# “Passing into the great romantic loves of rebellious flesh”: Medieval Religion and the Body in Walter Pater's “Poems by William Morris” and “Two Early French Stories”

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# "Passing into the great romantic loves of rebellious flesh": medieval religion and the body in Walter Pater's "Poems by William Morris" and "Two Early French Stories"

This study concentrates on the oft-neglected notion of the "medieval spirit" that Walter Pater defines in two texts, "Poems by William Morris" and "Two Early French Stories." It attempts to show a paradox: for Pater, the reaction against religion in the Middle Ages—which took the form of medieval antinomianism but also of a sensual or physical liberation—originated in Christianity itself. Our reading also aims at showing how Pater deploys diverging discourses on love, which evoke either disorder or harmony according to whether the focus is on the male or the female body.

*La notion d'« esprit médiéval » chez Walter Pater a été relativement peu abordée. À partir de l'étude de deux textes, « Poems by William Morris » et « Two Early French Stories », on s'efforcera de souligner le paradoxe suivant : selon Pater, la réaction contre la religion, qu'elle prenne la forme de l'antinomisme ou d'une libération sensuelle et physique, a pour origine le christianisme lui-même. Notre hypothèse de lecture est aussi que les modalités du discours sur l'amour sont différentes selon que Pater traite du corps féminin ou masculin, l'un évoquant le désordre et l'autre l'harmonie.*

Appreciations of Walter Pater's relation towards religion have often seen a divide: he either re-endorsed orthodox Christianity in his later works, or remained faithful to the relativistic or anti-religious stance of his beginnings. But discourse on religion plays a central role in his texts and readings insist on his valuation of religion as "cultural practice."[1] The

1. See Higgins 287: "Pater's texts have a double motive: firstly, to dismantle the absolute claims of Christianity, interrogating its doctrinal paradigms and especially its somatic regime; and secondly, to reaffirm, as an alternative, the imaginative and idealistic potential of historically-specific religious discourse."

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aim of this essay is not to make a thorough overview of religious discourse in Pater's *œuvre* but rather to concentrate on two texts that deal with the freeing of what he terms the "human spirit" in the context of the Middle Ages. In these texts, Pater posits the dangers of rigid religious systems and counters the Christian discourse on the body, insisting instead on the primacy of the senses and refusing to establish a dichotomy between body and soul. But he elaborates a strategy of oscillation between references to religion and allusions to poetry, which enables him to paradoxically locate sites of rebellion within the very space of Christianity. And so Pater finally seems more radical when he deploys his various discourses on the body than when he deals with questions of religion proper.

In October 1868, Pater anonymously published "Poems by William Morris," which deals of course with Morris's poetry and lists central tenets of the Aesthetic movement. In 1873, he extracted the second part of this essay to form the Conclusion to the first edition of *The Renaissance*. He later turned the first part of the essay into a text entitled "Aesthetic Poetry"[2] and inserted it into the first edition of *Appreciations* (1889).[3] In another essay, "Aucassin and Nicolette," published in the first 1873 edition of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, he addresses the irruption of the Renaissance in the medieval world. He then revised this, modifying or suppressing some passages and adding an analysis of the tale of "Amis and Amile." This was re-published as "Two Early French Stories" for the second edition in 1877 of the volume, now entitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry.*[4]

In his essay on William Morris's poems, Pater undertakes to define the characteristics of the particular contemporary "aesthetic poetry" Morris belongs to. This derives from a "romantic school," which, according to him, "marks a transition not so much from the pagan to the medieval ideal, as from a lower to a higher degree of passion in literature," (*A* 214). There is confusion as to what his object really is, since he sometimes examines Morris's "aesthetic poetry," and sometimes the "medieval spirit" which is one of the sources of that poetry. His central idea is that "the medieval spirit" comprises two elements: "its mystic religion at its apex in Dante and Saint Louis, and its mystic passion, passing here and there into the great

