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Lene Østermark-Johansen

- ¹ A few months after the Victorian writer Walter Pater (1839-94) had died, the poet and mystic William Sharp (1855-1905) published recollections of his friendship with Pater in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Sharp). On moving to London in 1878 Sharp frequented the artistic circles of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne (Pittock), and by the early 1880s he had also become closely acquainted with Pater. Sharp's very personal account is bathed in the golden light of the author's memories of lengthy visits to and conversations with Pater.¹ It included several long quotations from Pater, heavily edited and neatly polished by Sharp's poetic hand into a Golden Treasury of Paterian prose gems, glittering as they were imbedded in Sharp's own prose. Pater emerges from Sharp's reminiscences as a veritable "chrysophilic" enthralled by the beauty of gold in nature, art, and literature. In Sharp's artful piece of writing he stepped from his own visual perception to Pater's, to verbatim quotations from their conversation, followed by an extract from Pater's 1877 essay on Giorgione.² Pater's college rooms in Brasenose College Oxford provided the setting for this anecdote:

I noted a long ray of sunlight slant across the flowers and waver into a shadowy corner, where it moved like a golden finger, and seemed to point out or lead forth unexpected vagaries of light and shade. When I glanced at my companion, I saw that his gaze was arrested by the same vagrant sunbeam. He began to speak in a low voice about gold: the gold of nature; above all, the chemical action of golden light; and how it was "the primary colour of delight" throughout nature and in nearly all art.

"Through all writing, too, that is rare and distinctive and beautiful", he said, "there is a golden thread. Perhaps the most skilful weavers are those who so disguise it in the web that its charm is felt though its presence is undetected, or at least unobtrusive." (Sharp quoted from Seiler 86)

- 2 This essay is concerned with those golden Paterian threads: I partly attempt to trace the image in Pater's writings of the 1870s and 1880s as a subtle, yet powerful, metaphor for thought in art and literature, a connecting link between Pater's art theoretical and archaeological writings and his fiction. I am, however, also interested in the ways in which the golden threads become the transmitters of a long aesthetic tradition, from Homer to Ovid to Pausanias to Apuleius to Pater, and potentially to Sharp himself. Sharp was among Pater's earliest hagiographers, some sixteen years younger than him, yet a writer with a keen sense of taking up the aesthetic torch after Pater. His "reminiscences" are a subtle piece of literary mythmaking, asserting his own not insignificant position in the literary world at the fin de siècle.

- 3 In the passage quoted above Sharp transmutes the ray of sunlight into a deictic and didactic golden finger, and establishes a profound connection between himself and Pater by means of their shared appreciation of the golden afternoon light. He moves from "sunlight" to "delight" in Pater's apocryphal definition of gold as "the primary colour of delight". The phrase sounds Paterian enough, with its pun on the word "primary", so rich in connotations: as the first and most original of colours; primitive; a colour of the highest rank or importance; as the colour which is the origin of all other colours, with the additional pun on the term "primary colour", first used in English in the early seventeenth century.³ Gold is, of course, not a primary colour; it does not mix with others and form new colours, but is rather celebrated for its extraordinary purity. Pater's juxtaposition of "gold" with "delight" couples the material with the immaterial and abstract, with the result that it loses much of its physical and tactile quality. Gold causes a feeling of delight, it springs from delight, it is natural and artificial, with occurrences in both the God-made and the man-made world.

