

Piotr Juszkiewicz

INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY, ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY, POZNAŃ

“Our ‘I’ and History”: The Polish Reception of Walter Pater

The title quotation from Stanisław Brzozowski points to several aspects of the Polish reception of Pater.¹ First, it suggests that the period when the works of the author of *The Renaissance* were translated into Polish and discussed by reviewers was that of the so-called “Young Poland”, of which Brzozowski’s work was a highly significant achievement. Second, it suggests that the reasons for either the interest in Pater’s writings or neglect or disapproval of them were related to variously defined concepts of the “I”, individuality or soul, which, regardless of the differences, remained most valid for those Young Poland writers and critics who were searching for the fundamental meaning in works of art and literature. Third, the term ‘history’ implies that neither the ways of reading Pater nor the concepts of the “I”, individuality or soul were unchanging. Within about two decades, Young Poland as a cultural formation, and particularly the metaphysical foundations of its most outstanding artists and writers’ *Weltanschauung*, became subject to criticism. With time, the attitude towards Pater also changed – as accusations of sterile aestheticism or positivistic pedantry gave way to encomia on the stylistic quality of his texts and on the psychological accuracy of the *Imaginary Portraits*.

The Young Poland period, which was perhaps one of the most fruitful periods in the history of Polish culture, has generally been located by scholars between the late 1890s and the year 1918. Since Young Poland borders on a past dominated by Positivism on the one hand, and on the interwar decades marked by Poland’s regained political independence and aesthetic revolutions on the other, it appears to have been an era of various interrelated ideas, simultaneity of different worldviews, and quick changes of dominant intel-

1 S. Brzozowski, “Nasze ‘ja’ i historia”, in: *Legenda Młodej Polski* [The Legend of Young Poland], in: *Eseje i studia o literaturze* [Essays and Studies on Literature], ed. H. Markiewicz, Wrocław, 1990, pp. 699–718. A version of the current essay first appeared in *The Reception of Walter Pater in Europe*, ed. S. Bann, London, 2004, pp. 203–215 [Print permission has been granted by Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc].

lectual orientations. In general, the brief but fertile period of 'Young Poland' opens up with a critique of the positivistic model of the universe, stemming from the sense of a collapse of values founded on the crumbling authority of science and suffused with melancholy scepticism. The search for answers that could no longer be provided by scientists led to metaphysical speculations combined with a budding ideology of activism that inspired the Polish independence movement which was coming of age in a context of emerging social antagonisms. The era began with a turn towards metaphysics and mysticism under the auspices of Schopenhauer, while its progress was fuelled by the ideas of Nietzsche and Bergson. As regards art, Young Poland meant a shift from Realism to Symbolism and, later, to early Expressionism.²

A significant element of Young Poland's programmes was the distinctly articulated question of the autonomous value of art, which was pursued in a particularly radical way by the critic and poet Zenon Przesmycki, editor of *Chimera*³ as well as by Stanisław Przybyszewski, for whom art, defined as a means of reaching the absolute, was free of any non-artistic obligations.⁴ Most likely, that last postulate was closely related to the influence of foreign literature and art on Polish writers and artists, as both at that time achieved unprecedented intensity. The belief in the intrinsic value of art which, although it could occasionally play a patriotic role, should not be reduced to its social functions, contributed to thinking about art and literature in terms of universal ideas, changing in the course of their progress through "various walks of the nation's life" under the "specific impact of the environment".⁵ The openness to literature and art that were produced in other European countries also manifested itself in many translations and comments on foreign authors. Traditionally, the most attractive was French culture, but there was also much interest in the works of the Scandinavians. According to Wanda Krajewska, English literature was for the most part considered conservative by Polish authors, yet with time more and more information became available not only on English writers of the past, but also on the literary present. Particularly at the apex of Young Poland, which came, in Krajewska's estimation, between 1887 and 1908, English literature gained in importance and its appeal could be compared to that of French literature.⁶

2 On the periodisation of this era in Polish art, cf. W. Juszcak, *Wojtkiewicz i Nowa Sztuka* [Wojtkiewicz and New Art], Warsaw, 1965.

3 Z. Przesmycki, "Walka ze sztuką" [A Fight with Art], in: *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu Młodej Polski* [Programs and Literary Debates of the Young Poland Period], ed. M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, Wrocław-Cracow, 1973, pp. 297–328.

4 S. Przybyszewski, "Confiteor", in: *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu Młodej Polski*, op. cit., pp. 235–243.

5 W. Krajewska, *Recepcja literatury angielskiej w Polsce okresu modernizmu (1887–1918): Informacje. Sądy. Przekłady* [Reception of English Literature in Modernist Poland (1887–1918). Information, Assessments, Translations], Wrocław, 1972, p. 8.

6 Ibid., pp. 11–12.

Information concerning English literature, wrote Krajewska, was available to the Polish reader in the press – both in newspapers and in literary and other periodicals – and in books.⁷ Published translations, reviews and comments included and referred to poetry, fiction, drama, literary and art criticism, high-brow and popular literature, authors of the past and those who were still alive and active. Some dailies, such as *Życie* [Life] in Warsaw and *Świat* [The World] in Cracow, had their regular foreign correspondents who more or less competently discussed recent publications. Among the translated authors of the past were Byron, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, while a group of translated and reviewed contemporaries included Yeats, Swinburne, Rossetti, Ruskin, Morris, Pater, Wilde, Tennyson, and Robert Browning, as well as J. K. Jerome, Caine, Conan Doyle and some celebrities for a season, such as Grant Allen and Rider Haggard.

