

## CHAPTER 10

### Critical Impressionism as Anti Phallogocentric Strategy

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**IN RECENT YEARS**, it has become something of a commonplace to associate rhetorical strategies in the writing of Walter Pater with deconstruction. In his introduction to *Marius the Epicurean*, for example, Ian Small, without explicitly terming Pater's work deconstructive, notes his resistance to conventional novelistic closure, representation of character, and respect for textual authority.<sup>1</sup> David Shaw has argued that in *Plato and Platonism* (1893) Pater provides a vigorously "deconstructionist" reading of Plato.<sup>2</sup> Pater notes that the "Parmenidean 'One' or 'Absolute' " for which Plato searches, "is after all but zero, and a mere algebraic symbol for nothingness."<sup>3</sup> In *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, Linda Dowling has contended that Pater's resistance to the essentialism of Romantic philology makes his writing deconstructive. Although the discipline parted from the Christian view that had identified language with a divine, centering, and energizing Logos, nineteenth-century philology continued to be logocentric by virtue of identifying language with human reason itself. The foremost exponent of this view during Pater's lifetime was the comparative philologist and mythographer, Max Müller, who taught at Oxford from 1868 to 1875. Pater's affinities, in contrast, are with Müller's antagonists in the new field of anthropology and with eighteenth-century English epistemology, which, in a revisionary reading of Locke, had acknowledged the arbitrary character of linguistic signs.<sup>4</sup> This rhetorical concept of language matches Pater's sense of its contingent character.

Pater consistently opposes totalizing views of linguistic and other forms of culture. In an early essay, he deplores Samuel Taylor Coleridge's yearning for the absolute and argues instead that "modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the 'relative' spirit. . . . To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions."<sup>5</sup> While Pater grounds this view in contemporary science, especially biology, elsewhere in the essay he draws upon the *Symposium* in order to indicate the basis of this proposition in individual experience, especially experience of

desire. For "us," "the Greek spirit, with its engaging naturalness, simple, chastened, debonair, is itself the Sangrail of an endless pilgrimage."<sup>6</sup> The Greek phrase, quoted from the *Symposium* (Steph. 197D), makes clear that "Greek spirit" is Pater's discreet translation of the term eros.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, when Pater emphasizes the importance of "know[ing] one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly,"<sup>8</sup> "impression" is in part erotic.

Nevertheless, critics who have aligned Pater with deconstruction, first and most prominently J. Hillis Miller, ignore or misconstrue the specifically erotic tenor of difference in his writing. Yet male-male desire is as evident a "motive" (to use one favoured term) as it is in the writing of Johann Winckelmann, whom Pater in his first major essay takes as a model of the aesthetic critic. In other early essays on figures like Leonardo da Vinci, Pater again underscores the importance of masculine desire in prompting and shaping cultural activity, an idea that he returns to in his essays on Greek mythology, in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), and in imaginary portraits like "Denys l'Auxerrois" (1886) and "Apollo in Picardy," this last published in the year before his death. Pater's concept of language is material in character and "material" in this context includes the relations between language and somatic experience, sexual awareness, and gender-roles. Pater's ambiguous position at Oxford, where he functioned as a member of a male elite at the same time that he subtly polemicized on behalf of a form of desire whose overt expression could occur only at the expense of the moral and practical authority of that elite, placed him in a highly self-conscious relation, at once complicitous and antagonistic, to literary expression. His language is always masculine both in his inscription within the male institution summed in the word "Oxford" and in his attempt to express masculine difference. When Pater republished his essays in book form in 1873, John Wordsworth, a colleague, objected to Pater's publication under the signature, a "Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford." Wordsworth was not prepared to tolerate the mixing of nonconformity with Oxford discourse yet to object on this ground, as Pater himself was painfully aware, was to object precisely to his position at, but in resistance to, Oxford.<sup>9</sup>

In this essay I consider Miller's ambivalent approach to sexual difference in Pater as symptomatic of the subordination of impressionist criticism within a conventionally masculine outlook. Miller's handling, moreover, occurs at the expense of difference in his own practice since the term loses its significance as a marker of differences, both sexual and otherwise. Without differences, however, difference like other critical principles necessarily becomes phallic: abstract, colourless, and rhetorical in a non-deconstructive sense. I also attempt briefly to glimpse Pater's critique of masculinity in high cultural discourse and his own counter-effort to establish a principle of masculine difference.

