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William Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater: The Romantic Notion of Education and its Relation to Culture

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Abstract

This research paper examines the relationship between Arnold, Pater and modernism through the mediation of Wordsworth's ideas on education. Arnold's ideas on education are inspired by Wordsworth, and Arnold remains the most influential critic and theorist of education in the 'Wordsworthian tradition'. It is important to acknowledge the centrality of Arnold's ideas since Wordsworth's influence on later writers was largely mediated through Arnold's writings. Arnold echoes the best of Wordsworth in his best prose work, Culture and Anarchy. Education is a great help to culture as he says emphatically that 'education is the road to culture'. He recommends 'the right educative influences...under the banner of cultural ideals'. Arnold's influence on Pater is well-known (even if he departs from him). Wordsworth is a common source of influence on both Pater and Arnold. It is argued that Pater's aestheticism is not simply its anti-bourgeois, anti-Christian quality but its links to the notion of education and development.

Key Words: Wordsworth, Culture, Education, Aesthetic, Humanistic Vision

Introduction

[Matthew Arnold \(1822-1888\)](#) was one of the most influential British writers of his time. He was not only a poet and cultural critic – he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857 – but his services in the field of education as a government inspector of schools were also profoundly important. As [Meisel \(1987\)](#) argues, “Although Arnold's reputation as a poet will always be subject to some dispute, as an essayist he remains among the principals of English nonfiction prose, and among the principals, too, in the history of the intellectual's self-definition in modern culture” (p. 39). Arnold was dissatisfied with nineteenth-century liberalism, his dissatisfaction based on his opposition to the “acrid rationalism and utilitarianism” which liberalism promotes ([Trilling, 1939, p. 220](#)). Arnold stood up against liberalism “to defend the passing order” ([Trilling, 1939, p. 206](#)). For Arnold, the relation between culture and education

was fundamental; he recommended, “the right educative influences...under the banner of cultural ideals” ([Novak, 2002, p. 611](#)). Arnold's ideas on education were inspired by Wordsworth, and Arnold remains the most influential critic and theorist of education in the ‘Wordsworthian tradition.’ As [Meisel \(1987\)](#) states, “Of course, the ideal is not only and not really Homer (nor even Jesus, who takes Homer's place in Arnold's later religious phase), but also and above all Wordsworth” (p. 46). Also, [Leavis \(1969\)](#) affirms, “Of the Victorian poets it is Arnold who is known as the Wordsworthian, and if there can be said to have been a Wordsworthian tradition, it is through him that it passes” (p. 186). It is important to acknowledge the centrality of Arnold's ideas since Wordsworth's influence on later writers was largely mediated through Arnold's writings. As [Meisel \(1987\)](#) comments on the continuing importance of

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Arnold: “It is nothing less than tradition that weighs Arnold down, a poet who rightly puts aside the Muse in 1853 in favour of an empiricist criticism, both literary and cultural, that does for Arnold in prose what Arnold the poet can never accomplish – the production of a strong and influential myth of the modern” (p. 46). Meisel defines the term ‘modern’ by quoting from Trilling’s 1955 essay on Freud: “the will to modernity...as the redemptive search for a realm ‘beyond’ or apart from ‘the reach of culture’” (1987, p. 1). He further defines ‘the will to modernity’: “The will to modernity that we commonly equate with the structure of modernism as a whole is largely a defensive response to the increasingly intolerable burdens of coming late in a tradition” (1987, p. 2).

Analysis and Discussion

Arnold’s appreciation of Wordsworth’s poetry is evident in his essay on Wordsworth. (Arnold’s essay on Wordsworth is also included in *The Poems of Wordsworth*, selected and edited by Arnold in 1879). In the same essay, Arnold (1915) declares that “I am a Wordsworthian myself” (p. 161). He clarifies the nature of his relationship with Wordsworth by stressing that “No Wordsworthian has a tenderer affection for this pure and sage master than I” (1915, p. 162). Arnold points out that the best period of Wordsworth’s poetic life was from 1798 to 1808; it is this period of his poetic life where he appreciates him the most. He ranks him as the greatest English poet after Milton and Shakespeare. Finally, he declares Wordsworth’s best poetry “as inevitable as Nature herself” (1915, p. 155).