2. Except when stated, all references are to this version of the text, published in the 1889 edition of *Appreciation* (referred to as *A*). "Poems of William Morris" was originally published in the *Westminster Review* XXXIV (October 1868): 301-12.
3. The Morris essay attracted adverse criticism both in 1868 and in the 1873 "Conclusion" form. Brake believes that Pater removed "Aesthetic Poetry" from the second edition of *Appreciations* of 1890 because of the context of the Cleveland Street scandals of 1889 which involved male prostitutes and members of the upper class, and because he feared attacks from conservative critics on the subject of religion (see 2002, 32). See also Brake 1991, 53-55.
4. All references are to the Macmillan edition of *The Renaissance* (referred to as *R*). Donald Hill's edition of *The Renaissance*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1980, contains Pater's revisions to the text; see also Inman.

romantic loves of rebellious flesh, of Lancelot and Abelard" (*A* 214). He alternates discussions of Morris's *The Defence of Guinevere* with remarks on medieval religion. Religion thus acquires a rather unorthodox dimension because of its privileging of passion, sensuousness, and physicality. For example, he finds common elements in Guinevere, in the poetry of the Troubadours (which may be grouped with the category of the profane or the artistic), as well as in Abelard or in a medieval monk, namely religious or ecclesiastic figures.

The passion Pater extols in Morris's poem on Guinevere was literally kindled in the very context of medieval religion:

> The poem . . . is a thing tormented and awry with passion, like the body of Guenevere defending herself from the charge of adultery, and the accent falls in strange, unwonted places with the effect of a great cry. In truth these Arthurian legends, in their origin prior to Christianity, yield all their sweetness only in a Christian atmosphere. That religion, monastic religion at any rate, has its sensuous side, a dangerously sensuous side, has been often seen[.] (*A* 215)

For Pater, it is Guinevere's "body" and not her soul that is reacting against accusations of sexual misdemeanour, and such passion here entails physical anguish. But this poetry's "sweetness"—a notion which he uses in the other essay and opposes to "strength"—only becomes apparent when seen in the medieval context of Christian religion. And according to him, "poetry"—here the "Arthurian legends" or "Provençal poetry"—and "the religious spirit" share common characteristics and aims (*A* 217). Shortly after he evokes Guinevere, Pater indeed turns to medieval Christianity. Again, the juxtaposition of references contribute to what is perhaps his deliberate confusion. The word "only" may indeed betray Pater's preference for those figures that rebelled against religious strictures. He then stresses the "aesthetic beauty" of medieval religion:

> The Christianity of the Middle Age made way among a people whose loss was in the life of the senses partly by its æsthetic beauty, a thing so profoundly felt by the Latin hymn-writers, who for one moral or spiritual sentiment have a hundred sensuous images. (*A* 215)

Incidentally, Pater's antithetical position with regard to Christianity was even stronger in the 1868 version, in which he wrote that "religion shades into sensuous love and sensuous love into religion" and that the "Latin hymn-writers" had a "beautiful idol, presumably Christ" (Pater 1868, 301). But for Pater, the passions of the courtly love tradition originated in the overcharged spirituality of the Middle Ages. And he envisages the outbreak of the same feelings both in the religious and the lay worlds, as when he deals with the presence in medieval literature of the theme of the conflict between love for a lover and love for Christ: "What is characteristic in [these Arthurian legends] is the strange suggestion of a deliberate choice between Christ and a rival lover" (*A* 215). Immediately afterwards, he inscribes this rivalry within religion itself:

> And so in those imaginative loves, in their highest expression, the Provençal poetry, it is a rival religion with a new rival cultus that we see. Coloured through and through with Christian sentiment, they are rebels against it. The rejection of one worship for another is never lost sight of. The jealousy of that other lover, for whom these words and images and refined ways of sentiment were first devised, is the secret here of a borrowed, perhaps factitious colour and heat. (*A* 215-16)

Therefore the text poses a rival to religion which is constructed as a real human being and, interestingly enough, one who is defined as jealous.

