the recurring phrases of *Salomé*, that bind it together like a piece of music with recurring *motifs*, are, and were to me, the artistic equivalent of the refrains of old ballads.”<sup>104</sup> And, as David Wayne Thomas argues, “his numerous references in this vein clarify that his association of *Salomé* and verbal musicality is not merely a passing one...[for] the play finds its definitive ‘musical’ stratagem precisely in the matter of repetition.”<sup>105</sup>

The perception of *Salomé* as a ‘musical’ and ‘visual’ or ‘interartistic’ work is common to much of its critical reception. Lord Alfred Douglas, who translated the play from French to English, asserted in a signed review in the short-lived Oxford student

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<sup>102</sup> Mortimer, *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde*, 73.

<sup>103</sup> See Ed Block, Jr., “Evolutionist Psychology and Aesthetics: *The Cornhill Magazine*”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45: 3 (1984), 465-75; and Heather Seagroatt, “Hard Science, Soft Psychology, and Amorphous Art in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 38:4 (1998), 741-59.

<sup>104</sup> Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.), *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Rupert Hart Davis Ltd., 1962), 590.

<sup>105</sup> David Wayne Thomas, “The ‘strange music’ of *Salomé*: Oscar Wilde’s Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality”, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 33: 1 (2000), 15.

journal *The Spirit Lamp* (May 1893): “One thing strikes one very forcibly in the treatment, the musical form of it. Again and again it seems to one that in reading one is *listening*; listening, not to the author, not to the direct unfolding of the plot, but to the tones of different instruments, suggesting, suggesting, always indirectly[...].”<sup>106</sup> William Archer who was, with Bernard Shaw, the only major critic publicly to criticise the Examiner of Plays’ decision not to license *Salomé*, also drew analogies with music as well as painting. In his letter in defense of the play to the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 July 1892), he wrote:

I have jotted down the highlights, as it were, of the picture left on my mind by Mr. Wilde’s poem. In speaking of a picture, however, I am not sure that I use the happiest analogy. There is at least as much musical as pictorial quality in *Salomé*. It is by methods borrowed from music that Mr. Wilde, without sacrificing its suppleness, imparts to his prose the firm texture, so to speak, of verse.

Arguing that “the brief melodious phrases, the chiming repetition [and] the fugal effects...characteristic of Mr. Wilde’s method” were also beloved by “Maeterlinck”, Archer resorted to a pictorial analogy as a means of emphasising Wilde’s greater powers as an artist: “His properties, so to speak, are far more various and less conventional. His palette—I recur, in spite of myself, to the pictorial analogy—is infinitely richer. Maeterlinck paints in washes of water-colour; Mr. Wilde attains the depths and brilliancy of oils.”<sup>107</sup> The synaesthetic qualities of *Salomé* that Archer detected, which were both structural and rhetorical, underscored the nature of his praise, which similarly and self-consciously relied on synaesthesia. Indeed, on two occasions Archer drew attention to this rhetorical manoeuvre, this need to speak of *Salomé* through musical and pictorial analogies.

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<sup>106</sup> Alfred Douglas, “[review of] *Salomé*”, *The Spirit Lamp* (May 1893), 21-7.

<sup>107</sup> Reprinted in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Hart Davis, 317.

In addition to the play's musical allusiveness, its style, like that of *Dorian Gray*, is highly, self-consciously sensorial. When Iokanaan implores *Salomé* to move away from him, she laments:

It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like the pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and redder than roses, are not so red. The red blast of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press...there is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth...Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.<sup>108</sup>

Wilde's allusion to the 'red blast of trumpets' (like Gilbert's remark in "The Critic as Artist" about playing "some mad scarlet thing by Dvorak") is an explicit and common synaesthetic metaphor in which colour registers a sound's intensity.<sup>109</sup> His alliterative repetition of the colour red and its variants, on the other hand, illustrates what Wayne Thomas refers to as the play's "verbal musicality." After *Salomé* demands Iokanaan's head in exchange for dancing for her stepfather King Herod, she embarks on a monologue about his beauty in which Wilde abandons simile for metaphor: "There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth. Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music."<sup>110</sup> Wilde's use of sensorial imagery enhances *Salomé*'s lustful perception of Iokanaan. His voice is defined in relation to 'strange perfumes' and his physical presence ("when I looked on thee"), rather than being seen or touched, is heard as "strange music." The visual field elicits an aural sensation just as the erotic experience of Iokanaan's voice is visual and olfactory.