Next to the knowledge possessed by the editors, critics and translators, the choice of English authors whose works were translated and reviewed was determined by French criticism. Once some British author had been "discovered" for good in Paris, his or her name would usually soon appear in the Polish press. What also counted was the scholarly authority of Taine and his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, occasionally supported by other French studies translated into Polish, such as *Ruskin et la religion de la Beauté* [Ruskin and the Cult of Beauty, 1897] by Robert de la Sizeranne (translated by the eminent critic Antoni Potocki). In use were also studies on English literature by German critics and scholars.⁸

Polish commentators and translators of English literature were particularly interested in the authors of the Aesthetic movement, e.g. Ruskin, the pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne, Morris, Wilde and Pater. The most popular of all were no doubt Ruskin and Wilde. In 1900 the first translation of the selected works of the former was published, including fragments of the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*, to be followed by other translations: *The Ethics of the Dust*, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, *Sesame and Lilies*, and *The Queen of the Air*.⁹ Foreign works on Ruskin translated into Polish included a study by de la Sizeranne and a German monograph by S. Saenger entitled *Ruskin, His Life and Work*. Polish books on the subject included *John Ruskin* by M. Buyno-Arctowa (1901) and *Ku światłu* [Towards the Light] by Z. Hartingh (1911). Krajewska emphasises that the reception of Ruskin was filtered through French criticism, which resulted in recognising the author of *The Stones of Venice* primarily as an aesthete focusing on the external form of works of art.¹⁰ Though Polish critics revealed his spiritual affinities with Polish poets, and

7 For a complete bibliography, see: *ibid.*

8 This is what Krajewska claims with reference to works on English literature by Feliks Jezierski. Cezary Jellenta read Pater for the first time in the German translation.

9 For a complete bibliography, cf. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

the quality of his prose was readily acknowledged, in contemporary opinion he exerted little influence on artistic ideas in Poland.

Apparently, Ruskin's popularity with Polish readers was surpassed by that of Oscar Wilde. According to Krajewska, Wilde was perceived as the main protagonist, and even founder of the "school of aestheticism" with its central idea of "art for art's sake". Since 1897, translations of Wilde's writings were published in Cracow's *Życie* [Life], while the programmatic texts of Young Poland reflected his concept of a critic as an artist. Among the translated works were *The Nightingale and the Rose* and other poetic fables (1902), *Salome* (1904), *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime* and *Poems in Prose*. Critical studies of Wilde included *Poglądy na sztukę i krytykę Oskara Wilde'a* [Oscar Wilde's Views on Art and Criticism] by S. Jabłonowski (1905) and an Introduction to *Dialogues* by Adolf Nowaczyński (1905). Wilde was considered an outstanding individualist, a refined aesthete and a great aesthetician and artist who throughout his whole life had opposed the conservative public opinion.

In comparison to the reception of other representatives of the Aesthetic movement, Pater's works were relatively less influential in Poland. Acknowledged later and translated only after 1909, they may have seemed less attractive than those of Ruskin and Wilde, both of whom were considered the main champions of aesthetic subjectivism and autonomy of artistic impressions as the proper background of critical activity. Moreover, Pater's texts did not contain one specific motif which particularly appealed to Polish authors. The leftist *Prawda* or, even more to the left, *Głos* stressed the social aspect of Ruskin's and Morris' opinions. In such a context, Pater, classified as a critical impressionist, appeared to be a sensitive connoisseur of beauty, yet was much less radical in his aestheticism than Wilde, and much less socially progressive than Ruskin or Morris.

Information and opinions on Pater appeared in the Polish press for the first time in the 1890s. In 1894, Mściław Edgar Nekanda-Trepka contributed a note on Pater's death to *Biblioteka Warszawska* [The Warsaw Library]. Three years later, Leon Winiarski, a sociologist and socialist interested primarily in the social aspects of art and literature who was residing permanently in France, published a mini-series of sketches on Pater's achievements in *Prawda*, of which he was a foreign correspondent.¹¹ His social bias already became quite apparent in the first essay from the first issue of *Prawda* in 1897, in which he showed Pater as a melancholy, subtle daydreamer, an artist pursuing ideal beauty and a loner living virtually like a monk; for Winiarski, such an attitude was unacceptable. In his opinion, Pater was "consistently evading responsibility, action, and direct duty. He preached and practised the gospel of sophisticated intellectual and artistic cynicism, the religion of beauty. It is obvious that there was something abnormal about it. One might say, degenerate. [...]"

11 Ibid., pp. 37–38.

Pater was a decadent. [...] No doubt, those who believe in science and progress will condemn him. [...] He lived only to give a name and expression to a certain state of mind".¹² Winiarski considered *Marius the Epicurean* to be Pater's most outstanding work, identifying in the next number of *Prawda* (in which he summarised the book), Marius' spiritual vacillation between Stoicism and Christianity with the author's own doubts.