In "Two Early French Stories," Pater returns to this idea of a conflict between Christ and a rival religion, which is again expressed in terms of the presence of a rival lover. He also defines his notion of liberation by referring to a theme he derived from Heine—the survival of the pagan gods in the Christian world:

> In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion. It was the return of that ancient Venus, not dead, but only hidden for a time in the caves of the Venusberg, of those old pagan gods still going to and fro on the earth, under all sorts of disguises. (*R* 25)

The power of Venus, Pater then suggests, accounts not only for the love of Abelard and Heloïse or the legend of Tannhäuser but also for Albigensian or antinomian movements. For Pater, the goddess of carnal love embodies the renaissance of the spirit and the liberation of the body, and this is exemplified by the legend of the knight whom Venus diverts from his quest of the Holy Grail—a favourite motif of Pre-Raphaelitism. Aucassin and Nicolette rebel against the strictures of religion as the Guinevere of Morris's poems does; they indeed choose the body and the senses at the expense of spiritual salvation:

> Of this spirit Aucassin and Nicolette contains perhaps the most famous expression: it is the answer Aucassin gives when he is threatened with the pains of hell, if he makes Nicolette his mistress. A creature wholly of affection and the senses, he sees on the way to paradise only a feeble and worn-out company of aged priests, "clinging day and night to the chapel altars," barefoot or in patched sandals. With or even without Nicolette, "his sweet mistress whom he so much loves," he, for his part, is ready to start on the way to hell, along with "the good scholars," as he says, and the actors, and the fine horsemen dead in battle, and the men of fashion, and "the fair courteous ladies who had two or three chevaliers apiece beside their own true lords," all gay with music, in their gold, and silver, and beautiful furs. (*R* 25-26)

Pater associates here with Pre-Raphaelite artists like Rossetti, who had looked favourably upon adulterous lovers: Paolo and Francesca's passion was also stronger than the religious fear of hell.

Religion and the poetry of the Troubadours share a similar spirit of freedom. Pater establishes a connection between Abelard and their poetry since both display the same "liberty of the heart":

> But it is not so much the ecclesiastical art of the middle age, its sculpture and painting—work certainly done in a great measure for pleasure's sake, in which even a secular, a rebellious spirit often betrays itself—but rather its profane poetry, the poetry of Provence, and the magnificent after-growth of that poetry in Italy and France, which those French writers have in view when they speak of this medieval Renaissance. In that poetry, earthly passion, with its intimacy, its freedom, its variety—the liberty of the heart—makes itself felt; and the name of Abelard, the great scholar and the great lover, connects the expression of this liberty of heart with the free play of human intelligence around all subjects presented to it, with the liberty of the intellect, as that age understood it. (*R* 3-4)

Abelard embodies an oscillation between theological pursuits and earthly concerns. Pater indeed defines him as "the great scholar and the great lover" (*R* 3), an association that he uses time and again in his works: an intellectual or religious figure becomes a loving being, a recurrent conflation derived from Plato.[5] Pater insists on the physicality of Abelard, whom he describes as a "comely clerk" (*R* 4). He has him evolve in an atmosphere characterized by diffuse sensuality:

> And so from the rooms of this shadowy house by the Seine side we see that spirit going abroad, with its qualities already well defined, its intimacy, its languid sweetness, its rebellion, its subtle skill in dividing the elements of human passion, its care for physical beauty, its worship of the body[.] (*R* 5)

He then suggests that the refusal of corporeality begets a rebellion of the spirit and the flesh:

> [A]s Abelard and Heloïse sat together at home there, to refine a little further on the nature of abstract ideas, "Love made himself of the party with them." You conceive the temptations of the scholar, who, in such dreamy tranquillity, amid the bright and busy spectacle of the "Island," lived in a world of something like shadows; and that for one who knew so well how to assign its exact value to every abstract thought, those restraints which lie on the consciences of other men had been relaxed. (*R* 4)

To abstraction, Pater opposes desire, and this culminates with Abelard's relationship with Heloïse. Rebellion against the constraints of religion is then expressed in terms of a recovery of the senses:

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5. Here Pater echoes Winckelmann's characterization as "philosopher and lover at once," modelled on Plato's image of the philosopher in love in *Phaedrus*.

