

Art History and the Invention of Botticelli

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History of Art

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor T. J. Clark, Chair
Professor Whitney Davis
Professor Barbara Spackman

Fall 2010

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the construction of the figure of Botticelli in European culture, c. 1860-1915, and its unexpected impact on understandings of art as historical. Botticelli's "rediscovery" by John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and the Aesthetes has become a notorious episode in the history of taste. Yet why those engagements occurred; what it was, exactly, that these and other figures saw in his paintings; and how the specific texture of the phenomenon became the crucial testing ground for the emergent discipline of art history—these questions remain unanswered. In addressing them, the dissertation argues for the special importance of the heterogeneous body of writing and art-making that accrued around the figure of Botticelli in the second half of the nineteenth century, in any attempt to come to grips with modernity's fraught sense of the historicity of art.

"Art History and the Invention of Botticelli" is a study in the emergence of art history from a complex of writings about art, and about the past, that included modes of "criticism," "connoisseurship," philosophical meditation, an "iconography" not yet claiming the name, imaginative recreation, rhapsodic free-association, and, as constant ground-bass, the invention of further "Botticellis" by artists of the time. It is, in the main, about two things. The dissertation tells the story of the rediscovery of Botticelli itself, the work of English painters like Simeon Solomon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Walter Crane and, in their wake, of a string of strong writers about art: Walter Pater, John Ruskin, Giovanni Morelli, Bernard Berenson, Herbert Horne, Aby Warburg. Moreover, it reveals that in and through this rediscovery, a great battle was waged about the nature of writing on the visual arts. A mode of writing with an orientation towards description, ethics, and the affective impact of works of art faced off against an ascendant mode that valued the stabilization of the artist's oeuvre via "scientific" criticism and the patient, scholarly reconstruction of his life-world. Artwriting increasingly made a claim to the grander status of *Kunstwissenschaft*. In this paradigmatic contest, the paintings of Botticelli—in particular, the strangeness of their historical position—proved crucial. The result was a set of exaggerated, self-reflexive interactions between the verbal and the visual that gives special insight into the treatment of art as an embodiment of the past.

Chapter one concerns the strategies of pictorial reference and reconfiguration by which late Pre-Raphaelite painters first constructed the figure of “Botticelli.” Chapter two centers on the peculiar sense of art’s history as it develops in the writings of Walter Pater and John Ruskin on Botticelli. It argues for the centrality of these accounts: positively or negatively, they would orient all those that followed. Chapter three turns to the so-called “scientific” connoisseurship of Giovanni Morelli and Bernard Berenson, focusing in particular on the impact of their attempts to stabilize Botticelli’s oeuvre through the figure of the artistic follower. Chapter four discusses the writings of Aby Warburg and Herbert Horne in relation to the tradition out of which they emerged, attempting to situate their phobic refusal of the “cult of Botticelli.”

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Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to thank the institutions that have supported my research: The University of California, Berkeley for a Regents' Intern Fellowship; the Paul Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art, London; The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; The Yale Center for British Art; the Research Forum at the Courtauld Institute of Art; and the History of Art Department at the University of California, Berkeley (with special thanks to T. J. Clark).

For their tireless help I wish also to express my gratitude to the staff of the National Gallery Archives in London; the Warburg Library; the Paul Mellon Centre, London; the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum; the Print Room at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; the Beinecke Library at Yale; and the Pierpont Morgan Library. Special thanks go to Alison Smith and her staff at Tate Britain; of the Special Collections at the Huntington Library; Kraig Binkowski and his staff at the Library of the Yale Center for British Art; and to Stephen Wildman and his staff at the Ruskin Library.

The writing of this dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and enthusiasm of my advisory committee. My debt to them is profound. T. J. Clark has supported the project since its inception, and has sustained my intellectual growth in countless ways since I arrived at Berkeley. His generosity, personal and intellectual, has been humbling, and I am grateful for his friendship as well as his supervision of my project. His scholarship and teaching have served as constant sources of inspiration—a model of what writing about art might still be—and his careful readings have improved every line of the text that follows. I have learned from him more than he will ever know. Whitney Davis has constantly pushed me to think beyond the limits of my intellectual prejudices and beyond those of the academic discipline we share. Many of the ideas pursued in this dissertation would be unthinkable without the example of his scholarship. He has been a constant source of encouragement and an unfailingly generous interlocutor. Barbara Spackman's writings have been a model for me since I first read them; it has thus been a special source of pleasure to find their author also so continually cheerful, insightful, and kind. I am grateful for her careful and incisive attention to the arguments I have wished to make, and for our conversations about Decadence (basic and advanced). Although she did not officially serve on my committee, I also wish to thank Anne Wagner for her kindness and support through the years. Her generous presence has been an indispensable part of my time at Berkeley.

Many others have kindly discussed aspects of my research with me, and offered help in various ways. Here I wish to thank Caroline Arscott, Stephen Bann, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, David Peters Corbett, Colin Cruise, Lisa Florman, Hal Foster, Jason Gaiger, Cordula Grewe, Margaret Iversen, Stephen Melville, Morna O'Neill, Satish Padiyar, Elizabeth Prettejohn, Patricia Rubin, Sebastian Zeidler, and the participants of the "Writing Art History" seminar at the Courtauld, especially Catherine Grant, Nick Chare, Charlie Miller, Barbara Penner, Pepper Stetler, and Francesco Ventrella.

Dear friends have relieved the loneliness of writing. Beyond Berkeley, I have been sustained by Ava Alkon, Joan Banach, Sara Bodinson, Martin Dines, James Glisson, Stevie Hanley, Anny Jones, Bertram Kaschek, Joe Lovoi, Megan Luke, Tom Otten, Joachim Pissarro, Sergio Rigoletto, Brandon Sousa, and John Tain. And in the Bay Area I have been endlessly grateful for the friendship, over the years, of Bridget Alsdorf, Elise Archias, Jessica Buskirk, Anne Byrd, Sherry Ehya, Sarah Evans, Sarah Hamill, Amy Kim, Gerard Koskovich, Jake Kramer, Chris Lakey, Vanessa Lyon, Jessica May, Andrew Moisey, Travis Peterson, Joey Plaster, Marcelo Sousa, Jen Stager, Joni Spigler, Justin Underhill, and Lynn Xu. Their companionship has ensured that my heart, at least, has always felt at home. Finally, I wish to thank my parents for their continual support. I am at a loss to express my gratitude to them.

Introduction

“Art History and the Invention of Botticelli” considers the construction of the figure of Botticelli in European culture, c. 1860-1915. Botticelli’s “rediscovery” by John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and the Aesthetes has become a notorious episode in the history of taste.¹ It came towards the end of a period (roughly 1750-1880, as Francis Haskell suggests) in which “rediscoveries” and “revivals” came to assume a central place in the culture of art.² The religious ecstasies of the Primitives, the Le Nains’ dour realism, Vermeer’s enigmas of feeling and space: one by one these and other phantoms of art’s history took their second turn. The rediscovery of Botticelli belonged deeply to this moment, and to its wishful blurring of present and past. Yet it also opened onto more troubled construals of history’s course. “His imagination is of things strange, subtle and complicated—things it at first strikes us we moderns have reason to know, and that it has taken us all the ages to learn; so that we permit ourselves to wonder how a ‘primitive’ could come by them.”³ This is Henry James, writing about Botticelli in 1873.

We soon enough reflect, however, that we ourselves have come by them almost only through him, exquisite spirit that he was, and that when we enjoy, or at least when we encounter, in our William Morrises, in our Rossettis and Burne-Joneses, the note of the haunted or over-charged consciousness, we are but treated, with other matters, to repeated doses of diluted Botticelli.⁴

Over the course of James’s description, “our” relation to Botticelli’s precocious modernity turns round on itself. By its end, the passage seems to suggest, we do not feel the subtle delicacies of the modern temper in Botticelli’s evocations of the “haunted or over-charged consciousness”: rather, they feel us. In a movement soon to become characteristic of engagements with the artist, wonder here gives way to disorientation—

¹ For the most sustained previous treatments, see Michael Levey, “Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 3-4 (July-December 1960): 291-306; G.S. Weinberg, “Botticelli and the Aesthetes: The Victorian Literary Response to a Renaissance Painter” (PhD diss., Harvard University 1980); and Vanessa Müller, “‘How Botticellian!’: Studien zur Botticelli-Rezeption im englischen Ästhetizismus” (PhD diss., Univ. of Bochum, 2000). See also Frank Kermode, “Botticelli Recovered,” in *Forms of Attention* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 3-31; and Adrian S. Hoch, “The Art of Sandro Botticelli through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes,” in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Lene Østermark-Johnsen and John Law (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 55-85.

² See Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art* (London: Phaidon, 1976); and Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

³ Henry James, “The Autumn in Florence” (1873), in *Italian Hours* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 385. James had recently discovered Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), with its crucial essay on Botticelli, in a bookshop window in Florence.

⁴ James, “Autumn,” 385.

an experience of belatedness and historical bewilderment, to which Botticelli's paintings give particular, elusive form.

Or take a more specific case. In September 1873, a month or two before James penned his essay, a surprising discovery was made on the upper floor of a villa between Florence and Fiesole. As whitewash was scraped from the walls, there emerged two large frescoes (**figs. 1-2**), as well fragile traces (long since vanished) of a third. The villa's owner knew immediately he was onto a good thing, and the paintings were quickly identified as works of Botticelli.⁵ Twenty years earlier, this would likely have seemed no special occurrence; now, as the tide of the Botticelli's fame rose, the discovery became something of an international event. Photographs circulated, experts were dispatched. Art historians rapidly identified the subject matter as having to do with the wedding of Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giovanna degli Albizzi in 1486, and gradually interpretations of these allegorical scenes approached consensus. (The frescoes are now identified as *Giovanna Receiving a Gift of Flowers from Venus* and *Lorenzo Presented by Grammar to Prudentia and the other Liberal Arts*.) The Louvre sent its agents to broker a deal. As it became apparent that the French would indeed purchase the frescoes, cutting them from the villa's walls and re-setting them on canvas backing for transport to Paris, many enthusiasts panicked. Ruskin, who had seen photographs of the paintings, dispatched his chief copyist, Charles Fairfax Murray, to study them before they were damaged by the move, which finally took place in the early months of 1882. Ruskin mentioned the frescoes, by way of Murray's copies, during his lectures on "The Art of England" at Oxford the following year:

These copies, made under the direction of Mr. C. F. Murray, while the frescoes were still untouched, are of singular value now. For in their transference to canvas for carriage much violent damage was sustained by the originals; and as, even before, they were not presentable to the satisfaction of the French public, the backgrounds were filled in with black, the broken edges cut away; and, thus repainted and maimed, they are now, disgraced and glassless, let into the wall of a stair-landing on the outside of the Louvre galleries.⁶

Sadly, Ruskin's description of the frescoes' "restoration" is largely accurate. There they still sit, shuffled past by tour groups on their hurried course from the untouchable hem of Victory's *chiton* to Lady Lisa in her impregnable glass bunker. The frescoes remain in ruins, their surfaces dulled and mute. In the face of such misfortunes, Ruskin tentatively offered Botticelli's works another fate:

You will judge for yourselves of their deservings; but for my own part I can assure you of their being quite central and classic Florentine painting.... Their

⁵ On the discovery, see Cosimo Conti, "Découverte de deux fresques de Sandro Botticelli," *L'Art* 27 (Oct-Dec 1881): 86-7; 28 (Jan-Mar 1882): 59-60; Herbert Horne, *Alessandro Filipepi, commonly called Botticelli, painter of Florence*. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), 142; and Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), 2:60-3.

⁶ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), 33:313-4.

subjects should be of special interest to us in Oxford and Cambridge, as bearing on institutions of colleges for maidens no less than bachelors. For these frescoes represent the Florentine ideal of education for maid and bachelor—the one baptized by the Graces for her marriage, and the other brought to the tutelage of the Great Powers of Knowledge, under a great presiding Muse, whose name you must help me to interpret; and with good help, both from maid and bachelor, I hope we shall soon be able to name, and honour, all their graces and virtues rightly.⁷

Past repair, the Villa Lemmi frescoes might at least now be understood. As so often for Ruskin, the fragility of the work of art—its material endangerment in the face of modernity and its institutions—seems to require some reparative act on the distant, imperfect viewer's part. Around them might be formed a community of interpretation and instruction, perhaps a wholesale reorganization of social form. Ruskin seeks to reinvest the paintings with moral meaning, to construct for them a second interpretive life. Yet, strangely, it seems predicated on their vulnerability to ruin.

Ruskin's misgivings at the frescoes' transport to Paris were widely shared, and not only for reasons of preservation. Something still seemed peculiar, in 1882, about subjecting the works of Botticelli to the kind of dubious public existence promised by their mummification at the Louvre. He still belonged somewhere outside the grand narrative of art that the museum's galleries described, an object of more intimate associations. Regarding the Villa Lemmi frescoes, the most sustained reflection along these lines came, unexpectedly, from the writer and aesthete Vernon Lee. Unexpectedly, because Lee had a stomach neither for the Aestheticist cult of Botticelli nor for the painter himself. (Of Botticelli, she wrote, "I am never in tune, always too high or too low for him. . . .")⁸ Her interest in the frescoes stemmed rather from a deep commitment to the phenomenology of place, and to what she called our "facility . . . of assimilating art into life."⁹ Lee, that is, was committed to the total lived experience of these works of art—the delicate and untransferable sensation of being there before the frescoes at on the villa's wall, in an atmosphere made up of the particularities of weather and time of day, glimpses at the landscape outside adjacent windows, and impressions half-consciously gathered in arriving there and heading home. Attention to such conditions was, for Lee, a matter of principal—a measure of what she cared about most in art.¹⁰ What made it especially relevant to Botticelli's frescoes, however, was the very thing that elicited her distaste: the elusive, unnerving effects of his inscrutable artistic presence. "[H]e is," Lee wrote, "as . . . one of those people who never give you the satisfaction either of thoroughly liking or thoroughly disliking them, and who at the same

⁷ Ruskin, *Works*, 33: 314.

⁸ Vernon Lee, "Botticelli at the Villa Lemmi" (1882), in *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), 86.

⁹ Lee, "Botticelli," 105-6.

¹⁰ Such interests look ahead the fully physiological and, as it were, environmental aesthetics of empathy Lee would develop with Clementina Anstruther-Thomson in the 1890s. See, for example, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, "Beauty and Ugliness," *Contemporary Review* 72 (October 1897): 544-69; (November 1897): 669-88.

time will not permit you to grow indifferent.”¹¹ Always too proximate but never familiar, the tenor of his art could only be captured—indeed, might only exist—in fugitive, under-determined, ultimately personal fancies and associations. Encounter with Botticelli presents a special quandary, and leads to a kind of descriptive exasperation:

Oh the weebegone Madonnas, lanky yet flaccid beneath their bunched-up draperies, all tied in the wrong places...; Madonnas drooping like overblown lilies, yet pinched like frostbitten rosebuds, neither old nor young, with hollow cheeks and baby lips,...sallow, languid, life-weary with the fever which haunts the shallow lakes, the pasture-tracts of Southern Tuscany; seated with faces dreary, wistful, peevish, gentle, you know not which, before their bushes of dark-red roses, surrounded by their living hedges of seraph children, with faces sweet yet cross like their own—faces too large, too small, which?—with massive jaws and vague eyes of dreaminess. Madonnas who half drop their babes in sudden sickening faintness, Christ children too captious and peevish even to cry; poor puzzled, half-pained, half-ravished angels; draperies clinging and flying about in all directions; arms twining, fingers twitching in inextricable knots; world of dissatisfied sentiment, of unpalatable sweetness, of vacant suggestion,... of aborted beauty and aborted delightfulness.¹²

Lee’s essays are not notable for their verbal restraint, and no doubt the perturbed garrulousness on display here was native to her. This excess, however, may also be taken as specific, pointing to the difficulty of describing—of seeing—the works of Botticelli, even at this early height of his fame. For what words would do in rendering the feverish formal energy of his paintings, the mysterious, melancholic tone of his figures, the weird intensity of their relation to each other? By what interpretive paths could so eccentric and individual a sensibility be approached? Lee’s text extravagantly performs an inability to keep hold of the paintings themselves. Ostension gives way to dissatisfaction, and even blindness, as language loses grasp of its object, and becomes enmeshed in its own equivocations. How, then, to escape? How best to describe?

* * *

Such questions lay at the core of the attention Pater, Ruskin, and their contemporaries lavished on Botticelli. James and Lee lie at the outer edges of his “rediscovery,” but the problems of interpretation and description to which they bear witness were widely shared. Why such fraught engagements with Botticelli occurred; what it was, exactly, that these and other figures saw in his paintings; and how the specific texture of the phenomenon became the testing ground for something we have come to call art history—these are the questions with which I am concerned. In addressing them, this dissertation suggests ways in which the formation of “Botticelli” requires us to reconsider the notion of art as historical. Offering an account both of the various strands of artwriting that gathered around Botticelli and of works of art that styled themselves “Botticellian,” I

¹¹ Lee, “Botticelli,” 85-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86-7.

seek to bring into focus the real complexities of the commerce between visual and verbal representation which shepherded modern stances toward art into being.

What follows, then, is a study in the emergence of “art history” from a complex of writings about art—and about the past—that included modes of “criticism,” “connoisseurship,” philosophical meditation, an “iconography” not yet claiming the name, imaginative recreation, rhapsodic free-association, and, as constant ground-bass, the invention of further “Botticellis” by artists of the time. It serves to correct an artificial dichotomy that has emerged between a disreputable English tradition of “subjective” artwriting and an “objective,” German one of *Kunstwissenschaft*. By now we need a more nuanced account of the actual tissues of affiliations, influences, refusals, and repressions that formed attitudes to past art in the later nineteenth century—attitudes uniquely condense in the case of Botticelli’s reception. Nonetheless, that dichotomy emerged for a reason. It points to a deep tension within the history of artwriting. Warring parties indeed gathered around Botticelli. Part of what makes his rediscovery so important for the development of art history as a discipline lies in the fact that so great a variety of approaches claimed him for their own. Just because his art was so “new”—so recently recovered as a key moment in painting’s long history—Botticelli engendered a special sort of self-consciousness for writing about art. In and through his rediscovery an improbably wide range of kinds of artwriting presented themselves in exaggerated form, setting conceptual tensions in the high relief. The stabilization of Botticelli’s identity occurred only across an extraordinary variety of types of writing, and in the face of that figure’s constant scattering. The dissertation therefore attends not only to moments of creative effervescence in response to the artist’s achievements, but also to the kinds of practices by which this wild, shifting figure was tamed, and the limitations of his corpus set. The distinctive approaches of Ruskin and Pater—descriptive, affective, ultimately ethical in nature—are set against moments of factual consolidation, such as Giovanni Morelli’s “scientific” connoisseurship, or Herbert Horne’s patient, scholarly reconstruction of the artist’s lifeworld.

If a sequence of strong writers forms the backbone of this study—Ruskin, Pater, Morelli, Bernard Berenson, Aby Warburg, Horne—it is guided by a sense that the fortunes of artwriting cannot be isolated from the actual texture of works of visual art. Art historiography always risks engaging in mere intellectual history or textual criticism, all too often absenting the very works its subjects wrote about. The essential claims of artwriting can only be approached by way of the complex attention it gives to the particularity of works of art—in this case to the formal features and elusive atmosphere of Botticelli’s paintings. Such attention arrives at its object via circuitous routes. It may be triangulated in relation to competing written accounts, which a text draws on or attempts to replace; or mediated by the visual temper of contemporaneous developments in artistic practice. Accordingly, the dissertation juxtaposes its chosen texts with modern works of art—by Simeon Solomon, Walter Crane, and the later Pre-Raphaelites, among others—that responded to Botticelli’s example, exploring parallels in the kinds of attitudes each medium assumed towards the quattrocento artist’s work.

Taken together, and considered in light of increasingly fraught issues of attribution and of mechanical reproduction, these pictures and texts reveal Botticelli’s paintings to have been important actors in late nineteenth-century European culture. Their specific pictorial qualities, their striking condensation of religious and erotic sentiment,

and the peculiarity of their historical position—somehow both ancient and modern at once—attracted Botticelli’s disciples, and also presented them a difficult brief. His oeuvre provided a model of what it might mean for artworks to belong to their specific historical moment, but also of how they might, perhaps always, be ceasing to belong. Botticelli became not simply a favored object for the pursuit of art’s history, but a primary site in which late nineteenth-century subjects could live, as Friedrich Nietzsche put it in his notorious indictment of the era, “in a historicizing and, as it were, a twilight mood.”¹³ Botticelli, that is, provided new ways for feeling historical. He came to stand not only for “the freshness, the uncertain and diffident promise” of the “earlier Renaissance itself,”¹⁴ but also for the untimeliness of modernity: a pastness inherent to the very presence of art.

“Botticelli” and “History” go together in this period. The insistence as well the strangeness of the conjunction allows us to re-evaluate central features of the modern production and consumption of works of visual art. For it remains a question why the stabilization of artwriting’s forms took place through the linking of the category of “history” to that of “art” in the first place. The conceptual frame within which replicable procedures for investigating and writing about art might have been otherwise, prioritizing different aspects of the objects under scrutiny. And yet, what emerged was art history.¹⁵ In the pages that follow, I will be suggesting ways in which Botticelli was crucial to this formation, becoming the very figure of historicity for the emergence of the discipline. That he was so crucial gives us a key to understanding why historicity was taken to be art’s most important dimension—or at least that dimension which best opened itself to understanding and restatement in written form. Such writing could only take place within some experience of alienation (however faint or unconscious) from one’s “own” time. To live “in a historicizing... mood,” in Nietzsche’s sense, is to inhabit a pervasive sense of belatedness and unbelonging, for which Botticelli came to stand. It is to mark oneself, with acute self-consciousness, as falling out of step with time. Whatever else it may do, “history” gives a name to an uneasy intuition of temporal emplotment—a consciousness that I am at this place and time conditionally, pointing (or pointed) to some other, future way of life; and yet also half belonging to some anterior moment, some prior scene beyond my control, and in relation to which I have come too late. To inhabit history is to experience time as no longer “given,” no longer effortlessly lived, and to give such loss voice. To write it—to trace history’s features in works of art—is to formalize that feeling, lending it at least provisional, speakable stability.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1873), in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. David Breazeale, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 107.

¹⁴ Walter Pater, “A Fragment on Botticelli,” *The Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 8 (Aug 1870), 160.

¹⁵ On the discipline of art history’s systematic avoidance of such questions and the instabilities they open onto, see especially the writings of Georges Didi-Huberman: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l’image: Question posée aux fins d’une histoire de l’art* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps: Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000); and Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’image survivante: Histoire de l’art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002). I discuss *L’image survivante* in Chapter Four.

“Botticelli,” as I say, became the key figure for these vagaries of historical experience. We might understand his importance in terms of a peculiarly nineteenth-century entwinement of “personality” with history. It is striking that art’s history was so often, in practice, articulated through the complex historicity of singular artists—Leonardo, Lotto, Velázquez.¹⁶ This disciplinary habit has often been derided as a lingering romanticism, peddling in the mystifications of hero-worship. Certainly, this was partly true. Yet, so censorious an attitude risks ignoring the true strangeness of the symbiotic relation between personality and history—the extent to which, in the nineteenth century, they served as mutually disorienting categories of thought. In Botticelli, artwriters discovered an artist in productive tension with his age: embodying the conclusion of one moment of art, perhaps, or the inception of another, but also mapping out a field of affective possibilities—“strange, subtle and complicated”—that seemed utterly singular, belonging to no sensibility (no temporality) other than the artist’s own. And therefore belonging ultimately to “us.” For the force of Botticelli’s agency was measured by the long delay of its effects, and artists and writers were as fascinated by the artist’s idiosyncrasy as by his art’s uncanny forward reach. “Persons” of the kind that Botticelli was imagined to be only become part of history when their position in a specific social milieu is haunted by figures of displacement. To speak of an artist as out of sync with his or her age, or as only ever incompletely belonging to it, is to treat history as a concept organized around its interruptions, perhaps even around its exceptions. Botticelli’s very art seemed an anachronism, undoing its stable temporal position, its placement-at-a-distance in the past.¹⁷

There are various ways in which such paradoxes were registered by the figures I consider in the pages that follow. An essential one, to which I return again and again, was

¹⁶ Along these lines, see Gabriele Guercio’s exceptional study of the nineteenth-century artist’s monograph: Guercio, *Art as Existence: The Artist’s Monograph and its Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

¹⁷ In the recent study by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010)—regretfully, it appeared after the following chapters were written—the authors write of the “anachronic artifact” whose “relation to time is plural;” and of “the possibility of the work’s symbolic reach *beyond* the historical life-world that created—its ability to symbolize realities unknown to its own makers.” Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 9, 17. They see this as a structural feature of works of art, but one that was subjected to special reflection by artistic practice during the Renaissance. Nagel and Wood prefer the unusual (archaic) term “anachronic” to more common “anachronistic,” in order to avoid what they take to be its “judgmental” tone, which “carries with it the historicist assumption that every event and every object has its proper location within objective and linear time. From a historicist point of view, an artifact that has been unmoored from its secure anchorage in linear time and has drifted into an alien historical context is an ‘anachronism.’” *Ibid.*, 13. By contrast, the “anachronic artifact... does not depend for its effect on a stable conception of the historicity of form.” *Ibid.*, 14. These are thoughtful distinctions. (That “anachronic” itself was used during the nineteenth-century interchangeably with “anachronism” should not distract from their usefulness.) And yet, without fetishizing terminology, “anachronism” still seems to me preferable for approaching the paradoxical temporalities with which this dissertation is concerned—preferable precisely because it is *not* value-free. The descriptive power of “anachronism” resides precisely in its “minoritarian,” illegitimate air, pointing to artistic phenomena that do not so much float free from stable conceptions of historical time as run athwart them.

sexual. The vicissitudes of sexuality—a category of experience, an “intuitive” form of knowledge, a mode of relation that offers its shape to others—provided a primary means by which the instabilities of nineteenth-century subjects’ interaction with the past could be figured. It offered a supple and evocative vocabulary for experiences of unfixing and displacement: a form in which the fraught entwinements of personality and history could be most intensely imagined. Proximity to the excitements of visual experience; the heightening of sensual experience and of the senses’ self; access to the worlds of complex pleasures depicted in picturing’s past; the possibility of making such pleasures “mine”—these could be rendered vivid in the language of erotic experience. But along with these terms come a counterpoising set of possibilities: of disappointment and unpleasure, of a fractured relation to the world, perhaps even the complete undoing of the self. These valences of the sexual became a way of staging both suture and painful separation between past and present, flesh and paint. And once so staged, they became open to various forms of consolidation and taming. Looking at Botticelli, the dubious satisfactions of self-discipline could start to take hold. Repression could begin its endless, necessary work. The result was a set of exaggerated and self-reflexive interactions between the verbal and the visual that gives us special insight into this culture’s paradoxical sense of art as an embodiment of the past—a sense whose complexities continue to inform our own.

* * *

This dissertation is divided into four chapters.

Chapter One, “What Does Botticelli Look Like?” considers the “visual culture” of Botticelli at the end of the nineteenth century. It offers an account of the ways in which British painting, between c.1865 and c.1900, drew on the work of Botticelli (consciously and unconsciously) in order to picture its own artistic modernity. Beginning with a painting by Simeon Solomon—I suggest it is the first “Botticellian” painting in late-modern Europe—the chapter considers the influence that Botticelli’s style asserted on late Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Movement artworks by figures such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Spencer Stanhope, and Walter Crane. The modern figure of “Botticelli” was first produced within this complex artistic milieu. In particular, I attend to these artists’ responses to the peculiar ambivalence of Botticelli’s position within art’s history, somehow embodying both the “early” and the “late.” The chapter suggests ways in which such complexities could become the later nineteenth century’s own.

Chapter Two, “Ruskin, Pater, and the Pastness of Art,” explores the treatment Botticelli received, beginning in 1870, in the paradigmatic texts of Walter Pater and John Ruskin. Ruskin and Pater wrote the first and most important modern accounts of Botticelli’s art. Through close analysis of their writings, I seek to bring into focus the distinctiveness of their approaches. In both cases, the close description of pictures opens onto affective and finally ethical paradigms, offering up novel ways of being in the world. Moreover, I suggest the ways in which Ruskin and Pater attempted to work out the parameters of a historical criticism—understood in idiosyncratic, Hegelian terms by Pater, and even more mysteriously personal ones by Ruskin—within which Botticelli’s anachronistic achievement could make sense. As for the painters, Botticelli appeared to

Ruskin and Pater as a kind of historical shifter. Through their writings, this peculiar historicity began to seem an essential aspect of the artist's work. Positively or negatively, their accounts would orient all those that followed.

Chapter Three, "Connoisseurship, Painting, and Personhood," takes up the question of the consolidation of Botticelli's artistic identity, focusing on the "scientific" connoisseurship of Giovanni Morelli and his disciple Bernard Berenson. It especially concerns Berenson's invention of a new "artistic personality"—a novel kind of artistic agent—in the vicinity of Botticelli in 1899. Berenson proposed to name "Amico di Sandro" as the author of a scattering of late fifteenth-century Italian paintings previously divided between Botticelli and his student Filippino Lippi; the only evidence for his existence was Berenson's own eye. In attending to Berenson's invention of this novel figure, the chapter ultimately explores the paradox whereby definition of the figure of the follower, whose style can never be his own, might describe the work of the master, rendering his achievement "whole."

Chapter Four, "Against Aestheticism," turns to the writings of Aby Warburg, who submitted his doctoral thesis on Botticelli in 1891, and of Herbert Horne, the author of the seminal 1891 monograph on the artist. It argues that the achievements of their scholarly reconstruction of Botticelli can best be understood as reaction-formations against the artist's late nineteenth-century cult. More specifically, their writings should be understood as moments of *self*-discipline. For rather than refusals of some repulsive "other," their reaction against the aesthetes, in its very extremity, must be seen as an abjection of intimate parts of themselves. In his description of a learned quattrocento social milieu, Warburg provides a displaced description of the networks of citation and appreciation which made up the cult of Botticelli. Horne (who had closer biographical associations with aestheticism) seems concerned to tame the emotional aspects of aesthetic appreciation by way of the austere and seamless descriptive texture of his monograph itself. Through these writers, a scholarly Botticelli was founded on a dynamics of repression—and constituted in the repressed's perpetual return.

Finally, a brief conclusion surveys the cult of Botticelli's various ends, suggesting several aspects of this complex tradition's unexpected afterlife within the more thoroughly policed and self-censoring field of twentieth-century art historical writing.

Chapter One: What Does Botticelli Look Like?

*A pleasure shared by artists, collectors, and historians alike is the discovery that an old and interesting work of art is not unique, but that its type exists in a variety of examples spread early and late in time, as well as high and low upon a scale of quality, in versions which are antetypes and derivatives, originals and copies, transformations and variants. Much of our satisfaction in these circumstances arises from the contemplation of a formal sequence, from an intuitive enlargement and completion in the presence of a shape in time.*¹ – George Kubler

This chapter investigates the place of Botticelli in later Pre-Raphaelite art—though to speak of “place” here is perhaps already to get things wrong. “Placelessness” would better capture the fugitive intensity, everywhere and nowhere at once, that characterized Botticelli’s reemergence at the end of the nineteenth century. The connection between Pre-Raphaelite painting and interest in Botticelli is well established. “[P]eople have begun to find out the charm of Botticelli’s work,” Walter Pater wrote already 1870, “and his name is quietly becoming important.”² If Pater’s text marks the beginning of Botticelli as a textual figure, the artist was on the minds of visual artists throughout the previous decade. Painters discussed him in their studios in the 1860s, and Edward Burne-Jones noticed his works in Italy as early as 1859. On visual evidence alone, the mature work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and their associates seem to form a matrix for the taste in Botticelli—languorous expressions, the rustle of early-modern drapery, endless, fetishistic profusions of hair. Moreover, the stylistic historicism and eclecticism that characterized this painting—its wistful, self-conscious primitivism—also possess an elective affinity with the peculiarities of Botticelli’s historical position and style.

It would be a mistake, however, to take such painting merely as a screen through which Botticelli became visible. These artists engaged with Botticelli actively, making deliberate and highly self-aware reference to his works, and turning them to modern ends. They did not simply come to “see” the quattrocento artist’s paintings, but rather sought to engage them in some trans-historical collaboration. In the face of so active a stance, we would do better to speak of the *construction* of Botticelli than of his recovery. Moreover, adding another layer of complexity to this peculiar process, such actions did not always occur on a fully conscious level. For every direct citation of Botticelli as a source within the corpus of late Pre-Raphaelite and Aestheticist painting, an attentive viewer can find a dozen fleeting Botticellian “moments” or effects, in which aspects of his art seem to pass like a shadow over parts of a later picture, lending them strangeness and depth.

Such depth was borrowed from the peculiar historicity of Botticelli’s paintings themselves. Botticelli came to hold (partly due to these painterly replications themselves) a temporally ambivalent position within the nineteenth-century view of early modern

¹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962), 45.

² Walter Pater, “A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli,” *The Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 8 (August 1870): 155.

Italian art. Was Botticelli still a primitive, a true “pre-Raphaelite,” belonging to the religious and sentimental refinements of a quaint, unself-conscious late-medieval world? Or should he be seen as belated, already troubled by modernity, enigmatic in relation to the clarities of the tradition from which he stems? That Botticelli could be seen to be both made up the essence of his special availability—his imitability—for the late Victorians. Insecurely fixed to his “own” historical moment, Botticelli became available for nineteenth-century painting’s use, and to such an extent that he came to belong as much, if not more, to this later moment, long after his death.

In order to give such complexity its due, this chapter proceeds peripatetically, moving from one artist to another in an attempt to register both the variety and intricacy of the responses Botticelli elicited. Certain themes nonetheless recur. Botticelli emerges again and again for these artists as a catalyst of self-consciousness, necessitating the situation of the self within art’s history. Throughout, I also try to bring into focus the kinds of social life that Botticelli was used to imagine. In these artists’ hands, his works again and again seemed to open onto novel forms of community set free of the past, as if the paintings themselves embodied a set of social and aesthetic possibilities that their admirers might be able to set in motion again. Just as often, that situation promised no stability. Again, questions stage the predicament best: Was the wish to take up Botticelli merely an archival impulse, a scavenging over dead forms? Or were they to understand themselves as somehow continuing Botticelli’s work in the present, tapping into a still-living root of his style?

Such quandaries are hinted at by Herbert Horne in the introduction to his 1908 monograph on the artist. Before he begins his own account Botticelli, Horne feels it necessary to offer a brief history of Botticelli’s reception, as much to disentangle the artist from his modern reputation as anything else. Polemically, Horne associates the cult of Botticelli with the very worst of the “school-pictures...in which the imitators of Botticelli exaggerate his mannerisms, in the attempt to reproduce that peculiar sentiment which is inseparable from his personality and art.”³ (He had in mind paintings like the National Gallery’s *Madonna and Child with Saint John and Angles* [fig. 3], with which the Pre-Raphaelites were intimately familiar.) The misrecognition of such derivative works as authentic parts of Botticelli led both critics and artists astray:

[I]t was but natural that the bizarre vein of feeling, and the obvious, though very real, decorative qualities of such school-pieces, should appeal strongly to a time when an art, chiefly pre-occupied with detached ornament which had no direct relation to architecture, and with detached sentiment which had no direct relation to actual life,—for such essentially was the art of Morris and Burne-Jones—was all the vogue.⁴

Horne imagines reciprocity between the excesses of Botticelli’s followers early and late. He thus damns the artist’s late nineteenth-century admirers twice over. They are like Botticelli’s immediate imitators in their lifeless exaggeration of his forms, evaporating

³ Herbert Horne, *Botticelli, Painter of Florence* (1908; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), xix.

⁴ Horne, *Botticelli*, xix-xx.

human significance and submitting ornament to vapid elaboration. Yet, even these affectations are derived at second hand: imitating not Botticelli himself but his weakest students, late nineteenth-century artists are set at an even further remove from the artistic achievement they profess to admire.

Horne's text also raises the question of what could be recognized as "of" Botticelli in the period. As Michael Levey notes in reference to an erstwhile "Botticelli" now in the New York Historical Society (**fig. 4**), in the earlier part of the nineteenth century the artist's name "might be applied to anything really old and odd-looking."⁵ In a sense, however, there is hardly anything less odd about the collector William Graham's appreciation for Rossetti's bizarre *La Ghirlandata* (1873, **fig. 5**) towards the century's end. Requesting a companion to this recently acquired work, he wrote to the dealer Charles Augustus Howell: "let it be a fair beautiful woman as like Botticelli as possible, for this one is exactly like Botticelli, and if R will only paint me pictures of this class I will buy nothing else but his, and any old master you can get me."⁶ Graham was no fool. All evidence points to the refinement of his passion and expertise. One of Rossetti's and Burne-Jones's most important patrons, he also amassed an important and idiosyncratic selection of old master paintings, mainly from the Italian quattrocento. Burne-Jones, at one point, took his taste to be "infallible," and, as the remarks about Rossetti already quoted would suggest, this had everything to do with the combination of the painting of the present and that of the past.⁷ Indeed, as a patron, Graham worked to secure in the paintings he commissioned the very sort of historical intermixing he arranged along his home's wall, lending, sometimes even giving, key quattrocento paintings to his favorite artists so they might inspired to make kindred works.⁸

Graham's experience of Rossetti and Botticelli as "exactly like," then, represents a highly specialized set of perceptions. What exactly could he have meant? What did he see in Rossetti's picture that reproduced the quattrocento master's work? *La Ghirlandata* metaphorizes aesthetic pleasure as a combination of nature and artifice, the sexual and the celestial, overlaid with melancholy—"all shadowed," as his brother William Michael Rossetti wrote, "by mortal doom."⁹ Certain works by Botticelli come to mind, of course: the integration of bodies with vegetation is reminiscent of the *Primavera* (though Rossetti knew it only from reproductions), and the faces of his angels recall attendant figures in

⁵ Michael Levey, "Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 3-4 (July-December 1960): 296.

⁶ Gail Weinberg, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Ownership of Botticelli's 'Smeralda Brandini,'" *Burlington Magazine* 146 (January 2004): 26. William Graham (1817-1885) was one of the late Pre-Raphaelites' most important patrons, and probably their most sensitively attuned collector. On Graham, see Olivier Garnett, "The Letters and Collection of William Graham—Pre-Raphaelite Patron And Pre-Raphael Collector," *The Walpole Society* 62 (2000): 145-343.

⁷ As Burne-Jones wrote to Graham's daughter seven years after his death: "I used to think one could use no other word but genius for his perception and instinct for painting. It was infallible. He was never wrong," Garnett, "William Graham," 165.

⁸ Graham lent two "Mantegnas" to Burne-Jones (who had encouraged Graham's enthusiasm for the painter in the first place), and gave Burne-Jones his "Botticelli," a work now at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

⁹ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London: Cassell & co., 1899), 87.

any number of Botticelli's famous tondos (**fig. 6**). Yet, if present, such prototypes have been submitted to radical re-organization. In *La Ghirlandata*, the legibility of pictorial space ceases, strangely, to exist. The cropping of the angels' bodies only draws attention to the unlocatedness of the woman herself. She seems to coalesce from the green surfaces surrounding her, an eerie figure emerging from a lush, unmotivated profusion. If her face and fingers suggest the availability of pleasure, that pleasure stands groundless, floating in the picture's no-space, and attached to a figure that makes little sense. The base of her prodigious, serpentine neck refuses to recede into virtual space, rendering the body uncanny and unreal, a fleshy expanse of paint that hovers on the far side of recognizable form. Fluttering, "Botticellian" drapery distracts from the exaggeration.

The picture depends upon a structure of internal repetition. In its three figures, we seem to see various orientations of the same face. I take this as evidence of Rossetti's self-conscious relation to past painting. It is as if re-doing "Botticelli" only once could not be enough, as if the principle of replication entailed its own continuation. This, too, may have been an aspect of the work to which Graham warned. Resemblance requires a series of like configurations, and for a mind attuned to its recognition, such internal signs of seriality could only bring increased pleasure. Throughout this chapter, my understanding of the later Pre-Raphaelites' engagement with Botticelli is oriented by George Kubler's discussion of what he calls "serial appreciation," from which I draw my epigraph. The concept usefully draws together pictorial replication and aesthetic appreciation, implying similarities in their structure: Kubler shows, in effect, how one mode of engagement might be staged as the other. There are real differences here, of course: it can prove crucial to pursue the specificities of picturing that set it apart from mere appreciative looking. For my purposes, however, the overlap helps bring into focus the continuities between attitudes to Botticelli embodied in the actual work of replication—the pictorial rethinking of a cherished prototype—and those put forward by the art-writing that followed in the painters' wake. "Contemplation of a formal sequence," to use Kubler's phrase, might occur in pictures, in texts, or in their interaction. To replicate Botticelli—to set him self-consciously in a series—was a way to situate oneself in relation to him, and thus also to "write" his history.

This helps account for the sense of belatedness hovering about Rossetti's picture. If we see Botticelli in *La Ghirlandata* at all is, it is through layer upon layer of intervening art. Its sensuality seems to belong a later moment of painting, perhaps to the Venetian painters of the High Renaissance, whose eroticism Rossetti had spent much of the preceding decade making his own. *La Ghirlandata* is a self-conscious achievement of stylistic anachronism. Perhaps this was also what Graham meant by "exactly like." For him, as for the artists who were his friends, Botticelli's paintings were uncannily modern, belonging to their own late nineteenth-century moment as much as to the historical quattrocento. Contrary to Horne, these figures took Botticelli to be *in his essence* the distribution of a set of effects—a distribution continuing to spread across time. These attitudes developed in relation to notions of Botticelli's own lateness, which I have alluded to above. Painters like Rossetti gravitated towards Botticelli's sophistication, and his almost mannered stylization of earlier quattrocento painting. Botticelli emerged as a figure for an anachronistic mixing of styles—a mirror, in this, of a certain late Pre-Raphaelite ideal. This recognition played out differently for different artists. Each had his or her own version of the work Botticelli was to do. Yet, again and again, they turned to

him as a model of serial complexity and historical mobility, offering a painting always out of time.

Simeon Solomon

It was Simeon Solomon, a generation younger than Rossetti or Burne-Jones, who executed the first “Botticellian” painting of the nineteenth century. *Love in Autumn* (1866; **fig. 7**) depicts, as Solomon wrote to his patron Frederick Leyland, “Eros being blown by Autumn winds along a place of Cypresses near the Sea.”¹⁰ He painted the work during his first visit to Italy, in the fall and winter of 1866-67. The canvas is signed and dated “1866 Florence” amidst the detritus of fallen leaves in the lower left corner, marking the work’s connection to the city and perhaps suggesting the abjection of Solomon’s artistic self. A single androgynous figure stands hesitantly at its center, or perhaps stumbles forward on ground his feet barely touch. Love clasps a long swath of richly colored drapery to his throat as the wind whips it round his naked body with an energy and vehemence that the body itself lacks. He seems vulnerable to the elements, and yet also to stand somewhat apart. Solomon has given us just enough indication of setting for us to register the figure’s obliviousness. The feminized features of his youthful face seem abstracted further still, absorbed in some hypnotic state, as if Love cannot see the nearby shore, the swaying cypress trunks, the leaves blown up from the bare, rocky ground, or feel against his body the blast of autumn wind.

This sense of abstraction hinges on *Love in Autumn*’s direct reference to Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (**fig. 8**). Solomon’s painting centers itself on an act of citation, with a self-reflexivity both deliberate and awkward. Dyed deeply in its source, the painting makes its prototype so intrinsic to its effect that *Love in Autumn* seems to sacrifice its own autonomy as a work of art. The painting never lets us forget its own secondariness. The *Birth of Venus* seems to hover at the edge of every aspect of *Love in Autumn*’s configuration, making itself felt as a kind of absence—a deep, inconsolable lack—robbing the picture of its intensity and presence.

Such figurations of dependence are characteristic of Solomon’s work, and it is partly a matter of biographical accident that has kept their importance from being explored. The scandal of Solomon’s 1873 arrest for sodomy has until recently kept scholars from recognizing the centrality of Solomon’s achievement to the development of Aestheticist and Symbolist painting,¹¹ and we still have no full account of the reciprocal

¹⁰ Undated letter to Frederick Leyland, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Colin Cruise, *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* (London and New York: Merrell, 2005), 145. Leyland was an important collector of Whistler, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones—and also of Botticelli.

¹¹ His obscurity began early, when his immediate circle of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Swinburne abandoned him. For important recent studies of Solomon, see Gayle Seymour “The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1986); Cruise, *Love Revealed*; Whitney Davis, “The Image in the Middle: John Addington Symonds and Homoerotic Art Criticism,” in *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1999), 188-216; and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2007).

circuitry of appreciation and emulation that bound Solomon to his older colleagues.¹² Part of their interest in Solomon must have been their seeing aspects of themselves in the young artist's designs, an affinity Solomon himself pursued with remarkable self-consciousness.¹³ He was an artist peculiarly attuned to the question of "influence." Take for instance, a satirical drawing from Solomon's youth (**fig. 9**) (It must date to the late 1850s, around the same time as his sardonic text, "The PRB Catechism for the Use of Disciples of that School" of 1859.) In a studio space crowded with canvases, models, animals, disapproving elders, and the artist's sorrowful wife, Solomon's aspiring Pre-Raphaelite stands absorbed. In one stiff hand he holds palette, in the other he clutches a volume of Ruskin to the breast of his archaic jacket. Out of the artist's eyes, as if pulling them apart, emerge two perfectly geometric cones of vision, each branded with the initials of the first Pre-Raphaelite brothers—John Everett Millais on one cone-cap, William Holman Hunt on the other, Dante Gabriel Rossetti spread across both. The strange visual device equivocates: are we to understand the young artist's vision as intromissive—a taking-in of the work of these older painters that blinds him to his surroundings? Or is it extromissive, a dislocating projection of "J.E.M. / D.G.R. / W.H.H." onto the world at large? Note, too, that what Solomon's artist sees is writing: he metaphorizes the abstraction from reality as a shift from the pictorial to the linguistic, staging the otherness of his optical world.¹⁴ In a way, we cannot help but take the work as autobiographical. It offers early evidence of Solomon's conception of himself as secondary, as perceiving the world only through the screen of cherished predecessors—seeing, in effect, only them.

Such self-consciousness fulfils itself as Solomon turns to Botticelli. The association of Botticelli with the cultural dialectic of "Hebrew" and "Hellene," so crucial to late-Victorian intellectual life, took on a deeply personal dimension in Solomon's work. A member of England's most prominent family of Jewish painters, Solomon's turn to hybrid subjects, and to a painter who worked both in Christian and classical modes, could not help but be over-determined.¹⁵ (Solomon's depictions of scenes from the Hebrew bible and of Jewish ritual were early vehicles for his dreamy Aestheticist vision.)

¹² From a remarkably early age, he seemed to have served as a kind of cult figure for the artists gathered around Rossetti. For additional accounts of Solomon's Pre-Raphaelitism, see Cruise, *Love Revealed*; Steven Kolsteren, "Simeon Solomon and Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 2, no. 2 (May 1982): 35-48; and Roberto C. Ferrari, "To the Rossettis from the Solomons: Five Unpublished Letters," *Notes and Queries* 52, no. 1 (March 2005): 70-75.

¹³ As George Price Boyce wrote in his diary on 7 April 1857: "Went to [Abraham] Solomon's, saw some remarkable designs by his younger brother showing much Rossetti-like feeling." Boyce, *The Diaries of George Price Boyce*, ed. Virginia Surtees (Norwich: Old Watercolour Society, 1980), 17.

¹⁴ A more forceful interpretation might see in the initials a casting of Pre-Raphaelite painting as "textual"—as semantically rich objects to be "read." On this aspect of Pre-Raphaelite art, see principally Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), and David Peters Corbett, "'Not Material Enough for the Age': Pre-Raphaelite Words and Images," in *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914* (Manchester: Manchest Univ. Press, 2004), 37-82.

¹⁵ On the cultural moment, see the classic study David J. DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969).

What interests me is the intricacy with which such over-determination played itself out as a matter of picturing, and was thereby made available to others. In a sense, Solomon's characteristic compositional moves became so powerfully associated with the quattrocento artist that to engage the one was to engage the other, as if these modern techniques of incorporation were part of Botticelli's painting itself.

In the first place, these might be described in terms of compositional and thematic reversal. Where Botticelli shows us the foliage of springtime, in *Love in Autumn* we see October's desiccated leaves. Dawn has turned to dusk, and the panoply of dynamic figures in the *Birth* has dwindled to one. Most blatantly, where those figures rush with the wind towards the right, to be met by an attendant with robe at the ready, Solomon's Eros mournfully shuffles leftward, the cold wind at his back. Solomon seems to present us with some composite figure riven by internal contradictions, unable to come together as a convincing whole. When the painting was exhibited in 1872, critics were consistently troubled by the orientation of Love's legs.¹⁶ They are peculiar. Colin Cruise has ingeniously suggested that the strangeness may stem from the figures source in the *Birth*'s winged Zephyr, whose robes billow round his body, and whose legs, of course, bear no weight.¹⁷ This connection can be extended. Notice that the position of Eros's legs also echo, perhaps even more emphatically, that of Venus's legs in Botticelli's painting—the feet especially—as if her figure had been rotated in virtual space. Indeed, the longer one looks, the more points of contact become evident. It is as if *The Birth of Venus* presented a space of fantastic realization, in which Solomon imagines moving round the depicted body—perhaps even being *in* that body—fleshing out the two-dimensional configuration into three-dimensional form. Love's strange inconsistency, then, would be a matter of pictorial condensation. His wings remain in the position the Zephyr's hold in Botticelli's painting, as though they could not be made fully his. Like Venus, Love stands just off center, staring blankly and closing his arms around his body in a gesture of self-protection and sensual awakening. Like the receiving nymph at the *Birth*'s right, rushing forward to cover the goddess, Solomon's figure wraps his own body as if mourning a companion.

