CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The decade we have examined, is associated with decadence, and Peter, due to sheer misunderstanding of the well-known Conclusion to The Renaissance, is supposed to be a decadent influence in the literature of the period. The decadent movement, as is well known, was only a later phase of Aestheticism which culminated in the Symbolist Movement.¹ These movements, interrelated as they are, were in fact the aftermath of the Romantic Movement.² Although the term decadence generally denotes a decline in or degeneration of, moral and aesthetic values and standards of excellence in art and


literature, it has been identified most persistently in the works of many writers of the Nineties in England.

It is quite obvious that the writers of this generation shared certain qualities which distinguished them from those who preceded and those who succeeded them. The peculiar character of their writings is perhaps best interpreted by Arthur Symons, who of all the critics of the eighteen nineties was closely acquainted with the movement in the early years but was sufficiently removed from it in his later writings to offer an objective assessment of it. He wrote in 1893:

The most representative literature of the day, the writing which appeals to, which has done so much to form, the younger generation is certainly not classic nor has it any relation to that old antithesis of the classic, the romantic. After a fashion it is no doubt a decadence ... If what we call the classic is indeed the supreme art - those qualities of perfect simplicity, perfect sanity, perfect proportion, the supreme qualities - then this representative literature of today, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease.  

It is of interest to note that at the end of the decade he applied the term to cover certain peculiarities of style. In The Symbolist Movement

(1899) he speaks of it as "something which is vaguely called Decadence" — a term either used vaguely or as a reproach or a defiance:

It pleased some young men in various countries to call themselves Decadents, with all the thrill of unsatisfied virtue masquerading as uncomprehended vice. As a matter of fact, the term is in its place only when applied to style; to that ingenious deformation of the language, in Mallarmé, for instance, which can be compared with what we are accustomed to call the Greek and Latin of the Decadence. No doubt perversity of form and perversity of matter are often found together, and, among the lesser men especially, experiment was carried far, not only in the direction of style. But a movement which in this sense might be called Decadent could but have been a straying aside from the main road of literature. Nothing, not even conventional virtue, is so provincial as conventional vice; and the desire to "bewilder the middle classes" is itself middle-class. The interlude, half a mock-interlude, of Decadence, diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation. That something more serious has crystallised, for the time, under the form of Symbolism, in which art returns to the one pathway, leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty.

Of the two opinions expressed, the one in the earlier essay is obviously nearer the truth, as Holbrook Jackson rightly suggests, for there is surely more in decadence than mere novelty of style, as style cannot be separated either from idea or

4. The Symbolist Movement in Literature, p.4.
5. The Eighteen Nineties, p.55.
from personality. The fact is that in the early nineties decadence seems to stand for "mere tricks of style and idiosyncrasies of sensation" but later on it came to denote a definite phase of artistic consciousness, nowhere better described than in Symons' words as an endeavour "to fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly, to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul; that is the ideal of Decadence." This description certainly points towards the mystical form that the aestheticism of the day was taking. It is no surprise then that Symons, in the Dedication to Yeats, should venture to speak of mysticism and aver that he (Symons) had been "gradually finding my way, uncertainly but inevitably, in that direction which had always been to you your natural direction." Yeats, according to Symons, was "the chief representative" of the Symbolist Movement in England.

Seen in retrospect, aestheticism, the cult of beauty in art and literature, recognisable in England

6. Ibid., p.55.
8. The Symbolist Movement in Literature, p.xx.
from eighteen sixties onwards, was revolutionary in aspect. It was a protest against traditional and conventional ideas and put forth a new conviction in the significance of beauty vis-a-vis other values in life and art, such as morality and material utility.9 The votaries of aestheticism found in art and literature everything that gave meaning to life and believed that it supplied all their need for personal fulfilment.