- 4 Sharp then introduces the spoken voice of Pater, the critic and reader, who judges the quality of other people's writings by the presence or absence of a structural golden thread. This thread is the aesthete's counterpart to Ariadne's red thread, which in Classical mythology led Theseus the way out of the labyrinthine corridors of Knossos and which has served as a metaphor for textural structure and argument ever since (see Miller). Unlike the red thread, which is clearly visible, the golden thread is unobtrusive. First-rate writers appeal to first-rate readers who can detect the hidden structure instinctively, through empathy and feeling rather than through intellect, and the submerged golden thread of quality writing is a subtle presence, thin and delicate, which creates an elusive beauty in good writing as it appears and disappears. Pater is alluding to such mythological female spinners and weavers as Ariadne, Arachne and Athena, to Penelope, the Three Fates and to the magic of Northern Folklore in tales such as "The Gold Spinners" and "Rumpelstiltskin", where hay is turned into gold thread by witchcraft and magic. He thus takes the golden thread of good writing back to its origins in both Germanic and Classical folklore, setting gold as the primary colour of the delight of good story-telling in its earliest and most primitive days. The good writer is himself capable of transforming straw into gold like the imp of Grimm's fairy tale "Rumpelstiltskin", first published in *Kinder - und Hausmärchen* [*Children's and Household Tales*] in 1812. Grimm's tale was popular among the Victorians, and Pater's publisher Macmillan printed it in Walter Crane's illustrated edition of Grimm in 1882 (Grimm). Andrew Lang's *Blue Fairy Book*, the first of his twelve fairy books published by Longmans, Green & Co. between 1889 and 1910, contained both "The Gold Spinners" and "Rumpelstiltskin" (Lang). The aesthetics of late Victorian book design confirms the magic of gold: as decorative dust or delicately

interwoven thread, gold is closely tied to the delight of spinning out a good tale, if one judges from the covers of Andrew Lang's twelve fairy books, each of which has a different background colour, sprinkled with decorative gold.

Walter Crane, illustration from *Rumpelstiltskin* in *Household Stories from the Collection by the Brothers Grimm*, translated from the German by Lucy Crane and done into Pictures by Walter Crane (London: Macmillan, 1886)

Cover of Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*, blue cloth with gold (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889)

- 5 If we go back to Sharp's reminiscences of 1894, we can see how the poet was keen to promote the image of Pater as a golden writer. Sharp skilfully steps from Pater's private to his essayistic voice in the Giorgione essay in a demonstration of how the celebrated golden thread works in Pater's own writings.⁴ Sharp compresses some sixteen pages of "Giorgione" into one dense paragraph in which the images of golden threads work their way, leaving the uninformed reader with the impression that Pater was a gold theorist, seeing gold practically everywhere:

[...] colouring, that weaving as of just perceptible gold threads of light through the dress, the flesh, the atmosphere, in Titian's *Lace-Girl*, the staining of the whole fabric of the thing with a new, delightful physical quality [...], the accidental play of

sunlight and shadow for a moment on the wall or floor [...] this particular effect of light, this sudden interweaving of gold thread through the texture of the haystack, and the poplars, and the grass Only, in Italy all natural things are, as it were, woven through and through with gold thread, even the cypress revealing it among the folds of its blackness. And it is with gold dust, or gold thread, that these Venetian painters seem to work, spinning its fine filaments through the solemn human flesh, away into the white plastered walls of the thatched huts. (Sharp quoted from Seiler 86-87. Ellipses and italics are Sharp's own)

- 6 Pater would probably not have been very pleased with this truncated version of his text; in his eagerness to pursue one particular image, Sharp sacrifices much of Pater's subtlety in a piece of prose where the delicately scattered references to gold threads turn up at irregular intervals as the surface patterning on one of those Venetian canvases which Pater evokes in his essay. "The School of Giorgione" is Pater's most extensive and complex exploration of colour in painting, a celebration of the richness of Venetian light and colour over the Florentine line discussed in the Italian essays of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). Pater is essentially interested in the alchemy of Venetian painting, in the transformative powers of Italian light which transmutes even the plainest and darkest colours into filaments of gold. Haystacks, poplars, grass, cypresses are all "woven through and through with gold thread", and the omnipresence of gold in Italian nature contributes to the quality of colour which Pater finds in Venetian art, thus combining the ephemerality of gold in the natural world with its eternity in art. As Catherine Maxell points out, Pater took his image of the alchemy of art from Swinburne, who in turn had culled it from Coleridge and Shelley, most notably from Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" (Maxwell 82-88). Shelley had praised the way in which:

Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best or most beautiful in the world [...]. [It] turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy turns to portable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life. (Shelley 505)