Later critics did not find it difficult to detect in Paterian impressionism a desire that by century's end could be referred to with the new term, *homosexual*. In a hostile review of

the Library Edition of the Works (1910), Paul Elmore More objects in particular to the seductive tenor of Paterian interpretation: "too often his interpretation, when the spell of his manner is broken, will be found essentially perverted."<sup>10</sup> The comment refers both to the canonical text (whose meaning Pater per-verts) and to Pater's psychology (which, in More's eyes, *is* perverse). The *ad hominem* attack contributed significantly to the depreciation of Pater's reputation during the high modernist phase even though desire between men continued to be a major motive in aesthetic production.<sup>11</sup>

Against this background, it is not surprising that when, in two essays of the mid-1970s, J. Hillis Miller contributes to the recovery of Pater by invoking him as a presiding spirit of allegorical criticism, he does so in a way that relies on but also misrepresents and eventually elides sexual difference in Pater. In "Walter Pater: A Partial Portrait," Miller signs Paterian tradition with the names of a number of men whose homosexuality is notorious: "This line [of criticism] leads from certain aspects of Ruskin through Pater and Wilde to Proust, and beyond Proust to Walter Benjamin and to the rhetorical or 'deconstructive' criticism of our own moment in literary criticism."<sup>12</sup> As Miller observes, Pater's criticism depends on ideas of "difference and discontinuity":

Meaning or significance in a personality, in a gem, a song, a painting, a piece of music is always defined by Pater as a force, as the power to make an impression. This power is not single, nor is it a harmonious collocation of energies making a unity. A "virtue" always results from antagonistic forces, sweetness against strength in the case of Michelangelo, strangeness against the desire for beauty in Leonardo, and so on. The meaning is in neither of the two forces separately, nor in their sum. It arises in the space between them, out of the economy of their difference.<sup>13</sup>

Later, more categorically, Miller says that in Pater "meaning" is "constituted by difference."<sup>14</sup> In addition to the mention of Wilde and Proust, the artists whom Miller refers to, Michelangelo and Leonardo, are major figures in a tradition of male-male desire. And the conflations that Miller adduces of sweetness and strength, of strangeness and the desire for beauty signify, in Pater, different flavours of homoerotic sensibility.

Having emitted these signals, Miller proceeds to dissociate contemporary deconstruction from *being-homosexual*. Taking as an example Pater's description of a painting of Medusa incorrectly attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, Miller observes Pater's use of the image to suggest a liminal state in which the expression of wayward desire overcomes the limits of a rigid gender-identification that subsumes the self in masculinist norms, in "the phallus," to use Miller's word.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, he suggests that another sort of male-male desire could capture Leonardo/Pater in phallogocentrism. Miller asks: "Was Pater 'phallogocentric,' frozen like Leonardo himself at a Narcissistic or adolescent homosexual stage?"<sup>16</sup> The implicit answer to this question, which endorses Freud's diagnosis of

Leonardo's sexuality, is "yes." The male-male desire to which Miller refers exists within a conventional, that is, heterosexual economy as idolization of the father. By specifying this desire as homosexual, Miller associates homosexuality with the logocentrism of conventional academic discourse while directing attention away from Pater's self-conscious use of masculine desire as one way of surmounting fear of loss of the phallus.

Similarly, in the ensuing discussion of the recurrence of Medusa-imagery in *Marius the Epicurean*, Miller leaves Marius unable to resolve either the castration or the Oedipus complex despite the fact that Miller might easily argue that Marius, who has "no particular dread of a snake's bite, like one of his companions, who had put his hand into the mouth of an old garden-god and roused there a sluggish viper,"<sup>17</sup> overcomes the paralyzing force of these complexes precisely by letting the snake bite. Immediately following this passage, Miller shifts to the expressly theoretical portion of his discussion; in the process, Pater's erotic difference is translated into an "incipient theory of signs."<sup>18</sup> An apt translation but one that should be made without dropping the thread of sexual difference.