The direct outcome of such a way of thinking is the absolute separation of art from life. Not that it is difficult to see the difference between art and life. But in these writers the difference is stressed to such an extent as to suggest that art has no reference to life at all and consequently no moral implications whatsoever. This is precisely the point of view represented by aestheticism and this is the attitude which impelled Wilde to urge that "... if something cannot be done to check, at least to modify, our monstrous worship of facts, art will become sterile and beauty will pass away from the land."10 Or to point out that "Life imitates Art far more than

10. Ibid., p.912.
Art imitates life,"¹¹ and to proclaim that "all art is immoral."¹²

The artist has ever raised an anguished cry against the imposition of moralistic views of society upon literature. Should literature merely delight or instruct or is it the business of literature to delight as well as instruct, has been a recurrent controversy. One way of looking at aestheticism is to consider it as a movement which opted for delight as the only function of art; it rejected didacticism, and upheld the belief that the value of a work of art does not necessarily consist in its having any relevance to the conduct of life. The sole purpose of the work of art is the immediate aesthetic pleasure it gives and nothing else.

There is much truth in the statement that "A moral theory of art ... is intrinsically a theory about a subject matter."¹³ This explains the aesthetes' scant regard for subject matter. It is important to note what Wilde said in this context: "The only beautiful things ... are things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary

¹¹ Ibid, p.924.
¹³ Literary Criticism: A Short History, p.486.
to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or pleasure ... it is outside the proper sphere of art. To art's subject matter we should be more or less indifferent. If, then, the aesthetes dealt in their art with the exotic and extravagant, the morbid and ugly, the gilded and artificial, it was not only because they stood for novelty and a freedom of choice in subject matter but also because there was a sort of exaltation in choosing what hurt the moral susceptibilities of the bourgeoisie, a sort of triumph in the mere act of defiance.

The indifference towards subject-matter made the aesthetes turn their eyes towards form, which is supposed to be a purely aesthetic element in art. Wilde, for example, speaks of form as the secret of life: "Start with the worship of form and there is no secret in art that will not be revealed to you." The confusion that arises when one tries to interpret ideas about form is obvious, because it is difficult to define the precise relationship between form and matter. The aesthetes seem to give the impression that form is separable from matter, and the artistic quality of a work of art inheres in it. A poem, for instance,

15. Ibid., p. 991.
can be appreciated for its formal elements such as verbal texture, diction, imagery, rhythmic effects, without any reference to the content. What represents the spirit of revolt in aestheticism is the stress on conscious artistry and the idea of craftsmanship. This in turn implies a repudiation of the theory which regarded language as a mere dress of thought implying thereby the importance of thought or subject matter in art. "The real artist", Wilde said, "proceeds not from feeling to form but from form to thought or passions." The emphasis on language and form also helps the aesthetic artist to keep out any palpable design which poetry may have upon men.

For these decadent writers the notion of the primacy of form had the authority of Walter Pater. In fact, this was a clear misunderstanding of Pater's position. Experience tells us that form cannot be distinguished from matter, even though we try to simplify matters by referring to form and matter as separate elements. The most aesthetically satisfying work of art unites form with matter in an indistinguishable whole. The emotional response to a poem, for example, cannot be traced back either to

16. Ibid., p.991.
form alone or to matter alone. Pater held music to be the ideal of all arts because in it form and matter are inseparably fused, and such a condition gives a distinctive aesthetic value to a work of art. Their emphasis on form as the only element worth considering apparently fostered the ideal of pure art in the later part of the nineteenth century and to some extent, of formalist criticism in the twentieth century.

The motive behind the stress on form in aestheticism was evidently to strengthen the cause of the autonomy of art against the tendency to evaluate works of art by moral or philosophical criteria. It, however, accentuated the aesthetic trend towards a direction where art tended to become a mystery. Wilde echoes Pater in suggesting that "music is the perfect type of art" but gives a new interpretation and opens new vistas when he argues that it is so because "Music can never reveal its ultimate secret." That is to say, it is the subtle suggestive quality in art, its wonder and its mystery, which gives it an exclusive appeal, provokes the

17. Ibid., p.970.
18. Ibid., p.970.
While Oscar Wilde stressed the notion of suggestiveness and mystery in literature, Arthur Symons elaborated the idea of form in such a way as almost to do away with it. As he said, "There is such a thing as perfecting form that form may be annihilated." This is in fact the symbolist view of form. The art of the symbolists brought verse to "a bird's song", to "the song of an orchestra" so as to "evoke the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority. Description is banished that beautiful things may be evoked magically ... Mystery is no longer feared ... " The purpose of this revolt against exteriority and rhetoric was "to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul of whatever exists and can be realised by the consciousness." Symbolism, in fact, was an attempt to spiritualise literature.