Solomon has combined all the actors of *The Birth of Venus* into a single, composite figure, as if *Love in Autumn* were haunted by compositional memories so strong that it could not be fully singular. In this, the painting evokes the deepest structures of fantastic incorporation. In their classic account, Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis describe the way in which mere daydreaming—fantasies which the subject inhabits in the first person—can open onto the more primal workings of “original fantasy,” which follows the implacable movements of primary psychic processes. Here, the subject identifies with—immolates itself in—the structure of the fantasy scenario itself. Such fantasies are characterized, Laplanche and Pontalis say, “by the absence of

¹⁶ The critic of *The Times* noted “failure...in the lower limbs, which look insufficient to support the figure of the red-mantled, sickly youth, who walks the bleak sea-shore through whistling wind and falling leaves.” *The Times*, 11 Nov 1872, 4; *The Athenaeum* scoffed at “defects...utterly incompatible with exalted fancy, to which nothing is more fatal than badly-drawn legs,” “The Winter Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures in Oil, Dudley Gallery.” *The Athenaeum* no. 2349 (2 Nov 1872): 569.

¹⁷ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 147.

subjectivization”: no longer a separate self, “the subject is present *in* the scene.”¹⁸ A child is being beaten; a father seduces a daughter: nothing fixes the “I” at any single point of characterization or action.¹⁹ “[T]he subject,” they write, “although always present in fantasy, may be so in a desubjectified form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question.”²⁰

In *Love in Autumn*, incorporation of the Botticellian “raw material” entails an identification not with any particular aspect of the prototype, but rather with its *structure as a whole*. Solomon’s complex figure is multiple, giving form to a simultaneous series of identifications—to the “multiple entries”—that constitute the formalized stasis of the fantasy scene. The painting’s primary sign of such multiplicity is Love’s ambiguous gender. The androgynous figure signals the complexity of the pictorial encounter. On the one hand, it remembers the combination of various figures within Botticelli’s painting (of which the double body of Zephyrs at the painting’s left would be the wildest form). On the other, it imagines the fantastic merging of painting with beholder—Solomon’s finding in *The Birth of Venus* another kind of “self.”²¹

Strikingly, *Love in Autumn* stages this process in terms of its spatial structure, tracing a kind of topology of fantasy-incorporation. I spoke earlier of a reversal of direction effected by Solomon’s painting, from the strong rightward movement of Botticelli’s *Birth* to a single figure moving leftward. But it would be more accurate to speak of a combination of opposing vectors here: Solomon depicts the figure of Love, effectively, twisting round on itself (think again of the turning inward of Venus’s legs). The body finds itself caught in a spiral described even more emphatically in the swirling of leaves and wrapping-round of the figure’s cloak. It is as if the painting’s composition were buckling in on itself, under the weight of its over-determination. Such a pictorial structure might be said to allegorize a suspension of the painting’s agency. *Love in Autumn* neither situates itself as an actor upon the painting of the past nor, it would seem, as a separate entity which the *Birth of Venus* might affect. It suspends itself between aggressive incorporation of the Botticellian referent and a fantasy of being itself swallowed up. As in the elusive grammar of “a child is being beaten,” so deeply tied to the structure of masochism in which agency drops away, we cannot locate Solomon’s practice in any single place.²²

¹⁸ Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49, no. 1 (1968): 13.

¹⁹ We are presented, Laplanche and Pontalis say, with “a scenario with multiple entries, in which nothing shows whether the subject will be immediately located as *daughter*; it can as well be fixed as *father*, or even in the term *seduces*.” Laplanche and Pontalis, “Fantasy,” 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ Solomon’s picturing of a position between genders was crucial in the iconographic development of a late nineteenth-century homoerotic visual culture. On Solomon’s importance here, see especially Davis, “The Image in the Middle,” and Cruise, *Love Revealed*. It is important to note that the figure of Botticelli is from the very beginning involved with this particular picturing of community.

²² It is interesting to note how the dynamics of such fantasy-structures have prolonged themselves—indeed, have been literalized—in wilder moments of critical response to the painting. As late as 1997, in a remarkably salacious exhibition catalogue entry, Christopher Newhall fleshes out these agentive peculiarities into a full-fledged scene of sadomasochistic

At its deepest and most coherent level, then, *Love in Autumn* develops and gives form to a fantasy of looking at Botticelli. It recapitulates, crystallizes, perhaps even mourns the plenitude of a particular visual experience. The form given to this recapitulation is knowingly inadequate. Solomon's painting stages not the untrammelled power of fantasy but, more profoundly, its ultimate impotence before external objects of desire. The most lurid of decadent descriptions applies. Writing retrospectively in 1929, Arthur Symons, attempted to capture peculiar affect of Solomon's late work:

These faces are without sex: they have brooded among the ghosts of passion till they have become the ghosts of themselves: the energy of virtue or of sex has gone out of them, and they hang in space, dry, rattling, the husks of desire.²³

Symons deftly evokes the second-order nature of Solomon's paintings. The "ghosts" of which Symons speaks are the pathetic forms of painted passion, the replications of which can only, in the end, feed on themselves (**figs. 10-11**). He seems attuned to the repetitive structure of Solomon's practice, the way in which the exhausted faces on which he looks themselves derive from whole series of predecessors in Solomon's art, and beyond that, antetypes in the art of others. Desire was in the first place for paintings of the past; all we are left with are its "husks," the detritus of an identificatory process long over.

perversion, engaging a mode of description as wild as anything the 1890s might have produced: "The figure of a cupid, naked except for a red drapery with which he attempts to shield himself, is buffeted by the cold winds of autumn. The sky is lit by the setting sun. Night, as well as winter, is approaching and the discomfort of the boy is apparent. Solomon, encouraged by Swinburne and the members of a circle of homosexuals with which he had become involved in the later 1860s, treated themes of sadism and the physical suffering of boys. *Love in Autumn* was much admired among this group, and Solomon presumably had it in mind when a year or two later he wrote to his friend Oscar Browning, a master at Eton, encouraging him to treat with particular cruelty a boy, Gerald Balfour, whom they both especially admired: 'Balfour should be beaten, he should be scourged with rods of iron, pray, my dear Oscar, beat him till the wings, which are latent in his should blades, sprout'. That the subliminal theme of the painting is one of flagellation is indicated by the straining trunks of an olive tree and a grove of cypresses in the background and by a menacing branch of twigs and leaves that seems to whip the boy as it is blown in the wind. Flurries of leaves fly past like flecks of blood." *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, ed. Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (London: Tate Publishing, 1997), 111-12.

²³ Arthur Symons, *From Toulouse Lautrec to Rodin* (London: John Lane 1929), 156. Symons had been thinking about Simeon Solomon since the late 1880s. In 1887, he wrote to Herbert Horne (already taken as something of an authority on the artist): "I knew nothing about him but his name, but the references to his pictures which I came across now and then in looking into old periodicals had made me curious about him, and when the other day at Manchester I saw half a dozen pictures of his in the Exhibition, I was so impressed with their beauty and originality, and a certain morbid grace they have, that I asked one or two people about the man, and finally got the lamentable story from [Havelock] Ellis. One cannot wonder that he has dropped out of sight, and foregone his future; but it is an infinite pity." Letter to Herbert Horne, 19 September 1887, in *Arthur Symons: Selected Letters, 1880-1935*, ed. Karl Beckson and John M. Munro (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press 1989), 30.

As I say, the interest of all this lies in the way such association and manners of approach seemed to meld with their object, becoming part of the texture of Botticelli's rediscovery—or even of “Botticelli” himself. It was not just the fact of Solomon's acts of citation that proved important but their specific form. That fact mattered, of course: Solomon had strong social connections with many of the artist and writers we most associate with Botticelli in the period—Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Walter Pater, and even Herbert Horne. (Indeed, Pater and Horne were among the few friends who refused to abandon Solomon after his disgrace, and Horne became one of Solomon's most important patrons at the end of his life.) Yet the forms such appreciation took proved even more indelible. The dialectic of Christian and Classical subjects; the self-conscious staging of identification and fantasy; the mournful theatrics of historical self-situation; the setting of seriality—of “serial appreciation”—in motion: these are the very stuff of Botticelli's rediscovery. Already its lineaments were coming into view.

Edward Burne-Jones

Inter-pictorial reference was the lifeblood of Solomon's art. More than to any other artist, this fact made its way to Edward Burne-Jones. His own artist whose own interest in Botticelli was longstanding. As noted, he had already fallen under Botticelli's spell during his first trip to Italy in 1859, copying various motifs from paintings in Florence into a notebook now in Cambridge. No doubt Burne-Jones played a crucial role in the discussions of Botticelli that took place in artists' studios of the 1860s. We have later evidence of the kinds of effects to which he warmed. In 1876, he sent a series of letters to Agnes Graham (daughter of his patron William Graham, already mentioned) detailing the sights she should search out on her trip to Italy. He turns again and again to Botticelli. “I once found,” he writes, “a Botticelli [**fig. 12**] not mentioned anywhere in a nunnery chapel at the end of Via della Scala.... and it is a coronation of the Virgin & has heaven & earth in it just as they are, heaven beginning about 6 inches over the tops of our heads, as it really does. It was terribly neglected & ruined & stuffed up with candles which I took the British liberty of removing...”²⁴ Or even more specifically:

I do want to see things so much, living & painted.—I want to see the Calumny in the Uffizi dreadfully today. & the Spring in the Belle Arte, and the dancing choir that goes hand in hand up in heaven over the heads of four old men in that same dear place [**fig. 13**—you know them all by now—and if those angels are photographed will you buy them for me? At the back of the Virgin the rays of gold rain on a most dear face that looks up, and I want to see it....[A]nd in the Pitti a Botticelli where the Virgin holds down a dear little face to kiss another fat face—& no one is like him & never will be again—”²⁵

²⁴ Francis Russell, “Advice for a Young Traveler from Burne-Jones: Letters to Agnes Graham, 1876,” *Apollo* 108 (December 1978): 425.

²⁵ Russell, “Advice,” 425-6.

However fragmentary, such evidence of Burne-Jones's careful looking and detailed memory is precious. The angel's face that Burne-Jones singles out (**fig. 14**), also fixed on by Ruskin at about the same time (see Chapter Two), combines an expression of religious rapture with the jarring order of a decorative scheme. Its sweetness is set off by a kind of ornamental anguish. The angel is seen through the geometric striations that both heighten the expression's intensity and de-face it, cutting across the figure's delicate flesh.

This kind of heightened feeling, produced by strange conjunctions of the human body with the autonomy of ornament, lay at the heart of Burne-Jones's most characteristic effects. Caroline Arscott has described a polarization of history painting and the decorative in Burne-Jones's mature art. As she puts it, his work "stood as a melancholy meditation on the dying of history painting, which he figured as succumbing to the strongly desired forces of decoration."²⁶ In *The Briar Rose* series (1870-1890), for instance, "the possibility of figurative depiction and the representation of action are opposed to decorative art in which figuration, action and narrative surely disappear."²⁷ A master figure for this dynamic occurs in the visual metaphor of "grafting": Burne-Jones often depicts the human body literally succumbing to vegetative decorative schemes, melding the intensities of bodily pleasure and pain with the ornamented environment.²⁸

It seems unsurprising, then, that Burne-Jones would find himself drawn to similar moments in Botticelli's painting, or that he would draw on them as a source. For instance, the wan figure of Love in the oil painting *Chant d'Amour* (1868-77, **fig. 15**) seems to feel pleasure and anguish at the ornamental vines encircling his neck (**fig. 16**). Hovering round the edge of his clothes, they seem almost to spread under his skin, colonizing vulnerable flesh. (The leaves look as though might have been taken from a template for decorative art—off a page of Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856), almost.) In case we were to miss the connection, Burne-Jones repeats his point below, as a literally decorative figure, carved onto the organ's leg, succumbs to the plants that reach around him (**fig. 17**). Botticelli's paintings are full of such worrying at the boundary of natural and ornamental form. We might look to the *Primavera*, in which flowers seem to spill seamlessly into their decorative counterparts on Spring's dress (**fig. 18**); or, even closer, to the attendant nymph of *The Birth of Venus* and the foliage that plays at her throat (**fig. 19**).

Such moments of recall occur throughout Burne-Jones's work, in more or less meaningful form.²⁹ Indeed, within his lifetime, Burne-Jones was the artist most closely associated with Botticelli by critics, though they rarely approached the issue by way of

²⁶ Caroline Arscott, *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 27.

²⁷ Arscott, *Interlacings*, 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105-25.

²⁹ To take one example among many: the oil canvas depicting *The Hours* (1870-83; **fig. 20**), now at Sheffield, recalls in its compositions two "Botticelli" panels Burne-Jones would have known from the collection of Christ Church, Oxford (**figs. 21-22**). These depict the seated Sibyls, gesturing from their alcoves. Though now considered studio productions, at the times they were taken as works by the master—an attribution which no doubt helped secure that of the Sibyl engravings so dear to Ruskin, to which I return in Chapter Two.

specific echoes or moments of reference.³⁰ Rather, Burne-Jones was taken to be generally Botticellian in character. In a famous diatribe on “The New Renaissance; or, The Gospel of Intensity” (1880), for instance, Harry Quilter sought to diagnose the “morbid,” “sickly,” “hybrid pre-Raphaelitism” of the Aesthetic Movement, which had infected the age largely by way of Burne-Jones:

Perhaps the difference of spirit between Millais and Burne Jones in pre-Raphaelitism may be fairly likened to that between the art of Giotto and that of Botticelli, in which there is evident on the one side a loss of purpose and frankness of treatment, and, on the other, a growth of sumptuous colour and detail, and the substitution of over refinement and sweetness of expression for the vivid energy of the older painter.³¹

For Quilter, the primary sign of stylistic decadence was the breakdown of boundaries of gender. Once again, Botticelli was associated with androgyny:

One curious resemblance to Botticelli which belongs to Mr. Burne Jones’s work may indeed just be noticed in passing, which is the assimilation of the types of male and female; it is difficult, if not impossible to tell, in many instances, in either painter’s work, the sex of the person represented.³²

The suppression of sexual difference tropes a profounder “loss of purpose” for art. Rather than a coherently masculine staging of avant-garde “force,” turning its back on all that is dead in tradition, Aestheticist art falls into a feminized world of “manners.”³³ It results in a kind of hybrid artistic monster—androgynous, full of “refined and weary cynicism,” embodying a “sad, weary, hopeless beauty” that seems equal parts Botticelli and Burne-Jones.³⁴

By 1880, the accusation of androgyny had become a mainstay of Burne-Jones criticism. Ten years earlier, Tom Taylor, the critic of the *Times*, discussed what he took

³⁰ A number of factors may have been in critics’ fixation on Burne-Jones. Among them, I think, was the fact that the other principal Botticellians, Rossetti and Solomon, were unavailable to public view—Rossetti, because he largely refused to show in public; Solomon because of his 1873 disgrace.

³¹ Harry Quilter, “The New Renaissance; or, the Gospel of Intensity,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 42 (September 1880): 395.

³² Quilter, “New Renaissance,” 395. Quilter goes so far as to imagine this effeminate second-order production in terms of a lurid death of art: “[T]hough pre-Raphaelitism, in its pure and original form, has passed away, its dead carcass is still left with us, and is a source of corruption which cannot be too soon fully understood. The claims of the modern gospel, and the critical theories of pure sensuousness which are proclaimed so loudly just now, have their curiously unfitting root in the pre-Raph movement; and it strangely happens that the action taken by three or four clever art students, towards a reformation in art as healthy as it was needful, has ended in breeding phases of art and poetry, which embody the lowest theory of art-usefulness, and the most morbid and sickly art-results.” *Ibid.*, 392.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 398, 396.

to be a breakdown of compositional and gendered relations in Burne-Jones's *Phyllis and Demophoön* of 1870 (**fig. 23**), the last work he exhibited at the Watercolor society.³⁵

Taylor saw "no true or possible proportion between the trunk and limbs of the Demophoön; no true characterization of sex between the Demophoön and the Phyllis."³⁶ ("The idea of a love-chase, with a woman follower, is not pleasant," he added.)³⁷

The scene was the most directly Botticellian that Burne-Jones would ever depict. The watercolor shows the denouement of the story of Phyllis and Demophoön, which Burne-Jones knew both from Chaucer's "Legend of Goode Wimmen" and from Ovid's *Heroides*.³⁸ While Demophoön, son of Theseus, is visiting the court of Thrace, the king's daughter, Phyllis, falls in love with him. On his departure, Demophoön pledges to come back; when he does not, Phyllis takes her own life and is metamorphosed into an almond tree. When Demophoön finally returns, he embraces the tree, releasing Phyllis who forgives him. So runs the story. We quickly see, however, that Burne-Jones in fact depicts something like its reverse. Rather than pressing against the tree, Demophoön recoils in alarm from its uncanny embrace. Encircled in the chilly grasp of Phyllis, who emerges impossibly from the almond tree, Demophoön struggles to escape, twisting his delicate body in order to look back—face nearly touching face—with an expression at once of guilt, enchantment, and fear. Phyllis's weird hold on her lover is reiterated twice: as a matter of surface organization, by Demophoön's tight squeeze between the picture's four edges, a suffocation made poignant by the partial reach of one hand beyond the picture's right frame; and within the painting's fictional space, by the limp drapery that entwines each of Demophoön's legs.

The watercolor's primary intertext makes Phyllis's embrace all the stranger. Burne-Jones directly recalls the rape of Chloris depicted at the right of Botticelli's *Primavera* (**fig. 24**). Here, Zephyr rushes down through the branches of the orange tree to grasp the nymph of spring by surprise. The embrace about to come seems also, in the *Primavera*, already to have occurred: flowers already spill from her frightened mouth, and she stands transformed into Flora—her future self—directly to the left. The moment of contact itself has been elided. Most strikingly, of course, Burne-Jones reverses the figures' gender, the pose of Demophoön in particular recalling that of Chloris. Like Solomon, Burne-Jones stages his partial inversion of gender (for something of the

³⁵ Burne-Jones resigned from the Society over the *furor* caused by his depiction of the male nude. He would not exhibit publicly again until the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877. It seems fitting that *Phyllis and Demophoön* was purchased by Frederick Leyland, who owned, as Alison Smith notes, several of the period's most important nudes—works such as Frederic Leighton's *Venus Disrobing* (1867), Albert Moore's *A Venus* (1869), and Rossetti's pastel *Venus Verticordia* (1868): see Smith, "The Pre-Raphaelite Nude," in *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, ed. Margaretta Frederick Watson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 86.

³⁶ *The Times*, 27 April 1870, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See the catalogue entry in Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 136-8. Burne-Jones seems to have favored Ovid as a source, a fact perhaps significant for understanding the melancholic intensity of the watercolor. The second letter of the *Heroides*, "Phyllis to Demophoön" spares nothing in its first-person portrayal of Phyllis as inconsolable.

feminine stays, giving Demophoön an androgynous air) in terms of the bodies' reversal and re-orientation. The figures are flipped around and brought onto a level.

Such compositional maneuvers are, of course, the bread and butter of replicative practice, current in Western artistic self-consciousness at least since Giulio Romano.³⁹ What gives them special intensity here, I think, is the way they manage to engage both Botticelli and the work of Solomon as well. A second reference to Botticelli helps make this clear. In turning and flipping the figures of Zephyr and Chloris, Burne-Jones also closes the gap between them, thus recalling Botticelli's other depiction of Zephyr in the *Birth of Venus* (fig. 25)—the very double-body that had proved so important to Solomon. As in the Botticelli, the faces here are pushed together, and Phyllis's grasp of Demophoön mirrors the female zephyr's hold on her companion. Once seen, the complexity of the compositional relations ramify, as point after point of connection—the identical position of Phyllis's and the wind-god's head, the emphatic rightward movement, the fluttering of hair and drapery—come into focus. The “accessories in motion” are particularly reminiscent of Solomon. I cannot help but see the garment encircling Demophoön's thigh (which has no real impetus in the painting's fiction) as a ghostly reminder of *Love in Autumn*'s twisting cloak. Note, too, that just as Phyllis's head repeats Zephyr's, Demophoön's is set at an angle identical to that of Love.⁴⁰

In the face of an intertextual palimpsest so dense and carefully managed, it seems no coincidence that Burne-Jones's most directly Botticellian composition—the one that motivates the reference most explicitly—would set itself also in relation to Solomon. Even given his long-standing appreciation of the quattrocento artist, Burne-Jones seems to be making great efforts to see Botticelli *through* Solomon's painting—to engage with the one painter by way of another, more proximate example of turning back. As in Solomon, the position of Botticelli's figures are repeated and reconfigured as a space of fantasy. Identification is made mobile, several scenarios are condensed, and the viewer experiences a kind of pathos-ridden oscillation between moments of the composition's self-assertion and self-loss, as *Phyllis and Demophoön* fails to make its prototypes fully its own. Like *Love in Autumn*, particular motifs within Botticelli's paintings become scripts to be acted out, imagined as if from the inside. This becomes a way to rethink Solomon's practice, too. Like Solomon, Burne-Jones takes Botticelli as an impetus to identification, and that very opening of the prototype to the work of fantasy serve to assert modernity *within* the replication of the “antique.” And yet, in the case of Burne-Jones, this seems motivated to slightly different ends. If, for Solomon, Botticelli provides the prototype for a reorganization of gendered identity, Burne-Jones reasserts some minimum of sexual difference—however scrambled its signs. Whatever deficiencies of distinction critics may have found, the figures of *Phyllis and Demophoön* remain two,

³⁹ For a classic account, see E. H. Gombrich, “The Style *all' antica*: Imitation and Assimilation,” in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 122-8.

⁴⁰ The close-pressed faces also connects *Phyllis and Demophoön* to Solomon's work—most obviously his depiction of *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene* (1864, fig. 26), but also an early Jewish subject, *Shadrac, Meshach and Abednego* (1863, fig. 27). And a few months before *Phyllis and Demophoön* was exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1870, Solomon showed his most iconic version of the motif at the Dudley Gallery, *The Sleepers and the One who Watcheth* (fig. 28).

rather than one. Burne-Jones pushes his figures towards androgyny, rather than fusing them. And as with their orientation towards some asymptote of gender, so with their engagement with narrative: the figures remain within the realm of meaningful action in order that we feel significance draining (drained) away. Botticelli provides a model according to which significant, heroic action might fold itself into a purely decorative surface. Here, as elsewhere in Burne-Jones's oeuvre, history painting subsists as its own negation.

The self-consciousness of Solomon's painting—its marking itself as secondary in relation to Botticelli's—is thus, effectively, doubled. In taking up Botticelli so directly, Burne-Jones seems to need also to account for this key prior moment in the history of Botticelli's reception, enacted by his friend. To look at Botticelli at all becomes an historiographic exercise. The referential structures of Aestheticism (discussed in more detail below) are prefigured in such acts of inter-pictorial artistic reference. More than that, however, we have a precursor of the scholarly attitudes that would later try to distance themselves from the cult of Botticelli here operating to further Aestheticist appreciation itself. To speak of Botticelli, for figures like Horne or, before him, John Addington Symonds, necessitated a telling of the history of the artist's reception. Horne, as we have seen, needed to give an account of the artists and writers that came before him; Symonds, too, refers to Burne-Jones in order to move on.⁴¹ Some version of this dynamic is already at work here. In order to subsume Botticelli into the workings of his own style, Burne-Jones needed to attend to the source as already somehow hybrid—half modern, half antique. The anachronistic impulse needed already to be there.

The period's most interesting criticism recognized this aspect of Burne-Jones's practice. His general affinity with Botticelli was often taken to be a matter of such mixing. In an obituary, M.H. Spielman spoke of Mantegna and Botticelli together as Burne-Jones's "chief masters."⁴² And as early as 1871, the critic and enthusiast of Botticelli Sidney Colvin spoke of Burne-Jones as a kind of bridge between the quattrocento and the modern: "no one," he writes, "at all adequately acquainted with the English art of to-day, and acquainted at the same time with the great art of the expiring Middle Age and early Renaissance in Italy, would dispute the importance of the place held by Mr. Jones as a link of connexion and of resemblance between the two."⁴³ Such anachronistic combination proves a special theme of critics in France. Charles Blanc writes of *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1874): "The painter's Vivien seems to have been conjured by an incantation; she is like a figure by Mantegna, retouched and lovingly enveloped by the brush of Prud'hon"; Octave Maus in 1897 sees Burne-Jones's return to

⁴¹ Of Botticelli, Symonds writes: "For us he has an almost unique value as representing the interminglement of antique and modern fancy at a moment of transition, as embodying in some of his pictures the subtlest thought and feeling of men for whom the classic myths were beginning to live once more." Symonds then turns to the question of Botticelli's revival, mentioning Ruskin and, as exemplifying "the tendencies of our best contemporary art," the appreciation of Burne-Jones. See John Addington Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy: the Fine Arts* (1877; London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1901), 181.

⁴² M. H. Spielman, "In Memoriam, III: Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart.," *The Magazine of Art* 21 (1898): 528.

⁴³ Sidney Colvin, "English Painters of the Present Day: III.—Edward Burne Jones," *The Portfolio* 2 (1870): 17.

styles of the past less a matter of imitation than “an analogous way of thinking, feeling and seeing—the transposing of the modern artist to a chosen land, at a time when it was silently reliving the days of its forgotten past.”⁴⁴

The summa of this critical mode can be found in the writings of Burne-Jones’s acquaintance Robert de La Sizeranne, the interpreter and translator of Ruskin.⁴⁵ In *La peinture anglaise contemporaine* (1895), Sizeranne honed the Symbolist/Decadent interest in Burne-Jones’s anachronism to a fine critical point; his subtle treatment of Burne-Jones’s Botticellianism is worth quoting at length. For more explicitly than in other texts, Sizeranne portrays Burne-Jones’s achievement of a characteristic style as paradoxically dependent on a synthesis of quattrocento prototypes:

When he returned to London [from Italy], he discarded all imitations and former limitations, and definitely fixed his own style. Such as he was then he will be to the last. Henceforward he draws inspiration plainly from Botticelli and Mantegna. Far from making any mystery of it, he filled his rooms with reproductions of these two masters, as Turner loved to show a Claude Lorrain beside his own works. From Botticelli he took his type of female beauty, such as you see it in the fresco of the “Nozze de Tornabuoni,” on the staircase of the Louvre; the eyes rather round, the cheek-bones forced into prominence by the hollowness of the lower part of the face, a slightly turned up nose, a full sensual mouth rising close to the nostrils, a lengthened chin. From Mantegna he copied his elegant types of knights in armour so closely that, looking at his King Cophetua kneeling before the beggar maid he is to make his queen, he might be Francesco de Gonzague [sic] kneeling before he “Vierge de la Victoire,” in the collection of the Primitives in the Louvre.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Charles Blanc, *Les Beaux-Arts a l’Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris: Renouard, 1878): 335; and Octave Maus, “Burne-Jones,” *L’Art Moderne*, 28 June 1897, 205; both quoted in Laurence des Cras, “Edward Burne-Jones and France,” in Wildman and Christian, *Burne-Jones*, 33, 34.

⁴⁵ Just prior to his extremely influential *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), Sizeranne also wrote an important account of later Pre-Raphaelite painting, *Le Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (Paris: Hachette, 1895). Both books were quickly translated into English. On Sizeranne’s Ruskinism, see Stephen Bann, “Robert de La Sizeranne, médiateur de Ruskin et de la peinture anglaise,” in *Relire Ruskin*, ed. by Fabrice Douar and Matthias Waschek (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2003), 103-19. I also wish to thank Prof. Bann for sharing his unpublished entry on Sizeranne for the *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, and for speaking with me about the critic in Bristol, September 2007.

⁴⁶ Robert de la Sizeranne, *English Contemporary Art* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1898), 222-23. Sizeranne’s example is well chosen. *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1880-84; **fig. 29**) had caused a sensation at the Exposition Universelle of 1887, marking Burne-Jones’s full entry into the French artistic imagination. (The way had already been prepared by the favorable criticism *The Beguiling of Merlin* had received at the Exposition Universelle of 1878). Part of the painting’s appeal no doubt lay in the directness of the Mantegna that Sizeranne mentions (**fig. 30**). If *Phyllis and Demophoön* is Burne-Jones at his most Botticellian, *King Cophetua* shows him referring if anything more directly to Mantegna.

The painting has also been ingeniously connected to Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars* (**fig. 41**) in the National gallery, as if Burne-Jones had turned Botticelli’s painting on its side, rearranging

In the turn to Botticelli, Sizeranne sees something both more specific and less definable, taking us to the heart of Burne-Jones's sentimental immersion in art of the past:

He goes boldly to the Florentines for the secret of their grace of body. He takes their faces and into these renascent, vigorous, almost classical faces, this Northerner breathes the fatalistic, melancholy, pessimistic spirit of Byron. He entombs these Italians, made for merriment, and changes them into the gloomy companions of Merlin. He has Swinburne's verses recited to Donatello's statues. His figures have the muscles of the Renascentists and the gestures of the Primitives. The beauty is there, but it does not display itself; it seems almost to ignore and conceal itself. Botticelli weeps, Mantegna has the spleen, Burne-Jones is born to us.⁴⁷

Sizeranne deepens our sense of Burne-Jones as an artist most himself when he is incorporating the styles of others. His modernity comes about only through deep immersion in the past. Most interestingly, Sizeranne describes this anachronistic interlacing of styles as a kind of bringing art of the past to consciousness—giving it a decadent education, even. He thus situates Burne-Jones's historical self-consciousness as a relation to figures like Botticelli: a synthesis of self and other that establishes as well troubles artistic identity. His allusive style appears forceful yet ungrounded, individuated only as a function of its lack of “originality.” As layer upon layer of history pile up, Botticelli and Burne-Jones both seem to exist under erasure. We might, for instance, look to the way in which Michelangelesque musculature invades the bodies of Phyllis and Demophoön in *The Tree of Forgiveness* (1881-2, **fig. 31**), Burne-Jones's revision in oil of ten years later. Here the mixture of stylistic features seems to articulate the *history* of his style. The doubling of reference not only speaks to shifts in Burne-Jones's object choices, but also allows us a glimpse at his complex palimpsest of stylistic references, in which we see Botticelli “beneath” or “behind” the citation of later modes of art.

Spencer Stanhope's Discipleship

Within the expanding contours of Aestheticism, paintings such as Solomon's *Love in Autumn* (**fig. 7**) Walter Crane's *Renaissance of Venus* (**fig. 32**), and Spencer Stanhope's *Birth of Venus* (**fig. 33**) served to give that network itself the form of a “conversation” between paintings: a system of echoes increasingly dense with cross-reference. In certain

its components—the disarmed man, the staring woman, the two young attendants, the long reach of the lance—to fit a vertical frame. See the discussion in Andrea Wolk Rager, “Art and Revolt: The Work of Edward Burne-Jones” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009). Interesting as it is, the force and relevance of the identification can be overstated. For surely the interest of a possible allusion to Botticelli would lie in its *subordination* to the primary citation to Mantegna—Botticelli, that is, being seen only through the Mantegnesque schema, as a complication within painting's affective atmosphere, rather than constituting the programmatic allusion Rager suggests.

⁴⁷ Sizeranne, *English Contemporary Art*, 223.

instances, the activity of cross-reference could itself be an artwork's central theme, and an artist find himself painting the system of repetition and appreciation as such. Such was the case with Spencer Stanhope, a now largely forgotten epigone of later Pre-Raphaelitism.⁴⁸ Stanhope's obsessive, unwavering return to a limited set of prototypes—mostly works by Botticelli—takes to an extreme many of the procedures we have so far been tracing, and allows us to describe with greater nuance the development of the movement as a whole. In Stanhope, we find not so much an identification with Botticelli—a wish to inhabit the earlier figure's procedures—as an absorbing identification with Botticelli's effects. Stanhope's orientation as an artist is primarily towards citation, concerned with signaling and even, somehow, “being” the social network of appreciation in which he participates.⁴⁹ Even more than Solomon's, his practice formed an echo-chamber of Botticellian motifs. In contrast to the affective idiosyncracies of a painting such as *Love in Autumn*, presenting as it does a process of aesthetic absorption in a single work—an attempt to think that prior painting through—in Stanhope we find a fetishistic recycling of Botticelli's frozen forms. His paintings seem to proceed by automatism, as though they were mechanized variations on a single theme. Flow along the chain of reference has come to a halt. Painterly practice has congealed into a repository of highly specific, overlapping, and above all redundant acts of reference.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For the principle sources, see: A.M.W. Stirling, “Roddam Spencer-Stanhope, Pre-Raphaelite,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 66 (August 1909): 307-25, expanded as “A Painter of Dreams: The Life of Roddam Spencer Stanhope Pre-Raphaelite,” in Stirling, *A Painter of Dreams, and Other Biographical Studies* (London, 1916), 287-345; Peter B. Trippi, “John Roddam Spencer-Stanhope: The Early Years of a Second-Generation Pre-Raphaelite, 1848-73” (master's thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1993). For more specific studies of Stanhope's work, see: Francesco Fiumara, “A Painter Hidden: John Roddam Spencer Stanhope: His Life, His Work, His Friends. The British Period: 1829-1880” (PhD diss., Università di Messina, 1993); Simon Poë, “Roddy, Maria, and Ned (And Georgie, Topsy, Janey and Gabriel),” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n.s., 9 (Fall 2000): 69-87; Poë, “Penelope and her Suitors: Women, War, and Widowhood in a Pre-Raphaelite Painting,” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n.s., 11 (Spring 2002): 68-79; Poë, “Mythology and Symbolism in Two Works of Roddam Spencer Stanhope's Maturity,” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n.s., 12 (Spring 2003): 35-61; and Poë, “Venus, Rising from the Waves: Morris, Stanhope, Botticelli and *Aphrodite Anadyomene*,” *The British Art Journal* 3, no. 3 (Winter 2006/7): 54-57.

⁴⁹ On Aestheticism as a social network dependent on intertextuality, see Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Walter Pater and Aestheticist Painting,” in *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Prettejohn, 36-58; and Jason Edwards, *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism: Gilbert Among Whistler, Wilde, Leighton, Pater and Burne-Jones* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁵⁰ Given his obscurity, a word or two of introduction may be in order. The son of an antiquarian, John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1828-1902) became a painter while a student at Oxford. He was a pupil first of George Frederick Watts, and traveling with him to Italy in 1856. In 1857, he worked alongside Burne-Jones, Morris, and Rossetti on the Oxford Union murals, becoming close to Burne-Jones especially. Due to chronic asthma, Stanhope began wintering in Florence in the 1860s, spending more and more of the year there during the 1870s, and relocating permanently in 1880. At this point his art became more and more imitative of quattrocento painting, and correspondingly less concerned with the kinds of Pre-Raphaelite “truth to nature” marking his earlier works. For Peter Trippi, this second stage marks a failure of nerve, a turn

Stanhope's *Birth of Venus* (c. 1870; **fig. 33**), was a very specific act of homage. On 12 June 1863, a *Venus Pudica* was sold as lot 80 at Christie's (**fig. 34**), part of an old master collection belonging to Rev. Walter Davenport Bromley. Across the figure's waist, a sumptuous girdle of flowers once preserved her modesty (they were later removed during restoration).⁵¹ The painting was one of several "Botticellis" in the sale, including two Madonnas (lots 85 and 166) and another full-length nude *Venus* (lot 170; **fig. 35**).⁵² Both figures of Venus were bought by the Ashburtons, important collectors of Rossetti's work. Effectively, these works served as mediators between artists and critics in England and the Uffizi's *The Birth of Venus* itself: they were local representatives, concrete points of focus within the distribution of the Florentine painting's fame. The girdle of flowers in Stanhope's *Venus* makes the reference specific, as well as relating the painting to the artists gathered around Burne-Jones and William Morris: one of several Aestheticist works referencing the Ashburton Venus around 1870.⁵³

From the vantage of the present, Stanhope's painting has become difficult to see. The miserable pink of the nipples, lips, and flowers, the contrivances of her sweeping hair, the absurd recession of medievaesque "dolphins".⁵⁴ it is hard to recover how such features might once have seemed acceptable. Effects of historical remoteness are so integral to the painting, however, they must have always formed part of its aesthetic texture, undercutting its promise of sensual presence. Stanhope's newborn Venus is a figure from the past. Paradoxically, the self-consciousness of its historicizing effects—the reference to Botticelli, the dolphins' naïveté—also advertise the painting's modernity. Solomon's *Love in Autumn* seems never far from the painter's mind; and in features like the goddess's haunted expression, the perversity with which the nipple peaks out from crook of her left arm, and (of course) the obsessive attention to the hair as it loops, braids, and runs free, we have an excess of signs pointing to modern sexual knowingness. Like Rossetti and Burne-Jones, Stanhope anachronizes, overlaying the early-modern with the late. Here, however, the acts of citation are simplified and made nearly univocal, signaling "Botticelli" above all. Its self-consciousness seems structural rather than mindful: part of some principle of replication. This paring down of reference to a kind of

away from an early practice of creative imitation, in which Stanhope referred "not to nature but to earlier art, mixing motifs and techniques anachronistically to suit his purposes," to one in which Stanhope "typecast himself as a Neo-Tuscan painter of repetitive, quasi-hallucinatory scenes from the Bible and mythology." Trippi, "Stanhope," ii, 9. Stanhope's imitative cast of mind, however, is evident throughout his career—his Pre-Raphaelite naturalism being as much the imitation of his colleagues' style as of nature itself—and manifest in his early interest in the practice of photography.

⁵¹ See Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), 2:121-22. Davenport Bromley had exhibited one of these Venuses alongside another "Botticelli" *Virgin and Child with Angels* at the British Institute in 1859. The picture is now untraced.

⁵² A third, better executed Venus of the same type had entered Berlin's Gemäldegalerie in 1821 out of the Solly collection (**fig. 36**). G. F. Waagen had attributed it to Botticelli: Waagen, *Verzeichniss der Gemälde-Sammlung des Königlichen Museums zu Berlin* (Berlin: Gedruckt in der Drukerei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1841), 64.

⁵³ Simon Poë, "Venus, Rising," importantly notes the painting as a prototype for both Morris and Spencer Stanhope. Morris executed his own, rather limp *Birth of Venus* in the years around 1870.

⁵⁴ They seem related to the "dolphins" in Raphael's fresco of Galatea at Villa Farnesina.

mechanism of repetition steers the painting towards automatism. In this regard, one is tempted to take the absurd procession of sea-creatures into unbelievable space as the sign of such a structure. Like puppets, we imagine, Venus after Venus steps to shore.

Stanhope's work of repetition also spreads beyond the frame of this single painting. It forms part of a long sequence of near-identical figures he executed in the 1870s and 1880s. These seem to oscillate between Botticellian prototypes, mixing the iconography, poses, and perceived sexual attitudes of *The Birth of Venus* and the *Primavera*—without, however, providing the viewer with any clear sense of intention, or any justification of why any particular configuration has been constructed. Hair threads over or under hands variously placed; torso and pubis are covered or exposed; the figure stands by water, before flowers, or atop stones, alone or eerily watched (**figs 37-38**). Andromeda, Flora, Venus, Eve stand as exchangeable, minimally variant terms within the logic of serial practice. Indeed, so close do they come to insignificance, it is almost as if the motifs were mindlessly re-arranging themselves. Increasingly isolated from his pre-Raphaelite peers by his relocation to Florence, Stanhope reconstituted the social circulation of appreciated objects from the actual "Pre-Raphaelite" paintings he could see, staging it within the repetitive syntax of his own paintings.

This held even when Stanhope prepared especially ambitious canvases for major exhibitions. When Coutts Lindsay opened the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, providing London's preeminent space for Aestheticist painters to show their work, Stanhope sent two important works.⁵⁵ In *Eve Tempted* (**fig. 38**), a close variation on his nude Venus is introduced into the garden of Botticelli's *Primavera*, producing a curious impasse between the painting's narrative impulse and its decorative effect. The hair takes on a disturbingly animate air as it moves to preserve Eve's modesty. Her hands are otherwise occupied—one in bracing her body on a raised bank of earth, the other to perform the unforgivable deed, gathering fruit from a Botticellian orange-tree. Most grotesquely, the serpent presses close, its humanoid face breathing sin, materialized as an escape of steam from his lips, into her ear. Within this unfolding story, however, Eve's face preserves its blankness and impassivity, as if it refused to leave its home in the series and let specific narrative significance take hold.⁵⁶

A more stable achievement, *Love and the Maiden* (the second major canvas exhibited in 1877; **fig. 40**) seems to present an even stranger version of Botticelli. In comparison to Stanhope's other paintings, this painting's field of reference is wider and more complex. Its composition alludes both to the story of Cupid visiting Psyche and to the Annunciation, even as the painting condenses several works by Botticelli—*The Primavera*, the *Birth of Venus*, *Venus and Mars* (**fig. 41**)—into a strangely seamless

⁵⁵ On the Grosvenor Gallery, see most recently Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995); *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, ed. Susan B. Casteras and Colleen Denney (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996); Colleen Denney, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated Univ. Presses, 2000).

⁵⁶ Indeed, it seems to be the oppressiveness of this logic Stanhope's niece, Evelyn Pickering, responded to in her own versions of Botticelli. Seen in this light, the insipidity of her *Flora* of 1893 (**fig. 39**)—like Solomon's *Love in Autumn*, marked lower-left as executed in Florence—seems less a flattening out of Botticelli than a pointed refusal of Stanhope's staging of Botticellian femininity: blandness, we might say, as critique.

whole. The multiplicity of narrative allusions serves only to intensify the stillness of the image. The atmosphere seems airless. Within the dramatic action *Love and the Maiden* depicts, Stanhope has found an impossible moment of arrest. We can easily see his debt to Burne-Jones here, as elsewhere in the picture. In general, Stanhope's pictures provide some of our best evidence for the correlation of Botticelli with Burne-Jones in the Aestheticist imagination.⁵⁷ Yet, this is not Burne-Jones's kind of melancholic stasis, in which one feels significant action being smothered out. Rather, *historia* seems to have evaporated altogether: the body has been stilled within a world of artifice, and Botticelli has been asked to secure an arrangement between ornament and nature. Look, for instance, at the juxtaposition of natural flowers with the rose-pattern of Eros's skirt—or, even more strangely, at the clean-cut, manicured stump over which he is poised to step, echoed in a branch's clean break above. Stanhope seems driven to provide an account of his naturalism as decorative repetition; and, at the same time, as clearing the visual obstructions of nature away. Conscripted by Stanhope's various allusions to this cause, the Botticelli imagined by *Love and the Maiden* becomes the first Aesthete.⁵⁸

We might take *Mars and Venus* to be Stanhope's main source were not that source double. For two Botticelli allegories of Venus were bought at auction by the National Gallery in 1874 (the second [fig. 43] is now demoted to a school work), out of the extraordinary collection of Alexander Barker.⁵⁹ (Both had also been exhibited at the South Kensington Gallery in 1869: surprising as it now seems, the attributions at that point were the attributions were reversed, the *Venus* seen as the authentic Botticelli, and *Mars Asleep* as a school work.)⁶⁰ Stanhope's long-limbed, wavy-haired Eros perhaps recalls Mars in the famous painting (at least in his position stage right), and the Maiden's pose, as well as the complexity of her clothing, look to the figure of this painting's Venus. However, the profusion of roses at right, the care lavished on the Maiden's bed of flowers, and the echo in her clothes of the colors of the pillow on which Venus bring the

⁵⁷ The key intertext here would be Burne-Jones's peculiarly intense quattrocento fantasy, *The Mill* (fig. 42), worked on between 1870 and 1882.

⁵⁸ As picked up on by Oscar Wilde, in his first piece of art criticism: Wilde, "The Grosvenor Gallery," *The Dublin University Magazine* 110 (July 1877): 125-6.

⁵⁹ Little is known of the enigmatic Barker (d. 1873), whose enormous collection included French furniture, English and continental ceramics, stained glass, and crystal carvings, as well as important paintings from Bellini to Boucher. He amassed an unusually large number of quattrocento masterpieces, including Piero della Francesca's *Nativity*, Luca Signorelli's *Triumph of Chastity*, and several works by Botticelli that entered the National Gallery after his death. Barker also owned several other "Botticellis," including a famous cycle of the seasons (figs. 44-47) that loomed large in the aestheticist imagination, and all four of the *Nastagio degli Onesti* panels, which he bought in 1868.

⁶⁰ Indeed, according to documents in its Archives, the National Gallery paid a good deal more—£1627.10 vs. £1050—for the lesser work. This must have had to do with the indecorous elongation of the bodies and features and the awkward splaying of Mars's pose (and perhaps also the devilish insistence of the grotesques). The "naïve" simplicity of the less complex composition would have chimed more easily with a professional assessment of Botticelli in the period; as would the association of Botticelli with roses. A third, related painting was put on display at the Musée Napoleon III in 1862—where, as Michael Fried notes, it was commented on by Zacharie Astruc and may be one of the many paintings that lie behind Manet's *Olympia*: see Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 153-56.

lesser known *Allegory* into play;⁶¹ and other references to Botticelli abound.⁶² As the layers of Stanhope's referential palimpsest begin to multiply, one begins to see in *Love and the Maiden* a virtuoso performance of being secondary: the artist as a conduit for the recirculation of Botticellian motifs.

On this matter, Stanhope's strongest critic was Burne-Jones himself. Stanhope had a long history with Burne-Jones.⁶³ It is striking that the strongest testimony we have about Stanhope's appreciation for Burne-Jones should be about the Botticellian *Phyllis and Demophoön*.⁶⁴ Burne-Jones described Stanhope's replicative practice with great acuity. Before relocating to Florence, according to Burne-Jones—a move that “injured his work very much”—Stanhope's colour “was beyond any the finest in Europe.”⁶⁵ However, he continues:

It was a great pity that he ever saw my work or that he ever saw Botticelli's.... [Stanhope's] absence from London has removed him from his proper atmosphere, and from his contemporaries and their criticism, and he's got to think more and more exclusively of old pictures to that extent that he'll almost find his own pictures on them and give up his own individuality. But I did love him.⁶⁶

This conversation of 1896 shows Burne-Jones not simply aware of his own connections to Botticelli, but of the fact of such connections being triangulated through—made in and by—the work of someone else. The figure of the follower serves to crystallize such recognition. In this passage, Burne-Jones describes as a matter of failed artistic

⁶¹ Interestingly, during the course of his treatment of the painting, Wilde seems to wish for a *return* to Botticelli's simplified color-scheme: “there is, perhaps, too great a luxuriance of colour, and it would have been relief had the girl been dressed in pure white.” Wilde, “Grosvenor,” 122.

⁶² We can see *The Birth of Venus* especially in the shore-line promontories we see through the woods. The painting's echoes of the *Primavera* are more peculiar. The dancing trio of the middle distance recalls the three dancing Graces of Botticelli's painting, of course. But the figure of Love breaking through the foliage also recalls Zephyr accosting Chloris, an allusion that gives Love's entrance a distinct association of violence.

⁶³ Stanhope left an almost erotic testimonial to their work on the Oxford murals: “As time went on, I found myself more and more attracted to Ned. The spaces we were decorating were next to each other and this brought me closely into contact with him. In spite of his high spirit and fun, he devoted himself more thoroughly to his work than any of the others with the exception of Morris; he appeared unable to leave his pictures as long as he thought he could improve it, and as I was behindhand with mine we had the place all to ourselves for some weeks after the rest were gone.” Quoted in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (London and New York, Macmillan, 1904), 1:164.

⁶⁴ Thomas Rooke recalls Stanhope coming to Burne-Jones's studio in the winter of 1869-70 while Burne-Jones was out, and being in “such a passion of admiration over [the] head of Phyllis that...I supposed he couldn't be an artist,” conversation of 7 January 1896, in Mary Lago, ed. *Burne-Jones Talking: His Conversations, 1895-1898, Preserved by his Studio Assistant, Thomas Rooke* (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1981), 77. In Burne-Jones's watercolor find another, fainter inter-text between *Primavera* and *Love and the Maiden*: the example of Burne-Jones's rethinking the rape of Chloris, we imagine, remained always present to Stanhope's mind.

⁶⁵ Lago, *Burne-Jones Talking*, 77, 76.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

achievement what I have been describing as the deep structure of Stanhope's serial practice—and beyond Stanhope, of the entire Aesthetic Movement in its relation to Botticelli: a mode of art-making that not only submits to being secondary, but sustains that submission through painting after painting, directing attention beyond itself to some other, absent object. Such art attempts to constitute the social in a kind of vacuum, solely through a set of determining pictorial forms. In his account of Stanhope, Burne-Jones gives the practice a kind of personal pathos, recognizing with sad affection the toll on a follower's social self that his imitative practice takes.

Walter Crane's Difference

The collective output of such imitative practices formed a conspicuous part of the 1877 Grosvenor Exhibition. The gallery's inaugural exhibition did more than tighten the connection between Botticelli and Aestheticist painting, making it available to an increasingly wide audience. It also conjured Burne-Jones as the head of a painterly "school."⁶⁷ Critics sorted the painters on display into hierarchies of masters and students, thereby formalizing the loose affinities of Aesthetic Movement art.⁶⁸ —When, that is, they were not bemoaning the confusing, seemingly infinite sequence of copies upon copies.⁶⁹ The painters' turn to Botticelli had always entailed anxieties about imitation and originality. Here those anxieties were writ large, coming into focus as a central, thematized feature of the art. For critics, the Botticellian turn elicited the specter of unending esoteric derivation.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ George Fraser, for instance, spoke of the "eclectic manner" of painting in the circle of Burne-Jones as hermetic: "It is only a limited number of admirers of art who can love or appreciate the productions of the earlier Italian masters, and the appreciations of this modern style, which follows that elder one so closely, will be confined, in a large measure, to those who can find the greatest delight in the delicately beautiful but soul-less formalities of Pollaiuolo and Botticelli." Fraser, "The Grosvenor Gallery," *Aesthetic Review and Art Observer* 9 (June-July 1877): 132. Fraser goes on to cite several specific paintings as examples of this tendency, including *Eve Tempted*.