At the end of the essay, Miller reduces meaning in Pater to a play of language whose significance is the indeterminacy of linguistic reference:

His texts lead the critic deeper and deeper into a labyrinth until he confronts a final aporia. This does not mean, however, that the reader must give up from the beginning the attempt to understand Pater. Only by going all the way into the labyrinth, following the thread of a given clue, can the critic reach the blind alley, vacant of any Minotaur, that impasse which is the end point of interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

Miller, choosing to satisfy himself with "A Partial Portrait," assimilates Pater to his own theory of critical interpretation. The partiality of the portrait, moreover, re-situates Miller's discussion within the academic tradition that he consciously seeks to resist. One should not be surprised, then, that in his usage "difference" does not mean sexual difference either in the way that the phrase is characteristically used to register the categorization of a feminine Other or in the way that I use it to refer to an awareness of desire not cast in the antitheses of what Monique Wittig has referred to as "the straight mind."<sup>20</sup>

The nexus of the Ariadne-Theseus-Minotaur-Dionysus-labyrinth is central to "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line." Miller takes as one of three epigraphs to this essay a long passage from "Apollo in Picardy," one of a number of Pater's re-tellings of the myth of Dionysus. In the passage quoted, Pater describes the collapse of the "long and intricate argument" of "the twelfth volume of a dry enough treatise on mathematics, applied, still with no relaxation of strict method, to astronomy and music." The blocked author of this text is the protagonist, Prior Saint-Jean. Pater draws connections between the phallus (the Prior expects to be rewarded upon completion of the work with "well-

earned practical reward as superior, with lordship and mitre and ring, of the abbey"), logocentrism (the "method" pursued in the first eleven books), and phallogocentrism (the Prior as author). On the other hand, his breakdown is associated both with "new light" and with the birth, in deconstructive terms, of a decentered subject: the twelfth volume "began, or, in perturbed manner, and as with throes of childbirth, seemed the preparation for, an argument of an entirely new and disparate species, such as would demand a new period of life also, if it might be, for its due expansion." The "new period of life" seems to mean both a new historical period, that is, a Renaissance, since the "new light" perceived by the Prior is his anticipation of Galileo's discovery that the earth moves around the sun, and also a new way of personal living that includes an overtly expressed desire for other males, whether Apollyon, the Apollo/Dionysus figure that the Prior meets during his sojourn at the Grange of Notre-Dame-De-Pratis, or Hyacinth, another Dionysus figure who, on the literal level, is the attractive adolescent who accompanies the Prior on his journey.<sup>21</sup>

The link between the idea of history as cultural repetition and the avowal of desire is characteristic in Pater and is connected in his mind with new knowledge in the natural and social sciences. Adapting from anthropology the idea of culture as a series of recapitulations of earlier phases with a difference, in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, he devises "an evolutionary scheme showing the transmission of pagan elements under the surface of 'Christian' art from medieval France through Pico of Mirandola into the Renaissance in Italy, then back to the France of du Bellay and thence to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."<sup>22</sup> In two pioneering essays, one in *Fraser's Magazine* and the other in the *Fortnightly Review*, in 1872 and 1873 respectively, Andrew Lang, a young literary anthropologist who had come up to Balliol in 1865, attacked Müller's theory of the development of mythology as the corruption of an original solar myth.<sup>23</sup> Drawing instead on the work of Benjamin Tylor, Lang argued the survival of primitive residues: "the lower mythology the elemental beliefs of the people do survive beneath a thin covering of Christian conformity."<sup>24</sup> Influenced by these essays as well as by Lang's earlier articles on the development of French literature, Pater organized the book to account for the phenomenon of the Renaissance in terms of a sequence of survivals and returns of "pagan tradition."<sup>25</sup> This pattern doubles on the intellectual level the myth of return summed up in Pater's favoured trope of the young body red in the grave, and, as the image suggests, includes the idea that renaissance is possible only in a culture prepared to celebrate desire between men.<sup>26</sup> To these associations, Pater in "Apollo in Picardy" adds mordant observations about desire in male homosocial culture. In homophobic culture, the fantasy of a masculine desire connecting individuals across lines of class as in the Prior's attraction to Apollyon, whom he takes to be "a serf. . . , a servant of the house, or farm-labourer, perhaps"<sup>27</sup> necessarily rebounds upon itself. And the sacrifice of youthful male vitality to the needs of older men induces psychosis.