- 7 For Pater Venetian painting is poetry, and in his essay a complex merging of poetry and painting, art and nature, takes place, with the result that it is not really possible to distinguish one from the other. The golden thread which ties everything together reflects the quasi-divine Italian light, but is also founded in something magic, mystic and inexplicable. Sharp's careful selection of quotations from the Giorgione essay resonates with many of his own interests: mysticism, inter-art relations, and Italy as a magic, transformative country. On going to Italy for the first time in 1890 Sharp had experienced a very powerful artistic and spiritual awakening, and Pater's tribute to the almost supernatural powers of the country, its light and landscape, would have tied in with Sharp's own admiration of the place. Sharp kept returning to Italy for the remaining 15 years of his life, and eventually died in Sicily in 1905 where he is buried (Pittock).
- 8 Elizabeth Prettejohn and others have pointed out the topicality of Pater's discussion of colour and gold threads in the Giorgione essay, coinciding as it does with the Ruskin-Whistler controversy over Whistler's painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, first exhibited at the opening exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 (Prettejohn 272-278; Higgins; Østermark-Johansen 45-60). Ruskin's libellous accusation that Whistler was flinging a pot of paint in the public's face with his abstract painting caused a year-

long controversy, resulting in a court case won by Whistler in 1878 (Merrill). Pater's celebration of gold, light, accidental surface patterning and gold dust against a black ground may well be a subtle reference to the artistic warfare playing itself out in the periodical press and the court room in the late 1870s. The golden threads of the Whistlerian canvas may appear to be accidental, but just like the Paterian passages mentioned by Sharp, they merge light effects with art and the natural world in an apparently accidental manner, which is, nevertheless, highly contrived, thus signifying the highest degree of artfulness. Pater only very rarely wrote about contemporary art, but was an absolute master when it came to discussing modern issues under the pretext of dealing with the distant past. The threads of gold in the Giorgione essay thus have long fibres which reach right into late Victorian London.⁵

James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875), oil on canvas, 60.3x46.4cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Creative Commons

- 9 Sharp's account of his and Pater's reading in the afternoon sunlight hovers in the interesting interface between biographical anecdote and fictional construct. Contemporary readers might well have picked up echoes from the famous scene at the opening of Chapter Five in Pater's only completed novel, *Marius the Epicurean* of 1885, where the two young male protagonists, Marius and Flavian, enjoy the intimacy of their joint reading of the so-called "Golden Book" in the sunlight amidst the hay. The novel, set in Antonine Italy in the second century AD, was a religious and philosophical Bildungsroman, exploring the formation of Marius's youthful mind through his encounters with a series of philosophical schools: mysticism, stoicism, epicureanism and Christianity, to mention just a few. Pater was, undoubtedly, fascinated by the similarities between straw and gold, between the cheapest and most abundant of crops and the rarest and most precious of metals. In the novel the transformation from one material to the other is merely an optical illusion, brought about by the intervention of Pater's favourite deity, Apollo, god of light:

The two lads were lounging together over a book, half-buried in a heap of dry corn, in an old granary—the quiet corner to which they had climbed out of the way of their noisier companions on one of their blandest holiday afternoons. They looked round; the western sun smote through the broad chinks of the shutters. How like a picture it all was! And it was precisely the place described in what they were reading, with just the added poetic touch in the book, which made it delightful and select, and, in the actual place, the ray of sunlight, transforming the rough grain among the cool brown shadows into heaps of gold. What they were intent on was, indeed, the book of books, the “golden” book of that day, a gift to Flavian, as was shown by the purple writing on the handsome yellow wrapper, following the title—Flaviane!—it said,

FLAVIANE! FLAVIANE! FLAVIANE!

LEGE VIVAS! VIVAS!

FELICITER! FLOREAS! GAUDEAS!