Arnold echoes the best of Wordsworth in his best prose work, *Culture and Anarchy*, which was first published in book form in 1869, as [Trilling \(1939\)](#) affirm Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* “the keystone of his intellectual life” (p. 251). He takes up a position similar to Wordsworth in terms of his response to the model of development based on industrial-capitalist civilization. He designates the present state of modern civilization as “mechanical and external, and constantly tends to become more so” and thinks that it is more evident here in England (2006, p. 37). As [Williams \(1990\)](#) explains the general climate of opinion at the time when Arnold was writing, there was “the general reaction to the social effects of full industrialism and in particular to the

agitation of the industrial working class” (p. 112). Also, Eliot’s comment on *culture and anarchy* bears the same testimony, “As an invective against the crudities of the industrialism of his time, the book is perfect of its kind” (1963, p. 432). [Trilling \(1939\)](#), on the contrary, points out the decline of the industrial spirit when Arnold was writing: “England has already been reduced to a third-place among the nations after France and America” (p. 229). Arnold discards this model of development on the grounds that it is not only limited but also tends to inculcate – a key phrase in his writing – ‘stock notions and habits. He endorses the Wordsworthian model of growth, which is not limited to the development of a few targeted aspects of an individual’s personality. Like Wordsworth, Arnold’s idea of education goes beyond “plain book learning” ([Kuhn Jr., 1971, p. 53](#)). Also, Kuhn Jr. states Arnold’s response to the English system of education, “Several times Arnold says English university education is no better than the secondary schooling of France or Germany” (1971, p. 55). Arnold’s condemnation of ‘stock notions and habits’ is based on his aversion to the “worship of machinery, and of external doing” (2006, p. 6). He condemns the ‘worship of machinery’ because it inculcates “a narrow and twisted growth” (2006, p. 11). He reiterates his view with increasing emphasis on another occasion: “Faith in machinery is our besetting danger” (2006, p. 37). Both Wordsworth and Arnold are in perfect agreement here. One example is sufficient to throw light on Wordsworth’s reaction against machinery and its consequences. What he finds in London is the exaltation of the mechanical and the artificial means of life over the natural. Both suggest an alternative to the ‘worship of machinery’ in the form of “inward ripeness”; both wish to see humanity uplifted to a higher state by means of ‘inward ripeness’ (Arnold, 2006, p. 10). It is evidenced in Arnold’s concern for “a high development of our humanity” (Arnold, 2006, p. 15). In order to avoid the consequences of the ‘worship of machinery’ and of ‘external doing’ – with ‘stock notions and habits’ – Arnold’s recommendation is “a fresh and free play of the best thoughts” (2006, p. 6). In other words, he endorses the view of the power of imagination that gives fresh and new meanings to the already formed perception of things. Wordsworth criticizes the institutional mode of education on

grounds not dissimilar from Arnold's. It is the recurring feature of *The Prelude* to express his disdain for the mechanical way of life and its emphasis on the external nature of things. Wordsworth, too, recommends the inward nature of things. Arnold's dislike of public schools and boarding schools expresses a similar Wordsworthian concern with 'inwardness.' [Novak \(2002\)](#) goes back to Arnold in order to find adequate answers to the issue of public confidence in democracy. He argues that "the key to shaping a humanized democracy lay in shaping a humanizing system of public schooling" (p. 595). Wordsworth, too, encourages an imaginative way of seeing things and discourages the formation of 'stock notions and habits.' As [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) points out in Arnold, "a reassertion of the political tradition of the English Romantics. The central political idea of Burke, Coleridge and Wordsworth was that society is of so organic a nature that it prohibits the interference of the analytical intellect" (pp. 272-3). There are examples of an imaginative way of seeing things in *The Prelude*.

Arnold explains why culture is important: "what culture really is, what good it can do, what is our own special need of it" (2006, p. 32). Arnold's belief in culture is linked to "the intense desire to correct the world and to make right prevail" (Trilling, 1939, p. 191). Also, [Kuhn Jr. \(1971\)](#) argues, "Although Arnold's professional interests centre on primary and secondary education, his deeper interests go beyond them to higher education and eventually to culture in general" (pp. 54-5). Arnold defines culture as the "study of perfection" (2006, p. 9). [Eliot \(1963\)](#) criticizes Arnold on the grounds that he has "little gift for consistency or for definition" (p. 431). He argues that the terms Culture and Conduct are not adequately defined as he charges Arnold with "vagueness of definition" (1963, p. 432). He denounces Arnold's prose work on account of 'little gift for consistency or for definition': "Nothing in his prose work, therefore, will stand very close analysis" (1963, p. 431). He argues that "both Culture and Conduct were important for his own time" (1963, p. 432). In this sense, Arnold is irrelevant to the present times, "To my generation, I am sure, he was a more sympathetic prose writer than Carlyle or Ruskin" (Eliot, 1963, p. 432). Arnold's definition of culture recalls Wordsworth's emphasis on developing the