Despite the long epigraph from "Apollo in Picardy," "Ariadne's Thread" includes no

discussion of Pater. Instead, taking another epigraph as his point of departure, Miller analyzes the myth of the labyrinth in a strictly heterosexual context. In "Walter Pater," Miller recognizes that the radiant figures of Denys and Apollyon embody alienation in their recurrence in antagonistic, medieval environments: "the tragedy of all these figures is in the incompatibility between the meanings they carry and the material conditions within which they are forced to embody them."<sup>28</sup> Homophobia, however, is one condition that goes unnamed; and Miller misreads the significance of the trope of the "new body."<sup>29</sup> He sees Pater as decorporealizing the body in a set of fugitive traces: " `a dream that lingers for a moment, retreating in the dawn, incomplete, aimless, helpless; a thing with faint hearing, faint memory, faint power of touch; a breath, a flame in the doorway, a feather in the wind'."<sup>30</sup> But, as Jeffrey Wallen has recently pointed out, the situation is more complex than Miller allows. Pater repeatedly invokes the word "embodiment" to refer to the work of art: the "sensible embodiment" of "thought"<sup>31</sup> remains an ideal goal of art. Although Pater just as regularly registers the "discrepancy between meaning and its incarnation,"<sup>32</sup> the ideal remains. Similarly, Pater repeatedly invokes the idea of a cultural renewal in which the human body will be recognized as an object of desire without neurotic anxiety.<sup>33</sup>

Pater's double attitude helps account for key concepts in his critical theory. In the first place, difference is intrinsic to his position as one schooled in a "normal" masculine outlook at the same time that he knows himself to be different. This self-recognition inflects and in part impels a revisionary view of literary figures such as Plato while fueling skepticism about logocentric interpretations of language and tradition. Pater is altogether aware of the anxieties about desire and the body inherent in such traditions as Neoplatonic interpretation of the Dialogues. His descendental interpretations of writers like Plato and Hegel are part of a polemical project to revalorize desire, especially between males, and to create the conditions in which groups of women, of homosexuals, of industrial and agricultural workers, of colonial others might devise alternative forms of discourse, forms that imply in turn a shifting set of relations between new discourses, emergent communities, and hegemonic masculinity. Passages in Pater such as his description of "The Minor 'Peace of the Church' " in *Marius the Epicurean* locate him in that stream of late Victorian liberalism that is drawn towards social democratic politics.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Pater attacks the formation of masculinity within Victorian liberalism that both legitimated resistance of the claims of marginal groups after passage of the Second Reform Bill in 1867 and also underwrote the role that young well-educated men would be compelled to play in administering the Empire.

After the Indian Mutiny of 1857, utilitarian and Evangelical rationales for British expansion abroad lost a good deal of their persuasive power. Instead, subject peoples were categorized as racial degenerates. The upshot, as Karl Marx predicted in articles written for the *New York Daily Tribune*, was "a more repressive dominion."<sup>35</sup> When in a lecture delivered at Oxford six years later, Matthew Arnold extenuates the persecution of

Christians during the reign of Marcus Aurelius on the grounds that "Christianity appeared something anti-civil and anti-social, which the State had the faculty to judge and the duty to suppress,"<sup>36</sup> he prompts the cynical wit of youthful listeners liable to find themselves as directors of South African mining companies a generation hence. For his part, writing in the overtly imperial Britain of the 1880s, Pater criticizes conventional gender-roles and the institutions that propagate them. In the chapter, "Manly Amusement," at the end of volume I of *Marius the Epicurean*, he uses a scene of gladiatorial combat to attack ideas of masculine self-worth that depend on aggression and physical brutality. Yet more significantly, he criticizes the Stoicism of the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, that authorizes his complicity with the spectacle below. Since Arnold and others typically invoke Aurelius's philosophy as a guide for Victorians, the confusion of high mindedness, *raison d'état*, and privilege in Aurelius's tolerance of abuses of power warrants underlining.