If, then, the ideal of art is to create an aesthetic impression, with no reference to ethical, religious or philosophical values because art must be

19. The Symbolist Movement in Literature, p.3.
20. Ibid., p.5.
21. Ibid., p.5.
true to itself, what is the function of criticism? Obviously the critic's job is no more than to help in the communication of the aesthetic impression to the reader to obviate any difficulties that may lie in the right response to the work of art. The implication is that the critic must recreate in the reader's mind the impression which he has himself experienced. Such criticism is impressionistic; and it could well lead to, as it did lead to in the case of Wilde, criticism for it's own sake. Since in impressionistic criticism the critic's sensibility is the most important and necessary equipment, there is an inherent danger that the object of criticism may be sacrificed in favour of the critic's free and wandering fancy. For Wilde, as for Pater, "Temperament is the primary requisite for the critic - a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty." But Wilde goes further than Pater and argues, "To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear an obvious resemblance to the thing it criticises." Thus criticism becomes an autotelic activity, an art in itself and for itself. However, such an extreme subjectivism

is surely not the necessary outcome of impressionistic criticism. If a critic's temperament is sufficiently disciplined his impressions will not always be fanciful. In fact, the interpretation of a work of art can be objective enough to focus the reader's attention on its essential features.

The interpretative nature of impressionistic criticism tends to make it more appreciative than evaluative. For, judgement about a work of art, its being good or bad, its being high or low in a particular hierarchy, is not at all required when the business of criticism is only to communicate the peculiar pleasure that a work of art gives. It is only when art is considered as a formative force in the shaping of men and society, in improving them and leading them towards an ideal moral condition, that the need to judge arises. Because in that case the critic has perforce to find out whether a work of art performs its specified function or not, and its goodness or badness is judged in relation to its accomplishing, or failing to accomplish, the function it has set before itself. It is indeed true that "a strong emphasis on critical evaluation goes with a strong moral conviction." Aestheticism we have found, was a revolt against the demand for moral values.

in art and literature, and so, impressionistic
criticism precludes all judgement while it fosters
appreciation, the experiencing, the analysing, and
the communication of the unique pleasure of a work
of art.

Essentially, then, Aestheticism or the
Decadent Movement corresponds to Romanticism in that
both represented a revolt. While Romanticism was a
revolt against the neo-classicism of the eighteenth
century, a revolt of the individual against the
claims of society, of the subjective against the
objective in art, Aestheticism was a revolt against
traditional and conventional ideas, and against the
strong ethical and social bias discernible in
Victorian literature and culture. The purpose, in
both cases, was to effect a liberation of the artist
and his art from all bondage, all that cramps his
imagination and proves inadequate to convey what he
feels. In all such periods of reaction, one perceives
literature rebounding from one extreme to the other,
from the classical pole, for instance, to the romantic
one, as in the beginning of the nineteenth century.
So we have at the end of the nineteenth century such
theories as literature divorced from life, form devoid
of content and aesthetics without any controlling ethics.

The superiority of Pater as critic over his
contemporaries and his disciples lies in the fact that he was not a reactionary and yet was a symbol of modernity. He, in fact, endeavoured to heal such cleavages as resulted from the fragmenting art-for-art's-sake debate in the later part of the nineteenth century. His was a message not of despair for the future of art but for a reconciliation of the old with the new, of form with content, of ethics with aesthetics, of the personal with the impersonal and of the ideal with the concrete. How then could he be a decadent influence?