totality of human faculties: it conceives of "true human perfection as a *harmonious* perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a *general* perfection, developing all parts of our society" (2006, p. 9). Eliot (1963) criticizes Arnold's use of it on account of its vagueness: "when we go to Arnold to enquire what is 'man's totality'...we learn nothing" (p. 437). Also, [Sidgwick \(2006\)](#) criticizes Arnold on practical grounds: "the study of perfection, as it forms itself in members of the human race, is naturally and primarily a study of the individual's perfection, and only incidentally and secondarily a study of the general perfection of humanity" (p. 160). However, [Williams \(1990\)](#) corrects the misreading of Arnold's emphasis on 'personal cultivation': "It is often said that Arnold recommends a merely selfish personal cultivation: that although he professes concern about the state of society, the improvement of this state must wait on the process of his internal perfection" (p. 118). Arnold defines the culture at a later stage in the text as a "disinterested pursuit of perfection" (2006, p. 61). While defining culture, he echoes Wordsworth: it is "a desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are" (2006, p. 33). He further clarifies the meaning of the term culture as "*sweetness and light*" (2006, p. 40). Arnold borrows it from Jonathan Swift's *Battle of the Books*. He draws a relation between culture and poetry and suggests how they are related to one another: "It is by thus making sweetness and light to be characters of perfection, that culture is of like spirit with poetry, follows one law with poetry" (2006, p. 41). It is worth mentioning here that in his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865), he exalts poetry to the level of religion and foresees a new future for poetry where poetry will replace religion. [Eliot \(1963\)](#) criticizes Arnold, "The total effect of Arnold's philosophy is to set up Culture in the place of Religion, and to leave Religion to be laid waste by the anarchy of feeling" (p. 436). He invests great confidence in "culture as the great help out of our present difficulties" (2006, p. 5). As [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) argues, "The analytical reason has yielded such melancholy results that it is certainly worthwhile to look for another instrument of intellectual discovery. Arnold evolves now the new instrument of *culture*" (p. 265). Also, [Trilling \(1939\)](#) comments on the

'melancholy' nature of 'our present difficulties': "Palmerston's death, however, seemed to signalize an era when the change was inevitable; 1866 was an agitated year of great mass meetings, of the Hyde Park railings and flowerbeds, of class feeling grown explicit and bitter, exacerbating the nervousness resulting from financial panic and from a series of disastrous agricultural failures" (p. 223). His solution to 'our present difficulties' is not in an "outward set of circumstances" but in the 'inwardness of culture' (2006, p. 37). As [Trilling \(1939\)](#) argues, "In the end, Arnold must turn to the individual, to that possible Socrates in each man's breast, and make reason wait upon the assent he gives" (p. 254). He does not explain the whole process of looking inward for the means of self-transformation, but he seems to endorse the Wordsworthian emphasis on 'inwardness'. Nevertheless, there is a conflict between the 'mechanical and external' modern civilization and the 'inward condition': "The idea of perfection as an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit is at variance with the mechanical and material civilization" (2006, p. 37). Arnold's alternative to the 'mechanical and material civilization is "a spiritual condition" (2006, p. 38). He echoes Wordsworth when he "places human perfection in an *integral* condition, the growth and predominance of our humanity proper" (2006, p. 36). He endorses the Wordsworthian emphasis on the cultivation of humanitarian values.