In his double position at Oxford as both a privileged and a subordinated male, Pater was well versed in what today might be referred to as hegemonic masculinity. In an essay in which he challenges social-role models of masculinity, John Lee has used the phrase to mean

not . . . "the male role" but . . . a particular variety of masculinity to which others among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men are subordinated. It is particular groups of men, not men in general, who are oppressed within patriarchal sexual relations, and whose situations are related in different ways to the overall logic of the subordination of women to men. A consideration of homosexuality thus provides the beginnings of a dynamic conception of masculinity as a structure of social relations.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the basis of Lee's analysis in the study of contemporary behaviour, the statement has implications for a study of nineteenth-century English literary culture. First of all, although Lee emphasizes the central importance to masculinity of the subordination of women, he also adduces the significance for masculinity of the subordination of working-class men, men of colour, boys, and homosexuals. In this way, he indicates symmetries between the structure of male-female relations, on the one hand, and male relations on the other. Without underplaying the fact that male homosexuals at times occupy the hegemonic male position with regard to women, children, and some other males, the structural parallel that Lee adduces indicates the basis in experience of Pater's critique of Oxonian masculinity. In other words, while terms like "homosexual" or "homosexual existence" need to be used with care in order to avoid anachronism, the relational structure described by Lee provoked resistance in 1885 as it continues to do today.<sup>38</sup>

In the pointedly entitled "Manly Amusement," Pater specifically draws the connection between the games and a relational understanding of masculinity by observing that the emperor has organized them in order to celebrate the engagement of his daughter "to a

swinish but influential general."<sup>39</sup> Besides touching on the unequal status of men and women in marriage, Pater locates Marcus Aurelius with respect to the debate within the Victorian middle class over appropriate masculine behaviour. In this context and in contrast to Arnold's portrayal of the emperor as "so beautiful a moralist,"<sup>40</sup> Pater's emperor is a figure of the sacrifice of moral sensitivity, bodily well-being, and emotional affect that Arnold's listeners at Oxford were expected to be prepared to make in the service of God and Empire.

Pater supplements his critique of Roman/British logocentrism with an approach, at once rhetorical and material, to the Logos in "The Will as Vision," a chapter that has received a good deal of attention. Although Dowling and others, as I indicate at the outset, argue that Pater abandoned earlier, theologically based views of congruence between self and meaning, on the one hand, and verbal expression on the other, some current commentators argue that a nostalgic pursuit of the authorizing Word motivates his writing. Following Harold Bloom, for instance, Daniel O'Hara has contended that in "The Will as Vision" "Pater expresses . . . a sublime experience of the presence of a divine spirit, a creative Logos, pervading nature."<sup>41</sup> Yet this assertion misses precisely the figural character of the experience of Pater's protagonist as he meditates "in an olive-garden."<sup>42</sup> In a paragraph that begins with a recollection of Marius's two most important friendships, with Flavian and Cornelius, Marius casts his apprehension of divine presence in terms of an analogy with the experience of friendship: he imagines the reality of "*Creator*" "even as one builds up from act and word and expression of the friend actually visible at one's side, an ideal of the spirit within him."<sup>43</sup> The analogy points not to an antithesis of the friend's physical expressivity versus his "spirit," for instance but to the basis in bodily awareness of a sense of noumenal presence. The paragraph begins and ends with the experience of male friendship, though friendship of a special character in this novel, in which Pater polemically engages hegemonic masculinity.