> The opposition into which Abelard is thrown, which gives its colour to his career, which breaks his soul to pieces, is a no less subtle opposition than that between the merely professional, official, hireling ministers of that system, with their ignorant worship of system for its own sake, and the true child of light, the humanist, with reason and heart and senses quick, while theirs were almost dead. He reaches out towards, he attains, modes of ideal living, beyond the prescribed limits of that system, though in essential germ, it may be, contained within it. (*R* 7)

Pater opposes the humanist to those ghost-like defenders of dogma for whom religion entails exclusion of the senses and who turn him into a victim. Abelard seems engaged in a spiritual ascent towards an "ideal living" which is then reversed and becomes problematical: it is described as unconstrained by the limits imposed by a rigid spiritual system, while being enclosed within that very religious system. But what crowns it is an immersion into the world of the senses:

> But the human spirit, bold through those needs, was too strong for them. Abelard and Heloïse write their letters—letters with a wonderful outpouring of soul—in medieval Latin; and Abelard, though he composes songs in the vulgar tongue, writes also in Latin those treatises in which he tries to find a ground of reality below the abstractions of philosophy, as one bent on trying all things by their congruity with human experience, who had felt the hand of Heloïse, and looked into her eyes, and tested the resources of humanity in her great and energetic nature. (*R* 7-8)

Abelard regains a footing in the concrete and fleshy world through his sensual, erotic experience with Heloïse.

Pater refuses to privilege soul over body. He draws a comparison between the aesthetic poetry of Morris, where "there is no delirium or illusion, no experiences of mere soul while the body and the bodily senses sleep, or wake with convulsed intensity at the prompting of imaginative love; but rather the great primary passions under broad daylight," and the transition brought about by the Renaissance. To him, "the monk in his cloister, [who] through the "open vision," open only to the spirit, divined, aspired to, and at last apprehended, a better daylight, but earthly, open only to the senses," exemplifies this transition (*A* 221). The figure of the monk looms large in his analysis of the moment during the Middle Ages when "the mood of the cloister is taking a new direction" (*A* 216). The cloister thus becomes the site of rebellion, the locus of an escape towards the life of the senses. And the male, isolated figure of the monk, with which the Oxonian don Pater perhaps identified, becomes a symbol of that liberation:

> But the choice life of the human spirit is always under mixed lights, and in mixed situations, when it is not too sure of itself, is still expectant, girt up to leap forward to the promise. Such a situation there was in that earliest return from the overwrought spiritualities of the Middle Age to the earlier, more ancient life of the senses; and for us the most attractive form of classical story is the monk's conception of it, when he escapes from the

> sombre atmosphere of his cloister to natural light. The fruits of this mood, which, divining more than it understands, infuses into the scenery and figures of Christian history some subtle reminiscence of older gods, or into the story of Cupid and Psyche that passionate stress of spirit which the world owes to Christianity, constitute a peculiar vein of interest in the art of the fifteenth century. (*A* 224-25)

The monk escapes from his cell in order to envision another world, and this has repercussions on the literary and artistic domains. For it is a monk who permits the return of pagan gods within the Christian tradition; conversely, the Christian reading of a classical love story entails tension.

Pater then repeats the idea that in medieval religion, "the very absence of form led to the same reverie he discerned in Provençal poetry":

> Hereon, as before in the cloister, so now in the château, the reign of reverie set in. The devotion of the cloister knew that mood thoroughly, and had sounded all its stops. For the object of this devotion was absent or veiled, not limited to one supreme plastic form like Zeus at Olympia or Athena in the Acropolis, but distracted, as in a fever dream, into a thousand symbols and reflections. But then, the Church, that new Sibyl, had a thousand secrets to make the absent near. Into this kingdom of reverie, and with it into a paradise of ambitious refinements, the earthly love enters, and becomes a prolonged somnambulism. Of religion it learns the art of directing towards an unseen object sentiments whose natural direction is towards objects of sense. Hence a love defined by the absence of the beloved, choosing to be without hope, protesting against all lower uses of love, barren, extravagant, antinomian. It is the love which is incompatible with marriage, for the chevalier who never comes, of the serf for the *châtelaine*, of the rose for the nightingale, of Rudel for the Lady of Tripoli. (*A* 217-18)