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<sup>108</sup> Raby (ed.), *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 110.

<sup>110</sup> Raby (ed.), *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, 90.

The intersensory nature of this description enhances the sensuality of Salomé's desire. That is to say, synaesthetic metaphor makes this desire explicit. In an unsigned review in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the reviewer argued that the play was a "mosaic" that would "tickle [only the Philistines'] untempered [sic] palates with suggestions of voluptuousness...please their sluggishness with its catalogues of objects of price, with the largesse of adjectives, with its tricks of colour and odour and simile." The term "mosaic" was in reference to Wilde's perceived derivativeness: "There is no freshness in Mr. Wilde's ideas, there is no freshness in his method of presenting those ideas." Specifically, the reviewer detected Maeterlinck, Flaubert, and Gautier whose borrowed voices "painted pictures in words."<sup>111</sup> The play's synaesthetic qualities thus alerted the reviewer to the legacy Wilde was drawing on, the company he wanted to keep, and the aesthetic philosophy he abided by, which might "trick" a 'philistine' but certainly not the "English public." That the reviewer considered the play's "colour", "odour" and "similes" all 'tricks', illustrates how the work's synaesthetic qualities were considered deceptive. Although Swinburne and Whistler's formalism was also interpreted as a ruse, Wilde's appeared to hide or conceal an ambiguously sexual counter-narrative.

The idea that art should 'veil' (conceal) rather than 'mirror' (reveal) was similarly, if not more so, applicable to critical discourse on the arts and, more specifically, 'aesthetic criticism.' It was, after all, criticism that Wilde defined as the highest or purest art form in "The Critic as Artist."<sup>112</sup> The essay represents Wilde's most explicit participation in contemporary debates over critical discourse and the institutionalisation of literature during the mid-to-late Victorian period. In particular,

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<sup>111</sup> Unsigned Review, *Pall Mall Gazette* (27 February 1893), 3.

<sup>112</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 137.

Wilde places himself at the end of a trajectory that begins with Arnold and is ‘mediated’ through Pater. Pater’s distortion of Arnold’s emphasis on knowing an object as in itself it really is, to knowing one’s impression of an object as it really is, is modified by Wilde to the point of paradox: “to see the object as in itself it really is not.”<sup>113</sup> Wilde also rephrases the “imaginative reason”—used by Arnold and adapted by Pater—into the “aesthetic sense”, thereby further accentuating the role of subjectivity within critical discourse on the arts.<sup>114</sup> This, for Wilde, is the true basis of all ‘aesthetic criticism’, which “deals with art not as expressive but as *impressive* purely.”<sup>115</sup> And this, for Wilde, is also what underscores his praise of Wainwright in “Pen, Pencil and Poison”: “As an art-critic he concerned himself primarily with the complex impressions produced by a work of art, and certainly the first step in aesthetic criticism is to realise one’s own impressions.”<sup>116</sup> Wainwright was an innovator in what Wilde referred to as “the art-literature of the nineteenth century” because he was able to translate “those impressions into words, to give, as it were, the literary equivalent for the imaginative and mental effect.”<sup>117</sup> Stylistically, Wilde’s intersensory language enhanced the opacity of his prose just as it veiled the object of his critique—we see the object as in itself it is not, or as in itself

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 144. For a detailed discussion of this trajectory, see Wendell V. Harris, “Arnold, Pater, Wilde and the Object as in Themselves They See It”, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 11:4, Nineteenth Century, (1971), 733-47. See also, Brake’s chapter “The Discourse of Journalism” in *Subjugated Knowledges*. For an analysis of Wilde’s theoretical construction of the role of ‘subjectivity’ in criticism, see Bruce Bashford, “Oscar Wilde and Subjectivist Criticism”, *English Language in Transition* 21 (1977), 218-34.

<sup>114</sup> As Gilbert states in “The Critic as Artist”: “It is through its very incompleteness that Art becomes complete in beauty, and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone, which, while accepting both reason and recognition as stages of apprehension, subordinates them both to a pure synthetic impression of the work of art as a whole, and, taking whatever alien emotional elements the work may possess, uses their very complexity as a means by which a richer unity may be added to the ultimate impression itself”, *Intentions*, 146-7.

<sup>115</sup> Italics mine. Ibid, 139.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 71-2.

Wilde *perceived* it. His rhetorical development of synaesthesia aimed to conceal and affect whilst expressing, in perceptual terms, Wilde's individualistic, decadent gaze.