Two years later Winiarski returned to Pater, at that time to the *Imaginary Portraits* (which he actually called "imaginable"), in order to modify his previous judgement. He summarised *Denys l'Auxerrois* in no. 38 of *Prawda* in 1899, and *Carl von Rosenmold* in no. 40. On that occasion, *Marius* was referred to by Winiarski as a less significant achievement. What gained importance was the impressionistic critical method which enabled Pater to create "imaginable portraits" – poems rather than studies – the true "jewels of criticism". Winiarski considered as most important Pater's unique ability to describe a given personality as an embodiment of major elements of a historical breakthrough. In 1901 he wrote about Pater one last time, presenting *Sebastian van Storck* in no. 33 of *Prawda*, and combining the two lines of his reasoning about the English critic. On the one hand, *Imaginary Portraits* were a kind of reflection of the universal psychology of a specific place and moment in time ("So far in *Sebastian* Pater has been showing us the artistic psychology of Holland"), on the other hand they reflected the mind of Pater himself – its various aspects were revealed in the successive portraits. According to Winiarski, *Denys* was an artist who proved able to lead the masses, *Rosenmold* was a daydreamer, while *Storck* was a thinker. Consequently, for the Polish critic Pater was not so much an expert on the Renaissance as a writer focusing on his own subjectivity, one who applied the introspective method to a more general objective – that of probing into the souls of the heroes of his imaginary portraits in order to reach to the characteristics of a more universal psychology of a given time and place.

As late as eight years after the last essay by Winiarski, Pater's achievement again found its way onto the Polish cultural scene. In 1909 the first, and until recently¹³ the only Polish translations of Pater's works came out in Lvov and Warsaw, which then belonged, respectively, to Austria and Russia. In Lvov, a selection of Pater's essays was translated by Stanisław Lack,¹⁴ while in Warsaw three extracts from *The Renaissance*, translated by Maria Rakowska, were published in 1909 and 1910 in the journals *Literatura i Sztuka* and *Sfinks*.¹⁵

Lack's translation was published by Księgarnia Polska B. Połonieckiego, a press that had been founded in 1872. In 1889 it was taken over by Bernard

12 L. Winiarski, "Walter Pater", *Prawda*, Warsaw, 17.01.1896/1897, p. 9.

13 W. Pater, *Renesans. Rozważania o sztuce i poezji*, translated by P. Kopszak, Warsaw, 1998.

14 W. Pater, *Wybór pism*, translated by S. Lack, Lvov, 1909.

15 W. Pater, "Luca della Robbia", translated by M. Rakowska, *Sfinks*, Warsaw, 1909, no. 6, pp. 413–21; idem, "Leonardo da Vinci", anonymous translation, *Literatura i Sztuka*, Poznań, 1909, no. 9; 10; 11; 12:1; idem, "Pico della Mirandola: Z cyklu szkiców P.T. Odrodzenie", translated by M. Rakowska, *Sfinks*, Warsaw, 1910, no. 11, pp. 334–351.

Połoniecki, who turned it into a more ambitious enterprise. Apart from the press, he opened a public library and academic reading-room (50 000 volumes), publishing mainly Polish romantic literature, foreign classics such as Shakespeare and Molière, and works (often first editions) of contemporary Polish authors. In the relatively liberal Austro-Hungarian empire, Lvov was at that time, besides Cracow, a major cultural centre of the province of Galicia. At the turn of the twentieth century the city had many literary periodicals, an opera house and a theatre specialising in contemporary drama, a university, learned societies, and a large group of Young Poland writers and critics, such as Jan Kasprówicz, Stanisław Korab-Brzozowski and Wincenty Korab-Brzozowski, Ostap Ortwin, Józef Ruffer, Maryla Wolska and Leopold Staff. In 1905 the literary critic Ostap Ortwin (Oskar Katzenellenbogen), who had initiated a series called "Symposion", became head of the literary department of Księgarnia Polska. Lack's selection and translation of Pater's essays was published as volume IV of the series, which had been edited by Leopold Staff since 1890, an outstanding poet and himself a prolific translator. According to the cultural programme of Young Poland, the proper objective of the series was to present to the Polish reader a variety of works by eminent foreign authors, yet not so much the most recent publications as some fundamental texts of European culture – "essential excerpts from the timeless masterpieces of antiquity, Renaissance, the age of humanism, the Enlightenment, and early modern times" in an "artistic translation". The editors wrote in the general introduction: "The Symposion Library is intended to familiarise the contemporary Polish reader in his mother tongue with the views which shaped the mindset of whole generations, leaving a permanent imprint on their moral pursuits; which today constitute the universal cultural heritage, the most valuable depository of practical wisdom and mature knowledge of man".