Throughout *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold is persistently concerned with developing all parts of an individual's personality; by saying so, he means to suggest that society could be developed on a similar pattern. He warns his readers again and again of the dangers of developing one part of personality at the cost of other parts, and the same is the case with society. He does not favour a lopsided personality; too much turning to inwardness or too much turning to outwardness both lead to an incomplete personality and society. For example, the development of "a moral side" at the cost of "an intellectual side" and vice versa could easily develop into a lopsided personality and society (2006, p. 107). He employs the term 'Hebraism' for the 'moral side' and 'Hellenism' for the 'intellectual side'. He speaks from a historical perspective: "Hebraism and Hellenism - between these two points of influence

move our world" (2006, p. 96). The present state of modern civilization tends to regard the over-development of the moral at the cost of the intellectual, which in Arnold's view is "a limited conception of human nature, the notion of a one thing needful, one side in us to be made uppermost, the disregard of a full and harmonious development of ourselves" (2006, p. 111). As [Trilling \(1939\)](#) argues, "Hebraism is the root of anarchy" (p. 258). Nevertheless, [Eliot \(1963\)](#) criticizes Arnold for the over-development of Hebraism in himself: "In Arnold himself there was a powerful element of Puritan morality, as in most of his contemporaries, however diverse" (p. 434). His persistent concern to "*see the object as it really is*" – a key phrase in Arnold – is very significant; he keeps referring to seeing things in their right proportion, a disinterested seeing of an object as it really is. As [Trilling \(1939\)](#) explains, "To *see the object as it really is* was the essence of Arnold's teaching" (p. ix).

Therefore, the relation between the development of an individual and the development of society is intertwined. He sets a purpose for 'inwardness' which is linked to 'a *general* perfection'. Though Wordsworth does not employ the word 'perfection' to designate the growth of an individual, his assumption of a developing or a developed individual is not different from Arnold's. Also, the point of difference between Arnold and Wordsworth is on the nature of society; for Wordsworth, it is an organic rural society; Arnold does not specify whether it is a rural or urban society. His conception of society seems to encompass both. Since Arnold is dissatisfied with the different classes of society – as he categorizes them into Barbarians (aristocracy), Philistines (middle class), and Populace (working class) – he recommends 'culture' as a remedy to 'our present difficulties.' [Kuhn Jr. \(1971\)](#) points out another reason for Arnold's dissatisfaction with the social classes: "As Inspector of Schools, Arnold saw the issue of formal education complicated by the classes in English society" (p. 52). The term Arnold employs as the opposite of culture is Philistinism. Though he specifically designates this to the middle class, he takes it as a general term for those who disregard culture. He condemns the love of wealth in Philistines as he condemns the 'worship of machinery'. The love of wealth is a natural

consequence of “our proneness to value machinery as an end in itself” (2006, p. 55). He designates wealth as “the commonest of commonplaces” (2006, p. 39). So in this sense, the ‘greatness and welfare of society are located in the ‘worship of machinery’ and the love of wealth. He gives a detailed account of the qualities of each social class, but their negative qualities exceed the positive ones. Each class is predominantly fixed around its own interests. As [Trilling \(1939\)](#) states, “the reason of a class is its interest” (p. 253). He rejects “an exterior culture” of aristocracy; middle-class energies are predominantly focused on two things: “the concern for making money, and the concern for saving our souls”; the working class is “raw and uncultivated” (2006, pp. 76, 116 & 56). As [Trilling \(1939\)](#) affirms the point that “the new society was increasingly based on money. Money was a middle-class medium which had always been scorned by an aristocratic ethic and literature” (p. 225). Also, Trilling points out, “the profound unintellectuality of the middle class surely had its roots deep in religious doctrine” (1939, p. 227). [Eliot \(1963\)](#) criticizes Arnold on the grounds that his religious views are confused. He goes on to say that “Arnold’s prose writings fall into two parts; those on Culture and those on Religion; and the books about Christianity seem only to say again and again – merely that the Christian faith is, of course, impossible to the man of culture” (1963, p. 434). The working class are the most feared forces of “anarchy and social disintegration” (2006, p. 61). [Williams \(1990\)](#) argues to the contrary, “Certainly he feared a general breakdown, into violence and anarchy, but the most remarkable facts about the British working-class movement, since its origin in the Industrial Revolution, are its conscious and deliberate abstention from general violence, and its firm faith in other methods of advance” (p. 125). [Trilling \(1939\)](#) locates Arnold’s fear of ‘general breakdown’ in another direction: “Arnold, like his father, lived in the shadow of the French Revolution and of the Reign of Terror” (p. 206). Arnold’s alternative to anarchy is culture – “right reason, ideas, light” (2006, p. 62). As Trilling says, “Growth, development and the knowledge” (1939, p. 254). As he says emphatically that “without order, there can be no society, and without society, there can be no human perfection” (2006, p. 149). He believes that “within each of these

classes there are a certain number of *aliens*, if we may so call them, - persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection; and that this number is capable of being diminished or augmented” (2006, p. 81). These *aliens* do not embody ordinary selves – ‘stock notions and habits’ – as they transcend their class interests and cultivate humanitarian values. They are Arnold’s hope of extending the work of perfection.