It was perfumed with oil of sandal-wood, and decorated with carved and gilt ivory bosses at each end of the roller. (Pater 2008, 39)⁶

- 10 The ancient book beautiful is fragrant and aesthetic, golden inside and gilt at the ends, itself a long, golden thread, gradually unrolled through reading. Although speaking of the Golden Book, Pater is attempting historical accuracy by describing it as a scroll rather than a book. Marius and Flavian’s Golden Book is Apuleius’ second-century novel *Metamorphoses*, like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* a cornucopia of tales within tales of human transformation. St. Augustine renamed the work *The Golden Ass*, the animal into which Lucius—the male protagonist, who enjoys experimenting with magic—is suddenly transformed.⁷ Pater’s epithet “golden” applies as much to the book as a material object as to its wealth of stories within stories, one of which, the story of Cupid and Psyche, Pater translates and incorporates in his own text. The whole process of textual interweaving is one with which he experiments at many levels in the chapter on the Golden Book, as he moves away from his own convoluted prose and into his own very accessible translation of Apuleius. But he is also weaving strands of golden phrases in different languages together, as when he discusses Marius’ admiration of Apuleius’ precious style of writing in the light of the contemporary praise of Apuleius. Like the book itself, the style is ornate and fragrant, and Marius recognizes some of his own prose style in it. Writing, reading, translation and criticism are thus curiously intertwined in Pater’s passage:

What words he had found for conveying, with a single touch, the sense of textures, colours, incidents! “Like jewellers’ work! Like a myrrhine vase!”—admirers said of his writing. “The golden fibre in her hair, and the gold thread-work in her gown, marked her as the mistress”—*aurum in comis et in tunicis, ibi inflexum his intexum, matronam profecto confitebatur*—he writes, with his “curious felicity”, of one of his heroines. *Aurum intexum*: gold fibre—well! There was something of that kind in his own work. (Pater 2008, 40. Italics are Pater’s own)

- 11 *Aurum intexum* occurs twice in the brief passage as the Latin precursor of Pater’s golden threads. The term forms an interesting subtext to Pater’s notion of literature as texture, as tactile, sculptural material,⁸ here with the original Latin and its English translation subtly layered as weaving, set apart orthographically in the contrast between the Roman and the italic type font. Etymologically the English word “fibre” may derive from the Latin *filum*, the OED informs us, and the filaments of language may well become precious if carefully wrought, like jewellers’ work. Sharp may have been a devoted myth-maker, keen on proliferating the image of Pater’s golden prose style, but Pater had himself provided the basic vocabulary.

- 12 The connection between the pagan divine, gold fibres and metamorphosis were subjects to which Pater returned after the publication of *Marius*. One of the pieces of short fiction, which he produced in 1886, begins with an allusion to the myth of the Golden Age, which opens Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁹ His French medieval story, "Denys l'Auxerrois" is, as he says, "a quaint legend, with detail enough, of such a return of a golden or poetically-gilded age (a denizen of old Greece itself actually finding his way back again among men) as it happened in an ancient town of medieval France" (Pater 2014, 167).¹⁰ Pater's Denys is a Dionysian figure, a resurrected pagan god in Auxerre, a Medieval town built on the remains of a Roman colony in Northern France, and evidence of the pagan past keeps surfacing throughout the narrative. From the very beginning Pater is making a distinction between "golden" and "poetically-gilded"; indeed, it would seem that the narrator does not quite know whether the ensuing tale is to be "golden" or merely "poetically gilded". Where "golden" suggests solid gold mass, "gilded" only denotes a thin covering of gold, a superficial layer here closely connected with the powers of language and poetry, with a sinister awareness that something else may be lurking underneath. The return of the golden age is intricately connected with the golden liquid, produced in the region of Burgundy: the wine which flows as a Dionysian river through most of the story. The uncorking of an ancient Roman bottle of wine, unearthed at the beginning of the tale, lets out the spirit of the pagan past and blesses the local wine harvesting:

