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CHASING THE METAPHYSICAL REFERENT IN
VICTORIAN AESTHETICS: (RE)CONSTRUCTING
HISTORY, (DE)CONSTRUCTING THE SELF

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Lauren Leigh Todd

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CHASING THE METAPHYSICAL REFERENT IN VICTORIAN AESTHETICS:
(RE)CONSTRUCTING HISTORY, (DE)CONSTRUCTING THE SELF

By

Lauren Leigh Todd

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ABSTRACT

CHASING THE METAPHYSICAL REFERENT IN VICTORIAN AESTHETICS: (RE)CONSTRUCTING HISTORY, (DE)CONSTRUCTING THE SELF

By

Lauren Leigh Todd

Victorian aesthetic theory involves a complex convention of reading literature and art that involves finding the author or artist's identity within the work. The Victorians' desire to determine a single, stable meaning in a work of literature of art depended on the assumption that this meaning was created by a single, stable self. However, their study of the aesthetic self-concept resulted in the discovery of the instability of self-presentation and the possibility of multiple or fragmented selves. The Victorians had to reevaluate their theoretical model in order to accommodate this plurality of "self." In doing so, they began to question the relationship between the construction of selfhood to the construction of history, or the *zeitgeist*. Thus I contend that Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* demonstrates a pivotal move toward accepting and exploring the inherent multiplicity of historical versus ahistorical selfhood in the Victorian convention of reading that was furthered and sometimes disputed in the works of his successors: John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater.

Dedications

First and foremost, to *my parents*, for going beyond the call of parental duty with their support, their confidence in me and what I do, and especially for believing that this project was a full time job.

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INTRODUCTION

In his study of Victorian aesthetics, Lawrence J. Starzyk agrees with Alba Warren Jr.'s observation that, "Hopelessly overtaxed with a variety of functions, many of them incompatible with each other, Victorian aesthetics 'recognized few common aims'" (167). However, I have found that such an assumption subverts and distorts the relationship that the works of the major Victorian aesthetic theorists have with one another, and the importance of the common aims shared and explored within these various works. In this thesis, I shall discuss the ideological compatibility and commonality exhibited in the works of Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater. I contend that Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* embodies the primary assumption inherent in Victorian aesthetic theory that Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater successively adapted: that the critical enterprise should consist primarily of the search for stable meaning of texts and other works of art as well as the means used by authors and artists to establish their identities within those works, which was predominantly illustrated through the study of the self-concept in criticism. This search, in turn, results in the discovery of a multiple or fragmented self, suggesting plurality rather than stability. I will argue that the idea of multiple or fragmented selves subsequently creates the need for a theoretical model that accounts for plurality, which is the "common aim" shared by the four abovementioned critics.

This concept of a readily tangible artistic or authorial self is linked to Carlyle's extensive explication of the concept of the *zeitgeist*. In Victorian aesthetic theory, the *zeitgeist* emerges to embody or at least describe the sense of objective tradition—or, in simplified terms, the past—that all artists/authors draw upon in order to develop their particular (subjective) perspectives in the present. In other words, this theory developed as a means to illustrate the relationship between the ahistorical past and the more historical creative impulse as it was assumed to exist within a specific text or work of art. The inclusion of the subjective reflects the highly individualistic Romantic tradition the

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Victorians saw themselves working within. Still, the Victorians' insistence on including the idea of an objectified tradition differed from the Romantic understanding of objectivity. The Romantics searched for "a unifying order and meaning" through imagination and individual will (Tarnas 369), whereas the Victorians strove to reject the "confusion" and "irresolution" of "the variegated quality of [subjective] human experience" by re-establishing a "conventionally acceptable and consensually validated" tradition of experience (*ibid.* 374). This indicates that the Victorians viewed themselves working against that Romanticism as well. Thus the *zeitgeist* represents both aspects of a neoplatonic "subject-object" dichotomy. The tension in such a theory, then, lies in the maintenance of a dichotomy that, in the end, seeks to objectify the subjective, and generalize (or historicize) the specific (or ahistorical). Consequently, the critic's struggle encompasses blurring these deeply drawn divisions in an attempt to achieve praxis, or an unmediated relationship among the comparable differences existing between not only the perceiving subject and the object of perception, but also the perceiving subject's individualized (and thus relative) process of making meaning and the idea of an objective essential, concrete signification informing and lying within every symbolic means of communication. The *zeitgeist* in dialectic, then, is the "thing-in-itself," or "essence of praxis [that] consists in annulling that indifference of form towards content" as Georg Lukácz says (126); or, that point of convergence between the signification believed to be perpetuated through a historical tradition and the more ahistorically interpreted signifiers emerging in a specific time or age. This kind of praxis "envisages...a genuine transformation of these forms" of opposition in which that very opposition can be at least conceptually transcended (Lukácz 177). One makes this transcendence possible by "becom[ing] conscious" of the particular elements of opposition and continually making oneself conscious of the way in which those concepts and ideas in opposition continue to oppose each other in a logical and immanent manner (*op. cit.*).

As with any attempt to develop praxis or a dialectic relationship between seemingly contrasting ideas, the problematic tension can never be fully eased. In his "Reassessment of Early Victorian Aesthetics," Laurence J. Starzyk recognizes the importance of this tension, pointing out that Victorian aesthetic theory contains a conflict between a more prominent ahistorical "metaphysics of becoming" struggling to completely supersede a less-prominent historical "metaphysics of being" which prevents the total theoretical cohesion the Victorians sought (170). However, by treating this tension as a power struggle rather than a counterbalance, Starzyk's terminology does not seem to easily lend itself to describing praxis. As with any vocabulary or terminology, the very use of language itself poses limitations and restrictions that, though recognized, remain unavoidable. Nevertheless, Starzyk's terminology gives us a necessary and hopefully useful means to discuss the binary aspects of a dialectical theory; and, whereas Starzyk uses these categories to maintain distinction between the two, I maintain them as a means to identify the two halves of the greater theoretical whole.

The idea that Victorian aesthetic theory embodies an attempt at praxis between ideas of *being*, or stasis, and those of *becoming*, or process, germinates in *Sartor Resartus* and begins to come to fruition in the critical works of John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* explores the problematic relationship between the symbolic *signifier* and the notion of a corresponding "real" or "actual" *signified* in art by placing the *signifier/signified* in a cyclical historical paradigm—a construction of history which, as we will see in an analysis of *Sartor*, is perpetually beset by the advent of subjectively constructed ahistorical ideas and expressions. The restrictions produced in Carlylean theory will be addressed and somewhat alleviated by Ruskin. Robert Hewison's work on Ruskin's "practice of treating objects both as real and symbolic" (208) provides a basis for discussing the precarious balance between the tangible and the intangible, the historical and the ahistorical. Though Hewison insists that this balance functions "without any sense of contradiction" (208), close analysis of Ruskin's texts according to the ideas

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present in *Sartor* shall suggest that Ruskin's dialectical counterbalance still contains a great deal of contradiction between a Carlylean sense of *zeitgeist* and the attempt to differentiate between objective historicity and ahistorical interpretations of art. Through exploring theoretical tension in Ruskin's works, we shall further revisit the problematic of the self-concept made apparent in *Sartor*, and the problems that arise when the fragmented self—in the form of artist/author as well as critic—is forced into the role of textual interlocutor.

In turn, this issue figures predominantly in the texts of Matthew Arnold. In his quest for disinterested objectivity in the critical enterprise, Arnold parallels Ruskin's attempts to establish a relationship between the "real" and the symbolic by not only "gratify[ing] the desire for knowledge and constru[ing] knowledge as a relation in which a [perceiving] subject respects" rather than subjectively interprets "an object" (Donoghue 399), but also creating a convention of reading in which the critic shares in the creative powers of the artist in order to find a single thread to lead one through the labyrinth of multiple textual voices. Paradoxically, Arnold's criticism thus illustrates the problematic internal tension within art as it leads the reader to recognize the polyphonic textual voices of competing assumptions in a single given work, and the subsequent need to establish praxis or a dialectic in order to adequately consider all these variances as suggested by *Sartor Resartus*. The works of Walter Pater, specifically *Marius the Epicurean*, explore the very process of developing this kind of praxis or dialectic through the establishment of what he considers a "transformative" combination between the subjectivity of Romanticism and the objectivity of Classicism. The end result of Pater's theoretical wanderings—a theory based on subjective impressions that "[are] not entirely subjective" (*ibid.* 389)—encompass both Ruskinian and Arnoldian ideas, but comes curiously full circle back to Carlyle and *Sartor*'s "Philosophy of Clothes."

Finally, I must say a few words about my work itself. Throughout both the research and writing phases of this project, I could never quite decide whether I wanted

this to be a critical or a scholarly essay. It has turned out to be both: critical in that there are points in my text in which I focus more on my own analyses of the works at hand, especially in my discussion of *Sartor* and parts of my discussion of *Marius*; and scholarly in that I spend a significant amount of time incorporating and deliberating on what I found to be some of the most interesting, thought-provoking, and useful scholarship already performed in the field, especially in my discussions of Ruskin and Arnold. But I also feel compelled to add that in no way do I expect or intend my project to be fully representative of all previous scholarship, nor for it to be a definitively decisive outline of what, exactly, Victorian aesthetic theory and Victorian conventions of reading and critiquing art *are*. Rather, my essay is an exploration of potentials, a presentation of ideas and analyses meant to be furthered, examined, and even contested by myself and/or others in the future.

Thomas Carlyle: *Sartor Resartus* and the Problem of Tangibility

Despite the critical attention given to autobiographical elements appearing in the work, *Sartor* is not about Carlyle's presence in the text, but his very absence from it. It is difficult to pinpoint a unified authorial persona in *Sartor*; the point of view shifts from that of the character of Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, the German Romantic writer-philosopher, to the commentary provided by the character of Teufelsdröckh's nameless editor, who serves as a sort of allegorical "Everyreader." The editor serves as critic appointed to decipher Teufelsdröckh's "Philosophy of Clothes," and his endeavor proves to be as much a criticism of the critical process he is expected to employ upon Teufelsdröckh's work as a criticism of Teufelsdröckh's actual "text" and its Romantic ideologies. Throughout the work, the editor's growing conflict between his limited understanding of who Teufelsdröckh is in relation to his (Teufelsdröckh's) "Philosophy of Clothes" corresponds, in several ways, to the conflict the editor comes to perceive in the relationship between the socially-constructed self and the private self. The editor will eventually uncover similarities between the problem of establishing a unified concept of "self" and the problematized relationship between symbols (signifiers) and their meanings (or referents).

Concurrently, the relationship of the past and of the passing of time to the idea of the collectively-constructed concept of the self as manifest in the *zeitgeist* is one of *Sartor's* central issues. The *zeitgeist* is the referent for the stable, outside concept of history. In more Carlylean terms, the *zeitgeist* refers to the "Time-Spirit," a sort of Jungian collective unconscious that the individual artist taps into in moments of creation; as the editor of *Sartor* remarks, the "seedfield" of the "speculative man" is Time (9), providing the artist with the traditions of his predecessors--or, what the editor terms "the Institutions of our Ancestors" (13). To elaborate on this using Carlyle's own words from his later work, *Past and Present*, this collective tradition ensures that "[o]ut of old Books,

new Writings, and much Meditation not of yesterday, [the author] will endeavor to select a thing or two; and from the Past, in a circuitous way, illustrate the Present and the Future" (45). At first, this appears to suggest that artistic ideas and perspectives are cyclical and permanent. Yet the finitude implied in this statement is undermined by the tension indicated in the mention of "new Writings" and "much Meditation not of yesterday," which complicates the idea of finitude. In the meditation of the present, the past is circuitously illustrated rather than directly portrayed; therefore, the present day is not so much an ahistorical recreation of the past, but instead a historical event suggesting prescribed progress and change. Such a concept of the *zeitgeist* suggests the existence of a finite set of ideas constantly recycled by the creative minds of any given historical period. No idea can ever be entirely new; to apply the observation of Stanley Fish, a new idea "announces itself as a break from the old, but in fact is radically dependent on the old, because it is only in the context of some differential relationship that it can be perceived as new or, for that matter, perceived at all" (349). Rather, contemporary artists merely refashion or rearrange the works of their predecessors as the means of representation available to them changes and evolves, reflecting a constantly changing perspective. Yet the concept of a finite set of artistic ideas suggests an equally limited number of ways the ideas contained in such a fixed set can be perceived. To put it more simply, if the subjects of art and literature remain the same, artists' and critics' perceptions of them must retain similarities, if only to provide the "differential relationship" between past and present day perceptions. And shared perception would seem to indicate the existence of an artistic aggregate superseding the individual talent. History, or the acknowledgment of the passing of time, becomes a thread forming human individuals and holding them together; by appointing art as the embodiment of history, or time, art becomes the thread holding individuals together, too. Yet without relating an intangible concept like time to a tangible concept such as art, it hardly seems that time, or history, is comprehensible or perceptible to an individual or even a collective of individuals. The intangibility of any such concept

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of infinity must be represented in terms which enforce a suggestion of finitude, so that these relationships can be established and recognized. In his text, Teufelsdröckh states that "*Man is a Spirit*, and bound by invisible bonds to *All Men*...[and] *he wears clothes*, which are the visible emblem of that fact" (60); but it is also clothes that "[gi]ve us individuality, distinctions, social polity" (41). Thus Teufelsdröckh's "Philosophy of Clothes" becomes the metaphor not only for this binding historical perpetuity, but also the slight variations in any given (present) historical moment.

The editor seems aware of the concept of time, and the sense of a living history, as a symbolic construct. The *zeitgeist* is actually a temporary, finite representation of the permanent infinitude of eternity; it is a term enacted to communicate an idea to the reader, though its limitations render it somewhat incomplete. Like most figurative representations, the *zeitgeist* is an "apparition....[like] Souls rendered visible: in Bodies, that took shape and will lose it", seemingly consisting of "solid Pavement" but really without consistency (21). As the editor enacts his momentary figures of speech, he notes that his language—the way he represents and embodies conceptual knowledge—"is but of Today, without a Yesterday or a Tomorrow" (21). And though he addresses his reader, saying, "Friend, thou seest here a living link in that Tissue of History, which inweaves all Being: watch well, or it will be past thee, and seen no more" (22), the editor is not so much testifying to the adequacy of his figurative language, but to the transient nature of it. Any artistic proffering, such as the editor's text, might be a "living link in that Tissue of History," but provides only a momentary and incomplete glimpse.

The possibility of the unknowability of – or, the impossibility of fully unveiling—any text surfaces here, especially as the editor seeks to invoke the persona of Teufelsdröckh "to bring what order we can out of this Chaos" (34). The editor claims that the chaos simply results from Teufelsdröckh's text's "almost total want of arrangement" (34), but the chaos runs deeper than lack of organization. The editor has been placed in the precarious position of attempting to bring order to the chaos that lurks

within systems of signification such as language and the construction of meaning. That he feels compelled to integrate what he thinks he knows of Teufelsdröckh's biography and persona further complicates the issue: for the editor must construct a meaning for Teufelsdröckh's text that most closely resembles the acceptable idea of man's inherent "meaning"--his "natural state," or social (collective) consciousness. This requires a rejection of the traditional Romantic notion that man's "natural state" and his "social state" are diametrically opposed. Romantic philosophies contended that social constructions and "civilization's sophistications...neglected man's actual nature--his feelings, his depths of impulse and intuition" (Tarnas 313), and that any type of socially-developed consciousness would not reflect the inherent "feelings" and "depths of impulse and intuition" linking human beings together. Thus, the editor becomes more than the allegorical Everyreader: he becomes a paragon of conflict by assuming the Romantic figure of the lone, individualistic, struggling aesthetic theorist in his attempt to explicate the meaning of life and human existence though using art and literature-- socially-constructed mediums of communication--as his evidence. Paradoxically enough, the editor subsumes the role he sees Teufelsdröckh portraying throughout his "Philosophy of Clothes." The editor labors to portray Teufelsdröckh's "self," yet strives to reveal as little about himself as possible--not even his name. At times the editor and Teufelsdröckh seem indiscernible from one another, as the editor's interjections seem a part of, rather than separate from, the quotes of Teufelsdröckh's text; they appear as enmeshed personalities, sharing the same perspectives and perceptions--much like members of an artistic collective as earlier discussed. Yet, at other times, the distinctions between the editor and the author whose work he edits are quite clear, and the editor questions the feasibility of ever really "knowing" or unveiling the actual Teufelsdröckh or his text. The editor, then, leads us to question ourselves: What is identity? What is meaning? What is the self? And what function, if any, does art/literature have in answering these questions?

The editor would like to lead one to believe that the answers to such questions can be found in the work of Teufelsdröckh, whom he rhapsodically addresses, proclaiming, "The secrets of man's life were laid open to thee; thou sawest into the mystery of the Universe, farther than another" (16). Moreover, the editor also insists that "any personal connection of ours with Teufelsdröckh...or this Philosophy of Clothes, can pervert our judgment, or sway us to extenuate or exaggerate" (13). This particular insistence is notable precisely because it plays into the problematic of perspective. Here the editor seems quite concerned that the reader will not approach Teufelsdröckh's text with the same perspective through which the editor and/or Teufelsdröckh himself approaches it. This complicates the idea of a similar, shared perspective intimated by the mention of the reader's potential "personal connection" with Teufelsdröckh, especially as the editor later remarks that "Teufelsdröckh is our friend, Truth is our divinity [and i]n our historical and critical capacity, we hope we are strangers to all the world" (14). Such strangeness to the world seems impossible when the editor seeks to share elements of Teufelsdröckh's identity with the reader so that we not only form a "personal connection" with Teufelsdröckh but consider him a "friend," too. Arguably this "personal connection" could refer to nothing more than sharing the fruits of artistic perception with Teufelsdröckh; still, if Teufelsdröckh is our friend, we are not disinterested in him. How can one be appropriately neutral about Teufelsdröckh's and his "Philosophy of Clothes" if one assumes prior knowledge of and familiarity with him, as the editor professedly does?