⁶⁸ One instance among many: "The disciples of this master of the emotions [Burne-Jones]—Walter Crane, Spencer Stanhope, Evelyn Pickering, and Melhuish Strudwick may be dismissed in fewer words..." "The Grosvenor Gallery. Second Notice," *Magazine of Art* 1 (1878): 81.

⁶⁹ For instance: "Our readers are acquainted with the characteristics of the painters we refer to. Some copy more or less the old masters; too many are content to copy other copyists, when we have, of course, the blind leading the blind. Scarcely any affectation is too shallow or too morbid to find imitators, till a sort of cultus is promulgated for the indiscriminate worship of the results, mainly of neglected training, or the products of sheer imbecility, and appropriately enough the faith is protected by a band of amateur critics." "The Grosvenor Gallery. (Second and Concluding Notice.)" *Illustrated London News*, 14 June 1879, 567.

⁷⁰ "Now, experience tells us that pretenders are too ready to rally round a claim to superiority in anything that is the subject of 'aesthetic' or emotional manifestation, and depending more or less on an...estimate, as in poetry, the belle-lettres, experimental religion and, pre-eminently, art. Accordingly, the Grosvenor Gallery became the favorite home of works claiming esoteric meaning, of transcendental aesthetics evolved out of the internal consciousness, not from steady observation; of sickly sentimentalism, and of the pictorial disciples of the 'sensuous' school of

The seventy-ninth installment of Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*, his ever unruly series of letters "to the labourers and workmen of Britain," dated July 1877, has become notorious for its judgment of Whistler's *Falling Rockets*: it initiated the spectacular libel-suit that would do so much to crystallize the rhetoric of Aesthetic Movement artists.⁷¹ Ruskin also offered a critique of installation practices at the Grosvenor. For him, the problem was how best to mitigate the visual effects of repetition, both within the oeuvres of individual artists and between the work of masters and pupils. The works of an artist, says Ruskin, ought to be separated from each other on the wall; for "[t]he most original of painters repeat themselves in favourite dexterities,—the most excellent of painters forget themselves in habitual errors: and it is unwise to exhibit in too close sequence the monotony of their virtues, and the obstinacy of their faults."⁷² In an argument that seems to invert scientific connoisseurship's concerns, which depend upon the recognition of repeated dexterities, habits, virtues, and faults, according to Ruskin such signature effects blind us to a great artist's force. And matters only grow worse when such repetition is prolonged in the painting of others:

[T]he pictures of scholars ought not to be exhibited together with those of their masters; more especially in cases where school is so distinct as that founded by Mr. Burne-Jones, and contains many elements definitely antagonistic to the general tendencies of public feeling. Much that is noble in the expression of an individual mind, becomes contemptible as the badge of a party; and although nothing is more beautiful or necessary in the youth of a painter than his affection and submission to his teacher, his own work, during the stage of subservience, should never be exhibited where the master's may be either confused by the frequency, or disgraced by the fallacy, of its echo.⁷³

Ruskin's neglect to even name such subservient agents—Stanhope, John Melhuish Strudwick, Walter Crane—only drives the point home.

Meanwhile, F.G. Stephens, the Pre-Raphaelite painter turned critic, diagnosed this tight-knit circuitry as nothing less than an "arrest of development."⁷⁴ "It is certain," he says, "that the genius of an artist does not necessarily continue to grow. Messrs. Crane and Stanhope seem to have stopped at the period of adolescence, with all its joys, and, it

poetry, of modern archaisms, and 'cribs' from the Old Masters; the whole kept in countenance by the cant of elegant litterateurs and professional dilettanti." *Illustrated London News*, 9 May 1880, 451.

⁷¹ "I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now," wrote Ruskin, "but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen), 29:160. The well-known story need not be rehearsed here. For an exhaustive account, see Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

⁷² Ruskin, *Works*, 29:158.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29:158-9.

⁷⁴ Stephens also authored an important early manifesto of how contemporary artists should model their relation to painting of the past. See: F. G. Stephens [John Sewald, pseud.], "The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art," *The Germ* 1 (January 1850): 58-64.

must be added, its unaccountable fancies.”⁷⁵ Earlier in his review, Stephens proves even more precise. The passage deserves to be quoted at length, and its judgment to be kept in mind as we turn to the painting that is the primary object of his critique:

On the other side of Mr. Jones’s compartment will be found another symptom of delight in the old North Italian school; it is Umbrian in defect of colour, Venetian in luxury of sentiment, Florentine in the imperfectly expressed sense of grace, the elaborate draughtsmanship and romantic inspiration. This is Mr. Crane’s beautiful *Renaissance of Venus* [fig. 32], a landscape, with antique ruins, on the bank of the sea; a questionably drawn Venus naked on our left. This delicious picture is marked by curious affectations, and betrays...[a] lack of independence and stamina.... This lack of independence is traceable in the whole of the painters, even in a degree in Mr. Jones; but to Messrs. Stanhope and Crane especially. The style of thought and painting which is affected by these extremely able and cultivated men is nowadays at least the result of culture, over-refinement, and caprice. Mr. Rossetti has quite outgrown whims of this sort and carried his practice to its legitimate conclusion, not stopping with the early fifteenth century, but growing with the following period, and painting as Titian and Giorgione painted, designing like himself, with all his might and main. The style affected by our neo-Italians, Umbrians, Florentines, Mantegnesques, Venetians, and what not, is, it must be admitted, marked by what may be called an arrest of development. Mantegna, Botticelli, and Piero della Francesca, the favourite models of the school, stood on the confines of tempera and fresco practice and oil painting, and their modern disciples retain, with the purity and brilliancy, the thinness and isolated tints of the former mode, and attain but a portion—a small one, indeed—of the luminosity of oil.⁷⁶

Once again, “Botticelli” participates in a world of “culture, over-refinement, and caprice”; and at the same in an organic, progressivist narrative—one reaching back to Vasari—of the course and development of art.⁷⁷ While neither association seems surprising in itself, it is striking how Stephens amalgamates them. In his account of the Grosvenor painters, the slow, hard-won developments that make up the history of art seem to be simultaneously spread out before his eyes. In their reversion to moments of artistic earliness, these artists tap into some internal logic of art’s development, making it their own, retracing its course. Phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny, and the individual’s artistic germination proceeds (or comes to a stop) along an evolutionary continuum that brings its own overarching shape again and again into view. In the museum-style of late

⁷⁵ F. G. Stephens, “The Grosvenor Gallery,” *Athenaeum*, No. 2584 (5 May 1877): 584.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ On such organic framings of art history see: E.H. Gombrich, “The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences” (1952), in *Norm and Form*, 1-10; Gombrich, *The Ideas of Progress and their Impact on the Arts* (New York: Cooper Union, 1971); and Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative of Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000).

nineteenth-century painting as on the literal museum's walls, art's different ages could be judged side by side.

With uncanny precision, Stephens intuits (albeit negatively) the kind of historical awakening Walter Crane means his *Renaissance of Venus* to perform. If Crane's painting refers to Botticelli more directly than even Stanhope's hallucinatory combinations, the force of such reference also shifts its sense. For while Crane's picture fully participates in the social circulation of Botticelli, it also sets itself decidedly apart from Stanhope's automatisms. Rather than merely circulating signs in a Botticellian echo-chamber, Crane sought actively—polemically—to motivate them. “Botticelli” was once again to mean. The overstressed nature of Crane's desire (for the painting cannot be taken as altogether successful) presents in extreme form the tension between an ultimately self-annihilatory practice of citation and a will to appropriate the original, taking hold of it and setting it to work. Much of this has to do with the explicit clarity with which Crane, in both composition and title, adheres to his source. Crane's *Renaissance of Venus* wishes to depict Venus reborn, recalling but also renewing the promise set out in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*.⁷⁸

Compared with Botticelli's Venus, Crane's figure inhabits a quieter scene. She stands fully naked at the edge of the sea. Her hands are lifted to dress her hair, leaving the full vertical expanse of body exposed. The wind in Botticelli's painting is recalled in a flight of doves, the gentle unruliness of Venus's locks—an insistently “naturalistic” correction of the earlier canvas—and a ship in full sail. A shattered temple stands in the middle distance, and the goddess herself comes close, entering the natural world. Instead of Stanhope's preposterous grotesques, Crane gives us a careful description of seashore life. This naturalistic ecology replaces Botticelli's emblematic shell. All of Venus's attendants are gone, and the goddess seems to have appeared quite suddenly. The awkward bathers at right (straight out of Puvis de Chavannes, it would seem) peer at her quizzically, not sure what to make of this strange new body luxuriating before them.⁷⁹

The painting itself has seen better days. Its surface has deteriorated badly and no doubt because of this, it almost never appears on view.⁸⁰ This is a pity, as the painting has been especially poorly served by existing reproductions. Though damaged, its surface is not quite the wreck that photographs imply, and our inability to see Venus's face up close in particular robs the painting of interest. Beside the strange blankness of the face in Botticelli's painting, half in shadow, that of Crane's figure seems haunted and overcharged. One detects a memory of Solomon's *Love in Autumn* in the averted features—that melancholy, unfixed stare—which undo any sweetness of expression. More is at stake than emotional tone, however, in thinking of the painting at real size. For

⁷⁸ Crane had seen the painting during his 1871-73 tour of Italy, as he recalls in his memoir: “Botticelli was not at that time in the honoured places, not having been re-discovered by the critics, but more or less scattered, and sometimes ‘skied’ in less important rooms, but I shall never forget the charm of his beautiful ‘Spring’ and the ‘Venus.’” Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 125.

⁷⁹ Isobel Spencer notes that Crane would have seen Puvis's work exhibited in London during the early 1870s: see Spencer, *Walter Crane* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 74.

⁸⁰ The work was bought by the painter G. F. Watts, who left it to the Tate; it entered the collection in 1913. I thank Alison Smith and her staff for allowing me to study the painting at the Tate's storage facility in November 2007.

without registering the painting's lateral expanse—it is fully six feet wide—or its historicizing “Renaissance” frame, ornamented with sea-shells carved in relief, one can miss its full decorative force. The painting appears far flatter than in reproduction, an effect to do not only with its size, but also with the dry, matter-of-fact materiality of its surface. Not that virtual distance is altogether denied: the pull of the horizon-line is important, and here and there (the ship top left, for instance, or the tiny features of the townscape to the right) Crane takes a kind of quattrocento delight in perspectival miniaturization. Yet, both compositionally and narratively, the painting works methodically to bring things to the fore. Surface is its theme. The ocean recedes, but only to involve us in the particulars it reveals. The doves take flight from ruined temple's lintel, and though their forms recede into depth, it is as if we were watching this process in reverse: palpably they move towards us, inscribing a vector across the painting's surface that undoes the recession of the shoreline, stitching up the picture's surface. The reflection of the temple itself reaches forward along an incoming wave, and Venus's hair, on which so much of the painter's attention has been lavished, seems almost to thread through the temple's ruined columns. In the painting's most potent sign of surfaceness, the extraordinary expanse of Venus's naked body stands only a step or two back from us (the bush at left and tidal pools at her feet make this clear), seeming to long for—perhaps even to press against—its place on the picture plane.

These effects are meant to be noticed. Crane wants the intentions behind his composition to be clear. This is in keeping with the tenor of the work as a whole, which wishes to be seen not simply in relation to *The Birth of Venus* but as doing something to Botticelli's painting, making it new. Look again at the positioning of Crane's Venus: there is a frankness about her nudity, a facingness that attempts to outdo the “quaintness” of Botticelli's conception of the figure. We have a strong sense that Venus has floated forward from the temple—from her other self in the shattered statue—and also, following the composition's asymmetries, that she has come in from stage left. The Venus de Milo (**fig. 48**) (for this appears to be what the ruin contains) has been re-configured and outdone.⁸¹ Crane allegorizes “Renaissance” as a Pygmalion-like operation, in which Venus reappears in the real, as part of a supple, unstoned world. Crane has been careful to plot us in relation to Venus's new body: we are placed right at the edge of the shallows, just barely on the shore, giving us that minimum of fictive distance that frames the scene and lets her more intensely emerge. Naturalistic details, in her body and its surrounding, imply mobility, a freedom from their schematization within quattrocento pictorial convention. Botticellian decorativeness has been supplemented with “natural” presence: the finding of their compatibility within modern painting seems to be what this re-birth is about.

Such internal spatial drama works hard (perhaps too hard) to stage the painting's allegorical message. William Michael Rossetti seems to have recognized the work's

⁸¹ As Morna O'Neill suggests in her forthcoming book, *Walter Crane: The Arts and Crafts, Painting, and Politics, 1875-1890* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, forthcoming). There may be something of a historical polemic to this choice, too. Botticelli's at least partial dependence on the Medici Venus (**fig. 49**) type for his own composition is brought up to date. The Venus de Milo had only been unearthed in 1820. It seems also important to note the important role the statue plays in Walter Pater's writings, particularly his essay on Winckelmann.

polemical edge, and Crane accepted his judgment, quoting it with approval in his autobiography:

Mr. Crane's chief contribution... is named 'The Renaissance of Venus,' a title which one has to think over a little before one hits upon any genuine meaning for it; but we suppose it so signify substantially 'The Re-birth of Beauty'; Venus as the symbol of beauty, re-born at the period of art and culture.⁸²

In turning to the past, Crane's decorative surface was meant to bring about a new age of art.⁸³ It was meant to help forge a new repertoire of legible allegorical forms in order to construct a newly significant public art. Crane took an evolutionary view of art's struggle to progress—even, at times a Darwinian one.⁸⁴ "Art," he would later write, "is an organic thing, having its own laws": new forms come to life in the face of "continuous, fierce and strenuous struggle for existence throughout nature."⁸⁵ Painting's renewal in the present depended, he thought, on the development of an incisive allegorical practice, founded on the clarity and fixity of symbolic meanings, that might leave the inconstant decadence of the merely individual behind.⁸⁶ His return to the principles of Botticelli was recruited to this general nostalgia for an age of public art.⁸⁷

⁸² Crane, *Reminiscences*, 184. Rossetti continues: "At any rate, Mr. Crane has painted a charming and delicious picture, full of gracious purity—one which holds its own well even against such formidable competition as that of Mr. Burne-Jones. We see a liquid bay and sands, the ruins of a classical temple, three women bathing, an almond tree in bloom, white doves darting and hovering about, and in the left foreground the queenly apparition of Venus. As in Mr. Armstrong's picture, blue is here the predominant colour, but in a lighter way; a sweet, clear, brilliant blue, not chilly, but softly limpid." *Ibid.*

⁸³ This is the argument put forward by O'Neill, *Walter Crane*. I rely on O'Neill's account of Crane's polemicizing in what follows, and wish to thank her for several discussions of Crane in the fall of 2007, as well as making a draft of her chapter on the painting available to me at that time.

⁸⁴ Though he came to formulate these ideas as art-theoretical and socialist principles some time later, we may plausibly suspect at least the seeds of these ideas in the period we're considering—he had after all studied his key reference-points during the 1860s. Crane read Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* for instance, in 1862: see Isobel Spencer, *Walter Crane*, 66. For a fine account of Crane's wish for a "public language of art," see Greg Smith, "Developing a Public Language of Art," in *Walter Crane 1845-1915: Artist, Designer and Socialist*, ed. Greg Smith and Sarah Hyde (London: Lund Humphries, 1989), 13-23. Smith emphasizes how allegory (or better, allegoresis—the demand that viewers participate in the picture's semantic tenor by decoding it) was, for Crane, the ideal form of a public art.

⁸⁵ Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892), 3. The Darwinian nature of Crane's terminology is even more explicit in his discussion of the pediments of the Parthenon: "After the lapse of ages, through darkness, destruction, and neglect, these fragments remain, not only unequalled in sculpture, but true as figurative design, as expressing what Nature herself continually teaches—namely, the triumph of mind over matter, of the dominion of the higher organism over the lower, or, in modern philosophic phrase, the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence." Crane, *Claims*, 25.

⁸⁶ Crane returned to this theme in his autobiography: "Painting becomes more and more a matter of individual expression or impression, and modern economic and commercial conditions favour

All of this was tied to the *Renaissance of Venus*'s sense of surface. In the painting, we are witness to a double evolutionary movement: just as this fresh, painterly Venus replaces her ruined precursor in stone, re-imagining her promise of sensuous presence in terms of an interplay of flatness and virtual depth, so Crane's painting, with its self-consciousness historicizing, replaces its quattrocento precedent. Rather as in Stephens's sense of art itself progressing in an artist's oeuvre, history takes place here before our eyes. Everything turns on revelation of the nude. "Depth" is meant to translate into legible lateral expanse, and the painting imagines a directness of outward address grounded in the canvas's literal width. The drive to flatness even overtakes the body itself. The breasts of Venus are enigmatic: they tend to retreat and flatten out under scrutiny. On certain viewings, they even tend to cave in, making the archetype of femininity seem androgynous.⁸⁸

In this regard, it is striking that the painting's most gruesome passages of deterioration occur in the depiction of Venus's body. We seem to be witness to some material abrasion of the embodied sign. Stephens did not only mean his remarks on tempera metaphorically: he was also offering a literal critique of certain key Grosvenor artists. By 1877, Stanhope had eschewed oil altogether, having refined a recipe for egg tempera over the course of the decade. Crane himself painted *The Renaissance of Venus* in an experimental mixture of oil and tempera, which may partly account for its distress. His desire to experiment must have had in part to do with his construction of the figure of Venus—a wish to deploy a refreshed medium in rendering her new-born liveness. Questions of decay and historical belonging ran deep in the discourse of tempera.

It was partly on the basis of Crane's experiments that the late nineteenth-century saw a revival of tempera painting. The phenomenon formed an attempt to renew the practice of art-making by way of reviving its material means.⁸⁹ The medium's discursive association would only begin to cohere at the century's end, after years of practical

this individualism." Crane, *Reminiscences*, 297-8. As he had put it earlier in that text: "The decline of art corresponds with its conversion into portable forms of private property, or material for commercial speculation." *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁷ Was Crane aware of the irony of founding this on *The Birth of Venus*? He would know from Vasari that the work had been intended for a private patron, and was not "public" in Crane's sense at all.

⁸⁸ At the opening of the Grosvenor, Frederic Leighton famously spotted in Crane's Venus the bodily features of a favored Italian male model.

⁸⁹ For modern studies of the revival of tempera painting in Britain, see: Abbie N. Sprague, "The British Tempera Revival: A Return to Craftsmanship," *British Art Journal* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 66-74; Hannah Spooner, "The Society of Painters in Tempera, 1901-1909," (master's thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2001); Spooner, "Pure Painting: Joseph Southall, Christina Herringham and the Tempera Revival," *The British Art Journal* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 49-54. For a technical discussion, see: Jill Dunkerton, "Technical Note: Joseph Southall's Tempera Paintings," in *Joseph Southall 1861-1944: Artist-Craftsman* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum, 1980): 18-24. For period discussions, see Aymer Vallance, "The Revival of Tempera Painting," *The Studio* 23 (1901): 151-65; Vallance, "The Tempera Exhibition at the Carfax Gallery," *The Studio* 35 (1905): 289-96; Roger Fry, "Tempera Painting," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 7 (June 1905): 175-6; and *Papers of the Society of Painters in Tempera*, vol. 1: 1901-1907, ed. M. Sargent-Florence (Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1928).

investigation; culminated in the first Tempera Exhibition in April and May 1901 at Leighton house, during which a Society of Painters in Tempera was founded.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, certain elements of the discourse seem relevant to the works I consider here. Part of the medium's appeal lay, as Stanhope himself put it in the 1890s, in the fact that "tempera-painting *quâ* painting has never had a decadence, but was suddenly arrested in the full tide of youth, by the substitution of oil-painting."⁹¹ (It is as if Stanhope were echoing and turning round the very criticisms Stephens leveled at him in 1877.) The medium was taken to have a youthful purity that conveyed meaning without the self-conscious equivocations of oil painting. "The beauties of tempera," wrote Christina Herringham,

are not those of preciseness of values and gradations, nor of dexterous brush-work. The charm is in its simplicity and carelessness of effect, with complete absorption in the subject, which the picture is the means of realising to the spectator.⁹²

When Crane came to speak of the medium, he emphasized its pure communicative function. A tempera surface, he says, may be worked at again and again over time—"it will be all of a piece and stay where it dries."⁹³ This stability lends both decorative and semantic value to the work it constitutes. "The luminous and brilliant clear and strong effect obtainable," he goes on, "is very valuable, especially to painters who value decorative effect and allegorical methods of expression."⁹⁴

In discussions of tempera at this time, a rhetoric of purity prevails. It is a medium that, says painter Marianne Stokes, "does not allow irreverent work;" it tends most toward "spirituality, sincerity, and purity of colour."⁹⁵ Artists turned to Botticelli in order to give these ideas a face: by the century's close, it would seem, he had become associated with revival as such. Christina Herringham's portrait-like copies of the

⁹⁰ It should be noted, of course, that technical discussion of tempera begins a good deal earlier, with Charles Eastlake's *Materials for a History of Oil-Painting* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847).

⁹¹ Quoted in Christina J. Herringham, *The Book of the Art of Cennino Cennini: A Contemporary Practical Treatise of Quattrocento Painting* (London: George Allen, 1899), 189. Herringham (1852-1929) lay at the heart of the tempera revival, goading it on not only with her Cennini translation but also by the example of her copying practice, discussed briefly below.

⁹² Herringham, *Book of Art*, 219.

⁹³ Vallance, "Revival," 164.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Roger Fry, who at this time painted in the medium, turned this rhetoric towards a proto-modernist call to order: "Indeed, one may sum up the whole question of tempera as a medium by saying that whereas it is more difficult than in oil painting to produce any effect at all, it is yet far more difficult, almost impossible indeed, to produce with tempera those thoroughly ugly and uninviting surfaces which it requires profound science to avoid in the clayey mixtures of oil paint. It is not to be hoped that any change of medium, any technical recipes, could purify the mass of modern painting of its incurable vulgarity of sentiment, its bad ethos, but nothing would be likely to have a more restraining and sobering influence on our art than the substitution of tempera for oils as the ordinary medium of artistic expression." Fry, "Tempera," 176.

Magdalen and St. Catharine, from the *Sacre Conversazione* in Florence, watched over the proceedings of that first Tempera Exhibition with a rather saccharine benevolence (**figs. 50-52**).⁹⁶ As Hannah Spooner notes, the apparatus of the saints' iconographies are excluded in these intimate studies of the face.⁹⁷ In their technical rigor and intimate effect, these works seem to hover somewhere between manifesto and artistic autobiography. Close study of quattrocento originals, purity of execution, and a feminized embodiment of spirituality were melded under Botticelli's name.

Though in some ways Stanhope's darkly eroticized vision of Botticelli could not be more different, his own descriptions of tempera also turn on the question of exactitude and of the copy. "Some thirty years ago," he writes in 1903,

I chanced to make acquaintance, when studying in the galleries at Florence, with a Signor Rocchi, who had long experience in the use of the Yolk of Egg as a medium, and which he invariably used in copying the early Florentine Masters; he kindly gave me information as to the way of working in it, and I have followed his instructions pretty closely ever since.

The *SYSTEM* he followed, and which I believe in its principal features as that practised by the early Masters, is as follows....⁹⁸

Stanhope transposes into an account of technical instruction key themes of his own work: reproduction, discipleship, systematicity, fantasized proximity to "the early Florentine masters." Behind these formulations one detects an undercurrent of fear: they are meant to defend against the specter of decay. Again and again, in the rhetoric of tempera, the medium's effects of historical and semantic endurance are imagined in relation to everything that painting might not survive. "Oil," writes Aymer Vallance, "inevitably tones and mellows—or, not to economise truth, darkens and densifies—with age."⁹⁹ Fleshing out his point, Vallance turns to Botticelli:

[O]f the permanence of tempera there can be no doubt. Take the case of the circular *Madonna* ascribed to Botticelli, no. 275, in the National Gallery [**fig. 53**]. The face of St. John the Baptist on the left of the picture [**fig. 54**], having at some period been injured through ill-usage, has been subsequently retouched with oil, to repair it. The new work has deteriorated to a dingy drab, in striking contrast to the fresh and pure colour of the surrounding surface which remains of the original tempera.¹⁰⁰

And yet even these surfaces—organic, but striving towards crystalline stability—prove vulnerable. For a considerable amount of time after completion of a painting, says

⁹⁶ Of the ten works Herringham exhibited in 1901, nine were copies—six of works by Botticelli.

⁹⁷ Spooner, "Pure Painting," 52.

⁹⁸ Stanhope, "Yolk of Egg Tempera" (23 April 1903), in *Papers of the Society of Painters in Tempera*, ed. Sargent, 38.

⁹⁹ Vallance, "Revival," 155.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

Stanhope, its surface “remains soft and liable to injury.”¹⁰¹ Mold might develop as the painting dries; the egg-yolk binding its pigments might rot.

These anxieties bear also on Crane’s *Renaissance of Venus*. Crane wanted for his Venus both decorative intensity and material perduring. Cultural re-birth was to occur with all the vividness and presence of a luminous body. And therefore identification with Botticelli occurs in the very stuff of painting: the artwork’s historicism is embodied in its materiality. Crane even took his historicist desires one step further in experimenting with mixed media. Pre- and post-Raphaelite techniques intermingle on a surface that was meant to give form to a cyclical structure of history. The painting interleaves its historical strata, acknowledging modernity and attempting to begin it again.

In the process, Venus’s body comes to grief. Whatever Crane’s intentions, in its final form the work pictures earliness and belatedness at once. We might say of Crane what Pater had written of Botticelli a few years before: no doubt he “meant all that imagery to be altogether pleasureable; and it was partly an incompleteness of resources inseparable from the art of that time, that subdued and chilled it; but his predilection for minor tones counts also; and what is unmistakable is the sadness with which he has conceived the goddess of pleasure.”¹⁰² Those minor tones came to the fore in a pendant painted a year later, *The Fate of Persephone* (**fig. 55**). Indeed, they emerge with irresistible chthonic force: Death rushes up from beneath a grassy floor borrowed from Botticelli’s *Primavera* to seize Beauty (now clothed) from her companions, dragging her down to hell.¹⁰³

As time went on, Crane worked hard to re-configure his chosen iconography as one of cultural optimism. His 1886 illustrated poem, *The Sirens Three* interprets these figures as signs of renewal, of the eternal return of “beauty’s image graven on the mind” (**fig. 57**):

Like Venus flashing from the lucent sea,
Or, from the earth, the flower of Persephone;
She that was buried, lo! is born again,
And time her resurrection brings to be.¹⁰⁴

In 1891, she is born again as the emblem for *Renascence: A Book of Verse* (**fig. 58**). And yet, none of this masks the negative affect of Crane’s earlier work. Cyclical or not, the work of history entails inescapable loss. *Persephone* imagines this in terms of narrative violence—a gruesome battle of the sexes. In 1877, in *The Renaissance of Venus*, the idealized androgynous wholeness of beauty’s body has not yet suffered division. Venus stands alone, triumphant and disintegrating. Splendidly disheveled, yet sinking into ruin.

¹⁰¹ Stanhope, “Yolk of Egg,” 42.

¹⁰² Pater, “A Fragment,” 559.

¹⁰³ A watercolor study for Crane’s *Persephone* (**fig. 56**) reveals the extent of debt to Botticelli. Pluto’s ghoulish coming down upon Persephone; her casting back a look of shoulder: these features directly echo the *Primavera*’s depiction of the rape of Chloris (**fig. 24**).

¹⁰⁴ *The Sirens Three: A Poem Written and Illustrated by Walter Crane* (London: Macmillan, 1886), stanza CXLI.

Rossetti Redux

When he wrote his brief history of the cult of Botticelli, Herbert Horne did not neglect Rossetti. He wrote to his still living brother, the critic William Michael Rossetti, for an account of Dante Gabriel's involvement with the artist; evidently, he found the reply so clear and succinct that he quoted it directly, adding little comment. "In 1849," William Michael wrote,

when my brother...first visited Paris, he observed in the Louvre, with particular pleasure, one or two pictures by Botticelli, and talked about them on his return.... In 1860, I for the first time visited Florence, and was greatly struck by the Botticellis—very specially by the "Birth of Venus." On my return, I spoke about these works to my brother and others. This refreshed his interest in Botticelli; and in March, 1867, he bought that little picture of which you speak.¹⁰⁵

One imagines Dante Rossetti responding to the sweetness and melancholy of Botticelli's *Madonna and Child with Saint John* (c. 1468) in Paris (**fig. 59**), as well as to its ambiguous spatiality. (Indeed, the composition—especially the strange handling of the Virgin's lap and legs—is not unrelated to that of *La Ghirlandata*.) The painting was one of the few Botticellis the Louvre then owned. Horne's primary interest, however, had been in the portrait by Botticelli that belonged to Rossetti himself for nearly a dozen years (**fig. 60**).¹⁰⁶ This *Portrait of "Smeralda Bandinelli"* (since identified as of Smeralda Brandini) had been one of Rossetti's most prized objects. He acquired it at Christie's in 1867 for a pittance—twenty pounds.¹⁰⁷ At that time, the picture was somewhat in ruins, and perhaps had even been deliberately disfigured: its surface bears signs of incisions across the mouth and eyes. Professional restoration followed, yet Rossetti was not satisfied, and set about touching up the painting himself.¹⁰⁸ His changes were subtle but definitive. As his brother recalls, by the end of March 1867, Gabriel "had painted on the back of his Botticelli, and improved it very sensibly—the previous condition of this part

¹⁰⁵ Horne, *Botticelli*, xviii.

¹⁰⁶ He would sell the painting sometime around 1880, to the Greek businessman and collector of Aestheticist painting Constantine Ionides, who left it to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it now forms part of the Ionides bequest.

¹⁰⁷ The picture came out of the Pourtalès collection in France, a distinguished provenance that Gail S. Weinberg speculates helped attract Rossetti to the painting: see Weinber, "Rossetti's Ownership," 24. I rely on Weinberg's empirical research in my account of this painting. On the Pourtalès collection, see "Sale of the Pourtalès Collections," *The Athenaeum*, no. 1944 (28 Jan 1865): 127; R. Middleton, "L'Hotel Pourtalès-Gorgier," in *Felix Duban 1798-1870: Les Couleurs de l'Architecte*, ed. Sylvain Bellenger and Françoise Hamon (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 137-46. For the cultural context of the collection's formation, see H. Secherre, "The DuBois and Fauchet Collections: The Connoisseurship of Italian Primitives in Paris at the Time of the First Empire," *Apollo* 157 (2003): 21-31.

¹⁰⁸ As Howell recalls in a letter to William Michael Rossetti some years later, "It cost me originally £22 and Gabriel paid £4 more to have it cleaned." Helen Rossetti Angeli, *The Pre-Raphaelite Twilight: The Story of Charles Augustus Howell* (London: Richards Press, 1954), 62.

of the picture being obviously wrong, and I understand injured by previous cleaning”—a fact corroborated by a revealing letter Gabriel Rossetti himself sent to Howell.¹⁰⁹ “I forgot,” he wrote, “to ask Kate to tell you not to shriek when you see the Botticelli if others are here—I have been restoring the head-dress, but don’t mean to tell.”¹¹⁰

In Rossetti’s material dealings with the “Smeralda Bandinelli” portrait, two features are striking. A relation might be drawn between the facts of restoration and the more general questions of replication and cultural decay. There is a way in which Rossetti’s act of restoration, his taking an actual brush to a canvas by Botticelli, condenses the dynamic of submission to, competition with, and repetition of a prototype with which this chapter has been concerned. Repainting this surface, Rossetti identifies himself with Botticelli in both deferential and rivalrous ways. Indeed, as a palimpsest of different hands, the object raises important questions about the conceptualization of conserving artifacts of the past in this period—about the kinds of fantasies and troubled subject positions onto which it opened. We ought also to attend to what, exactly, is being repaired: Rossetti sought to reconfigure the portrait’s already elaborately framed face (**fig. 61**)—particularly sensitive territory for the artist in the 1860s. At that point, his whole art had come to turn on various presentations of the female visage. Botticelli’s careful contrivance of intimacy evidently interested Rossetti—the starkness of the figure’s surroundings, the modest folds of her clothes, her hand taking hold of her frame, and all working in concert to make vivid the enigma and allure of her expression. Rossetti wanted the face to be seen just so, with just the right balance between its belonging to the picture and its emergence into the viewer’s affective world.

His re-imagining of the portrait was not yet done. To turn to Rossetti’s *La Donna della Finestra*, completed in 1879 (**fig. 62**), is to enter another world. Smeralda’s simple form has swollen into extravagance. Lavish curls float above shoulders where they are met by roses in full bloom. The woman’s shimmering sleeves spill over the windowsill; animate leaves lap at their edge. Not a single surface within Botticelli’s painting—the peculiar single column, the obliquely receding door—has escaped decorative elaboration. The effect borders on the ludicrous, in part because of the attention Rossetti lavishes on the Botticellian schema. It is as if he proceeded from feature to feature with unwavering precision, and this presents real difficulties as we try to describe the two paintings’ relations. Carefully ticking off several of these points of connection, Gail S. Weinberg finally seeks stability: “beneath the restless ornamental impulse of Rossetti’s late style,” she writes, “the calm scaffolding afforded him by Botticelli is strikingly preserved.”¹¹¹ Does “persevered” capture the lunacy of the operation underway here? “Entombed” would be more like it (as in Sizeranne’s description of Burne-Jones); or “mercilessly swallowed up.”

The painting’s title is taken from Dante. In the *Vita Nuova* (which Rossetti had translated in 1861), soon after Beatrice’s death, the Woman in the Window brings Dante

¹⁰⁹ *Rossetti Papers 1862-1870*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 228.

¹¹⁰ Letter to Howell, Rossetti Collection, Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. Quoted in Weinberg, “Rossetti’s Ownership,” 24.

¹¹¹ Gail S. Weinberg, “Botticelli and the Aesthetes: The Victorian Literary Response to a Renaissance Painter” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1980), 50.

consolation along a complex circuit of sympathetic feeling.¹¹² Wandering Florence in grief, Dante looks up to meet the pitying countenance of a woman leaning out her window. Her compassion starts his own tears flowing again in a reciprocal (and therefore calming) structure of mimetic sympathy and grief. Whatever else, the literary source helps situate the painting within a dizzying series of specular doublings all hinging on the female face: between Dante and *La Donna*; between Dante and Rossetti (who took the poet's name as his own); between Rossetti and *La Donna*; between Botticelli and *Smeralda*; between *La Donna* and *Smeralda*; and, of course, between Rossetti and Botticelli. As with other paintings we have encountered, however, this super-saturation of the work with significance also robs it of visual force. Once seen in relation to the Botticelli, the sheer artificiality of Rossetti's confection is revealed, and the later painting begins seem more like an over-elaborate referential exercise than the vivid staging of some presence.

This is in keeping with many aspects of Rossetti's Aestheticist practice; it is also characteristic of his moment's understanding of Botticelli. Commenting later on Botticelli's *Primavera*, Rossetti wrote of the painting's central figure that "the same lady, here surrounded by the masque of Spring, is evidently the subject of a portrait by Botticelli formerly in the Pourtalès collection"—i.e., his own *Portrait of Smeralda*

¹¹² "Then, having sat for some space sorely in thought because of the time that was now past, I was so filled with dolorous imaginings that it became outwardly manifest in mine altered countenance. Whereupon, feeling this and being in dread lest any should have seen me, I lifted mine eyes to look; and then perceived a young and very beautiful lady, who was gazing upon me from a window with a gaze full of pity, so that the very sum of pity appeared gathered together in her. And seeing that unhappy persons, when they beget compassion in others, are then most moved unto weeping, as though they also felt pity for themselves, it came to pass that mine eyes began to be inclined unto tears. Wherefore, becoming fearful lest I should make manifest mine abject condition, I rose up, and went where I could not be seen of that lady; saying afterwards within myself: 'Certainly with her also must abide most noble Love.' And with that, I resolved upon writing a sonnet, wherein, speaking unto her, I should say all that I have just said....

Mine eyes beheld the blessed pity spring
 Into thy countenance immediately
 A while ago, when thou beheld'st in me
 The sickness only hidden grief can bring;
 And then I knew thou wast considering
 How abject and forlorn my life must be;
 And I became afraid that thou shouldst see
 My weeping, and account it a base thing.
 Therefore I went out from thee; feeling how
 The tears were straightway loosen'd at my heart
 Beneath thine eyes' compassionate control.
 And afterwards I said within my soul:
 'Lo! with this lady dwells the counterpart
 Of the same Love who holds me weeping now.'"

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Early Italian Poets. From Ciullo D'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri (1100-1200-1300) in the Original Metres Together with Dante's Vita Nuova* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co. 1861), 296-7.

Bandinelli.¹¹³ Rossetti puts his own spin on a common nineteenth-century tale: it was usual to understand the marked similarity in the features of Botticelli's women as the mark on his practice of a single model, "La bella Simonetta," to whom he again and again returned (see Chapter Four). Rossetti thereby stages a convergence of Botticelli's practice with his own. As his sister Christina Rossetti observed, Rossetti was always painting the same woman the same face. Rossetti's late obsession with Jane Morris's features is well known—the present picture being but one instance; and the most productive recent criticism of Rossetti (both hostile and sympathetic) has fixed on the strangeness and rigidity of this serial structure.¹¹⁴ Here we see it taking hold of Botticelli, too. Whether we understand that convergence as self-aggrandizing—a projection meant to serve Rossetti's narcissism—or as responsive to something in the original, it is the connection itself that proves important. It shows us, once again, the extent to which Botticelli was tied to—in some sense, just *was*—such structures of repetition.

The example also helps us to specify the peculiar sense of art's history that Botticelli led these artists to evoke. Not simply a pure example of quattrocento freshness and naiveté, he opened, I have been suggesting, onto a radically complicated and self-conscious sense of historical-stylistic retrieval. *La Donna*'s plumped-up flesh and profuse decorativeness, again, would strike many of Rossetti's viewers as having to do with his turn to the painting of Venice. Botticelli is seen through a lush "Venetian" overlay—an eroticized fullness of form—that Rossetti had by the 1870s made his own. In this confrontation of Florence and Venice (perhaps it should be described as another specular doubling?), Rossetti found a way to stage his own supreme artistic self-consciousness, and to stage it in terms of a style made anachronistic. In part, this serves to locate Rossetti's own position in the history of art: chronologically speaking, he finds himself on the far side of the Venetian high Renaissance from Botticelli. And yet, that very acknowledgment stages a wish it were otherwise. Much of the peculiarity and power of Rossetti's painting lies in the force with which its impossible identifications are made. We "see" Botticelli only beneath Venetian expansiveness, a sad, fugitive memory-image beneath the confidence of costume and flesh.

It is precisely this haunted historicism that Botticelli came to figure in the years that followed. Looking at Botticelli, painters and artwriters were drawn to—baffled by—the ghostly eroticism of lingering on. Rossetti's maneuvers were in some sense restated in the texts on Botticelli to come, as writers tried to stage the elusiveness of the artist's historical position, as well as the vividness of his continuing effects. Here it is as if these themes had permeated the texture of the visual itself, leaving us unsure of the picture before us, witness to an art already past.

¹¹³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "For Spring, by Sandro Botticelli (In the Accademia of Florence," in Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis and White, 1881), 312, n.1.

¹¹⁴ Griselda Pollock, "Woman as Sign: Psychoanalytic Readings," in *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1988), 166-211; Elizabeth Prettejohn, "'Beautiful women with floral adjuncts': Rossetti's New Style," in Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn, and Edwin Becker *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 51-108.

Chapter Two: Ruskin, Pater, and the Pastness of Art

*The philosophy of art is...a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is.*¹

– G.W.F. Hegel

Walter Pater (1839-1894) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote the first serious modern accounts we have of Botticelli. Their essays were by far the most important texts on the artist since Vasari's brief life, and mark Botticelli's emergence as a personality and creative force within nineteenth-century culture. It is not that Botticelli's name had gone entirely without mention, or that suggestive, fragmentary interpretations had not been here and there put forth. As Pater notes already at the opening of his 1870 essay, "people have begun to find out the charm of Botticelli's work, and his name, so little known in the last century, is quietly becoming important;"² and the paintings considered in Chapter One speak for themselves. Nonetheless, in ways it will be my business to describe, the writings of Ruskin and Pater stand at the very origins of the rise of interest in Botticelli, a position secured in part by the retrospective importance these accounts were given. Their importance was understood from very early on. In the introduction to his seminal 1908 monograph, for instance, which has Pater as one of its two dedicatees, Herbert Horne singles out both authors for special mention. He praises Pater's essay as "the subtlest and most suggestive appreciation of Botticelli, in a personal way, which has yet been written."³ He reminds his readers "how largely this...essay has contributed towards the discovery of the unique place which Botticelli holds among the great masters of the Renaissance."⁴ For Ruskin's *Ariadne Florentina* (1873-76), Horne reserves more ambivalent appreciation:

Although Ruskin starts out with the fantastic assumption that the prints [he considers]..., traditionally associated with the name of Baccio Baldini, had been designed by Sandro, as studies for an unrealized project for the decoration of the vault of the Sistine ceiling, he does not fail to say many suggestive things by the way, concerning the painter and his work. Both this book and "Mornings in Florence"...were widely read, and contributed not a little (though nothing was further from the intention of their writer) to bring about that peculiarly English cult of Botticelli, which now became a distinctive trait of a phase of thought and

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, tr. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1975), 11.

² Walter Pater, "A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 8 (August 1870): 155.

³ Herbert Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence* (1908; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), xviii.

⁴ Horne, *Botticelli*, xix.

taste, or of what passed as such, as odd and extravagant as any of our odd and extravagant time.⁵

I will return to this question of oddity and extravagance soon enough. For now, I simply note the specialness of the texts that Horne recognized and singled out; and he was not the first to do so.⁶ For an entire field, the writings of Ruskin and Pater proved more than merely interesting treatments of the artist. They served to orient all “Botticellis” that would follow.

This chapter seeks to bring into focus the central features of these writers’ accounts—their core assumptions as well as their descriptive achievements—and the idiosyncracies of interpretation that would haunt the interpretation of Botticelli well into the twentieth century. Ruskin and Pater cannot be equated, of course: even in the moments their concerns most overlapped (I will be arguing that their appreciation of Botticelli was one such a moment) these writers prove very different creatures. Nonetheless, in what follows I consider two main aspects in which they may be compared. Firstly, Ruskin and Pater each developed innovative modes of pictorial description, finding new ways to stage not only the formal and stylistic aspects of painting, but also our affective and ethical involvement as viewers in what we see.⁷ Whatever their differences, for each the proper object of artwriting was the artwork in its greater totality: not simply the arrangement of a painting’s surface, but also the beholder’s lived experience of it. They wished to stage a picture’s self-sufficient intensity as well as its multiple points of suture to the world. Secondly, in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated, these modes of writing were conditioned by highly developed (and extremely fraught) senses of the uses and disadvantages of history. Ruskin and Pater both concerned themselves with working out the parameters and goals of an historical criticism. And for each, this meant sorting out the impact of the past on the present—its structuring effects, and its situating of our belatedness and loss.

For this Botticelli proves once again a complex and yet (it seems in retrospect) inevitable choice. Here, too, the artist serves as a historical shifter—a limit case of art’s historicity, balanced on a razor’s edge between modernity and antiquity. Indeed, the artist’s role in the “renewal” of pagan antiquity provided these writers with a figure for

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ As already noted, John Addington Symonds felt compelled to add a peculiar historiographic footnote to his treatment of the artist: “The prophecy of Mr. Ruskin, the tendencies of our best contemporary art in Mr. Burne Jones’s painting, the specific note of our recent fashionable poetry, and, more than all, our delight in the delicately poised psychological problems of the middle Renaissance, have evoked a kind of hero-worship for this excellent artist and true poet.” Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy: The Fine Arts* (1877; London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1901), 181, n. 1.

⁷ The connection between these terms is made explicit in Pater’s “Introduction” of 1873: “But it is in Italy, in the fifteenth century, that the interest of the Renaissance mainly lies, in that solemn fifteenth century which can hardly be studied too much, not merely for its positive results in the things of the intellect and the imagination, its concrete works of art, its special and prominent personalities, with their profound aesthetic charm, but for its general spirit and character, for the ethical qualities of which it is the consummate type.” Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), xii.

some of their most central concerns about art of the past. In looking at painting like Botticelli's—a painting that embodies so many elements of its age, yet survives as a force within our own—does the immediacy of aesthetic experience make that past over into our present? Or do we rather find ourselves drawn out of ourselves, into history? Both Ruskin and Pater focused on what they took to be Botticelli's *trans*-historical significance. For Pater, Botticelli's painting provides “a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the work of the Greeks themselves;”⁸ for Ruskin, he was a “reanimate Greek,” who received classical learning “as a native element of his being.”⁹ And as with the painters considered in Chapter One, Botticelli again and again elicited from his critics a recasting of such complex historical dynamics in erotic terms. His paintings made available the forms in which peculiar, convoluted, and (to put it mildly) “non-normative” forms of sexuality might be articulated.

In addition to the few works available to him at the National Gallery in London, now all demoted to school pictures (one sees in them what Pater meant in speaking Botticelli's “peevisish Madonnas” [fig. 3]), Pater also studied Botticelli's works at first hand in Italy. His trip there with his friend Charles Shadwell in 1865 provided a foundation for Pater's later writings. Though it is commonly assumed that Pater remained abstracted from the particulars of his experience there,¹⁰ we know that he routinely traveled well off the beaten track to study pictures in forgotten provincial galleries and chapels, and his writings are full of carefully registered specificities.¹¹ His 1870 essay, “A Fragment of Sandro Botticelli,” for instance, which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, includes, here and there, evocative memorials to that Southern scene.¹² The essay

⁸ Pater, “A Fragment,” 159.

⁹ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-12), 22:400, 22:440.

¹⁰ F.C. McGrath's understanding of this is typical, and I will be disagreeing with its line of reasoning in what follows. “For all Pater's rhetoric about the senses and the concrete,” writes McGrath, “especially the visual sense, the visual quality of his own writing, fictional or critical, is very unremarkable. For example, in his description of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, there are many more physical details, especially in the characterization of light, than in the Mona Lisa passage; but the passion and aesthetic impact of Pater's writing on the *Birth of Venus* pale beside his reverie over Leonardo's masterpiece. What is missing in the former is the intellectual passion Leonardo's lady aroused in him. In the Botticelli essay Pater's passion emerges when he deals with matters of the human spirit pressing for expression from the subtlest recesses of the artist's consciousness. Purely sensuous and concrete detail, however, is not what motivates Pater's most famous and moving passages.” F. C. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: University of Florida Press, 1986), 178. McGrath greatly underestimates the intellectual weight of the Botticelli essay; but what he says here does respond to important feature of Pater's prose more generally. Nonetheless, we need a more nuanced understanding of the complex relation *between* “sensual and concrete detail” on the one hand and “intellectual passion” on the other in Pater's artwriting—not the artificial polarization that McGrath suggests.

¹¹ Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: the Making of a Connoisseur* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), 146-7.

¹² Pater speaks at one point of “gipsy children, such as those who, in Apennine villages, still hold out their long brown arms to beg of you, but on Sundays become *enfants du chœur*, with their

appeared again, with few revisions, as the third chapter of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which he dedicated to Shadwell, and in every edition that followed. One textual amendment over the years stands out. In 1870 and 1873, Pater asked as he brought his "Fragment" to a close: "Is a painter like Botticelli, a second-rate painter, a subject for general criticism?"¹³ By 1877, the "second-rate painter" had become a "secondary" one, changing the vocabulary of newspaper art criticism for something more complex. Pater's essay has been best remembered for its evocation of Botticelli as an artistic temperament, a "personality" of the kind he says (perhaps echoing Jacob Burckhardt) the Renaissance offers us for the first time in human history. Botticelli is "before all else a poetical painter, blending the charm of story and sentiment;" the vehicle of "ineffable melancholy;" the conduit of "an undercurrent of original sentiment, which touches as you as the real subject of the picture through the veil of its ostensible subject."¹⁴ Nonetheless, such "original sentiment" emerges, for Pater, from an at times barely articulated—barely articulable—matrix of historical conditions that can be seen only in the perspective that the "secondary" allows. Rather than a mere art-critical judgment, the word embodies a viewpoint determined by a cultural history surveyed from the vantage of the present:

But, after all, it may be asked, is a painter like Botticelli—a secondary painter, a proper subject for general criticism: There are a few great painters, like Michelangelo or Leonardo, whose work has become a force in general culture, partly for this very reason that they have absorbed into themselves all such workmen as Sandro Botticelli; and, over and above mere technical or antiquarian criticism, general criticism may be very well employed in that sort of interpretation which adjusts the position of these men to general culture, whereas smaller men can be the proper subjects only of technical or antiquarian treatment. But, besides those great men, there is a certain number of artists who have a distinct faculty of their own by which they convey to us a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere, and these, too, have their place in general culture, and have to be interpreted to it by those who have felt their charm strongly, and are often the objects of a special diligence and a consideration wholly affectionate, just because there is not about them the stress of a great name and authority. Of this select number Botticelli is one; he has the freshness, the uncertain and diffident promise which belongs to the earlier Renaissance itself, and makes it perhaps the most interesting period in the history of the mind; in studying his works one begins to understand to how great a place in human culture the art of Italy had been called.¹⁵

thick black hair nicely combed and fair white linen on their sun-burnt throats." Pater, "A Fragment," 158.

¹³ Pater, "A Fragment," 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 155, 157, 155.

¹⁵ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: the 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 48.

This, as I say, is the language of a historical cultural criticism—an “aesthetic historicism,” as one of Pater’s best recent critics has phrased it—oriented in relation to its audience.¹⁶ Yet in the case of Botticelli it suggests not so much a position of stability as a process of continual unnerving, in which our gravitation towards history continually works to unseat us from present concerns. We cannot grasp Botticelli’s import for all this, I shall argue, unless we see Pater’s essay in an Hegelian light. The impact on Pater of his rigorous study of Hegel was profound and far-reaching, and in what follows I focus on the undercurrents of Hegelianism that run through his texts. Pater was among the first generation of British thinkers for whom Hegel’s philosophy was not simply a fixed system to be understood or selectively applied, but a living, shaping force. He worked *within* Hegelian aesthetics to establish his idiosyncratic critical stance.