It should be added that the publisher wished to choose texts which "appeal both to the heart and to intellect", since he did not mean to promote only intellectual interest, pure proliferation of knowledge, and "burdening the reader's memory". Apparently, then, the writings of Pater seemed to the editors nearly classic – a significant part of the canon of European literature. The preceding volumes were Plato's *Symposium*, *Selections* from Montaigne, and *Moral Maxims and Remarks* by Vauvenargues, while the following ones contained the texts of Diderot, Leopardi, La Rochefoucauld, Goethe, La Bruyère, Fichte, Voltaire, Hebbel, Kierkegaard and Newman. The translators were Polish writers and poets, such as Staff and Kasprówicz, as well as critics: Stanisław Brzozowski, Antoni Potocki and Stefan Frycz. They belonged, at least some of them, to a group of young literati who held meetings in the Academic Reading Room, to an association of students from Lvov University. There, Staff, who was editor-in-chief of the series, met Ortwin and Stanisław Brzozowski. It was thanks to them that the literary discussion group of the Reading Room became more active, organising a series of lectures on both Polish and foreign literature. Its members discussed the works of Hamsun, Strindberg, Poe, Longfellow,

Coleridge, Wilde, d’Annunzio, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Leconte de Lisle, Maeterlinck, Rodenbach, Verhaeren, Barbey d’Aureville, France, Nietzsche, and, last but not least, Pater.¹⁶

It is difficult to establish beyond any doubt who came up with the idea of including a selection from Pater’s writings in the series. Staff must have heard of him when he attended the Academic Reading Room, but we do not know how familiar he was with Pater’s works. On the one hand, it is known that he started learning English intensely only in 1911;¹⁷ on the other, he wrote to the critic Wilhelm Feldman in 1908:

It seems to me that from Pater we ought to translate his masterpiece, the culmination of his achievements, *Marius the Epicurean*. Among his other works, the only one that matches *Marius* is the essay on the blooming of dew and fire from the *Greek Studies* [...] Ostensibly nothing but a scholarly trifle, but in fact an ingenious attempt to put under a common denominator the ritual aspect of Greek enthusiasm and the religious affinity of modern soul and nature. How suggestive it is, how it may impress the reader! Not a word of didacticism, no unnecessary wrestling with problems.¹⁸

Perhaps Staff had read *Marius* and *Greek Studies* in the French translation resulting from interest in Pater’s works in France, as reported in 1903 by Antoni Potocki, who was the Paris correspondent of the *Kurier Warszawski*.¹⁹ The above fragment of Staff’s letter indicates that the final decision concerning the selection of Pater’s texts was left to the Polish translator.

Stanisław Lack (1876–1909) actually did not belong to the Lvov intellectual circles, but he maintained close ties with them. Born and educated in Cracow, Lack had studied at the School of Law and Administration at Jagiellonian University, although he eventually chose to become a literary and art critic, and was remembered in the history of Polish culture primarily due to his interpretations of the playwright, painter and poet Stanisław Wyspiański. His selection of Pater’s writings proved quite wide-ranging: the opening text, *Platon* [Plato], was an excerpt from *Plato and Platonism* (1893), then came two texts from *Greek Studies* (1895): *Studyum o Dyonizosie* [A Study on Dionysus] and *Epoka atletów* [The Age of Athletes]; *Imaginary Portraits* were represented by *Denys l’Auxerrois*, while two essays from *The Renaissance* (1873), i.e. *Winckelmann* and *Konkluzja* [Conclusion], closed the volume. The translation is mostly quite accurate; some passages, however, were not properly corrected, probably because of Lack’s serious illness which became more acute in 1908 and finally resulted in his untimely death on 20 January 1909 in Vienna, where he had

16 I. Maciejewska, *Leopold Staff: Lwowski okres twórczości* [Leopold Staff: his Oeuvre in the Lvov Period], Warsaw, 1965.

17 L. Staff in a letter of 1911: “Next year I would like to improve my command of English and start transplanting new herbs onto our ground”; cf. Maciejewska, op. cit., p. 61.

18 L. Staff, *W kręgu literackich przyjaźni: Listy* [In the Circle of Literary Friendships: Letters], ed. J. Czachowska and I. Maciejewska, Warsaw, 1966, pp. 398–399.

19 Ibid., p. 61.

made a brief stop on his way back to Poland after having undergone unsuccessful treatment in Italy. Some brief passages were left out (e.g., on p. 136, “possessing an inexhaustible gift of suggestion”), others were simplified, and at times the meaning was misconstrued (in *Winckelmann*, the expression “free of master library” was translated as meaning “having the master’s library at hand”). Lack’s illness may also have been the reason why, in contrast to the other volumes, the Pater volume of the *Symposion* series does not contain an introduction with a general overview of the author’s achievements.

Maria Rakowska (1864–1940) was a writer and translator of French, German, and English texts (from the English she translated, for instance, Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1909). She also wrote essays on English literature – she published a text on Swinburne in *Literatura i Sztuka*, and in 1911 her *Zarys literatury angielskiej* [Outline of English Literature] came out as a popular book founded predominantly on the ideas of Taine. Rakowska’s translations of Pater were limited to his studies on the Renaissance: in 1909, *Literatura i Sztuka* published what was probably her rendering of “Leonardo da Vinci”,²⁰ in the same year *Sfinks* printed her translation of “Luca della Robbia”, and a year later the same journal published “Pico della Mirandola”. Unfortunately, nothing is known of how interested the publisher of *Sfinks*, i.e. Władysław Bukowiński, was in Pater. It is known, however, that Bukowiński (1871–1927), who was a poet and admirer of Słowacki, Asnyk, and Konopnicka, was trying to continue the key role of Przesmycki’s journal *Chimera* in the Young Poland culture, and often published translations and articles on foreign literature. The 1909 translations by Lack and Rakowska were accompanied in *Literatura i Sztuka* (published in Poznań, under Prussian rule, as a weekly literary supplement to the daily *Dziennik Poznański*) by two short texts on Pater that were signed with the initials “C. J.”.²¹ Their author was most probably Cezary Jellenta (1861–1935), a writer and outstanding critic who wrote studies on both Polish and European Romanticism. His notes were actually summaries of some chapters of *The Renaissance*, which Jellenta might have read in the German translation by Wilhelm von Schölermann, published in Leipzig and Jena by Diederichs in 1902 and 1906.²² The chapters devoted to the times before the Renaissance were interpreted by the Polish critic as Pater’s effort