This also leads one to yet another question: namely, the viability of the editor's own presentation of Teufelsdröckh and the "Philosophy of Clothes." If we must consider the variety of perspectives one could apply to a reading of the text, we must also consider the myriad of perspectives presented in the text(s) of *Sartor Resartus* itself. To approach *Sartor* according to the general mode of Victorian conventions of reading is to piece together the patchwork of the author's persona located throughout the work. However, as the text employs two narrative voices embodied by fictional characters, one

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cannot assuredly locate Carlyle in either; thus, the next step would seem to be to form a picture of Teufelsdröckh, especially as *Sartor* is subtitled "The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh." Even so, the careful reader must always keep in mind that, considering the way the text(s) is/are crafted, the editor controls the presentation of Teufelsdröckh's "Philosophy of Clothes" and the accompanying vignettes from Teufelsdröckh's "autobiography." The construction of Teufelsdröckh's self—or at least how Teufelsdröckh supposedly wishes to represent himself to others—is subject to how the editor wants to construct Teufelsdröckh's "self." *Sartor* creates a textual atmosphere in which the editor controls the elements of presentation. Ironically, the editor notes, "Great men are too often unknown, or what is worse, misknown" (17). The editor remains largely unknown to us, as the reader only "knows" him through his reaction to the work of Teufelsdröckh. And, as the reader can only "know" Teufelsdröckh as filtered through the editor, it also appears that Teufelsdröckh is unknown, or misknown, to us. Even before plunging into the "Philosophy of Clothes," the editor remarks, "Certainly a most involved, self-secluded, altogether enigmatic nature, this of Teufelsdröckh!" (32) *Sartor*, as an entire work, may attest to the inability to truly "know" anything or anyone despite our efforts to construct ourselves and construct the "selves" of others, and an equally-constructed belief in shared perspective. Everything is rendered conceptual rather than concrete—shadows or garments of misrepresentation of what there is "to know." Incidentally, this is the very issue that the "Philosophy of Clothes" addresses.

The "Philosophy of Clothes" can be read analogously as both the philosophy of language, art, and other systems and/or modes of expression. Teufelsdröckh declares clothing a tool that "gave us individuality, distinction, social polity...[and has] made Men of us" (41). Although he questions the present usefulness of such a tool—as it "threaten[s] to make Clothes-screens of us"—he also acknowledges that "Nowhere do you find [man] without Tools; without Tools he is nothing, with Tools he is all" (41). *Sartor* implicitly asks the reader to question the usefulness, or the communicative ability, of artistic

expression, just as Teufelsdröckh explicitly asks the reader to contemplate the effectiveness of the manner of human dress. As clothing can camouflage, hide, distort, and misrepresent a person, an artistic and/or literary language can be misused, or used to construct misleading and/or ineffectual expositions. Still, the writer or artist cannot abandon such tools. The writer/artist, beyond the tools available to him, may be part of the "continual growth, re-genesis, and self-perfecting vitality" (40)--suggesting a rather Romantic belief that the human artist harnesses a godlike creative power and that it moves him toward a sort of "ultimate meaning" encompassing this growth and perfection--but all would be impossible without the tools of expression, despite their many limitations. For example, language might make "word-screens" that scarcely reveal the concepts and ideas language is intended to represent; yet, without language, concepts and ideas are nothing. According to Victorian aesthetic theory as we have discussed thus far, then, would the artist be "anything" if he did not have the tools for expression? If one subscribes to the belief that the artist can be found in (and is defined by) his work, then one's work--his expression--becomes the proof of his existence. As Teufelsdröckh seeks the best garmentage to wear, the Victorian critic desires a language of expression appropriate for embodying concepts and ideas--and especially those concerning the self--most accurately.

Teufelsdröckh asks himself, "Who am I; what is this ME? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance--some embodied, visualised Idea in the Eternal Mind?" He cannot seem to answer his own question, only to say that "[t]he answer lies around, written in all colours and motions...thousand-figured, thousand-voiced..." (53). He may identify himself as an individual connected to a society of individuals all "sail[ing] through the Infinitude of Cloth" (51), but that cloth is comprised of "infinitely complected tissues" (52). The key term here is *infinity*, since it connotes a concept or idea ultimately intangible to us. We can provide a definition for *infinity*, but only through using words that attempt to help us conceive the inconceivability of the limitless and uncontained. As I discussed earlier, this directly relates to the all-important concept of the *zeitgeist* that reoccurs throughout

Sartor. The *zeitgeist*, put in terms of "Time," becomes something one can set limitations on, or something parceled out so one can account for it. In other words, one adheres finitude onto infinitude. Teufelsdröckh even acknowledges this: "Space is but a mode of our human Sense, so likewise Time; there *is* no Space and no Time" (55). It would seem that Teufelsdröckh's desire for a more accurate portrayal of the pluralistic realities of infinitude in the modes of artistic expression would lead him through discussions of a *zeitgeist* that would be less an exercise in pondering a constantly repetitive and arguably reductive historico-artistic cycle and more an exercise in chaos theory, which "point[s] to new possibilities for a less reductivist...conception" (Tarnas 405). Rather ironically, this admission functions to complicate, rather than completely dismiss, the recurring notion that a repetitive cycle of artistic ideas confines historicity and tradition--the past--to an easily reducible set of finite parts as there is always the ahistorical, momentary perspective--the present--to help account for that pluralist infinitude.

In his "Philosophy of Clothes," Teufelsdröckh asserts that "[t]he vestments and [the] self are not one and indivisible" (57), but the editor does not readily heed that advice. Teufelsdröckh's text is his vestment, and from the visible, tangible text the editor wants to construct a visible, tangible Teufelsdröckh. However, the editor does not seem to realize that the necessity for an act of construction indicates an absence--or, the editor's own need to create a persona he assumes to be Teufelsdröckh's to inhabit an otherwise uninhabited, or depersonalized, text. Strangely enough, Teufelsdröckh warns us to "be not the slave of words" (55), though that is exactly the position in which *Sartor* places both the editor as well as the reader. The editor's attempt to piece Teufelsdröckh's texts--his "autobiography" with his "Philosophy of Clothes"--together to function as one cohesive unit indicates a desire for constructions of a cohesive, rather than a plural and fragmented, self. This desire leads the editor to project finitude onto the printed word, with its self-imposed limitation on meaning, so that Teufelsdröckh's texts might be understood as an adequate portrayal of a finite persona of Teufelsdröckh. This further

places the reader in a position precariously akin to that of the editor, as the text offers nothing but the words of the editor interspersed with those of Teufelsdröckh as evidence and explanation of the impotency of words. In turn, this leads us to question the traditional conventions of reading and interpretation suggesting that the pretense of cohesion is superior to the incompleteness suggested by the plurality of fragmentation. Throughout the multiple layers of intertext residing in *Sartor*, therefore, the incompleteness of definition and expression—and the inaccessibility of fully articulating the concept of the self, or what Teufelsdröckh terms the "mysterious ME" (65)—keeps rearing its head.

Recognizing the inaccessibility, or inability, to completely articulate an infinite or at least multi-faceted concept within the limitations of language (or any other form of artistic expression) depends on an application of Saussurian semiotics, specifically the division between the *signifier* which cannot fully or completely express all qualities of the concept being *signified*. The tension created by using signifiers while realizing one's relative inaccessibility to the represented concept at large parallels the neoplatonic tension inherent in the terminology associated with Victorian aesthetic theory and conventions of reading as discussed earlier. We must also consider that the concept of a cohesive and discernible "self" functions as a sort of signifier as well, as it is a construction that incompletely conveys an idea that cannot be fully conveyed or realized. Because this discrepancy suggests that such signifying expressions are forced onto signified concepts with which they only share "the rudiment of a natural bond,"[1] one might even say there is a sense of fictionality associated with signifiers. And, if the self-concept is merely a signifying expression for a myriad of possible selves, then the expressed "self" may house

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[1] See Ferdinand de Saussure, "Selections from *Course in General Linguistics*," trans. Wade Baskin, Davis and Schleifer, p. 252. Many of the ideas presented in this section of my essay are based, though at times rather loosely, on the semiotic theory discussed in Saussure's work.

that sense of fictionality, too. Ann Rigney reminds us to take into account "the incompleteness of fictional beings," especially as "invented objects are understood as determined only in those respects which are described, implied, or alluded to in the text, which are relevant to the story being told" (338-9). To put it more simply, according to Rigney's theory Carlyle only invented enough "self" for the editor and Teufelsdröckh to function in the text.

This may seem to grant Carlyle too much authorial power within the text (and within the act of reading and interpreting *Sartor*) yet it provides impetus for a much greater issue: namely, the boundaries between fictional and historical writing. As Rigney states, "[T]o the extent that historical writing is defined by its claim to represent the objective world....[historical] residue is always in theory relevant to the way readers approach works *as* history" (340-1). This "historical residue" is "the awareness that `something has been left out'" of a text, and Rigney adds that it "may impinge negatively on the reader's assessment," thus compelling us to "openly confront...the limits of our access to the past and its representability" (341). But what is the difference between fictional and historical/nonfictional writing? Does this in turn mean that there are ahistorical texts as well, and that all of those are necessarily fictional? A historical text, like a fictional text, contains constructed characters moving along in a succession of events or vignettes; furthermore, a successful fictional text, like a historical text, provides the reader with enough evidence to therewith create the assumption that these characters have a pre-textual as well as a post-textual--even an extra-textual--existence. In other words, the text creates the illusion that there are unknowable aspects to its characters; that its characters have a past preceding the text, a future succeeding the text, and have lived through events not textually recounted. *Sartor Resartus* contains the history of the fictional Teufelsdröckh, with the editor functioning somewhat as Teufelsdröckh's historiographer who must navigate, as we must, the voids of textually-created unknowability. Yet because of the limitations of textual representation, we must consider,

to a greater degree than the editor, that even the most multidimensional character cannot reveal every dimension of their "being" to us: as Carlyle himself stated in his essay "On History," "[S]tudy and recapitulate it as we may, [this] remains in so many points unintelligible to us; how much more must these million, the very facts of which, to say nothing of the purport of them, we know not, and cannot know!" (qtd. by Rigney, 342).

Once again the Carlylean concept of the *zeitgeist* complicates the issue. As Rigney points out, "History is an 'essence' to be distilled from numerous biographies. In its stress on plurality, Carlyle's definition of history reflects...a breakdown of a homogeneous 'History' into particular histories which either singly or together represent History as a whole," thus "identifying the territory of the historian with the totality of human experience" (342-3). Yet, by this definition, the *zeitgeist* becomes both historical and ahistorical; Carlylean history becomes a patchwork of decontextualized moments. *Sartor's* editor embodies this theory, seeking to piece together Teufelsdröckh's texts to prove that they represent Teufelsdröckh as a whole. Subsequently, according to this line of thinking, the editor seeks to identify Teufelsdröckh's "self" so that he can identify the whole of human experience, though by doing this he is trying to recreate history by connecting the series of Teufelsdröckh's ahistorical moments.

The editor undertakes the daunting task of sifting through Teufelsdröckh's autobiography, indulging in though tacitly examining his Romantic interest in self-objectification, self-symbolism, and the creation of one's own self-concept. The Romantics created an atmosphere of publicized privacy in which the boundaries between the public and the private self seemed blurred into indistinction, but the editor discovers that such a distinction is very much intact, inasmuch as the public self is the only self available for recognition. The editor can only know the "public" Teufelsdröckh. The glimpse of Teufelsdröckh's private identity his autobiography promises to give is very much packaged for public consumption—as indicated by the way it is presented to the editor in separately labeled paper bags. Moreover, the section of *Sartor* containing

Teufelsdröckh's autobiography begins with the editor imputing, "In a psychological point of view, it is perhaps questionable whether from birth and genealogy, how closely scrutinized soever, much insight is to be gained" (81). Thus, before even presenting the autobiography to us, the editor's tone indicates that perhaps one should approach Teufelsdröckh's autobiography—and all author biographies in connection to an author's texts—with a suitable amount of skepticism.

Within his autobiography, Teufelsdröckh comments on his own critical work, remarking that, "as man is ever the prime object of man...it was my favourite employment to read character in speculation, and from the Writing to construe the Writer" (113). This, of course, has become the heart of the theory I am here deconstructing; and this is the critical approach used by *Sartor*'s editor, too. Yet, interestingly enough, Teufelsdröckh discusses this critical approach in the past tense, noting that, at that time, his "whole Universe, physical and spiritual, was as yet a Machine!" (113) At least from the presentation made available to us within the autobiography, Teufelsdröckh seems to prefer his more Romantic yearnings, akin to the "Satanic School" of art and literature in which overly individualistic art becomes so obscured that it no longer is a form of viable and comprehensible expression to anyone but the artist himself. In such obscurity, the artist within the work cannot be recognized by anyone else: the artist/author may be able to recognize his own signature in his work, but to anyone else the signature is a glyph stylized to the point in which it cannot impart any discernible or definite information about its creator. Notably, this metaphysical Romanticism is what the editor—the allegorical Everycritic—seeks to aver. His convention of reading depends on the ability to recognize and comprehend this glyph of persona; upon realizing the obscurity of the glyph and/or its inability to be specifically defined, the editor realizes the tenuous nature of that convention. And, consequently, the editor expresses confusion and displeasure at this turn of events in Teufelsdröckh's text: "Hopeless is the obscurity, unspeakable the confusion" (152). The editor loses sight of who or what he assumed Teufelsdröckh to be, exclaiming,

"Foolish were it in us to attempt following him, even from afar" (152). Even the very name "Teufelsdröckh" becomes an empty signifier that appears to deconstruct before the editor's (and the reader's) very eyes. The editor later addresses Teufelsdröckh directly, petulantly criticizing him: "Singular Teufelsdröckh, would thou hadst told thy singular story in plain words! But it is fruitless to look there, in those Paper-bags, for such. Nothing but innuendoes, figurative crotchets: a typical Shadow, fitfully wavering, prophetico-satiric; no clear logical Picture" (185). Suspecting that his convention of reading has become a convention of chasing shadows without ever finding the concrete bodies that cast them, the editor even surmises that perhaps the reader of Teufelsdröckh's text "must endeavor to combine" the fragments of Teufelsdröckh's past given in the autobiography "for their own behoof" (185), meaning that the reader must construct for himself a concrete body to correspond to the shadow.

Nonetheless, if Teufelsdröckh is a "typical Shadow," this reverts back to the original discussion of the conceptualized *zeitgeist* and the ensuing existence of a fixed Idea or archetype of what the "Shadow" (or "soul") embodied by a "typical" artist/writer actually is. The editor needs a sense of a fixed system of type from which to mold his version of the artist's "concrete body." If a finite archetype exists and is perpetuated throughout the *zeitgeist*, and the *zeitgeist* contains the perspective legacied to every individual, then the combinations each reader will make of the fragments of Teufelsdröckh's life will produce similar results. This once again brings to mind the dualism between "a metaphysics of being" and "a metaphysics of becoming" as discussed in Laurence J. Starzyk's "Reassessment of Early Victorian Aesthetics."

As Starzyk explains, a metaphysics of being "recognize[s] the existence of transcendent Absolutes and conceptualized forms towards which differentiated existence resolutely moves" (170-1). Starzyk poses the highly individualistic, if not Romanticized, metaphysics of becoming as the more prominent, and diametrically opposed, aesthetic orientation in which "[t]he artist is not a contemplative being actively or passively in touch

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with transcendent realms of meaning, but rather a creator of significance engaged, again actively or passively, in a process of finding a solution for a world without meaning" (171). However, as indicated by this discussion of Victorian aesthetics and *Sartor Resartus* thus far, the differentiation between the two branches of aesthetic theory is not as marked and impassable as Starzyk suggests. As J. Hillis Miller asserts, "Symbols [in *Sartor*] are words or signs, hieroglyphical emblems, which are used to name the highest, the unnamable....This infinite reality lies hidden behind the garment of nature, of words or other signs, and of human consciousness, all three" (7). Because *Sartor* specifically addresses the belief, so important to Victorian aesthetics, that an "infinite reality" exists and should be represented in art to the best of the artist's ability, it seems that, despite Starzyk's assessment, Victorian aesthetics is more a metaphysics of being. The *zeitgeist* already *is*; hence, the creation of art is the reformulation and presentation of what already exists. Despite this, we cannot entirely discount Starzyk's adherence to the prominence of the metaphysics of becoming. As J. Hillis Miller demonstrates, *Sartor* addresses the problematic usage of catachresis in art, "the forced and abusive transfer of a name [or word, or symbol, or other sort of signifier] from its ordinary or at least seemingly literal use to a new realm. There it functions to name something which can be named no other way, which has no literal name" (8). Miller implies that an act of catachresis must be used in order for one to force the mysterious and obscure glyphs of works of art to impart information, or at least allow one to believe that information is being imparted to him. Because of "the dimension of fleeting time or transiency," despite the stability attributed to the time-full yet timeless *zeitgeist* and the "'transient intrinsic worth'" it supposedly brings to all forms of artistic representation (Miller 11), it seems that, despite the constructive involvement of the reader/observer, the author/artist is still considered the "creator of significance." Recalling the cyclical nature of the *zeitgeist* as well as Miller's observation that "[i]t is impossible, in principle, to distinguish this"--the notion of a comprehensive collective tradition of finite meaning-- "from the notion that the symbols are created or

projected, by a kind of performative fiat, through the man himself who proffers the new symbol" (11), it appears to follow that the artist creates a symbol in a specific way which will allow his audience to construct a distinct meaning, or sets of meanings. Especially considering that, according to the adjacent metaphysics of being, no symbol is ever truly "new." To once again quote Miller, though according to the theory set forth in *Sartor* "no symbol retains its efficacy beyond its own time," it is replaced "by a revalidation, a reinterpretation of the old which makes the old effectively new" (11). The metaphysics of being must exist dialectically with the metaphysics of becoming in order to temper it, to ensure the Victorian goal of creating an art that "must teach man [as Carlyle states in 'Recent English Poetry'] 'to fix a centre around which the chaotic element of human impulse and desire might take solid forms and move in their ordered ellipses, to originate a spiritual stability'" (qtd. by Starzyk, 173).