Marius's turn at the end of the chapter away from the afternoon's epiphany and back to everyday life indicates the primary importance in Pater/Marius's view of improving the time. Marius wonders: "Must not all that remained of life be but a search for the equivalent of that Ideal, among so-called actual things a gathering together of every trace or token of it, which his actual experience might present?"<sup>44</sup> The weight of emphasis in the quotation is not on the fugitive character of material actuality but on the need to find equivalences in mundane life for one's needs, desires, and apprehensions. Both sides of the equivalence remain within the range of human experience. Marius's search is varied; he attempts to overcome self-alienation, including alienation from the body; he searches lifelong for intimate male relationship; he seeks a community infused, to use anachronistic terms, with democratic and communitarian values. In the novel's historicizing rhetoric, he looks toward "the 'new city'," "some celestial New Rome" brought within scope of the temporal imagination.<sup>45</sup>

Because O'Hara fails to see the class and gender politics of the novel that join Pater with members of other groups subjected to hegemonic masculinity, he glides over the qualifications that Pater makes and which bind him to a world of immanent struggle. Given O'Hara's blindness, one is not surprised to find him later belaboring Pater for being apolitical:

Pater in the end falls prey to his own beautiful idealizations, becomes *victimized by his impossible dreams*, and so appears as the perfect object of attack, awash in the sea of *his own fantastic impotence*. For when one asks what idea of society and of the individual's relation to society does this vision of the creator reinforce, one finds that the answer involves a rationalization, exquisitely phrased, of *the need to capitulate* to the structures of power at work in the world whatever the historical epoch.<sup>46</sup>

Ascribing to Pater a logocentrism that he consciously resisted, O'Hara also commits the indignity of imposing upon him the stereotype of the *fin-de-siècle* aesthete, fiddling while Rome burns. One could scarcely worse misread Marius/Pater's endorsement of "Christianity in its humanity, or even in its humanism, in its generous hopefulness, for man, its common sense, and alacrity of cheerful service, its sympathy with all creatures, its appreciation of beauty and daylight,"<sup>47</sup> an endorsement that we should remember is based on Marius's attachment to his "half-known friend."<sup>48</sup>

If a new form of male friendship provides one counter to the ideological construction of masculinity in Victorian high culture, Pater's contingent approach to cultural artifacts provides another. Pater attempts to theorize difference within culture: for example, in the figures of interpretation that he deploys in a variety of texts: in "the lover of strange souls" who tries to define "Leonardo's genius" or the "I" who pieces together the fragmentary remains of Denys's existence in "Denys l'Auxerrois."<sup>49</sup> Further, Pater positions the subject in cultural production in the theory of *Anders-streben*, which he proposes in the essay, "The School of Giorgione," published in a journal in 1877 and not added to *The Renaissance* until the third edition in 1888. Pater uses the term to refer to music conceived as the paradigmatic artistic medium to which other nineteenth-century artistic forms aspire.<sup>50</sup> More generally, *Anders-streben* is the tendency for work in any medium to exceed the limits of the medium in the search for greater expressiveness:

Although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an *Anders-streben* a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but

reciprocally to lend each other new forces.<sup>51</sup>

Further, and as Miller has observed, *Anders-streben* refers to language and critical impression themselves: "The moment, it turns out, though unique, is not single. Each 'impression' is in fact 'infinitely divisible.' . . . It is divisible because it is self-divided, an *Andersstreben* [sic], or striving to be other than itself."<sup>52</sup> In art, "alienation," or what Miller refers to as self-division, is implicit within the very limits of the medium itself.

The term locates as well the producer or receiver of the form as a subject of desire limited by the conditions of material existence. In the nineteenth century, music is often regarded as the medium par excellence of excess, of passion, usually between a man and a woman. But music has a further valence in both revisionary masculine and specifically homosexual tradition, where it is associated as by both Shelley and Pater with the rebellious flute-player,

Marsyas.<sup>53</sup> Robert Martin has argued that in *Redburn* (1849) Herman Melville uses the image of Carlo's "hand organ" to signify the various pleasures of music-making, of the free play of fantasy, of masturbation, and of desire between men.<sup>54</sup> Melville associates Carlo with

Dionysus.<sup>55</sup> Pater's "Denys l'Auxerrois" begins with the narrator's discovery of representations of Denys/Dionysus in stained glass and tapestry: "the figure was that of the organ-builder himself, a flaxen and flowery creature, sometimes wellnigh 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."<sup>56</sup> In "Apollo in Picardy," the Prior, precipitated into crisis by inability to complete his treatise on music, is taught by Apollyon's "power of untutored natural impulse, of natural inspiration" to hear "the singing of the planets: he could hear it, and might in time effect its notation."<sup>57</sup>