20 Krajewska suggests that the author of this translation was Rakowska and that it was published in *Literatura i Sztuka*, Poznań, 1909, no. 12, p. 1. In fact, there was a sequence of four extracts from *Leonardo* and the first one appeared in no. 9. Cf. Pater, “Leonardo da Vinci”, anonymous translation, *Literatura i Sztuka*, Poznań, 9;10;11;12:1. Therefore, in no. 12 only the last part was printed. Additionally, the name of translator does not appear in any of these publications.

21 C. J. [Cezary Jellenta], “Z Przed-Renesansu” [From Before the Renaissance], *Literatura i Sztuka*, Poznań, 1909, no. 17, pp. 257–259; idem, “Z Po-Renesansu” [From After the Renaissance], *Literatura i Sztuka*, Poznań, 1909, no. 19, pp. 289–292.

22 W. Pater, *Die Renaissance: Studien in Kunst und Poesie*, translated by W. von Schölermann, Jena–Leipzig, 1906.

to grasp the characteristic features of the human spirit that had started to appear in the Middle Ages, then flourished in France and eventually in Italy, and persisted until the eighteenth century. The most impressive to Jellenta was the story of Amis and Amil from *Two Early French Stories*, which he summarised in some detail. The other text he published in *Literatura i Sztuka* was a summary of *Winckelmann*.

The period of 1909–1910/1911, marked by the most intense interest in Pater's works, did not bring any systematic account of his achievements. It may have been written if it were not for the untimely death of Young Poland's most outstanding critic, Stanisław Brzozowski, who was phenomenally well read and independent-thinking. Before, however, turning to the reasons why Brzozowski had paid some attention to Pater's writings and, by the same token, why the writers and critics of Young Poland decided to offer these to the Polish audience, one more publication should be noted, which, focusing directly on Pater, concluded, as it were, the most direct, if not the only, phase of the reception of his works in Poland. This was a book-length study by Zbigniew Grabowski entitled *Walter Pater: życie – dzieło – styl* [Walter Pater: Life – Work – Style], published in 1929 in Poznań by the Poznań Society of Friends of Learning, and developed from a doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Roman Dyboski, a distinguished historian of English literature and professor at Jagiellonian University. Grabowski's book summarises Pater's works in detail and attempts to locate them against the background of the Victorian era, the author's biography and the writings of other members of the Aesthetic movement. As an academic study, it also indicates the moment when Pater was excluded from the immediate context of Polish literary tradition and situated in the domain of literary history and the history of criticism.

Walter Pater has often been referred to as a critical impressionist. Such a classification definitely provided enough grounds for positivistic critics to repudiate his writings, which was exemplified by Winiarski's first text. Still, it is not enough to explain the general interest in Pater as shown by those Polish writers who were critical of the positivistic paradigm, particularly with reference to art and instead stressing the problem of experience, the autonomy of aesthetic emotion, the role of the individuality and the power of self-expression. What is more, the writers of Young Poland, even though they emphasised the problem of the aesthetic experience and the subjectivity of the artist and critic, distanced themselves from the impressionistic method in criticism when it meant nothing but a pure, chaotic flux of impressions. That is why, when trying to understand the motivation of Young Poland writers, which might have determined either their interest in Pater's writings or their rejection of them, we must take a somewhat closer look at the critical method of Pater himself.

For Pater, significant criticism meant aesthetic criticism – an activity which was evidently different both from positivistic pedantry and from metaphysical speculation. Its objective was to reveal the specific identity of the aesthetic

object through an analysis of the subject's reaction, i.e. answering the question as to which elements of a work of art exert the strongest and most unique influence on the recipient. The intensity of that influence was rooted in its relationship to the key elements of the creative process: first, with the personality of the artist (reconstructed on the basis of the subject's feelings), which focuses the spiritual energy of the age (history and its understanding appear in an act of the work's comprehension; during reading this is what makes it the subject's property), and, second, with the artistic decisions that are made, as it were, through the prism of that personality in the context of tradition defined not as a certain static state of affairs but as one increasing emphasis on fidelity to the medium. In this respect, for Pater, aesthetic criticism differs from academic criticism, which is concerned with biography, attribution and facts, since it aims at the experience of personality and the revelation of the autonomous character of the work's medium.

Besides the problem of history, the question of the medium was of the greatest importance for Pater. In his view, a work of art cannot be reduced simply to ideas conveyed in various manners. The sensual value of each medium cannot be translated into another one, which is significant because the work does not appeal to pure sensibility but to the imaginative intellect which operates on the level of images, while some sensual arousal is necessary to facilitate the perception of the work's other aspects. In these circumstances, a work of art is analogous to the imaginative intellect, which is suffused with emotion just as the content of the work is suffused with its form. The quality of the medium's application is important for the meaning and efficacy of the work. In painting, the essential question is how the artist deals with the pictorial matter and how he proves capable of choosing Lessing's "fruitful moment". Besides, even though every medium is unique in its own right, the common tendency of all types of art is towards the condition of music, which is an ideal example of the coexistence of content and form. One might say that the medium and history are combined together in a Hegelian model of the interrelated development of different forms of consciousness and types of art.