Arnold assigns a central role to the bearers of ‘sweetness and light’ who first perfect themselves and then disseminate it among the unenlightened many. He warns that if ‘sweetness and light’ are restricted to a privileged few, then the ‘pursuit of perfection’ falls short of its real purpose. He is strongly in favour of the dissemination of ‘sweetness and light’ to the unenlightened multitude: “the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light” (2006, p. 52). He wishes to see the ideal realized in the actual. Sidgwick (2006) criticizes Arnold on the grounds that he confuses the ideal with the actual: “when he speaks of culture, is sometimes speaking of an ideal, sometimes of an actual culture, and does not always know which” (p. 159). What Arnold wishes to realize in the actual is “a *national* glow of life and thought, when the whole of society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent and alive” (2006, p. 52). He imagines a classless society when the ‘sweetness and light’ would prevail: “It seeks to do away with classes; to make all live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, and use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, - to be nourished and not bound by them” (2006, p. 52). [Eliot \(1963\)](#) denounces Arnold’s ideas: “He was a champion of ‘ideas’ most of whose ideas we no longer take seriously” (pp. 433-4). He goes on to say that “Arnold is in the end, I believe, at his best in satire and in apologetics for literature” (1963, p. 433). He believes that a classless society is possible because “the men of culture are the true apostles of equality” (2006, p. 53). He does not assign to ‘the men of culture’ any such role which concerns “uprooting the definite evils on all sides” (2006, p. 54). He does not prescribe any political, religious or ideological programme but “a spirit of cultivated inaction” (2006, p. 54). [Trilling \(1939\)](#) affirms the

same point about Arnold's 'disinterested criticism': "if the criticism is to assure its own disinterestedness, it must remove itself from practical life" (p. 204). He manifestly prohibits 'the men of culture' from "public life and direct political action" (2006, p. 152). [Williams \(1990\)](#) criticizes Arnold on the grounds that "his emphasis in detail is so much on the importance of knowing, and so little on the importance of doing" (p. 125). Eliot's criticism is more pronounced than Williams: "His Culture is powerless to aid or to harm" (1963, p. 434). However, [Trilling \(1939\)](#) argues, "We may best think of Arnold's effort as an experiment of light, rather than as an experiment of fruit. It is that play of the mind over the subject, of which criticism consists: immediate practicality is not its point any more than it is the point of *The Renaissance*" (p. 255). His reason for keeping them "in a stock of light for our difficulties" is grounded in the assumption that "action with insufficient light, action pursued because we like to be doing something and doing it as we please, and do not like the trouble of thinking" (2006, p. 55). However, [Sidgwick \(2006\)](#) charges Arnold with elitism. He argues that "If any culture really has what Mr Arnold in his finest mood calls its noblest element...It can only propagate itself by shedding the light of its sympathy liberally; by learning to love common people and common things, to feel common interests" (p. 168). Arnold is very sarcastic about his countrymen's love of liberty because it saves them from 'the trouble of thinking'. He thinks that "our national love for the assertion of personal liberty" as his countrymen conceive of it has in itself become a stock notion (2006, p. 58). As [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) argues, "He diminished liberty in the interests of what he thought more important – Equality and Fraternity" (p. 284). It requires a fresh assessment of what it means to be free. (2006, p. 58). As [Novak \(2002\)](#) explains Arnold's concern "to actively 'draw out', or educate, the latent and potential energies of human freedom" (p. 600). He also prohibits 'the men of culture' from "despondency and violence" (2006, p. 152).