Further complicating this already problematic issue is the issue of creation. An established, fixed center that creates standards of meaning and expression in art and literature suggests a humanism markedly absent from all discussions of the *zeitgeist*; such a godlike act of creation seemingly negates the omnipresent concepts of collectivity and the metaphysics of being. In fact, Teufelsdröckh issues an artistic edict, or what Miller would call a "performative fiat"; like the God of Genesis, Teufelsdröckh attempts to command the conceptual (in)finitude of greater meaning--or, in Neoplatonic terms, the World of Ideas that is the *zeitgeist*-- "Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin" (197), as if chaos can be sorted by merely issuing an edict. Teufelsdröckh represents Starzyk's metaphysics of becoming, but also its shortcomings according to this theory of aesthetics at large. Notice that this is a command given through language: Teufelsdröckh, while trying to restore or reevaluate the comprehensive communicability of the language of artistic expression, has nothing but the problematic language itself as his creative tool. And, of course, this is the very tool *Sartor*, in its entirety, calls into question.

Meanwhile, the editor, long a subscriber to the metaphysics of being, becomes skeptical near the end of *Sartor*, as he questions the usefulness of biography and the construction of an author persona as a critical tool. He voices his suspicion that Teufelsdröckh's autobiography is "partly a mystification," considering the possibilities that exist "if many a so-called Fact were little better than a Fiction" (202). Here we must not only recall the collapse of historical, or nonfiction, writing with fiction and the impression of unknowability created by what Rigney termed "historical residue," but also Miller's discussion of catachresis. The editor potentially identifies his search for the persona of Teufelsdröckh an act of catachresis, wondering if one could with surety decide "that Teufelsdröckh's Biography, allowing it even, as suspected, only a hieroglyphical truth, exhibits a man" (205). Whether or not the artist's revelation comes to him as a realization of meanings that exist or the self-conscious creation of meaning, the editor cannot locate with specificity the artist within the text to whom to attribute any sort of revelation and construction to. Teufelsdröckh, in the very end, remains intangible to the editor, as does the meaning of Teufelsdröckh's texts. And, likewise, both the editor and his subject, Teufelsdröckh, remain relatively intangible to the reader. We cannot locate specific and concrete evidence to construct a complete picture of either character in *Sartor Resartus*; thus we must use *Sartor* to begin questioning the viability of searching for an intangible artist in order to create or reevaluate meaning in art, as the Victorians set out to do according to their aesthetic theory.

John Ruskin: The Importance of Dialectical Counterbalance

Robert Hewison suggests that John Ruskin's typology contains "the practice of treating objects both as real and symbolic, without regarding one condition as canceling out the other. The result was his ability to move in parallel along separate levels of argument, of the actual and the symbolic, without any sense of contradiction" (208). This would seem to indicate that Ruskin successfully achieved the praxis, or sort of theoretical counterbalance, that eventually eluded the editor in *Sartor*, but that statement would be erroneous. Hewison's view seems based on the kind of approach Ruskin sets forth in his essay "Of the Received Opinions Touching the 'Grand Style,'" in which Ruskin discusses the three successive stages for studying art: to first recognize the "Ideas of Truth" by "perceiving simple resemblance to Nature," or reality, before acknowledging the "Ideas of Beauty," or the means of representation used; this, in turn, leads to contemplating the "Ideas of Relation," in which "the contemplative and imaginative faculties" are used to discern "the meanings and relations of these things," or assign and interpret the artwork's symbolic properties (42). Hewison appears to assume that Ruskin's "Ideas of Relation" is a synthetic mode used to counterbalance reality and artistic representation, subjectivity and objectivity. However, as Ruskin leaves the "Ideas of Relation" external to the actual object and the means of artistically expressing that object in a given work, he seems to drive a wedge between the real and the symbolic and thus uphold the neoplatonic dichotomy causing tension within Victorian aesthetic theory. For Ruskin, the communicative power in any given mode of artistic expression then, whether it be the language of literature or the use of form, texture and/or color in the visual arts, allows the individual artist a means of "saying everything, and yet saying nothing too plainly" (Ruskin, "Water" 33). Subsequently, the elements of expression work as double-edged signifiers, indicating a tangible and fully representable signified as well as an intangible and largely unrepresentable signified simultaneously. According to this course of thought, the

assignment and equation of signifier to signified becomes a duty of the artist, though we must question how much creative control the artist has within such a theory.

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Carlyle's explanations of the *zeitgeist*, the continual cycle of human history and the "historical residue" that accompanies it, never quite account for the infinite unknowability suggested by such a concept. And, as Ann Rigney suggests, that unknowability plagues readers of texts like *Sartor*. This unknowability was a central issue for Ruskin, and led him to apprehend art as elaboration upon history. Ruskin places a more individualistic slant on *Sartor's* key issue of adequate and truthful representation, claiming "poetical ornaments destroy that air of truth and plainness which ought to characterise History; but the very being of Poetry consists in departing from this plain narrative, and adopting every ornament that will warm the imagination" ("Style" 45). Here Ruskin portrays an understanding of poetry as a timeless art, existing outside of time or in a moment of captured and/or suspended time. Artistic expressions thus contain and represent a more ahistorical moment distinguished from "merely historical statement[s], not by being more vague, but more specific" ("Style" 49). Ruskin here seems to indicate not only a symbiotic relationship between the historical tradition and the ahistorical moment, but also seems to be defining the *zeitgeist* not as an objective historical tradition but as an infinite collection of myriad ahistorical, subjective experiences; as he states, "that which is incapable of change has no history" (*op. cit.*). Whereas Carlyle's *zeitgeist* was a continual unchanging cycle more orderly than chaotic, Ruskin's seems a more linear continuum allowing for greater change and greater possibilities of plurality--and, ultimately, more individualism on the part of the author/artist as well as the audience and the critic.

Discerning Ruskin's design of the *zeitgeist* depends on explicating his own concept of the "pathetic fallacy," in which "the externalization and affiliation of self" with objects of the external world, such as art "produces the desired loss of self-consciousness in the form of self-alienation" and eventually develops the construction of the "world as mirror"

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(Fellows 49). Ruskin developed the notion of the pathetic fallacy as a means to undermine what he felt was the "troublesomeness" of the metaphysical subject/object division that was ambiguous and therefore aesthetically "useless" ("Fallacy" 62). However, one must immediately recognize that Ruskin does not attempt to dismiss the dichotomy altogether, because he *does* maintain the distance between perceiving subject and perceived object. Rather, he is reacting against those who insist that the perceived object only exists within the perceiving subject. Through his reaction, then, he hopes to revise critical treatment of that dichotomy to incorporate his notions of the variety of individualism with the notions of uniform objectivity he believes underlie all acts of perception. As Ruskin explains, aesthetic contemplation always involves the observer's "feelings," sensations or emotional response to a work of art; so, one must recognize that these "violent feelings" always "produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things" (*ibid.* 65). Yet one should not be satisfied with such falseness. It is up to the individual to discern between the personal sensation caused by his perception of the work and the power of the work itself to incite sensation. And this power, Ruskin reminds us, "is always there, in the thing, whether we are there to experience it or not, and would remain there though there were not left a man on the face of the earth" (*ibid.* 63). It is the duty of the critic, then, to achieve the "grander condition when the intellect also rises, till it is strong enough to assert its rule against, or together with, the utmost efforts of the passions" (Ruskin, "Fallacy" 67). Basically, Ruskin asks the discerning critic to come to terms with his own concept of self and the subjective limitations one's self-concept imposes on perception in order to work beyond those limitations. Consequently, Ruskin imposes a new type of vision in which the critical observer sees himself in the act of observation, recognizes the myopia induced by that vantage point, and thus extends his line of sight beyond that which was formerly capable—as if the recognition of "self" is the necessary corrective lens. In this corrected vision, "the oppositions inherent in traditional epistemology—the oppositions of objective to subjective, appearance to essence, surface to depth, sensations

to powers, perception to conception, seeing to feeling, are united in a visual process by which the first term of the pair shifts into the second, 'truer' term" (Sawyer 40). However, such self-induced selflessness is problematic, as Ruskin's trope of vision assumes that the observer can either completely dismantle his assumptions from his observations, or that the subjective self can transform into an objective self. We must always consider that vision is *always* limited. Interestingly enough, Graham Hough identifies this concept of self-less vision as Ruskin's attempt "to release [the sense of sight] from the bondage to utility and convention and to set it free to operate in its own way" (qtd. by Sawyer, 36); albeit one in which the observer is free not to see beyond convention, but to perceive those conventions differently.

In *The Failing Distance*, an extensive and complex study of Ruskin's use of the trope of vision, Jay Fellows presents a crucial assertion that Ruskin aims to study art by acting as a *camera lucida*,[2] or an unseen observer looking in from the outside: the observer reflects an exact image of the observed for others to see, acting as an unassuming and unobtrusive mirror serving only to project, not interpret. In theory, the *camera lucida* does not operate as an intermediary device that filters or in any other way distorts the image before projection, as it does not operate in self-interest. This is a meager attempt at establishing an objective position, because the vantage point of the outsider is "solipsistic space," which is "space for only one person, and that person's tangible existence is [itself] entirely problematical" (Fellows 6) because of its two-fold isolation. The critic only recreates himself as *camera lucida* in order to project his observations according to the image or conceptualization he had of the respective object before assuming the position of the *camera*. And, furthermore, by placing oneself in

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[2]The *camera lucida* is an optical device, usually attached to the eyepiece of a microscope, that projects a virtual image of the studied object onto a page, so that it may be traced.

isolation, one remains isolated from what is being observed, maintaining the division between subject and object that one initially intends to overcome. The self "attempt[s]... nothing less than the creation of a visual mode of perception...that will be synthetic rather than 'scalpellic,'" (Fellows 14) but fails. By synthesizing with the perceived, the perceiver hopes to synthesize his own perception with that which always exists within the object to be perceived; or, to put it more simply, he wants to identify the catalyst that causes the pathetic fallacy, in order to prove that perception is not completely fallacious. But the *camera lucida* mode cannot allow the perceiving subject to establish unity with the object. This inability to completely annihilate self ensures the unavoidability of what Ruskin desires to transcend through vision correction: "the state of vision in which all the details of an object are seen, and yet seen in such confusion and disorder that we cannot in the least tell what they are, or what they mean" (Ruskin, "Truth" 26-7).

Granted, Ruskin is of a dual mind concerning the individual, private self. On one hand, he makes typically Victorian statements against individualism like "All great art is the expression of man's delight in God's work, not in his own" ("Pallas" 97). Yet he tempers such statements with ambiguous statements that could possibly pertain to the artist's individualism and godlike powers of creation: "[T]he power of assembling, by the help of the imagination, such images as will excite...feelings, is in the power of the poet or literally of the 'Maker'" ("Style" 51). Though Ruskin appears to place the ability to make meaning in the hands of the poet (artist), his ambiguous use of the term "Maker" complicates this subject. To put it more simply, "Maker" becomes a signifier that does not or cannot effectively portray what it signifies. Who, exactly, is the "Maker" of meaning in Ruskin's equation? When one tries to humanistically collapse the god-figure with the figure of artist or author, the idea of artist as creator is complicated by Ruskin's use of the verb "assemble" rather than "create." *Sartor's* Professor Teufelsdröckh found that his godlike performative fiat was not enough to create a new language of signifiers to adequately and completely represent the innumerous "World of Ideas" he was aware of;

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Teufelsdröckh remained confined by linguistic limitations nonetheless. Ruskin, trying to avoid Teufelsdröckh's dilemma, suggests instead that it is the human ability to assemble, or reassemble the limited signification allotted by language, through the employment of "Ideas of Relation" to connect signifiers with the signified that provides the establishment of meaning in art. In this, then, Ruskin seems to have evidence for the Carlylean concept of the finite and immutable *zeitgeist* of meaning constantly applied to all works of art and literature: a metaphysics of being. But reassemblance of meaning by the individual suggests that ahistorical subjectivity must also come into play, implying that a subjective, individual-centered metaphysics of becoming is taken into consideration as well. Ruskin's take on aesthetic theory tries to account for them both.

Despite Ruskin's apparent incognizance of Hegel's works, Ruskin's approach to aesthetics is remarkably Hegelian. Ruskin wished there to be a unity between the metaphysics of being and the metaphysics of becoming, or between what linguistic or artistic expressions *are* and what they *could possibly be*. The "foundation of Hegel's thought was his understanding of dialectic, according to which all things unfold in a continuing evolutionary process whereby every state of being inevitably brings forth its opposite" (Tarnas 379); in this case of Ruskin's aesthetic theory, then, the metaphysics of being would bring forth the metaphysics of becoming. Furthermore, any "state of being" would actually be an ahistorical moment, since "[w]hat at any moment [is] seen as fixed and certain [is] constantly overcome by the evolving mind," and as "every form of thought in human history [is considered] both an incomplete perspective and yet a necessary step in this...evolution" (*ibid.* 380). The constancy of the evolution that explores contradictions is the only real unifying element. But what, exactly, did Ruskin intend as his definition of "unity"? Hewison contends that "[t]he essential nature of [Ruskinian] unity is that all objects are seen in their context, both local and historical, influenced by their present and past surroundings, and influencing them in turn" (205). This sounds remarkably similar to the omnipresent, pervasive nature attributed to Carlyle's *zeitgeist*, a

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supreme, ideal unity to which all things are bound. In contrast, Gary Wihl contends that Ruskinian unity is an apparent rather than an actual unity; meaning that, for Ruskin, "appearance is 'essential' to unity, but not in the sense of a total fusion of form and matter or of image and concept" (134), or even of past and present: "Perfect unity can 'appear' as an 'appearance' (in the simple sense of 'superficial aspect') or as a sign, type, or suggestion" (*op. cit.*). Appearances are not permanent or concrete; furthermore, they are metaphorical. Metaphors are signifiers representing "the confusion, through a purely external analogy of abstract form, of two distinct objects" (Wihl 147) or concepts they are meant to signify. There is no absolute *signified* for them to correspond to--there must simply appear to be. Once again, even the appearance of the supposedly-corresponding *signified* is unstable, ever-changing, and abstract. Signifiers are forever in the process of "becoming" significant, suggesting but never completely asserting significance. In Wihl's paradigm, it is the act of suggesting unity, and not so much verification of it, that is important. Apparent and suggested unity is not perfect unity, of course, but as Ruskin himself states in "The Nature of Gothic," "*the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art*" (183, italics in original). Imperfection--even in conceptualizations of unity-- "is in some sort essential....[as] it is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change" ("Gothic" 183-4). Unity is never static; ideals of unity evolve and change. The ideal of unity presented by critics of the past does not always apply to criticism of works in the present. Still, we must still consider Ruskin's nearly constant reference to *zeitgeist* in his works, despite his "love of change" and recognizance of subjectivity and fallacious appearance. *Zeitgeist* provides the stability of tradition, the reason works of art, and the study of those works, are connected to history, past traditions, and to one another, even if only indirectly by association; here, *zeitgeist* is the principle of "rigidity" in art, the "not merely stable, but *active* rigidity," or progressively evolving *zeitgeist*; "the peculiar energy which gives tension to movement, and stiffness to resistance" (Ruskin, "Gothic" 193). Which is why Hewison's further

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comment that, as it was for Hegel, life for Ruskin "existed in Becoming, not Being" (205) seems forced. If Ruskin's vision was indeed dialectic in Hegelian spirit, life for Ruskin must exist as much in Being as Becoming. It is an unresolvable conflict between believing things possess a "definite and separate nature" and acknowledging the nagging detection that this nature is always "inextricable or confused in appearance" (Ruskin, "Gothic" 171) despite the many forms that nature assumes in order to rectify the confusion. In sum, Ruskin's theory of art places the search for truth within the examination of the nature of contradiction itself.

The best place to explore Ruskin's usage, application, and maintenance of this contradiction is perhaps *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. As Paul Sawyer points out, Ruskin uses architecture as the prototype for all other forms of art because Ruskin considers it the most expressive, "not in the sense that an emotion is an expression but in the sense that a sign is an expression" (87). For Ruskin, architecture is the utmost signifier for the subject/object (or spiritual/material) dichotomy as treated in art: "Uniting the technical and imaginative elements as essentially as humanity does soul and body, it shows the same infirmly balanced liability to the prevalence of the lower part over the higher, to the interference of the constructive, with the purity and simplicity of the reflective, element" (*Lamps* 3). Buildings represent the limitations of human creation, in that the technical elements that give form to meaning predominate over the meaning or "spirit" of their creation. Yet, to "inquire into each of these characters successively; and determine *first*, what is the Mental Expression, and *secondly*, what the Material Form of ...architecture" is (Ruskin, "Gothic" 171), Ruskin hopes to transcend the "interference" of the constructed sign with meaning, or the "reflective element" by placing greater emphasis on the imaginative "Mental Expression." In the preceding statement, though, Ruskin proceeds to reintroduce the critical standpoint of the *camera lucida*: "[B]y rejecting the imagination as a separate principle in aesthetic activity"--or rejecting form, or the technical element, as a separate principle from the imaginative element, or idea-- "Ruskin makes

possible an extreme theory by which the great artist becomes the world before which he annihilates himself" (Sawyer 43). This fits into Starzyk's paradigm quite well, in which one conceives oneself *becoming* the world and ceases to conceive of oneself as a "self" once in the state of *being* that world. To place this back into Ruskin's architectural paradigm, one builds in order to become a part of that world around one; and the completed edifices of art/architecture represent points of "being" that temporarily arrest that process of creative "becoming," or at least serve as fixed (rather than plastic) representatives of a specific stage of that process rather than the entire process at large.