The alleged reduction of Pater's critical method to impressionism – writing down personal, highly volatile impressions of the sensitive "I" – is also contradicted by his idea of the speaking subject, i.e. the medium for words. This subject is rarely rendered concrete by means of personal pronouns, and those rare moments are most often signals that the history which unfolds before our eyes as objective is actually a reconstruction. The way the text is delivered oscillates, just like our knowledge of Pater's heroes in the imaginary portraits, between a self-presenting objective presence and momentary flashes of intuition brought about by the power of empathy.

According to Peter Dale, the construction of the image of history through an analysis of subjective data released by an emotional and sensual impulse owes its specific form, which is characteristic of Pater, to a cluster of both positivistic and anti-positivistic ideas derived from Mill as well as Hegel, Goethe,

Heine, Ruskin, Gautier and Winckelmann.²³ It was founded not only on the negation of the mechanistic concept of man and reality, discarded in favour of a belief in the relative quality of all human knowledge, but also on detachment from metaphysical speculations. In particular, Pater's thought reveals a trace of the debates concerning the possibility of acquiring by the human mind objective knowledge beyond subjective existence. Pater's emphasis on subjective experience, reinforced by a statement from the *Conclusion* that "not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end", pushed him close to the extreme of solipsism. Dale claims that what actually saved Pater from solipsism was his effort to develop an idea of history founded on a belief in ties and communication between individuals. He describes Pater's understanding of that purpose, i.e. "interpreting the 'mystery' of the mind of the past", by means of Dilthey's idea of history. Both in the case of Dilthey and of Pater, the vision of history as a universal consciousness conditions the necessity of its emphatic reconsideration in the search for the meaning of the past. This is made possible, writes Dale, by treating the traces of the past as products of past minds, a mental experience of their relations, and the projection of our knowledge of customs, traditions, political circumstances and religious processes on those traces. All this means, Pater seems to think, that there is no essential discontinuity between our minds and the minds of the past. Even though we will never confront the past face to face, there are "threads" of past minds which run across time and appear in the minds of the present. In this sense, the study of history is a process of intense retrospection. Thus, in the case of Pater, there is a combination of an intensive effort to express individual impressions in contact with a given work, defined as contact with the artist's unique personality, and a search not so much for the spirit of history but for its major spiritual powers. It is a mixture, writes Dale, of self-expression and a kind of *Kulturgeschichte* which provides a framework allowing for a transformation of those spiritual powers into the aesthetic dimension of the work of art.

Expression and empathy are the two main categories of Young Poland criticism. Michał Głowiński, an author of brilliant studies on the literary criticism of the period, highlights as its basic assumption the claim that "the literary work cannot be separated from its author so that the artist's subjectivity is never a factor external to the text; approaching the work, we also naturally take into account its author, for there is nothing that can question such a relationship".²⁴ As a result of blurring the boundary between the work and its author, the object of the critic's interest is the artist's mind, even though, on the other hand, psychologism was programmatically opposed to mere

23 P. A. Dale, "Historicism as *Weltanschauung*", in: idem, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History*, Cambridge MA–London, 1977, p. 175.

24 M. Głowiński, *Ekspresja i empatia: Studia o młodopolskiej krytyce literackiej* [Expressiveness and Empathy: Essays on the Young Poland Literary Criticism], Cracow, 1997, p. 28.

biographism. The critic's task was to search in the depth of the work for the author's subjectivity and to grasp the authorial experience. Such empathy, the lived experience of the work, did not mean identification with an author of flesh and blood but rather with the subject created by the author in the work.

To be precise, the meaning of artistic expression and the task of empathy were understood in at least three different ways. The first can be defined as modified naturalism. It was founded on the belief that the only possible basis for the theory of art is not a metaphysical idea of beauty but psychology. According to Stanisław Witkiewicz, psychology, supported by the physical nature of physiological phenomena, should allow for the formulation of scientific laws of art that are related to practical artistic knowledge.²⁵ Its modification consisted in acknowledging the role of the artist's personality, which by definition subjectifies the presented world-picture and, by the same token, determines the domain of aesthetic analysis that is able to reveal the character of individual transformations of the objective world-picture which cannot be explained simply by an analysis of external factors. The basis of criticism defined in that particular way was subjective sensitivity to beauty, exemplified by the impressionistic studies of France and Lemaître. A subjective critical judgement, understood, as in the case of the critic Ignacy Matuszewski, in terms of a sincere confession of individual impressions produced by the work, did not quite exclude objectivism, i.e. references to "other categories of social phenomena".²⁶