Although Wilde criticised modern journalists and the institution of journalism throughout "The Critic as Artist", it was journalism that occupied much of his daily life from the mid-1880s, providing a relatively consistent income. In addition to Wilde's tenure at the *Women's World*, he worked as a drama critic for the weekly journal *The Dramatic Review* and contributed an eclectic range of articles (as well as poetry and fiction) to *The Court and Society Review*. Furthermore, from 1885 to 1890, Wilde wrote nearly 70 (usually anonymous) reviews for the affordable, daily and more radical *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was, at this time, operating under the editorship of William Stead.<sup>118</sup> If Wilde used the *Nineteenth Century* and the *Fortnightly* as forums for advancing his synaesthetic theory of art—and for dealing with theoretical aesthetic questions—Wilde's journalism relied at times on synaesthetic metaphor as a rhetorical mode to criticise or praise. This is evident in Wilde's favourable review of Morris' *Odyssey* for the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1887) within which he applauds the "rendering not merely of language into language, but of poetry into poetry", a sentiment recalling Swinburne's analysis of D.G. Rossetti. Indeed, Wilde adopts Swinburne's conception of translation in that work:

And though the new spirit added in the *transfusion* may seem to many rather Norse than Greek, and, perhaps at times, more boisterous than beautiful, there is yet a rigour of life in every line, a splendid ardour through each canto, that stirs the blood while one reads like the sound of a trumpet, and that, producing a physical as well as a spiritual delight, exults the senses no less than it exults the soul.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Anya Clayworth (ed.) and (intro.), *Oscar Wilde: Selected Journalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), xii-xviii.

<sup>119</sup> Oscar Wilde, "Mr. Morris's completion of the *Odyssey*", *Pall Mall Gazette* (24 November 1887), 5.

Wilde's use of the term "transfusion" parallels Swinburne's own construction and application in "Rossetti" (the passage is notably Swinburnian).<sup>120</sup> That Morris has managed to transfuse poetic forms constitutes his translation's excellence. To register the text's "aesthetic effect", Wilde employs a musical simile, "the sound of a trumpet", which produces a corporeal and spiritual sensation and by extension, a unity between body and soul. Morris' work elicits "physical delight", the sense of which is enhanced and intensified through Wilde's use of synaesthesia. Rather than focusing on historical and linguistic accuracy, his evaluation of Morris unfolds in relation to the text's powerfully affective physical influence on the spectator whose "blood" is "stirred." Synaesthesia situates Wilde's analysis directly in relation to the impressions upon a body, reminding us that the primary function of art is felt through the senses.

In Wilde's review of Symonds's study of Ben Jonson for the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1887) he uses synaesthesia to critique Symonds's own reliance on intersensory language:

As for Mr. Symonds' style, it is, as usual, very fluent, very picturesque and very full of colour. Here and there, however, it is really irritating. Such a sentence as 'the tavern had the defects of its quality' is an awkward Gallicism; and when Mr. Symonds, after genially comparing Jonson's blank verse to the front of Whitehall...proceeds to play a fantastic aria on the same string, and tells that 'Massinger reminds us of the intricacies of Sansovino, Shakespeare of Gothic aisles or heaven's cathedral...Ford of glittering Corinthian colonnades, Webster of vaulted crypts...Marlowe of masoned [sic] clouds, and Marston, in his better moments, of the fragmentary vigour of a Roman ruin," one begins to regret that any one ever thought of the unity of the arts. Similes such as these obscure; they do not illumine. To say that Ford is like a glittering Corinthian adds nothing to our knowledge of either Ford or Greek architecture. Mr. Symonds has written some charming poetry, but his prose, unfortunately, is always poetical prose, never the prose of a poet. Still, the volume is

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<sup>120</sup> See specifically, Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 88-92.

worth reading, though decidedly Mr. Symonds, to use one of his own phrases, has ‘the defects of his quality.’<sup>121</sup> On the one hand, Wilde praises Symonds’ style for its synaesthetic properties: his language is “very full of colour” and even musical. Yet, the “fantastic aria” that Symonds “plays”, is ultimately too intense which Wilde’s calculated allusion to operatic structure augments. If he can accept Symonds’ comparison of “Jonson’s blank verse to the front of Whitehall”, he finds his use of simile, extreme and essentially “uncritical”: the similes “do not illumine” but “obscure” such that Wilde regrets “the unity of the arts.” These comments reveal how the function of an intersensory metaphor is that of *illumination* and crucially, this is bi-directional: Symonds’ comparison of Ford to Greek architecture “adds nothing to our knowledge of either.”