Ruskin, meanwhile, began lecturing on Botticelli at Oxford in 1871 (he was the University’s first Slade Professor of Fine Art). The artist comes in for a mention in that year’s “Lectures on Landscape.” A year later, in October 1872, Ruskin published an issue of *Fors Clavigera*—Ruskin’s monthly “letters to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain”—concerned mostly with Botticelli’s life. He returned to the artist in his Michaelmas lectures of that year: “Sandro Botticelli and the Florentine School of Engraving,” published serially under the title *Ariadne Florentina* between 1873 and 1876. Here Ruskin took as his “text” a set of engravings in the British Museum, which he firmly attributed to the extended reach of Botticelli’s hand (**Figs. 63-64**). He compared the dour, northern engravings of Holbein (principally, those making up Holbein’s *Dance of Death*) with Florentine engraving’s conjuncture of “prophecy, and delight.”¹⁷ His idiosyncratic guidebook *Mornings in Florence*, in part concerned with Botticelli, soon followed (1875-77).

There is no mistaking the directness of Ruskin’s engagement with Botticelli’s pictures. His texts routinely situate themselves in the contingencies of a particular encounter—the time of day, the angle of vision, the unstable quality of light. Ruskin studied works by Botticelli closely on his 1872 trip to Italy, and again during the summer of 1874. In 1873, at the behest of Edward Burne-Jones, he purchased the book of drawings now known as the *Florentine Picture Chronicle*, now in the British Museum, in which Ruskin thought Botticelli may have had a hand (**fig. 65**). He also owned a “Botticelli” Madonna (**fig. 66**), purchased from his principal copyist Charles Fairfax Murray—a painting to which Ruskin never warmed.¹⁸

In the twenty-second letter of *Fors*, Ruskin praised Botticelli for his capacious moral character: “on the whole, the most universal of painters; and, take him all in all, the greatest Florentine workman.”¹⁹ The artist was, for Ruskin, uniquely attuned to the

¹⁶ Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater’s Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989). Williams adapts her title from Erich Auerbach, “Vico and Aesthetic Historicism” [sic], *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 8 (December 1949): 110-18.

¹⁷ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:395.

¹⁸ Ruskin acquired painting in 1877 for £300, having previously seen a photograph. To Murray he wrote that the painting “is so ugly that I’ve not dared to show it to a human soul. Your buying such an ugly thing has shaken my very trust in you.” Letter, 22 December 1877, Pierpont Morgan Library, quoted in Robert Hewison, Ian Warrell, and Stephen Wildman, *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), 145.

¹⁹ Ruskin, *Works*, 27:372.

natural world—“no man has ever yet drawn, and none is likely to draw for many a day, roses as well as Sandro has drawn them”—as well as being a right reader of Dante. Moreover, he goes on, Botticelli “was the only painter of Italy... who understood the thoughts of Heathens and Christians equally, and could in a measure paint both Aphrodite and the Madonna.”²⁰ “Botticelli is perfect in the life of the nobly natural world,” he would tell his Oxford students in 1874: “he is the only painter of all the religious schools who unites every bodily with every spiritual power and knowledge. He only can delight in every earthly and material beauty and enforce every material law without the least taint passing over him.”²¹ After his “conversion” to the religious purity of Fra Angelico, beginning in 1845, and his “unconversion” before Veronese’s sensuous *Queen of Sheba* in 1859, Botticelli represented something of a middle ground—a synthesis of his previous investments.²²

Retrospectively, in an 1883 addition to *Modern Painters* II, Ruskin took credit for the revival of interest in Botticelli:

But I say with pride, which it has become my duty to express openly, that it was left to me, and to me alone, first to discern, and then to teach, so far as in this hurried century any such thing *can* be taught, the excellency and supremacy of five great painters, despised until I spoke of them,—Turner, Tintoret, Luini, Botticelli, and Carpaccio. Despised,—nay, scarcely in any true sense of the word, known. I think, before the year 1874 [a mistake for 1872], in which I began work on the frescoes of Botticelli and Perugino in the Sistine Chapel, there will scarcely be found so much as a notice of their existence in the diary of any traveler, and there was no consciousness of their existence in the entire mind of modern Rome. They are little enough noticed *now*....²³

—a set of claims that sets Ruskin’s later editors into a flurry of qualification,²⁴ and Pater himself seems to have been wary of Ruskin’s appropriations.²⁵ Such “discoveries” were a

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27:371, 27:372.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23:271.

²² The shape of this dialectic echoes that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who moved from an early appreciation of Angelico, through his “Venetian” period in the 1860s, and on to the “Botticellian” canvases of the 1870s.

²³ Ruskin, *Works*, 4:355-56.

²⁴ In a footnote to Ruskin’s passage, Cook and Wedderburn are driven to present a history of Botticelli’s rediscovery in miniature: “The modern cult of Botticelli owes much to Ruskin’s enthusiasm; but something must be allowed also to the essay of Pater (first published in the *Fortnightly Review* of August 1870, reprinted in *Studies in the Renaissance*, 1873). Reference should be made also to Mr. Swinburne’s ‘Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence,’ (first published in the *Fortnightly Review* for July 1868), in which he speaks of ‘the faint and almost painful grace which gives a distinctive value and curious charm to all the works of Botticelli.’ At an auction in 1867 D.G. Rossetti picked up a Botticelli for £20. ‘If he had not something to do,’ writes his brother, ‘with the vogue which soon afterwards began to attach to that fascinating master, I am under a misapprehension.’ Pater’s essay first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* of August 1870. Ruskin’s first mention of Botticelli was in a lecture delivered at Oxford during the Lent Term, 1871. Carpaccio had been proclaimed in a lecture of the previous year, and it became

long time coming. Botticelli represented a revolution in Ruskin's own taste, before which he had done his own share of despising. Ruskin had found Botticelli's paintings intensely disagreeable on his first trip to Italy in 1845.²⁶ A notebook entry from this trip survives (Ruskin writes here of paintings by Botticelli seen at Florence):

An artist who never gives me pleasure, though he is always serious and often sweet in expression. But his heads may be taken as types of the Vulgar ideal, for they are not portraits. They are never terminated by the quiet oval line of the Giotto school, but are full of indentations & angles & breaks, while they all exhibit the fault of Taddeo Gaddi... and that in a still higher degree: they make the point of the nose expanded and round, the worst fault a face can have.²⁷

The distance covered between 1845 and 1883 was extraordinary. Still in 1855, Ruskin seems to have considered Botticelli's name a term of abuse. His "Notes on Some of the Principal Pictures Exhibited in the Rooms of the Royal Academy" of that year registers his dissatisfaction with William Dyce's *Christabel* (fig. 67):

An example of one of the false branches of Pre-Raphaelitism, consisting in imitation of the old religious masters. This head is founded chiefly on reminiscence of Sandro Botticelli. The ivy leaves at the side are as elaborate as in the true school, but are quite false both in colour and shade. There is some sweet expression in the face.²⁸

a standard joke among the profane to ask who was Ruskin's last 'greatest painter.'" Ruskin, *Works*, 4:356.

²⁵ In a letter of 28 November 1881 Pater wrote to Henry James Nicoll: "A large part of my Renaissance Studies had previously appeared in Reviews or Magazines, among others that on Botticelli, which I believe to be the first notice in English of that old painter. It preceded Mr Ruskin's lectures on the same subject by I believe two years." *The Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. L. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 41.

²⁶ In the second installment (1885) of his autobiography, *Praeterita*, Ruskin recalls his ignorance on his first trip to Florence: "Everybody about me swearing that Michael Angelo was the finest thing in the world. I was extremely proud of being pleased with him; confirmed greatly in my notion of my own infallibility, and with help of Rogers in the Lorenzo Chapel, and long sittings and standings about the Bacchus in the Uffizi, progressed greatly and vitally in Michael-Angelesque directions. But I at once pronounced the knife grinder in the Tribune a vulgar nuisance, as I do still; the Venus de' Medici, an uninteresting little person; Raphael's St. John, a piece of black bombast; and the Uffizi collection in general, an unbecoming medley, got together by people who knew nothing, and cared less than nothing, about the arts. On the whole, when I last walked through the Uffizi in 1882 I was precisely of the same opinion, and proud of having arrived at it so quickly. It was not to be expected of me at that time to like either Angelico or Botticelli; and if I had, the upper corridor of the Uffizi was an entirely vile and contemptible place wherein to see the great Madonna of the one, or the Venus Marina of the other. Both were then in the outer passage from the entrance to the Tribune." Ruskin, *Works*, 35:270.

²⁷ John Ruskin, "Résumé" of *Italian Art and Architecture (1845)*, ed. Paul Tucker (Pisa: Scuola normale superiore, 2003), 49.

²⁸ Ruskin, *Works*, 14:19.

In light of the kinds of criticism later leveled at Aestheticist references to Botticelli, it is striking to see the quattrocento artist already associated in 1855 with hollow imitation. The full interest of these early treatments, however, lies in their comparison to what would soon supersede them.

When Ruskin comes first to speak sustainedly of Botticelli in 1871, he fixes on the *Mystic Nativity* (**fig. 68**), now in the National Gallery:

If you look first at the faces in this picture you will find them ugly—often without expression, always ill or carelessly drawn. The entire purpose of the picture is a mystic symbolism by motion and chiaroscuro. By motion, first. There is a dome of burning clouds in the upper heaven. Twelve angels half float, half dance, in a circle, round the lower vault of it. All their drapery is drifted so as to make you feel the whirlwind of their motion. They are seen by gleams of silvery or fiery light, relieved against an equally lighted blue of inimitable depth and loveliness. It is impossible for you ever to see a more noble work of passionate Greek chiaroscuro—rejoicing in light.²⁹

There is some continuity here with Ruskin's earlier notes. He still finds ugliness in the Botticellian face. Yet attention now radiates outward to take in the whirling motion of the angels' draperies. Ruskin anticipates Aby Warburg. We might take Ruskin's Botticelli as one of several sources for the *bewegtes Beiwerk*—the “accessories in motion”—which became a fixation of Warburg's thought. Such features were a matter of fascination for Ruskin. In the Uffizi's *Coronation* (**fig. 13**), for instance, he fervently described the

choir of twelve angels, not dancing, not flying, but carried literally in a whorl, or vortex, whirlwind of the breath of heaven; their wings lie level, interwoven among the clouds, pale sky of intense light, yet darker than the white clouds they pass through, their arms stretched to each other, their hands clasped—it is as if the morning sky had all been changed into marble, and they into living creatures....³⁰

Yet his prior repulsion at the face also has its second, altered life. In Botticelli's Uffizi *Coronation* (**fig. 13**), for instance, Ruskin fixes first on the angels and then (like Burne-Jones) on central face of Gabriel, “opposite to you, between the Christ and the Madonna,” seen through “a close rain of golden rays... as a white bird through rain, looking up, seeing the fulfillment of his message” (**fig. 14**):

The main figures are the size of life. The surrounding choir of angels—about one-third the size of life—and the Gabriel is diminished by perspective on the farther side, so that his face is only about two inches wide. Well, across his face, between you and him, fall eight or ten straight bars of this golden rain like the base of a helmet visor. Right down across the face, every edge of them as fine and true as a line of gossamer, but you think the face will be spoiled. It is as perfect as if no

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22:46-47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23:273.

line crossed it; you see it as through a veil, tender, infinite in rejoicing, lifted in a light of the spirit brighter than gold.³¹

The veiling and schematization of the face, pinioned by bands of gold, as well its smallness, encourages an attention that somewhat interrupts the viewer's scanning of the surface. Whirlwind and still face: these are the poles of Ruskin's visual interest in Botticelli. They represent a double displacement of the material body: on the one, hand outward into its whirling prosthetic accessories, on the other, upward into frozen expression of the face. Where Pater always sees forlorn inwardness, an "undercurrent" of "sentiment" and self-reflection, Ruskin found himself caught in a rhythmic alternation of fixation and flow—one that traded Pater's celebration of figures sinking inward for a perpetual fanning out. The rays of gold across Gabriel's face are that radiation materialized.

I. SOURCES AND RIVALS

Ruskin and Pater shared a number of sources. Both studied, for instance, the writings of the reactionary Catholic moralist Alexis-François Rio (1797-1894), whose *Art chrétien, De la poésie chrétienne – Forme de l'art* (1835) was unavoidable within mid-century British cultures of art.³² In Rio's "moral art history," as Matthew Plampin justly calls it, an artist's greatness was measured by his or her art's expression of piety, rather than its technical or formal achievements. This invariably led Rio to value the Christian "primitives" over all who came after. The resurgence of paganism in the Italian Renaissance, meanwhile, resulted in its immediate decay. Within this peculiar and highly influential history, Botticelli comes in for brief mention. Rio noted the distinctiveness of the Virgin "who in the pictures of Botticelli, almost always wears an expression of melancholy," thus inaugurating the trope of the sadness of Botticelli's madonnas.³³ Generally, Rio's position had greater impact on Ruskin than on Pater, yet Pater certainly

³¹ Ibid., 23:273-4.

³² On Rio, see Sister Mary Camille Bowe, *François Rio: sa place dans la renouveau catholique en Europe (1797-1874)* (Paris: Boivin et cie., 1938). For Rio's influence in England, see R. W. Lightbown, "The Inspiration of Christian Art, in *Influences in Victorian Art and Architecture*, ed. Sarah Macready and F.H. Thompson (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1985), 3-40; and especially Matthew T. W. Plampin, "From Rio to Romola: Morality and Didacticism in the English Appreciation of Early Italian Art, 1836-1863" (PhD diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 2001).

³³ A. F. Rio, *The Poetry of Christian Art* (London: T. Bonsworth, 1854), 99. This had its effect also on the American art historian and collector of early Italian pictures James Jackson Jarves. He wrote in 1861 of "Botticelli's heads" as "touchingly sweet, with a sort of boding sadness, from which not even his angels or Venuses are exempt, and which is very noticeable in his Madonnas, as if there were a pensive misgiving at the bottom of his soul as to his own manner of life." James Jackson Jarves, *Art Studies: The "Old Masters" of Italy: Painting* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1861), 267.

picked up on the melancholic Botticelli one finds in these pages.³⁴ And in any case Rio's pronouncement is perhaps best understood for its effects outside the moralizing architecture in which it could be found: a brief, free-floating association available to further development.

For the factual scaffolding of their accounts both Ruskin and Pater turned (with skepticism) to the joint works of Joseph Archer Crowe (1825-1896) and Giovanni Cavalcaselle (1819-1897). Their ambitious three-volume work, *A New History of Italian Painting From the Second to the Sixteenth Century*, ground-breaking in its punctilious scholarship, appeared in 1864. When Ruskin and Pater came to write of Botticelli, the text of Crowe and Cavalcaselle served as a useful irritant—an enemy their arguments could be arranged against. Meanwhile, Algernon Charles Swinburne (at times a friend to both Ruskin and Pater) had perverted Rio's affective account in his haunting essay "Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence" (1868), which briefly considers the "the faint and almost painful grace, which gives a distinct value and a curious charm to all the works of Botticelli."³⁵ It is to these two competing accounts of Botticelli that I now turn.

Crowe and Cavalcaselle

As Paul Tucker shrewdly notes, when Pater and Ruskin discuss Vasari, they did so "*in preference* to modern sources," performing an elaborate end-run around the work of Crowe and Cavalcaselle.³⁶ *A New History* extended the essentially philological approach the two had developed seven years earlier in their *The Early Flemish Painters*. The new volumes were greeted with enthusiasm: "Their book is in short a new Vasari," wrote one critic, accurately characterizing its ambitions.³⁷ Pater and Ruskin, however, demurred. In his essay of 1877, "The School of Giorgione," for instance, Pater directed uncharacteristic sarcasm at Crowe and Cavalcaselle's demolition of the oeuvre of Giorgione. (This had occurred in *A History of Painting in North Italy* of 1874, their

³⁴ Ruskin's early understanding of Botticelli's "vulgarity" may have been derived from Rio, according to whom Botticelli "adopted the manner, style, and vulgar types of his master [Filippo Lippi]; with the exception, however, of that of the Madonna," *ibid.* Rio even fixed on the very passage of the *Trials of Moses* on which Ruskin would lavish so much attention in the mid 1870s. The terms of his appreciation, moreover, anticipate Warburg's obsession with "accessories in motion": "[T]here is a mixture of heroic and pastoral poetry in the episode of the daughters of Jethro, surrounded by their flocks, and chivalrously defended by Moses against the shepherds, which would leave nothing to be desired had the figure of the deliverer been as happily conceived as the group of young virgins, whose simple and animated attitudes, tresses of golden hair, and long white garments, arrest the attention of the spectator so completely, as to distract it from the other parts of the composition." Rio, *Poetry of Christian Art*, 100.

³⁵ Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Notes on the Designs of the Old Masters at Florence," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 4 (July 1868): 23.

³⁶ Paul Tucker, "'Re-animate Greek': Ruskin and Pater on Botticelli," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Leslie Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), 119.

³⁷ A. Wilson, "Correspondance de Londres," *Gazette des beaux arts*, XXIV (May 1868): 504.

follow-up to *A New History*.) “The accomplished science of the subject has come at last,” writes Pater, “and, as in other instances, has not made the past more real for us, but assured us only that we possess less of it than we seemed to possess:”

And now, in the “new Vasari,” the great traditional reputation, woven with so profuse demand on men’s admiration, has been scrutinised thread by thread; and what remains of the most vivid and stimulating of Venetian masters, a live flame, as it seemed, in those old shadowy times, has been reduced almost to a name by his most recent critics.³⁸

In his Oxford lectures, Ruskin, pursuing a somewhat cryptic point concerning the unity of the arts, takes a moment to deride Crowe and Cavalcaselle for having produced “a dictionary of details:”

...I may once for all prove to you the essential unity of the arts, and show you how impossible it is to understand one without reference to another. Which I wish you to observe all the more closely, that you may use, without danger of being misled, the data, of unequalled value which have been collected by Crowe and Cavalcaselle, in the book which they have called a *History of Painting in Italy*, but which is in fact only a dictionary of details related to that history. Such a title is an absurdity on the face of it. For you can no more write the history of painting in Italy than you can write the history of the south wind in Italy. The sirocco does indeed produce certain effects at Genoa and others at Rome; but what would be the value of a treatise upon the winds, which, for the honour of any country, assumed that every city of it had a native sirocco?³⁹

For Pater, the scholarship of Crowe and Cavalcaselle stood for myopic scholarly negations. For Ruskin, it offered an unorganized profusion of undigested facts, obscuring a more total understanding of painting’s place.

Neither account, of course, is quite fair to *A New History*.⁴⁰ The scholarly value of these volumes was immense: Crowe and Cavalcaselle not only provided readers with a

³⁸ Walter Pater, “The School of Giorgione” (1877), in Pater, *1893 Text*, 112-13.

³⁹ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:337-8.

⁴⁰ On the duo’s achievements, see especially Donata Levi, “Crowe e Cavalcaselle: Analisi di una collaborazione,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 3rd ser., 12 (1982): 1131-71; and Levi, *Cavalcaselle: Il pioniere della conservazione dell’arte italiana* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1988). See also Jaynie Anderson’s review of Levi’s monograph, “Cavalcaselle, Pioneer of Italian Conservation” *Burlington Magazine* 132 (January 1990): 43-44; R. Degennaro, “Cavalcaselle in Sicily: His Studies of Antonello da Messina,” *Prospettiva: Rivista di storia dell’arte antica e moderna* 68 (October 1992): 73-86; Donata Levi, “L’officina di Crowe e Cavalcaselle,” *Prospettiva: Rivista di storia dell’arte antica e moderna* 26 (1981): 74-86; Denys Sutton, “Crowe and Cavalcaselle: Two Nineteenth-Century Art Writers of the Victorian Age,” *Apollo* 122 (1985): 111-17. Finally, Crowe’s autobiography contains a fascinating discussion of Cavalcaselle’s connoisseurial method, though its accuracy regarding the dynamics of their collaboration has been questioned: see J. A. Crowe, *Reminiscences of Thirty-Five Years of My Life* (London: John Murray, 1895).

formidable collation of attributions and documented biographical facts about artists for the most part known only through the “legends” of Vasari. They also gave a frame in which such data could, with utmost neutrality, be placed. What interests me here, however, is that this mode of artwriting should elicit such immediate and fiercely negative reactions. This was not merely blind disgust: Ruskin and Pater, each in his way, carefully weighed the gains and losses of the new method before refusing it. In the very orientation of their empirical account, Crowe and Cavalcaselle had a diacritical effect upon artwriting, articulating the shape of a field through the unpleasure their presence caused. During the twentieth century, when the appetite for such art-historical positivism grew insatiable, their achievement would be seen (not wrongly) as ground-breaking and heroic: a harbinger of things to come.⁴¹ It is one of the fascinations of the development of art history that such a response should have been so long delayed.

The sixteen-page account of the career of Botticelli that Crowe and Cavalcaselle included in *A New History* was the longest and most detailed yet published.⁴² Its opening cannot have endeared itself to Ruskin and Pater. Crowe and Cavalcaselle begin their chapter on the artist by lingering over what they take to be his personal ugliness:

Amongst the spectators of the martyrdom of S. Peter painted by Filippino Lippi in the Brancacci chapel, one on the right is a sullen and sensual looking man in profile, whose head is remarkable for the salience of the nose, the deep set of the eye under the pent-house of the brow, the heaviness of underjaw and the size of a large and fleshy mouth. A purple cap covers copious long flowing locks, a red mantle envelops the form; and the legs are encased in green hose. This, according to Vasari, is the portrait of Sandro Botticelli....⁴³

From the start they position themselves against Vasari. They acknowledge his identification only to give an account of the painted figure in situ (**fig. 69**) more detailed than their predecessor’s mere notation—a move meant to imply, of course, the greater accuracy of their own description. The authors’ positioning as the “new Vasari” begins already in their own text. Their negative assessment of Botticelli’s work, moreover—negative, that is, when the account strays at all from the careful cultivation of its neutral tone—pointedly contrasts with Vasari’s few moments of praise. “Vasari,” they write, “who could appreciate technical skill might for that reason prefer the work of Botticelli to that of his rival [Ghirlandaio], but we look in vain for the deep expression of thought and subtlety which the biographer discovers and praises.”⁴⁴ Yet, despite their flirtation with physiognomic description, Botticelli’s personality is no more Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s object than the description of his achievement on affective, ethical, or even (strictly

⁴¹ For positivism as a rallying cry, see the editorial “In Praise of Positivism,” *The Burlington Magazine* 138 (May 1996): 299.

⁴² J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy From the Second to the Sixteenth Century. Drawn up from Fresh Materials and Recent Researches in the Archives of Italy; As Well as from Personal Inspection of the Works of Art Scattered Throughout Europe* (London: John Murray, 1864), 2:414-430.

⁴³ Crowe and Cavalscaselle, *A New History*, 2:416.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:415. It should be noted, however, that Vasari’s account was not altogether positive, making him also an object of Ruskin’s antagonism.

speaking) historical grounds. These writers wish only to place Botticelli within their construal of the body of Italian painting—within, that is, the comprehensive structure of *A History* itself—cataloguing stylistic affinities rather than portraying any essential dimension of his style. For them, Botticelli is “the contemporary of Domenico Ghirlandaio, Benozzo, Verrocchio and Pietro Perugino, an artist who developed at various periods of his career the semi-religious, semi-fanciful feeling of Fra Filippo and the more realistic character of the Pollaiuoli and Verrocchio, and a vehement and passionate manner of his own at last, in which he combined power with fantastic exuberance of thought;”⁴⁵ and accordingly, their chapter on Botticelli proceeds paratactically, one moment of bare-boned description following another.

Even in their most fulsome mode, Crowe and Cavalcaselle pursue Botticelli’s position in the unfolding of a regional style.⁴⁶ And, in general, their text tends towards the uninflected form of the list, studded with minimal description:

Florence. Uffizi. First corridor. No. 31 [fig. 8]. Allegory of the birth of Venus
The goddess issues from a shell which is driven to the shore by two flying allegories of the wind. Life size. The figures are a little out of balance. The picture originally belonged to the Medici and was painted for Cosimo’s villa of Castello.⁴⁷

Or even more characteristically:

[Berlin Museum]. *No. 1124 [fig. 36].* Venus erect, imitating the pose of the Medicean, not one of the best productions of Botticelli.⁴⁸

In the face of this kind of intentionally cultivated inattention, always moving as quickly as possible onto the next thing, one begins to see why Ruskin complained so often of the *New History*’s descriptive poverty. “Crowe and C. are mere brutes in questions of expression of character,” he wrote to his secretary St. John Tyrwhitt: “You may generally read them backwards—they would talk of Turner’s ‘splash-dash style,’ if they spoke of

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ For instance, their uncharacteristically positive evaluation of *The Coronation*, already noting the prominence “accessories in motion” that will become such a point of fixation for writers on the artist, in the end domesticates his achievement: “Botticelli succeeds in realizing at least the idea of infinity and space. The joy of the spirits of paradise is not mystically conceived as it was by Angelico. It is expressed by elastic and mirthful motion and by a certain grace which retrieves the want of nobleness in type. A balmy breeze waves through the locks and distends the draperies; and the eager angels who pass the flowers or cast them at the Virgin’s feet, foreshadow the similar productions of Raphael and proclaim Botticelli as the creator of models perfected by modern art.” Ruskin, *Works*, 2:421. He is, at best, a precursor of the fuller and more legitimate achievements to come.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2:423.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

him.”⁴⁹ In *A New History*, even the most distinctive artists served merely as connective tissue within the encompassing stylistic organization of Italian art itself.⁵⁰

Swinburne

The stylistic affinities between Pater’s historical studies and Swinburne’s “aesthetic criticism” have often been noted—in the first place by Swinburne himself. “I liked Pater’s essay on Leonardo very much,” Swinburne wrote to Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1869, “I confess I did fancy there was a little spice of my style as you say, but much good stuff of his own, and much of interest.”⁵¹ Notoriously, however, Pater’s sources were mixed and many.⁵² Locating Swinburne, moreover, in Pater’s writings is made all more difficult by the constitutive inconsistencies of Swinburne’s texts themselves. Recently, Elizabeth Prettejohn has heroically sought to make Swinburne make sense, arguing for his coherence as a critic, and casting him not merely as “art for art’s sake’s” chief

⁴⁹ Ruskin to Richard St. John Tyrwhitt, 29? September 1872, in Jay Wood Claiborne, “Two Secretaries: The Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Augustus Howell and the Rev. Richard St. John Tyrwhitt” (PhD diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1969), 310.

⁵⁰ Later, Crowe and Cavalcaselle would attempt to remedy something of their dry-as-dust approach in conceptually innovative monographs on Titian (1877) and Raphael (1882-85) that attempted to put the oeuvre into more profound alignment with the artist’s life. On this, see the fine discussion by Gabriele Guercio. Taken together, Guercio writes, the two works (whatever their failures) attempted to “radically rework the perception... that the making of an artwork points to a spatialized, humanized, and nonlinear time. The factual, chronological, and historical times characteristics of the life-and-work model are therefore virtually aligned, if not replaced, with time existing only as and through creation—and evidently inconceivable without the concurrent realization of someone being there.” Gabriele Guercio, *Art as Existence: The Monograph and its Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 181; 191-2.

⁵¹ 28 November 1869, *Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959-62), 2:58. He returned to theme more emphatically four years later, in a letter to John Morley, the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, in which most of Pater’s essays appeared: “I admire and enjoy Pater’s work so heartily that I am somewhat shy of saying how much, ever since on my telling him once at Oxford how highly Rossetti (D.G.) as well as myself estimated his first papers in the *Fortnightly*, he replied to the effect that he considered them as owing their inspiration entirely to the example of my own work in the same line: and though of course no one else would dream of attributing the merit to a study of my style of writing on such matters, I suppose, as Rossetti said, that something of the same influence was perceptible in them to him, there is just such a grain of truth in the pound of compliment as to impede the free expression of all my opinion as to their excellence. But in effect they seem to me throughout as full of original character and power as of grace and truth.” 11 April 1873, Swinburne, *Letters*, 2:240-1.

⁵² See, for instance, Billie Inman, “The Intellectual Context of Walter Pater’s ‘Conclusion,’” in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, ed. Philip Dodd (London: Cass, 1981), 12-30; Inman, *Walter Pater’s Reading: A Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Readings, 1858-1873* (New York: Garland, 1981); and Inman, *Walter Pater and his Reading, 1874-1877: With a Bibliography of his Library Borrowings, 1878-1894* (New York: Garland, 1990).

ideologue, but as its most subtle critical intelligence.⁵³ I am not sure, however, he does make this kind of sense, or that coherence provides a true measure of his intentions or his powers as a writer. For Swinburne's criticism always courted wholesale fragmentation. However formidable his intellect, or subtle his taste, a deeply productive incoherence lay at his achievement's heart. ("[W]e cannot say that his thinking is faulty or perverse—up to the point it is thinking," complains T.S. Eliot, "But Swinburne stops thinking just at the moment we are most zealous to go on.")⁵⁴ In their diffuseness, one can never be sure that Swinburne's critical pronouncements count as concrete engagements at all. One is never clear, that is, to what extent the verbal pyrotechnics of his essays are occasioned by their objects and to what extent those effects are self-motivating acts of reverie and free association. Swinburne's "Designs of the Florentine Masters" thus presents a special, not to say maddening, sort of evidence for the association of Botticelli with certain Aestheticist themes. Its semantic deliquescence makes the question of Swinburne's influence a difficult one.

Such difficulty is increased by the place Botticelli assumes within the essay's meandering structure. For Botticelli's "faint and almost painful grace" is overshadowed by the more impressive intensity Swinburne brings to securely canonical artists. It is Leonardo, for instance, who "allure[s] and perplex[es]," with his "[f]air, strange faces of women full of dim doubt and faint scorn; touched by the shadow of an obscure fate; eager and weary as it seems at once, pale and fervent with patience or passion..."⁵⁵ It is Michelangelo who pictures "the deadlier Venus incarnate"—her very "ornaments seem[ing] to partake of her fatal nature, to bear upon them her brand of beauty fresh from hell."⁵⁶ Swinburne's fevered reveries look ahead to the most exaggerated sub-Huysmanian texts of the 1890s; it seems stalked by the phantoms of a decadence to come.

Compared to such full-throttle ekphrases, the discussion of Botticelli can seem as "thin [and] pallid" as the artist's own works. A drawing that would seem to beg for the full projective treatment barely raises the poet's interest (**fig. 70**): "[T]wo witches loosely draped, not of the great age common to their kind; one stirs and feeds the fire under a caldron of antique fashion and pagan device; one turns away with a hard dull smile showing all her wolfish teeth."⁵⁷ Another of Venus elicits only the slightest mention.⁵⁸ The *Primavera* provokes an interesting description—but again, only in passing—as "Botticelli's beautiful and battered picture of Spring; beautiful for all its quaintness,

⁵³ Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Algernon Charles Swinburne," in *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 37-69.

⁵⁴ T.S. Eliot, "Swinburne as Critic," in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen and Co., 1920), 20. The phobic reaction to Swinburne by modernist critics such as Eliot, Ezra Pound, and T.E. Hulme is a fascinating phenomenon in its own right.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, "Notes," 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁸ Interestingly, however, Swinburne does connect it to one of the paintings of Venus from the Ashburton collection, confirming its importance as an icon for the Aesthete: "Here also is a sketch for the figure of Venus, seemingly the one sold in England in 1863, with no girdle of roses round the flanks; not the lovelier or likelier Venus of the two." Swinburne, "Notes," 23.

pallor, and deformities.”⁵⁹ And even when occasion arises to engage the crucial topoi of “Hebrew” and “Hellene,” Swinburne barely sniffs at the bait:

Another careful satyr-like head suggests the suppressed leaning to grotesque invention and hunger after heathen liberty which break out whenever this artist is released from the mill-horse round of mythologic virginity and sacred childhood: in which at all times he worked with such singular grace and such ingenuity of pathetic device.⁶⁰

“[T]he mill-horse round of mythologic virginity and sacred childhood” is very fine, of course. Yet Swinburne’s engagement with Botticelli seems especially random and unfocused, a loose collection of momentary incidents within the essay’s ever more peculiar flow. These passages raise issues to which Pater returns at greater length, and with more structured intelligence, in his essay of two years later. But that essay represents an engagement of another kind, one less scattered in its attentions.

In Swinburne, it is the scattering itself that proves interesting. Botticelli seems to enjoin a kind of drift. Description of the artist continues beyond literal attention to his (supposed) drawings, and Swinburne’s most compelling remarks concern Botticelli’s spilling beyond his boundaries and exerting influence over others. Of Filippino Lippi, Botticelli’s student, Swinburne writes that “[m]uch may be traced to his master Botticelli”:

From his teacher we may derive the ambition after new things, the desire of various and liberal invention, the love of soft hints and veiled meanings, with something now and then of the hard types of face and form, the satisfaction apparently found in dry conventional faults, which disfigure the beauty of Botticelli’s own pictures.⁶¹

Yet, one particular drawing stands out:

A fair sample of the somewhat lean and fleshless beauty, worn down, it seems by some sickness or natural trouble rather than by any ascetic or artificial sorrow, in which Botticelli must have taught his pupil to take pleasure, is here in the veiled head of Simonetta, thin-faced, with small sharp features, bright intent eyes, and rippling hair; a model, it will be remembered, dear to the teacher of Lippino.⁶²

The development of decadent types is here already under way. I wish to emphasize, however, their occurring *between* Botticelli and a follower, as though the actual affective qualities of Botticelli’s achievement could only develop in a space somewhat apart—an effect rather than an integral part of his artistry. In its peculiar, fragmentary way, Swinburne’s essay thus already engages the themes that scientific connoisseurship, with

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 24.

⁶² Ibid.

its super-charged investment in the boundaries between artists, was beginning to claim for its own.

Moreover, Swinburne stages Botticelli as historically over-determined. Within Filippino's practice, he emerges as a figure of belatedness: on the one hand, a conservative force holding the younger artist's stylistic development back; on the other, a sign of cutting-edge modernity resonant with Swinburne's own artistic contemporaries. A chain of association runs from Botticelli, through Filippino, to Edward Burne-Jones. Swinburne notes a drawing of a "strange typical figure of a woman holding what seems some armorial blazon on a scroll in her hand"—a figure of "some doubtful evil, some mystery of a witch's irresolute anger, . . . half expressed and half suppressed by her features and actions."⁶³ "Especially," he goes on, "will she recall the heroine of Mienhold to those who have seen Mr. E. Burne Jones's noble drawing of the young Sidonia."⁶⁴

Again, should this be seen as an elliptical pursuit of argument or as pure, unmeaning drift? In the end, it is the assertion of connection itself that matters. The passage builds in intensity and delivers us into a world of heightened anachronistic figuration. All of a sudden, Swinburne moves towards world-historical assertion, and offers a generalized description of modern disenchantment taking hold:

More than any others, these painters of the early Florentine school reproduce in their own art the style of thought and work familiar to a student of Chaucer and his fellows or pupils. Nymphs have faded into fairies, and gods subsided into men. A curious realism has grown up out of that very ignorance and perversion which seemed as if it could not but falsify whatever thing it touched upon.⁶⁵

Swinburne, that is, connects the painters whose drawings he considers to a set of sources familiar from Pre-Raphaelite art, as though a self-conscious medievalism and the medieval itself amounted to the same thing. What "Chaucer and his fellows or pupils" represent is a kind of historical limbo, an unfixated "age . . . of transition":

This study of Filippino's has all the singular charm of the romantic school which remains alike remote from pure tradition and allegoric invention. The clear form has gone, the old beauty dropped out of sight; no freshness and fervour of new significance has come to supplant it; no memory and no desire has begun to reach back with studious eyes and reverted hands towards it, as towards some purer and fuller example of art than any elsewhere attainable; but the mediaeval or romantic form has an incommunicable charm of its own. False and monstrous as are the local conditions and the local colouring with which it works, the forms and voices of women and men which it endeavours to make us see and hear are actually audible voices and visible forms. Before Chaucer could give us a Pandarus or a Cressida, all knowledge and memory of the son of Lycaon and the daughter of Chryses must have died out, the whole poem collapsed into romance; but far as these may be removed from the true tale and the true city of Troy, they are not

⁶³ Ibid., 24-5.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

phantoms; they tread real earth, and breathe real air, though it be not in Greece or Troas. Discrowned of epic tradition, dispossessed of divine descent, they are not yet degraded and deformed into base and brutish likeness by the realism and the irony of Shakespeare. Divine they are no longer, but not as yet merely porcine and vulpine. So it is with such designs as this Ariadne, if Ariadne it be; they belong to the same age, almost to the same instant, of transition. Two great samples exist of this school among painters: the Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli, the Death of Procris by Piero di Cosimo. Of Filippino's sketch the chief charm lies in a dim light of magic morning mixed with twilight and shed over strange seas and a charmed shore.⁶⁶

I quote at length in order to establish the vacillating rhythms of Swinburne's prose—rhythms that take hold even at moments of greatest intellectual seriousness—and to suggest once again the strangeness of Botticelli's place within them. Swinburne describes the artist as embodying an "instant of transition" reminiscent of late Pre-Raphaelitism in order to engage a new mode of historicism—one that brings him as close to Pater as he ever comes. Botticelli's painting is taken as an expression of novel, world-historical modes of feeling which mark an culture's transition between antiquity and modernity—but which also are somehow repeatable, recoverable within the special moods of late nineteenth-century art. In Swinburne, this amounts to a philosophical criticism that nonetheless remains ambiguous in relation to whatever tradition it has stemmed from, as well as in its grasp of the to which it seems intent to point. All drifts away in a music of "strange seas" and "charmed shores."

This leads to one final point. Swinburne's criticism exacerbates a perennial problem face by artwriting: the perpetually shaky hold of language on the very artworks it purports to describe. This was characteristic, certainly, of Swinburne's writing more generally. Eliot (to turn to him one last time) puts the problem this way:

The poetry is not morbid, it is not erotic, it is not destructive. These are adjectives which can be applied to the material, the human feelings, which in Swinburne's case do not exist. The morbidity is not of human feeling but of language. Language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified.⁶⁷

The separate existence of the object would also seem to be jeopardized in that last assertion, and the distinction Eliot draws between himself and Swinburne become dangerously fine. Yet, Eliot seems to have in mind here a distinction between good and bad forms of identification—between a closeness that preserves the object and one that forecloses its very existence:

They [language and the object] are identified in the verse of Swinburne solely because the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 25-6.

⁶⁷ Eliot, "Swinburne as a Poet," in *Sacred Wood*, 149.

hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment.⁶⁸

It is the possibility of such merely “atmospheric nourishment” that haunts the practice of artwriting. Can art history ground itself in the concrete particularities of its objects, or must it be settled to feast on mere assertion and thin air? What proves most interesting about Ruskin and Pater is the extent to which they each take these dangers self-consciously as a problem for his practice—as a site of imponderable difficulty, and therefore of novel experimentation.

II. PATER

Hegel Variations

In order to understand Pater’s Botticelli, we need to understand his Hegelianism. Hegel, of course, is not a figure for whom limits can be easily set. In a late lecture on the *Aesthetics*, Paul de Man makes the depressing observation: “Whether we know it, or like it, or not, most of us are Hegelians and quite orthodox ones at that.”⁶⁹ “[T]he name ‘Hegel’,” he goes on,

stands... for an all-encompassing vessel in which so many currents have gathered and been preserved that one is likely to find there almost any idea one knows to have been gathered from elsewhere or hopes to have invented oneself. Few thinkers have so many disciples who never read a word of their master’s writings.⁷⁰

The situation de Man diagnoses speaks especially to the problems of pervasive, largely unconscious inheritance that make up Hegel’s legacy within art history. It rings all the truer in sounding a late nineteenth-century note. In 1883, the Scottish Hegelian Edward Caird (like Pater, he was educated at Oxford) noted the peculiar influence that the German philosopher asserted over intellectual life:

It is... a necessary part of the greatness of such spiritual force that it is not like a definite scientific discovery, whose influence we can exactly measure. Rather it is so inextricably entangled with the whole culture of the time, and so closely identified with the general movement of thought, that we are increasingly unable to say what specially belongs to it alone. If we cannot estimate how much the poetical culture of modern times owes to Dante or to Shakespeare, much less can we precisely determine what, in the speculative development to which they all

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Paul de Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*,” in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), 93.

⁷⁰ De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, 93.

contribute, is respectively due to earlier philosophers, to Hegel, and to those who, since his day, have attempted to supersede, to criticize, or to complete his work.⁷¹

Within this enveloping atmosphere, Pater stands apart. Part of his unacknowledged importance for art history lies in his idiosyncratic and self-conscious engagement with the Hegelian master-text. It is in Pater's writings on Botticelli that he works out some of the most interesting features of his Hegelianism. Approaching them requires a somewhat detailed account of Pater's relation to the philosopher's work. Within literary studies, that relation has generated something of a cottage industry, especially in recent years.⁷² Much, however, remains to be said.

Pater's Hegelianism ran deep. He first encountered Hegel's writings as an undergraduate at Oxford—scholars have exactly dated his borrowing of each volume of Heinrich Gustav Hotho's edition of the *Aesthetics* from the Bodleian Library, and we have plausible testimony of his careful study of the *Phenomenology*.⁷³ By the early 1860s, he was an active member of the evocatively named "Old Mortality Society," an Oxford essay group that lay at the heart of British philosophy's Hegelian turn at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ Over the years, members included T. H. Green, Richard Nettleship, Edward Caird, William Wallace (whose translation of the *Logic* remains current), and Bernard Bosanquet; and its influence spread beyond the boundaries of the group itself, touching other Oxford thinkers such as Benjamin Jowett and, later, F. H. Bradley. Literary figures and cultural critics had also preceded Pater in the membership,

⁷¹ Edward Caird, *Hegel* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1883), 223-24.

⁷² For the earliest treatment, see Bernhard Fehr, "Walter Pater und Hegel," *Englischen Studien* 50 (1916-1917): 300-308. More recently, see Wolfgang Iser, *Walter Pater: die Autonomie des Ästhetischen* (Tübingen, 1960); Anthony Ward, *Walter Pater: the Idea in Nature* (London: MacGibbon and Gee, 1966); Peter Allan Dale, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History: Carlyle, Arnold, Pater* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977); McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit*; Peter Allan Dale, "'Distractions of the Spirit': Walter Pater and Modernity," *Papers on Language and Literature* (1992): 319-49; and William Shuter, *Rereading Walter Pater* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

⁷³ See Inman, *Pater's Reading*, passim. Hegel formed part of an ambitious and rigorous reading program in German Idealism. If Pater indeed studied the *Phenomenology* (contra Inman, I believe he did) his engagement with Hegel was unusual from the beginning. During the nineteenth century, the *Phenomenology* was usually ignored in favor of Hegel's *Logic*.

⁷⁴ On the Old Mortals, see Gerald Monsman, *Oxford's Old Mortality Society: A Study in Victorian Romanticism* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998).

On Hegel's pervasiveness in the period, see, for instance, the complaint of William James: "We are just now witnessing a singular phenomenon in British and American philosophy. Hegelism, so entirely defunct on its native soil that I believe but a single young disciple of the school is to be counted among the privat-docents and younger professors of Germany, and whose older champions are all passing off the stage, has found among us so zealous and able a set of propagandists that to-day, it may really be reckoned one of the most potent influences of the time in the higher walks of thought." William James, "On Some Hegelisms," *Mind* 7 (April 1882): 186.

Many treatments of Hegel's influence on British Idealism exist. For a recent one, remarkable for its clarity and conciseness, see Sandra M. Den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), esp. 10-51.

among them John Addington Symonds (whose own, more orthodox Hegelian account of art stands in contrast to Pater's) and Swinburne himself.⁷⁵

When Pater came to think through Hegel's systematic treatment of the arts—the great sequence of Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic art-forms—he did so intuitively, with a confidence that came from standing, as it were, within. He was able to mine the system in order to form his own critical stance, and even to shuffle its seemingly immobile terms as he sought to describe particular works of art. Nowhere does that stance prove stranger than in his refiguration of that most notorious thesis of Hegelian aesthetics, the “death” or “dissolution” of art. “Art,” Hegel famously wrote in his introduction to the *Aesthetics*, “considered in its highest vocation is and remains for us a thing of the past” [*In allen diesen Beziehungen ist und bleibt die Kunst nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung für uns ein Vergangness*].⁷⁶ Pater's refiguration began with his first published words. “Forms of intellectual and spiritual culture,” he wrote at the beginning of his 1866 essay on Coleridge, “often exercise their subtlest and most artful charms when life is already passing from them.”⁷⁷ Here and elsewhere, Pater attends to both parts of Hegel's well-known formula—both, that is, to art's “pastness” and to its untimely remaining. (“...is *and* remains...,” writes Hegel.) Pater was peculiarly attuned, that is, to art's persistence for us *as* past—to its “logic of lingering”⁷⁸—and to the ways that cultural formations that have outlived themselves refuse to let go. For his commitment to an irrevocable pastness of art sat uneasily with his commitment, apparently felt with equal force, to structures of cultural rebirth—to a “Renaissance,” as he put it, that was “ever taking place.”⁷⁹ It is the volatile conjunction of these tendencies—art as always dead, art as ever new—that marks the deepest interest of Pater's Hegelianism, and that most powerfully attaches itself to Botticelli. What emerges is a complex re-thinking of Hegel's death of art as a strange thing indeed: a guilt-ridden aesthetic of anachronism and a-synchronicity, branding viewers and artworks alike.

Pater's reformulation of Hegel's thesis went through several stages. Consistently, however, he seems to have taken the most recent form of art in Hegel's scheme—the Romantic—as itself a prolonged death of art. (This would prove something Oxford Hegelians shared. As Bernard Bosanquet would put it later, “romantic art *is*... in its several stages, one and the same thing with the dissolution of classical art, with its own dissolution, and with the dissolution of art as such.”)⁸⁰ In his first sustained treatment of

⁷⁵ It was no doubt in discussion with his Hegelian friends that Swinburne formulated his ideas regarding the evolution of culture. For an account of Symonds's Hegelianism, see Peter Allan Dale, “Beyond Humanism: J. A. Symonds and the Replotting of the Renaissance,” *Clio* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1988): 109-37. “Orthodox,” perhaps, does not do full justice to Symonds's understanding of Hegel; I mean to convey the extent to which Symonds drew on Hegel in order to envision an evolutionary progress of culture. Pater, I will be arguing, drew on Hegel in order to envision something else.

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11.

⁷⁷ Pater, “Coleridge's Writings,” *Westminster Review*, n.s., 29 (January 1866): 106.

⁷⁸ Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and the Mournful Life* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 59.

⁷⁹ Pater, *Studies*, 199.

⁸⁰ Bernard Bosanquet, “Appendix on Croce's Conception of the ‘Death of Art’ in Hegel,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 9 (December 1919), 284. Both Bosanquet and Pater develop

the concept, Pater describes it in literal terms as a deathliness inherent to the image. He brings the “death of art” into his text not simply as a philosophical orientation but as a lurid figure. Indeed, throughout the various moments I will be considering, there is a disturbing intermingling of figurative and conceptual registers.

This habit of thought first occurs in “Winckelmann” of 1867, Pater’s second published piece, later placed as the final essay of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. In “Winckelmann,” Pater follows Hegel’s evolutionary account explicitly—even, at times, slavishly, putting special emphasis on the transition between the Classical and Romantic modes.⁸¹ And here the peculiarities begin. For given its subject—the premier historian of Greek sculpture—one might expect the essay’s focus to fall on the Classical sculptural form. For Hegel, its presentation of the idealized human form represented a perfect harmonization of Spirit with sensuous embodiment. Yet, Pater’s deep affinity with the later Romantic moment creeps in. The essay takes as its topic not only Winckelmann’s treatment of classical art, but also the dilemma of his historical position—Winckelmann’s acutely felt distance from the artworks he longed to understand and live among. Pater allows the Romantic art of painting, with its incipient abstraction from sensuous form, to take center stage. Even as he lays out the general features that made classical sculpture a pinnacle in the history of art—the full embodiment of its culture’s highest ideals—the first artwork Pater actually takes time to describe in the essays is one that slips its mortal skin. He asks us to consider “a characteristic work of the Middle Age,” Fra Angelico’s *Coronation of the Virgin* at San Marco (**fig. 71**):

In some strange halo of a moon sit the Virgin and our Lord, clad in mystical raiment, half-shroud half priestly linen. Our Lord, with rosy nimbus and the long pale hair, *tanquam lana alba et tanquam nix*, of the figure in the Apocalypse, sets, with slender finger tips, a crown of pearl on the head of his mother, who, corpse-like in her refinement, bends to receive it, the light lying like snow upon her forehead.⁸²

Deathliness, as I say, inheres in the image. The Hegelian lesson follows only after this arresting description.⁸³ Pater’s choice of object is characteristically perverse: in fixing on Fra Angelico’s *Coronation* he sets himself against the established strain of “moral art history.” Rio’s description of the painting had long been a touchstone; an engraving of it

a statement of Hegel’s, that “romantic art is the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself.” Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 80.

⁸¹ Fehr, “Pater und Hegel,” focuses on the essay’s moments of literal quotation and citation of the Hegelian text.

⁸² Walter Pater, “Winckelmann,” *Westminster Review*, n.s., 31 (January 1867): 94-5.