And, whether or not the opening of the buried vessel had anything to do with it, from that time a sort of golden age seemed indeed to be reigning there for a while, and the triumphant completion of the great church was contemporary with a series of remarkable wine seasons. The vintage of those years was long remembered. Fine and abundant wine was to be found stored up even in poor men's cottages; while a new beauty, a gaiety, was abroad, as all the conjoint arts branched out exuberantly in a reign of quiet, delighted labour, at the prompting, as it seemed, of the singular being who came suddenly and oddly to Auxerre to be the centre of so pleasant a period, though in truth he made but a sad ending. (Pater 2014, 174)

- 13 The return of the golden age is linked to fertility, sexuality, artistic procreation within all the arts, as the Cathedral of Auxerre and its famous organ also come into being. The "singular being" who serves as a catalyst for this pagan renaissance is himself a creature intricately connected with golden glass and threads. At first spotted in a fragment of medieval stained glass by a nineteenth-century traveller, his story is pursued through a series of medieval tapestries, which depict him at the centre of Dionysiac revels, where the threads of the tapestry, the wreathings of the vine and the flaxen and flowery creature merge imperceptibly:

A sort of mad vehemence prevails, indeed, throughout the delicate bewilderments of the whole series—giddy dances, wild animals leaping, above all perpetual wreathings of the vine, connecting, like some mazy arabesque, the various presentations of one oft-repeated figure, translated here out of the clear-coloured glass into the sadder, somewhat opaque and earthen hues of the silken threads. The figure was that of the organ-builder himself, a flaxen and flowery creature, sometimes well-nigh naked among the vine-leaves, sometimes muffled in skins against the cold, sometimes in the dress of a monk, but always with a strong impress of real character and incident from the veritable streets of Auxerre. (Pater 2014, 171-172)

- 14 The visual arabesque described in the passage above is a manifestation of the return of the Golden Age, suggestive of Pater's gold threads run wild, intertwined with the wreathings of the vine. It is striking how in most of the allusions to gold in his writings Pater links them to the natural world. The aesthete's way of perceiving the world focuses

on its beauty rather than its ugliness and dwells on the omnipresence of gold in nature. The linearity of hay, flax and vine stems suggests the veins of gold in the ground, gold ores, which seem like natural golden threads. Denys, described as the flaxen and flowery creature in Pater's text, emerges as a figure out of a tapestry (see Daley). By the end of the tale, his body is torn to shreds by the Maenadic locals, for whom the wine has soured and the golden age turned out to be merely gilded: "People turned against their favourite, whose former charms must now be counted only as the fascinations of witchcraft. It was as if the wine poured out for them had soured in the cup. The golden age had indeed come back for a while—golden was it, or gilded only, after all? and they were too sick, or at least too serious, to carry through their parts in it" (Pater 2014, 180). The madness, the violence and the extreme aggression played out in the final scenes of the story suggest that darker forces are at work in Pater's Medieval French community. Pater structures his text around the dichotomies of light and darkness, with the first half bathed in a golden light, while the second half contains several exhumations and burials, scenes of both individual and collective madness rising to the surface. The disruption of the surface covering thus breaks the illusion of pure gold and reveals the gilding, and gold turns thin and brittle, rather than solid and robust.