Thus, Arnoldian culture transcends 'the worship of machinery' and its accompanying dangers; it trusts love: "Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred" (2006, p. 52). Towards the end of *The Prelude*, Love, for Wordsworth, is the centre of all values. The

Wordsworthian model of growth follows from simple love of nature and humans to higher love which he associates with "the Almighty's Throne" (1979, XIV, p. 187). He draws a relation between spiritual love and imagination. Both simple and higher forms of love, Imagination and Reason are in conjunction with one another. Similarly, nothing stands alone in Arnold's thought unless it is connected with other key concepts. Neither sweetness in itself nor light in itself is sufficient; he employs them in conjunction with each other. Arnoldian culture is a combination of sweetness and light, "best self, or right reason" (2006, p. 72). The Arnoldian touchstone of culture is 'right reason' which is a combination of reason and imagination: "The main element of the modern spirit's life is neither the senses and understanding nor the heart and imagination; it is the imaginative reason" (Cited in [Trilling \(1939\)](#), p. 206). He defines 'best self' as the "self to develop harmoniously" (2006, p. 81). It is "an endeavour to come at reason and the will of God by means of reading, observing, and thinking" (Arnold, 2006, p. 66). Education is a great help to culture as he says emphatically that "education is the road to culture" (2006, p. 153). As [Novak \(2002\)](#) explains, "By contrast, Arnold believed that the energies of freedom need to be actively cultivated and that we need to agree on the method and manner of their cultivation, through the institution of a certain kind of individualizing and humanizing public education" (p. 600). Also, [Kuhn Jr. \(1971\)](#) argues that "Education working through the State and through the individual leads a nation forward to that more comprehensive education to culture, to 'true liberty and true humanity'" (p. 65). For Arnoldian culture, "to model education on sound ideas is of more importance than to have the management of it in one's own hands ever so fully" (2006, p. 154). As [Williams \(1990\)](#) explains, "The work of perfection, which Arnold was to name as Culture, received increasing emphasis in opposition to the powerful Utilitarian tendency which conceived education as the training of men to carry out particular tasks in a particular kind of civilization" (p. 111). Arnold gradually works toward finding a 'centre of authority' which is "*the State*, or organ of our collective best self" (2006, p. 72). As [Williams \(1990\)](#) argues, "The most interesting point to consider is his recommendation of the State as the

agent of general perfection” (p. 119). Also [Kuhn Jr. \(1971\)](#) argues that “the role of the State, both as governing power and as the collective character of the nation, extends beyond formal education” (p. 52). Finally, it rests with “the State as governing power to shoulder responsibility for education” ([Kuhn Jr., 1971, p. 53](#)). He defines the *state* as “the nation in its collective and corporate character controlling, as government, the free swing of this or that one of its members in the name of the higher reason of all of them, his own as well as that of others” (2006, p. 60). Arnold clarifies the relation between culture and *state* by emphasizing that “culture suggests the idea of *the State*” while “culture suggests one to us in our *best self*” (2006, p. 71). As [Williams \(1990\)](#) states, “The State which for Burke was an actuality has become for Arnold an idea” (p. 123). [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) affirms the same point: “he [Arnold] was in Burke’s tradition of slow, almost imperceptible change” (p. 280). However, [Trilling \(1939\)](#) argues to the contrary, “Arnold’s theory of the State does not hold up as a logical structure, nor does it hold up as a practical structure” (p. 255).

Arnold’s influence on Walter Pater is well-known (even if he departs from him). The key distinction between Arnold and Pater is that Pater was homosexual, and his interest in aesthetics lay in separating discussions of beauty from Christian ethics and linking them to Greek ethics as mediated by John Keats: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” from “The Ode on a Grecian Urn”. [Eliot \(1963\)](#) calls Pater a “disciple of Arnold” (p. 440). Though Eliot regrets that Arnold is admired and read more than Pater, he denounces both of them: “The degradation of philosophy and religion, skilfully initiated by Arnold, is competently continued by Pater” (p. 437). He argues that Pater is “a development of the intellectual Epicureanism of Arnold” (p. 437). In contradistinction to Eliot’s scathing criticism of Arnold and Pater, [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) argues that Arnold and Pater are “the indispensable basis of our discussion of literature and the role of literature in the humanizing process” (p. xix-xx).