⁸³ “Certainly it cannot be said of Angelico’s fresco that it throws into a sensible form our highest knowledge about man and his relation to the world; but it did not do this adequately even for Angelico. For him all that is outward or sensible in his work—the hair like wool, the rosy nimbus, the crown of pearl—is only the symbol or type of an inexpressible world to which he wishes to direct the thoughts; he would have shrunk from the notion that what the eye apprehended was all. Such forms of art, then, are inadequate to the matter they clothe; they remain ever below its level.” Pater, “Winckelmann,” 95.

stood like an icon as *The Poetry of Christian Art*'s frontispiece. In Pater's formulation, however, we are made to feel not just the painting's spiritual abstraction, but also the morbid resistance of bodily life which Spirit abstracts itself from. He achieves a peculiar mixture of solipsistic reverie and descriptive precision—strange combinations of phrases that point (“slender finger tips”; “bends to receive it”) with over-determined evocations of mood (“some strange halo”; “corpse-like in her refinement”). In this almost rhythmic alternation between direct, sharable attention and private dreaming, the essay tends to locate “dissolution” simultaneously in the painting's objective features and in his own critical stance. The death of art seems to take place in an atmosphere that artwork and viewer share.

Most strikingly, such formulations seem to infect the Classical artwork itself. Belatedness, in Pater's account, is contagious. His prose consistently eschews the Classical's plenitude in favor of its undoing. In this, Pater draws directly on Hegel, forcing an issue raised in a peculiar feature of the philosopher's descriptive mode. Again and again, Hegel returns to the notion that “the classical gods have in themselves the germ of their decline.”⁸⁴ At the moment of their highest artistic self-presence, the Greek gods, for Hegel, subsists as an irresolvable contradiction. They stand divided between absolute spiritual “abstraction” and the utter contingency of their material presentation in the world:

The blessed gods mourn as it were over their blessedness or their bodily form. We read in their faces the fate that awaits them, and its development, as the actual emergence of that contradiction between loftiness and particularity, between spirituality and sensuous existence, drags classical art itself to its ruin.⁸⁵

Hegel walks a fine line here between locating mournfulness in the twilight musings of late-Romantic criticism and discovering it in the objects themselves. According to his historicizing vision of classical art, the future unfolding of aesthetic forms always takes place in the now. This passage in particular seems to anticipate Pater's constant insinuation of the mutual pollution between critic and object. Indeed, he draws attention to these very lines. In his reformulation, Pater proves both more lurid and more explicit:

Supreme as [Winckelmann] is where his true interest lay, his insight into the typical unity and repose of the sculpturesque seems to have involved limitation in another direction. . . . He failed even to see, what Hegel has so cunningly detected, a sort of preparation for the romantic within the limits of the Greek ideal itself. Greek art has not merely its mournful mysteries of Adonis, of Hyacinthus, of Ceres, but it is conscious also of the fall of earlier divine dynasties. Hyperion gives way to Apollo, Oceanus to Poseidon. Around the feet of that tranquil Olympian family still crowd the weary shadows of an earlier, more formless, divine world. Even their still minds are troubled with thoughts of a limit to duration, of inevitable decay, of dispossession. . . . [T]heir repose is. . . a premonition of the fleshless, consumptive refinement of the pale mediaeval artists. That high

⁸⁴ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 502.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 485.

indifference to the outward, that impassivity, has already a touch of the corpse in it; we see already Angelico and the “master of the Passion” in the artistic future.⁸⁶

We have, in other words, no need to wait for the Romantic art-form’s shrouded divinities: Death already inhabits Greek artistic “life.” “The crushing of the sensuous,” the passage continues, “the shutting of the door upon it, the flesh-outstripping interest, is already traceable.”⁸⁷ And lest this disturbing description of the ascetic ideal (one almost feels the flesh outstripped) fail to carry his point, Pater take us even further into rhetorical extravagance, with figures that exceed one’s imaginative sense: “Those abstracted gods, ‘ready to melt out their essence fine in the winds,’ who can fold up their flesh as a garment, and remain themselves, seem already to feel the bleak air in which, like Helen of Troy herself, they wander as the specters of the Middle Age.”⁸⁸ What would it mean—how it would feel—to fold up flesh like a garment? In Pater’s text, as in the work he considers, art’s self-negating drive begins its grisly work.

This direct engagement with Hegel’s text takes us to the core of Pater’s vision of the historicity of art. It is not just that the classical ideal’s sensuous self-presence is, for us moderns, always encountered after the fact. Rather, such displacements seem *constitutive* of the classical. Antique art embodies, Pater tells us, “a universal pagan sentiment” that only serves to “measure the sadness with which the human mind is filled whenever its thoughts wander far from what is here, and now.”⁸⁹ Paganism is not an embodiment of pleasure. It is not about direct experience of the intensities of present life. Stripped of its timelessness, its promise of an eternal present, we find here a Classical ideal that can never be timely: a historicity that finds form not in the satisfactions of presence but in perpetual consciousness of their loss.

Such ambivalence becomes nearly total when we move to Pater’s treatment of the rebirth of the classical, which he explores in language of intense morbidity. Figuring such “Renaissance” proves to be the crisis-point in his treatment of the deaths of culture and of art. For if the classical always already exists under conditions of displacement, how can it ever freshly return? The problem produces a passage of great complexity:

⁸⁶ Pater, “Winckelmann,” 106. It is unclear to what artist Pater refers as the “master of the Passion.” Critics have suggested the so-called “Master of the Berlin Passion,” a fifteenth-century engraver of the lower Rhine (see Donald L. Hill’s note in Pater, *1893 Text*, 438); but this identification seems only to have gained currency after 1889.

⁸⁷ Pater, “Winckelmann,” 106.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* The ghostly medieval wanderings of the Greek gods is a motif borrowed from Heinrich Heine: see John Smith Harrison, “Pater, Heine, and the Old Gods of Greece,” *PMLA* 39 (September 1924): 655-86. The phrases Pater quotes come from Keats’s “Endymion” (bk. I, lines 95-100):

For ’twas the morn: Apollo’s upward fire
Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre
Of brightness so unsullied, that therein
A melancholy spirit might win
Oblivion, and melt out his essence fine
Into the winds....

Quoted in Pater, *1893 Text*, 438.

⁸⁹ Pater, “Winckelmann,” 92.

When the actual relics of the antique were restored to the world, it was to Christian eyes as if an ancient plague-pit had been opened: all the world took the contagion of the life of nature and the senses. Christian art allying itself with that restored antiquity which it had ever emulated, soon ceased to exist. For a time art dealt with Christian subjects as its patrons required; but its true freedom was in the life of the senses and the blood—blood no longer dropping from the hands in sacrifice, as with Angelico, but, as with Titian, burning in the face for desire and love.⁹⁰

In their dizzying reversals and over-determinations, these sentences steer closer to dream-work than to dialectic. Christian art must “die”—must follow through on its tendency towards death—so that Pagan art can “live” again. But in what does this renewed life consist? Through “Christian eyes,” at least, the plague-pit’s contagion. I am not sure this perspective is ever fully overcome. By the end of this passage, of course, the text turns the corner (syntactically, rhythmically) to Titian’s erotic health. Blood, formerly “dropping from the hands in sacrifice,” now “burn[s]” in the face. Yet, however flush with desire Titian’s figures may be, their health seems haunted here—if only faintly, and in spite of Pater’s “no longer”—by ghastly recirculation of blood already spilt. In my experience, at least, the shadow of this gruesome, ghostly figure never entirely goes away. And in 1867, it would seem, Pater’s deepest commitments—to the imaginative structure of the Renaissance and to its actual historicity—cannot quite be reconciled. The shroud of art never quite washes clean.

“A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli”

It is to this intractable problem that Pater’s apparently modest twelve-page essay on Botticelli returns. Pater takes Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (**fig. 8**) as a kind of master figure for the Renaissance—for, that is, the question of rebirth as such. The picture’s color is, he says, “cadaverous, or at least cold,” in a phrase that echoes Swinburne; the “falling roses” are “embrowned a little, as Botticelli’s flowers always are.”⁹¹ As we have by now come to expect, the “shadow of death”—the shadow of the Romantic art-form as such—falls across Botticelli’s classicizing depictions. Yet Pater takes his conception forward. This proves to be a matter of thinking *with* the radical self-division of his earlier formulations rather than becoming trapped within them—a matter of turning their restlessness toward dialectical motion. Where the earlier essay had centered on the question of the Romantic spirit’s precarious presence in the very form of Classical art, pulling it apart from within, Botticelli requires of Pater something else. In “Winckelmann,” the Renaissance could only emerge within a structure of self-contradiction, a process of revival measured against the death of art. Now, however, Pater suggests that Renaissance must be figured *as* the death of art—as an untimely, self-negating presence. This can only be effected, moreover, if we turn the earlier essay’s terms upside down. Focus must fall not on the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 106-7.

⁹¹ Pater, “A Fragment,” 159.

Classical art-form's nascent "Romanticism," pushing ever towards death, but rather on the persistence—the truly uncanny survival—of the Classical within the Romantic form itself.

I have put this, I realize, in a somewhat convoluted way. Pater makes things more specific. In his essay, *The Birth of Venus* embodies anachronism. The "sentiment of ineffable melancholy" that haunts Botticelli's Christian art—the sadness of his "peevisish Madonnas," tying them to medieval sentiment—somehow sounds a distinctly contemporary note in *The Birth* itself. In this picture of "Venus rising from the sea," Pater writes, "the grotesque emblems of the middle age...frame a figure that reminds you of the faultless nude studies of Ingres."⁹² Such effects of stylistic simultaneity, confronting medieval grotesquerie with a contemporary, sexually charged naturalism, connects Pater's description to the kinds of conceptual experiments in Aestheticist painting we have already seen. Aesthetic modernity was intimately bound up with anachronism. It thus should not surprise us that, for Pater, *The Birth's* strange prescience—its looking ahead to the late nineteenth century—belongs to Botticelli's reversion to the antique. The longer you linger over Botticelli's painting, Pater suggests, "you will find that quaint design of Botticelli's a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the works of the Greeks themselves."⁹³ This astonishing claim only grows more so as the passage goes on. "Of the Greeks as they really were," Pater continues,

of their difference from ourselves, of the aspects of their outward life, we know far more than Botticelli, or his most learned contemporaries; but for us long familiarity has taken off the edge of the lesson, and we are hardly conscious of what we owe to the Hellenic spirit. But in pictures like this of Botticelli's, you have a record of the first impression made by it on minds turned back towards it in almost painful aspiration from a world in which it had been ignored so long.⁹⁴

Pater's formulations here are involved. As each phrase seems to move its readers into further complexities, Pater manages to fix "our" viewpoint as modern even as we are evacuated into the past. To say that Botticelli's painting is, for us, "a more direct inlet into" the life of Greek culture than Greek art itself is not merely to suggest that we identify more easily with the art of this closer moment, or that the quattrocento's turning-back anticipated our own. More surprisingly, Pater suggests that such layers of mediation constitute the past in its most authentic form—that such an "inlet" just is antiquity's afterlife. He thus returns us with tremendous concision to the Hegelian world of "Winckelmann." Our own historical distance, our irreparably being outside the past, has become part of the past itself. Pater's readers are asked not to look through the veil of Botticelli's painting to some plenitude of original Greek beauty, but rather to see, in the haunting presence of *The Birth of Venus*, the truth of the past as always out of place.

Pater makes the point even more sharply as he engages with Hegel directly. In language that recalls the "Winckelmann" essay's description of pagan sentiment,

⁹² Ibid., 158. Ingres's nudes had been exhibited in London in 1862. It seems that Pater had a reproduction of an Ingres nude hanging on the wall of his Oxford study.

⁹³ Ibid., 159.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Botticelli's figures, he says, always have "a sense of displacement or loss about them:" they are "saddened perpetually by the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink."⁹⁵ Perhaps the greatest refusal of all lies in his depiction of the Madonna's aversion to her own holy child:

It is this which gives to his Madonnas their unique expression and charm. He has worked out in them a distinct and peculiar type, definite enough in his own mind, for he has painted it over and over again—sometimes one might think almost mechanically, as a pastime during that dark period when his thoughts were so heavy upon him.... At first...you may have thought that there was even something in them mean or abject, for the abstract lines of the face have little nobleness, and the colour is wan. For with Botticelli she too, though she holds in her hands the 'Desire of all nations,' is one of those who are neither for God nor for his enemies; and her choice is on her face.... Her trouble is in the very caress of the mysterious child, whose gaze is always far from her, and who has already that sweet look of devotion which men have never been able altogether to love.⁹⁶

As usual in the Botticelli essay, Pater stages the idea even more concretely in description of a particular picture, *The Madonna of the Magnificat* (**fig. 72**), which was soon to be a central object of pleasure and regard for the Aestheticist imagination.⁹⁷ "Once, indeed," Pater writes,

[Botticelli] guides her hand to transcribe in a book the words of her exaltation, the *Ave*, and the *Magnificat*, and the *Gaude Maria*, and the young angels, glad to rouse her for a moment from her dejection, are eager to hold the inkhorn and support the book; but the pen almost drops from her hand, and the high cold words have no meaning for her...⁹⁸

It is as if the Madonna, in her dejected inwardness, wished to fall out of relations altogether.

What may at first seem lugubrious projection in fact reveals a complex inter-textual allegory. Pater condenses Dante and Hegel. Having earlier discussed Botticelli's illustrations of the *Commedia*, Pater explicitly distinguishes Botticelli's ethical vision from that of the poet. The painter, unlike Dante, concerns himself neither with "untempered good" nor with "untempered evil," but rather "with men and women, in their mixed and uncertain condition."⁹⁹

[J]ust what Dante scorns as unworthy alike of heaven and hell, Botticelli accepts, that middle world in which men take no side in great conflicts, and decide no great causes, and make great refusals. He thus sets for himself the limits within

⁹⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁹⁷ See Chapter Four.

⁹⁸ Pater, "A Fragment," 158.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 157.

which art, undisturbed by any moral ambition, does its most sincere and surest work.¹⁰⁰

Pater refers here to the “Neutrals,” described in the *Inferno*’s third canto: “[t]hose wretches who never were alive” [*Questi sciaurati, che mai non fur vivi*].¹⁰¹ Dante and Virgil encounter them as an overwhelming multitude gathered outside the gate of Hell. These are, Virgil tells him, those “who lived without disgrace and without praise” [*che visser senza infamia e senza lodo*];¹⁰² beneath contempt, they suffer alongside the angels who, during Lucifer’s rebellion from God, “were not rebels, nor faithful to God, but were for themselves” [*non furon ribelli nè fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sè foro*].¹⁰³ Pater loosely incorporates several lines into the body of his text:

*Poscia ch’ io v’ebbi alcun riconosciuto,
Vidi e conobbi l’ombra di colui
Che fece per viltà il gran rifiuto.
Incontanente intesi e certo fui
Che questa era la setta de’ cattivi
A Dio spiacenti ed a’ nemici sui.*

After I had recognized some of them I saw and knew the shade of him who from cowardice made the great refusal [Pope Celestine V], and at once and with certainty I perceived that this was the worthless crew that is hateful to God and to His enemies.¹⁰⁴

He does so to dramatize his point: what Dante most scorns, Botticelli loves. Unlike Dante, “[h]is morality is all sympathy.”¹⁰⁵

Pater recognizes in Dante’s “Neutrals” a sign of absolute negativity. As John Freccero has put it, the Neutral Angels (alongside whom they suffer) are “frozen in a state of aversion”:

It is pointless to ask whether they were better or worse than the lowest of sinners, for they do not fit into any category... They are as close to nothing as creatures can be and still exist....¹⁰⁶

The “Neutrals” are the detritus of the Dantean system—the parergon around its edges. Pater, however, seeks to make such negation central, locating it at the very heart of Botticelli’s depiction of the Madonna’s holy love. Here we rejoin Hegelian aesthetics. In Hegel’s system, Love is specially the province of the Romantic arts. As opposed to the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, tr. John D. Sinclair (Oxford, 1939), *Inferno* III.64.

¹⁰² Dante, *Inferno*, III.36.

¹⁰³ Ibid., III.39.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., III.58-63.

¹⁰⁵ Pater, “A Fragment,” 157.

¹⁰⁶ John Freccero, “Dante and the Neutral Angels,” *The Romantic Review* LI (1960): 13.

enclosed, self-sufficient embodiment of Classical sculpture, painting pictures relations. This necessitates a strange paradox in its spatial expression. The Romantic Ideal of art concerns itself with inwardness, a spiritual life retreating from the body's sensuous form. And yet, such interiority can only be depicted as an "outsidedness"—as a set of relations occurring *between* individuated terms. In the Romantic art of music, emphasis falls not on individual notes, but the transitions between them. In painting, the space between depicted bodies becomes charged as figures open their inner lives—constituted as such only in the moment of opening—out towards each other. Romantic art, Pater notes at the end of his Winckelmann essay, is the "poetry of situations."¹⁰⁷ In these new paradigms of art making, the self-sufficient integrity of the Classical art form dissolves.¹⁰⁸ Mary's dejection as Botticelli depicts it, however, threatens to fall out of the system of Romantic love altogether. It resists enmeshment in the web of relations. The Madonna's troubled caresses, whatever their Romanticism, seem to hold out for Classical aloofness—for a radical being-on-neither-side, for an apartness from others. Compositionally, she is subject to her dependence on others, and we read her resistance as relational feeling. But her heart is not in it, and "the pen drops from her hand." For Pater, Botticelli depicts an inalienable sadness that will not let her go.

Withdrawn from her proper historical position, the figure of Botticelli's Madonna shifts uneasily between incompatible organizations of art. Such over- (or under-) determination re-emerges in *The Birth of Venus*. "What is strangest," Pater writes, "is that he carries this sentiment into classical subjects, its most complete expression being a picture in the Uffizj [sic] of Venus rising from the sea":

The light is, indeed, cold—mere sunless dawn; but a later painter would have cloyed you with sunshine; and you can see the better for that quietness in the morning air each long promontory as it slopes down to the water's edge. Men go forth to their labours until the evening; but she is awake before them, and you might think that the sorrow in her face was at the thought of the whole long day of love yet to come.¹⁰⁹

Venus too shrinks in the face of her future, hesitant to assume her appointed role in what Pater calls the "central myth" of the Greek "imaginative system" (*ibid.*). Appropriately, his description of the painting (the most Ruskinian Pater ever wrote) moves towards a dying fall:

An emblematical figure of the wind blows hard across the grey water, moving forward the dainty-lipped shell on which she sails, the sea "showing his teeth" as

¹⁰⁷ Pater, "Winckelmann," 110.

¹⁰⁸ As Hegel puts it, in Romantic art "infinite subjectivity is not lonely in itself like a Grecian god who lives in himself absolutely perfect in the blessedness of his isolation; on the contrary, it emerges from itself into a relation with something else which, however, in its own, and in which it finds itself again and remains communing and in unity with itself. This being at one with itself in the other is the really beautiful subject-matter of Romantic art, its Ideal which has essentially for its form and appearance the inner life and subjectivity, mind and feeling." Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 533.

¹⁰⁹ Pater, "A Fragment," 159.

it moves in thin lines of foam, and sucking in one by one the falling roses, each severe in outline, plucked off short at the stalk, but embrowned a little as Botticelli's flowers always are. Botticelli meant all that imagery to be altogether pleasureable; and it was partly an incompleteness of resources inseparable from the art of that time, that subdued and chilled it; but his predilection for minor tones counts also; and what is unmistakeable is the sadness with which he has conceived the goddess of pleasure, as the depository of a great power over the lives of men.¹¹⁰

Pater deftly stages the restless energy of the painting, and even hints at a kind of turmoil from which that energy proceeds.¹¹¹ Yet an “unmistakeable sadness” dampens the mode, drawing attention to Venus's affecting immobility and chill. She shrinks before her role almost bureaucratic role as “depository of a great power over men”: called on to oversee the workings of love, she is about to become a functionary in the modern prose of the world—“a world of finitude and mutability, of entanglement in the relative, of the pressure of necessity from which the individual is in no position to withdraw.”¹¹² Pater's text focuses so closely on Botticelli's painting because its configuration gives the troubled entanglement of the Classical and the Romantic such striking, simultaneous form. The faultless classical body submits to contingency as it is blown across the sea; “quaint” quattrocento garments float across to enclose the goddess in their folds. Yet, something in the painting holds her back. Venus is not yet wrapped in her coverings, her shell not yet run ashore. In this arrested, emblematic moment, the painting's historical parts barely hold together. The very course of art's history seems to stutter and double back.

For Pater, this is what the re-birth of art looks like. It is hardly distinguishable from its death. By now I hope to have suggested the extent to which what might be taken as a merely private obsession with the morbid is transformed (via Hegel) into the genuine power of his texts. From an Hegelian standpoint, which would at first seem to secure a picture's belonging to its historical moment as an expression or datable sign, Pater opens to view instead the radical un-timeliness of complex works of art. At the center of *The Birth of Venus*—in the goddess's very face—he locates the painting's own immanent negation. And he gives that “great refusal” specific, densely figured form. Under Pater's eye, *The Birth* itself becomes an act of consciousness, reflecting on its own historical complexity—its belonging and not belonging to several cultural moments. As art histories go, these are real critical achievements. Yet the possibility of articulating such complexity depends, as we have seen, on a critical prose open to its own undoing—the pen almost dropping from its hand. “A Fragment on Botticelli” work both with and against Hegel, and therefore with and against itself. Recall that Pater ends by saying that Botticelli

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Paul Tucker is surely right to feel menace in Pater's evocation of aggressive orality in the sea “showing its teeth”—a sign of the gruesome castration of Uranus out of which Venus was born. See Tucker, “Re-animate Greek.”

¹¹² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 150.

has the freshness, the uncertain and diffident promise which belongs to the earlier Renaissance itself, and makes it perhaps the most interesting period in the history of the mind; in studying his work one begins to understand to how great a place in human culture Italian art had been called.¹¹³

Might this call be the very thing from which Botticelli's art shrinks? It is in such moments of apparent contradiction that Pater's greatest strength lies. Even his most positive acts of criticism carries out negation's restless work and, at their best, carry that negation over into the paintings they ask us to see.

III. RUSKIN

Fortitude

These early moments of Botticelli's nineteenth-century reception open a rare window onto Ruskin's attitudes to Pater.¹¹⁴ Both men held positions at Oxford during the 1870s and it has been plausibly suggested that Pater attended at least some of Ruskin's lectures, at times even responding directly to them in his own writings.¹¹⁵ What Ruskin made of his younger rival, however, has for the most part remained obscure. At Oxford, they also shared at least one crucial social connection. The Rev. Richard St. John Tyrwhitt (1827-1895) served as Ruskin's secretary and, at times, his confidante during his tenure as Slade Professor. Tyrwhitt was something of a fixture within artistic culture of the period. He worked with Rossetti, Morris, Burne-Jones and company on the Oxford Union murals in 1857, forming particularly close ties to Spencer Stanhope, whom he visited several times in Florence.¹¹⁶ Tyrwhitt also tried his hand at a Ruskinian set of murals depicting the Mer de Glace on the walls of Oxford's Museum of Natural History. As a critic, Tyrwhitt self-consciously imitated Ruskin's early mode. He found himself at the end of the line of "moral art history." With the kind of exaggerations that attend genres coming to an end, his studies of "Christian Art" again and again argued that art ought to teach us morality directly, and serve always as "Handmaid to Religion."¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Pater, "A Fragment," 160.

¹¹⁴ On Ruskin and Aestheticism more generally, see Nicholas Shrimpton, "Ruskin and the Aesthetes," in *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 131-51; and Laurel Brake, "Degrees of Darkness: Ruskin, Pater, and Modernism," in *Ruskin and Modernism*, ed. Giovanni Cianci and Peter Nicholls (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 48-66.

¹¹⁵ See J. B. Bullen, "Pater and Ruskin on Michaelangelo: Two Contrasting Views," *Prose Studies* 4.1 (May 1981): 55-73.

¹¹⁶ See Simon Poë, "Mythology and Symbolism in Two Works of Roddam Spencer Stanhope's Maturity," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n.s., 12 (Spring 2003): 38.

¹¹⁷ Richard St. John Tyrwhitt, "Ober-Ammergau and Symbolic Christianity," *Contemporary Review* 18 (September 1871): 246; see also Tyrwhitt, *Christian Art and Symbolism* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1872).

Tyrwhitt is perhaps best remembered for his homophobic screed, “The Greek Spirit of Modern Literature” (1877).¹¹⁸ At that time rector of St. Mary Magdalen, Oxford, Tyrwhitt focused on John Addington Symonds (whose election to the Oxford Professorship of Poetry he wished to block) in a condemnation of Hellenism as “the total denial of any moral restraint on any moral impulse.”¹¹⁹ It thus comes as a surprise to find in Tyrwhitt an enthusiast of Pater, notorious in the period for espousing a vision of art insulated from morality. He also knew Pater at Oxford and praised him at several points in his books and essays. During the extensive research on Botticelli he conducted for Ruskin, Pater’s essay on the artist came up more than once. In a letter of 19 September 1872, written during preparation for November’s lectures on the artist, Ruskin asks to see the text again: “can you find, or lend me, that paper on Sandro, which I was so pleased with, in some magazine last year, by an Oxford man—you told me who, so must know.”¹²⁰ Ruskin’s student W.G. Collingwood remembers Ruskin making use of Pater in the lectures themselves, “quot[ing] with appreciation the passage on Venus Anadyomene from Mr. Pater’s ‘Studies in the Renaissance’, just published.”¹²¹ Nonetheless, Ruskin’s attitude towards Pater’s Botticelli was unstable. In a letter dated to late September, in between these moments of appreciation, he complains about the essay to Tyrwhitt:

I have your nice abstracts from Crowe & C. and the fortnightly with Pater’s article – in looking over which I am surprised to find how much I have changed in my own estimate of Sandro in my last Italian journies [sic] – for I recollect thinking Pater’s article did him full justice – and now – though quite right it reads Lukewarm to me.¹²²

Ruskin goes on to make more specific criticism. Towards the beginning of his essay, Pater locates the originality of Botticelli’s project in his deviations from the text in his illustrations of Dante. “[I]n the scene of those who ‘go down quick into hell,’” Pater writes, “there is an invention about the fire taking hold on the up-turned soles of the feet, which proves that the design is no mere translation of Dante’s words, but a true painter’s

¹¹⁸ Tyrwhitt, “The Greek Spirit in Modern Literature,” *Contemporary Review* 29 (March 1877): 552-556. For a brief but fine modern account of the controversy, see Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 90-92.

¹¹⁹ Tyrwhitt, “The Greek Spirit,” 558. Elsewhere in the essay, Tyrwhitt makes no bones about what kind of “moral restraint” he found lacking: “The expressions put in [Socrates’s] mouth [at sight of the beauty of young Charmides] are, no doubt, typically Hellenic. But they are not natural; and it is well known that Greek love of nature and beauty went frequently against nature.” *Ibid.*, 557.

¹²⁰ Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MA 2274 (24). Reprinted in Gail Weinberg, “Ruskin, Pater, and the Rediscovery of Botticelli,” *The Burlington Magazine* 129 (January 1987): 27.

¹²¹ W.G. Collingwood, *The Life of John Ruskin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893), 2:424. Collingwood must mean the *Fortnightly* essay itself, as Pater’s volume was not published until February 1873. Pater is never mentioned in the published version of Ruskin’s lectures.

¹²² Claiborne, “Two Secretaries,” 305-6.

vision.”¹²³ Though there seems to me some ambiguity about the word “invention” in the essay’s actual use, Ruskin sees none, and takes Pater to task:

If Pater will read his Hell carefully through, he will find Botticelli does not invent – but in the humblest and most reverent way, represents exactly what Dante tells him, (– see sentence about soles of feet) [...] Please ask him for reference to Leonardo’s mention of him – I never noticed it and it is most interesting to me.¹²⁴

As so often, Ruskin’s position is reactive. He establishes his portrait of Botticelli as an absolutely faithful reader—“the only painter of Italy who thoroughly felt and understood Dante,” he writes elsewhere¹²⁵—only through the refusal of his predecessor. A few days later, however, the essay returns to Ruskin’s good graces: “This is a delicious paper on Sandro,” he now tells Tyrwhitt, “and I should think certainly right.”¹²⁶ Ruskin’s vacillation is striking, unusual even for his contradictory mind, and it would only take on more involved forms.

In one of Ruskin’s most sustained and detailed accounts of a painting by Botticelli, he engages with Pater in the very texture of description. The passage occurs at the opening of “Before the Soldan,” the third essay of Ruskin’s erratic *Mornings in Florence* (1875-77) and describes Botticelli’s *Fortezza* in the Uffizi (**fig. 73**). Pater had noted painting (mistaking it for a depiction of Justice) as one instance of Botticelli’s fixation on a particular type:

The same figure—tradition connects it with Simonetta, the mistress of Giuliano di Medici—appears again as Judith returning home across the hill country when the great deed is over, and the moment of revulsion come, and the olive branch in her hand is becoming a burthen; as Justice, sitting on a throne, but with a fixed look of self-hatred which makes the sword in her hand seem that of a suicide; and again as Veritas in the allegorical picture of Calumnia, where one may note in passing the suggestiveness of an accident which identifies the image of Truth with the person of Venus.¹²⁷

¹²³ Pater, “A Fragment,” 156. He refers to the opening of the nineteenth canto of the *Inferno*, where Dante describes the fate of simonists (those who buy or sell holy offices):

*Fuor de la bocca a ciascun soperchiava
d’un peccator li piedi e de la gambe
infino al grosso, e l’altro dentro stava.
Le piante erano a tutti accese intrambe;
per che sì forte guizzavan le giunte,
che spezzate averien ritorte e strambe.*

Dante, *Inferno*, XIX.22-27.

¹²⁴ Claiborne, “Two Secretaries,” 308. Ruskin refers to the opening of Pater’s essay: “In Lionardo’s [sic.] treatise on painting only one contemporary is mentioned by name—Sandro Botticelli. This pre-eminence may be due to chance only, but to some will rather appear a result of deliberate judgment...” Pater, “A Fragment,” 155.

¹²⁵ Ruskin, *Works*, 27:371-2.

¹²⁶ Claiborne, “Two Secretaries,” 310.

¹²⁷ Pater, “A Fragment,” 160.

Misidentifying the figure, and misremembering her attributes, Pater pushes to an unusual extreme his insistence on melancholy.¹²⁸ With cumulative extravagance (“self-hatred”; “suicide”), he sees in the painting a depiction of morbid, self-conscious inwardness that connects it to any other painting by Botticelli one might care to mention. Ruskin takes this suggestion up, even echoing Pater’s characteristic cadences: for Ruskin also, she is “[w]orn somewhat; and not a little weary.”¹²⁹ He does so, however, in order to take the painting in a very different direction:

I promised some note of Sandro’s Fortitude, before whom I asked you to sit and read the end of my last letter; and I’ve lost my own notes about her, and forget, now, whether she has a sword or a mace;—it does not matter. What is chiefly notable in her is—that you would not, if you had to guess who she was, take her for Fortitude at all. Everybody else’s Fortitudes announce themselves clearly and proudly. They have tower-like shields, and lion-like helmets—and stand firm astride their legs,—and are confidently ready for all comers....

But Botticelli’s Fortitude is no match, it may be, for any that are coming. Worn somewhat; and not a little weary, instead of standing ready for all comers, she is sitting,—apparently in reverie, her fingers playing restlessly and idly—nay, I think—even nervously, about the hilt of her sword.¹³⁰

Ruskin begins by disarming his reader with an assertion of humility, insisting on the imperfections of his viewership and the faults of his memory. Soon enough, however, he brings us in close, pausing over the “restless,” “idle,” “nervous” fingers, vividly staging fixation in detail. On the pivot of this closely observed moment, the passage takes its ethical turn:

For her battle is not to begin to-day; nor did it begin yesterday. Many a morn and eve have passed since it began—and now—is this to be the ending day of it? And if this—by what manner of end?

That is what Sandor’s Fortitude is thinking. And the playing fingers about the sword-hilt would fain let it fall, if it might be: and yet, how swiftly and gladly will they close on it, when the far-off trumpet blows, which she will hear through all her reverie!¹³¹

We should care about “what Sandro’s Fortitude is thinking,” in other words, not because it allows us insight into Botticelli’s serial expressions of melancholia or (as a later scholar might have it) what he and his contemporaries would have meant by *Fortezza*. We should care because it tells us what the virtue of Fortitude *is*, as a moral principal and a way of being. Where Pater insists on world-weariness, relieved only by the possibility of

¹²⁸ In his error, Pater reverts to a more traditional iconography for the allegorical figure: neither Justice nor Fortitude is usually depicted with a mace.

¹²⁹ Ruskin, *Works*, 23:334.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 23:334-5.

self-slaughter (one more incarnation of “great refusal”), Ruskin sees in her worn aspect a state of pure potential: of preparation for right action. A kind of energy hums beneath Fortitude’s skin, an energy tied directly to the attention of Ruskin’s text, and it finds expression in the “playing” of her fingers on the hilt. Here we have Ruskin at his most visually acute. The fingers *are* strange. Ringing the changes on their characterization and imagining the narrative futures they might portend (“letting fall” or “closing on” the weapon), Ruskin guides his reader’s eyes. These repeated returns to Fortitude’s fingers are responsive to the magnetism of specific pictorial features, and Ruskin means them to keep faith with—to perform—a particular, sharable experience of seeing.

This kind of circular scanning of the picture, however, staged in Ruskin’s repeated modifications of descriptive language, runs somewhat counter to the narrative progress he hints at. In spite of his professed intentions, the suggested actions sit in perpetual postponement, and the evident agitation of the text sets in relief the peculiar animation of the fingers as Botticelli depicts them. And extraordinarily, the text seems to prolong its fixation beyond the boundaries of its treatment of the picture itself. We return to fingers again even as, following Ruskin, we study “yet another picture of Sandro’s”: “the small Judith in the room next to the Tribune” (**fig. 74**):

She is returning to the camp of her Israel, followed by her maid carrying the head of Holofernes. And she walks in one of Botticelli’s light dancing actions, her drapery all on flutter, and her hand, like Fortitude’s, light on the sword-hilt, but daintily—not nervously, the little finger laid over the cross of it.¹³²

Ruskin seems to have in mind not only Fortitude’s fingers, but also Pater’s description of the sadness of the *Madonna Magnificat*, where “the pen almost drops from her hand.”¹³³ The long, spidery fingers of the Madonna had presented Pater a sign of abstraction and withdrawal from action. For Ruskin they become an object of obsessive attention and significance.

Ruskin also turns to the question of Botticelli’s “aestheticism,” echoing Pater even more directly. Speaking of the *Birth of Venus*, Pater had addressed his nineteenth-century reader directly: “At first, perhaps, you are attracted only by a quaintness of design, which seems to recall all at once whatever you have read of Florence in the fifteenth century; afterwards you may think that this quaintness must be incongruous with the subject....”¹³⁴ Here is Ruskin:

And at first glance—you will think the figure merely a piece of fifteenth-century affectation. ‘Judith, indeed!—say rather the daughter of Herodias, at her mincingest.’

¹³² Ibid., 23:335.

¹³³ Pater, “A Fragment,” 158. One also thinks of what Ruskin takes to be Botticelli’s “reproof of war,” the engraving of *Joshua* from the *Prophets* series (**fig. 75**): Botticelli “draws Joshua, but quitting his hold of the sword: its hilt rests on his bent knee; and he kneels before the sun, not commands it; and this is his prayer...” Ruskin, *Works*, 22: 437-38.

¹³⁴ Pater, “A Fragment,” 158-9.

Well, yes—Botticelli *is* affected, in the way that all men in that century necessarily were. Much euphuism, much studied grace of manner, much formal assertion of scholarship, mingling with his force of imagination. And he likes twisting the fingers of hands about, just as Correggio does. But never does it like Correggio, without cause.

Look at Judith again,—at her face, not her drapery,—and remember that when a man is base at heart, he blights his virtues into weaknesses; but when he is true at the heart, he sanctifies his weaknesses into virtues. It is a weakness of Botticelli's, this love of dancing motion and waved drapery; but why has he given it full flight here?¹³⁵

Pater works with and against Hegel; Ruskin with and against Pater. The moves here run parallel to those pursued in the earlier text. Like Pater, Ruskin attends to the painting's forceful effects; like Pater, he shifts our attention from the figures accessories to her face. Yet, rather than a vessel of an "undercurrent of original sentiment"—that peculiar quality of unbelonging to which Pater turns his attention again and again—Botticelli becomes the powerfully faithful interpreter of Biblical text. The decadent possibility of her being Salome is banished. Ruskin asks us to compare the painting to a handful of Biblical passages, asking us to copy them out, the better to study them, as if our manual labor will bring us closer to Botticelli's own. Having done so, he promises, we will see that the Judith here depicted is "not merely the Jewish Delilah to the Assyrian Samson" but rather "the mightiest, purest, brightest type of high passion in severe womanhood offered to our human memory."¹³⁶ "Sandro's picture is but slight," Ruskin concludes: "but it is true to her, and the only one I know that is; and after writing out these verses, you will see why he gives her that swift peaceful motion, while you read in her face, only sweet solemnity of dreaming thought."¹³⁷ The dismembering, potentially discordant figure of Judith is thus made semantically whole.

Labyrinth

Ruskin's description of *Fortitude* summarizes many aspects of his investment in Botticelli. The final lecture of *Ariadne Florentina*, "Design in the Florentine Schools of Engraving," presents those investments in their most extensive form. This text culminates in its treatment of a fifteenth-century set of engraved Sibyls, now in the British Museum. These had traditionally been ascribed to Baccio Baldini who, Vasari says, depended on Botticelli to supply him with designs. As Ruskin himself put it, justifying his attribution of all their essential components to Botticelli:

The series of engravings... are part of a number executed chiefly, I think, from early designs of Sandro Botticelli, and some in great part by his hand. He and his assistant, Baccio, worked together; and in such harmony, that Baldini probably

¹³⁵ Ruskin, *Works*, 23:335.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23:336.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23:336-7.

does what Sandro wants, better than Sandro could have done it himself; and, on the other hand, there is no design of Baldini's over which Sandro does not seem to have had influence.¹³⁸

For Ruskin, the Sibyls figure both the reanimation of the Greek and, in their technical aspects, the historical life of ornamental line. In an earlier lecture, Ruskin had contrasted the effects of the rediscovery of antiquity on Northern and Southern artists:

[T]he newly recovered scholastic learning... is all out of Holbein's way; foreign to his nature, useless at the best, probably cumbersome. But Botticelli receives it as a child in later years recovers the forgotten dearness of a nursery tale; and is more himself, and again and again himself, as he breathes the air of Greece, and hears, in his own Italy, the lost voice of the Sibyl murmur again by the Avernus Lake.¹³⁹

Here Ruskin recovers the feminine voices of Botticelli's cultural "childhood" and follows his artist home.

As elsewhere, Ruskin's interest in ornament sits in peculiar relation to the depiction of the Sibyls themselves. There is, once again, competition between finery and face, and the untrammelled life of line seems to require the body it inhabits to fade somewhat from view. When Ruskin discusses the print of the Cumaean Sibyl (**fig. 76**)—"the voice of Nature and of her law"; "a mortal teacher...strengthening us for our mortal time"—Ruskin first speaks of her wasting away:

She desires immortality, fondly and vainly, as we do ourselves. She receives, from the love of her *refused* lover, Apollo, not immortality, but length of life;—her years to be as the grains of dust in her hand. And even this she finds was a false desire; and her wise and holy desire at last—is to die. She wastes away; becomes a shade only, and a voice.¹⁴⁰

This beautiful falling-away of the body into its least remainders—"shade" only, and "voice"—figures physical mortality as a precondition for art. Yet the body does not disappear altogether. Botticelli "could not...have painted her only as a voice."¹⁴¹ Compliant with the material exigencies of pictorial art, something—some body—must be seen to appear, taking on physical presence. And thus, voice is pictured as a process of corporeal diminishment, a materiality ever ceasing to be:

Therefore, if anything is to be conceived, rightly, and chiefly, in the form of the Cumaean Sibyl, it must be of fading virginal beauty, of enduring patience, of far-looking into futurity....Here then is Botticelli's Cumaean Sibyl. She is armed, for she is the propheticess of Roman fortitude;—but her faded breast scarcely raises the

¹³⁸ Ibid., 22:381.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 22:400.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 22:448.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 22:449.

corslet; her hair floats, not falls, in waves like the currents of a river,—the sign of enduring life; the light is full on her forehead: she looks into the distance as in a dream.¹⁴²

This embodied “voice of nature” seems to defy the conditions of its own corporeal presence. Her “faded breast” evades explicit depiction, her hair “floats” rather than falls.

As a contrast to the Sibyl’s gentle abstraction from the flesh, Ruskin brings his favorite fleshly villain on stage. Michelangelo emerged as the artistic *bête noire* of Ruskin’s period at Oxford—art’s “chief captain in evil”—precisely because of his enslavement, in representation, to the material world.¹⁴³ Here Ruskin compares a photograph of Michelangelo’s depiction of the Cumaean Sibyl (**fig. 77**) to “Botticelli’s” print.¹⁴⁴

Opposite,—fortunately, [a] photograph from the figure itself, so that you can suspect me of no exaggeration,—is Michael Angelo’s Cumaean Sibyl, wasting away. It is by a grotesque and most strange chance that he should have made the figure of the Sibyl, of all others in the chapel, the most fleshly and gross, even proceeding to the monstrous licence of showing the nipples of the breast as if the dress were moulded over them like plaster. Thus he paints the poor nymph beloved of Apollo,—the clearest and queenliest in prophecy and command of all the sibyls,—as an ugly crone, with the arms of Goliath, poring down upon a single book.¹⁴⁵

Michelangelo’s anatomizing drive produces an over-embodied monster: the sibyl’s spiritual voice smothered in dumb masses flesh. Michelangelo’s sin here is double, a matter of his ends as well as his means. Gross materiality characterizes not only the body he depicts, but also his techniques of depiction—the entire complex of manual and mental dispositions that make up his art.

In general, *Ariadne Florentina* concerns itself with the various relations engraving might take to these two materially necessary but nonetheless fraught conditions of picturing. For Ruskin, such attention required a series of displacements and evasions. Within the developing culture of English Aestheticism, the *Birth of Venus* had already emerged as central to Botticelli’s work. Ruskin barely mentions the painting at all.¹⁴⁶ If

¹⁴² Ibid., 22:448-9.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 22:83. On Ruskin’s views of Michelangelo, see Bullen, “Pater and Ruskin on Michelangelo.” For the most complete statement of Ruskin’s antagonism, see his 1871 lecture, “The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret,” first published in 1872: Ruskin, *Works*, 22:75-114.

¹⁴⁴ As often, knowledge of which illustrations, exactly, that Ruskin used remains allusive. Did he compare the print itself to his photograph of Michelangelo’s Sibyl? Or did he rely on an oversized lecture illustration? There exists one at the Ruskin Library at Lancaster.

¹⁴⁵ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:449.

¹⁴⁶ Its occurrence in a list of works adducing Botticelli’s “very miscellaneous course of study”—“the Coronation of Our Lady; St. Sebastian; Pallas in vine-leaves; and Venus,—without fig-leaves,” Ruskin *Works*, 22:430—is nearly the only mention the *Birth* gets in the thirty-nine volumes of Ruskin’s works, and is by far the most detailed. An additional comment that Filippo

we trust Collingwood, he recognized the gap during the course of delivering his lectures, reading out Pater's description of the *Birth of Venus* instead of providing his own. This omission is significant, especially given the many moments in which the painting seems deliberately evaded, or all but mentioned. In discussing the woodcuts of Thomas Bewick (1753-1828), Ruskin contrasts the vitality of his depictions of frog and pig with the clumsiness of his depiction of a naked goddess (**fig. 78**). The juxtaposition reveals the deep contrasts between the conditions of artistic production in modern England and in fifteenth-century Florence:

As it was, the nobles of his day left him to draw the frogs, and pigs, and sparrows—of his day, which seemed to him, in his solitude, the best types of its Nobility. No sight or thought of beautiful things was ever granted him;—no heroic creature, goddess-born—how much less any native Deity—ever shown upon him. To his utterly English mind, the straw of the sty, and its tenantry, were abiding truth;—the cloud of Olympus, and its tenantry, a child's dream. He could draw a pig, but not an Aphrodite.¹⁴⁷

Ruskin insists on the force that reality exerts upon the artist's mind—a set of determinant and historically shifting conditions for depiction. (This orientation determines Ruskin's sense of Botticelli's achievement as well: as he wrote of the *Primavera*'s Graces to Charles Eliot Norton in 1874: "I can't make out how that confounded fellow was so able to see such pretty things, or how he lived among them.")¹⁴⁸ Ruskin returns to Bewick's not-Aphrodite in his lecture on "Design in the German Schools," discussing of the coarseness of the Northern "temper"—the "nobleness of that temper, but also all its baseness":

Look back, first, to Bewick's Venus. You can't accuse her of being overdressed. She complies with every received modern principle of taste.... If the absence of decoration could exalt beauty of his Venus, here had been her perfection.

Now look back to Plate XXVI [**fig. 79**], by Sandro; Venus in her planet, the ruling star of Florence. Anything more grotesque in conception, more unrestrained in fancy of ornament, you cannot find, even in the final days of the Renaissance. Yet Venus holds her divinity through all; she will become majestic to you as you gaze; and there is not a line of her chariot wheels, of her buskins, or of her throne, which you may see was engraved by a gentleman.¹⁴⁹

Ruskin goes on to discuss an engraving "even more extravagant in accessories than the Venus" (**fig. 80**).¹⁵⁰ Partly, of course, Ruskin's choice of objects here is dictated by

Lippi's instruction of his pupil seems to have been "[n]ot wholly Calvinistic," *ibid.*, 22:430, is the closest Ruskin comes to acknowledging the work's erotic force.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22:362.

¹⁴⁸ *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, ed. John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 353.

¹⁴⁹ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:402-3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22:403.

matters of media, the clothed and extravagantly ornamented engraved figures “logically” displacing the powerful painted one of the *Birth of Venus*. But this in itself proves interesting: in the substitution, line functions to distract from the naked body itself. It is difficult not to feel the presence of Botticelli’s *Birth* as an eclipsed but structuring term of comparison. Malcolm Bull has wryly noted the elaborate orchestration of bodily screens in Botticelli’s painting, where “everyone’s genitals are covered twice, which only draws attention to them.”¹⁵¹ It is as if Ruskin’s text, in its choice of pictures, continued that logic of displacement: first substituting Bewick’s morbid Venus for Botticelli, and then rejecting the substitute in favor of an extravagance of “accessories.” This doubled negation of Botticelli’s *Birth* makes its evacuated presence all the more haunting.

And what of the sex of line itself? Line takes the lead role in Ruskin’s lectures, endlessly described, allegorized, and taking on an ever more bewildering range of associations. “Of delineators,” Ruskin would later write, “the chief is Botticelli.”¹⁵² Already the title of the lectures in their published form (*Ariadne Florentina*, changed from the more straightforward one announced at Oxford) genders their topic and poses the question of line’s metaphorical register. Does the linear figure entrapment or escape—labyrinth or clue? Throughout the early lectures of his series, Ruskin emphasizes the physicality of engraving, which he calls the “first of the arts.” Engraving, for Ruskin, is “primitive”—a “prior art to that of building or sculpture.”¹⁵³ It is grounded in the hard-won process of the physical displacement of matter: the digging out of a mark:

Engraving...is, in brief terms, the Art of Scratch. It is essentially the cutting into a solid substance for the sake of making your ideas as permanent as possible, graven with an iron pen in the Rock for ever. *Permanence*, you observe, is the object, not multiplicability;—that is quite an accidental, sometimes not even a desirable, attribution of engraving.¹⁵⁴

What this subtractive labor makes permanent is first and foremost line. As Ruskin emphasizes in his lecture on the “Technics of Metal Engraving,” when used as an artistic medium, and acknowledging “the virtues proper to its own sphere,” engraving must present “first of all...the *decorative* arrangement of *lines*”¹⁵⁵—decorative, that is, before the actual process of representation intrudes:

[B]efore any other matter can be thought of, his work must be ornamental. You know I told you a sculptor’s business is first to cover a surface with pleasant *bosses*, whether they mean anything or not; so an engraver’s is to cover it with pleasant *lines*, whether they mean anything or not. That they should mean

¹⁵¹ Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 206. Bull suggests this peculiar feature of the painting is itself a displacement of (or refusal to depict) the “anatomical peculiarities of [Venus’s] birth from the severed genitalia of her father...often shown with disturbing fidelity in late medieval illustration,” Bull, *Mirror*, 206. Poliziano described the event gruesomely in the very account on which Botticelli drew.

¹⁵² Ruskin, *Works*, 23:265.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22:305, 22:320, 22:304.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22:320.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22:379.

something, and a good deal of something, is indeed desirable afterwards; but first we must be ornamental.¹⁵⁶

Ruskin is not always consistent in his formulations, but the logic here seems to run as follows: Engraving is a material process that leads, perhaps inevitably, to the work of signification. Nonetheless it reserves a portion of itself apart from secondary signification—outside or somehow prior to it (besides, that is, signifying the fact of “permanence”). And therefore in trying to write about the “meaning” of engraving, one must participate in that secondary register of signification while never losing sight of its prior, grounding one. Ruskin must figure engraving’s significance in such a way that it does not eclipse the fundamental *insignificance* of the material practice in its primal form. Such a mode of description is, of course, quixotic. Ruskin pursues it with a strange mixture of conscious intention and intuitive—one wants to say, strategically unconscious—drive.

In fleshing this out, Ruskin draws on the body of pictures his lectures describe. There he finds *Ariadne Florentina*’s two master verbal-visual figures: the Labyrinth and the Grave. Towards the end of a fine essay on Ruskin’s attitude to engraved reproduction—indicative, its author suggest, of Ruskin’s “troubled relationship to a modernity” characterized by “impermanence and excess”—Jonah Siegel draws out one of *Ariadne Florentina*’s most “anxious figures”: “the Grave in Engraving.”¹⁵⁷ The pun is Ruskin’s own. “Engraving means,” he writes, “primarily, making a permanent cut or furrow in something. The central syllable of the word has become a sorrowful one, meaning the most permanent of furrows.”¹⁵⁸ He thus short-circuits from the start whatever generative associations “furrow,” as an agricultural metaphor, might have. (These associations are engaged by Ruskin, too, as when he describes the instrument of engraving as “a solid ploughshare, which, instead of throwing the earth aside, throws it up and out, producing at first a simple ravine, or furrow, in the wood or metal.”)¹⁵⁹ We eventually realize, over the course of the lectures, that Ruskin borrows conflation of figures from Holbein’s prints themselves.