- 15 It would seem that Pater primarily connected gold with the Mediterranean world. In his Italian essays and in his fiction, gold is associated with the classical world of Roman paganism, even, in the case of "Denys l'Auxerrois", when it resurfaces in the North of France. Alongside his fiction Pater was also writing essays on Greek art, much inspired by some of the latest archaeological excavations of Troy and Mycenae by the German Heinrich Schliemann, whose works he was reading hot off the press.¹¹ With more than 500 high-quality images, Schliemann's lavishly illustrated volume on the excavations at Mycenae gives the sense of a treasury of the past suddenly opened to the modern eye. The pages are littered with embossed metal objects: decorated golden buttons, clasps, bracelets, gold masks, and the overwhelming physical presence of ancient Greek culture must have impressed the Victorian reader. Schliemann's own 40-page long account of how he stumbled on gold, gold, gold everywhere is a veritable bonanza, which became a popular account of a modern treasure hunt.
- 16 Pater's references to gold in the Greek essays are subtler. The essays evolved from a series of lectures on Greek art given at the University of Oxford in the Michaelmas Term of 1878.¹² The lectures were partly based on the second-century Greek traveller Pausanias' accounts of artworks in Greece (Wright 182), and they were the first of their kind, as noted by the archaeologist L.R. Farnell, who was among Pater's students: "This itself was an epoch in the history of Oxford studies; for he was the first to give this practical expression to the idea that Greek art was a fitting lecture-subject for a classical teacher. [...] we may call him the father of archaeological teaching in Oxford, though his sensitive and retiring nature would have shrunk from being called the father of anything" (Farnell 76). When writing about the beginnings of Greek sculpture Pater was clearly fascinated by the Asiatic or Oriental influences, which brought polychromy and texture to the fore, as in the juxtaposition of gold and ivory in chryselephantine sculpture. Just as he had stressed the Oriental colour of Venetian painting, so he celebrated the white and gold, the opaque and the shining surfaces of chryselephantine art. Pater was not writing about the most famous pieces, such as the Phidian Athena Parthenos, which has been reconstructed repeatedly, both in our time and in the nineteenth century. Instead, he turned to another lost piece, known primarily through Pausanias' long ekphrastic description: the *Chest of*

Kypselos.¹³ The archaeologists' reconstructions in drawings based on Pausanias have their parallel in Pater's mental reconstruction, which syntactically raises a series of questions of a rhetorical character, suggesting that Pater himself already knows the answer. The processes of writing and reading stimulate new creative processes in the mind of the reader, and Pausanias' narrative passes almost imperceptibly into Pater's: "And, as we read the description, we can hardly help distributing in fancy gold and ivory, respectively, to their appropriate functions in the representation. The cup of Dionysus, and the wings of certain horses there, Pausanias himself tells us were golden. Were not the apples of the Hesperides, the necklace of Eriphyle, the bridles, the armour, the unsheathed sword in the hand of Amphiarauus, also of gold? Were not the other children, like the white image of Sleep, especially the naked child Alcmaeon, of ivory?" (Pater 1896, 228).

The Chest of Kypselus, colour lithograph, illustration from A. Quatremère de Quincy, *General Study of Greek Architecture and Sculpture* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1814), 124

- 17 Farnell had somewhat condescendingly remarked that all Pater had to say in his lectures on the Chest of Kypselos was that "it must have been a very beautiful thing" (Farnell 77), yet Pater clearly had more to say when he wrote up his ideas in the essays. A quick glance at the reconstructed chest gives us an idea of why the piece appealed to him: its narrative linear character takes us straight into the realm of literature and golden threads with its surface patterning where lines of gold appear and disappear. Gold does not blend; it stands apart as highlights capturing the sun, as little fragments of the sun itself. The chryselephantine influence of Greek art and literature reaches well into the nineteenth century, and engages the mind of the modern reader in a dialogue with a 2500-year old object, long since vanished. Pater compared the gesture and expression of the decorations on the Chest to the Bayeux Tapestry, which he may himself have seen in Normandy. He thus established a link between Pausanias, the ancient spectator, and the modern traveller: "any one who has seen the Bayeux tapestry, for instance, must

recognise the pathos and energy of which, when really prompted by genius, even the earliest hand is capable" (Pater 1896, 227).

- 18 It would seem that gold and literature were inextricably connected in Pater's mind. In his discussion of some of the earliest western art and literature he deliberately linked the two when speaking of the "chryselephantine language" of the Homeric epics. Determined to challenge the notion of Greek sculpture as abstract thought in white marble, Pater developed the idea of Homer's chryselephantine language, white and glittering, as of ivory and gold. The opacity of the ivory was set off by the reflective qualities of the gold, and Pater ignored the conventional myth of the blind bard, as he described how sight and touch mediated between the world of art and that of writing: "He [Homer] is as pleased in touching and looking at those objects as his own heroes; their gleaming aspect brightens all he says, and has taken hold, one might think, of his language, his very vocabulary becoming *chryselephantine*. Homer's artistic descriptions, though enlarged by fancy, are not wholly imaginary, and the extant remains of monuments of the earliest historical age are like lingering relics of that dream in a tamer but real world" (Pater 1896, 200). Homer thus becomes a precursor of Pater himself: an ancient aesthetic critic with a sensuous delight in the polychromatic beauty of both sculpture and language. When Pater spoke of Homer's language as "chryselephantine", he was alluding to some of the very same characteristics of literary style that William Sharp would detect in Pater's own writings: golden lines or passages which stand out against an opaque background, the rays of the sun reflected on itself. Sharp's anecdote about the golden afternoon in Pater's college rooms may partly be fiction, but it is a little gold nugget in its own right, a compressed version of the long golden thread which runs through Pater's writings.