Architecture, then, also embodies the paradox of constancy in change. In architecture, "[t]here is no law, no principle, based on past practice, which may not be overthrown in a moment, by the arising of a new condition, or the invention of a new material" (Ruskin, *Lamps* 3). To explain this more fully, Ruskin, in "The Lamp of Sacrifice," asks us "to distinguish carefully between Architecture and Building" (8). Architecture is the great design, or ordering principle, according to which we build; and "to build" is "literally, to confirm" that ultimate design (*Lamps* 8-9). Thus, in the greater scheme of art and aesthetic theory, Ruskin implicitly introduces *zeitgeist* as the ultimate architectural design prescribing the means or methods, numerous and unpredictable as they may be, by which works of art may be constructed.

The *zeitgeist* is also Ruskin's all-important "Lamp of Memory," or the illuminative renewal of the past in the present. He maintains that we have two duties to fulfill to architecture, and comparably all forms of art: "the first, to render the architecture of the day, historical; and, the second, to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances, that of past ages" (*Lamps* 178). The architecture of the *zeitgeist* may in practical application be subject to the kind of daring that Ruskin celebrated in the Gothic spirit and more broadly in all aesthetic endeavors—namely, the artistic spirit that of necessity "br[eaks] through [the] law wherever it f[inds] it in existence" and "delight[s] in the infringement of every servile principle" ("Gothic" 187) defined by past builders or artists—but the *zeitgeist*

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anchors all breakthroughs and infringements nonetheless. Once more, this is not merely an issue of completely separating past from present, nor becoming the present tradition by no longer being the past. Ruskin refuses to view any dichotomy so two-dimensionally, especially in the case of architecture:

> Ruskin animates the buildings through an act of imaginative seeing, the emotional equivalent of historical memory. The result is a continuous movement through four-dimensional space rather than a switching back and forth between past and present, with the result that each site contains within itself the flow of history, while the flow of history, arrested at each site, manifests itself in spots of time. (Sawyer 93)

Art and architecture are both spatial and temporal. Continuous movement through space and time, the change of the forms given to ideas in relation to historical change, gives birth to abundance and unpredictability. Any work of art, or contemplation of it, Ruskin knows is "[a]bundant beyond the power of the eye to embrace or follow, vast and various beyond the power of the mind to comprehend," but he is just as sure that "there is yet not one atom in its whole extent and mass which does not suggest more than it represents" ("Truth" 31). The "spots of time" manifest only the suggestion of total comprehension, its possibility. We cannot comprehend totality, even through the *camera lucida*. As Elizabeth Helsinger suggests, we should then adjust the trope of Ruskinian vision to encompass "a picturesque way of seeing [that] involves not so much composition--the artist's power to immediately imagine a whole--as *de*composition, breaking a whole into unrelated parts" (126). This is unavoidably still solipsistic space in which the observer reintegrates the parts "into the kind of wholeness that the...spectator looks for" (*op. cit.*), but it is solipsistic space that becomes "a point of identity" (Helsinger 127), rather than a point of self-annihilation, for the observer. The observing critic forms an appearance of unity--a self-made unity-- based on a self-interpreted ordering principle, placing responsibility for the vitalizing historical and artistic progress within the individual in

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conjunction with, rather than separated from, the *zeitgeist*. The importance of the involvement of "self" within *zeitgeist* is "a way of using linear to arrive at comprehensive perception" (Helsinger 129), or at least "implies the shift from immediate grasp of a whole" or an underlying totality of meaning "to the linear or progressive attention to details" (*ibid* 127).

But what is the proportional relationship of self to *zeitgeist*? How does he make adjustments so that the proper relations between construction and design, individualism and historical precedent, can be attained? Ruskin was extremely concerned with proportion in art, architecture, and theory. Proportion is both "a metaphorical structure [which] intensifies cognition" (Wihl 146) and "the orderly grasp of variations in appearance, the discovery of unity in difference" (*ibid* 142). To again consider Elizabeth Helsinger's study of Ruskin's aesthetic "vision," we must correlate Ruskin's discussion of the sublime in "The Lamp of Memory" with any discussion of Ruskinian proportion. Helsinger notes that Ruskin's differentiation between the "grotesque" and the "noble picturesque" sublime is crucial. The grotesque "is an attempt to see and express a large whole in a single image," or what the critic perceives when "arrested by an encounter with something that exceeds ordinary comprehension" (Helsinger 121). Unable to comprehend the totality of meaning, the true significance of the signifier at hand, one mentally produces "an obvious disproportion between the grotesque image and what it stands for" in one's interpretation of the work's symbolic properties (*op. cit.*). The "noble picturesque," in contrast, "uses excursive exploration to evoke strong feeling" (Helsinger 117) by requiring the observer to digressively explore the mental connections or relations between the thoughts and sensations evoked by initial acts of observation of that particular work to other works previously considered or known. Ruskin refers to this as "parasitical sublimity," in that the "noble picturesque" is always dependent upon a notion of the "true sublime." The "true sublime" is "the condition of completely clear and comprehensive vision, of absolutely governed imagination, of an obviously godlike grasp of visual design

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and metaphysical order" (Helsinger 123) that, as we realized through analysis of Ruskin's *camera lucida*, is impossible. Furthermore, the "true sublime" is the capability to invent the very primary modes of invention; but the closest the critical perceiver can come to this "godlike grasp" of design and order is to *re*invent them according to modes of invention already put into place. The parasitical sublime is "a sublimity dependent on the accidents, or on at least the essential characters, of the objects to which it belongs," which "is developed distinctively exactly in proportion to the distance from the centre of thought of those points of character in which the sublimity is found" (Ruskin, *Lamps* 189). Variety is accidental, in the philosophical sense: variety results from the production of meaning through idiomatic circumstantial attributes that are not essential or unchangeable qualities of that which is being signified—what Ruskin calls "the centre of thought," which as "meaning-in-itself" resists attempts at further definition. So long as variety can be understood as existing in exact proportion to a stable "meaning-in-itself," then Ruskin can reconcile the variety of individualism that arises in a given age (or within a particular individual, including himself) by "subject[ing] variety to unity" (Wihl 136). Still, he is not providing the proscriptive scale by which to measure the exactness of proportion. As Ruskin himself reminds us, "[p]roportions are...infinite" (*Lamps* 124).

Thus he establishes a dialectic in which the limitations present in the finitude of "primal forms" contradictorily relate to an infinity of possible imagistic expressions of those forms. Concerning art and architecture, Ruskin aspires toward the creation and appreciation of "perfect beauty," the "noble rendering of images of Beauty, derived chiefly from the external appearances of organic nature" (*ibid.* 103). As he states in the "Lamp of Beauty," the "organic nature" of primal forms and their correlative signifiers cannot be the same, since "[t]here is no proportion between equal things": "They can have symmetry only, and symmetry without proportion is not composition" (*Lamps* 125). The dialectic is also necessary because self needs to be convinced that his own solipsistic space does not prevent him from obtaining the perfect beauty existing beyond that space; the dialectic

feeds "the need for 'doubleness,' for options—a way out" (Fellows 4). Hewison describes

Ruskin's aesthetic dialectic as one in which "the forms of beauty are detected in each

momentary view of reality; [and] the artist, through his imaginative faculty, translates

these perceptions into a work of art" (211). But any view of reality is the view from the

solipsistic space of the *camera lucida*, and a view from any self-created or self-imposed

perspective cannot even momentarily be objective. Here Ruskin's notion of the pathetic

fallacy must be revisited: imagination is not always deceptive, as long as the imaginative

act is communicated truthfully.[3] Ruskin himself states:

> [T]he action of the imagination is a voluntary summoning of the
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> conception of things absent or impossible; and the pleasure and nobility
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> of the imagination partly consist in its knowledge and contemplation of
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> them as such, *i.e.* in the knowledge of their actual absence or im-
>
> possibility at the moment of their apparent presence or reality....It is a
>
> noble faculty so long as it confesses its own ideality. (*Lamps* 33)

Basically, Ruskin asserts that "thing-in-itself" is impossible to conceive except

metaphorically or symbolically, so the "essential truth" underlying the imaginative

metaphor or symbol is always absent from acts of interpretation. Awareness of this

absence drives further innovation to remedy this, despite its ultimate impossibility;

therefore, the constant innovation, so long as it is undertaken in good faith and with the

attainment of the ideal in mind, is "noble"—not purposefully deceptive. In other words,

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[3]Ruskin devotes most of his chapter on "The Lamp of Truth" to discussing the relative
"truthfulness" of the otherwise deceptive imaginative faculty in the creation of art and
architecture. It is somewhat beyond the scope of my work to outline Ruskin's argument
in full; for my purposes here, I think it suffices to say that truthfulness in deceit is just
another manifestation of the contradictions inherent in Ruskin's dialectical theory. For a
more complete discussion of this particular point, see *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*,
p.29-69.

imaginative acts of expression should always be in the process of *becoming* what they at length aspire to actually *be*.

By pronouncing Ruskin's theoretical assumptions as resembling the metaphysics of becoming over being as Hewison does, nevertheless, one might be tempted to play into the Victorian critics' overwhelming aspiration to place the artist as the centrifocal element of the work. Ruskin may have emphasized the artist's role in the artwork because he perceived his predecessors as "deluded in deriving their principles from...their hypothetical Aesthetic Man, a mere disembodied perceiver of beauty" (Rosenberg 221), but this does not discount the audience or critic's role from the equation entirely. For Ruskin, "Aesthetic Man" had to exemplify creative ability—which, in turn, is an expression of the self. But this leads us back to the issues presented in my reading of *Sartor Resartus* and recasts them in light of my reading of Ruskin. Of what, exactly, does the concept of "self" consist in relation to works of literature/art? Does the author/artist construct himself within the work, or is the construction of the concept of "self" the responsibility of he who perceives the work? And do the artist and the spectator share the same perception?

Unlike the editor of *Sartor* who finds that he does not necessarily share Teufelsdröckh's perspective, Ruskin adheres to the idea of the conventional connection between author and text, and even author and reader, in his essay, "Of Kings' Treasuries." Here Ruskin promotes

> the kind of word-by-word examination of your author which is rightly
> called "reading"; watching every accent and expression, and putting
> ourselves always in the author's place, annihilating our own personality,
> and seeking to enter into his, so as to be able to assuredly say, "Thus
> Milton thought," not "Thus *I* thought, in mis-reading Milton." (303)

Interestingly, Ruskin defines reading not as an examination of the text but examination of the author of the text, implying that the critical act consists of an immediate intercourse between the reader and the author and authorial intent in a work. Ruskin attempts

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another application of the self-annihilating *camera lucida* so that "the reader forgets himself, as he becomes part of a writer"; but, according to the *camera lucida* principle, the writer himself should be invisible to the reader (Fellows 72). Sawyer notes, "The unconscious artist is the precondition of an aesthetic interaction so immediate that the other elements fuse together: by [the author's] silence, his creations speak and his audience becomes 'part of him' and beholds with him" (45). Consequently, according to this method of reading, Ruskin should not be hearing Milton voicing his (Milton's) thoughts. How can Ruskin become part of Milton if Milton annihilated himself within his text? To pose Sawyer's question, "[H]ow silent is he really?" (*op. cit.*)

Though Ruskin asks one to "annihilate" one's own personality to assume the author persona, once the reader assumes that persona, the reader becomes responsible for the construction of meaning in that text. According to such logic, then, the reader constructs the author persona: theoretically, the reader does not put on Milton's mask but designs a mask to wear and calls it "Milton." Subsequently, Milton's relative silence or vocal presence does not matter much; the reader will only hear his own interpretation of it. The unknowable, "annihilated" author leaves an empty space in a text that must be filled by the reader, as "[a]nything empty inspires self-expression, submerged autobiography, intrusion without self-consciousness" (Fellows 28). Either the reader may not be conscious of his own intrusion into the text, or, like Ruskin, be conscious of his own intrusive interpretations but subconsciously employ them anyway. Such consciousness of readers' reconstructions of textual elements forces Ruskin to assert that the act of reading the works of the past grants one admission to "that great concourse of the Dead" that allows one to access those authors and their intentions, to "feel with them" and "be like them" ("Treasuries" 305), to adjust one's personal perspective to theirs.

Ruskin may believe that an artist and his audience share the same perspective but his appetite for contradiction requires us to question this "concourse of the Dead" as another form of the concept of *zeitgeist*, in that it suggests that the present-day reader can

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share in the perspective of an artist/author of the past. As I stated previously, Ruskin's present shares a complicated and contradictory relationship to the past; and for Ruskin the past can and should not be forgotten. He heralds "Poetry and Architecture" as the "two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men" (*Lamps* 178) because language "like architecture, bear[s] the moral record of a civilization" (Sawyer 237). As Hegel claims, the "Historical World-Spirit" or *zeitgeist* bequeaths us "that heritage of an already-formed language"--and comparably, as Ruskin might say, architectural design--to be used in acts of creation; at the same time, though, it is up to the historically-minded critic to "bind together the fleeting elements" dispensed in those created works in a reasonable and meaningful way ("History" 537). If the artist, his intent, and perspective are "fleeting elements," they are temporal and thus subject to change; but if the artist, his intent, and perspective are a permanent fixture within the artwork or text, then the artist and these accompanying concepts seem to be existing atemporally, as frozen moments or memories that time has long passed. As Gaston Bachelard proposes, these memories are not only "motionless," but "locked not in duration, the sequence of language, but in sight and space" (qtd. by Fellows, 20)--and time does not exist in space. This paradigm renders the artist, and the "concourse of the Dead," somewhat ahistorical. However, a dialectic approach of contradiction and tension can be applied to this convention of reading: for, as the reader is asked to form some sort of connection to the author, the reader approaches this task both historically and ahistorically. The reader must use the framework and traditions of the historical *zeitgeist* to try to place the author in the author's own context alongside the reader's more subjective act of applying his own context to his moment of reading.

Such necessary contradiction comes in the form of Ruskin's distrust of the methods of interpreting art. Though Ruskin's "goal of interpretation...is to find the truth hidden in the fallacies of art" (Shell 74), Ruskin also says "art must not be talked about" ("Mystery" 340). In "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts," Ruskin infers that perhaps the

author/artist is not so easily knowable through the examination of his art, as "[t]he moment [the artist] can really do his work he becomes speechless about it. All words become idle to him--all theories" (340). Ruskin has identified the moment in which one conceivably transcends ordinary signifiers and comprehends the elusive, intrinsic signified beyond the extrinsic mode of artistic expression, and, by analogy, linguistic expression as well. In this moment, the artist directly accesses creation, and the meaning of creation--the reasons why artists are driven to create: accessing "the instinctive and necessary result of power, which can only be developed through the mind of successive generations...[in which] whole æras of mighty history are summed, and the passions of dead myriads are concentrated...." (Ruskin, "Mystery" 342). In other words, the artist is given a taste of the infinity of the *zeitgeist* beyond the seemingly-finite limitations one needs in order to conceptualize such an idea. But, like the mystic, the artist can only impart his experience indirectly through language that fits the experience, as Teufelsdröckh would say, like ill-fitting and misrepresentational garments. Subsequently, this places the critic in a precarious position within Ruskin's paradigm, as this renders art rather inaccessible to the critic. If art is the byproduct of a personal, metaphysical experience, then the critic can discern neither the artist nor definite meaning from art--which is precisely the dilemma faced by *Sartor's* editor. The critic ends up chasing the metaphysical referent of the ahistorical moment just as the author had; they both have the same collective tradition, or artistic and literary history, as their framework, but the subjectivity of the individual's perspective at the ahistorical moment of creation or interpretation will provide a plurality of meaning rather than a stable, definite one.

Moreover, Ruskin holds literary/artistic language accountable for the dialectical counterbalance, stating, "[B]eauty has been in the world since the world was made, and human language can make a shift, somehow, to give account of it" ("Essay" 436). This becomes something of a theoretical cornerstone: if these "Ideas of Beauty" are stable and finite, then the "Ideas of Relation" that provide meaning of art/literature, like this concept

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of "beauty," always exist, and aesthetic theory resulting from such a belief must include the hope that language can be arranged in such a way as to adequately convey it. For Ruskin, unlike the editor and Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor*, language has that possibility, especially as language is as much subject to the Hegelian evolutionary process as aesthetic theory. One must note, though, that there seems a tone of wistfulness in Ruskin's use of the word "somehow," since Ruskin probably would not have interjected that word into his statement if he felt completely sure that this shift in language will come about, perhaps implying that the task, in practice, is not as viable as it seems in theory. Catachresis is not a problem but a solution for Ruskin, though a problematic solution it may be. Considering that language is association, the making of meaning is association as well. For Ruskin the surface object (or signifier) that inherently contained the meaning that "we subjectively associated with it...depends on the chance connections" related to individual experience (Hewison 55), so that reading a text or viewing an artwork becomes an act of individualized construction. The associations a particular author or artist may have made with the symbolic, figurative, and otherwise representational mode of expression will not necessarily be those of the critic/audience; and there is no way of knowing if both sets of respective associations are the same. Even if a *zeitgeist* exists, the plurality suggested by the occurrence of "chance connections" undermines the idea of a collectivity in which shared similarities allow one to directly access an artist or author in his work. To paraphrase Hewison, Ruskin treats the author concept as both real and symbolic, without regarding one construction as diametrically opposed to the other. Perhaps the "mystery of life and its arts" is the mystery Ruskin's theory cannot completely penetrate: he believes the "real" author/artist or that artist's own concept of self lies within the work, but cannot get past the symbolic author concept constructed by the critic.