Ruskin consistently plays up the aggressive impact of Holbein’s *Dance of Death* (1538), portraying it in terms of what he takes to be the series’ preacherly mission. From the start didacticism and death go together. He gives a long account of a print he entitles “The Two Preachers,” in which a sermon is interrupted (**fig. 81**):

Death comes quietly: *I* am going to be preacher now; here is your own hour-glass, ready for me. You have spoken many words in your day. But “of the things which you have spoken, *this* is the sum,”—your death-warrant, signed and sealed. There’s your text for to-day.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 22:379-80.

¹⁵⁷ Jonah Siegel, “Black Arts, Ruined Cathedrals, and the Grave in Engraving: Ruskin and the Fatal Excess of Art,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27 (1999): 397.

¹⁵⁸ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:306.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 22:348.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 22:335.

Ruskin ventriloquizes Death,¹⁶¹ an effect underlined textually by the partial omission of quotation marks, and one that would have been all the more arresting issued from the podium of his lecture-hall. It stands as one of his most chilling moments of public speech. Ruskin wishes somehow to stage the communicative drive of the print medium—its saying, “ ‘You *shall* look at this, or at nothing,’ ”¹⁶²—by way of a figure for all communication’s end.

This allegory of engraving’s power to arrest is paired with a picture that stages, in Ruskin’s use of it, the physicality of the image, symbolizing the sheer, matter-displacing labor of depiction. Ruskin turns to an engraving he calls “The Last Furrow” (**fig. 82**), which depicts the literal en-graving of the ground:

Of this other picture, the meaning is more plain, and far more beautiful. The husbandman is old and gaunt, and has passed his days, not in speaking, but pressing iron into the ground. And the payment for his life’s work is, that he is clothed in rags, and his feet are bare on the clods; and he has no hat—but the brim of a hat only, and his long, unkempt grey hair comes through. But all the air is full of warmth and of peace; and, beyond his village church, there is, at last, light indeed. His horses lag in the furrow, and his own limbs totter and fail: but one comes to help him. “It is a long field,” says Death; “but we’ll get to the end of it to-day,—you and I.”¹⁶³

Ruskin’s eerie description means to take us deep into the print’s depicted world. In part, Ruskin wishes to stage Holbein’s historical specificity—his position “at the head of the painter-reformers” embodying a particular moment in the emergence of modernity.¹⁶⁴ (Holbein’s *Dance of Death*, he tells us, “is the most energetic and telling of all the forms given, in this epoch, to the *Rationalist* spirit of reform, preaching the new Gospel of Death.”)¹⁶⁵ Yet, beyond this, via the very power of the depiction he describes, Ruskin’s text articulates the deathly gravity of the practice of engraving itself—*apart from* meaning and history. Such complexities of figuration emerge from a superimposition—a collision—of Ruskin’s various senses of history. He attends to the historical conditions of Holbein’s age, but also to their continuing relevance for the present; to the expression of those conditions in a particular medium, but also to their ontological alienation from that medium’s blind, material work. Death emerges as a figure for this shuttling in and out of significance—a figure for mark-making’s historicity, but also for history’s outside.

This all may seem to sit uncomfortably with Ruskin’s account of Botticelli, as Siegel suggests.¹⁶⁶ Yet within the economy of Ruskin’s text, the treatment of Holbein not only provides Botticelli a thematic counterpoint, but also lends it weight, serving as an

¹⁶¹ A point noted in Siegel, “Black Arts,” 411.

¹⁶² Ruskin, *Works*, 22:364.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 22:355.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22:353.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ “It is worth noting that these works of German engraved art are not at all in the purview of Ruskin’s originally-advertised topic, ‘Sandro Botticelli and the Florentine Schools of Engraving.’ He wrenches Holbein’s images into his presentation because of the economical way in which they engage his grave theme.” Siegel, “Black Arts,” 410.

earthly anchor for the text's more scattered treatment of Italian engraving. Moreover, as we have already seen in Ruskin's discussion of the Cumaean Sibyl, that treatment itself concerned the relation between physical mortality and spiritual significance. As the text goes on, and Ruskin turns to the Hellespontic Sibyl (**fig. 83**), questions of *historical* transmission and decay come to the fore:

I do not know why Botticelli chose her for the spirit of prophecy in old age; but he has made this the most interesting plate of the series in the definiteness of its connection with the work of Dante, which becomes his own prophecy in old age. The fantastic yet solemn treatment of the gnarled wood occurs, as far as I know, in no other engravings but this, and the illustrations to Dante; and I am content to leave it, with little comment for the reader's quiet study, as showing the exuberance of imagination which other men at this time in Italy allowed to waste itself in idle arabesque, restrained by Botticelli to his most earnest purposes; and giving the withered tree-trunks, hewn for the rude throne of the aged prophetess, the same harmony with her fading spirit which the rose has with youth, or the laurel with victory. Also in its weird characters, you have the best example I can show you of the orders of decorative design which are especially expressible by engraving, and which belong to a group of art instincts scarcely now to be understood, much less recovered (the influence of modern naturalistic imitation being too strong to be conquered)—the instincts, namely, for the arrangement of pure line, in labyrinthine intricacy, through which the grace of order may give continual clue.¹⁶⁷

The passage is extraordinary and complex. With the phrase “weird characters,” Ruskin intimates the existence of a language of line. The connection between word and ornament crops up throughout Ruskin's lectures, always with marked ambivalence. At one point, discussing the engraved reproduction of paintings, he speaks of “the language of engraving...so fertile, so ingenious, so ineffably subtle and severe in its grammar, that you may quite easily make it the subject of your life's investigation, as you would the scholarship of a lovely literature.”¹⁶⁸ Ruskin's point, however, concerns the seductions of *mere* grammar: “in doing this, you would withdraw, and necessarily withdraw, your attention from the higher qualities of art, as precisely as a grammarian, who is that, and nothing more, loses command of the subject and substance of thought.”¹⁶⁹ “[T]he subtlest draughtsmanship,” he goes on, “has perished from the canvas, and sought more popular praise in this labyrinth of disciplined language, and more or less dulled or degraded thought.”¹⁷⁰ within the clueless labyrinth of modern industrialized reproduction, drawing loses its way. Elsewhere, line and language seem incompatible aspects of the same set of marks, as in an Arabian vase Ruskin displays, on which “[t]he lines...write something; but the ornamentation produced by the beautiful writing is independent of its

¹⁶⁷ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:451.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22:375.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22:375-6.

meaning.”¹⁷¹ Here, in the engraving of the Helespotic Sibyl, “weird characters” suggests a partial language, one foreign to us, or that we have gradually lost.

What would it mean to engage such arabesque—earnest or idle, significant or unmeaning—with the “quiet study” and “little comment” that Ruskin suggests? The curious, labyrinthine sentence that follows offers an answer that, in its wistful infinitives (“I hoped to have justified...”), it also perpetually defers:

The entire body of ornamental design, connected with writing, in the Middle Ages seems as if it were a sensible symbol, to the eye and brain, of the methods of error and recovery, the minglings of crooked with straight, and perverse with progressive, which constitute the great problem of human morals and fate; and when I chose the title for the collected series of these lectures, I hoped to have justified it by careful analysis of the methods of labyrinthine ornament, which, made sacred by Thesian traditions, and beginning, in imitation of physical truth, with the spiral waves of the waters of Babylon as the Assyrian carved them, entangled in their returns the eyes of men, on Greek vase and Christian manuscript—till they closed in the arabesques which sprang round the last luxury of Venice and Rome.¹⁷²

Following the logic of a familiar refrain, Ruskin asserts the moral history of ornamental form.¹⁷³ Here, however, he somewhat splits its associations. Before the sentence’s semicolon, ornament, as a synchronically organized “sensible symbol,” bespeaks the dilemmas of morality. After the semicolon, the twisting lines become temporal, describing in graphic form a diachronic, historical process of cultural decay. Ruskin returns to ideas he had formulated a few months before his lectures in the twenty-third letter of *Fors*, dated 24 October 1872. (It followed directly on his discussion of Botticelli in *Fors* 22 of the previous month.) *Fors* 23 sets out to give an account of the figure of Theseus—his exemplary importance for modern moral disposition—and ends up

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22:310. These differing aspects of marks—as language or as mere decorative line—can also gradually fall out of phase, as on the hem of Botticelli’s Zipporah: “In copying Botticelli’s Zipporah this spring, I found the border of her robe wrought with characters... which a young painter, working with me, who already knows the minor secrets of Italian art better than I, assures me are letters,—and letters of a language hitherto undeciphered.” *Ibid.*, 22:427. To which one should compare Ruskin’s remarks on Botticelli’s difficult relation to writing: “To the end, though he knows all about the celestial hierarchies, he is not strong in his letters, nor in his dialect. I asked Mr. Tyrwhitt to help me through with a bit of Italian the other day. Mr. Tyrwhitt could only help me by suggesting that it was ‘Botticelli for so-and-so.’ And one of the minor reasons which induce me so boldly to attribute these sibyls to him, instead of Baldini, is that the lettering is so ill done. The engraver would assuredly have had his lettering all right,—or at least neat. Botticelli blunders through it, scratches impatiently out when he goes wrong: and as I told you there’s no repentance in the engraver’s trade, leaves all the blunders visible.” *Ibid.*, 22:426.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 22:452.

¹⁷³ This was Ruskin’s great subject in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), and its most famous chapter, “The Nature of Gothic.”

producing a treatise on labyrinths.¹⁷⁴ The connection, of course, lies in the story of Theseus himself, killing in the Minotaur in Daedalus's Labyrinth, before finding his way back out by following Ariadne's clue. Ruskin is concerned throughout the letter with the experience of living in the shadow of the past, haunted by the kinds of myths he describes.¹⁷⁵

The letter's primary figure for him is the maze itself (**fig. 84**). The Cretan Labyrinth has its afterlife in the ubiquitous "Greek fret" that, Ruskin notes, "[y]ou cannot pass a china-shop, for instance, nor an upholsterer's, without seeing, on some mug or plate, or curtain, or chair."¹⁷⁶ In a dizzying series of connections, he proceeds to find that labyrinth everywhere: surviving on the walls of medieval churches (**fig. 85**), in English nursery rhymes ("The House that Jack Built"), even in the topography of Dante's Hell (**fig. 86**). Two aspects of these survivals stand out. Firstly, its moral ambivalence. Should the labyrinth be seen primarily in terms of the achievements of Theseus ("you never pass a day without being brought, somehow under that power of Theseus");¹⁷⁷ or of the morally indifferent technics of Daedalus—"his finest piece of involution, or cunning workmanship," the "memory of it...kept by the Greeks for ever afterwards, in that running border of theirs, involved in and repeating itself..."¹⁷⁸ His "ghostly labyrinth," Ruskin notes ominously, "has set the pattern of almost everything linear and complex, since; and the pretty spectre of it blooms at this hour, in vital hawthorn for you, every spring, at Hampton Court."¹⁷⁹

Secondly, the multiplication of meanings is essential to the labyrinth's very nature. Meaning threads in and out of the maze of the symbol's historical course, never quite repeatable, never fully fixed:

Of course frets and returning lines were used in ornamentation when there were no labyrinths—probably long before labyrinths. A symbol is scarcely ever invented just when it is needed. Some already recognized and accepted form or thing becomes symbolic at a particular time. Horses had tails, and the moon quarters, long before there were Turks; but the horse-tail and crescent are not less definitely symbolic to the Ottomans. So, the early forms of ornament are nearly alike, among all nations of any capacity for design: they put meaning into them afterwards, if they ever come themselves to *have* meaning. Vibrate but the point of a tool against an unbaked vase, as it revolves, set on the wheel,—you have a

¹⁷⁴ For a beguiling study of the labyrinthine nature of Ruskin's mind, see Jay Fellows, *Ruskin's Maze: Mastery and Madness in his Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981).

¹⁷⁵ Ruskin even manages a swipe at utilitarian economic theory in these terms: "All the more strange, then, all the more instructive, as the disembodied Cincinnatus of the Roman, so this disembodied Theseus of the Ionian; though certainly Mr. Stuart Mill could not consider him, even in that ponderous block of marble imagery, a 'utility fixed and embodied in a material object.' Not even a disembodied utility—not even a ghost—if he never lived. An idea only; yet one that has ruled all minds of men to this hour, from the hour of its first being born, a dream, into this practical and solid world." Ruskin, *Works*, 27:399-400.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27:400.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27:403-4.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27:407.

wavy or zigzag line. The vase revolves once; the ends of the wavy line do not exactly tally when they meet; you get over the blunder by turning one into a head, the other into a tail,—and have a symbol of eternity—if, first, which is wholly needful, you have an *idea* of eternity!¹⁸⁰

Few passages in Ruskin's writings work so serenely against themselves. At its beginning, the paragraph asserts the priority of technical production to cultural significance: forms come before their meanings. And yet, by its end, the passage asserts the independent priority of cultural meanings: they do not proceed out of anything inherent to insignificant arrangements of marks, but rather become, at some point, attached to them. Meanings come before their forms. Ruskin portrays the coming together of these terms as taking place within the process of making itself, a cooperation of the hand and mind that occurs in the tracing of a line. Yet, whatever his explicit intention, the text also implicitly suggests that relation to be one of mere contingency. There is no necessary reason for a particular form and a particular significance to come together. Such coincidence calls into question his larger point. Given this, how can Theseus (or Daedalus, for that matter) serve as a primary, stable signified? Do we privilege a point of origin in mythic time or the actual historical unfolding of semantic drift? One begins to question whether the labyrinth can function as "sign" at all.

Ruskin's text thus opens itself to endless drifting. His meander mimics the labyrinth's unfolding, likening his ever-multiplying associations to the experience of being inside its complex design. "Again," Ruskin continues,

the free sweep of a pen at the finish of a large letter has a tendency to throw itself into a spiral. There is no particular intelligence, or spiritual emotion, in the production of this line. A worm draws it with his coil, a fern with its bud, and a periwinkle with his shell. Yet, completed in the Ionic capital, and arrested in the bending point of the acanthus leaf in the Corinthian one, it has become the primal element of beautiful architecture and ornament in all the ages; and is eloquent with endless symbolism, representing the power of the winds and waves in Athenian work, and of the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan in Gothic work: or, indeed, often enough, of both, the Devil being held prince of the power of the air—as in the story of Job, and the lovely story of Buonconte of Montefeltro, in Dante: nay, in this very of tale of Theseus, as Chaucer tells it....¹⁸¹

And on the letter goes. Ruskin's extraordinary erudition compels its own instability. The "no particular intelligence" of line—its lack of "spiritual emotion" and significance, its being affectless and blank—seems to produce an endless, self-involving series of figures, whose underlying logic seems to lie in its radiating scatter.

Just as the significance of labyrinthine ornament shifts historically, accruing meaning over time, so in the continued course of that history do ornament's form and meaning come apart. In *Ariadne Florentina* Ruskin only gestures towards an account of labyrinth like the complex, lengthy one he offered two years before. The version in the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 27:404-5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 27:405.

lectures seems anemic and attenuated by comparison. Ruskin makes excuses. He had wished to explain all this, he says:

But the labyrinth of life itself, and its more and more interwoven occupation, become too manifold, and too difficult for me; and of the time wasted in the blind lanes of it, perhaps that spent in analysis or recommendation of the art to which men's present conduct makes them insensible, has been chiefly cast away.¹⁸²

In this new paragraph, we enter the present tense of Ruskin's own experience. Rather than merely tracing the labyrinth's elaborate linear form, he finds himself inside it, lost in the labyrinth's "blind lanes." And Ruskin relates this performative admission of personal misery to more general historical conditions: his inability to speak what he had called ornament's "sensible symbol[ism]" does not matter because modernity has deafened his audiences' "insensible" ears.

The conjunction of Ruskin's wayward self and the decay of his unraveling age is made all the more striking as he turns to his immediate physical surroundings. "On the walls of the little room where I finally revise this lecture," Ruskin writes, "hangs an old silken sampler of great grandame's work: representing the domestic life of Abraham"—a scene he tells us is "wrought with involution of such ingenious needlework as may well rank, in the patience, the natural skill, and the innocent pleasure of it, with the truest work of Florentine engraving."¹⁸³ Botticellian ornament, then, is women's work. It is Ariadne's clue. "But," Ruskin asks, "what is the use of explaining or analyzing it? Such work as this means the patience and simplicity of all feminine life; and can be produced, among *us* at least, no more."¹⁸⁴ Line's "patient," entrancing meander embodies a "feminine life" we long to live in, and can no longer—perhaps never could. Ruskin's assertion of the femininity of line imagines a world replete with our gratified identifications even as it sets itself off limits. Form and the feminine are understood in terms of each other: parallel structures ambivalent between availability and alienation. Ruskin thereby stages the otherness of linear form, but also its immediacy, dramatized in terms of sexual difference, identification, and the play of desire. This is characteristic of Ruskin's thought in general, and of the kind of feminine life he looks for in Botticelli particularly. As we turn now to Ruskin's engagement with the figure of Zipporah, it becomes clear that femininity, for Ruskin, does not simply stand for "the other," or as the object of desire's checkered course: it stands as another kind of self. Or better: the feminine seems to describe a field of aesthetic possibility, in which self and other mingle, whatever distinctions he might try to make.

¹⁸² Ibid., 22:452.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 22:452.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 22:453. The passage continues with echoes of *Fors* 23, anticipating Ruskin's late, apocalyptic tone: "Gothic tracery itself, another of the instinctive labyrinthine intricacies of old, though analyzed to its last section, has become now the symbol only of a foolish ecclesiastical sect, retained for their shibboleth, joyless, and powerless for all good. The very labyrinth of the grass and flowers of our fields, though dissected to its last leaf, is yet bitten bare, or trampled to slime, by the Minotaur of our lust; and for the traceried spire of the poplar by the brook, we possess but the four-square furnace tower, to mingle its smoke with heaven's thunder-clouds." Ruskin, *Works*, 22:453.

Zipporah

The many currents of Ruskin's investment in Botticelli occasionally come together in a single, super-charged image. In the early 1870s, as his thoughts turned back toward the quattrocento, that figure was Zipporah. Ruskin became fascinated with Botticelli's depiction of the young daughter of Jethro, Moses's future wife, in his fresco of *The Trials of Moses* on the Sistine Chapel's wall (fig. 87). His study of Zipporah involved the execution of an exceptionally large copy—four and a half feet tall—of her figure in pencil, watercolor and bodycolor (fig. 88). Roger Fry, in an early discussion of Ruskin's drawings, singled it out as peculiarly unsatisfying:

Strangely enough when he turns to animate nature, this faculty of rendering the life of the inorganic and vegetable forms seems suddenly to ail: movement, as he himself said, even the possibility of movement disturbed and distressed him. The few drawings of heads are by no means so vivacious as his drawings of shells and crystals, and even when, as in the large copy of Zipporah from Botticelli's fresco in the Sistine, the rhythm of life and movement was there before him fixed immovably on the wall, he missed it strangely. The slow undulations with which Botticelli noted and slurred the articulations of the hands are here laboriously copied, but without any confidence, without any freedom, and with a total loss of organic continuity.¹⁸⁵

Harsh as they are, Fry's observations are also careful, responding to key features of Ruskin's picture. "Freedom," indeed, seems abjured. Botticelli's fresco entails a complex, piece-meal seeing: it presents different moments of narrative simultaneously—Zipporah occurs twice, figures of Moses abound—and encourages a constant scanning of its surface. These features of the picture interacted with Ruskin's own characteristic modes of looking. His involvement with Botticelli, as I have been suggesting, was characterized throughout by a rhythm of fixation and flow, in which moments of concentration on a single, stable figure gave way to perpetual movement along a chain of associations. Part of the peculiar effect of stillness in Ruskin's Zipporah, noted by Fry, might be a function of this structure. Here was a site of maximum stability for Ruskin, characterized by long periods of careful looking, copying, and verbal description. Yet, this uneasy, perhaps unsatisfying play between stasis and movement cannot fully account for the copy's odd intensity.

Like Botticelli himself, Zipporah, for Ruskin, was antiquity "reanimate":

His Zipporah is simply the Etruscan Athena, becoming queen of a household in Christian humility. Her spear is changed to a reed and becomes then her sceptre, cloven at the top into the outline of Florentine Fleur-de-lys, and in the cleft she fastens her spindle. Her *χιτων* falls short of the feet, that it may not check her motion, and is lightly embroidered; above, the *πεπλος* unites with its own

¹⁸⁵ Roger Fry, "The Ruskin Drawings," *The Pilot* 3 (16 Feb 1901): 207-208.

character that of the aegis. Where Athena's had the wars of the giants, it is embroidered with mystic letters, golden on blue, but it becomes the *αιγίς θυσσαποεσσα* at its edge, where what are only light tassels in the *πεπλος* become this waving fringe, typical of sacrificial fire, for you know she is a priest's daughter; but when the peplus falls in Greek statues into its *κολπος*, sinus, gulph, or lap, the aegis is here replaced by a goatskin satchel, in which the maiden holds lightly with her left hand apples, here taking the character of the Etruscan Pomona, and oak for the strength of life. Her hair is precisely that of the Phidian Athena, only unhelmed, and with three leaves of myrtle in its wreaths.¹⁸⁶

The obsessiveness with which Ruskin pursues the iconographic correspondence is worthy, almost, of Erwin Panofsky at his most maddeningly erudite. Yet where a bravura exercise like Panofsky's "Blind Cupid," for all its scholarly detail, is subtended by a robust theoretical orientation, Ruskin's "iconology" seems ad hoc, conjured almost out of thin air.¹⁸⁷ As such, the effect of historical stasis seems all the stranger. Rather than a dynamic process of historical transformation, as the figure reactivates antiquity, we have an assertion of absolute trans-historical identity—a conceptual stilling of the figure, as it were.

At times, however, Ruskin seems to take an opposing tack, asserting absolute distinction between Botticelli and the Greek past. In manuscript notes for his 1874 lectures, for instance, there occurs an extraordinary distinction, under the heading "Attitude is everything":

– Ghiberti's meek Madonna – no face – Botticelli's meek Zipporah all face¹⁸⁸

At first cryptic, Ruskin's compressed note seems to signal a wide-ranging distinction between Greek and Christian art (Ghiberti being, in this case, closer to antique sources than Botticelli). Elsewhere, Ruskin writes that "[o]ne of the Greek main characters, you know, is to be *aprosopos*, faceless."¹⁸⁹ This sentence occurs in relation to Ruskin's description of the *Mystic Nativity* already discussed. That earlier lecture of 1871 also introduced two of Ruskin's own drawings of a small ancient terracotta figure, which he had executed the year before (**figs. 89-90**).¹⁹⁰ Throughout the early 1870s, Ruskin associated Greek culture with rapid bodily movement, a mode of embodied expressiveness eclipsing that of the face. He juxtaposes this "faceless" dancing girl with Filippo Lippi's great *Madonna* in the Uffizi (**fig. 91**): "Greek motion against Gothic

¹⁸⁶ Ruskin, *Works*, 23:275-76.

¹⁸⁷ Erwin Panofsky, "Blind Cupid," *Studies in Iconology* (1939; New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 95-128.

¹⁸⁸ Manuscript for "The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Florence," Beinecke Library, Yale University (uncatalogued).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 22:46.

¹⁹⁰ The original statuette, from Cyrenea, c.200 BCE, is in the British Museum (GR 1856, 10-1.44, C.808), where Ruskin studied it.

absolute quietness; Greek indifference—dancing careless—against Gothic passion.”¹⁹¹ One way to see Zipporah, then, is as a curious synthesis of these aspects. Her gentle motion would be, for Ruskin, a negation of violent movement; her form a sublation of the body, now become “all face.”

Zipporah represented the center of Ruskin’s pictorial engagement with Botticelli as well. Ruskin executed a number of watercolor and pencil copies of works of art in relation to his duties as a lecturer at Oxford. Most (but not all) of these he would deposit in his teaching collection at the University, to be consulted by students alongside a wide variety of other visual materials, including photographs, watercolor copies by other artists, and old master prints. In particular, Zipporah belongs to a highly personal group of drawings centered on young female figures of quattrocento art, on which Ruskin lavished attention in the middle 1870s (Carpaccio’s *Dream of St. Ursula* and Jacopo della Quercia’s effigy of *Ilaria* at Lucca being the other principle examples). These figures bring into special focus the confluence of didacticism and desire that characterize Ruskin’s studies after works of the old masters more generally. —Or, to be more precise, the blockage of these aims that his studies in fact perform. Many of these drawings were intended as illustrations for lecturing, and we have been left accounts of their use: of tables and walls in the lecture-hall covered with pictures, and of Ruskin’s extemporizing before them. This context certainly matters. Yet the drawings may also speak to us *as* drawings, and here I focus on how such reproductions functioned as pictures—how, at the level of material facture, they embodied a particular kind of relation to their historical referents, and asked for a particular kind of response.

Drawing, it bears repeating, was fundamental to Ruskin’s identity as an observer and as a teacher. It modeled a particular mode of attention—a focusing and slowing-down of perception that might shift a viewer’s stance toward the world. Drawing imagined a kind of recovery of the self *into* history that would leave the degraded visual habits of modernity behind. Ruskin’s best drawings have a peculiar power all their own—an almost hallucinatory attention to natural detail. Yet such aesthetic effects were secondary to their central function as conduits to this new/old way of seeing. Within this project, Ruskin’s painstaking practice of copying artworks held a crucial, but also a peculiar position. On the one hand, the practice was continuous with the ethical aims Ruskin saw in drawing generally. Training us to see through the eyes, say, of Turner (**figs. 92-93**), isolating and leading us to think through particular moments of depiction, a

¹⁹¹ Ruskin, *Works*, 22:50. The passage is worth perusing at length, for what it says of Ruskin’s understanding of Greek and Christian art—reminiscent, in places, of Pater’s descriptions: “[T]he schools of Crystal, visionary, passionate, and fantastic in purpose, are, in method, trenchantly formal and clear; and the schools of Clay, absolutely realistic, temperate, and simple in purpose, are, in method, mysterious and soft; sometimes licentious, sometimes terrific, and always obscure.

“Look once more at this Greek dancing-girl which is from a terra-cotta...; look at her beside this Madonna of Filippo Lippi’s: Greek motion against Gothic absolute quietness; Greek indifference—dancing careless—against Gothic passion, the mother’s—what word can I use except phrensy of love; Greek fleshliness against hungry wasting of the self-forgetful body; Greek softness of diffused shadow and ductile curve, against Gothic sharpness of crystalline colour, and acuteness of angle, and Greek simplicity and human veracity against Gothic redundancy of irrational vision.” *Ibid.*, 22:50-51.

copy might allow its audience to participate in a more expansive vision of the world. Yet it also performs an act of submission that partly curtails the self that draws. These copies' self-conscious proximity to previous moments of depiction both asserts Ruskin's active interest and subsumes it under the authority of an antecedent master. Their painstaking labor turns on self-negation, producing mere remnants of their author's prolonged engagement: redundant objects, endlessly pointing away from themselves towards the cherished thing itself.

The play of such low-level anxieties is bad enough when inscribed in a copy of Turner's trees. With the human body at stake, they become a good deal more fraught. Ruskin could be quite self-conscious about this. In an unpublished letter to his cousin Joan Severn, sent from Assisi in June 1874, Ruskin caricatures himself as a tiny, energetic cipher atop precarious scaffolding, craning up his neck—his whole body, really—to capture a fresco on the lower chapel's ceiling (**fig. 94**).¹⁹² Ruskin is anxious, he tells his cousin, to take advantage of the mere hour-and-a-half of adequate light rushing in from right. He reproduces his curious figure twice more below—something like a body, something like a sign—in a repetition that makes the pose both insistent and self-effacing. The figure encodes the strain of bodily effort as well as the ease with which he hopes his viewer will see through his person to “read” the picture itself.

A month earlier, Ruskin was at Rome. He spent May 1874 studying Botticelli's fresco at the Sistine Chapel, preparing for his fall lectures on Florentine art. Atop his scaffold (his letters attest to the feats of bureaucratic navigation required for to gain the Vatican's permission), Ruskin honed in on Zipporah. Over the course of the month Ruskin executed his drawing. In it, Zipporah seems to stand isolated in the dreamy, rather fetishistic intensity one associates with Aestheticist painting more generally. But she does not stand entirely alone. Traces of her companion remain to the right, and the livelier action of these extremities—the swirl of the hem, the faintest remainder of loosening hair—tend to set Zipporah herself (contra Fry) just slightly in motion. They remind us, moreover, that her pose is relational, part of the fresco's larger formal syntax. In this way the drawing self-consciously inscribes its state of dependence on Botticelli's painting. The copy's soft focus and moments of unfinish mark it as partial, secondary, a mediating object meant to be seen through to the fresco itself. A portable trace, the study refuses to serve as a substitute. Even its deficiencies—the inexactness of color, the awkwardness of Zipporah's finger, her lumpish, unlively hair—seem meant to stage this derivative status.

The interest of such features lay not only in the conceptual weight they are asked to bear, but also in the alternatives they set out to refuse. Such self-conscious qualities, Ruskin felt, were ones that photography in particular could not deliver. At some point during his tenure at Oxford, he deposited several photographic details of Botticelli's fresco in his teaching collection, including a print of Zipporah's face (**figs. 96-98**). (The drawing itself, it seems, he could never bear to let go.)¹⁹³ The comparison lets us bring into focus several aspects of Ruskin's complex attitude to the medium.¹⁹⁴ An early

¹⁹² Ruskin had a figure of Poverty in his sights (**fig. 95**). His copy has since been lost. The letter, of 25 June 1874, is now at the Ruskin Library, Bembridge Collection, L39.

¹⁹³ It now hangs at Brantwood, Ruskin's Lake District home.

¹⁹⁴ Ruskin's symptomatic stance toward photography deserves further study. For useful treatments, see especially Michael Harvey, “Ruskin and Photography,” *Oxford Art Journal* 7, no.

enthusiast of daguerreotypes, which he began making in the 1840s, Ruskin became increasingly critical of photography's failings (even as he continued to rely on it for practical purposes). "Photographs," he wrote in a typical statement of the mid-1860s, "have an inimitable mechanical refinement.... They are popularly supposed to be 'true', and, at the worst, they are so, in the sense in which an echo is true to a conversation of which it omits the most important syllables and reduplicates the rest."¹⁹⁵ Photography is not just selective, for Ruskin, but positively misleading. A discussion of a photograph of the Filippo Lippi already mentioned (**fig. 99**), for instance, spills into the vaguely apocalyptic: while the photograph usefully points to "the perfectness of Lippi's line"—and it is surely for the quality of Botticelli's line that Ruskin had the Oxford photographs made—"all," Ruskin says, "that is red or orange-tinted in the painting becomes black or brown in the photograph; and the group which, with the infant they sustain, is throughout suffused with light in the painting, is darkened in its masses like a Bolognese picture, and blotted by the inky wing."¹⁹⁶ Such malevolent indifference on the part of photographs opens, for Ruskin, onto moral blindness. The achievement of drawing, he would suggest in 1879, lies in reverence towards its subject, knowledge "that there is something better than a picture":

It is precisely in its expression of... inferiority that the drawing itself becomes valuable. It is because a photograph cannot condemn itself, that it is worthless. The glory of a great picture is in its shame.¹⁹⁷

Photographs can never achieve such depths of masochistic intensity. Products of automatism, they cannot properly orient their viewers. Whatever else, Ruskin's statement tells us something about the visual qualities of his copies. Though not yet present at quite so high a pitch (this will come soon enough), we can nonetheless see the way that affective qualities such as "self-condemnation" correspond to the tenor of his drawing of Zipporah—its blurring, and hesitancy, and failure to get things right. The manual copy's value consists in its overtly signaled dependent stance to one side of Botticelli's fresco—its not merely being inexact but its feeling so, "shame" signaled in touch after touch.

The comparison also lets us address a thickening of self-consciousness around Ruskin's depiction of Zipporah's face. Ruskin would situate the "soft trouble of her features" during his lectures in the fall;¹⁹⁸ his drawing sweetens and further softens their expression. Such sentiment asks us to attend to the sexual dimension of copying. During his time in Rome, Ruskin carried on a peculiar, triangulated flirtation with the picture via his letters to cousin Joan—a flirtation he announced from the very start. "If I don't bring home pretty Zipporah," he writes, "and make some people jealous, I'm no professor of

2 (1985): 25-33; and Karen Burns, "Topographies of Tourism: 'Documentary' Photography and *The Stones of Venice*," *Assemblage* 32 (April 1997): 22-44. See also Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 243-46.

¹⁹⁵ Ruskin, *Works*, 19:150.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24:453.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15:353.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23:276.

fine arts.”¹⁹⁹ On 6 May he is “driven...quite wild today with drawing little Zipporah’s chemisette—you never did see such a dear little...edge as its got—just about four inches under her chin—and it looks as if the least breeze would blow it loose—”; and on the fifteenth: “—I had no notion what an awful little coquette she was about her sleeves and wristbands.”²⁰⁰ This Zipporah differs markedly from the stately “Etruscan Athena” described in his lectures. Yet, such contrast was not the result of some absolute division between “public” and “private” modes of communications. Throughout the 1870s, Ruskin experimented with modes of writing that muddled this distinction. Moments of ostensibly private association, following a logic only in part available to his audience, occur throughout his lectures in this period; and for all its cloying flirtatious play, his voluminous correspondence—thousands of letters, sent to recipients across Europe and North America—also contains countless moments of carefully calculated “objective” description. Indeed, this exactitude is often explicitly tied to the matter of faithful depiction, as when he writes to his cousin of Botticelli’s “black line as thick as this [/] for an outline” (**fig. 100**): “if one misses it at first, fancy the mess one get into in altering.”²⁰¹ The most capacious manifestation of this phenomenon could be found in the structure of *Fors Clavigera* itself: the very form of Ruskin’s “letters to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain” entailed a mixture of epistolary intimacy and grand public utterance. Within these smaller, self-constructed public spheres—one wants to call them *counter-public spheres*²⁰²—Ruskin could play both with the legibility of his communications and with the shifting posture of his writing self, composing texts at times almost impenetrable in their referential breadth and in their dense texture of personal resonance.

Moreover, the overcharged nature of his investments was, remarkably, evident to Ruskin himself. “I wish I could dream of seeing her with her clothes off...,” he writes of Zipporah to Joan: “Quite wonderful how Botticelli makes it look like R....”²⁰³ “R,” here, is Rose La Touche, the young woman with whom Ruskin carried on a fraught, never consummated relationship throughout the 1860s and 70s. Her connection to Botticelli was firmly established in Ruskin’s mind. In September 1872 he wrote an extraordinary letter to Tyrwhitt about the force she exerted over his working life. “I want to tell you one or two more curious things about that Irish child,” he writes:

She seems appointed to break me down by the vision of her always when I’m coming to a leap anywhere—and yet has been at the root of all that I best know and ought to know—for my work. She sent me back last month from Cheshire so miserable that I couldn’t speak to any one—but went to Euston Hotel, and worked at British Museum. In consequence of which—I came on Sandro’s engravings, just when I wanted them—and found out a lot of other things in the very nick of time for next lectures; Well,—in next *Fors* as I told you, I’ve got to do Theseus;—and I’ve always hated and disbelieved the vulgar Ariadne story. Now I got at Lucca duomo [?] the delicouesest mediaeval labyrinth—and it’s to go in next *Fors*

¹⁹⁹ Ruskin Library, Bembridge Collection, L39.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Letter, Ruskin to Joan Severn, 25 May 1874, Ruskin Library, Bembridge Collection, L39.

²⁰² After Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

²⁰³ Ruskin Library, Bembridge Collection, L39.

with the coins of Cnossus and the Minotaur and I've got all Minos and Aeacus and Rhadamanthus as smooth and nice as can be—but Ariadne wouldn't work in, no how. Well—in thinking over her again, today, I came on the Odyssey bit;—and there it is all at once—as right as right can be. My poor little Rose is dying, or like to die, at this moment, (having been to me truly *κουρη Μινως ολοοπρονος* [child of the destroying Minos])—dying “in the power of Diana,” madly pure, *μαρτυρησι Διονυσου* [of false Dioynsos] all the energies of her animal and passionate life becoming mortal to her. Now I know that the Labyrinth meant the entanglement of the animal nature—and Theseus is the divine law giver conquering Minos and fate—but here is Ariadne crushed in another lovely rosey—filling up the fable on this beautiful side.—and I've actually seen it. It makes one think one must be worth something, after all, to be plagued, in one's poor small way, like an Elgin marble—²⁰⁴

The letter is overwhelming, as much for its linguistic precision as for its wildness. “I've actually seen it,” Ruskin writes: the blatant force of Ruskin's statement challenges (perhaps even obviates) the sort of psychological account the letter would at first seem to cry out for. With the subject's “symptoms” so close to the surface, and their interpretive key announced in advance, what work is left for criticism to do? And the letter's peculiarities do not end there. In a way that proves structurally similar to the assertions of absolute identity between ancient and modern in Ruskin's “iconology,” so here the ancient legends are not merely associated with, but *materialized in* the present—in, that is, Ruskin's lived experience. Indeed, the associative chain unfolds as Ruskin's own biography, a set of sequential experiences. And what seems ultimately important about the conjuncture is not so much the particular—and on the face of it, limiting—interpretations it entails (Ariadne as Rose, Theseus as Ruskin, or the labyrinth as animal desire); or even the sexual content of those interpretations. What matters is the fact that they are “seen”—that the reanimation of antique myth exerts its presence with the full, simultaneous force of the visible world.

And so drawing Zipporah is associated, for Ruskin, with Rose (already very ill in 1872). Ruskin sees her in the picture and, via the picture, dreams of seeing even more. Or rather, he says, “I *wish* I could dream of seeing her with her clothes off” (my emphasis). There seem to me two ways we can read this peculiarly exact formulation.²⁰⁵ In the first place, it seems telling (and a bit sad) that wish fulfillment cannot come to Ruskin even in the fantasy-space these letters allows. Something in the picture, or in himself, resists that final unveiling; sitting before the painting, fixated on Zipporah's “accessories in motion,” he can never quite see what he thinks he wants to. We should take seriously this holding back; it indexes something more than merely personal inhibition. It is as if, for Ruskin, working through issues of visual likeness and unlikeness could not help but become a question of erotic identification and difference. Even more surprisingly, Ruskin himself seems driven to use this situation to his advantage. For we might also read Ruskin's peculiar phrasing as a kind of incantation, a self-conscious attempt to make desire materialize. Ruskin acknowledges not only his attachments' elusiveness—the difficulty

²⁰⁴ Claiborne, “Two Secretaries,” 311-2.

²⁰⁵ My thanks to Hal Foster for discussion on this point.

of his desiring anything in particular or, indeed, anything at all—but also the artificial intensity of the whole process of engaging the libido in the first place. This, as I say, turns to copying’s advantage: for copying does not so much serve the pursuit of desire, here, as the other way around. Libidinal investment is being recruited to the labor of depiction, giving it articulation, telling its story, metaphorizing its form.

Let me put this another way. In Michael Podro’s subtle account, depicting an object in paint entails both our “capacity to recognize through difference” and our wish to do so.²⁰⁶ It motivates, he says, “an intention to use the object that is materially present to imagine what we recognize in it”—to imagine, that is, something else—and to engage a mode of perception that is neither the same as recognizing a literal object in the world, nor entirely different.²⁰⁷ It is in this “hinterland” of depiction, as Podro calls it,²⁰⁸ that we should locate the fantasy life of Ruskin’s copies, with their conflation of perception and projection. Podro describes it as a “transitional zone” between the subject and the world, drawing an analogy with the experience of early infancy (as described by D.W. Winnicott), when gestures are not yet seen as securely “mine”—are not yet the products of a bounded self—and the responses they elicit cannot be yet attributed to the separateness of others.²⁰⁹ It is such play between undefined categories of “self” and “other”—between my associations before a picture, say, and the corrections that a picture’s close examination offers—that proves most relevant here. Depiction provides a space in which fantasy can be tested, adjusted, even allowed to run to excess without being outright confirmed or refused. It makes sense, then, that the special attention to depictive practice involved in Ruskin’s work of copying should provide a site both for fantasy’s work and for its coming to self-consciousness. Botticelli’s fresco is not simply a blank screen onto which Ruskin projects Rose: we follow Ruskin’s pursuit of similarity *through* difference, not in its stead. Fantasy necessitates its own disappointment. Narratively, Zipporah is the wife of Moses, not of Ruskin; materially, she is embedded in fresco, flat and unavailable to his touch. The function of flirtation seems to lie precisely in its coming up short, thereby letting the copy proceed.

The importance of the drawing to Ruskin, and to Ruskin’s sense of Botticelli, can also be approached by the kinds of copies he executed in its wake. The dynamic I have been discussing continued in the coming months of 1874. July found Ruskin in Lucca studying Jacopo della Quercia’s tomb of Ilaria del Caretto, a touchstone for Ruskin since 1845, when he took a daguerreotype of the sculpture (**fig. 101**) and wrote several descriptions of it. On this trip, however, after his delight in Zipporah, he found Ilaria troubling. “Iliaria beat me yesterday,” he confides to Joan at the end of the month; and again, two weeks later, “I am more than usually beaten with my drawings.”²¹⁰ Ruskin in part seems worried about how to render the three-dimensionality of sculpture and the viewer’s particular angle of vision. Whatever the actual order of their execution, taken together they present an almost cinematic sequence of approach: moving from a distant point of view (**fig. 102**), approximating that of Ruskin’s photograph, to the statue’s

²⁰⁶ Michael Podro, *Depiction* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), 6.

²⁰⁷ Podro, *Depiction*, 6.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 147ff.

²¹⁰ Ruskin Library, Bembridge Collection, L39.

profile (**fig. 103**), and then, “panning up,” to a more raised view of Ilaria’s face (**fig. 104**). It is on these last two drawings I focus. Where the profile picture, executed for the most part in pencil, concerns itself with registering form—the interaction between her fillet of flowers, her delicately executed hair, the thin line of her profile—this second view investigates more directly Ruskin’s own engagement. Rendering the effigy more clearly as carved stone, here he also wants, it seems, to convey a sense of breathless expectation in coming upon so silent and lovely a face.

A shift in medium—for the second drawing contains more bodycolor and wash—adds to a sense of the study being objective and subjective at once. The “impressionistic” quality of Ruskin’s wash engages our sense (as in *Zipporah*) that the study is provisional, a heuristic object to be seen through in our appreciation of the sculpture. It perhaps tries to respond to the extreme delicacy of Quercia’s carving, which had long fascinated Ruskin. (“You expect every instant,” he wrote to his father in 1845, “or rather you seem to see at every instant, the last sinking into death.”)²¹¹ But the study also signals, in the terms we have been considering, Ruskin’s subjectivity. Wash stages, as it were, the stain of experience over the surface of depiction: the liquidity of fantasy as it takes the world in. And once again, Ruskin relates this dead-alive figure to Rose. Hers was one of the few living faces (besides his own) that Ruskin seemed willing to draw; and his depictions of her from the early 1860s seem continually to turn that face around, trying to find a proper point of view (**fig. 105-107**). Once he even depicts her, eyes shut and in profile, with a fillet of flowers not unlike Ilaria’s (**fig. 105**). And yet, Ruskin’s return to the effigy seems also mean to disambiguate these figures. In 1874 he repeats that profile again without the fillet, as if to disentangle his fantasy objects (**fig. 108**). Before even her image, the desire to possess is directed at picturing the impossibility of possession.

This inability, on Ruskin’s part, is deeply related to peculiarities within the processes of substitution his investments tended to engage. Frustration, it would seem, was one of the things he most wanted from works of art; and one of the things he most wanted works of art to structure in his relations to figures of flesh and blood. I am agnostic, however, about the usefulness of characterizing the causal direction of these relations. It seems one of the most interesting things about the experiential world imagined by Ruskin’s pictures and texts that the question of whether substitution stems from frustration or vice versa should be so radically undecidable. At times, this movement seems phobic. The figure of Zipporah, on which Ruskin has chosen to lavish his attentions, stands adjacent to an explicit and disturbing scene of violence, as Moses raises his sword in slaughter, the Egyptian shrieks in mortal fear, and his terrified son is shuffled off stage (**fig. 109**). In the Perugino fresco directly beside Botticelli’s *Trials*, meanwhile, there occurs the gentle (but thematically no less volatile) scene of the circumcision of Moses’s son (**fig. 110**). Zipporah herself pinches the foreskin of the apprehensive boy between thumb and forefinger as she brings her blade—we cannot see it—in close. This is one of the figure’s most disturbing associations, illustrating a passage of *Exodus* that continues to vex biblical scholars. There, Zipporah, for reasons the text leaves obscure, violently circumcises her son:

²¹¹ John Ruskin, *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to his Parents, 1845*, ed. Harold I. Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 55.

And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him.

Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.²¹²

Whoever it is that God meets and tries to kill—is it Moses himself?—the child pays the consequences, at his mother’s bloody hand.

The sudden and unexpected nature of Zipporah’s act makes its tension with the young woman that Ruskin depicts electrifying. The drawing has a “dreamy, rather fetishistic intensity” I suggested earlier: perhaps, more strongly, Ruskin’s Zipporah should be taken as fetish tout court? Her stillness and uprightness (so different from the prone Ilaria) would signal not only the self-sufficient, phallic integrity of her figure but also her spatial proximity to—and absolute, categorical apartness from—the chaotic, castrative violence that surrounds her. Even the optical topography of Freud’s account of fetishism seems to have its echo here. Having (not) seen the traumatic site of the phallus’s absence—the sign of the young boy’s own imminent castration—the gaze moves elsewhere to invest some other, compensatory object with an excess of affective intensity. The very force of disavowal, that is, supercharges actual seeing—makes “seeing” its own desperate, compensatory avowal.

In the violence of its own interpretive force, this is perhaps unanswerable. There may be no defense against the all-too-seamless coherence of the fetish; it may make the kinds of analyses I have been pursuing seem so many precious hermeneutic feints. (No loose ends in fetishism.) And some level this is surely right. Yet, I want to resist it all making too much lurid sense—not least because I believe Ruskin’s texts and copies, at their best, themselves resist it, and attempt to retrieve the visual on terms other than their own. In declaring the case so firmly closed, we risk being blinded to their *constitutive* instabilities—the very ones that make Ruskin’s attentions so porous to the world.

Zipporah is a point of fixation for Ruskin; yet she is related to a whole series of them, some congenial to a psychoanalytic framework, but by no means all. As with so many pre-Freudian phenomena of the later nineteenth century, which seem ineluctably to lend themselves to the kind of interpretation psychoanalysis would finally bring, we easily risk loosing both the specific density and the elusive diversity of the phenomena as they were then experienced. Psychoanalytic criticism helps us articulate—lets us see—the affective intensity of these kinds of historical experiences at the same time as it threatens prematurely to impose a schema that makes their significance air-tight. Perhaps nowhere else is critical tact more required than in excavating this world of late nineteenth-century feeling. We see, as it were, the mess out of which Freud’s clarifying thought emerged—and which that thought preserved in its own ambivalences and contradictions. In the case of Ruskin, affective investment is continually on the move, sliding along a Möbius strip of public/private association. The figure Zipporah stands for stability, but in so doing, also stands for everything beyond the edges of her frame. The drawing figures fixed attention, yes—a looking-at this, here, now—but also suggests a

²¹² Exod. 4:24-6 (King James Version).

whole visual field characterized by the potential for displacement: a constant looking-somewhere-else.

It will have struck the reader that over course of the previous few pages I have drifted somewhat from the question of Botticelli's specific importance for Ruskin, and been led into deeper, less decidable waters. But I have done so only in order to suggest that Botticelli ultimately stood for this enigmatic complex of causes and effects in seeing and in depiction. Ruskin was on some level constantly aware of the dangers of bringing these "deeper" problems to the surface. For such difficulties were simply what "Botticelli" *was* in the period. The deadlock in his art between surfaceness of ornament, of pure line, and his troubling "depths"—intimating loss, sadness, detachment, a refusal to relate—formed the key to his power over Ruskin and Pater, and over the rest of the troubled late century.

It is another question whether and to what extent all this could be communicated to others. Before his audience at Oxford, Ruskin would have pointed to this very drawing of Zipporah when enjoining his students to "remember in the soft trouble of her features that the shepherds had driven the maids away from the well before the Egyptian knight could defend them, that she has watched him stand against and conquer them, and that he is now watering her flock, she looking at the ground, not at him."²¹³ Yet studying so over-determined an image we might rightly ask how much of all this—how much of everything else the depiction brings in its train—were they or, indeed, anyone expected to see? Before his audience, then and now, Ruskin displays a superimposition of fantasy objects that the drawing seems nevertheless also meant to pull apart. If the whole sequence may seem to entail for reproduction some reparative function—a stilling of his troubled mind via the stabilization of Rose—such comforts are belied by the drawings' deeper undertakings in the work of visual attention and correction. Ruskin's copies, I have been suggesting, seem to be after a staging of difference that might avoid both the threatening otherness *and* the all-too-familiar aspects of fantastic life. They imagine a hinterland in which such evasive maneuvers might form the foundation for new modes of exchange between present and past. Ruskin wants to lend artworks his own history: he wishes to trace and make vivid paintings' contours with a brush weighted with the fears and desires that they themselves occasion. In doing so, his reproductions come up against an unbridgeable divide: between copy and original, between self and other, between the aesthetic and the actual life. The works seem self-conscious of these conditions, but acknowledgment is not escape. In the lecture-hall, as in the drawings themselves, it was precisely this oscillation between shared and unsharable histories—between what could be seen and what could never be said—that provided a site for Ruskin's saddest and most deeply felt investments. Again and again, he wished to locate Botticelli there.