In the "Postscript" to Appreciations Pater criticises the use of the words classical and romantic to express a greater opposition between those tendencies than really exists, because "in that House Beautiful, which the creative minds of all generations ... are always building together, for the refreshment of the human spirit, these oppositions cease."²⁵ He believes that the two falsely opposed tendencies are really at work in art at all times, tilting the balance sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, but when the two principles, the two traditions in art, unite entirely "then the resultant beauty is

very exquisite, very attractive." The true critic, Pater said, ignores the meaningless distinctions between classic and romantic, between the adherents of the principles of authority and of liberty, of order and of strength, his aim being "to enter into the peculiarities of the objects with which he has to do." Pater's view regarding this ever-present conflict is perhaps the sanest possible, for in truth, as he says, "the legitimate contention is, not of one age or school of literary art against another but of all successive schools alike, against the stupidity which is dead to substance and the vulgarity which is dead to form." His own catholic tastes enable him to appreciate Sir Thomas Browne whose "genuinely romantic" writing "attained classical quality, giving the measure of the very limited value of those well-worn critical distinctions." Both Pater's admirers in the Nineties and many of his later detractors, grossly exaggerate his stress upon form or expression. For example, it is wrong to

27. Ibid., p.241.
29. Ibid., p.156.
infer, from Pater's enthusiasm for Flaubert's passionate search for the right world and the painful pursuit of fine expression that he was inclined to exalt form over content. The ideal of art, he said, is to reduce the distinction between form and content to the minimum, and it is well worth remembering his words in the essay on Style: "with Flaubert, the search, the unwearied research, was not for the smooth, or winsome, or forcible word, ... but for the word's adjustment to its meaning." "In the highest as in the lowest literature, then, the one indispensable beauty is, after all, truth." The wedding of form with thought is what Pater advocates and nowhere does this ideal find better expression than in his own dictum: "All art constantly aspires to the condition of music." It is obvious that the assumption of the art-for-art's-sake believers that form can exist without subject, as if in a vacuum, as well as of the champions of realism, who reacted against pure form and assigned all importance to content, is erroneous and misleading. The only correct position is the one taken by Pater, namely, the

30. Ibid., p.31.
31. Ibid., p.34.
32. The Renaissance, p.135.
reconciliation of form with content such that matter finds itself in form and form finds itself in matter.

It is not only the emphasis on the reconciliation of the traditional with the modern, and of form with content that makes Pater different from the aesthetes and decadents. His belief that ethics cannot be separated from aesthetics has been expressed in very clear terms. And yet it is suggested that his teaching was not "altogether without offence", and that "his sense of values was finally wrong."33 Some see unmistakable sign of decadence in the essay on Leonardo da Vinci, in which Pater speaks of the artist's life as "one of brilliant sins and exquisite moments"34 and of "the fascination of corruption" which "penetrates in every touch of its exquisitely finished beauty."35 Even the well-known description of La Gioconda has been cited as Pater's apotheosis of that corruption. It is no wonder, then, that Mario Praz finds a "family likeness between this portrait and the Fatal Woman of Gautier, Flaubert and Swinburne"36 and that Oscar Wilde spoke of The Renaissance as

35. Ibid., p.106.
"the flower of decadence." This led Paul Elmer More to see in such men as Oscar Wilde "the fruit of his (Pater's) teachings." But we have found that Pater was not a decadent like some of his disciples and that his ideal of art was not unconcerned with moral considerations. The Conclusion to The Renaissance, which is the source of all misunderstanding about Pater, lays stress on the role that art can play in giving "the highest quality" to man's brief life on this earth. Pater had withdrawn the Conclusion from the second edition (1877) for fear of being misunderstood, and reprinted it in the third edition (1888) with some slight changes to bring it closer to his original meaning. Besides, he had dealt more fully with the ideas suggested by it in Marius the Epicurean (1885). Pater deplored Wilde's debasing of his creed in Dorian Gray, chided George Moore for the doubtful moral tone of his Confessions of a Young Man, and is reported to have referred to G.K. Huysmans as "Beastly Man" when some one once tried to convince him of the excellence of G.K. Huysmans and his style.