Matthew Arnold: Creating the Culture of the Disinterested Self

Matthew Arnold, in the 1853 preface to his *Poems*, laments the disappearance of "the disinterested objectivity" existing in "early Greek" artistry (172). Arnold's approach to aesthetic theory depends a great deal on this concept of *disinterest*. Arnold was reluctant to address his own subjectivism and acknowledge the singularity of his personal critical perspective because he thought he could free himself of it. Arnold perceived himself ideally demonstrating disinterestedness "[b]y keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things'; by resolutely following the law of [criticism's] own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches" ("Function" 326). As Bruce Bashford explains, "Disinterestedness is a freedom *from*"—not *of*— "something: it describes a precondition for exerting a power, rather than the exertion itself, [a]nd the actual exercise of the critical power, as Arnold presents it, is not obviously free" (204). In other words, disinterest is a reactionary semblance of escape from subjective individualism rather than an absence of that subjectivity. Arnold presents this as if by recognizing the problem of subjectivity through admission of it, he has absolved himself from it and no longer should have to deal with it. However, as Mark Jones notes, there is "strain of Romantic irony" in this concept: like Wordsworth and the other Romantics Arnold positions himself against in a reactionary stance, he

> occupies the foreground, not just admitting but proclaiming the
> subjectivity problem. But insofar as such self-foregrounding enables
> the writer to continue to pronounce on the world, it is in effect merely
> an alternate way of attempting to overcome subjectivity. (79)

However, Arnold's goal was ultimately to demonstrate that his "pronouncements on the world" could and should be shared by others; for, in this sharing, he hoped to erase the subjectivity problem as well. Arnold worked with the presumption that an artist (and likewise the critic) could dissociate himself from the historicity of transitory political and

social issues and even his own likes and dislikes in the name of intellectual objectivity in order to work towards establishing an objective and ahistorical literary tradition. This seems adjacent to Ruskin's approach which took both the historical and ahistorical elements of artistic production and interpretation into consideration. Consequently, Arnold's approach assumes a much greater similarity of perspective between critic and critic, and artist and critic, as if artistic and critical perspective is collectively constructed.

In addition, Arnold's "disinterested" approach calls for subsequent discussion on his assumption that all works of art are a form of mimesis, or verisimilitude.[4] Mimetic art relies heavily on the perception of the reader or beholder as key in determining the qualities that make it, indeed, "mimetic." For Arnold, then, art and its criticism should capture, with an almost scientific precision, the reality of human experience objectively rather than subjectively. In many respects this is a version of the Ruskinian *camera lucida* in that Arnold seeks to produce texts that act as a lens projecting a precisely accurate image of human experience, but Arnold's critical *camera* seems to project a virtual—or "verisimilar"—reality rather than an actual reality. In his essay, "Literature and Science," Arnold even goes as far as to place the study of art and literature, or the *belles lettres*, alongside the natural sciences; as he explains, "[A]ll learning is scientific which is systematically laid out and followed up to its original sources" (459). Therefore, Arnold seeks to create an aesthetic paradigm which would allow a critic to systematically evaluate art by finding "its original sources"—its meaning, or the definite *signified* for the artistic and/or literary *signifiers* being observed. The artist/critic should understand that "[t]he

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[4]J.A. Cuddon, in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, initially defines "mimesis" as "representation," only to refer the reader to his definition of *verisimilitude*, which reads as follows: "Likeness to the truth, and therefore the appearance of being true or real even when fantastic" or fictional, as fantasy/fiction "is, or should be, rooted in reality" (1022-3). It depends "as much on the reader's knowledge, intelligence and experience...as upon the writer's use of those same resources (1023). This seems, to me, to summarize Arnold's working assumption quite well.

appeal, in the study of nature, is constantly to observation and experiment; not only is it said that the thing is so, but we can be made to see that it is so" (Arnold, "Science" 462). Here it seems that Arnold divides the labor of conveying and discerning meaning between author/artist and critic: it is the former's duty to convey meaning in a way that facilitates the latter's duty to discern it. Furthermore, the meaning conveyed and the meaning discerned will be the same for the creator and critic, who both share the same creative and cognitive powers.

In addition, we must also consider the problems inherent in Arnold's assumptions about unity as they relate to our previous discussions of *zeitgeist*. In order to mimetically represent human experience consistently in any given work of art,[5] one must believe in some sort of standard as to what that human experience *is*. This would seem dictated by history, meaning an objective historical tradition or "state of being," thus, limiting the knowledge that he insists we should find "naturally agreeable." Equally notable is Arnold's use of the words *imitation* and *representation* as potential synonyms for art and/or literature, as an imitation generally lacks all the qualities of the genuine article and, likewise, a representation serves as a comparable but not equal proxy, recalling the problems of misrepresentational language occurring not only in *Sartor* but in Ruskin's works as well. This contorts and problematizes Arnold's overall endeavor to remedy art that "is vaguely conceived and loosely drawn;...representation[s] which [are] general, indeterminate, and faint, instead of being particular, precise, and firm" ("Preface," 172). Arguably, the quest for objectivity—at least for the critic—would lead one into constructing meanings that become relatively "general, indeterminate, and faint," as the most

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[5]More specifically, in the "Preface," Arnold states: "The representation of...a man's feelings must be interesting, if consistently drawn. We all naturally take pleasure, says Aristotle, in any imitation or representation whatever: this is the basis for our love of poetry; and we take pleasure in them, he adds, because all knowledge is naturally agreeable to us" (172). What Arnold finds interesting is truth in verisimilitude, because it suggests stability of meaning, and such confirmation to him is pleasurable knowledge.

"particular, precise, and firm" constructions of meaning--meanings that "inspirit and rejoice the reader" as Arnold insists (*op. cit.)*--are tinged with individual subjectivity.

Arnold, though, finds the polyphonic nature of the individual act of constructing meaning, and the plurality that necessarily follows subjectivity, a source of artistic and critical distress: "The confusion of the present times is great, the multitude of voices counselling different things bewildering...." ("Preface," 178). Yet Arnold concurrently celebrates the power of the individual artist, stating in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" that "[t]he critical power is of lower rank than the creative," though he is quick to add that "it is undeniable, also, that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature and art"(318)--meaning, through criticism. But how much freedom of "creative activity" does Arnold really allow the critic? And does he allow more freedom of creation to the artist than the critic?

By assigning primacy to the artist's presence and intent within the artwork, Arnold intimates that criticism becomes a sharing of the artist's genius, which "does not principally show itself in discovering new ideas;" rather, the work itself demonstrates the artist's genius "of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery" ("Function" 319). It becomes the critic's duty to passively show how the artist--within the work--synthesizes and exposits meaning and man's "nature." As Mark Jones observes, such "passiveness betokens a communal world, and a certain bondage within it" (73). Thus it seems Arnold portrays an aesthetic realm in which, in the communal arena of artists and critics, the artist actively produces genius that the critic passively accepts. Yet it seems that "analysis and discovery"--which are interpretive acts--Arnold insists artists shy away from are very much present, inasmuch as he celebrates the "interpretative power" found in works of art (specifically poetry) themselves, but not in the critic. Arnold pointedly declares:

> The grand power of poetry is in its interpretative power; by which I mean,
> not a power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the
> mystery of the universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to
> awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of
> our relations with them. ("Guérin" 54)

Here "interpretative power" is a conjoining of the critical and the creative. By placing critical power in an uneasy equilibrium with the creative, it would follow that the critic is capable of placing the same "interpretative power" into critical works as the artist/author places in his work. This endangers the premise of critical disinterestedness by describing creatively-empowered criticism as an act of "free" creation, which is arguably a subjective treatment of the supposedly "objective" knowledge of "the universe" treated in an artistic work. The artist renders his interpretation of knowledge subjectively, and the critic does the same in turn. "[S]ubjective creativity betokens personal power and freedom, but also isolation" (Jones 73), and the creator only has power and freedom within his solipsistic space. Likewise, even if the critic portrays himself acting as a *camera lucida* passively projecting how another person (the artist/author) "dealt with things" in his work, the critic is still acting as a filter; his subjectivities, his individual limitations, cannot be avoided.

Nevertheless, Mark Jones advises us that Arnold's project of disinterestedness should be considered for its "pragmatic function as necessary fictions, self-encouraging self-delusions" (95). Arnold needed to use the concept of disinterest as the talisman to guide him toward "[t]he grail of theory," which is "the neutral judgment or the absolute standard" (Jones 88) by which to judge art and literature. Yet, as Stanley Fish reminds us, "there *is* no 'universal perspective of an interest (no interest) that is identified with no one in particular and therefore serves everyone in general'" (qtd. by Jones, 86): "every judge or standard we employ is contaminated by the fact that *we* employ it and deem it fit from our own ineluctible situations and interests" (Jones 88-9). For Arnold specifically, his attempt to find the neutral, absolute standard referents and signifiers for an equally neutral

and absolute *signified* through analysis, discovery *and* synthesis and exposition serves his own interests. Analysis and discovery--the work of the critic--is highly subjective, whereas "synthesis and exposition" of ideas which are not new, but omnipresent and collective, is more objective--and, for Arnold as critic, more desirable. We must always keep in mind, though, that to "see things as they really are," in a sense, is to see things as Arnold himself sees them.

Arnold seems to be applying a version of Ruskin's principle of the "Ideas of Relation" to artistic creation while removing it from the critical enterprise without thoroughly explaining why he creates such a dichotomy between objective artistry and subjective criticism. Timothy Peltason describes Arnold's criticism as "at once a succession of exact judgments and observations and an allegory of the critic's own mind" (752), most likely because Arnold demonstrates constant awareness of the differences between the qualities of an external artistic object and how they figure into the internal mental processes of the perceiving subject. But "[t]his combination," Peltason asserts, "evaporates the opposition between 'subjective' and 'objective' on which Arnold's criticism first seems to depend, and unite[s] him with...a modernism for which 'realism' is an inevitable, if also an adequate, label" (*op. cit.*), for the reason that "[t]he apparent essentialism of Arnold's position, with its reference to the fixed nature of the object 'in itself' and its...stress upon the 'ideas' that literary works hold in readiness...is belied and counterbalanced by another emphasis in his writings, on process and on particularity" (*ibid.* 750). One must also realize, though, that the "real" for Arnold is rhetorically devised and maintained: "[R]ather than conceiving of knowledge as a free-standing and correct representation of the world, rhetoric sees knowledge as sustained by human powers of thought and expression" (Bashford 207). By doing so, Arnold implicitly acknowledges that "reality," or the absolute truth, is constructed through a perpetually evolving process, and on a somewhat limited and individual basis. Despite this implicit

admission, however, he fails to explicitly acknowledge the subjectivity of such an approach.

As he persistently insists that "the sense of creative activity belongs only to genuine creation" ("Function" 338), and "genuine creation" is the domain of the artist, Arnold must also insist that the artist is responsible for the creation of meaning. It follows then, that there is one, inherent, stable meaning in a given work that the critic can and should objectively be able to discern. Once again, the belief in the stable artist and stable meaning within a work brings us back to the ever-present concept of the *zeitgeist*. As Starzyk notes,

> As the primary requisite of great art, Arnold...recognized the need to understand and express the *zeitgeist*. It is necessary, as Arnold points out, that the poet must first begin with an idea of the world in order not to be prevailed by the world's [subjective] multitudinousness. (174)

The "multitudinousness" Arnold finds in his "modern times" consists of "an immense system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules, which have come to them from times not modern" ("Heine" 96-7). This system is a collection of traditions that paradoxically both exhibits and obfuscates the all-important ahistorical "idea of the world" Arnold seeks. "In this system," Arnold continues, "their life has to be carried forward; yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation, that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that for them, it is customary, not rational" (*ibid.* 98). This is another incarnation of the *zeitgeist*, or the influence and intrusion of the past into the present. The *zeitgeist* holds that all important primary or absolute idea, though encoded in signifiers from previous historical moments that do not adequately convey meaning in Arnold's "modern" context. Thus, progress and change is needed in order to recontextualize and thus historicize this otherwise ahistorical "idea of the world"; so Arnold suggests that traditional expressions should be reevaluated and reconfigured in order to serve contemporary life. In short, this is a complex and

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problematic process of recognizing an ahistorical or timeless standard in order to historicize it and make it temporal.

Yet, at the same time, Arnold himself notes that, "the elements with which the creative power works are ideas; the best ideas, on every matter which literature"--and, comparably, all other forms of art-- "touches, *current at the time*" (Arnold, "Function" 319, italics in original). This suggests that perhaps these "ideas of the world" contained in the *zeitgeist* are just as historically malleable and impermanent as the means of representing them, after all. Arnold further says, "for the creation of a master-work of literature [to take place] two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment" (*op. cit.*). The "power of the moment" refers to the historical moment, created within a context reflective of the artist's own subjectivity, and this suggests that neither artist nor critic--and therefore any work either produces--can be separated from its context. So, as it was for Carlyle and Ruskin, Arnold's *zeitgeist*, whether he fully recognizes it or not, is a mixture of the historical and the ahistorical, the subjective and the objective.

Arnold developed his theory in accordance with his desire to understand *zeitgeist* as more than the history of human limitation and subjectivity, to "circumvent...the problem of historical change" by locating what he calls "'the elementary part of our nature'" (Carroll 10). Rather than maintaining the Romantic notion that "the elementary part of our nature" is primal or in some way animalistic, Arnold declares it to be the desire for a civilized, learned society. Accordingly, Arnold's *zeitgeist* becomes culture, "which is the study of perfection [that] leads us... to conceive of true human perfection as a *harmonious* perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a *general* perfection, developing all parts of a society" (*Culture* 8). This should recall Teufelsdröckh's reassessment of "natural man" and "social man," blurring the Romantic divisions between the two; meaning, more specifically to Arnold "natural man" *is* "social man" and civilization, or the culture that is social organization, is man's "natural state." Arnold sees human

development of society and culture as a natural inclination toward perfection. Moreover, studying "perfection"—or, rather, the human process of striving to achieve perfection—entails a reconstruction of history, in that human history needs to be understood as an ongoing and infinite progress toward perfection. This is explained more succinctly in the words of Joseph Carroll, as he contends that Arnold's concept of culture

> imposes on Arnold the task of reshaping history in some meaningful fashion, neither arbitrary and fantastic nor nihilistic and inhumane. His comparative critical method itself implies that there is some law of unity binding all the phases of "the collective life of humanity," and his dictum that humanity has an invincible tendency to develop implicitly presupposes a rationale for the course of civilization. (46)

As with Ruskin, Arnold's works do not demonstrate any explicit knowledge of or reference to those of Hegel, but Arnold's concept of culture is actually a somewhat Hegelian concept. Hegel's version of *zeitgeist* is the "Absolute...universal Mind or Spirit" that drives "[a]ll of nature's processes and all of history, including man's intellectual [and] cultural ...development" toward "the Absolute's [evolutionary] quest for self-revelation" (Tarnas 380-1). In the Hegelian paradigm, though, the infinite possibilities of self-revelation are reserved for the Absolute, rather than in human development; Hegel's *zeitgeist* does not seem to leave much room for human revelation, implying that the human mind is too limited to fathom such revelation. Therefore, Arnold's task is "to render historical change concordant with rationalist universalism...[by] rejecting the Romantic assumption that 'the All' is a formless infinity inaccessible to the divisive analytical categories of the mind" (Carroll 75).

Whereas Ruskin's application of the *zeitgeist* suggests that it is a counterbalancing, dialectical conceptual tool, Arnold's *zeitgeist* takes on godlike properties of perfection, not to mention the ability to catalyze and give meaning to creation and progress, thus becoming the belief on which he establishes his faith. Arnold may claim that "human

sensation and sentiment derive from a nature greater and more permanent than the individual self" (*ibid.* 14), but one must be careful not to immediately identify Arnold's belief in an Absolute as belief in an all-controlling, omnipotent God. Arnold's symbolic "God"—or ultimate meaning, ultimate objectivity— "is himself both the abstract ideal of perfect being and knowing...and also the historical process through which humanity advances in pursuit of this ideal" (Carroll 77). And both the abstract ideal and the historical process are created not by an "Absolute," but by man himself. As Arnold declares in "Literature and Science," "everyone knows how we seek naturally to combine the pieces of our knowledge together, to bring them under general rules, to relate them to principles...." (463). Thus we can conclude that, in Hegelian dialectic spirit, Arnold admits that absolute, objective ideals exist because human individuals create them subjectively and mentally place them outside themselves, or decide to consider them "external" to themselves; and consequently Arnold proceeds to consider those ideals as external and objective.

For this reason, many critics, including Bashford, write about the humanistic quality of Arnold's approach to criticism and aesthetic theory. For my purposes here, I find it necessary only to identify Arnold as humanistic in that he considered art, literature and criticism a civilizing influence capable of "mak[ing] man realize his potential...and to reduce the discrepancy between potentiality and attainment" (Cuddon 432). Furthermore, as Bashford illustrates, Arnold's critical and theoretical work "focuses on human powers or abilities...including the abilities to express and understand thoughts and feelings...and to discriminate values....[in order to] confer a certain character on our experience in the world" (197). Arnold subsequently establishes a humanistic "religion" of culture as represented in its literature. Just as members of a traditional religious congregation theoretically need to harmonize their beliefs, the congregation of artists, writers and critics of Arnold's "religion of culture," self-empower themselves collectively to construct knowledge and meaning. By "[f]ollowing our instinct for intellect and knowledge,"

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Arnold explains, "we acquire pieces of knowledge; and presently, in the generality of men, there arises the desire to relate these pieces of knowledge to our sense of conduct, to our sense of beauty" ("Science" 463). This "sense" of conduct and beauty seems a rather static principle ascribed to the *zeitgeist*, an ideal of perfection that allows one to make "criticisms of the existing order of things," although such "suggestions for their correction proceed invariably from a recognition of attitudes or material conditions that impede the realization of this ideal" (Carroll 62-3). To sidestep this impediment, Arnold ascribes a kinetic quality to the *zeitgeist* of "the art and poetry and eloquence of men who lived, perhaps, long ago" so that it "[has] also the power...capable of wonderfully helping us to relate" the works of the present to the tradition-establishing ones of the past ("Science" 468). This only serves to problematize Arnold's concept of the ideal, though, in that establishing comparative relationships between the ideal texts and works of the past and those of the present "suggests that value and meaning are always differential," as comparative relationships more often emphasize difference over similarity (Peltason 761). And Arnold must cling to any established similarities between past and present works of art and literature in order to make the *zeitgeist* an aesthetic platform to unify artist and critic, works of art with the critical and theoretical study of art, by claiming that the artist and critic/theorist both share the same kind of relationship with the traditions of the past. Out of necessity, he generalizes the definition of *zeitgeist* to the point where it can be defined as something all-inclusive. Thus Arnold's *zeitgeist* becomes not only a unifying concept but an Establishment, as perfection comes from "men who either belong to Establishments or have been trained in them" (*Culture* 9-10).