Wordsworth is a common source of influence on both Pater and Arnold. As [DeLaura \(1966\)](#) clarifies, “Not only does Arnold’s view of Wordsworth look back to Pater’s, but Pater’s own view shows an awareness of Arnold’s earlier

statements concerning Wordsworth” (p. 651). He further argues to clarify the relationship between Arnold and Pater: “Pater knew Arnold’s work intimately, and absorbed great amounts of his spirit into his own writings, is a critical commonplace” (1969, p. 192). This is evident in Pater’s essay on Wordsworth, which marks a significant shift in Pater’s literary career. As [DeLaura \(1966\)](#) argues, “Pater makes his essay the occasion of one of the most crucial statements of his career” (p. 651). Also [Meisel \(1987\)](#) comments on the importance of Pater, “Pater’s enduring neglect as a central figure within his own tradition continues apace despite Harold Bloom and despite the quite obvious and decisive influence Pater has upon High Modernism at large on both sides of the Atlantic” (pp. 53-4). Pater begins his essay on Wordsworth in almost the same manner as Arnold does by emphasizing the true estimate of Wordsworth’s poetry. For Pater, “the true estimate of Poetry” is based on the distinction between “the *Fancy*, and another more powerful faculty – the *Imagination*” (1918, p. 39). He further links ‘the Imagination’ and ‘the Fancy’ with “higher and lower degrees of intensity in the poet’s perception of his subject” (1918, p. 39). He finds it exemplified in Wordsworth’s best poetry: “it was Wordsworth who made the most of it” (1918, p. 39). On account of his best poetic qualities, he recommends “the reading of Wordsworth an excellent sort of training towards the things of art and poetry” (1918, p. 41). His best poetic qualities like “concentration and collectedness of mind” and “a special and privileged state of mind” are the kind of training Wordsworth’s poetry inspires (1918, p. 42).

Pater acknowledges that Wordsworth’s best poetry has inspired “some of our best modern fiction” (1918, p. 53). He appreciates Wordsworth’s ability to convey the depth and intensity of significant moments – ‘spots of time’. Pater’s work takes inspiration from Wordsworth’s mastery in conveying the depth and intensity of transfigurative moments; he explains the creative potential of these moments: “in those periods of intense susceptibility, in which he appeared to himself as but the passive recipient of the external influences, he was attracted by the thought of a spirit of life in outward things, a single, all-pervading mind in them, of which man, and even the poet’s imaginative energy, are but moments”

(1918, p. 56). For example, the profound significance of such moments in Pater's work, "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake"; "exquisite pauses in time, in which, arrested thus, we seem to be spectators of all the fullness of existence, and which are like some consummate extract or quintessence of life" (Cited in [Poirier, 1988, p. 23](#)). In his view, Wordsworth's best poetry is a "fusion of matter and form, which is the characteristic of the highest poetical expression" (1918, p. 58). It reflects Pater's own key statement concerning the nature of art: "All art constantly aspires to the condition of music" (Cited in [Meisel, 1987, p. 54](#)). He believes that it is not the poet's duty to moralize. Wordsworth's poetry yields a "peculiar kind of pleasure", and it is by means of this pleasure that "he does actually convey to the reader an extraordinary wisdom in the things of practice" (1918, p. 59). Above all, his poetry conveys "the supreme importance of contemplation in the conduct of life" (1918, p. 59). Pater perceives "impassioned contemplation" as "the perfect end" for Wordsworth's poetry (1918, p. 60). Like Arnold's recommendation of 'cultivated inaction', he, too, recommends 'impassioned contemplation' – *being* than *doing* – which he finds exemplified in Wordsworth's poetry. Pater's own concern with experience in itself rather than the fruit of experience is obvious here as he says of Wordsworth's best poetry: "Justify the end rather by the means, it seems to say: whatever may become of the fruit, make sure of the flowers and the leaves" (1918, pp. 61-62). He says that it is Wordsworth who thought deeply "on the true relation of means to ends in life, and on the distinction between what is desirable in itself and what is desirable only as machinery" (1918, p. 62). He acknowledges the complex nature of choice between means and ends, which determine the nature of our lives. He, too, finds in Wordsworth's poetry "a continual protest" against the "predominance of machinery in our existence" (1918, p. 61). [Eliot \(1963\)](#) demolishes Pater's view of art by saying that "being primarily a moralist, he was incapable of seeing any work of art simply as it is" (p. 440). He further says of Pater, "He was 'naturally Christian' – but within very narrow limitations: the rest of him was just the cultivated Oxford don" (p. 440).