Pater's distinction between "good art" and "great art" which is based on the dignity of its content.

37. The Nation, p.387.
38. Aesthetes and Degadents of the 1890's, p.xxix.
his firm belief that art helps in the enlargement of
human sympathies and the comprehension of truth, and
his constant search for profound aesthetic charm and
ethical qualities in art and artists show him to be,
as T.S. Eliot admitted, "primarily a moralist." 39
However, Eliot disapproved of Pater's attitude to
Christianity in Marius the Epicurean as "a counsel to
get all the emotional kick out of Christianity one can,
without the bother of believing it." 40 This comment
does not do justice to Pater. B.B. Wainwright takes
issue with Eliot on this point, and defends both Pater
and Marius. To quote him: "Marius believed in Christ's
teachings enough to lay down his life for a friend.
Which is closer to the heart of this religion - the
acceptance of some dogma or the belief that one saves his
life by losing it?" 41 There is no doubt that Pater
subscribed to Christian ethics. He makes clear his
objective, for example, in writing Marius the
Epicurean in a letter to Vernon Lee: "I regard this
present matter as a sort of duty. For you know I think
there is a ... religious phase possible for the modern
mind, the condition of which it is the main object of
my design to convey." 42

40. Ibid., p.434.
41. B.B. Wainwright; "Is Pater Outmoded?" in
42. Quoted by John Pick; "Divergent Disciples of
Walter Pater", pp.116-17.
Thus, the charge that Pater gave impetus to a philosophy of epicureanism and hedonistic ideas is ill-founded. Pater's own statement amply proves this: "A true epicureanism aims at a complete though harmonious development of man's entire organism." He gives a detailed explanation of his conception of refined epicureanism in chapter 9 of Marius the Epicurean, where he affirms: "Not pleasure, but fulness of life, and insight as conducting to that fulness - energy, variety, and choice of experience, including noble pain and sorrows even ... whatever form of human life in short, might be heroic, impassioned, ideal: from these the "new Cyrenaicism" of Marius took its criterion of values."

Pater's high regard for beauty and his belief that it could be perceived and experienced even through the sensory avenue of art was obviously one cause of his being misrepresented as a hedonist. But he is not to blame for the distortion which his views suffered in the writings of those who fell under his influence. Pater, we have found, was inclined to identify truth and beauty. For him beauty symbolises goodness, which

43. Sketches and Reviews, p.132.
44. Marius the Epicurean I, pp.151-52.
far from being a narrow set of rules is really fullness of life — a fullness that saves him from regarding a work as purely a stimulator of pleasurable feelings.

Of such a temperament it cannot be said that his method of criticism encouraged "anarchy of feeling" or that his "interpretation (of works of art) when the spell is broken, will be found essentially perverted." So, when Pater emphasises the importance of the individual sensibility of a critic even while maintaining the need for objectivity in evaluation he is only giving expression to a truism. It is almost impossible for criticism to be completely impersonal or have no admixture of the personality of the critic. The investigation of his works has revealed that Pater attempted to make criticism of art and literature as analytical and discriminating as possible, without doing away with the role of the critic's temperament. A correct balance between the personal and the impersonal is what he envisaged. Criticism, pursuing the objective set down by Pater and employing the method he advocated, could hardly be whimsical, much less "perverted."

That Pater followed meticulously the doctrines he enunciated in regard to the object and functions of

45. The Nation, p.365.
criticism is more than evident in his studies of writers, painters and sculptors. These studies show the miraculous ability of Pater to grasp the very essence of their genius. No wonder then, that the perusal of his critical works should have proved not only worthwhile but influential too. Pater may well be described as having given much direction to literary criticism in the nineties, as also in the twentieth century. But it is almost preposterous to speak of him as the man behind the lives of the commonly reputed decadent writers of the nineties. T.S. Eliot, for example, accuses Pater of being "not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives," as if Pater could be held responsible for Wilde's homosexuality, Lionel Johnson's drunkenness, Aubrey Beardsley's tuberculosis, or Arthur Symons' mental illness. W.B. Yeats's testimony, because he was one among the men of the nineties, is indubitably more reliable: "Pater had made us learned, and, whatever we might be elsewhere, ceremonious and polite."47