Excessive abstraction created the desire for physicality. For Pater, religion is indeed fundamentally characterized by absence, and Christianity has communicated its yearning for a presence or a form to Provençal poetry. But the "earthly love" between a lady and her chevalier is also characterized by a sense of absence and even of hopelessness. Such love is expressed in terms of endurance, punishment and unrewarded desire, as if the expressions of this type of "love" had been modelled on the practices of mortification of Christian asceticism:

> Another element of extravagance came in with the feudal spirit: Provençal love is full of the very forms of vassalage. To be the servant of love, to have offended, to taste the subtle luxury of chastisement, of reconciliation—the religious spirit too knows that, and meets just there . . . the delicacies of the earthly love. (*A* 217)

The juxtapositions of "luxury" and "chastisement," of "vassalage" and "delicacies" blend aesthetic, religious or sensuous realms, while giving this poetry a masochistic dimension, as if the lover's suffering and humiliation had been derived from religious practices. The curtailment of the senses provokes a nervous disruption which, in turn, leads to a better apprehension

of the world in which they hold sway. The poems of the Middle Age—and later, Morris's poems—are concerned with sensuousness:

> A passion of which the outlets are sealed, begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliancy and relief—all redness is turned into blood, all water into tears. Hence a wild, convulsed sensuousness in the poetry of the Middle Age, in which the things of nature begin to play a strange delirious part. (*A* 218)

Pater's conception of such forms of sensuousness is rife with fever and disorder. The general atmosphere is that of disease and sleepiness, and the very fragility of protagonists characterized as androgynous—which may hint at homoeroticism—prevents such love from being durable:

> Here, under this strange complex of conditions, as in some medicated air, exotic flowers of sentiment expand, among people of a remote and unaccustomed beauty, somnambulistic, frail, androgynous, the light almost shining through them. Surely, such loves were too fragile and adventurous to last more than for a moment. (*A* 217)

In fact, the word "here" is ambivalent and may refer either to religion or to the "earthly love" of Provençal poetry, since both have just been mentioned. Immediately afterwards, it is religion that is subjected to disorder and illusoriness:

> That monastic religion of the Middle Age was, in fact, in many of its bearings, like a beautiful disease or disorder of the senses: and a religion which is a disorder of the senses must always be subject to illusions. Reverie, illusion, delirium: they are the three stages of a fatal descent both in the religion and the loves of the Middle Age. (*A* 217)

Pursuing his analogies between religion and that poetry, Pater sees the same disruption of the senses conducive to delirium in both.

In "Two Early French Stories," he returns once more to this theme of disease and disorder, alluding also to Aucassin's vassalage:

> All through it one feels the influence of that faint air of overwrought delicacy, almost of wantonness, which was so strong a characteristic of the poetry of the Troubadours. The Troubadours … came to value a type of personal beauty which has in it but little of the influence of the open air and sunshine. There is a languid Eastern deliciousness in the very scenery of the story, the full-blown roses, the chamber painted in some mysterious manner where Nicolette is imprisoned, the cool brown marble, the almost nameless colours, the odour of plucked grass and flowers. Nicolette herself well becomes this scenery, and is the best illustration of the quality I mean—the beautiful, weird, foreign girl, whom the shepherds take for a fay, who has the knowledge of simples, the healing and beautifying qualities of leaves and flowers, whose skilful touch heals Aucassin's sprained shoulder, so that he suddenly leaps from the ground; the mere sight of whose white flesh, as she passed the place where he lay, healed a pilgrim stricken with sore disease …. With this girl Aucassin is so deeply in love that he forgets all knightly duties. (*R* 20-21)