Establishments call for moderation, or a tempering of individualistic impulse. Arnold's *zeitgeist* Establishment counterbalances, to once again borrow Starzyk's terminology, a metaphysics of being with a metaphysics of becoming. On one hand, Arnold notes that "Establishments tend to give us a sense of a historical life of the human spirit, outside and beyond our own fancies and feelings"—indicating a concept of history as

stable, finite, and unchangeable as one cannot change that which has always occurred--meanwhile adding that Establishments "thus tend to suggest new sides and sympathies in us to cultivate" as well (*Culture* 15), indicating the change and perhaps uncertainty associated with acts of "becoming." By Arnold's logic, then, believing in and perhaps even worshipping culture, the conceptually-embodied *zeitgeist*, leads one "to see things as they really are" (*Culture* 22), to recognize culture as a dynamic act of becoming that should result in the static repose of being. The dynamism, or "flexibility," Arnold attributes to culture recalls a Ruskinian sense of *zeitgeist*, but Arnold's version is much less Hegelian in nature.

With the idea of an establishment comes the subtle connotation of completion and finality which, analogously, must be transferred to Arnold's ideas of the established author/artist in a given work. Arnold, seeing a completed literary text, sees the author--or, the author's concept of self--as existing in a static repose of being within that given text, the end result of the author's dynamic act of becoming. Here Arnold establishes a Ruskinian "concourse of the Dead," in which the static author within the text is displaced from history and the passage of time. Arnold's version of the "concourse of the Dead" is an artistic and literary aristocracy--as "[a]ristocracies are, as such, naturally impenetrable by ideas" that bring change (Arnold, "Heine" 108)--inhabited by "the unapproached masters of the *grand style*" (Arnold, "Preface" 175). These grand stylists "deliver [themselves] from the jargon of modern criticism, and escape the danger of producing...works conceived in the spirit of the passing time"--the historical moment-- "and which partake of its transitoriness" (Arnold, "Preface" 181). Paradoxically, Arnold also claims that a grand stylist creates works in which the critic/reader can "feel...the power of modern ideas" ("Heine" 106), especially since "modernity" is such a transitory concept. This appears to contradict the advice of Maurice de Guérin, which Arnold adheres to in his essay on de Guérin: "Study...language by attentive reading, making it your care to remark constructions, turns of expression, delicacies of style, but without

ever adopting the manner of any master. In the works of these masters we must learn our language, but we must use it each in our own fashion" (qtd. by Arnold, "Guérin" 61). This implies that one never does escape one's historical moment, that works of art and the ideas they contain may never be completely ahistorical. Arnold, though, seems to interpret this as indicating that the methods of the artistic and literary "masters" are products of their historical concept though the meaning behind their methods are not restricted by such temporal construction.

Oddly enough, as Eugene Goodheart points out, "Arnold avoids the perception of self-contradiction in his work" (86). Belief in stable, finite meaning would arguably suggest belief in a correlating concept of a "best self" that he would like to believe is a unitary, rather than a shifting, self; and, though Arnold insists on finding the definitive author-concept in a text, he scarcely addresses the best self/everyday self dichotomy in relation to the author-concept. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold differentiates between the two versions of the self-concept: "By our everyday selves...we are separate, personal, at war....But by our *best self* we are united, impersonal, at harmony...and this is the very self which culture, or the study of perfection, seeks to develop in us" (64). He acknowledges the shift that he cannot seem to unify. On one hand, Arnold esteems artists and authors for being "great men of culture" able to transmit "the best knowledge [and] the best ideas of their time" through their artistry (*Culture* 48). Yet, simultaneously, if we consider Arnold's use of Montesquieu's idea that one approaches and studies art out of "the desire to augment the excellence of our nature, and to render an intelligent being more intelligent" (qtd. by Arnold, *Culture* 30), it seems that Arnold approaches literature to find the author--the figure of the "great man of culture"--and make that author-concept his (Arnold's) mirror image. As a critic he is facing, though contestably ignoring, the problem faced by the editor in *Sartor Resartus*: namely, that the instability and fragmentation of the self-concept evidences itself through the realization that the reader constructs the author-concept. This further recalls the apparent doubling of the editor and Teufelsdröckh

in *Sartor* also, the argument that by looking for the author's self-concept within a text one actually looks for himself, to "augment his own excellence."

Once again, we must call into question the typically Arnoldian concept of disinterest, too. If one approaches an artwork to discover the artist-concept (and how the artist conceptualized himself) objectively, the concurrent desire to ascertain and develop one's own self-concept--and the connection existing between artist and critic lies in the *zeitgeist*--seems highly subjective, and discordant with Arnold's *disinterested* philosophy. The inevitable emphasis on subjectivity suggests that the factor of unknowability problematizes the attempt to establish objectivity: because the inability to fully represent the signified must always come into play, any attempt to compensate for that unknowability requires subjective "guesswork" on the critic's behalf. One must revert back to the problematic caused by historical residue. If we are to believe Eugene Goodheart when he says that, unlike Ruskin, "Arnold failed to understand the power of the symbol"--or, in our case, language--"at the historical moment when it was both fact and symbol--that is, symbolic without being fictive" (90-1), then we must consider that Arnold never quite accounted for the factor of unknowability, or "the limits of our access to the past and its representability" (Rigney 341) as Ruskin did. Similarly, if the *zeitgeist* is the crucial link between artist and critic--that which allows the critic to ascertain the artist within the artwork--then the limits of representability and knowability lurking in the *zeitgeist's* residue arguably cause fragmentation and separation between artist and critic, critic and text, and perhaps even the artist and his own artwork. Furthermore, I contend that Arnold failed to understand the *limitations* of the signifier within the historical moment (or *zeitgeist)* because of its inescapably fictive nature; considering, of course, the struggle of *Sartor Resartus's* editor discovering the fictiveness of the various representations of Teufelsdröckh and the catachretic, subjective nature such fictiveness brings to the use of symbolic representation.

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Walter Pater: Theorizing the Aesthetic Mythos

Somewhat like Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*
serves as a mythic bildungsroman of the coming of age of an aesthetic theorist who, in
turn, is the embodiment of the theory he comes to profess. Like *Sartor's* editor, who must
emerge himself in the contemplation of Professor Teufelsdröckh's line of Romanticism in
order to reconcile it with the strains of skepticism and self-doubt fostered by the emerging
sense of Modernism, the distant and equally nameless narrator of *Marius* incarnates the
desire to incorporate the aesthetic lessons of the past in the context of the present. In
Pater's novel, past and present converge within the narrator's several interpretive
intrusions into Marius's biography. As William Shuter notes, "These intrusions [of
'historical glosses and explanations']...disrupt any illusion of immediacy by drawing
attention to the historical distance that separates the narrator and the reader from the
novel's subject and they uncover the mechanisms by which the narrator has accomplished
his historical reconstruction" (30). This is a crucial observation on Pater's work, in that
the text itself seems more concerned with using Marius as a personified conduit through
which one can explore textual mechanisms of interpretation and the construction of
meaning in terms of a historical aesthetic tradition than with the development of Marius as
an individual character.

Because the structure of the novel purposely calls attention to the inevitability of
interpretive distance between the historian/historical critic and history, one must again
reconsider the notion of *zeitgeist*, this time as explored somewhat contradictorily in
Pater's other works, in order to fully discern the progress of the aesthetic theorist that
Marius represents. In fact, Pater seems unable to maintain a single definition or
understanding of *zeitgeist*, which is not in itself uncommon or even problematic, inasmuch
as Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold incorporate a broadly pluralized and abstract understanding

of *zeitgeist* in their respective works. R.T. Lenaghan goes as far as to declare that Pater's works read "almost...as a series of essays examining different *zeitgeists*" (qtd. by Moran, 170). Indeed, Pater's works collectively suggest a greater, if not more theoretically complex, Hegelian understanding of *zeitgeist* than is explored in Carlyle's *Sartor*, and he further elaborates the reconfigurations of *zeitgeist* presented in the works of Ruskin and Arnold. Pater conceived *zeitgeist* to be chaotically kinetic in both the cyclical construction promoted by Carlyle as well as the more linear construction designed by Ruskin, while maintaining the quality of stabilized tension that Arnold attributed to his version.

Gerald Monsman astutely observes that an understanding of Pater's aesthetics ultimately depends on differentiating between ideology and mythos (19). In this case, we must define ideology as the subjective and impermanent body of ideas, doctrines, and beliefs reflecting the needs and aspirations of an individual or a group of individuals that is subject to constant change through human progress. Because ideology is subject to constant change inasmuch as it evolves through a series of mutations and eventually falls out of fashion, ideologies of the past are never completely accessible. Mythos, though, must be understood as a consistent pattern of universal, intrinsic basic values and attitudes shared by humanity throughout the ages, and it thus creates stable and concrete meanings to correspond with symbols and signifiers, always accessible in any time. Consequently, Pater regards the traditions perpetuated in and by the *zeitgeist* to operate on a mythic rather than an ideological level, especially as he relies on the perpetually universal qualities of mythos to serve as the enduringly stabilizing center around which "that nimbly-shifting *Time-Spirit*, or *Zeit-geist*...which is always modifying men's taste, as it modifies their manners and their pleasures" (Pater, "Postscript" 55) revolves. Thus Pater presents the aesthetic theorist (i.e., Marius)—the embodiment of aesthetic theory—as a kind of neo-Romantic mythic hero. Pater fashioned the theorist mythically rather than ideologically so that his recognition of the universality of mythic pattern in art and literature allows him to "mediate between time and eternity, bringing renewed life to those

around him through his powers of synthesis" (Monsman 39). Synthesis is itself an act of interpretation, and thus a subjective act wholly dependent on the individual's perception; as Maureen Moran reminds us, mythos "ascrib[es] shape, explanation, or meaning to diverse, inchoate experiences, intuitions and feelings" (172-3). And critical interpretation always incorporates an ideological context which displays itself subconsciously even if the critic makes a conscious effort to avoid it. Therefore, Pater, while presenting the theorist as being both the incarnation of his own age as well as the reincarnation of ages past in order to circumvent his contemporary ideologies, may ascribe to him the gift of an uncanny vision which pierces through the obfuscating layers of progress in order to clearly see the connections between past and present, but that gift of vision proves itself subjected to the relativity of ideological perspective nonetheless. The result of this endeavor is an aesthetic theory that "construct[s] a new reading of the modern temper but...deconstruct[s] the 'myth' of interpretation and den[ies] the possibility of a stable, identifiable meaning" (Moran 173).

Pater found the popular art and literary criticism of his time errant in its assumption that all works were "but translations...of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought" ("Giorgione" 43) embodied in a *zeitgeist* that sets the parameters for not only the subject matter of art but also the methods of presentation. Pater seems to adhere to this conception of *zeitgeist* when he declares that "[o]ne of the functions of aesthetic criticism is to define these limitations; to estimate the degree in which a given work of art fulfills its responsibilities to its special material" (*op. cit.*). Yet simultaneously he wants to define these limitations in order to reinvent and possibly transcend them, believing that even a *zeitgeist* limited to the perpetuation of stabilized mythic patterns of creating meaning—the correspondence of the "special material" of a work to the essence of 'true' meaning of any and all symbolic representations -- must permit those patterns to be perceived differently than they had been in the past and accordingly evolve in order to remain cogent and useful to both artist and critic. Here Pater allows for differences in

perception where his predecessors and contemporaries could not. Notwithstanding the idea of the "spectral essence" of truth underlying all, Pater, unlike Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold, does not use the concept of *zeitgeist* to mandate that there is a standard evaluation and interpretation of art that all must follow in order to truly comprehend art and/or create "good" art. Instead, Pater desires deviation and individualism. Art strives "to become a matter of pure perception" in that it is only "valuable and justly attractive" in correlation to how it is clothed in "the fashion of a time, which elevates the trivialities of speech, and manner, and dress, into 'ends in themselves,' and gives them a mysterious grace and attractiveness in the doing of them" ("Giorgione" 47). As does Carlyle through the character of Teufelsdröckh, Pater recognizes that meaning is continually clothed and reclothed according to the "changing conception of [a specific culture or era's] own experience" (Moran 175) as well as a changing conception of the past in relation to the context of the present. Unlike Carlyle's theorist, though, Pater questions the conception of meaning itself. Whereas Carlyle's (as well as Ruskin and Arnold's) *zeitgeist* contains meaning, established by some force beyond man, which transcended trivialities of particularity, Pater's *zeitgeist* appears to be, in part, an effluvial collection of all the man-made individualisms— the trivialities of particularity, or the fashions of each particular time or previous epoch, that both make meaning and change the ways in which meaning is derived.

In his essay on Coleridge, for example, Pater proclaims that the critic should discern meaning from a work by evaluating "its connexion with the intellectual and spiritual condition of its age" (17), rather than its connexion with the intellectual and spiritual condition of the *zeitgeist* at large; insisting it is "the character of the [particular] age" which influences artist and critic through "the medium of language and ideas" (2). Yet, if neither the artist nor the critic controls the language and ideas belonging to the "character of the age," then neither artist nor critic can be responsible for creating the character of that age. It has to have been generated by or evolved from the character of a

previous age. In this way, Pater implicitly defines the "particular character" of the given age as something corresponding to the general character of all ages, calling into question his view of the role of originality and individualism in the evolution of conceptualized meaning. To put it more simply, if the individual cannot control the language and ideas corresponding to meaning, the individual instead uses the language and ideas made available to him to discover and discern that meaning that precedes language and idea and that has, in essence, created that language and these ideas. Thus, in more Carlylean terms, the individual rearranges or reevaluates these given ideas in the language made available to him in order to redress, or "re-clothe," the ideas recycled in the *zeitgeist*. Language may "possess...a genius, a very fastidious genius, of its own" which "change[s] along with the changing thoughts of living people" (Pater, "Style" 66), but it is a veiled and limited form of expression in that it must correspond to absolute meaning. Pater "held that within the shifting fabric of the sensuous veil itself...there can be discerned the eternal outline of the Absolute" (Monsman 6).

This brings us back to the initial Neoplatonic subject/object dichotomy that all versions of Victorian aesthetic theory painstakingly try to address. Pater equates this dichotomy to the two dichotomous tendencies that have always existed in the history of art and literature: the Romantic and the Classical ("Postscript" 48). Criticism in the Romantic vein celebrates the "strangeness of beauty," thus making "the desire for beauty" a "fixed element in every artistic organisation"; the Classical defines "qualities of measure, purity, [and] temperance" for artistic excellence (*ibid.* 50). The Romantic and the Classical always have a dialectical relationship with each other: the Classical presents an authoritative and stabilized prescription for the creation and contemplation of a work of art, and lends that stability to the Romantic tendency in order for beauty to become any sort of fixed element in aesthetic criticism, and the Romantic lends to the Classical the recognition and acceptance of "strangeness," or individuality. Monsman calls this the dialectic of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies in Pater's aesthetics, in which the

centrifugal Romanticism that "derives its energy and strength from some inward source and is subjective in nature" eternally intertwines with the centripetal Classicism "[un]related to the revolutionary, individualistic world of romanticism, but belong[ing] to a fixed world of the type," characteristically more objective, that "tends instead to be authoritative" (10). "Because romanticism is always transforming itself into its opposite, classicism, and because classicism constantly needs the rejuvenating touch of romanticism, these tendencies seem to alternate in periods" (Monsman 11) and thus the dialectic continually exists in motion.

When defined in this manner, Pater's dialectical aesthetic theory appears to involve the assumption that the *zeitgeist* is cyclical, as it repetitively alternates periods of Romanticism and Classicism as well as maintains the "fixed world of the type," or the standard repetition of the mythical/historical archetypes, throughout history. Interestingly enough, though, the seeming simplicity of this cyclical structure can be complexified by a careful consideration of Monsman's word choices in his definition of Pater's theoretical construct. He notably describes Romanticism—or the centrifugal tendency—as both "rejuvenating" and "transforming"; moreover inferring that as Romanticism has the ability to "transform" itself into Classicism, Romanticism becomes a transformed kind of Classicism different than the last because its "rejuvenating" touch brings a kind of new, inspired life to Classicism's previously used, fixed types. In this rejuvenation, "[w]hat is lost in precision of form is gained in intricacy of expression" (Pater, "Coleridge" 4), or individualized style. Still, with Classicism one cannot ignore the belief in one eternal form of meaning from which all forms of imaginative expressions of meaning are derived. Like Ruskin, Pater maintains that imaginative expressions are "intuitive grasp[s]...of the essence of an object" emanating from the "indwelling principle" that "leaves its trace in metaphors, visual or verbal" (Sawyer 67), just as, Neoplatonically, imaginative expressions can be explained as subjectified emanations from the objective "First Principle." However, these

subjectified emanations occur with each rebirthing of the cycle, or advent of a new epoch or historical period; how, then, is change accounted for in Pater's notion of *zeitgeist*?

Actually, the idea of change and evolution in human perception perplexed Pater. On one hand, Pater wanted to acknowledge and celebrate the importance of the individual genius' "power of conceiving humanity in a new, striking" manner, yet simultaneously wanted to limit this individualistic power by imposing upon it "an element of permanence, a standard of taste which genius confesses" independently of time and place ("Winckelmann" 28). Change could not deviate from the unity which Pater emphasized as the most important aspect not only of art but of criticism: "All depends upon the original unity, the vital wholeness and identity, of the initiatory apprehension or view" ("Style" 69). Like his contemporaries, then, Pater still clings to the assumption that the "original unity" of all art—of all thought—lies in an omniversal *zeitgeist*; for this assumption provides him assurance that all artistic, literary and critical endeavors are related to one another and thus made meaningful. Only in this manner can the critic truly perceive that "[a]ll art aspires toward the condition of music"—music being the one form of art which does not separate matter from form (Pater, "Winckelmann" 45), the static from the kinetic, the body from the garment. All "apprehensions or views," though, especially apprehensions of change and progress, may be limited to the perceptions possible in a particular time; but, as that "time is infinitely divisible," each mode of perception "is infinitely divisible also" (Pater, "Renaissance" 40). This, though, is problematic in that the *zeitgeist* does present limitations which are then compounded with the limitations of the human mind, "of the individual in his isolation" (*op. cit.*). So it appears that Pater attempts to "infinitely divide" something that he previously describes as finite. As a result, one might be tempted to conclude that his endeavor to make the limited appear unlimited ultimately fails, but that would be the result of a failure to understand the complexity of Pater's appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic in his formulation of his theory of the self in relation to the

construction of history and *zeitgeist*—which is, incidentally, the primary concern addressed in *Marius the Epicurean*.