Many critics in the nineties were drawn to

47. *Autobiographies*, p.303.
Pater's critical doctrines and incorporated in their practice the formula techniques, the appeal to experience, and refused to impose preconceived standards upon literature. His views regarding the aims and functions of criticism are echoed again and again in the criticism of his followers. However, some of his disciples deviated in practice from his views and even distorted them. Oscar Wilde's reckless and extravagant ideas put forth as an aesthetic theory are a little amazing particularly when he asserts that he is carrying out Pater's ideas expressed in The Renaissance. He is partly to blame for bringing Aestheticism into disrepute, creating an image of Pater as a decadent influence. Wilde's enthusiasm for Pater was limited to the ideas contained in The Renaissance, and even those ideas he either misunderstood or deliberately distorted to suit his own needs. He misread the conclusion to The Renaissance, for example, as a gospel and a guide to a life of sensations, easy morals and artificiality. His personal tastes, deviant temperament, and a dandyistic outlook on life made him look for such meanings in Pater's words as embarrassed the writer himself. By adopting a course of life, for which there was no sanction in the "golden book", he wrecked not only his own life but also his reputation.

Wilde's critical theory insists on the importance
of the critic's temperament and its exquisite susceptibility to beauty, and the power to receive impressions. The impressions, however, need not have any relation to the work of art criticised, for the function of criticism, Wilde said, is not to analyse a work of art or find its essence, but to offer an imaginative reconstruction of it. In this attempt to raise criticism to the level of a creative art, he only brought discredit to impressionism as a method of criticism and reduced it to a shallow and fragmentary thing. But his remarks, in the same context, that the meaning of a created thing lies as much in the soul of the beholder as in the soul of the creator and that the finished work of art "has, as it were, an independent life of its own" remind one of some modern critics who regard a work of art as an organism. According to T.S. Eliot "We can only say that a poem in some sense has its own life ... that the feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet." Of some interest from the twentieth century point of view is Wilde's statement that the critic must

intensify and enrich his own personality to be able to interpret the personality and work of others by a study of different ages: "To realise the nineteenth century", to quote him, "one must realise every century that has preceded it and that has contributed to its making."\textsuperscript{50} This recalls what T.S. Eliot says in *Tradition and Individual Talent*: 
"... the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous order."\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, Wilde's exclusive attention to form provides a liaison with the "formalist" criticism, which has as one of its antecedents the art-for-art's-sake theory.

However, the total indifference to subject matter led Wilde to separate art from morality. For him Art is beyond the reach of morals because it is concerned with beauty and beauty lies in form. In a bid to raise art to the highest pinnacle, Wilde goes so far as to suggest, ridiculously though, that art has nothing to do with life and nature, that it

\textsuperscript{50} The Works of Oscar Wilde, p.979.
\textsuperscript{51} The Sacred Wood, p.49.
never expresses anything but itself, and as for art
being an imitation of life he says it is on the
contrary, life that copies art. "A great artist invents
a new type and life tries to copy it." Thus,
Wilde’s critical opinions are more of a caricature
than a reflection of Pater’s ideas.

Lionel Johnson’s interpretation of Pater’s
critical opinions was nearest to their meaning, and his
own criticism closely corresponds to the doctrines laid
down by his master. The most important thing that he
obviously did was to clear the confusion in the mind
of his readers, created by some of his followers like
Oscar Wilde, that Pater was an epicurean and an art-
for-art’s-sake votary or a decadent aesthete. He was
not only fascinated by the early writings of Pater but
the later mature works, Marius and Plato and Platonism
for example, had an equally strong impact upon him and
so his view of Pater as a critic presented in the
various essays about him was not lopsided. He vigorously
opposed the decadent aesthetic theories that had taken
hold of the writers’ sensibility in the nineties.