²¹³ Ruskin, *Works*, 23:276.

Chapter Three: Connoisseurship, Painting, and Personhood

If Gimi substitute parts of themselves for other parts at different moments in time, we should be looking more generally at how people substitute one set of relations for another. And if it is persons who embody relations, it follows that 'persons' can appear as substitutes for or as though they were composed of other 'persons'.

– Marilyn Strathern¹

In the consolidation of an identity for Botticelli, no aspect proved more important than limiting the shape of his oeuvre. Deciding what works he had executed, and separating them from those in which he had no hand, fell increasingly to professional connoisseurs during the period I consider. Nonetheless, the new, so-called scientific connoisseurship, associated most with the names Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891) and his most ardent follower Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), engaged themes broached elsewhere in writings on Botticelli. The practice itself was always intimately associated with this artist.

Morelli's first publication of his findings, in 1874, begins with the problem of distinguishing Botticelli from the Lippis, father and son (**fig. 111**);² and in his final years, Morelli told his closest friends and students that the method itself had been developed in the halls of the Uffizi while gazing at the works of just these artists, noting the similarities and differences between their configurations of hands and ears.³

Connoisseurship sought to define artists differentially—in negative, as it were, through attention to the art-producing agents they were not. In the process, there sprung up around art's major figures a whole host of posited “followers” and “schools,” serving to siphon off works for which the authenticity of a master's name could not be claimed. This question of the “follower” was not entirely a new one. As we have already seen, Swinburne seems to prefigure connoisseurship's concerns in his description of the place

¹ Marilyn Strathern, “One Man and Many Men,” in *Big Men and Great Men: Personifications of Power in Melanesia*, ed. Maurice Godelier and Strathern (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 197.

² Giovanni Morelli [Ivan Lermolieff, pseud.], “Die Galerien Roms I. Die Galerie Borghese,” part I, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 9 (1874): 1-11.

³ As Morelli's friend Elizabeth Eastlake put it in a lengthy obituary: “Studying a picture with numerous figures by Botticelli in the Uffizi Gallery, it suddenly struck him that there was an agreement in the hands and in the ears which he had not remarked before. He was confirmed in this conviction by other pictures by the same master—the hands and the ears, whether in young or old, in man or woman, had all the same character. He turned to the pictures by Botticelli's pupil, Filippino Lippi; and the same fact of similarity between these features, however differing from those by his master, was there also. Other Florentine masters showed a similar peculiarity; and in cases where the application of this test failed, the picture itself proved to be falsely or doubtfully named.” Elizabeth Eastlake, “Giovanni Morelli: The Patriot and the Critic,” *The Quarterly Review* 173 (1891): 242. See also Jean Paul Richter, “Giovanni Morelli: Lermolieff,” *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung* 79 (1891): 1-4; Gustavo Frizzoni, “Giovanni Morelli: Ein Lebensbild,” in Morelli, *Kunstkritische: Die Galerie zu Berlin* (Leipzig, 1893), xi-lxii; and Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes, “Morelli, Giovanni,” in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (London, 1911), 28:830.

of Botticelli within the art of his student Filippino Lippi, as though the work of the master could only be appreciated—only be seen—through the wider field of his effects. And Swinburne was not alone. Ruskin wrote of the special intimacy shared by Botticelli and Baccio Baldini, and of the ethical dimensions of discipleship encoded in Botticelli's own name—a lesson “concerning Mastership and Pupilage”:

[A]ll the great early Italian masters of painting... felt themselves so indebted to, and formed by the master-craftsman who had mainly disciplined their fingers... that they practically considered him their father, and took *his* name rather than their own; so that most of the great Italian workmen are now known, not by their own names, but by those of their masters, the master being himself entirely forgotten by the public, and eclipsed by his pupil; but immortal *in* his pupil, and named in his name. Thus our Sandro... [H]is master was Botticello; of which master we nevertheless know only that he so formed, and informed, this boy, that thenceforward the boy thought it right to be called “Botticelli's Sandro,” and nobody else's.⁴

The figure of the follower might make up an artist's deepest truth, especially for an artist so singular and yet so open to imitation as Botticelli.

This chapter considers Botticelli's fate among the connoisseurs through concentration on a single crucial text. It attends to the creative structures and cultural consequences of Morellian connoisseurship as they play out in Bernard Berenson's “Amico di Sandro,” first published in a French translation in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1899, and in English two years later.⁵ Here Berenson invents a distinct “personality” as author of a scattering of late fifteenth-century Italian paintings variously ascribed at that time, but principally divided between Sandro Botticelli and Filippino Lippi. In Berenson's “discovery” of a third, mediating hand between these painters, neither Botticelli nor Filippino but partaking of both, he personified all that separated these artists, but also all that they shared. As Berenson himself explained it: “I attempted without the aid of a single document or a single ‘literary’ hint, to construct an artistic personality; to show how it proceeded from, how it was influenced by, and how it influenced other such personalities; and even to establish with fair accuracy the period when this personality was active.”⁶ He published several other reconstructions around 1900—of “Alunno di Domenico” and Girolamo da Cremoni, for instance⁷—closing a

⁴ John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera* Letter 22, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), 27:372-73.

⁵ Bernard Berenson, “Amico di Sandro,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 41 (1899): 459-71; 42 (1899) 21-36. The English text (from which I quote) appeared as Bernard Berenson, “Amico di Sandro,” in *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1901), 46-69. For an account of the essay with emphases other than mine, see Patrizia Zambrano, “Bernard Berenson e l'Amico di Sandro,” in Bernard Berenson, *Amico di Sandro*, ed. Patrizia Zambrano (Milan: Electa, 2006), 9-70.

⁶ Berenson, *Study and Criticism*, vii-viii.

⁷ Bernard Berenson, “An Altar-Piece by Giorlamo da Cremona,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd ser., 3:2-3 (1899): 161-176; Bernard Berenson, “Alunno di Domenico,” *The Burlington Magazine*, 1 (March 1903): 6-20. Typical of Berenson's pride was his deliberately

decade that had been a hey-day for *noms de commodit *. This was the age of “Pseudo-Boccaccino” and the “Master of F malle”: figures that embodied the new connoisseurship’s dream of inventing new kinds of art-making agents.⁸ Such “artistic personalities,” to use Berenson’s key phrase, depended for their existence neither on the narrative structures of Vasarian biography nor on the truth-effect of the archival document, but rather on the evidence of the eye alone. They were creatures generated within the classificatory protocols of the connoisseurial gaze. For connoisseurship only really found its voice in making people up, grounding itself in the “recovery” of shadowy figures from the faintest of traces. It was within this burgeoning field that Berenson created his “Amico di Sandro;” and in terms of its influence and notoriety, as well as in its power as a text, the essay stood apart. It would serve as the prime example in a polemic Berenson put forward concerning the legacy of Morellian connoisseurship—both with and against Morelli himself.

Connoisseurship’s composite entities, however, do not only index the mystifications of a profession. The very fragility of the circuit running between invented artist and improvisatory author reveal the paradoxical constructed-ness of artistic personhood itself during the period of Botticelli’s rediscovery. Connoisseurship treated of *analytic* individuals rather than flesh-and-blood ones, and there was nothing in the method itself—nothing on the level of its theoretical articulation—that necessitated the existence of biographical individuals on the other side of the brush.⁹ Take the case of a group of specialized students painting drapery or hands in a studio situation, completely internalizing the workshop’s procedures, for instance: connoisseurial practice might well

continuing to refer to the “Alunno” well after his documented identity as Bartolommeo di Giovanni became well known.

⁸ For the “discovery” of these masters, see Wilhelm Bode, “Pseudo-Boccaccino,” *Archivio storico dell’arte* 3 (1890): 192-5; and Hugo Tschudi, “Der Meister von Fl malle,” *Jahrbuch der k niglich preussische Kunstsammlungen* 9 (1898): 8-34, 89-116.

⁹ A point I owe to Whitney Davis, “The Stylistic Succession,” in *The General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, forthcoming). Compare Davis, *Replications* (Univ. Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1996), 25: “the psychoanalytic ‘person’ is not the ‘analytic individual’ picked out...by stylistic analysis;” or Davis, *Masking the Blow* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1992) 53, n.4: “It is immaterial...whether one, two, or many hands were at work on this or any other object; the label *image maker* or *artist* designates the agency or ‘analytic individual’ by which a chain of replications is produced.” Neer makes a similar point (also acknowledging Davis) via a discussion of Richard Wollheim’s great essay on style: “These cases [anonymous productions] make it clear that Wollheim’s ‘individual style’ must be that of an analytic individual, which is not necessarily the same as a particular human subject. An individual style stands in a causal relation to the originary manufacture of the object(s) in which that style is recognized; but there is no reason a single individual human must have performed that manufacture.” Neer, “Connoisseurship,” 12. Neer concerns himself here with Wollheim’s distinction between “general style,” which is simply taxonomic—a tool for sorting artifacts—and “individual style,” which points to a generative, intimately causal relation between an artwork and its maker. See Wollheim, “Pictorial Style: Two Views” (1979), in *The Concept of Style*, ed. Berel Lang (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), 183-202. Neer understands the distinction between these poles of stylistic analysis to break down in practice. One way to think of connoisseurial phantoms like “Amico di Sandro” would be as haunting the interval between these conceptions of style, insecurely involved with both.

speak of their products as belonging to a single agency. Similarly, art historians speak of *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) as the work of “Jacques-Louis David”—as a product of his style, embodying a singular world-view—even though they well know that idiosyncratic members of his studio (François Gérard, Anne-Louis Girodet) in fact had a hand in crucial passages, including Brutus’s face. Notionally, connoisseurship concerned itself with the origins of artifacts—with those patterns of agency by which artifacts came to be. And yet for authors like Morelli and Berenson, to speak of agency was always, as if by reflex, to speak of individual persons.

Berenson’s connoisseurship, even more than that of Morelli (a former student of medicine, as he constantly reminded his readers), had bodily foundations. He was concerned not only with the externalization of corporeal habits in painting, but also with the transmission of those habits from one body to another. What might it mean for the reflexes of the master to be repeated in the student? And what are the consequences of this for the connoisseur him- or herself, whose own senses take the paintings in? Description of the process of individuation became the site of its own unravelling, and opened onto peculiar figurations of the category of the person. Connoisseurial anxieties became concentrated in “artistic personalities,” perhaps nowhere more acutely than in the neighborhood of Botticelli.

Berenson chose for his creation some of connoisseurship’s most volatile territory: as already noted, methodologically speaking, the school of Botticelli was hallowed ground. In addition to his obituaries, the method’s primal scene had been staged in Morelli’s own “Princip und Methode” of 1890, an introductory text in the first volume of his collected *Kunstkritische Studien über italienische Malerei*. “Principles and methods” turns out to be another name for the spaces of fantasy and fiction. The *Studien* were published under the pseudonym Ivan Lermolieff (a Russified anagram of Morelli’s own name) that the connoisseur had long used—in spite of the fact that his identity was by then already well known. The essay took on a self-consciously fictional form. Morelli adopts that favored genre of the later nineteenth century, the Platonic dialogue, giving it a gothic twist: one version of Morelli, an older, anonymous Italian politico, encounters another—Lermolieff, the youthful skeptic—and schools him in the tribulations of attribution, beginning with the works of Botticelli. At about the same time, Morelli’s friend and admirer, the writer Carlo Placci (1859-1941) had begun work on his own work of fiction meant to popularize the Morellian method (later he would become a close friend of Berenson, too). When the novel *Un Furto* appeared in 1892, a year after Morelli’s death, it took place on this ground, too.¹⁰ In a dark corner of what is a barely disguised version of Florence’s Corsini Gallery,¹¹ a young man comes upon a small, dirty, unattributed painting of a Madonna that he feels must be close to Botticelli—a school-picture, an imitation, perhaps even the work of Sandro himself. His obsession grows, and apprenticing himself to Ivan Lermolieff, that “russo stravagante” (Morelli’s authorial persona here has his afterlife), our hero’s intuition receives more and more fuel.

¹⁰ Carlo Placci, *Un Furto* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1892).

¹¹ For this and other identifications, I follow Jaynie Anderson, “Connoisseurship in Risorgimento Italy,” in *Collecting, Connoisseurship and the Art Market in Risorgimento Italy: Giovanni Morelli’s Letters to Giovanni Melli and Pietro Zavaritt (1866-1872)*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Venice: Istituto Veneto Scienze, Lettere e Arte, 1999), 58.

Lermolieff convinces young Piero to write a monograph on Botticelli, and filled with enthusiasm, the youth steals the painting from the gallery and furtively has it restored. As the layers are stripped away and its fundamental forms emerge, the painting at last reveals the master's hand. Yet, in a curious negative turn Piero finds he cannot make the announcement himself; improbably stricken with guilt over his theft, he retires to the sidelines, leaving his fellow-student and rival Dr. Preller to baptise the painting "Botticelli."

In turning from Placci's roman-à-clef to Berenson invented person, we move from the fictionalisation of connoisseurship's external circumstances—its procedures and characters and social effects—to the fictions of "personality" that lay at its core. "Amico di Sandro" would have an afterlife much longer than Placci's novel. Despite its detractors, the figure would not disappear from Berenson's lists of Florentine painters until 1932. During that time, the name "Amico di Sandro" occurs for the delight of tourists in popular guides to the galleries of Florence; in Herbert Horne's stately monograph; and still, with a slightly reshuffled corpus, in the 1931 volume of Raimond van Marle's behemoth, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*.¹² And meanwhile, the essay inspired fictionalizations of its own. Around 1910, the decadent English writer Frederick Rolfe, known better as Baron Corvo—he, too, no stranger to pseudonyms—had begun a novel (never finished) concerning Berenson's fictional personage. Corvo's *Amico di Sandro* offers a homoerotic imaginary portrait of Botticelli's development, told in the voice of the artist's lovelorn follower: the Amico.¹³ As a concept, then, "Amico di Sandro" had legs. Yet, he had his beginnings in the late nineteenth-century world Placci describes. For all its meditation on method, Placci's novels presents as well as participates in connoisseurship's dense social web, stitched through with affections and rivalries, and fraught with anxieties about the public life of its findings. Turning as much on the heat of the chase as on the nature of the quarry, Berenson's essay is made out of this material, dependent on the social situation it has refigured and displaced.

* * *

Berenson was not so much a Morellian critic as a Morellian fantasist; and it is on the level of something like fantasy—its distortions, displacements, and defensive maneuvers—that Berenson's most important texts inform us of what is at stake in scientific connoisseurship. Taken this way, Berenson's effort in "Amico di Sandro" to fill in the space between artists with a "personality," an internal history, and something like a name emerges as a symptom of complexities inherent in the Morellian moment—and, what is more, in the category of the artistic person as such. "Amico di Sandro" opens

¹² Maud Cruttwell, *A Guide to the Paintings in the Florentine Galleries* (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1907), 209, 213-14; Herbert Horne, *Alessandro Filipepi, commonly called Botticelli, painter of Florence* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), 34; Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1923-1938), 12:244-66.

¹³ Frederick Rolfe, *Amico di Sandro: a Fragment of a Novel* (London: privately printed, 1951). For connections between Rolfe's novel and Berenson's essay, see A.Z., "Editorial: *Amico di Sandro*," *Desiderata* 7.22 (4 June 1954): 1-3.

onto a conceptualization of that category in terms of what anthropologists have come to call the “distribution of personhood.” The term signals the ways in which personhood need not be coterminous with, or even necessarily centered on the body at all, but rather may be seen as spread “beyond the body-boundary,” across the social milieu as a whole.¹⁴ Personhood is not an innate concept, Marcel Mauss suggests, but rather a category that has “slowly developed over many centuries and through numerous vicissitudes, so that even today it is still imprecise, delicate and fragile, one requiring further elaboration.”¹⁵ We ought therefore to attend (to revert to Marilyn Strathern’s phrase) to the way that “persons embody relations:” not just to how persons distribute their own selves through their artifacts and social alliances, but also to how such constitutive, grounding relations *cut across* individual bodies.¹⁶ For the “personhood” relevant to a particular situation, or to a particular mode of description, may indeed be inhabited by several bodies, or even be seen to inhabit those bodies’ pieces, subsisting as a set of relations between detached, individuated forms.

Turning back to Morelli makes this more concrete.¹⁷ From the very beginning of “Ivan Lermolieff’s” career, Morelli’s work was described, especially in English periodicals, as “destructive criticism.”¹⁸ Critics were picking up on a phrase (*zerstörenden Kritik*) the impatient young Lermolieff utters in ‘Principles and

¹⁴ Alfred Gell, “The Distributed Person,” in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), 104. For other accounts of the concept, see Roy Wagner, “The Fractal Person,” and Strathern, “One Men and Many Men,” in *Big Men*, ed. Godelier and Strathern, 159-73, 197-214.

¹⁵ Marcel Mauss, “A Category of the Human Mind: the Notion of Person; the Notion of Self,” in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 1.

¹⁶ Strathern, “One Man and Many Men,” 197.

¹⁷ Among treatments Morellian connoisseurship, see especially: Hubert Damisch, “Le gardien de l’interprétation,” *Tel Quel* 44 (Winter 1971), 70-84; 45 (Spring 1971), 82-96; Richard Wollheim, “Giovanni and the Origins of Scientific Connoisseurship,” in *On Art and the Mind* (London, 1973), 177-201; Henri Zerner, “Giovanni Morelli et la science de l’art,” *Revue de l’Art* 40-41 (1978): 209-215; Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method,” *History Workshop Journal* 9 (Spring 1980): 5-36; Carol Gibson-Wood, *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli* (New York: Garland, 1988); Hayden B.J. Maginnis, “The Role of Perceptual Learning in Connoisseurship: Morelli, Berenson, and Beyond,” *Art History* 13 (March 1990): 104-117; *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*, ed. Agosti, Giacomo, Maria Elisabetta Manca, and Matteo Panzeri (Bergamo: P. Lubrina, 1993); and Davis, “The Stylistic Succession.” I have also benefited from Thomas J. Otten’s brief but incisive account of connoisseurship in relation to Henry James’s fiction in *A Superfluous Reading of Henry James: Preoccupations with the Material World* (Columbus, OH: Univ. of Ohio Press, 2006), 78-81.

¹⁸ For instance: “No doubt in such a process destructive criticism is far more easy than to attain really satisfactory affirmative results.” Elizabeth Eastlake “Morelli’s Italian Painters,” *The Edinburgh Review; or Critical Journal* 176 (1892): 337; and: “Seldom, indeed, does he descend into sentimentality, and his destructive criticism is wholesomely violent.” Charles Whibley, “Italian Art at the New Gallery,” *The Nineteenth Century* 35 (February 1894): 335.

Methods’—ironically or in confession is hard to say.¹⁹ One sees what they meant. Far more famous than any recovery of the kind imagined by Placci was the almost sadistic pleasure Morelli seemed to take in de-attribution, cutting off countless beloved paintings from the lofty names they had assumed. He participated in the decimation of Giorgione’s oeuvre begun by his great rival, Giovanni Cavalcaselle.²⁰ Most sensationally he demoted the Dresden Gallery’s famous “Correggio” Magdalen (**fig. 112**), “dethroning,” as Lady Eastlake put it, “perhaps the most popular picture of the last hundred years.”²¹ And other masterpieces followed.²²

Such controversies went hand in hand with a subtler corroding of aesthetic appreciation. Pleasure is deferred, perhaps even usurped, by the rigors of methodical observation. Morelli displays surprising ambivalence on this matter: when, in “Principles,” Lermolieff returns home from Florence, he is “dissatisfied,” he tells us, with the “dry, uninteresting, and even pedantic study” that formed his initiation.²³ He seeks solace in the Raphaels he had known in his youth. Yet, he says:

I could hardly believe my eyes.... [T]hese pictures which only a few years before had appeared to me admirable works by Raphael himself, did not satisfy me now, and on closer inspection I felt convinced that these much-vaunted productions were nothing but copies, or perhaps even counterfeits.²⁴

It is striking the extent to which methodological gain takes the form here of aesthetic embarrassment and loss.

These forms of destruction, moreover, are subtended by an even more radical third. The “Morellian method” depends on the imaginary isolation of telling details in order to compare the morphology of pictorial configurations apart from a picture’s total effect on its viewer. Before the eyes of the connoisseur, paintings fall to pieces (**fig. 113**). In the habitual configuration of a notionally detached ear or hand, typical examples of what Morelli called *Grundformen* (ground- or fundamental forms) and the subject of his famous schedules of hands and ears, the careful, methodical observer can detect the artist’s involuntary objectifications of his or her creative touch. As Morelli himself put it, in a phrasing that seems almost deliberately to collapse author and creation, “every important painter has, so to speak, a type of hand and ear peculiar to himself.”²⁵ Yet, paintings do not always present authentic individuals: just as likely, they may have been executed by an *unimportant* painter:

¹⁹ Morelli, *Kunstkritische Studien über Italienische Malerei: Die Galerien Borghese und Doria Panfili in Rom* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1890), 73; Morelli, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of their Works*, tr. Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes (London: John Murray, 1892-3), 1:59.

²⁰ The demolition of Giorgione was begun in Arthur Crowe and Giovanni Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy* (London: John Murray, 1871).

²¹ Eastlake, “Patriot and Critic,” 205.

²² For instance, the famous portrait of Bildo Altoviti then in Munich, long considered a self-portrait by Raphael, but demoted by Morelli to a work by Giulio Romano: see Morelli, *Italian Painters*, 2:112-114.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1:60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:77.

[T]he mannerisms of some artists are simply the result of chance or habit. The [*Grundform*]... of hand and ear is characteristic in the work of all independent masters, and affords valuable evidence for identifying them, while mannerisms may, at most, serve to distinguish those of painters wanting in individuality.²⁶

For Morelli, that is to say, only some painters are persons.

Here we enter some of the greatest difficulties of Morelli's conception. Generally speaking, he responds to the historical doubleness of ideas about artistic style. As Williband Sauerländer explains it, the notion of style emerges from the "framework of a system of classification, dominated by norms...and...interdictions"; but only to encounter "modern system of ideas" grounded in ideas of "originality and individuality."²⁷ Sauerländer astutely notes (and it is this that keeps his dichotomy from caricature) that even in the modern era, the old model never quite disappeared. Instead, style took on "a double face": a valorization, and even fetishization of "the particular, the peculiar, and above all the innovative" that nonetheless could not shake free from that "traditional background of rule, norm and prescript."²⁸ Within the development of this increasingly fraught set of notions, Morelli offered a novel synthesis. His logic seems to run as follows. Only in the important painter, the painter whose practice is really seized by and directed to the articulation of a new, distinctive world-view, does the rendering of "minor" or "incidental" features (the habitual ear, the distinctive shape of the hand) really become automatic or unconscious—and this, because all the artist's creative attention is otherwise absorbed by the central representational task: that of invention, of *unprecedented* articulation. *Grundformen*, those deeply embedded ciphers of stylistic repetition, are the by-products of originality: the unintended "ground," within the artist's own system, against which all his or her other achievements comes into relief.

For Morelli true individuality only attaches to certain hands. The touch of what were undoubtedly in some sense actual biographical agents—real bodies working paint across a surface at a certain time and place—cannot be counted as artistic or stylistic ones in any sense that matters. At most their products could be said to be not-Raphael, not-Botticelli—pictures with only negative, diacritical authorial content. And so, in reassigning the so-called *Fornarina* in the Uffizi to Sebastiano del Piombo, Morelli could write: "The form of the hand here is nothing but the transition from Giorgione to Raphael; it is an academic hand, devoid of character."²⁹ Merely transitional, mindlessly repetitious: these other, un-fundamental forms describe a zone of non-, derivative, or at best only partial personhood that might give any partisan of stable authorship, or even its logical deconstruction, pause.

* * *

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:45.

²⁷ Williband Sauerländer, "From Stylus to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion," *Art History* 6, no. 3 (1983): 255.

²⁸ Sauerländer, "Stylus to Style," 256.

²⁹ Morelli, *Italian Painters*, 1:45.

It was at this point of instability that Berenson's "Amico" was meant to do its work. Roger Fry, for one, appreciated the salve it offered. "Any one," he wrote in a 1901 review,

who has looked much at Florentine painting must have been struck by the immense number of pictures bearing Botticelli's name, and must have often felt a sense of discomfort at finding so many of them evidently by other hands, and yet full of charm. But these pictures, which even a superficial amateur of Florentine art would reject as not by the master himself, fall by that into a limbo of imperfect concepts.³⁰

Berenson, he suggests, intends to lead us out of such limbo. Before, we could "place them together only by saying that they are not Botticelli's own work;" now, we can place them "in the logical sequence of a personal artistic development."³¹ Fry proves eloquent on essay's reparative function: its gathering fragments together into a coherent whole, filling in the fissures of so many part-persons with an aesthetically and methodologically approachable "personality."

However, Fry only gets things half right. For the real interest of "Amico di Sandro" lies in its never quite leaving the "limbo of imperfect concepts" behind. Berenson allows his figure to hover somewhere between the fullness of artistic personhood and a mere circulation of social form. At its heart, the essay's problem lay not in how this supposedly distinguishable agent graduates from Botticellian school-style to an authentic one of its own. Rather, the issue lay in describing how that agency is always compromised by its incomplete autonomy, and how the mere recirculation of Botticelli's style might issue in something like a person.

The essay begins with a painting that had been traded between various attributions. If according, to Berenson, the *Madonna* in question (now in Naples: **fig. 114**) cannot be made to fit with either of the Lippis, neither can it be by Botticelli. "Filippo's winsome gaiety," Berenson says, "gives way here to a heavy melancholy, a dolorous yearning which exaggerates the mood at times expressed by Botticelli."³² Yet, in comparison to an autograph work (Berenson chooses the famous "*Chigi Madonna*" [**fig. 115**] he had recently helped Isabella Stewart Gardner acquire), the picture in Naples evidences an author who "debases Sandro's form and surcharges his sentiment. . . . betray[ing] the imitator rather than the inventor of a style"; it "reveals," he says, "the existence of a painter who toward 1475 was imitating Botticelli closely, a painter not at all contemptible, but dependent, and of uneven attainment."³³ Berenson concentrates on how the putative artist develops away from these sorry beginnings. He wastes no time in growing his creature whole. "From an almost characterless imitator of Botticelli," Berenson goes on, "our Anonimo becomes, in the next of his pictures we encounter, a distinct artistic personality."³⁴ A set of characteristic features ("square jaws,

³⁰ Roger Fry, "Fine Arts," *The Athenaeum* no. 3864 (16 November 1901): 668.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Berenson, *Study and Criticism*, 46.

³³ *Ibid.*, 48, 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

pointed chins, faulty noses...the hair curling and yet as of a wig”) connects the *Tobias and the Archangels* at Turin (**fig. 116**) with these pictures, even as a new attitude emerges before our eyes. For now the Anonimo “reveals a gayer, more easy-going temperament than Sandro’s. He does not take his art at all so earnestly, [and] is something of an improviser.”³⁵ This lighter hold on the master’s forms—“gayer” and “more easy-going” just because they do not belong to the painter who deploys them—turns out to be the very sign of that mode of individual personality that Morelli’s approach would seem to deny. Features of Botticelli’s style, detached from his own authorial hand, are seen to subsist and become “personal” on their own.

The effect grows only stranger as we take into account the figure’s variance from the chronology of Botticelli’s own development. On the one hand, Berenson dates the Turin painting to 1480 at the latest. Yet, he suggests, its

painter dashes, in a fashion, ahead of Botticelli. The draped legs, for instance, of Gabriel and Raphael are more like those dancing angels in Sandro’s *Nativity* of 1500 [the National Gallery’s *Mystic Nativity*, **fig. 68**] than of any of his earlier pictures. The sweep of Tobias’ mantle also would, in Botticelli, point to a later date.³⁶

On the other, turning to a *Coronation* and to a *Story of Virginia* (**figs. 117-118**), Berenson fills out this effect of looking-ahead with instances of stylistic retention. He notes the “same suggestion of a sudden maturity, but with a curious harking back to first impressions”: a “mingling of elements that in Botticelli would belong both to the beginning and to the end of his career.”³⁷ Berenson’s attention to such small-scale stylistic anachronisms marks the peculiarity of his account. He disallows the logic of straightforward historical explanation—Botticelli, say, drawing on the innovations of his students in his own later work—from the very beginning. He has something else in mind. For his “Amico” does not exist outside his master’s style at all:

We are thus led to suspect that our painter was a sort of feebler Sandro, describing a smaller orbit about a kindred artistic purpose, and therefore travelling with greater speed through its signs. He would suggest a person of rapid development, and what so often occasions is, a life destined to be brief, and as if aware that it has but a little span wherein to accomplish its desire.³⁸

Rather than some human agent, “Amico di Sandro” seems here like an inferior species or lower form a life—a machine for the production of Botticelli-effects. Berenson begins collecting for his readers a set of bodily and pseudo-psychological automatisms, fleshing them out from the bare traces of a supposed pupil’s hand. His reduction reads almost as a mockery of the heroic project of the nineteenth-century monograph—its “vision of the artist as a ‘subject’ existing not prior to but born within the practice of artistic creation

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 50.

³⁷ Ibid., 51, 52.

³⁸ Ibid., 51.

and engaged with the very dynamic of being and becoming,” in Gabriele Guercio’s words.³⁹ For as the contours of his “Amico” emerge, they do not allow for anything outside those determining habits. The life just *is* the style; both seem meager.

The rest of Berenson’s essay is concerned with mapping his figure’s “smaller orbit.” Tracing a rapid movement through the master’s signs, Berenson establishes a consistent set of stylistic recursions that forward the progress of his creature’s career. Already bound within the outer limits of “Botticelli,” they are circumscribed again by his supposed “friend.” Berenson turns to paintings now in Chantilly and Toronto:

We have found in all these works the same types, but in the Esther panels we have besides a noted a return to certain faces that either we know our Author to have used, or that we can infer him to have used in the earliest stages of his career. And this need not surprise us, for the law of the mind is that we all tend to return to those habits which we formed in our younger years.⁴⁰

These astonishing powers of inference produce, for Berenson, nothing short of a subject. In applying a bit of psychology lifted from his Harvard professor William James, for whom all living creatures were “bundles of habits,” he seeks to establish the *internalization* of artistic procedures.⁴¹ Detached from Botticelli and from Filippino, such procedures are shown to be lived from the inside, pursuing an autonomous organic maturation that issues in “personality.”

* * *

In constructing his experimental fiction, Berenson drew on an eclectic range sources. Part of the difficulty of engaging with such a field lies in marking its limits. Take the terminology of “artistic personality” itself. Conservatively, we might stick to main-line German scholarship. The term occurs prominently in the English translation of Franz Kugler’s *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei* (1847). Kugler opposes the “perpetual recurrences” of Byzantine art to the proto-modern Western medieval artisan, who “retained not only a great freedom in arrangement of subject, but also created every single figure anew”: “Head, action, and drapery,” Kugler writes, “belong to him alone, and are evidence of his artistic personality [*seiner künstlerischen Persönlichkeit*], not of a tradition independent of himself.”⁴² Here, “artistic personality” stands for stylistic individuation.

More dramatically, we might note the affinity of Berenson’s creation with that great symptom of the late nineteenth-century crisis of the self: the invention of “split

³⁹ Gabriele Guercio, *Art as Existence: The Artist’s Monograph and Its Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 12. For Guercio’s fine discussion of Berenson, see 197-219.

⁴⁰ Berenson, *Study and Criticism*, 56.

⁴¹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt, 1890), 1:104.

⁴² Franz Kugler, *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*, ed. Charles Eastlake, tr. Elizabeth Eastlake, second edition (London: John Murray, 1851), 89; Kugler, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei* (Berlin: Duncker, 1847), 104.

personalities” as a psychological disorder.⁴³ As an aside in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890)—a book we know Berenson to have studied carefully—William James discusses the troubling phenomenon of “*secondary personal selves*.”⁴⁴ He quotes the infamous Parisian psychologist Pierre Janet:

M. Janet caught the actual moment of inspissation (so to speak) of one of these secondary personalities in his anaesthetic somnabulist Lucie. He found that when this young woman’s attention was absorbed in conversation with a third party, her anaesthetic hand would write simple answers to questions whispered to her by himself. “Do you hear?” he asked. “No,” was the unconsciously written reply. “But to answer you must hear.” “Yes, quite so.” “Then how do you manage?” “I don’t know.” “There must be some one who hears me.” “Yes.” “Who?” “Someone other than Lucie.” “Ah! another person. Shall we give her a name?” “No.” “Yes, it will be more convenient.” “Well, *Adrienne, then*.” “Once baptized, the subconscious personage,” M. Janet continues, “grows more definitely outlined and displays better her psychological characters.”⁴⁵

Effectively, James accounts for the existence of errant thoughts and behaviors by supplying them with other, supplemental selves. In doing so, he quotes what has emerged as the still shocking primal scene of *dédoublement de la personnalité*, in which Janet bullies a new person into existence.⁴⁶ For all the differences of their institutional location and ethical import, what these procedures share with Berenson’s divinations—giving a name, defining “outlines,” producing “psychological characters”—is striking.

Perhaps, however, we would do best to split the difference between the art historical and psychological, and focus on another source. In 1881, Vernon Lee published “In Umbria: A Study of Artistic Personality.”⁴⁷ Berenson and Lee were at odds in the late 1890s—he accused Lee and her partner, Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, of plagiarizing his aesthetic theories in their (vastly more sophisticated) essay, “Beauty and Ugliness” (1897), and one wonders whether the accusation may have masked a deeper dependence on Lee’s work.⁴⁸ “In Umbria” offers a meditation on Perugino that seeks to square Vasari’s description of Perugino as greedy and unpleasant with the painter’s ethereal religious works. She wishes to make sense of “the relations between the character of the

⁴³ For an incisive accounts, see Ian Hacking, “The Invention of Split Personalities,” in *Human Nature and Natural Knowledge*, ed. Alan Donagan, Anthony N. Perovich, Jr., and Michael V. Wedin (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel and Hingham, 1986), 63-85.

⁴⁴ James, *Principles*, 1:227.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:228.

⁴⁶ The “conversation” was recorded in Pierre Janet, “Les Actes inconscients et le dédoublement de la personnalité pendant le somnambulisme provoqué,” *Revue Philosophique* 22 (1885): 581.

⁴⁷ Vernon Lee, “In Umbria: A Study of Artistic Personality,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 23 (1881): 800-16. The essay was reprinted in Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: T. Unwin Fisher, 1881), 156-196. I quote from *Fraser’s Magazine*.

⁴⁸ Though he later claimed to have encountered Lee only once he moved to Florence, Berenson read her work as a young man, even writing a review: Berenson, “Baldwin,” *The Harvard Monthly* 2, no. 5 (1886): 207-9. Here *Belcaro* comes in for special praise.

work of art and the character of the artist who creates it.”⁴⁹ In doing so, she presents two different figurations of artistic personality. On the one hand there is the creature of the essay’s opening, whose boundaries are those of the geographical region itself. Umbria has, she says, a “special, isolated school of art;” it gives us “nothing new, nothing individual, no impression which we can disentangle from the general, all-pervading impression given by the one man Perugino.”⁵⁰ “Is it a school,” she asks, “or a man?”:

—A school concentrated in one man or a man radiating into a school. There are a great many men all about the one man Perugino, masters or pupils; the first seem so many bungled attempts to be what he is, the second so many disintegrations of him. Even the more powerful individualities are lost in his presence; at Perugia we know nothing of the real Pinturicchio. . . . Raphael is no separate individual, has no personal qualities before he leaves Perugia. Everything is Perugino, in more or less degree.⁵¹

This individuality, diffuse and overwhelming, finds its corollary in the peculiar emotional tone of Perugino’s painted figures. For his, Lee says, is “the painting of solitude, of the isolated soul; alone, unaffected by any other, unlinked in any work, or feeling, or suffering, with any other soul, nay even with any physical thing;” his subjects are “the most completely alone that any artist ever painted”—a repertoire of “intenser selves.”⁵²

On the other hand, in counterpoint to this ghostly field of diffusion, the essay also figures separateness of another kind. Lee posits an “artistic organism” that inhabits the biographical individual with desires of its own. There are cases, she suggests—Leonardo, for instance—in which man and artist almost fully coincide, and the “art-producing organism comprises nearly the whole of the mere individual.”⁵³ Yet this need not be the case, and the dissonance will be seen by sensitive observers of pictorial form. Stripped of our interfering associations, and of the painter’s own exterior life, paintings will disclose the pure workings of the artistic organism. The distinction allows Lee to imagine that being’s inner life:

Now suppose we remove from the individual all the qualities which are not directly connected with the production of arrangements of line and colours, and lights and shades. What shall we get? A creature which can perceive with infinite keenness, and reproduce with perfect exactitude. . . . A living and most sensitive organism which feels, thinks, everything as form and colour; fostered with the utmost care by other such organisms, themselves nurtured into intensity more intense than that with which they were born; for ever put in contact with the visual objects which are, let us remember, the air it breathes, the food it

⁴⁹ Lee, “In Umbria,” 810.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 802.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 802, 806.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 813.

assimilates; until the visual organism becomes beyond compare perfect in its power of perceiving and reproducing.⁵⁴

Lee describes here a kind of displacement of perceptual activities and competencies away from their normal integration into the practical and imaginative economy of the “I.” They are no longer subject to the dictates of the purposeful, biographical self, and re-constellate into a purpose of their own. Moreover, it is as if this displacement of the artistic organism—“this abstract being, this quivering thing of sight”⁵⁵—was the condition of its wider expanse, its distribution across the exterior fabric of its paintings. Though it might be, as Lee writes, “lodged in the same body as a sordid, base, cynical temper,” personality emerges as that part of the painter that transgresses the body’s boundaries to “perceive...and reproduce” the world at large.⁵⁶

This bears resemblance to neglected aspects of Morelli’s thought. The play between fragmentation and wholeness runs through all his texts. Effects of disintegration always prove most prominent. Yet they are subtended, here and there, by intimations of some larger integrity: an organic, evolutionary unity underpinning for his conception of art. Characteristically, these emerge in moments of mourning, in which Morelli stages the failure of his fragmentary writings to cohere. “Again,” he writes, “my division of art-history into several periods, organically grown out of each other, might well have been set before the reader with more method and precision.”⁵⁷ Sensing this desire for totalization in Morelli, Mary Berenson (then Costelloe, writing under the pseudonym “Mary Logan”) called him the “Darwin of art criticism.” According to her, Morelli had revealed art’s “fixed laws of evolution, from which the individual artist can no more escape than the individual animal can escape from genus and species;” it was now the Morellian critic’s job to trace “the derivation of one artist from another, the gradual modifications of his forms, and the ‘survivals’ of inheritance.”⁵⁸

This provides another way to understand Morelli’s notorious schedule of forms. His concentration on anatomical details was always meant to bracket the picture’s total impression. It is as if those bodily fragments had been pulled away from the painted figures in order to be integrated into a much vaster notional organism: the total configuration Italian art, of which effects of individualism would be mere inflections. As for so many in the nineteenth century, Morelli’s figure for such totality was Raphael. For all their corrections of Vasari’s account, Morelli and his circle followed the sixteenth-century writer in taking Raphael’s singularity to be an achievement of overarching synthesis. As he moved from Timoteo Viti to Perugino to Pinturicchio, and on through the influence of Leonardo, Fra Bartolommeo, and Michelangelo (to follow the favored Morellian genealogy) Raphael came not so much to define himself against the various

⁵⁴ Ibid., 815.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 805.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Masters in German Galleries*, tr. Luis Maria Schwaab Richter (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 443-44.

⁵⁸ Mary Berenson [Mary Logan, pseud.], “The New Art Criticism,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 76 (August 1895): 266.

sources of his style as effortlessly to absorb them.⁵⁹ Like Lee's Perugino, he emerges as a "fractal person" in the anthropologist Roy Wagner's sense: "never a unit in relation to an aggregate, or an aggregate standing in relation to a unit, but always an entity with relationship integrally implied."⁶⁰ He was not just one articulated component of Italian painting's organic complex, then: he was the whole.

For all her initial concern with the spiritual tenor of Umbria, and with Perugino's encompassing regional identity, the heart of Lee's account lies in its fascination with the life of the artistic organism. In this, the overlap between Berenson's conception of the "artistic personality" and Lee's is striking. In his creation of "Amico di Sandro," Berenson takes up each half of his predecessor's exposition—the personality's broad diffusion on the one hand; its status as discrete, autonomous part-person on the other—and condenses them in a single figure. Moreover, like Lee, he imagines that figure's embodiment—its internal organic consistency. Or rather, how that consistency was always under threat. The importance of the biological to this intellectual universe cannot be over-emphasized; yet in it, the body should not be treated as some self-evident ground. More often than not, it is the very instability of corporeal identity that is at issue. The category of the person, again and again, finds itself staged in terms of the paradoxes of an embodied self.

Nowhere is this more evident than at the culmination of Berenson's reconstruction, when the metaphors of his essay shift gears. In discussing a crucial *Madonna* in the National Gallery (**fig. 119**), the text suddenly breaks with the organic and adopts a sterner vocabulary. Certain features of the painting, as usual, are seen to resemble those already discussed. "The drawing and modelling of the eyebrows, the eyelids, and the mouth in the Madonna's face is almost identical," Berenson writes, to a painting cited earlier; "[t]he vase on the parapet has changed but little, and holds the same almost metallic flowers."⁶¹ Here are the key sentences:

Thus, the National Gallery 'Madonna' with its points of resemblance to both the earlier and more recent work of our Anonimo, is like a clamp helping to hold them together in the bond of identical authorship. It will assist us in attaching to the same group still further works.⁶²

Metallic flowers, prosthetic clamps: the reader is ushered into a world of artifice, in which the painting's mineral qualities stage the connoisseur's steel-trap mind. In the bondage of identity to which these pictures are made to submit, Berenson's own authorship goes ostentatiously, even nervously on display. In its very effort, Berenson's text begins to ironize itself, offering an unconscious reminder of its fragility. In this play with possibilities of detachment and fragmentation, we are invited to imagine not only

⁵⁹ Morelli's comments on Raphael are scattered throughout his oeuvre. For a sustained Morellian account, see the study by Morelli's colleague in the Italian senate, Marco Minghetti, *The Masters of Raffaello (Raphael Sanzio)* (London and New York: Hamilton, Adams and Scribner & Welford), 1882.

⁶⁰ Wagner, "Fractal Person," 163.

⁶¹ Berenson, *Study and Criticism*, 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*

how the “Amico” holds together, but how his carefully collated “bundles of habits” might begin to come apart.

* * *

As already suggested, a Jamesian understanding of habit lay at the bedrock of Berenson’s practice. This had consequences not only for his description of the mechanisms inherent in art-making but also for the constitution of the connoisseur’s own bodily life. Habit always leaves its trace. The connoisseur watches for the moment that fatigue sets in, and the artists “give[s] the fold a turn that he knows it ought to take, or that he is accustomed to give it; in either case permitting the intrusion of habitual and therefore characteristic touches.”⁶³ Yet, even here, we find the by now familiar vacillation between imitation and the unique. For such “habits of attention, and of visualization; habits of feeling and of thinking” do not only discriminate individuals: they also serve, Berenson says, as “the best clue to a painter’s origin’ within ‘the history of his novitiate.”⁶⁴ The “Amico” condenses these possibilities. For if the habits shared between Botticelli and his student are fundamentally the same, it is in their combination that distinctions emerge. In the master, there is no (deliberate) arrangement of the automatism: it is only the secondary figure who seizes on the habits and tries to make a pseudo-totality—a “form”—out of them. Berenson remains committed to the possibility of personality emanating from such rearrangements. Committed, even as his creations threaten to dissolve. For Berenson mirrors an ambivalence fundamental to William James. In describing the stream of consciousness which makes up a person’s thought (indeed, makes thinking personal in form) James often seems torn between the consolidation and the diffusion of identity, between a wish to lose the self in pure flux and countervailing drive to shore it up.⁶⁵ The effect occurs everywhere in his work. James wishes us to feel both the mind’s self-identical consistency and its entropic tendency towards disintegration.

Berenson’s equal reliance on the aesthetic positions of Walter Pater is well known. Like many of his generation, Berenson studied Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* as though it were a sacred text. There, in the essay on Leonardo, Pater describes how the figure of the follower opened onto ecstasies of self-loss. At one point, Pater begins to discuss Leonardo’s “usual choice of pupils”: “men with just enough genius to be capable of initiation into his secret, for the sake of which they were ready to efface their own individuality.”⁶⁶ A paragraph later, he picks up the thread:

And these pupils of his acquired his manner so thoroughly that though the number of Lionardo’s [sic.] authentic works is very small indeed, there is a multitude of

⁶³ Bernard Berenson, “The Rudiments of Connoisseurship,” in *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art: Second Series* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1903), 137.

⁶⁴ Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1895), xvii.

⁶⁵ For this aspect of James’s thought, I follow Ross Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁶⁶ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), 110.

other men's pictures through which we undoubtedly see him, and come very near to his genius.... Sometimes... the lost originals have been re-echoed and varied upon again and again by Luini and others. At other times the original remains, but has been a mere theme or motive, a type of which the accessories might be modified or changed; and these variations have but brought out the more the purpose, or expression of the original.⁶⁷

In a fine treatment of the erotics of discipleship imagined here, Jonah Siegel notes how Pater seems to critique the concerns of scientific connoisseurship in advance: “[t]hese beautiful beings,” Siegel writes, “at once receptacles and transmitters... are not simply weak imitators of the achievements of another; rather they are perfect conduits of the force of genius.”⁶⁸ Pater thus proves an early participant in the discourse of the follower. Like Perugino, Pater depicts Leonardo as “a school concentrated in one man,” to use Vernon Lee’s phrase (she, too, was deeply indebted to Pater), and as “a man radiating into a school.” Like Raphael, Leonardo proves fractal: both the part and the whole of an enchainment of persons. It is not simply that both paintings and students are artifacts of Leonardo’s genius. As Pater describes it, they *are* that genius: they embody, in their plurality, what Pater calls Leonardo’s “solitary culture of beauty” and “self-love.”⁶⁹

Absorbed in another’s art, the follower seems as much a beholder as a creator. Berenson understood both relations in bodily terms: as Tom Otten has put it, for Berenson, “the habits that form paintings also form those paintings’ viewers.”⁷⁰ Berenson closely followed the physiological turn taken by aesthetics at the end of the nineteenth century. Thinkers like Grant Allen and Vernon Lee (to speak only of writers in English) sought to locate the sociability of the aesthetic—its conjuring of community—in the material stuff of the body itself.⁷¹ For them, the beautiful’s delicate balance between pleasure and society was to be found in the workings of the beholder’s physical sensorium. Throughout his career, Berenson, too, wished to ground his findings in the experience of the sensate body. Figurations of corporeal reciprocity lay at the core of his aesthetic thought. And these concerns could be turned to address problems in the field of scientific connoisseurship.

In reparation for the difficult and troubling social stances implied in Giovanni Morelli’s texts, Berenson, as I will discuss, offered the enveloping experience of his own body. This was evident from his earliest works. In the “Resulting Impression” that concludes *Lorenzo Lotto* (1895), his first book, Berenson consolidates the “composite image, made up of impressions left upon our mind by the painter’s various artistic achievements” into a coherent whole.⁷² This will take the form of the critic’s own

⁶⁷ Pater, *Studies*, 111.

⁶⁸ Jonah Siegel, “Schooling Leonardo: Collaboration, Desire, and the Challenge of Attribution in Pater,” in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Leslie Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), 144.

⁶⁹ Pater, *Studies*, 110.

⁷⁰ Otten, *Superfluous Reading*, 80.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Grant Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1877); and Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, “Beauty and Ugliness,” *Contemporary Review* 72 (October 1897): 544-69; (November 1897): 669-88.

⁷² Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto*, 307.

“confession,” Berenson suggests: for “our final impression of works of arts” will always be, in the end, “an equation between them and our own temperament.”⁷³ Accordingly, Lotto emerges as Berenson’s contemporary. He is “a kindred soul in another age;” his *Family Group* in the National Gallery “unexpectedly anticipate[s] the spirit of the modern psychological novel;” and in an astonishing tautology, his artistic personality is seen in its ability to register itself—“a consciousness of self, a being aware at every moment of what is going on within one’s heart and mind, a straining of the whole tangible universe through the web of one’s temperament.”⁷⁴ Lotto’s practice, it would seem, mirrors the connoisseur’s. It is therefore no surprise to find the painter’s identity threaded through Berenson’s own. Through a “slow process of selection and combination” of painterly attributes, the sense of the painter fixes into “a perfectly individualized face” for the connoisseur, a kind of “composite mental photograph” of an artistic personality.⁷⁵ And out of the oeuvre itself, at times “one figure or face” will rise to meet the connoisseur’s composite, occurring, he writes, “in some vague way, as the portrait of the painter himself.”⁷⁶ Lorenzo Lotto’s most intimate self takes place in Berenson’s process of regard.

Or is it that Berenson takes place in Lotto’s paintings? Berenson’s most sustained treatment of the beholder’s corporeal involvement in works of art can be found in *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*, published in 1896. Presented as a survey of Florentine painting from Giotto to Michelangelo, *Florentine Painters* reads more like an aesthetic manifesto. Amidst his discussion of individual paintings, Berenson gestures towards a more general “philosophical” aesthetics based on the efficiency of the body. The text held a special, stressed place in Berenson’s process of self-explanation. It was meant to be a placeholder for a more ambitious work on the psycho-physiology of viewing art that would never be written. Nonetheless, the unfixed, sensate body at its core recurs in all he would write afterwards. In *Florentine Painters*, the nebulous outlines of the connoisseur’s own embodiment prefigure the instabilities inherent in Berenson’s later “artistic personalities.”