As I mentioned earlier, Pater presents Marius as a neo-mythic and somewhat Byronic hero in that he "is not merely a passive reflection of his intellectual environment" but "a delineat[ion of] that mythic element in the hero by which he has his 'own masterful way with that environment' and transcends his age" (Monsman 39). Marius portrays the "mythic element" of Romanticism by adhering to a belief that sense perceptions enable one to descry a spiritual ideal internalized within the corporeal, and thus allow one to surpass the idiomatic ideology of one's peers and produce an "idealogy" more attuned to the essential or supreme design from which all things originate. And this "idealogy" one creates is just as applicable in any past or future age. However, the extreme individualism required of this position tends to decline into what Pater calls in his essay on Coleridge an "egotism," or form of the self-concept, that "do[es] something with the idea in spite of the essential nature of the idea" (6), or the ideal. It is an obfuscating manipulation of truth that renders "all...fictitious from the beginning" (*op. cit.*) because of its dependence on the very relativity of perception. The hero relies on his perception of himself as heroic; and, as mentioned earlier, Pater was quite concerned about the isolating limitations of an individual's mind. In *Marius*, Pater explores this issue with regard to the way self-perception influences one's perception of that which exists outside the self. His only means of allowing Marius to maintain some sort of separation between self-perception and object-perception, then, is to ascribe to him to the kind of autonomy present in Classicism. In sum, Marius is a Romantic figure who transforms himself, via an embrace of Classicism, into a theoretically rejuvenated and thus dialectically balanced critic embodying both tendencies, shifting adeptly between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the *zeitgeist* in order to reconcile the temporal and the atemporal, the historical and the ahistorical.

Before proceeding into the text of *Marius* itself, I must note here that the reader must be constantly aware that the narrator presents Marius's biography in a retrospective

style; more specifically, one should always be aware that the narrator's knowledge of the result of Marius's theoretical growth and change influences his presentation of each of Marius's incremental steps toward complete transformation into the dialectic. Furthermore, similar to the textual inter-relationship between the editor and Teufelsdröckh in Carlyle's *Sartor*, the narrator at times seems to conflate himself with the figure of Marius so that it is often difficult to separate Marius's own recognition of his mental progressions from the narrator's interpretation of such. The narrator presumably writes Marius's biography as a project of reflective history, which relies on the postulate that the historian (or, in this case, biographer) is able to relate past events objectively and thus accurately. However, considering Pater's extensive use of Hegelian dialectic philosophy[6] we must then utilize Hegel's cautionary stance on historical construction in reading *Marius the Epicurean*. Hegel advises a careful reader to be wary of conflations between the writer and his historical subject, as "it often happens that the individuality of attitude that must characterize a writer belonging to a different culture is not in accord with the period; [thus] the spirit of the writer is quite other than that of the times in which he treats" ("History" 540). However, as Hegel also defines reflective history as "history whose mode of representation is not really confined by the limits of time to which it relates, but whose spirit transcends the present" (*op. cit.*), Pater's insistence on the recognition of mythic pattern in aesthetic criticism seems applicable to our reading, in that the text asks us to assume that Marius and the narrator can be reasonably conflated by virtue of sharing what Monsman calls the same delineation of the mythic element allowing each character to transcend their respective historical contexts and share a universalized experience. This rather abstract notion, of course, will become complicated during the

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[6]Unlike Ruskin and Arnold, Pater directly addresses Hegel's texts in his work. Pater obviously had extensive knowledge of Hegel's works, and cites Hegel as a great influence on his own work.

course of evaluating the text, yet it seems the most reasonable point from which to launch explication.

When the reader first meets Marius, he is a youth living the consummate pastoral experience typical of most Romantic figures. The narrator notes that, while living simply and thus close to nature, "[a] sense of conscious powers external to ourselves...that *conscience*, ...was become in [Marius] a powerful current of feeling and observance" (4). Marius interprets his own consciousness as manifest in his emotional and sensual cognition of himself within his environment, as existing correspondingly to an external conscience of a supreme or essentialist design. At first, this implies that Romanticism is the solid foundation for Marius's intellectual maturation; but even in Marius's earliest stages of theoretical development, in his most unmitigated adherence to Romanticism, the narrator intuits that the seeds of Marius's philosophical discontent are sown. The narrator finds evidence of this in the very name of Marius's childhood home-- "White-Nights," a "coy, retired" place heavily steeped in memories of the past. The narrator provides a curious analogy in his explanation of the name's importance:

> 'The red rose came first,' says a quaint German mystic, speaking of 'the mystery of so-called *white* things,' as being 'ever an afterthought--the doubles, or seconds, of real things, and themselves but half-real, half-material--the white queen, the white witch, the white mass, which...is celebrated by young candidates for the priesthood with an unconsecrated host, by way of rehearsal'. So, white-nights, I suppose...should be nights not of quite blank forgetfulness, but passed in continuous dreaming, only half veiled by sleep. (9)

By implying that the red rose is the progenitor of the white, the narrator also implies, albeit symbolically, that the red rose is the thing-in-itself, idea unified with form/content; the white rose, subsequently, is a shade, or pale copy, of the original, similar but not the same. The white rose cannot be "blank forgetfulness" as it retains enough properties that

it remains relative to the red, but at the same time it is "half veiled," wearing what the narrator earlier describes as "the veil of our familiarity with things by no means vulgar"—or idiomatic— "in themselves" (7). "So-called white things," then, are the idiomatic forms that carry meaning in a specific age or historical context.

Since the juvenile Marius lives "with the traditions of the past" (15), we must relate this analogy to Pater's presentation of history (and the way history is constructed) within the text. The "traditions of the past" or *zeitgeist* of which Marius is aware at this particular time is a collection of "white things" or idiomatic forms; it is not the very forging of the absolute pattern for human history that Marius reflects upon specifically, but a wider, more non-specific notion of previous eras. Expressing a Hegelian outlook that his "culture is essentially comprehensive, and immediately changes all events into historical representations" ("History" 539), fostering a cyclical construction of history, Marius seems to conclude that, through forging connections between past and present idiomatic vehicles of meaning, he is able to deduce the true or ideal meaning in the world, or the "red rose" from which all "white roses" came, through historical reconstruction. This idealism is mistaken, the narrator quickly tells us, because Marius is "constructing the world for himself in great measure from within" and producing a "vein of subjective philosophy, with the individual" rather than any external ideal or thing-in-itself "for its standard of all things" (15). In short, Marius is reinventing the past to correspond to his view of the present. Thus Marius must reconsider his version of Romanticism to realize that it is "useless to revert to similar circumstances in the past" because "[t]he pallid shades of memory struggle in vain with the life and freedom of the present" (Hegel, "History" 542)—or, to use the terminology of the narrator's analogy, the reconstructions of the "white things" of the past vainly struggle with those being constructed in the present.

The catalyst for Marius's reconsideration of his early Romanticism is the death of his mother, which "made him a questioner" by turning his "seriousness of feeling into a

matter of the intelligence" (26). Plausibly, the bond between Marius and his mother, being a bond between generations, represented to him a bond between present and past; as Marius felt adjoined to his mother, he also felt adjoined to the past, as if his individual identity was in part externally constructed thus producing an individualism not completely self-centered. As death introduces to Marius the prospect of change, he must now struggle with reconciling the idea of change with a belief in the cyclical nature of the world. Recognizing that his senses and emotions had "lent [him]self to an imaginative exaltation of the past," he begins to explore his capacity for reason in his intellect, which "suggested the reflection that the present had, it might be, really advanced beyond the past...." (28).

At this pivotal point in the text, the narrator interjects with his own interpretation of the issues Marius is only beginning to consider, stating:

> If, in a voluntary archaism, the polite world of that day went back to a choicer generation, as it fancied, for the purpose of a fastidious self-correction, in matters of art, of literature,...at least it improved, by a shade or two of more scrupulous finish, on the old pattern; and the new era... might perhaps be discerned, awaiting one just a single step onward....in the consummation of time. (28-9)

This is not quite an abandonment of a cyclical construction of history, or a reliance on a cyclical *zeitgeist*, but brings into question the properties of each repetition of the historical cycle. Specifically, Pater's use of the word "shade" recalls the discussion of "so-called white things" from the previous chapter. Artistically, "shade" represents differentiation in color: for instance, navy and royal are both shades of blue, but are not the same blue, as they each respectively embody different properties of "blueness." More philosophically, then, each historical era is a shade of the cyclical pattern, but each respective era is not the same; each era embodies different properties of the pattern-at-large. As the narrator suggests that the emergence of different properties in the reproduction of the historical

pattern demonstrates progress, one must differentiate between defining progress as simply being change, and defining progress as "change as improvement."

This is further complicated when one adds Pater's use of the phrase "consummation of time" into the consideration of the different versions of the definition of progress indicated by the text. Consummation suggests unity, but also finalization and completion, as if time has an end. As I discussed in the chapter on Carlyle, the notion of *zeitgeist* itself is a term meant to indicate time; the idea of time itself is constructed to impose seemingly finite indicators on something that is actually infinite. We must impose limitations of alleged finitude on concepts of infinity in order to comprehend them. *Zeitgeist* then can be understood as a finite cycle to contain human progress within the parameters of our limited abilities of comprehension. As we observed in Ruskin's work, when history is envisioned more as a linear continuum than as a repetitive cycle, greater possibilities for plurality, allowed by a greater recognition of infinity, emerge. In a cyclical *zeitgeist*, the "consummation of time" would be the point in the cycle in which the end of the pattern conjoins with the beginning, and the cycle is reinitiated. But, in a linear construction, there cannot be a temporal point where progress just stops, as lines extend themselves infinitely; therefore, any point on a time-line which one would call the "consummation of time" would be an atemporal construct in which one imposes finality on something which can never be finalized. This quandary prominently figures into Pater's aesthetics because he believes the theorist must formulate a working concept of how history is constructed in order to ascertain how the individual makes progress in accordance to the role he plays in recognizing, maintaining, and/or elaborating the *zeitgeist*. For this reason, Pater turns to Hegel's advice to consider history not reflectively or critically, but philosophically: to undertake the "thoughtful consideration" of the study and presentation of history itself ("History" 563) and realize that "the history of the world...presents us with a rational process" (*ibid.* 544). Through establishing the difference between cognition and intellection, or history as one perceives it to be versus

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history as it really is, Pater--through Hegel--asserts that once one can discern the process by which, or the supreme "Reason" why (*op. cit.*), history progresses or evolves, one can explain the role the individual plays in not only the progression of history at large but specific histories, such as literary or artistic histories. Of course, this all depends on something similar to Arnold's idea that one can feasibly "see things as they really are."

This idea is explored in depth in the novel's extended retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche and the narrator's ensuing commentary. Monsman considers this the pinnacle moment of the whole text, contending, "The drama, the real action of the novel, is a duplication of the allegorical and mythical pattern of the quest of Psyche for Cupid," as this is the "pattern reflected in Marius's quest" for truth and meaning (66). Marius processes the anecdote too early in his theoretical development to provide the critical climax Monsman suggests, but the reader's realization that the mythic pattern of heroism from which Marius derivates is Psyche's is indeed pivotal. Like Marius, Psyche recognizes the obfuscating properties of the veil of familiarity that drapes her environment and is driven by the desire to discover the concrete material from which her familiar abstractions derive; at the same time, though, Psyche is punished with a series of seemingly impossible trials for her discoveries, and ultimately fails in her final quest. Thus, to Marius, she represents the possibility that the concrete can be found if one persistently explores and evaluates the abstract, though her punishment and failure serve as a reminder that stories can only partially correspond to reality--that Marius, as well as all artists, critics and theorists he represents, might fail to find true meaning, or to a greater extreme, that there may not be absolute meaning and constancy in his world to find. And the possibility of failure becomes increasingly apparent to Marius through his relationship to Flavian and his flirtation with Flavian's brand of egocentric Romanticism.

Under Flavian's influence, Marius takes his quest for meaning to the study of literature, becoming like Flavian "an ardent, indefatigable student of words, of the means or instrument of the literary art" (54), in hopes that he will discover in literary art the unity

between content and form, subject and object. Flavian figures importantly in Marius's development as he embodies a belief in a construction of history as both linear and cyclical and comprehends himself as instrumental in both configurations. On one hand, Flavian adheres to the philosophy of Pliny the Younger, who said, "'I am one of those who admire the ancients, yet I do not, like some others, underrate certain instances of genius which *our own times* afford" (55, italics mine). In this case, Flavian suggests that progress is improvement through the furthering of genius, allowing for separation between the past and the present. On the other hand, Flavian characterizes his task of genius to be one of restoration of the old rather than the creation of something new: instead of creating new meanings for the form of artistic expression, his work is the

> disentangling [of words from] the later associations and going back to the
> original and native sense of each,--restoring to full significance all its
> wealth of latent figurative expression, reviving or replacing its outworn or
> tarnished images...to re-establish the natural and direct relationship
> between thought and expression...[to] restore to words their primitive
> power. (55)

Flavian's approach depends on the assumption that language has definite meaning--its "original and native sense"--rather than associative and arbitrarily designated meaning. This assumption is problematic in and of itself, especially considering the relative inability of words to fully express meaning and the concurrent plurality of interpretations that this inability causes, as revealed by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*. But in this case we cannot dismiss this assumption completely because it is so instrumental in Pater's text. Flavian does not realize that if he adhered absolutely to a linear construct of history, he would be only "replacing" the outworn and tarnished significations, thus substituting one meaning arbitrarily for another. As he also sees himself "reviving" standard and traditional significations, especially considering his belief in an absolute "original and native" meaning of words, he is actually supporting a more cyclical historical construct. The conclusion

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that the narrator comes to, which seemingly will become Marius's conclusion as well, is that an individual must recognize "the power of the enchanted-distance fallacy" (58) that allows one to reconstruct the past and to acknowledge its similarities to the present while at the same time to concede that the reconstruction is, at least in part, inaccurate and fictitious. One cannot ever truly escape the context of one's own age or step outside one's own perception. Even a "conscious effort in the way of a reaction or return to the conditions of an earlier [age]...would be but...artificial artlessness" (*op. cit.*). To once again employ the narrator's initial rose analogy, the past is the red rose with the "freshness of the open fields," whereas the reconstruction would be but white roses "in a heated room" (58). But the differing versions or shades of the rose still retain similarities, thus indicating that perhaps one can compose a concept of history, or *zeitgeist*, which dialectically contains both cyclical and linear properties.

Flavian may represent the germ of this dialectical pattern, but in no way does he represent the dialectic put into practice. He is too much the *dilettante* preoccupied with "mere details of form" which "serve the purpose of bringing to the surface...certain strong personal intuitions...which the artistic or literary faculty was called upon to follow, with the exactness of wax or clay, clothing the model within" (59). His individualism did not result in the reconciliation of subject and object, but merely conflated subjectivism and objectivity in order to create a false semblance of unity. Like Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, Flavian's concern with the role the individual plays in the creation and perception of the material world overshadows, or perhaps too heavily influences, his conception of the essential "model within." Flavian's theories did not bring Marius the answers he sought, so he must modify his approach. In Marius, Flavian's Romanticism must transform itself into Classicism.

Once again, the catalyst for this next step in Marius's intellectual development is a death—Flavian's. Flavian, the embodiment of extreme Romanticism, dies because "he suffers the fate of a mind imprisoned in its own subjectivity" (Monsman 74); and, if

allowed to continue his tutelage in what Gerald Monsman calls "a sinister Epicureanism" (70) under Flavian, Marius would have become imprisoned in his own subjectivity as well. Freed from Flavian's influence, then, Marius's Romanticism can—according to Pater's design—transform itself into Classicism. This begins with Marius's growing empathy for the "poetic beauty in mere clearness of thought, the actually aesthetic charm of a cold austerity of mind" (*Marius* 72). His "natural Epicureanism" or Romanticism "already prompt[ed] him to conceive of himself as but the passive spectator of the world around him," a version of the Ruskinian *camera lucida*; but, rather than passively accepting his, or Flavian's, interpretive observations without question, Marius becomes "[i]nstinctively suspicious of those mechanical *arcana*, those pretended 'secrets unveiled'" (*op. cit.*) by sense perception and emotional reaction. In order to discover the "wandering Platonic soul [that] was but so frail a residue or abstract," Marius must resort to a "severe intellectual meditation," or application of the powers of reason, "to get that precise acquaintance with the creative intelligence itself, its structures and capacities, [and] its relation to other parts of himself and to other things" (*Marius* 72-3).