Nicolette is akin to a witch and a *femme fatale* who has literally maddened Aucassin. Pater's vision of that feminine figure is very personal. He previously said that Heloïse was able "to penetrate into the mysteries of the older world, she had become a sorceress, like the Celtic druidesses" (*R* 4). It seems as if to him such feminine figures are disquieting or threatening. Venus lulls knights into the Venusberg; Heloïse, the female intellectual, is compared to a witch; and the love inspired by Nicolette is like a disease. Pater uses descriptions drawn from Dante to insist on Aucassin's emasculation: the "tyranny" of his love for Nicolette "became actually physical, blinding his senses, and suspending his bodily forces" (*R* 23). Lovesick and suffering, Aucassin is deprived of his masculinity:

> [T]he slim, tall, debonair, dansellon, . . . with his curled yellow hair, and eyes of vair, who faints with love, as Dante fainted, who rides all day through the forest in search of Nicolette, while the thorns tear his flesh, so that one might have traced him by the blood upon the grass, and who weeps at eventide because he has not found her, who has the malady of his love, and neglects all knightly duties. (*R* 23)

If Aucassin is a wounded knight whose bleeding evokes the Passion of Christ, he is also a demasculinized and disempowered figure. Under the influence of Nicolette, he forsakes his masculine vigour: "a song relates how the sweet, grave figure goes forth to battle, in dainty, tight-laced armour. It is the very image of the Provençal love-god, no longer a child, but grown to pensive youth" (*R* 23-24); but then, when "that great malady of his love came upon him," he is debilitated and thus becomes an easy prey to his enemies.

Interestingly enough, Nicolette's femininity is described in subdued tones, since Pater suppresses aspects of her description from the translated quotations of the story, especially when it comes to references to parts of her body that may be eroticized, such as her breasts. Critics have seen Victorian prudishness here (Inman 293), which may be dismissed by another interpretation: his discourses on the body diverged according to whether a man or a woman is concerned; indeed, his wish to insist on physicality sometimes had limits when it comes to feminine figures. So because of its peculiar vision of feminine figures, this essay may not be read as a "sunny story of romantic and purely sensual love that puts the happiest face on Pater's aesthetic spirit" (Becker-Leckrone 291).

But Pater turned to a "sunnier" story of love—one based on a Greek narrative. When he revised the essay in 1877, after the volume's first edition had elicited criticism for its hedonism and anti-Christian accents, he included the story of Amis and Amile. This was an editorial strategy since the structure of the story evokes an even more disreputable Greek motif.

Pater first uses metaphors of procreation and engendering to affirm that the Renaissance that had begun in the Middle Ages comprised "a revival of classical antiquity"; with that revival, "the taste for sweetness generated there becomes the seed of the classical revival in it, prompting it constantly

to seek after the springs of perfect sweetness in the Hellenic world" (*R* 2). So the rediscovery of the pagan past involves "sweetness." In the story he adds, Amis and Amile's amity surpasses love for their wives. Comparing them to other Greek-inspired medieval couples, he insists on the physical dimension of this friendship:

> *Li Amitiez de Ami et Amile*, that free play of human affection, of the claims of which Abelard's story is an assertion, makes itself felt in the incidents of a great friendship, a friendship pure and generous, pushed to a sort of passionate exaltation, and more than faithful unto death. Such comradeship, though instances of it are to be found everywhere, is still especially a classical motive; Chaucer expressing the sentiment of it so strongly in an antique tale, that one knows not whether the love of both Palamon and Arcite for Emelya, or of those two for each other, is the chiefer subject of the Knight's Tale (*R* 8)