He admired, like Pater, discipline and austerity
of taste and strenuous effort to achieve perfection in

form and style, but the passion for precision, he made clear, must not lead to a belief in form for its own sake. He attached equal value to the thought behind the words and said that perfect correspondence between conception and expression should be the ideal before the artist. The greatness of a work of art, he believed like Pater, is dependent upon its human interests, the awakening of "the old charities and common pieties," achieved by it.

Johnson had a firm faith in the belief that ethics could not be separated from aesthetics. His reading of Pater's writings convinced him that Pater always held such a view and his own criticism was based on this doctrine, as is seen in his essays and particularly in his book on Thomas Hardy. On the question of impersonality in art again, he followed Pater's thought and argued that an artist or a critic could not be expected to achieve scientific objectivity and that a proper balance or reconciliation between the personality of the artist and the impersonality required by his art should be maintained. Johnson suggests that the artist can give the "sense of fact" in his work of art and at the same time he true to his own vision of things. This will naturally lead to the

harmonising of personality and impersonality, the ideal of all art and criticism.

The essential nature of Johnson's criticism, like his master’s, is interpretative and appreciative. The manner in which he clears away all doubts and misunderstandings about Pater, for example, by giving a correct interpretation of his work is noteworthy. In fact, the interest in interpretation is characteristic of all his criticism. In spite of some failings noticeable in his critical writings, such as the element of pose and self-consciousness, there is enough evidence to show that Johnson possessed a fine sensitiveness and perception as a critic. His great contribution is to have set forth clear critical values in a period of complexity and uncertainty, and, above all, to have interpreted Pater's critical ideas correctly at a time when they were generally being misinterpreted, even by some of his disciples.

Two writers who tried to do justice to Pater were Arthur Symons and W.B. Yeats. Arthur Symons' early passion for Pater, it is seen, was little short of idolatry, but he was, like many others, influenced by The Renaissance, particularly by the Conclusion, and, like many others, he also missed Pater's subtle emphases. So, Pater's pleading for greater freedom for the arts from any moral or social consideration is twisted in such a way as to suggest absolute freedom in
the choice of subject matter. The choice of new, quaint, even immoral subjects is justified by Symons on the ground that artistic values are different from ethical values, and that art can never be the servant of morality. Evidently, in proclaiming the separation of art from morality Symons did not take into consideration the sense of austerity and disciplined temperament necessary for the artist, which Pater so very much emphasised. Symons' practising the "religion of the eye," making his own all the shifting impressions of life and insisting upon rendering sensations only, are a clear misrepresentation of the ideas contained in the Conclusion. Similarly Symons' argument that perfection of form is the highest virtue in literature is an extension of Pater's ideas about form to a degree not intended by him. It is noteworthy all the same that the apparently unwarranted extension of Pater's views on form led to a connection with the new development in literature as is seen in Symons' book on literary criticism, The Symbolist Movement in Literature. All this, as well as his lavishing more care upon the arts than on the little and great things of life, makes Symons "the perfect product of the Yellow Nineties," a6 an aesthete and a decadent.

But when it comes to the function of criticism, Symons follows what is set down in the Preface to *The Renaissance*. He unhesitatingly subscribes to the view held by Pater, for example, that it is the aim of criticism to distinguish the essence of a work of art, that it is not so important for a critic to pass judgement on a work of art as to trace out and analyse what moves the reader in a work of art. Symons echoes his master when he says that criticism is not just a record of the personal likes and dislikes of a critic but is an objective, almost scientific analysis of the "virtue" of a work of art and that the critic after discovering and analysing the "virtue" must interpret and communicate his findings to the reader. How successfully Pater's critical method is applied by Symons is revealed in his subtle and penetrating criticism.