However, [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) argues to the contrary, "Arnold and Pater remain for us figures of permanent interest and significance precisely because both are 'moralists' who assign a high role to art and intelligence in modern life" (p. 181). He declares it as a supreme principle of poetry, "a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding" (1918, p. 62). It is reminiscent of Arnold's definition of culture: it is a desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are'. In Pater's view, Wordsworth's poetry most exemplifies it: "To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry" (1918, p. 63). [Eliot \(1963\)](#) charges Pater with 'vagueness' as he charges Arnold: "Art for art's sake is the offspring of Arnold's Culture; and we can hardly venture to say that it is even a perversion of Arnold's doctrine, considering how very vague and ambiguous that doctrine is" (p. 439). However, [DeLaura \(1966\)](#) argues to the contrary, "Pater's code of treating life in the spirit of art, his supreme, artistic view of life, his ideal of moulding our lives to artistic perfection, is a simplification and extension of Arnold's ideal of disinterestedness" (p. 661).

Pater is a key literary figure of the Aesthetic Movement that emerged in response to Victorian moralism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) explains Arnold's reaction to aestheticism. The attraction of aestheticism was not simply its anti-bourgeois, anti-Christian quality but its links to the notion of self-education, self-development. [Wilson \(2004\)](#) gives Pater the credit of playing the same role in England as Stéphane Mallarmé, the key Symbolist, was playing in France. He calls Pater "an English equivalent to the Symbolist theory of the French" (p. 28). Kermode's study of the Image reveals that the Image the Romantics employed in their poetry became the foundation on which Symbolism is constructed. He argues that the isolation of the artist is a price to be paid in order to have the "esthetic image", which for Joyce is the epiphany (1957, p. 1). [Scotto \(1973\)](#) affirms the same point that "Joyce's very definition of the epiphany is Paterian" (p. 46). He quotes Marvin Magalaner and Richard Kain, who "call Pater Joyce's youthful idol" (p. 45). He also quotes Robert Scholes and Richard

Kain, “who first illustrated how the very definition of ‘epiphany’ was probably borrowed in part from Pater’s *Renaissance*” (pp. 45-6). Pater took the notion of moral development from Wordsworth but came to locate beauty not in nature but in artifice, art objects, the epiphany as something achieved through art or vision rather than through engagement with nature. [Perlis \(1980\)](#) clarifies that “Pater helped to establish an aesthetic climate that gave not only Joyce direction but also the confidence of perception necessary to allow the world to approach him on its own terms” (p. 278). As he argues, “At the core of Pater’s theory of visions is the Aesthetic Hero, a fictional embodiment of the life of sensations” (p. 272).

Conclusion

Despite scathing criticism by Sidgwick, Steiner, and Eliot, the humanistic view of Arnold and Pater still survives today as it is necessary for the “re-humanizing of democracy” ([Novak, 2002, p. 596](#)). The notion of the humanist self was demolished by the Structuralist and Post-Structuralist critics in the 1970s and 1980s. May’s study is helpful in order to determine why the notion of the humanist self was unacceptable to the critics of this period: “Contemporary Western culture is dominated by rigid conservatism and resurgent nationalisms on the right hand and by certain staunchly antihumanistic and illiberal forms of postmodernism on the cultural left” (1997, p. 2). For example, the Marxist critic

Terry Eagleton challenged “Arnold’s belief in the social value of literature” ([Mazzeno, 1999, p. 98](#)). Mazzeno comments on Eagleton’s demolishing view of Arnold: “Eagleton portrays Arnold as the first and principal villain in the capitalist and aristocratic struggle to keep the working classes enslaved through the use of literature” (p. 97). However, [DeLaura \(1969\)](#) comments on the continuing importance of Arnold and Pater: “They remain figures of living importance even today because, with unparalleled force and fullness in their own generation, they insisted on a humanistic vision” (p. xvii). [Meisel \(1987\)](#) clarifies the relation between Arnold and Pater and modernism: “their largely implicit debate produces two divergent lines of High Modernism at large, Arnold’s devolving upon Eliot, Pater’s upon Joyce” (p. 67). The ‘implicit debate’ between Arnold and Pater contributes to another significant debate which forms the basis of modernism: “The implicit debate reappears early in the twentieth century in the striking contrast to be found between Eliot and Joyce, producing two separate lines of High British modernism” (p. 6). He clarifies further, “Repressing the sure evidence of Pater, Eliot will instead press an implicitly Arnoldian case against all odds in both his central essays and his poems, even against the evidence of his own strongest essay, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’” (pp. 6-7). In DeLaura’s words, “Both Arnold and Pater were essentially mediators, honest brokers between past and future” (1969, p. 344).

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