According to Hegel, the *zeitgeist*, the "creative intelligence itself," that maintains the structure and capacity of all human endeavors and events is the infinite essence of Reason; accordingly, all human powers of reason exist in relation to this higher Reason. And, ultimately, Hegel contends Reason is what unifies form and content, matter and idea:

> Reason ...is Substance, as well as Infinite Power, its own Infinite Material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the Infinite Form—that which sets this Material in motion. On the one hand, Reason is the substance of the universe.... On the other hand, it is the Infinite Energy of the Universe. ("History" 544)

Reason is thus placed "outside reality," and is "something separate and abstract....[as i]t is the infinite complex of things, their entire Essence and Truth" (*op. cit.*). This Infinite Form is not only Pater's mythic archetype but the ultimate meaning for the application of

that archetype. More specifically, it is the pattern which underlies rather than prescribes history, a pattern which is paradoxically energy-as-form, spirit-as-material, signified-as-signifier. This pattern leaves no room for an arbitrary relationship between the two halves of the dichotomy; in this construction, progress—whether progress as variations on the same or progress as metamorphosis—is the result of an energy, a movement, that is ultimately fixed and still. For Marius, recognizing this concept of *zeitgeist* includes a Heraclitean "denial of habitual impressions" which give "a false impression of permanence or fixity in things, which have really changed their nature in the very moment in which we see and touch them" (*Marius* 74). Though not adhering to a complete Heraclitean denial of the existence of a permanent reality by recognizing only the reality of change, Marius, applying an acceptance of "the 'perpetual flux' of things" to his Neoplatonic belief in absolutism, conceives there to be "a continuance, if not of their material or spiritual elements, yet of orderly intelligible relationships, like the harmony of musical notes, wrought out in and through the series of their mutations" (75). In other words, Marius approaches a Hegelian concept of unity, the dialectical correspondence, like that Pater finds in music, in which form meets content.

This demonstrates the advent of Marius's becoming what William Shuter terms a "periegetic critic." Shuter remarks that Pater's texts are those of a "periegetic writer...in continual movement, but this movement is constantly arrested by the sites"—or, in this case, the various philosophical and theoretical tangents— "he has undertaken to visit and describe" (28). Pater enables Marius, a periegetic character then, to find

> in the aesthetic realm...the ideal reality denied us by the Heraclitean,
> scientific world view....[as] art gives to the ideal its necessary concrete
> expression; for the aesthetic object, anchored in the world of sensuous
> perception, within the fabric of the veil of immediate experience, becomes
> the visible and empirical locus of the Absolute. The presence of "flux"
> need not rule out the existence of fixed form. (Monsman 16)

Art--and the artistically-created aesthetic world Pater creates for Marius--is, like Hegel's philosophy and Victorian aesthetic theory itself, a "region of paradox" (Shuter 65). In this paradox, there is no point of stasis that is truly not kinetic. Applying this to the separation Laurence Starzyk presumes exists within Victorian aesthetic theory, then, in periegesis there cannot be a "theory of being" that is not simultaneously a "theory of becoming."

In terms of *zeitgeist* and constructs of history, then, it would seem that a "theory of being" would place more emphasis on the traditions of the past, mythic patterns, fixed archetype, etc., and oppositionally a "theory of becoming" would emphasize the present and the future in terms of transformation, improvement, and permutation. The basis for "theories of being" in which "being" is equated with pure stasis (removed from kineticism) is a "'common experience'" which is "after all only a fixity of language" (*Marius* 70). As Marius discovers, the addition of kineticism concedes for "the abstract apprehension that the little point of this present moment alone really is, between a past which has just ceased to be and a future which may never come...." (79-80). In this construct of time, time--and history--is not quite cyclical *or* linear. It cannot be cyclical because the cycle always brings the promise that the past has not really ever "ceased to be," and that the future is always coming. As for linear construction, the past would provide a point of departure which would "cease to be" inasmuch as it would be the point from which one moves away. But we must consider that points on a line are constructs we place upon it in order to limit the unlimited, or make the infinite finite; meaning, even if point A is the past and point B is the present in which we can foresee a perceivable future, we cannot ignore that the line on the plane always infinitely extends before point A and beyond point B beyond our line of sight. Consequently, the past is also "beyond A" and the future always "beyond B"--and point B itself is only a transitory, arbitrary and misleading "fixity of language." In any case, the idea of chaos is introduced into both constructs of history, or of *zeitgeist*. In the linear construction, chaos exists as the disordered state of the infinite space extending beyond the perceivable points. In the cyclical construction, the dynamics

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of chaos theory take effect, suggesting that small variations in the repetition of the historical cycle could lead to vast and unpredictable deviations of the same pattern—or that each repetition of the cycle centers on a variable of non-fixed value. All of this leads up to a specific question: how can theory make order of chaos, and how does Marius-as-critic do so?

Considering that at this point Marius is steeped in classicism, it seems relevant to point out that, in Greek mythology, Chaos was the unfathomable space from which *Theôria*, "that vision of a wholly reasonable world, which, according to the greatest of them, literally makes man like God" (*Marius* 80), or what Hegel calls the ultimate Reason, arose. Pater applies a delineation of this mythic pattern to his understanding of the function of art and literature; by casting his milieu as chaotic, works of art then become the means to create "a wholly reasonable world" within that chaos. Pater is actually issuing another form of Teufelsdröckh's performative fiat, insisting that through artistic expression, he can command chaos to transform into "a World, or even Worldkin" (Carlyle, *Sartor* 197) in which reason, order and meaning are tantamount to existence, just as he textually commands the transformation of Marius's Romanticism into Classicism. Yet we must still be aware that this performative fiat only forces the semblance of order—or the concept of order—onto chaos, unpredictability. It is a self-imposed fiat that perhaps only has meaning and "reason" to the individual issuing it. Even Hegel is forced to admit that imposing order on a universe in perpetual flux through any "severe and lengthened process of culture" ("History" 553) such as art or theories of art is an egocentric act. Even "[i]f...we consider Subjectivity," he says, "we find that the subjective knowledge and will is Thought. But by the very act of thoughtful cognition and volition, *I will* the universal object—the substance of absolute Reason" (*ibid.* 580, italics mine). Accordingly, then, the essential, absolute Reason or *zeitgeist* assumed to lend meaning to all things, is just as self-willed and subjective as interpretive manifestations of such. So wherein lies the differentiation that Pater still maintains between the two? Pater's

adherence to Arnold's idea of a "disinterested" study of culture, in which individual ersatz selfhood exists only in relation to collectively-born "actual" selfhood, seems key, as does a reliance on a Ruskinian device of objectifying vision. Pater's incorporates his contemporaries' theoretical designs for "refining all the instruments of inward and outward intuition, of developing all their capacities, of testing and exercising one's *self* in them, till one's whole nature became one complex medium of reception, towards the vision...of our actual experience in the world" (*Marius* 82) so that he can maintain his contention that the absolute can exist--or, at least, that it can be conceived and thus used as a basis for aesthetic theory.

But, unlike Arnold or Ruskin, Pater stops short of insisting that one can annihilate one's own concept of self to walk freely and impartially within "that great Concourse of the Dead" (Ruskin, "Treasuries" 305) which supposedly maintains the stability of traditional meaning and the means of transmitting it. Pater recognizes that the concourse consists of abstractions that "are but the ghosts of bygone impressions...that so often only misrepresent the experience of which they profess to be the representation" (*Marius* 81). Even when, in the text, he propels Marius into "the wonderful machinery of observation,...free from the tyranny of mere theories" (*op. cit.*), Pater implicitly concedes that this "machinery of observation" is a theoretical and thus abstract device in and of itself. Even empiricism, in the form of going "back...to experience, to the world of concrete impressions, to things as they may be seen, heard, felt by [the observer]" (*op. cit.*) relies on subjectivity--not only the perspective of the observing self, but the self's ability to process that data in order to define concrete reality through language, which is itself an illusory attempt to define reality and characterize the universe.

Once again inducing a paradox, Pater calls this "neutraliz[ing] the distorting influence of metaphysical system by an all-accomplished metaphysic skill" (*op. cit.*). In his "Postscript to *Appreciations*," Pater admonishes artists and critics for too easily indulging "the common-place metaphysical instinct" which allows one too easily to claim

recognition of the general traits of reality which supposedly define the universe and "which we must renounce if we mean to mould our lives to artistic perfection" (37). Perhaps this is Pater's way of adhering to Hegel's warning in his *Philosophy of Fine Art* that a completely metaphysical means of theorizing art would limit art to being "regarded as aspiring to something else that is set before consciousness as the essential and as what ought to be, so that then the work of art would only have value as a useful instrument in the realization of an end having substantive importance *outside* the sphere of art" (640). If art is perceived only as one of many manifestations of the "Universal History" or *zeitgeist* in which "Spirit displays itself in its most concrete reality," then its aesthetic properties are not completely accessible or comprehensible; for, as "we must premise some abstract characteristics of the nature of spirit" (Hegel, "History" 551) if we try to completely attune aesthetic objects to non-aesthetic history, we then rob works of art of their "self-contained existence" (*ibid.* 552). Hegel himself proposes that "the content of art is the Idea, and that its form lies in the plastic use of images accessible to sense"; and, furthermore, that "[t]hese two sides art has to reconcile into a full and united totality" can only find reconciliation within the specific realm of aesthetics (*Art* 640). In favor of unifying Idea and its plastic form himself, Pater consciously decides to contend that, in the aesthetic realm, one must "detect the passion and strangeness and dramatic contrasts of life" as "a magic web woven through and through us,...penetrating us with a network subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world" ("Postscript" 37). And although this "magic web" is nothing more than self-contained and self-imposed limitations, it must seem infinite to both the artist and critic; by believing that this "magic web" of art exists to unify idea and form, it therefore becomes a self-induced "equivalent for [a] sense of freedom" (*op. cit.*)—or an assumed, rather than an actual, freedom. Moreover, this is freedom in the classical Stoic sense, entailing freedom from the constraint of human emotion or "passion," in the vein of Arnoldian "disinterest."

The ability to accept the premise of limited freedom is the end result of what Pater calls Marius's "'aesthetic' education" in *culture*, in which he, after "ascertaining the true limits of man's capacities" can work within those limitations to expand and refine them (*Marius* 84). Pater's aesthetic culture, like Arnold's, aims to achieve perfection, or at least examine the possibility of that achievement, within human limitations. Aesthetic perfection, in the Paterian sense, is of course unity; and it is that unity Marius seeks in his pilgrimage to Rome. However, the "perfection in the things of poetry and art" Marius finds in Rome is "a perfection which indicated only too surely the eve of decline" (99). Marius may have "come to Rome partly under poetic vocation, to receive...the very impress of life itself, upon the visual, the imaginative, organ, as upon a mirror" and subsequently "transmute them into golden words" (103); meaning to transmute them into words of the "golden mean," so that Marius can construct the world through language that takes the course between the two extremes, whether those extremes be between the material and spiritual, subject and object, Romanticism and Classicism, etc. However, Pater's use of the word *transmute* indicates that, even at this stage, even with Marius's introduction into and assimilation of the edicts of Classicism, further transformation or "transmutation" of his initial Romanticism is necessary.

However, it is important to remember that Pater never abandons the Romantic impulse completely. Just as Marius encountered the danger of taking his Epicurean Romanticism to an extreme through his involvement with Flavian, his fascination with Aurelius and the Empress Faustina threatens to lead him into complete submersion into the purest form of Stoic Classicism which doubtless is, to Pater, what leads to the decline of Rome's "perfection." The narrator notes that the rhetoric of Stoicism "was grown persuasive and insinuating, and sought not only to convince men's intelligence but to allure their souls" (*Marius* 143). This language intended to be unifying, orderly and reasoned—or meaningful—was becoming pretentious and misleading, creating and

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transmitting subjectified and arbitrarily assigned meaning like all other forms of language. As the narrator further states, "[I]t was almost Epicurean" (*op. cit.*).

Once he begins to more explicitly deliberate on Stoicism, especially the teachings of Cornelius Fronto, Marius finds the Stoic contention that the "idea of Humanity—of a universal commonwealth of mind, which becomes explicit, and as if incarnate, in a select communion of just men made perfect" (146) is dubious. He finds that, while listening to Fronto, "his own thoughts were passing beyond the actual intention of the speaker; not in the direction of any clearer theoretic or abstract definition of that ideal commonwealth, but rather as if in search of its visible locality..." (147). Through Classicism then, Marius reaches the epiphany of "the perception of an order external to himself," but this mode of thought in turn gives him the task of "find[ing] that ideal actually incarnate in the fabric of the visible world" (Monsman 85). This must be a world visible to all, not just the select few, or the one. The expressions of the will of each individual in a society, culture, or epoch is both individual and collective. Only collectively can "this matured totality...thus constitut[e] one Being, the spirit of one People," and "[t]his spiritual Being (the Spirit of Time) is his; he is a representative of it; it is that in which he originated and in which he lives" (Hegel, "History" 583). Marius begins to conceive himself—the aesthetic theorist—as the representative of *zeitgeist*; to put it more simply, he returns to the concept of self to find the ideal in the visible world. Made aware of human limitations, Marius now conceives of perfection in its "narrowest" sense: "the perfection of but one part of his nature"—self-perception (*Marius* 154). He believes that through "an imaginative sympathy" with the "aesthetic character" of visible things, "as because to be occupied, in this way, with the aesthetic or imaginative side of things, is to be in real contact with those elements of his own nature, and of theirs, which...are matter of the most real kind of apprehension" (155). Pater thus asserts that form and content may only be unified within works of art and within a theoretical matrix particular to aesthetics. For, in the domain of

art and literature, there is a venerable system of sentiment and idea, widely extended in time

> and place, in a kind of inpregnable possession of human life—a system which…is rich in the world's experience; so that, in attaching one's self to it, one lets in a great tide of that experience, and makes, as it were with a single step, a great experience of one's own….(*Marius* 155)

Pater thus contents himself by acquiescing to the limitations of human subjectivity and the absolute unknowability of things, and (almost) reconciles himself that meaning itself is uncertain, certainty being a humanly-created concept of one's own design to begin with; but only because he maintains that the very existence of "[t]he *Logos*, the reasonable spark in man" evidences the existence of an essential *Logos* external to man (*Marius* 167). Near the end of his journey into theory, Marius concludes that "[t]here could be no inward conversation with one's self…unless there were indeed someone else, aware of our actual thoughts and feelings, pleased or displeased at one's disposition of one's self" (*op. cit.*). Marius comes to recognize this as the Judeo-Christian God; but, taking into account Pater's extensive use of mythic pattern and delineation, Marius's 'God' becomes another symbolic representation of Hegel's "spiritual Being" or *zeitgeist*. By personifying *zeitgeist* as an omnipotent creator who has made a "world, or a worldkin" from chaos and thus created the order for human history to follow, Pater fashions the artist and the theorist as a creator cast from a similar mold. In Pater's theory, therefore, the artist creates a work to reflect the world around him, the critic/theorist creates an understanding of that work; and both their creations correspond, henceforth, to past creations and their creators as they are all "but reflections in, or a creation of, that one indefectible mind" (179) that is *zeitgeist*. As *Marius's* narrator concludes, "It [is] easier to conceive of the material fabric of things as but an element in a world of thought—as thought in a mind, than of mind as an element…or passing condition in a world of matter, because mind was really nearer to himself" (180).

In conclusion, then, Pater indicates that accepting the relationship the present moment has with the past does not rely on understanding history, and/or time, as conducting itself in either a cyclical or a linear manner. Study of historical constructs may indicate that time can or may operate according to either formulation, and both formulations can be pertinent in specific situations or modes of thinking; which is why asserting that both constructions must be understood as operating dialectically with and against one another is preferable. In art and thus in aesthetic theory, explanatory definitions of the *zeitgeist* itself may become "trapped at a particular point on the circumference" or line of the progress of time/history, "unable to synthesize the larger world of temporal and spatial particulars" (Monsman 202), rendering the concepts of *zeitgeist* themselves relative, subjective, and therefore incomplete. This is why works of art become important as they represent in themselves moments of *apparent* synthesis and the possibility—though not the actuality—of *resolute* synthesis. "Art is the supreme visible embodiment" of *zeitgeist* inasmuch as "the aesthetic object condenses the random movements of the circumference" or linear progression "to the hard, gem-like permanence of central form" (Monsman 204).

This promotes the idea that all artworks are, like Keats's Grecian urn, the embodiment of a 'frozen moment' rendering the temporal atemporal: that a work of art condenses random movements into an orderly and perceivable moment that can be explicated, or at least observed within the limitations of human ability and humanly-created theory. Of course, these atemporal moments are still kinetic in that they retain a correspondence with progressive temporality, which too carries a sense of order or reason that makes the correspondence possible.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As this discussion of *Sartor Resartus* in conjunction with the works of Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater demonstrates, Victorian aesthetic theory was, as Starzyk suggests, "overtaxed with a variety of functions." But this was due to the demands created by the maintenance of the neoplatonically-based divisions between subject and object, which in turn created further divisions between the historical and the ahistorical, perspective and tradition, critic and artwork/text. The multiple implications resulting from the manifold applications of the concept of the *zeitgeist* asserted by each critic often added considerably to the complexity and seeming impermeability of these dichotomies, though these revaluations of the *zeitgeist* as well as these dichotomies were intended to provide a simplified or definite treatment of such. Inasmuch as the quest for an objective and systematic aesthetic theory for criticism resulted in the proffering of engaging and temporarily functional conventions of reading literature and explicating other forms of art, it also proposed further doubts, increasing the number of seemingly unanswerable questions and promoting assumptions concerning textual and aesthetic synthesis that grew increasingly tenuous.

Concurrently, the Victorians' growing awareness that establishing concrete connections between author/artist and reader/audience/critic, as well as between the author/artist and the artwork, was impossible resulted in a theoretical explosion in which issues of plurality and inaccessibility demanded attention. The tensions that resulted from these conflicting dichotomies forced the Victorians to at least begin the process of establishing a dialectical aesthetic theory to account for all these points of opposition in a counterbalancing praxis, moving away from more traditional synthetic aesthetic theories requiring resolution through compromise. As illustrated in explications of Arnold's critical work, the need for praxis made evident in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* complicates attempts at theoretical synthesis. And, though Ruskin's work comes closer to achieving

the sort of analytic counterbalance required of praxis, his inability to fully abandon more traditional attempts at synthesis illustrates the enormous difficulty associated with the task. Pater's concept of apparent rather than actual unity and synthesis comes closest to embodying this ideal praxis in a materialized, experiential critical practice. Still, as these issues are apparent in the works of all four critics, and as the works of all four critics illustrate similar contradictions in the treatment of similar theoretical and ideological obstacles, this at least demonstrates that Victorian aesthetics recognized a common aim.

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