Wilde’s review of W.E. Henley’s verse-collection *In Hospital: Rhymes and Rhythms* (1888) for *The Woman’s World* demonstrates how synaesthesia contributed to the ‘opacity’ of Wilde’s critical prose:

Some of them are like bright, vivid pastels; others like charcoal drawings, with dull blacks and murky whites; others like etchings with deeply-bitten lines, and abrupt contrasts, and clever colour-suggestions. In fact, they are like anything and everything, except perfected poems—that they certainly are not. They are still in the twilight. They are preludes, experiments, inspired jottings in a note-book, and should be heralded by a design of “Genius Making Sketches.” Rhyme gives architecture as well as melody to verse; it gives that delightful sense of limitation which in all the arts is so pleasurable, and is, indeed, one of the secrets of perfection.<sup>122</sup> Wilde’s technique parallels Swinburne’s approach in “*Les Fleurs du mal*”: his similes gesture towards various visual arts (“pastels”, “drawings”, “etchings”) as a means of critiquing and distinguishing between Henley’s poems. Thus, text is spoken of, or represented through the experience of non-text. In this instance, synaesthesia is used to

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<sup>121</sup> Oscar Wilde, “Review of Ben Jonson by John Addington Symonds”, *Pall Mall Gazette* (20 September 1886), 6.

<sup>122</sup> Oscar Wilde, “A Note on Some Modern Poets”, *Woman’s World* (December 1888), 108-12.

highlight precisely what is missing from Henley's work. Wilde employs a variety of visual-art terminologies to illuminate Henley's failings as a poet: he is unable to satisfy the condition of a "perfected poem", which is an oral or musical condition. Hence, he compares the actual look or layout of the poems to visual patterns:

Théophile Gautier once said that Flaubert's style was meant to be read, and his own style to be looked at. Mr. Henley's unrhymed rhythms form very dainty designs, from a typographical point of view. From the point of literature, they are a series of vivid, concentrated impressions...but the poetic form, what of that?<sup>123</sup>

Henley's verse appeals more to the eye than the ear. Consequently, Henley's verse *conforms* to the sordid visual standards of Wilde's "ugly" and "sensible" age, which Wilde's intersensory similes accentuate. Synaesthesia is thus central to what makes language 'literary' or a poem, a poem.

Although Wilde chastises Henley for forsaking rhyme (poetry's 'limitation'), he praises Henley—and importantly, this is one of the few instances in which this happens—for a line of verse in which the poet uses synaesthesia: "the green sky's minor thirds' being perfectly right in its place, and a very refreshing bit of affectation in a volume where there is so much that is natural."<sup>124</sup> Wilde finds Henley's characterisation of nature appealing precisely because of its dependence on intersensory metaphor. Henley's use of synaesthesia has obscured or 'veiled' what is natural to ascend to the level of artifice and affectation: his rhetoric of synaesthesia stylises nature and this, in turn, delineates Henley's 'decadent' sensibilities.

Throughout *Dorian Gray*, nature is also described in terms immediately associated with the arts. When Lord Henry first learns of Dorian in the garden of Basil Hallward's house, Wilde speaks of "the sunlight slipping over the polished leaves" and of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

“the green lacquer leaves of the ivy.”<sup>125</sup> The adjectives “polished” and “lacquer” and the idea of light “slipping”, subtly yet clearly ‘aestheticises’ nature, as does Wilde’s allusion to “copper-green skies” and “apricot-coloured light”, which add an element of artifice to the natural world. This language of “jewelled seduction” also emerges in “The Critic as Artist”: the moon is a “clipped piece of silver”, “the sky is a hard hollow sapphire”, the stars are like “gilded bees” (recalling the gilded tortoise in *À Rebours*), and the daffodils are exquisite because “They seem to be made of amber and cool ivory. They are like the Greek things of the best period.”<sup>126</sup> Wilde’s style joins with his theory of style. His tendency to discuss voices as music further attests to this: Lord Henry has “a low, musical voice”<sup>127</sup>; in “The Decay of Lying”, the liar is known for his lulling cadences; and in *Salomé*, the princess repeatedly refers to Iokanaan’s voice as “music to mine ear” and later as “like the sound of the flute, of one who playeth on the flute.”<sup>128</sup>

If Wilde significantly modified Pater’s theory of “*Anders-streben*” by providing a cultural context for its existence and function, his development of synaesthesia was nonetheless motivated by a common impulse. Aesthetic greatness, as Wilde tells us time and again, was determined by ‘aesthetic effect’—the experience of ‘extraordinary sensations.’ And language, when used well and creatively, had the greatest potential to cultivate a range of aesthetic effects because of its intrinsic synaesthetic abilities. This in turn underscored the profound faith that Wilde vested in literature. Like Pater, he characterizes music as the greatest emblem for the arts, and literature the form most capable of expressing the infinite varieties of human experience in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>125</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 178, 208.