Symons was much influenced by French literature and had a big hand in introducing the Symbolist Movement in England. He saw an affinity between the Paterian approach and the symbolist point of view and thus revealed how Pater anticipated some of the directions in which literary criticism subsequently developed. As an upholder of symbolism Symons is naturally associated with W.B. Yeats to whom *The Symbolism Movement in Literature* was dedicated. To some
extent Pater's influence on Yeats was mediated through Symons. The relationship between Pater and Yeats has to be highlighted because Pater happened to be an important shaping influence during the nineties. Harold Bloom believes that Pater is, "the central link between nineteenth and twentieth century Romanticism in Britain and America, the figure who stands midway between Wordsworth and his followers and such major modernists as Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and Wallace Stevens."\(^5^5\) And Richard Bizot justifiably affirms: "Increasingly, Pater is a point of reference; he is pivotal; at once the last of the pre-moderns and the first of the moderns."\(^5^6\) But while determining the nature of Pater's influence on Yeats, it is generally assumed that the influence was not quite wholesome and Yeats did well to escape from it in his later years. The pattern seems to have been set by Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Castle* (1931) wherein he says that the aestheticism of Pater is "carried through to its consequences" in the early works of Yeats and further suggests that following Pater, that is, "living for beauty ... of cultivating the

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imagination, the enjoyment of aesthetic sensations, as a supreme end in itself", will mean that "we shall be thrown fatally out of key with reality." 57 Louis MacNiece holds an identical view and writes: "his (Yeats's) early cult of passion came from Pater," 58 and later "Yeats steadily moved away both from the doctrines of Pater and the Aesthetes and from the Romantic model," 59 till he broke away from Pater's influence. And Graham Hough's position is not very different because he believes that "Yeats is mentally far too vigorous for this religion of the moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." 60

Yeats did not view the influence of Pater on his work in the way in which these critics have spoken of it. There is Yeats's own testimony in the Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936) that it was deep and lasting, neither epicurean, nor confined to the early Yeats. Yeats was impressed by the mature and conservative aspect of Pater. He had

59. Ibid., p.44.
a clear understanding of Pater's conception of style and was not just enamoured of his elegant prose in a superficially fashionable way. He considered substance to be as important as manner and agreed with Pater's view that content cannot be separated from form and that the greatness of a book is dependent upon its subject-matter. He disapproved of art-for-art's-sake doctrine for its artificiality, insincerity and isolation from life. His conception of beauty was akin to Pater's. Similarly Yeats is one with Pater in his belief that art cannot be divorced from life and has an ethical influence upon people in that it makes them more charitable and understanding. Pater was confident that a reconciliation between the opposing tendencies in literature could help produce the most aesthetically satisfying work of art and Yeats "throughout his thinking on art was preoccupied with the thought of unity, tantalized by its difficulty of realisation, sometimes repudiating it in the quest for pure art, but always returning to it in the end." 61 What we find in Yeats is the widening and deepening of his interests. The subjects that are excluded from his early poetry begin to engage his creative attention in later years. His

poetry takes note of the turmoil around him. Even
events of the day are treated in his poems.

Yeats learned about the French Symbolists from
Arthur Symons and it is evident that he approved of
the Symbolist Movement. His interest in symbolism
is revealed in a number of critical articles in which
he explores and discusses the technique of symbolism.
In "The Symbolism of Poetry" he gives a thoroughgoing
account of what he means by symbolism. As he
indicated in The Introduction to The Oxford Bank of
Modern Verse he was aware of the affinities existing
between his own theories of symbolism and Pater's
suggestive treatment of the symbolist method,
particularly in the essay on Leonardo da Vinci. It
is not just a wild conjecture that Pater, however
slightly, did help in the formation of Yeats's
understanding of the symbolist method.

Such then was Pater's influence in the
Nineties. It was deep and pervasive. If it was
decadent, it was in spite of himself. He set forth
ideals for criticism and envisaged a kind of
temperament for a critic, difficult of attainment but
open to misconstruction. The delicate balance between
apparently contradictory aesthetic and humanistic
strains in his writings increased the possibility
of one element being emphasized at the cost of the other. And this is what happened in the Nineties. His critical opinions were reflected diversely by his divergent disciples according to their own temperaments and needs. Oscar Wilde vulgarized Pater’s ideas whereas Lionel Johnson rendered a correct exposition of them. Arthur Symons codified his master’s doctrines and connected them with the symbolist movement whereas W.B. Yeats found seeds of modernism scattered in them.