Miller hears a different music in Pater. In his essay on the writer, Miller refers to the myth of Ariadne and Dionysus in the passage cited earlier, in which he says that Pater's "texts lead the critic deeper and deeper into a labyrinth until he confronts a final aporia. . . . Only by going all the way into the labyrinth, following the thread of a given clue, can the critic reach the blind alley, vacant of any Minotaur, that impasse which is the end point of interpretation."<sup>58</sup> In the myth, the hero Theseus is saved by the love of a young woman, Ariadne. He is saved *from* being devoured by a monster, half man/half beast at the center of the labyrinth. In Miller's abbreviated version, the Minotaur is not encountered; rather, following Ariadne's (Pater's, in context) thread, the critic learns that the monster does not exist; he is a figment. What is at the centre is an aporia. In "Ariadne's Thread," Miller uses the myth as a figure of deconstruction generally. Commenting on the essay in the course

of a discussion in which she attempts to locate "the relations between deconstruction and feminism as practiced in the United States,"<sup>59</sup> Nancy K. Miller has argued that Hillis Miller erases feminine/feminist difference by conflating Ariadne's thread with his own critical practice. In a footnote, however, the feminist critic suggests a more radical view of how masculinity functions in Miller's use of the myth: "the masculinist critic uses Ariadne to negotiate his encounter with the woman, perhaps in himself, the monstrous self the male critic might meet at the heart of the maze of heterosexuality."<sup>60</sup>

Reading the myth as Hillis Miller presents it, I notice that a woman's love "saves" the hero in his encounter with a male/monster that recalls the demonic representations of men sexually involved with other men that have long characterized Western culture. In "Walter Pater," in which Pater substitutes for Ariadne, a *feminized* homosexual enables the hero to play his role. Accordingly, Miller is free to leave nominally unanswered the question as to whether Pater is "frozen" at an "adolescent homosexual stage." (In the psychological economy of O'Hara's essay, Pater's "impotence" enables a contrasting display of vigour on O'Hara's part. Hence, ignoring Pater's complex politics is not fortuitous but necessary since otherwise the categories of seriousness, political relevance, and masculine self-assertion would be mingled with a weak, that is, a specifically homosexual approach.) Neutralized by O'Hara or domesticated as *Ariadne-manqué*, Pater's thought becomes useful to the male deconstructionist who, now able to thread the maze, can show that the monster does not, after all, exist. The Minotaur is an aporia. At this moment, the process of subordination and elision serves yet another function in enabling an implicit fantasy of release (into aporia) from the bonds of conventional masculinity. Yet the setting aside of male homosexual difference has a number of large, unforeseen consequences. For one thing, if the specificities of gay male (not to mention, feminine) and other differences are to be excluded, then what exists within aporia? Or does it become a "blind alley"? In "Ariadne's Thread," the sexual mingling described in the opening interpretation of the myth is superseded, in the turn to theory, by a statement of "nine areas of linear terminology"<sup>61</sup> in terms of a strictly literary taxonomy.

At the end of the essay, however, gender returns in the form of expressly male anxieties when Miller moves to the third text from which he has drawn the epigraphs, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*. This final section deals with fears of genealogical extinction since, in *Cranford*, an "effeminate or effeminizing doubling"<sup>62</sup> threatens to lower the birth-rate to zero. While Miller wittily invokes these anxieties, conjured by a female writer, in order to dispel them, in face of the absence of other differences the attempt miscarries and what is reinscribed is continuing anxiety about the legitimate exercise of cultural authority within an alienated male intellectual elite. In its refusals, gaps, and reversals, Miller's writing signals the importance of those who, like Pater, have tried to write masculinity differently. In that process, deconstructive criticism has a significant part to play as it does, for example, in recent work by Joseph Boone and Lee Edelman;<sup>63</sup> to play that part, however, requires an approach that recognizes both rhetorical contingencies and continual analysis

of the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity within the academic practice of deconstruction itself.