<sup>126</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 110-11, 99.

<sup>127</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 183.

<sup>128</sup> Raby (ed.), *The Importance of Being of Earnest and Other Plays*, 72, 75.

The power Wilde invests in music and finds within language reflects the extent to which synaesthesia was largely about discourse. This is evident in Dorian's first encounter with Lord Henry. In a passage with notably homoerotic undercurrents, Dorian describes the effect of Lord Henry's words as "[touching] some secret chord that has never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses." If music is used to register Lord Henry's alluring powers of speech, music is still described as a property of the linguistic realm as Dorian's (Marius-esque) reverie confirms:

Music had stirred him like that. Music had troubled him many times. But music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?<sup>129</sup>

The emotional vagaries stirred by music are balanced by the "clear" yet "cruel" properties of 'Words!': whereas language opens up a new and inescapable world for one to realize their own desires, music is chaotic. Language was the most resilient and malleable of the arts because it could generate the "magic" of other forms. This property particular to language accounted for the mesmeric power of its unique, intersensory 'aesthetic effect', a sentiment expressed in "The Critic as Artist": "Movement, that problem of the visible arts, can be truly realized by Literature alone. It is Literature that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest."<sup>130</sup> If Wilde's description of decadent style in *Dorian Gray* emphasised its brooding attributes, his characterisation of criticism (in contrast to journalism) in "The Critic as Artist" promoted its innate synaesthetic propensities:

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<sup>129</sup> Bristow (ed.), *Dorian Gray*, 184.

<sup>130</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, 134.

The material that the painter or sculptor uses is meagre in comparison with that of words. Words have not merely music as sweet as that of a viol or lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, and theirs indeed alone...to know the principle of the highest art is to know the principle of all the arts.<sup>131</sup>

Like Pater, whose construction of words involved colour, light and texture in “Style”, Wilde’s is subsumed in sensory potentialities. Challenging Lessing’s spatio-temporal distinctions, his homage to critical discourse also clearly swipes at Whistler. The limitations of painting are absent within language: only words have sweet music, rich colour and plastic form. Yet, it was not poetry nor even prose, but ‘aesthetic criticism’ (which Wilde constructed as interchangeable with “literature”) that most revealed the depth of language’s intrinsic powers as an art form:

So the critic reproduces the work that he criticizes in a mode that is never imitative, and part of whose charm may really consist in the rejection of resemblance, and shows us in this way not merely the meaning but also the mystery of Beauty, and, by transforming each art into literature, solves once and for all the problem of Art’s unity.<sup>132</sup>

Wilde’s characterization of ‘aesthetic criticism’ as a linguistic genre that “[rejects]” “resemblance” and is “never imitative” forges a link between literary ‘veiling’ and Wilde’s interest in, and homage to artifice in “The Decay of Lying”: “What is interesting about people...is the mask that each of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask.”<sup>133</sup> Wilde’s epigrammatic emphasis on masks, lying, and veiling—interchangeable terms—are inextricably connected to his notion of the personality as a constantly fluctuating *pose*. It was also a keen reflection of his trenchant egalitarianism. For, as he conceded in the essay, we are “all made out of the same stuff”, what amounted to our differences was “dress, manner, tone of voice, religious opinions, personal appearance,

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 14.