Another way of defining expression and empathy was related to thinking in metaphysical terms. Placed in such a perspective, a work was supposed to focus all critical attention which, in turn, was supposed to ignore its social context. In that case, though, what was repudiated was not only the approach advocated by Taine, but also naive impressionism. The point was to reveal in the work its absolute element, not just to experience aesthetic pleasure. This does not mean, however, that emotions did not count at all. On the contrary, the absolute was approached in an emotional way, while the process of response was modelled in terms of "communion" of both the artist's and critic's souls. Such a manner of thinking, close to Aurier's theory of symbolism, was characteristic of Przesmycki and the programme of his *Chimera*.²⁷ Stanisław Przybyszewski represented an interesting blend of positivistic science and categories of metaphysics. His key interpretative category, the "naked soul", implied a shift from the dualism of matter and spirit to that of consciousness and the unconscious dominated by *chuć* (Przybyszewski's idiosyncratic term corresponding to the Freudian "libido"). The true reality revealed through an

25 S. Witkiewicz, *Sztuka i krytyka u nas* [Our Art and Criticism], ed. J. Z. Jakubowski, Warsaw, 1949.

26 I. Matuszewski, "Subiektywizm w krytyce" [Subjectivism in Criticism], *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1897, no. 2, pp. 76–103.

27 M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "'Żyjąc w pięknie' (O Miriamie krytyku)" ["Living in Beauty" (On Miriam the Critic)], in: *Somnambulicy – dekadenci – herosi* [The Sleepwalkers – the Decadents – the Heroes], Cracow, 1985, pp. 390–424.

artistic symbol, a flash of the absolute, was for Przybyszewski the moment of the revelation of the "naked soul".²⁸

For naturalists, the writings of Pater must have been difficult to accept, since they were liable to be regarded as examples of impressionism. Stanisław Witkiewicz accepted the prose of Ruskin only as literature; as an achievement of a specific individual uniquely and persuasively formulating his judgements on the works of art. Hence, he recognised the author of the *Stones of Venice* only as a master of verbal art, and not as a critic. On the other hand, to the metaphysicians Pater seemed probably little more than a relic of the positivistic past. Przybyszewski wrote in one of his letters: "Writing about all those petrified mammoths – the Wordsworths, Arnolds, Kellers, Mörikes, Paters – thank God, it is finally coming to an end!".²⁹

The third way of understanding empathy and expression, characteristic of the generation and the circle of Pater's translators, was related both to their distance from positivism, and to the critique of metaphysical rapture. Particularly striking was the evolution of Stanisław Lack – from a manifesto of the impressionistic criticism of the kind represented by Lemaître and France, as well as Ruskin (which meant resistance against the debasement of the individual self by the universalist theories of beauty) through metaphysical longings³⁰ to a concept of criticism as "tracing literary ideas and their fates over centuries".³¹ The task of the critic, formulated in the above quoted text of 1905, was for Lack "[t]o acknowledge the progress and continuity of ideas and various manners of expressing them. An outstanding token of progress may be consciousness which expresses itself through the construction of events, that is, of a new work". Then Lack added that a critic who "manages to suppress his desire to psychologise on the mysteries of the soul may logically trace the course of an idea and follow its life in the minutest details of construction".³² This, however, did not mean abandoning an individual perspective and denying

28 E. Boniecki, *Struktura nagiej duszy: Studium o Stanisławie Przybyszewskim* [The Structure of Naked Soul. On Stanisław Przybyszewski], Warsaw, 1993.

29 Quoted in Krajewska, op. cit., p. 68.

30 "New criticism is symbolic, one, and by that it becomes an offshoot of art, also symbolic. It will be neither subjective, nor objective, for we have seen how easily these concepts may be misinterpreted. It is self-evident, however, that criticism will be individual, since it is practised by the artist who condenses and concentrates the changeable and, above all, perishable phenomena and makes durable statues of stone; immortal, moving with their own specific, separate, and only rhythm. He creates the synthesis of the individual identity of the 'artist under discussion' and connects him with the universal being – first of all, with its eternal type. The artist, just like religion (and art is a religion) connects an individual human being with its eternal type which is called God or Nature, it does not matter". Lack, "Przegląd przeglądów" [Review of Reviews], in: *Wybór pism krytycznych* [Selected Critical Texts], ed. W. Głowala, Cracow, 1979, pp. 477–478.

31 Lack, "Luźne uwagi o krytyce literackiej" [Loose Remarks on Literary Criticism], in: *Wybór pism krytycznych* [Selected Critical Texts], p. 314.

32 Ibid., p. 321.

the emotional value of the work, but only a shift of interest towards history which manifests itself in it.

Stanisław Brzozowski, perhaps the most astute and profound mind of the Young Poland movement, included among the tasks of literary and art criticism shaping the future of both art and non-artistic matters, which was, in his view, impossible without the understanding of the present and the past. A key role in the process of understanding was played by the recognition of human subjectivity and the position of the "I" against the background of history. To Brzozowski, Pater's detachment from the positivistic kind of objectivism, resulting in the appreciation of the personal perception of the world, was quite obvious. The Polish critic supplemented the critical lesson of Kant with a Marxian analysis, a combination which allowed him to approach reality as a human product subject to continuous transformation. That, in turn, brought Brzozowski to a specific understanding of culture, produced in connection with the process of human labour directed at external reality ("From this point of view, every culture is a system of the instruments of self-preservation"), which, contrary to facts, undergoes continuous mythologisation. The essence of that mythologisation is artificial separation of culture from its genesis – the autonomisation, and, finally, ritualization of its achievements. In this sense, mythologisation means universalization of the historical – our metaphysics, Brzozowski claimed, is always nothing but our social mythology. Mythologisation pertains also to the "I" which is not something primary, but an outcome and product of history. "Our 'I' – he wrote – does not stand outside history, but it is history itself. There is no way to free oneself of history, for there is nothing in the 'I' which does [not – P. J.] belong to it". This idea, even though it reached beyond the horizon of the Paterian reconstruction of history inscribed in works, implied that Brzozowski was likewise interested in penetrating the creative personality through which, as through all of us, "flows the river of history". Of course, that did not mean the endorsement of criticism championed by Lemaître or France, referred to by Brzozowski as a set of accidental remarks made with no sense of responsibility. What mattered was the understanding of the human soul in connection with its historically conditioned world – the analysis of the latter gives us a chance to reach to the creative depth.