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NOTES

1. The earliest preserved letter from Pater to Sharp is dated 30 July 1882. It refers, among other things, to Sharp's recent visit to Oxford (Evans 43).
2. "The School of Giorgione" was first published in the *Fortnightly Review* XXII n.s. (October 1877): 526-538. It was subsequently included in the third edition of *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1888).
3. "Primary", *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed on 21 January 2015.
4. In 1878, a year after the first publication of the Giorgione essay in the *Fortnightly Review*, Pater had plans of issuing a second volume of essays, entitled "The School of Giorgione, and other Studies". Printing was quite advanced when Pater suddenly abandoned the project. In the summer of 1882 he presented William Sharp with the corrected proofs of "The School of Giorgione", so Sharp would have been particularly familiar with that essay (Evans 32-33, 43-45).
5. Venice was the centre of Ruskin's influential theory of the rise and fall of western civilization from the Nature of Gothic to the Grotesque Renaissance, articulated in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53). It would also become the temporary home for the impecunious Whistler, bankrupted by the trial, and the beginning of a new and ground-breaking series of etchings from his hand.

6. Pater's editor, Gerald Monsman, translates the Latin: "Flavian! Read Happily! / Flavian! Live! Flourish! / Flavian! Live! Rejoice!"
7. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 18.18.2 refers to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* as the "asinus aureus", "the golden ass".
8. I explore this at length in my monograph *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, in particular in chapter 6.
9. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 89-112. There are many studies of the significance of the myth of the Golden Age, see such a classic work as Harry Levin. *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*. London: Faber & Faber, 1970.
10. "Denys l'Auxerrois" was first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* LIV (October 1886): 413-423. It was subsequently published in book form in Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*. London: Macmillan, 1887.
11. Pater borrowed Heinrich Schliemann's *Mycenae: A Narrative of Researches and Discoveries at Mycenae and Tiryns* from Brasenose College Library already in December 1877. Although the publication date is 1878, the book had been released the previous year in time for the Christmas sales (Inman, ix and 409).
12. The essays appeared in the periodical press in the course of the 1880s and were only published posthumously in book form in the volume *Greek Studies*, compiled by Pater's friend and literary executor C.L. Shadwell.
13. The 170-line description in Pausanias (5.17.5 – 5.19.10) of a chest in cedar wood, clad with ivory and gold, of 600 BC, richly decorated with inscriptions and reliefs of some 30 legendary subjects, is one of the stock pieces of classical ekphrasis. It is the second longest descriptive passage in Pausanias, dry, factual, attempting to get to grips with a hugely complicated work of art.