tricks of habit and the like.”<sup>134</sup> The more ‘veiled’ a discourse, or the more self-reflexive, musically allusive and synaesthetic, the greater its personal expression, and this, in turn, underscores Wilde’s final and fruitful deviation from Pater in the essay: “the very condition of any art is style”<sup>135</sup>, a sentiment that chimes throughout Wilde’s works and throughout decadence more generally, it being above all a movement so frequently defined and discussed in relation to style. Wilde’s theoretical development of synaesthesia in the essays comprising *Intentions* illustrates the politics of intersensory metaphor as anti-mimetic, anti-Realist, and anti-populist. Furthermore, his rhetorical reliance on synaesthetic language was guided by his desire to *affect* his readers as broadly and provocatively as possible as attested in particular by “The Critic as Artist”, an essay that modifies Pater’s own tribute to “prose literature” as the most “characteristic art of the nineteenth century” in “Style” by reorienting it to the genre of ‘aesthetic criticism.’ To an extent, this reorientation emerges as a tribute to Pater and to *The Renaissance*, within which the “objects” that ‘aesthetic criticism’ must deal with, as well as the “temperament” that the true ‘aesthetic critic’ must possess, were first addressed. Wilde concludes this thesis, then, because the self-conscious and persistent intertextual dialogue that he maintained with Pater throughout his own career as an ‘aesthetic critic’ summarises the differences between Aesthetic and decadent constructions of synaesthesia.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 5.

## AFTERWORD

From urban homelessness to imperial decline, from sexual revolution to sexual epidemics, the last decades of the twentieth century seem to be repeating the problems, themes and metaphors of the *fin de siècle*.<sup>1</sup>

‘Synaesthesia’ could be added to Showalter’s examination of the parallels between the ends of the nineteenth and twentieth century’s in *Sexual Anarchy* (1991). For our long *fin de siècle* witnessed renewed, interdisciplinary interest in synaesthesia.<sup>2</sup> This resurgence occurred within the sciences and the arts whilst generating fecund collaborations between these discourses. Societies for synaesthetes were established; extensive media coverage led to the outing of famous synaesthetes including Kandinsky and Nabokov. Additionally, synaesthesia’s role within Modernism generated—and continues to do so—increasing scholarship in a variety of disciplines. In 2004, the George Pompidou Center (Paris) hosted ‘Son et Lumieres’—the title pulled from Baudelaire’s poem ‘Correspondences’—which focused on the formative impact of music in visual art from 1900 until the present date. The Museum of Contemporary Arts (Los Angeles), also in 2004 and in collaboration with the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum (Washington D.C.), hosted ‘Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900.’

Introductions rather than afterwords are commonly used to pit one’s work against other, potentially similar examinations. There is, however, a reason that the following two texts have been saved for this brief conclusion: Irving Babbit’s study, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910), amounts to a ‘Modernist’s’ account of synaesthesia; Kevin Dann’s text *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synesthesia and*

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1991), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Leonardo’s extensive and continuously updated bibliography, “Synesthesia in Art and Science”: <http://lbs.mit.edu/isast/spec.projects/synesthesiabib.html>.

*the Search for Transcendental Knowledge* (1998) is largely an examination of synaesthesia's role within Modernism. In Babbitt's case, one finds a disparaging analysis of synaesthesia's topicality during the late-Victorian period which follows on from Nordau's both in its content and tone: he singles out common artists (Wagner, Huysmans, Ghil and so on), interprets "genre confusions" as signs of "abnormally heightened sensibility" and "nervous disorder", and groups "the aesthetes and dilettantes, the last effete [representations] of romanticism" into "the neurotic school" within which "color-audition has found literary expression."<sup>3</sup> Dann's more reasoned, scholarly examination of synaesthesia, explores its topicality in the sciences and the arts as well as its role within Madame Blavatsky's mystical Theosophical movement.<sup>4</sup> Writing from the perspective of a cultural historian and, largely, writing a cultural history of synaesthesia, his analysis illustrates synaesthesia's malleability during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dann does not, however, examine synaesthesia's role in 'art for art' in Britain, focusing instead on French symbolism. And yet, even here, the attention he gives to the rich and varied development of synaesthesia within symbolist aesthetics is brief.

My dissertation signifies the missing text, the chapter before Dann's begins—indeed, the chapter that questions Modernism as a beginning. For Swinburne, Whistler, Pater and Wilde, in their own particular ways and as a 'movement', played a critical role in nurturing the gestations of this synaesthetic Modernity. Their development of synaesthesia broadens our understanding of the complicated, nuanced claim of 'art for

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<sup>3</sup> Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (London: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1910), 172-75. See, in particular, "Chapter Six: Suggestiveness in Romantic Arts."

<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, Dann's introduction as well as the following chapters from his text: "From *un Truc* of occult truth: The Fascination with Synaesthesia in *Fin de Siècle* France"; A Transcendental Language of Colour: Synaesthesia and the Astral World"; and "The Meaning of Synaesthesia is Meaning."

art' in the mid-to-late Victorian period; and this, in turn, augments our sense of the rich inheritance they bequeathed to their Modernist successors.

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