Consequently, criticism was for Brzozowski a form of social self-consciousness, an effort to answer the question of human identity. His line of reasoning, pervaded with the atmosphere of social revolt, marked with anticipation of action, seems very distant from Pater's serene silence. Yet, for the Polish critic, the silence of Pater's texts was only ostensible – he sensed in them enormous emotional tension. Brzozowski called Pater's style "malarial", full of subdued passion and feverish.³³ That specific emotional aspect stemmed from

33 "Pater's style is so malarial that one can sense in it thrills, hypodermic fever, blissful desire, disturbing, suffocating joy – in other words, all this is just apparently and only apparently thought; in depth, it is a world that is ill, feverish, cruel and evil. To me,

the blend of "high emotional culture" and tremendous intellectual effort which penetrates deeply into "moral longings, nostalgias and the cognitive values of truth", most likely causing the oscillation between strong emotions and the endeavour to keep them under control in the process of understanding. Perhaps this explains other references by Brzozowski to the works of Pater: all of them happen to connote the same heavy atmosphere, sultriness, and strained standstill. Yet the most significant element of Pater's intellectual achievement, highly appreciated by his Polish reader, was related to the problem of history – a specific introspective interpretation developed in search for the historical meaning inherent in the reconstructed artistic personality. In a late essay included in his posthumously published collection, *Głosy wśród nocy* [Voices at Night], Brzozowski wrote, asking a question about the chances to reveal the secret of the growth of artistic soul:

When will come a man able to reveal, show and impose on people an understanding of the growth of artistic soul? Each artist has such a secret within himself [...] Pater, a master, ought to be born again in Polish letters, since much power is needed to acknowledge the existence of those inner realities and stop at that, as we know that whoever does not see them in the work, will not notice them when helped by the critic, either.³⁴

For Brzozowski, too, criticism was essentially an act of judgement that one soul passed on another, except that the Polish critic, standing on the threshold of the twentieth century and appreciating the power of Pater's empathy, wanted the critic to embody the moral consciousness of a given epoch, to make it clear that man should attempt to control the historical forces which determine him. Of course, this is not the Paterian history of the inner development of a spiritual community, close in its concreteness to the Hegelian spirit of history, and besides, the aesthetic bliss evaporates from it, too. Instead, what we have is distance to the practice of quietist individual aestheticism.³⁵

there is no doubt about it. Berenson and probably Shadwell could not appreciate the portrait of Watteau, they did not want to understand it. It is almost Dostoyevskian [...] A strange kind of sadism which consists in bleaching the blood and emotion out of the writing subject. Then Sebastian Storck [...] When Pater writes about curiosity which multiplies the content of the world, he means also that content which is usually considered something more profound than curiosity – when there is a change in this respect, there is neither time, nor strength to think in psychic terms; this is something new as a fact, as knowledge, because it is not only that knowledge changes, but the knowing subject as well. Yet Pater wanted to live, let's say, in the Baudelairean sense, and wearing Spinoza's cassock". S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik* [Memoir], Lvov, 1913, p. 57.

34 S. Brzozowski, "Skarga to rzecz straszna. (Rzecz o Róży Józefa Katerli)" [A Complaint is a Terrible Thing. (On Józef Katerla's *Róża*)], in: *Eseje i studia o literaturze*, op. cit., p. 1064.

35 "As a matter of fact, the type of modern 'cultured' mind is represented by such people as Remy de Gourmont, Anatole France, Oscar Wilde, Pater, Georg Simmel, etc. They all have one feature in common: taking advantage of historical experience for their own individual purposes [...]". Brzozowski, op. cit., p. 699.

History becomes a task, and the artistic or critical activity a way to its fulfilment, though a key to its understanding still remains in the artist's "I", manifesting itself in an act of expression and accessible through empathy.

Abstract

The essay focuses on the Polish reception of Walter Pater's works. The author raises three main points: first, that Pater's texts were translated into Polish and were lively discussed by reviewers mainly during the period of the so-called "Young Poland" (1890–1918); second, that the reasons for either the interest in Pater's writings or the neglect or disapproval of them were related to variously defined concepts of the human subject, i.e. the "I", individuality or soul, which, regardless of the differences, remained most valid to Young Poland writers and critics searching for the fundamental meaning in works of art and literature. Third, that with time the attitude of Polish writers, artists and poets towards Pater changed and initial accusations of sterile aestheticism or positivistic pedantry, levelled at him in the first decade of the 20th century, gave way to encomia on the stylistic quality of his texts and on the psychological accuracy of his *Imaginary Portraits*.