ABSTRACTS

The Irish poet William Sharp recalled visiting Walter Pater's college rooms, when a golden ray of sunlight suddenly provoked a lengthy discourse on gold from the Victorian critic. Pater explored what he called "the primary colour of delight" throughout his thirty years as a writer. This paper maps the range of Pater's use of gold in his writings in an attempt to capture the complexities of his notion of the purest of metals. In his Greek essays Pater dealt with the purest gold as a material for sculpture as it had recently surfaced in Heinrich Schliemann's excavations of Mycenae. But he also dealt with the polychrome sculpture of Antiquity and spoke of Homer's language as "chryselefantine". He thus addressed the controversial issue of colour in ancient sculpture, while linking sculpture and language by means of the adjective "chryselefantine". In his novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* figured as the protagonist's "Golden Book", and in one of his short pieces of fiction Pater's Dionysian figure Denys l'Auxerrois was framed in the context of the classical myth of the Golden Age, popularly known from the opening of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In "The School of Giorgione" (1877) the golden threads of Venetian painting relate in a complex manner to J.A.M. Whistler's controversial *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* and to the influence of Byzantine art on Venetian painting. Gold figures as mass, as line, as surface covering, as composite sculptural material, as an intriguing metaphor and as myth. It is likened to light, and is thus immaterial, and at the same time, it is tangible—whether as a thread in weaving, as surface covering or as solid material, alone or set off by other

materials. Its primary aesthetic effect is dependent on light. To Pater gold is pure, truthful, essential—as the result of an alchemical process—and potentially deceptive, as indicated in his distinction between the terms “golden” and “gilded”. It is questionable whether it is at all possible to condense Pater’s use of gold over a long career into any one clear definition, but inevitably his continued reference to the material reflects a range of highly topical late Victorian issues, whether the latest archaeological discoveries, the latest art controversies or the late Victorian interest in myth. Pater’s golden writings, themselves distilled through endless revision and polishing, thus serve as a reflection of the late nineteenth-century concern with gold.

Le poète irlandais William Sharp se souvient avoir rendu visite à Walter Pater dans son appartement universitaire, lorsqu’un rayon de soleil doré provoqua soudain une longue réflexion sur l’or de la part du critique victorien. En effet, pendant toute sa carrière d’écrivain, Pater ne cesse de méditer sur ce qu’il appelle « la couleur primaire du délice ». Cet article examine donc le rôle de l’or dans les écrits de Pater afin de cerner les complexités de sa pensée sur le plus pur des métaux. Dans ses essais sur l’art grec, Pater envisage l’or en tant que matériau utilisé en sculpture, comme c’est le cas dans les œuvres retrouvées lors des fouilles de Mycènes réalisées par Heinrich Schliemann en 1874. Mais Pater évoque aussi la sculpture polychrome antique, sujet très controversé à l’époque, et qualifie la langue d’Homère de « chryséléphantine », comme pour lier les arts du langage et de la sculpture. Dans son roman *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), il fait référence à *L’Âne d’or* d’Apulée comme le « livre d’or » du personnage principal, tandis que sa nouvelle « Denys l’Auxerrois » représente le personnage dionysien central dans le contexte du mythe classique de l’Âge d’Or tel qu’il est décrit dans l’introduction des *Métamorphoses* d’Ovide. Dans son essai « The School of Giorgione » (1877), Pater relie les fils d’or de la peinture vénitienne à la toile scandaleuse de J.A.M. Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, et à l’influence de l’art byzantin sur la peinture vénitienne. Qu’il soit considéré comme matière, ligne ou surface, l’or figure chez Pater comme une métaphore et un mythe complexes. À la fois tangible et intangible, l’or est pour Pater lié à la lumière d’où il tire ses principaux effets esthétiques. Mais s’il évoque la pureté, la vérité et une essence d’origine alchimique, l’or est aussi potentiellement trompeur, ainsi que le critique le suggère en distinguant ce qui est de l’or massif de ce qui est seulement « doré ». Même s’il est vain de chercher à donner une définition unique de l’or dans l’œuvre de Pater, il semble évident que sa réflexion continue sur le sujet rejoint un certain nombre de préoccupations centrales de la fin de l’ère victorienne, en lien avec les découvertes archéologiques récentes, le regain d’intérêt pour la mythologie et les controverses artistiques de cette époque. C’est enfin par son écriture aurifère, distillée et raffinée à force de révisions et polissages, que Pater nous permet de comprendre la signification de l’or à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle.

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oeuvre citée *Marius the Epicurean*, *Golden Ass (The)*, *Metamorphoses*, *School of Giorgione (The)*, *Denys l’Auxerrois*, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, *Greek Studies*, *Imaginary Portraits*

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