Because of their physical resemblance, Pater associates these two friends—and their equivalents in Chaucer's tale—with the motif of the "Dioscuri" (*R* 9). He intermingles Greek legend and medieval lore. This friendship thus verges towards a type of love laden with homoerotic undertones: "the fair friendship, which had made the prison of the two lads sweet hitherto with its daily offices" (*R* 9). Their friendship is associated with sacrifice, chivalry, and Christian love. The Pope gave them two similar cups when he baptized them and there are many references to blood—which evoke the Grail. The story belongs to hagiography, a fact Pater insists on through mentioning its complete title, *La vie des saints martyrs Amis et Amile*. He then adds that "[i]t was not till the end of the seventeenth century that their names were finally excluded from the martyrology; and their story ends with this monkish miracle of earthly comradeship, more than faithful unto death" (*R* 27). So medieval Christian culture is conflated with Greek homoerotic friendship.

The story follows the same pattern of disease and disorder as in "Aucassin and Nicolette." Just as Nicolette was a healer, Amile cures Amis of his leprosy. However, Pater establishes a contrast between these two texts:

> There, as I said, is the strength of the old French story. For the Renaissance has not only the sweetness which it derives from the classical world, but also that curious strength of which there are great resources in the true middle age. And as I have illustrated the early strength of the Renaissance by the story of Amis and Amile, a story which comes from the North, in which a certain racy Teutonic flavour is perceptible, so I shall illustrate that other element, its early sweetness, a languid excess of sweetness even, by another story . . . which comes, characteristically, from the South, and connects itself with the literature of Provence. (*R* 15)

Strength is here associated with an almost palatable virility that has ideological connotations, while sweetness was linked with languidness in the other story. This, for Pater, justifies the addition of the text. But

the story that represents the idea of "strength" concerns a type of love that transcends conjugal or filial love. Besides, this story of manly love frames the other tale, and since the latter alludes to the two lovers'—a man and a woman—bodily intimacy, the reader is encouraged to associate the former with physicality or eroticism as well. Pater ends his essay with a quotation from "Amis and Amile" in which their bodies are miraculously reunited in the same church. He affirms that while the other story suggests conflict, this story evokes harmony and unity; it exemplifies his precocious conception of the Renaissance, where "all breathes of that unity of culture in which whatsoever things are comely are reconciled, for the elevation and adorning of our spirits" (*R* 27). This is why he makes a distinction between these two medieval stories:

> In the story of Aucassin and Nicolette, in the literature which it represents, the note of defiance, of the opposition of one system to another, is sometimes harsh. Let me conclude then with a morsel from Amis and Amile, in which the harmony of human interests is still entire. For the story of the great traditional friendship, in which, as I said, the liberty of the heart makes itself felt, seems, as we have it, to have been written by a monk …; and their story ends with this monkish miracle of earthly comradeship, more than faithful unto death (*R* 28)

So not only does Pater repeat his idea of the Morris essay that the spirit of liberation was engendered in the cloister—the story was written by a monk—but he also links a story of male love with harmony.

In his 1877 revisions of "Aucassin and Nicolette," Pater stated that the new humanism of reason, heart and sense was contained within medieval religion itself: Abelard was only in opposition to the zealots of a system. He examines antinomianism and its expressions in literature. He also insists on the reconciliation brought about by the Renaissance. Abelard "prefigures the character of the Renaissance, that movement in which, in various ways, the human mind wins for itself a new kingdom of feeling and sensation and thought, not opposed to but only beyond and independent of the spiritual system then actually realised" (*R* 6-7). Pater no longer talks of conflict here, as he had mitigated the anti-Christian tone that coloured his writings of the 1860s. However, he maintained the references to the body and the senses. But in 1890, he was cautious not to re-publish "Aesthetic Poetry"; strangely enough, he maintained his discourse on male friendship in the third edition of *The Renaissance* of 1893. And in his 1889 essay on the Renaissance theologian Giordano Bruno, described as a "comely" and rebellious monk, he devoted as much attention to his heretical pantheistic conception of the world as to his privileging of the senses. This shows that throughout his career, his discourse on the homoerotic body, once and again attached to the figure of someone who is "a lover and a monk," ("Giordano Bruno" 238) kept its fascination for Pater.

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