Like the artist reliant on habits of execution, the subject of Berenson’s aesthetics is a creature of effort and mechanical fatigue. He risks exhaustion in the perception of stimuli. Accordingly, the pleasure one takes in art resides in its ability to pre-digest the world. Painting “lends a higher coefficient of reality to the object represented,” and we experience an “exhilarating sense of increased capacity”: the viewer’s “whole personality is enhanced.”⁷⁷ Berenson’s language here only seems to keep subject and object discrete. If half the work of perception has been carried out by the work of painting, it functions as an extension of one’s own sensorium. Thus Berenson’s figures the “tactile imagination,” as a process of extromission in which “[o]ur palms and fingers accompany our eyes.”⁷⁸ If

⁷³ Ibid., 308.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 346, 322, 314.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 340-1. Berenson’s figurative language here anticipates his own later practice of flipping through his vast archive of real photograph to consolidate an attribution.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 341.

⁷⁷ Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (London and New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1896), 10.

⁷⁸ Berenson, *Florentine Painters*, 14.

such synaesthiac pleasures make Berenson's bodily aesthetics self-centered, they also trouble the self's boundaries. As the world dissolves into the self's relay of sensations—space, say, taking place only in our sensations of touch—it becomes difficult to distinguish the body from its surround. Berenson's insistence on “the sense of greater psychological capacity” and the interior pleasures of incorporation only sharpens the most pressing question that it raises:⁷⁹ Where does the body in fact occur?

This is the key difficulty of Berenson's aesthetics. The question of what is aesthetic experience again and again folds out in the question of *where* it is—in what relation to the body? And within the economy of Berenson's text, where affective and spatial experience are so deeply intertwined, this immediately—uncontrollably—becomes a question of erotic intimacy and sexual difference. It is striking the kinds of scenes Berenson wishes himself into:

I see...two men wrestling, but unless my retinal impressions are immediately translated into images of strain and pressure in my muscles, of resistance to my weight, of touch all over my body, it means nothing to me in terms of vivid experience—not more, perhaps, than if I heard one say, ‘Two men are wrestling.’⁸⁰

It is hard *not* to see homoeroticism at play here, as the gendered play of identification opens onto more primal fantasies of touching and being touched. Yet, the drift of Berenson's argument only grows stranger. When the wrestlers are engaged fully with each other, the viewer's pleasure is left out: the movement is too fast for his powers of realization. In order to get “out of the wrestlers more than they themselves can give us,” representation must intervene, providing a “clearer, intenser, and less fatiguing realisation.”⁸¹ Form, then, is another kind of touch. The “extraction” of “the significance of movements” pluralizes pleasure: detached from their embrace the wrestlers become more available to the viewer's optical caress.⁸² “What a pleasure,” Berenson imagines his viewer saying, “to realise in my own muscles, on my own chest, with my own arms and legs, the life that is in him as he is making his supreme effort!”⁸³ The movements seen become the beholder's own.

As the text turns to Pollaiuolo's *Battle of the Nudes* (**fig. 120**), Berenson's two wrestlers become ten, and are opened out into an array of entanglements that the viewer may incorporate at will. “[T]hese savagely battling forms,” we are told, please us with “their power to directly communicate life, to immensely heighten our sense of vitality”:

we imagine ourselves imitating all the movements, and exerting the force required for them—and all without the least effort on our side. If all this without moving a muscle, what should we feel if we too had exerted ourselves! And thus while under the spell of this illusion—this hyperaesthesia not bought with drugs, and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁸¹ Ibid., 51.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

not paid for with cheques drawn on our vitality—we feel as if the elixir of life, not our own sluggish blood, were coursing through our veins.⁸⁴

The Battle of the Nudes both continues and redirects the desire that emerged in relation to the imaginary wrestlers' bodies. Indeed, that passage now reveals itself as a fantastic back-formation of the pleasures inherent in Pollaiuolo's print.

At last, the essay comes to Botticelli:

[W]hat is it then that makes Sandro Botticelli so irresistible that nowadays we may have no alternative but to worship or abhor him? The secret, is this, that in European painting there has never again been artist so indifferent to representation and so intent upon presentation.⁸⁵

Berenson's Botticelli "left everything behind him"—naturalism, religious painting, psychological characterization— "abandon[ing] himself to presentation of those qualities alone which in a picture are *directly* life-communicating, and life-enhancing."⁸⁶ One might well ask, however, what such "presentation" looks like—how it could take on visual form. Berenson takes Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* to embody "the quintessence of all that is pleasurable to our imagination of touch and of movement;" and accordingly, at first he trains a period eye (one shared by figures throughout the period) on "the goddess's mane-like tresses of hair fluttering to the wind, not in disorderly rout but in masses yielding only after resistance."⁸⁷ And yet, in the paragraph that follows, the painting evacuates any depictive specificity at all. It is as if the wind were stripping even these last remainders of the flesh from the work's underlying structures:

Take...the lines that render the movements of the tossing hair, the fluttering draperies, and the dancing waves in the 'Birth of Venus'—take these lines alone with all their power of stimulating our imagination of movement, and what do we have? Pure values of movement abstracted, unconnected with any representation whatever.⁸⁸

The ecstasies and evasions of the Aestheticist imagination issue here in an abstract desire for "movement" per se. Berenson's avoidance of the naked female form at the painting's center is striking. It is as if that figure were somehow too present, too integrated for the freer circulation of sensation that he imagines. In figuring Botticelli, Berenson seems to wish for a bodily aesthetics that leaves the body behind.

In between these passages on *The Birth of Venus* stands his description of a recent addition to Botticelli's oeuvre: *Pallas and the Centaur*, now in the Uffizi (**fig. 121**).⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibid., 54-5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 69-70.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 73-4.

⁸⁹ The painting was discovered in 1894 by William Blundell Spence, an English collector and dealer living in Florence, in a disused corridor of the Pitti Palace: see *Kunstchronik*, no. 19 (1894-

Despite its elaborate quattrocento iconography, for Berenson this allegory of violence subdued surprisingly epitomized the painter's bypassing his socially determined obligations. "At times," he writes, "it seems that the less artistic the theme, the more artistic the fulfilment, the painting being impelled to give the utmost values of touch and movement to just those figures which are liable to be read off as mere empty symbols."⁹⁰ This emptiness seems to heighten the erotic intensity of form. For on the centaur, Berenson insists, the artist has "lavished his most intimate gifts:"

He constructs the torso and flanks in such a way that every line, every indentation, every boss appeals so vividly to the sense of touch that our fingers feel as if they had everywhere been in contact with his body, while his face gives to a still heightened degree this convincing structure of brow, nose, and cheeks. As to the hair—imagine shapes having the supreme life of line you may see in the contours of licking flames, and yet possessed of all the plasticity of something which caresses the hand that models it to its own desire!⁹¹

The specificity of his sensuous evocation almost immediately disappears, preparing the way for that second description of the *Birth of Venus* abstracted:

In fact, the mere subject, and even representation in general, was so indifferent to Botticelli, that he appears almost as if haunted by the idea of communicating the *unembodied* values of touch and movement. Now there is a way of rendering every tactile value with almost no body, and that is by translating them as faithfully as may be into values of movement.⁹²

More pointedly than with the *Birth of Venus* (and at variance, it would seem, with the treatment of Pollaiuolo), "un-embodiment" here serves the purposes of self-censorship: abstraction is an abstracting from the specificity of homoerotic desire.

This reading is as necessary as it is predictable—a familiar example of homoerotic representation's vicissitudes in the 1890s. The real interest of the passages, however, lies in the kind of work these erotic inflections are asked to do. In the first place, this interest emerges when we recall that Berenson's text, for all of its hyperbole, is ostensive. Taking his description as such—as bound to the painting to which it points—we realize that for all his apparent evasion of the figure of Pallas, the hand that "models to its own desire" and is "caressed" in return is quite literally present in the painting, and is hers. The economy of the text turns on an unspoken identification with the female figure. Her body stands in for his. And though we might be tempted to say that Pallas

95): 290; and John Fleming, "Art Dealing in the Risorgimento I," *The Burlington Magazine* 115 (January 1973): 4-17. Berenson made the painting his own. It became a key stop on his tours of Florentine collections, and he published an essay on the picture: Bernard Berenson, "La Pallas de Botticelli," *The Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 37 (June 1895): 469-475. It failed to name Spence.

⁹⁰ Berenson, *Florentine Painters*, 72.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 74.

models a relation between Berenson and the Centaur, their weird intimacy prevents the position of any of the three from becoming fixed.

As materialized in the painting, “the supreme life of line” jumps across the point of contact (her hand in his hair) to encircle the whole body in animate line. Pallas’s body springs to life as decorative surface. It is as if, for Berenson, these two discrete figures were host to some greater linear organism, encompassing them both. Under this aspect, body’s integrity and discreteness dissolve, revealing it to be only a provisional articulation of this encompassing relation. The Centaur’s hirsute hind-quarters leak into Pallas’s eerie green robe, floating insecurely around body it seems at first to clasp. “Tactile values” are set in motion. Touch migrates between viewer and canvas in a reciprocity that borders on the reflexive—a circuitry of “touch all over my body” becoming touch all over his, in which distinctions of “self” and “other” begin to lose their sense. By way of the connoisseur’s identification with Pallas, herself everywhere caressed, painting and its viewers are imagined as integral.

These strange, exceptional pages take us to the core of Berenson’s thought. *Florentine Painters* turns on the question of what it might mean to have a body also “over there,” outside of oneself, hanging on the wall. Painting, for Berenson, is a technology for this distribution of sensation. The *Pallas* does not so much allegorize such distribution as depict it. It pictures embodiment in the process of its undoing, “haunted” by the will-to-movement—the “almost no body”—of decorative line. If we take grasping hands and affectionate glances at the center of the “Amico’s” *Tobias and the Angel* (fig. 116) as a meta-depiction of discipleship—providing a kind of visual locus to the “Amico’s” own discipleship to his master—the grasp at the center of Botticelli’s *Pallas* serves a similar function: it gives visual form to the endless circulation of aesthetic pleasure from painting to body and body and painting. In doing so, it returns us to the materialist foundations of Berenson’s connoisseurial practice. As with the bundled habits of the student painter, so with the aesthete’s corporeal senses: they become mingled with—they go on display in and are colonized by—the material stuff of the paintings which they look at and make. Aesthetic feeling is the contagion of bodies upon each other. Berenson’s texts seem to figure a way in which artist, painting, and viewer might be bundled together in one long enchainment of bodily effects. Held so tenuously together, they might make up something like a “person.”

* * *

“Amico di Sandro” ends with a final moment of authorial assertion. Berenson baptizes his painter at last: “Considering our Anonimo’s close following upon Sandro, in default of a well-established historical name for him, we shall do well to call him AMICO DI SANDRO, for whatever were his relations in real life to Botticelli—an imitator is not always a friend!—in art, he was Sandro’s companion.”⁹³ And then, close on the heels of this ambivalent description of friendship, he considers the possibility of an actual name suggested by “my friend”—the recursion of the term is astonishing—“Mr. Herbert Horne.”⁹⁴ Horne would soon prove no ally of Berenson’s creation: “Mr. Berenson’s

⁹³ Berenson, *Study and Criticism*, 64.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Amico,” he wrote to an American collector in 1909, “is a farrago of good, bad and indifferent; but with one early exception, all the pictures show Filippinesque traits.”⁹⁵ It marked the beginning of the “Amico’s” dissolution. In the late 1890s, however, Horne characteristically sought to ground Berenson’s painter in the documented historical record, pointing out, as Berenson’s essay tells us, that Vasari, in his double-life of Chimenti Camicia and Baccio Pontelli, mentions in passing a painter named Berto Linaiuolo, whose dates and situation might correspond to Berenson’s Anonimo. Yet, Berenson resists. “Amico di Sandro,” he concludes, “may therefore be the historical Berto Linaiuolo;” “But,” he adds, “as until further proof appears, this can be no more than an hypothesis, and as the real name of Berto Linaiuolo is neither more familiar nor more pleasant, I prefer to call our Anonimo ‘Amico di Sandro.’”⁹⁶

In Berenson’s preference lay his perversity, but also his symptomatic importance as a critic. Again and again, we see Berenson lending just enough personhood, just enough “personality,” to his creation for his readers to feel the pathos of its failing to cohere. It is in this potential dissolution of identity into its constitutive parts—painting’s release (to quote Fry once again) into a “limbo of imperfect concepts”—that the main interest of the “Amico di Sandro” lies. In gathering only that minimum of social fabric required to weave a feeble, partial personhood—hypothetical, temporary, an analytic fiction to be utterly seen through—the figure presents a radical truth not so much of connoisseurship itself as of artistic identity in connoisseurship’s wake. Made up of other persons, Amico di Sandro also unmakes the artists of which he is a part. If the Amico embodies parts of Botticelli and Filippino, it may be necessary see Botticelli or Filippino dissolved into relations (the persons) by which they are constituted—into the stylistic and affective habits they sometimes share. For relations never stand still: those that make up the person must be built upon, or undone, or replaced. To attend to the distributed authorial person might have been—might still be—a way to imagine personhood’s redistribution, to think through how it has shifted historically and how it might be shifted rhetorically in order to write such histories.

This was not destined to be—at least not in any straightforward way. When Berenson officially abjured his creation in an appendix to the 1938 edition of his *Drawings of the Florentine Painters*, calling it a “useful” but failed “hypothesis,” he did so in terms that reified the grand architecture of Italian art:

Hitherto attributed, as we have seen, to all sorts of people, [these paintings] for the first time constitute an organic whole forming from the point of view of pure design a necessary arc of that curve which springs from Lorenzo Monaco, passes through Fra Filippo, and thence is continued through Botticelli, and thence again through Filippino, to die away with the Raffaellinos.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Herbert Horne to John G. Johnson, quoted in Carl Brandon Strehlke, “Bernhard and Mary Berenson, Herbert P. Horne, and John G. Johnson,” *Prospettiva* 57-60 (April 1989-October 1990): 427-438.

⁹⁶ Berenson, *Study and Criticism*, 69.

⁹⁷ Bernard Berenson, “Appendix VI. Amico di Sandro,” in *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters. Amplified Edition*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1938), 1: 335-36.

The “Amico” helped us bring into view and appreciate, in other words, the stable aesthetic shape of early Florentine painting. “I should prefer to consider the artists as discarnate torch-bearers, with no civic existence whatever,” he added.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, in the larger field of Botticelli’s oeuvre, far from undoing the master’s achievement, Horne would consider Botticelli’s followers agents of stabilization and fixity. Horne projected two volumes for his monograph. One would deal with the facts of Botticelli’s life and works, “but without losing sight of the fact that the only valuable function of the connoisseur is to distinguish the genuine productions of a master (especially in the case of Sandro) from those of his imitators, and to disengage and note the significant qualities of such genuine works.”⁹⁹ The second volume would have dealt with the work of those imitators, broadly conceived: it would concern “the productions both of [Botticelli’s] immediate disciples and of those painters who fell indirectly under his influence, or who were associated with him in some way or another; in short, the productions of his school in the widest sense of the word.”¹⁰⁰ It is as if the master’s work could only be stabilized and made singular through the careful description of everything outside that singularity, at some measurable distance from the central artist’s achievement. Botticelli’s part in such peripheral works is at once acknowledged and denied.

It is in the simultaneity of these procedures—shoring up an artistic identity in the “significant qualities of . . . genuine works” on the one hand, scattering it across a “school in the widest sense of the word,” on the other—that we find the essence of the connoisseurial project. As approaches to a body of work, they are not wholly compatible. But neither are they wholly contradictory. They exist in some kind of uneasy alliance within the authorial desires of connoisseurship itself. The special complexities of Botticelli’s oeuvre, I have been suggesting, seem to have attracted—to have served, even, as a figure for—this kind of double-consciousness within connoisseurship. And perhaps the new criticism’s deep misrecognition of its own destructiveness, and of its gravitation towards effects of destabilization, was finally for the best. Figures of instability can themselves be fetishized. “Psychic fragmentation, self-dissemination, affective discontinuity and partial selves,” Leo Bersani noted more than thirty years ago, “have become ideological tenets of much contemporary thought.”¹⁰¹ Their over-simple celebration threatens to leave us high and dry:

There is . . . good reason to be skeptical about the practical value of recent blue-prints for a revolution of consciousness, and the evident difficulty in making even the first steps in such a revolution suggests the usefulness of stepping back and exploring more carefully and coolly our potentialities for both rigidity and change. . . . [I]t is more profitable to study a crisis in subjectivity . . . than . . . the programmatic subversion of the subject.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Berenson, *Drawings of the Florentine Painters*, 335.

⁹⁹ Horne, *Botticelli*, xx.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Leo Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), 4.

¹⁰² Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 5.

Something similar may be said of the crisis of artistic personhood as it plays out in the Berenson's "Amico di Sandro." Its value lies in the symptomatic presentation of that crisis—its susceptibility to everything unresolved in the Morellian moment, its tissue of contradictions—so close to the surface. But then such a texture belonged to the writing of Botticelli more generally—perhaps to the writing of Botticelli most of all. Here and there, the instabilities of his oeuvre continued to persist, unfixing without ever overturning modern senses of artistic identity. His "personality" could never settle down into a person.

Chapter Four: Against Aestheticism

*The primeval category of causal thought is Kindschaft. Kindschaft displays the enigma of a tangible material connection bound up with the profoundly bewildering trauma of the separation of one living thing from another. The detachment of the subject from the object which establishes the zone for abstract thought originates in the experience of the cutting of the umbilical chord.*¹ – Aby Warburg

*Every age has the renaissance of antiquity it deserves.*² – Aby Warburg

Like most scholars, art historians have enjoyed telling themselves stories about the nature of their discipline and the “state” of their “field,” and about the falsities and temptations overcome for a discipline to constitute itself as such at all. A favorite setting for such tales has been the turn of the last century, in which scholarship wrested itself from a hothouse of cultural decadence (Superstition by Reason overcome). A favorite episode has been the recovery of Botticelli.

This chapter considers the scholarly interventions of Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and Herbert Horne (1864-1916) into the complex field of writings about Botticelli. For once the dramatic formulation applies: each of these authors did intervene, positioning himself self-consciously against the sorts of intense investment held by English Aestheticism and, on the continent, by the Decadents, in the art of Botticelli. Both Warburg and Horne referred uneasily to the “cult of Botticelli.” Warburg wrote of “*der Botticelli-Gemeinde*” (literally, Botticelli-congregation) worshipping Botticelli’s “Florentine choir-boys” [*Florentischen Chorknaben*];³ Horne of “that peculiarly English cult of Botticelli, which...became a distinctive trait of a phase of thought and taste, or of

¹ “*Die Urkategorie kausaler Denkform ist Kindschaft. Diese Kindschaft zeigt das Rätsel des materiell feststellbaren Zusammenhangs verbunden mit der unbegreiflichen Katastrophe der Loslösung des einen Geschöpfes vom anderen. Der abstrakte Denkraum zwischen Subjekt und Objekt gründet sich auf dem Erlebnis der durchschnittenen Nabelschnur.*” Quoted in E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), 220. As often in Warburg’s late fragments—here, drawn from notes towards his “Lecture on Serpent Ritual,” composed at Ludwig Binswanger’s sanatorium—translation proves problematic. Gombrich renders the unusual term “Kindschaft” [lit., “childship”] twice, first as “maternity,” and then more happily as “the relation between mother and child.” I understand the word as naming that relation, but also, given Warburg’s emphasis on the infant’s psychic trauma (for which he uses no lesser word than “Katastrophe”), as conveying something like “the undertaking of being a child.”

² “*Jede Zeit hat die Renaissance der Antike, die sie verdient.*” Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 238.

³ Aby Warburg, “Sandro Botticelli” (1898), in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, tr. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 158 (hereafter cited as *Renewal*); Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1932), 64 (hereafter cited as *GS*). I rely on Britt’s translation, except where noted.

what passed for such, as odd and extravagant as any of our odd and extravagant age.”⁴ Yet, each of them also belonged to that cult, if only to its last gasps. Their dismissive utterances, so central to the development of their scholarship, need to understand in relation to the context they deride. Accordingly, I seek in what follows to situate their re-formulation of Botticelli within the end-game of Aestheticism, and to suggest the extent to which such phobic abjection of the “other” ultimately formed an intimate part of their disciplined, scholarly selves.

The process of disentangling Botticelli from Aestheticism, begun by Warburg and Horne, has a long history. In December 1944, towards the end of the war that had made him an exile, Fritz Saxl gave a lecture at the Courtauld Institute entitled “Three ‘Florentines’: Herbert Horne, A. Warburg, Jacques Mesnil”—a key document of mid-century disciplinary formation.⁵ Saxl delivered his speech at a moment of institutional consolidation (earlier in the year, the Warburg Institute, of which he was the head, was officially absorbed into the University of London), and it may have been as a sign of friendship to his adopted home that he gave pride of place to an Englishman.⁶ Herbert Horne, Saxl says, “was perhaps the most accomplished historian of art whom this country has ever produced.”⁷ His essay traces the heroic inner development of the fin-de-siècle scholar. Horne, moving out of the Aestheticist milieu in which he came of age, at last produced an “accomplished work full of *gravitas*.”⁸ his 1908 monograph on Botticelli:

had admired Pater for his gift of evoking impressions of works of art by almost magical language pictures. The task which he set himself was more austere; his energies were to be devoted to the discovery of facts, which he was to state in a severe and unimpeachable language. . . . Day after day he would go to the archives and consult the documents in order to check up on Vasari and other contemporary writers. Day after day, year after year, he would go to churches, palaces, and galleries to distinguish with certainty between the work of Botticelli and that of his pupils. Historical criticism of all available sources, pictorial, literary, and documentary, became his life’s work.⁹

⁴ Herbert Horne, *Botticelli, Painter of Florence* (1908; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), xix.

⁵ Fritz Saxl, “Three ‘Florentines’: Herbert Horne, A. Warburg, Jacques Mesnil,” in *Lectures* (London: Warburg Institute, 1957), 331-44. Jacques Mesnil (pseudonym of Jean Jacques Dwelschauvers 1872-1940) was a Belgian anarchist turned historian of Florentine Renaissance art—a close friend, in Florence, of Warburg and of Horne. The author of *Le mouvement anarchiste* (1897) and *La mariage libre* (1901), as well as of an appreciative study of Gabriele D’Annunzio, Mesnil turned increasingly to work in the archives of Florence, publishing painstakingly collected dossiers of quattrocento documents. He finally publishing his massive study of Botticelli in the final years of his life: Jacques Mesnil, *Botticelli* (Paris: A. Michel, 1938).

⁶ “I have chosen to speak about an English, a German, and a Belgian scholar, all born around 1860, who all lived for years in Florence, who knew and appreciated each other, and each one of whom produced results which will live on in the work of future historians.” Saxl, “Three ‘Florentines,’” 332.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 334-5.

Submission to the diurnal rounds of archival research and inspection of paintings, however, is not enough to form the careful scholar that Saxl celebrates. These behaviors must be matched by discipline of a more inward kind:

[Horne] left England with all her friendly figures, gave up his work as an artist and man of letters, and became an austere Florentine scholar who rather shunned the company of men. His main interest in life was from then on to write on Botticelli accurately and disinterestedly, in a frigid style which almost obliterates the personality of the author. Any attempt to connect the effects of Botticelli's art with his own emotional experience is severely avoided—an almost heroic attempt at subduing the 'torrid' streak in his character in order to produce an unimpeachable piece of historical scholarship.¹⁰

Such extravagant litanies of abnegation (meant perhaps to lend mid-century scholarship itself at least a reminiscent heroic air) proved paradigmatic. Years later, from the vantage of an adjacent discipline, Frank Kermode celebrates Horne's calm retrieval of Botticelli from a world in which "[e]nthusiasm counted for more than research, opinion for more than knowledge."¹¹ John Pope-Hennessy finds in the author of "the best monograph in English on an Italian painter" a scholar whose "knowledge of Florence and Florentine art in the fifteenth century was so profound that he was incapable of formulating judgments which were unhistorical."¹² And in blunter terms, conveyed in an unusually explicit endnote, Francis Haskell lays the whole phobic structure bare:

Herbert Horne was almost alone in being able to escape from the homosexual, aesthetic ambience in which his responses to Botticelli originated, to produce the superb and scholarly biography of the artist which has not yet been surpassed.¹³

So the parameters of a discipline come into view.

In what follows, I make a claim for the continuity between Warburg and Horne and the world of feeling they set themselves against. Through their more "disciplined" and "objective" historical research they sought to finally overcome it. Yet "overcome" here bespeaks something closer to a structure of identification or self-recognition than of outright rejection. If the more or less hysterical descriptions of the scholar as St. Anthony put forward by Haskell and others seek to cover that relation over, they also set something of its importance in symptomatic relief. The proximity of Warburg and Horne

¹⁰ Ibid., 335.

¹¹ Frank Kermode, "Botticelli Recovered," in *Forms of Attention* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 6.

¹² John Pope-Hennessy, "Introduction," in Horne, *Botticelli*, ix. "Let us hope," Pope-Hennessy adds, "that... young art historians will pray, to whatever deity they may believe in, to grant them the stamina and the unflagging concentration, the accuracy and the flawless sense of relevance, the all-embracing curiosity, the culture and the grasp of probability, the delicacy of perception, and the urbanity of Herbert Horne." Ibid., xiii.

¹³ Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion, and Collecting in England and France* (London: Phaidon, 1976), 212, n. 9.

to the culture of Huysmans and Burne-Jones was a more matter than of mere timing. Accordingly, rather than some clean break with decadence, I speak of repression, with its connotations of *internal* ordering, and a bringing the unruly psyche—the unruly “self”—under control. This chapter explores the unfolding of Warburg’s and Horne’s dynamic relation to Aestheticist and Decadent culture of the 1880s and 1890s, assessing both their explicit disgust and their unspoken, perhaps unconscious, debts.

Such structures of repression and refusal can be understood as episodes within the long history of scholarly objectivity. In their extraordinary recent study, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison examine the way in which the rise of scientific objectivity during the nineteenth century predicated (and was predicated on) the shaping of a correspondent subjectivity: a “scientific self.”¹⁴ In suggesting this connection, I do not wish to erase differences between the rise of scientific protocols and the development of scholarly treatments of works of art. In many ways, these are different kinds of objectivity. (The story of art history’s scientism, nonetheless—its drawing on the language and austere glamour of science—remains to be told.) In regard to the kind of subjectivity that the objective ideal enjoined, however, the analogy proves apt. Far from devaluing the subjective, or dissipating its effects, the rise of objectivity paid strange homage to the unruliness of the self. It positioned subjectivity as powerful, errant, in need of constant monitoring and control. The self of science’s imagining was an overwhelming potentiality that needed to be tamed and put to work, its energy redirected to more proper channels. Objectivity was hard-won, the reward of constant vigilance and self-censorship. It emerged from—or rather, it produced—a self divided, “actively willing its own passivity,” as Daston and Galison put it.¹⁵ “Objectivity enshrined the will,” they write, “but the will now exercised internally, on the self.”¹⁶

Like other fields, art history is, in part, a technology of the self. This fact lends renewed interest to the “subjectivity” of much of the artwriting with which this dissertation is concerned. What if we were to understand the unruliness of the texts I have been considering neither as a deviation from some disciplinary ideal retrospectively applied, nor merely as colorful “period” discourse, but rather as part of a dialectic of self-discipline peculiar to writing about art? The evocation of emotion could then be understood in terms of the management of affect—a complex sorting out of the self’s relations to its artistic objects. In this light, the subsequent repression of these modes of writing would emerge as a doubling of self-discipline—a kind of second-order self-fashioning. Such inward exertions leave their mark. The very techniques of self-discipline find their way symptomatically into the products of scholarship along with the appetites those techniques abjure. It is along these lines that I approach the work of Warburg and Horne in what follows, focusing on moments of fissure and (in the case of Warburg) outright arbitrariness in their texts. I do not take the gesture to be hostile. Far from undoing their formidable achievements as scholars and writers about art, it seems to me that such attention is very nearly the only way of making proper sense of them—of

¹⁴ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Scientific Self,” *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 191-251.

¹⁵ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 246.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

appreciating their distinctiveness, of measuring their strengths, and of beginning to describe what their efforts might have been for.

In the Realm of Venus

We first glimpse Warburg the scholar in his dissertation, submitted at the end 1891 to Hubert Janiteschek at the University of Strasbourg, and published two years later.¹⁷ Here Warburg examined Botticelli's two major mythological canvases, *The Birth of Venus* and the *Primavera*, for the evidence they gave concerning the nature of early Renaissance attitudes toward the antique. He positions his research in relation to those branches of psychological aesthetics—theories of expression and of aesthetic empathy—which formed the pervasive ground-note of advanced late nineteenth-century art historical and aesthetic discourses, and in which Warburg had a growing interest.¹⁸ Warburg saw his thesis as forwarding the scientific study of culture. Already in 1888, he positioned himself against uncorrected aesthetic impressions:

We of the younger generation want to advance the science of art [*Kunstwissenschaft*] so far that anyone who talks in public about art without having specially and profoundly studied this science should be considered just as ridiculous as people are who dare to talk about medicine without being doctors....¹⁹

In this campaign for *Kunstwissenschaft*, *Sandro Botticellis "Geburt der Venus" und "Frühling"* was to be an opening salvo.

"This work," Warburg says in his "Prefatory Note",

sets out to adduce, for purposes of comparison with Sandro Botticelli's celebrated mythological paintings, the *Birth of Venus* and *Spring*, the analogous ideas that appear in contemporary art theory and poetic literature, and thus to exemplify what it was about antiquity that "interested" the artists of the Quattrocento. It is possible to trace, step by step, how the artists and their advisers recognized "the antique" as a model that demanded an intensification of outward movement, and

¹⁷ Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticellis "Geburt der Venus" und "Frühling." Eine Untersuchung über der Vorstellungen von der Antike in der Italienischen Frührenaissance* (Hamburg and Leipzig: Von Leopold Voss, 1893). For two careful accounts of this work, see Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 43-66; and Spyros Papapetros, "On the Animation of the Inorganic: 'Life in Movement' in the Art and Architecture of Modernism, 1892-1994" (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2001), 67-146.

¹⁸ For an anthology of the key texts, see Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873-1893* (Santa Monica: Getty Research Institute, 1994).

¹⁹ "Wir junge Generation von Kunstforschern wollen die Kunstwissenschaft so weit zu bringen versuchen, dass der, der über Kunst öffentlich redet, ohne sich eigens in sie vertieft zu haben, als ebenso lächerlich gelten soll wie Leute, die sich über Medizin zu reden getrauen, ohne Doctoren zu sein...." Letter of 3 August 1888 in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 39-40.

how they turned to antique sources whenever accessory forms—those of garments and of hair—were to be represented in motion.²⁰

In these, Warburg's first published words, interpreters have found the seeds of his life-long concerns. He couches his argument in terms of the synchronic relation between artists and milieu, bound together by the circuits of shared appreciation. Already, however, Warburg also seems ready trace the kinds of pictorial formulae through which antiquity's anachronistic survival took place. Yet, the shape of these difficult arguments (as well as the tensions they contain) are somewhat obscured by the nature of the dissertation's writing. Returned to single-mindedly, in citation after citation of supporting materials, Warburg's points get lost in the very mass of quotations that are meant to shore them up, and which make up the majority of his text. Gertrud Bing, in her "Editorial Foreword" to the 1932 edition of Warburg's writings, feels it necessary to apologize for this strangeness: the dissertation "may not," she suggests, "exactly offer the easiest introduction to Warburg's writings; in this, his earliest work, the abundance of material does not seem to come under the same effortless conceptual control as in the later essays."²¹ True enough. Compared to his exuberant reformulation of the place of portraiture in Florence in "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie," 1902; or to the profound erudition of "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia" (1912), with its moving plea for "an extension of the methodological borders of our study of art;"²² or even to the moody, claustrophobic intensity of his treatise on "the bondage of superstitious moderns" in "Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images" (1920), written as Warburg himself descended into madness—compared to these extraordinary high points, his dissertation on Botticelli seems no great thing. And it is precisely here, in the thesis's imperfect hold on its materials that the work's importance emerges. We see the raw, resistant material out of which that (supposedly) "effortless conceptual control" emerged, catching something of its symptomatic, perhaps even perverse, nature.

Warburg begins with the *Birth of Venus*. (It was not until Horne's monograph that the *Primavera* was definitively considered the earlier work.) He argues for what he takes to be its intimate connection with Angelo Poliziano's *La Giostra* (1476-78), exploring in particular the poem's description of a fictional sculpted reliefs depicting Venus emerging from the sea. Poliziano drew for his imagery on "The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite," and Warburg notes echoes of the Greek source appear throughout. Warburg seems most interested, however, in those features of Poliziano's poem that set him apart from his

²⁰ "In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird der Versuch gemacht, zum Vergleiche mit den bekannten mythologischen Bildern des Sandro Botticelli, der 'Geburt der Venus' und dem 'Frühling' die entsprechenden Vorstellungen der gleichzeitigen kunsttheoretischen und poetischen Literatur heranzuziehen, um auf diese Weise das, was die Künstler des Quattrocento an der Antike 'interessierte,' klarzulegen.

"Es läßt sich nämlich hierbei Schritt für Schritt verfolgen, wie die Künstler und deren Berater in 'der Antike' ein gesteigerte äußere Bewegung verlangendes Vorbild sahen und sich an antike Vorbilder anlehnten, wenn es sich um Darstellung äußerlich bewegten Beiwerks—der Gewandung und der Haare—handelte." Warburg, *Renewal*, 89; *GS*, 5.

²¹ Warburg, *Renewal*, 83.

²² Warburg, *Renewal*, 585; *GS*, 478.

ancient sources—“original additions” that are “almost entirely limited to the delineation of details and accessories.”²³ These are, of course, Warburg’s famous *bewegtes Beiwerk*—“accessories in motion.” They not only mark the peculiarity of Poliziano’s attitude to the antique, Warburg suggests, but also tie him so closely to Botticelli, who “departs from the *Homeric Hymn* at exactly the same point as the poet.”²⁴ Warburg’s noting analogous departures from ancient “sources” ties together two preoccupations of his text. Warburg seeks to reconstruct the court culture of the Florentine quattrocento as the earliest moment in which modernity defines itself self-consciously in terms of its past—its likeness to and difference from antiquity. At the same time, within the economy of his argument, it ties Poliziano and Botticelli together within the pleasurable agreements of a community of taste. Acts of aesthetic appreciation embody social bonds and vice versa. Poliziano emerges as, perhaps, Renaissance art history’s first “humanist adviser” [der gelehrte Ratgeber].²⁵ For Warburg, the special closeness stands for a whole social world. The sign of this sociability is found in the portrayal of accessories animating the edges of the female form. The “concern—equally conspicuous in the poem and in the painting—with capturing the transitory movements of hair and garments,” Warburg says, “corresponds to a tendency prevalent among Northern Italian artists from the first third of the fifteenth century onward.”²⁶ Alberti’s *Libro della pittura* (1435) is brought forward, followed by a selection of fragmented phrases from Ovid and Claudian, which in turn give way to an even wider scattering of fifteenth-century texts and images, as if the text were caught up in some frenzy of associative thinking.

Warburg takes this “tendency” [*Neigung*] toward the repetition of motifs to be his object. “A succession of works related by content,” he writes,

—Botticelli’s painting, Poliziano’s poem, Francesco Colonna’s archaeological romance, the drawing from Botticelli’s circle, and Filarete’s ekphrasis—has revealed the tendency, shaped by what was then known of antiquity, to turn to the arts of the ancient world whenever life was to embodied in outward motion.²⁷

And at points, this “turn to the arts of the ancient world” encourages, in the cultural production of the early Renaissance, something like its dialectical reversal. That very image of movement, ostensibly borrowed from antiquity, is in turn projected *back onto* antiquity, if it ever happens not to be there. Warburg turns to a striking schoolwork now at Chantilly (**fig. 122**). (Throughout the dissertation, Botticelli’s studio serves as yet

²³ Warburg, *Renewal*, 93; *GS*, 9.

²⁴ Warburg, *Renewal*, 91; *GS*, 7.

²⁵ Warburg, *Renewal*, 122; *GS*, 35. As Gombrich notes: “Today, when real or postulated ‘humanist advisers’ haunt the pages of our art-historical studies, the originality of this approach needs pointing out.” Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 57.

²⁶ Warburg, *Renewal*, 95; *GS*, 10-11.

²⁷ “Bei einer Reihe dem Gegenstande nach einander nahestehender Kunstwerke: in dem Gemälde Botticellis, der Dichtung Polizians, dem archäologischen Roman des Francesco Colonna, der Zeichnung aus dem Kreise Botticellis und in der Kunstbeschreibung des Filarete, trat die auf Grund des damaligen Wissens von der Antike ausgebildete Neigung zutage, auf die Kunstwerke des Altertums zurückzugreifen, sobald es sich um die Verkörperung äußerlich bewegten Lebens handelte.” Warburg, *Renewal*, 108; *GS*, 22.

another manifestation of the social transmission of accessory forms.) He writes of the “life studies” (the two left-most figures) juxtaposed to the figures loosely copied from a sarcophagus (the three to the right):

The two adjacent life studies show how a fifteenth-century artist extracts from an antique original [*aus einem Originalwerk des Altertums*] what “interests” him. In the present case he has taken nothing but the garment, billowing out in an elliptical curve—which he has reconstituted as a scarf, dangling from left shoulder to right hip, in order to make the motif comprehensible to himself—and the coiffure of the female figure, to which he has added a flying lock of hair (not visible in the original), no doubt supposing that this was all very antique [*recht “antikisch” zu sein*].²⁸

The scare quotes around “*antikisch*” point to the concept’s simulacral identity: a set of quattrocento mannerisms that emerge even when they are not there, in the “Originalwerk,” to be seen.

Warburg goes on to consider the *Primavera* in much the same vein. If anything, the range of affinities and sources he pursues in his attempt to interpret “the design of the painting through analogies with the critical literature, art, and poetry of the period” seems in this section even more scattered and overwhelming.²⁹ Alberti; Seneca; Virgil; the Ovid of the *Fasti*; Poliziano’s *Orfeo*; Boccaccio; Lorenzo “il Magnifico”; Niccolò a Correggio; Horace; Lucretius (to whom John Addington Symonds had already connected the painting in 1877);³⁰ Poliziano once again: Warburg’s interleaving of ancient and modern continues. Yet, as the text goes on, the reader begins to wonder just how perspicuous its profusion of references continues to be. Are we still on the tail of Botticelli’s special social milieu? Or have we turned to follow Warburg in a chase for some more personal object? Such insecurities seem structural to a piece of writing that continuously forgoes its grounding in argumentation, in favor of continuing to weave its ever more attenuated tissue of citations.³¹

²⁸ “Die beiden Modellstudien nebenan eigen, wie ein Künstler des 15. Jahrhunderts sich aus einem Originalwerk des Altertums das herausucht, was ihn ‘interessiert’. In diesem Falle nicht weiter, als einerseits das oval geschwellte Gewandstück, das er als Schal (dessen Ende von der linken Schulter zur rechten Hüfte herabgeht) ergänzte, um sich das Motiv verständlich zu machen, und andererseits den Haarputz der Frauenfigur, den er mit frei flatterndem Schopf (von dem auf dem Vorbild nichts zu sehen ist) versah, sicherlich in der Meinung, recht ‘antikisch’ zu sein.” Warburg, *Renewal*, 107; *GS*, 21.

²⁹ Warburg, *Renewal*, 112; *GS*, 27.

³⁰ “His painting of ‘Spring’, suggested by a passage from Lucretius [*De rerum natura*, 5.737] is exquisitely poetic.” John Addington Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy: The Fine Arts* (1877; London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1901), 182. The passage remains unchanged from the first edition.

³¹ Indeed, for Warburg’s followers, it was this second chapter that most needed supplementation, and firmer scholarly definition. See, for example, Ernst Gombrich, “Botticelli’s Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of his Circle,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8 (1945): 7-60; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1958); and Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*

As I say, Warburg's interpretation tends to get lost in the midst of all this, and his archival material to take on a life of its own. The movements of his text—at the foundation of twentieth-century iconological studies—raise questions of scholarly tact from the start. Unavoidably, Warburg's study makes us reconsider the relevance of his citations to the paintings that are ostensibly his focus. How should such evidence be balanced against the texture of visual representation? Indeed, what counts as evidence here at all? What kinds of citations could build towards a form of specific description? Logically and rhetorically speaking, what citations are meant to do in art history is a problem. The conceit of the “*gelehrte Ratgeber*” fleshed out in the third, socio-historical section of Warburg's text, “How the Works Came to be Painted,” functions in part to patch these difficult questions over. There, Warburg seeks to stabilize the dizzying play of textual echoes by way of discrete historical agents, condensing discursive flow into figures of flesh and blood. In the process, his readers are left in a quandary, unsure of which Warburg we are to trust: the textual *collagiste*, juxtaposing his disorienting fragments of text (fig. 123), or the reasonable historian, pinning his mercurial “sources” down.

Somewhat surprisingly, Warburg does not describe the central figure of the *Birth of Venus* at all. He leaves us to intuit (or project) that description from the textual shards he brings into her proximity. Venus exists only as an embodiment of or deviation from the texts he cites. Warburg suggests this literally when he turns to the *Primavera*, quoting from Ovid's *Fasti* in order to stage the struggle of Zephyr and Chloris. Ovid, he says, provides “*die Komposition im Kern*”—the composition *in nucleo*.³² Text generates painting out of itself, organically: Botticelli's accessory elaborations radiate like petals from this central stem. Indeed, throughout the thesis, Botticelli is consistently positioned off center. By the end, the artist is portrayed as a slave of fashion. He was “one of those who were all too pliable,” Warburg writes, all too prone to perpetuating that “unthinking repetition of superficially agitated motifs of motion” that the “influence of antiquity” would seem to enjoin.³³

Such figurative play implicates Warburg himself as a producer of texts. What he teaches us to consider “quattrocento” predilections also infect Warburg's own prose. Here, for instance, he gives an account of the attendant figure who welcomes Venus to shore:

She stands at the water's edge, turned to face leftward in strict profile, and holds out to Venus the wind-blown mantle that she grasps in her outstretched right hand above and in her left hand below. In the critical literature she is almost unanimously described as a goddess of spring. Her gown, embroidered all over with cornflowers, clings to her body, clearly revealing the outlines of her legs. A

(Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1960). All three authors are discussed in my Conclusion. For a fine account of Warburg's methodological legacy, see Carlo Ginzburg, “From Aby Warburg to E. H. Gombrich: A Problem of Method,” *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, tr. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), 17-59.

³² Warburg, *Renewal*, 120; *GS*, 33.

³³ Warburg, *Renewal*, 141; *GS*, 55.

fold curves gently downward to the right from the back of her left knee, fanning out in smaller folds below. Her narrow sleeves, puffed at the shoulders, are worn over a white undergarment of soft material. Most of her fair hair wafts back from her temples in long waves, but some has been made into a stiff braid that ends in a bunch of loose hair. She is the “Hora of Spring,” as imagined by Poliziano.³⁴

Warburg describes only the figure’s accoutrements—garments, gestures, hair. As in Ruskin’s description of the Cumaean Sibyl, there is almost no body left, and what little remains, moreover, seems an *effect* of the garments, not a cause, a projection beneath these super-animate contours. (Here, Philippe-Alain Michaud acutely notes, “attributes define the substance,” not the other way around.)³⁵ The myopic intensity of Warburg’s description proves all the more striking when one realizes it is by far the most detailed on offer. Elsewhere in the thesis, we get only fragmentary moments of staged attention, again and again focused exclusively on accessories. In the Spring of *Primavera*, for instance, our attention is led from the “girdle round her floral dress” to the “chaplet of flowers” on her head, and the extremities of her dress as it “clings to her left leg, which she advances in walking, and flutters down from the back of her knee in a shallow curve, fanning out at the hem.”³⁶ This nearly obsessive single-mindedness paradoxically makes it difficult to distinguish the agency of the scholar from that of his objects. Warburg seems to mimic the attention to hair and wind and fluttering garments that flash out of the poetic fragments he has gathered.

All of this renders the reader uneasy regarding Warburg’s choice of visual agitation and “accessories in motion” as the distinctive feature of Botticelli’s art—and, indeed, of the whole modern sense of the antique. The motif, as presented in Warburg’s thesis, seems both under- and over-determined: under-determined in that Warburg’s language seems unable to stage the instances to which points with descriptive conviction or to enact an actual experience of looking; over-determined in something like Freud’s sense, evidenced in the nervousness and sheer, excessive repetitiveness with which the point is staged. And thus comes the compensatory proliferation of citations. Inevitably, the reader must ask whether the “sources” on which Warburg drew are justly characterized. Is the texture of Poliziano’s poem really like this? Does Warburg’s account of it seem persuasive, or has he cherry-picked his evidence in a way that leaves its

³⁴ “*Sie steht (in strengem Profil nach links gerichtet) am Uferrand und hält der herantreibenden Venus den vom Winde geschwellten Mantel entgegen, dessen Rand sie oben mit der weit vorgestreckten Rechten, unten mit der Linken gefaßt hält; sie wird in der kritischen Literatur fast durchgängig also Frühlingsgöttin bezeichnet. Ihr mit Kornblumen durchwirktes Obergewand legt sich eng an den Körper an und läßt die Umrisse der Beine scharf heraustreten; von der linken Kniekehle ab geht in flachem Bogen ein Faltenzug nach rechts, der unten in fächerförmig gespreizten Falten verflattert; die engen, an den Schultern gepufften Ärmel legen sich über ein weißes Untergewand aus weichem Stoff. Der größere Teil ihres blonden Haares weht von den Schläfen aus in langen Wellen nach hinten, aus einem kleineren Teil ist ein starker Zopf gemacht, der in einem Büschel loser Haare endigt. Sie ist die ‘Frühlingshore,’ wie sie Polizians Phantasie entspricht.*” Warburg, *Renewal*, 102; *GS*, 16-17.

³⁵ Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, tr. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 71.

³⁶ Warburg, *Renewal*, 125-26; *GS*, 38.

essential program unrecognizable? No doubt, these questions may seem unfair: Warburg, after all, takes as his object not this or that text, but the cultural complex as a whole. And yet, one gets the feeling that his citations multiply because Warburg, on some level, knows that too few of them perform the work they have been enlisted to do. If his whole approach to Botticelli begins to seem arbitrary, it is because of its determination by this arbitrary choice of formal key.

Under such selective intensity of focus, the pictures themselves seem to come apart, fragmenting into a *mere* collection of accessory forms. Michael Podro has offered perhaps the best description of these effects. He suggests that Warburg, in his dissertation, “dissolved the self-containedness of the painting in two ways: he...isolated the motifs from the fabric of the painted image and he...treated the picture as a whole as an element in a wider chain of works. His analysis both isolates elements within, and directs itself beyond the painting itself.”³⁷ This description well captures the sense the reader has that Warburg treats Botticelli’s paintings not as discrete, formally cohesive entities but rather as bits and pieces of some larger cultural formation. As Podro puts it, he “sets up circuits which pass through the work”: “[t]he painting becomes merely one element in a network...[I]t is not so much that we confront the work but, rather, that we are allowed to enter and leave it as part of the conduct of a wider life.”³⁸ By his own avowal, Warburg is not interested in the paintings as such, or even its isolatable parts, but in the world of quattrocento “interests” they give onto. What concerns him, in other words, is something that can only be glimpsed *between* paintings and texts, or in the displacement from one register to another. This indeterminate zone occurs within the space of Warburg’s essay. A ghostly social milieu emerges as the invisible commerce between the verbal tags and pictorial fragments conjoined by Warburg himself.

Podro celebrates this as an achievement of historical retrieval, an opening out of the Florentine material to our understanding. The nature of such conduct, however—both the what and the when of that “wider life”—seems to me less stable. Given, the directions that Warburg’s thought was soon to take, we might be tempted to take the hybrid of visual and verbal motifs he constructs here to be some nameable *mental* image: a psycho-cultural phantom, an ideated figure embodying movement as such, lurking just off stage. “Warburg would identify this composite entity as the universal type of the figure in motion,” Michaud suggests of the dissertation’s preoccupations;³⁹ he sees already the *Ninfa* Warburg was to evoke so powerfully a few years later—“the attractive offspring of a multiple conjunction of art and archaeology, such as only the Quattrocento could produce”; “a boldly striding maiden, with flowing hair, skirts kilted up *all’antica* and fluttering in the breeze,” haunting both painting and “as a living figure.”⁴⁰ Giorgio Agamben will later celebrate this phenomenalized *Ninfa* as the “most limpid figure of the

³⁷ Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 164.

³⁸ Podro, *Critical Historians*, 161.

³⁹ Michaud, *Aby Warburg*, 68.

⁴⁰ Warburg, *Renewal*, 381; *GS*, 289. This description occurs in Warburg’s essay “Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi of 1589” of 1895—a prototype for the many evocations that would follow.

historical subject itself.”⁴¹ In 1891, however, such consolidating figures have yet fully to emerge. The “social mneme,” the *Pathosformel*, the *antikisierendie Energiesymbol*, even the *Ninfa* have not yet coalesced. Instead, attention is displaced from text to painting to text along the beguiling superficialities of repeated motifs.

“*Jede Zeit hat die Renaissance der Antike, die sie verdient,*” I have quoted Warburg as saying—Every period has the Renaissance of the antique that it deserves. The question, then, is what in Warburg’s particular *Zeit* deserves *this* Renaissance, this Botticelli, suspended in a sea of citations—“circuits” of shared appreciation that constitute a common life. To answer this, we need to turn to the circulation of “Botticelli” in Warburg’s own day.

Ends of Aestheticism

Warburg’s dissertation both explores and enacts a process by which ways of looking at the antique become essential aspects of it—how the objects of antiquity ought to look. This process encompasses Warburg, too, in a dialectic the text itself seems to acknowledge. At crucial moments of his thesis, Warburg brings the cult of Botticelli into its very heart.

In an epigraph for his second chapter, on the “*Realm of Venus*,” for instance, Warburg offers an anomalous citation. He quotes, in English, the final three and a half lines of a sonnet by Dante Gabriel Rossetti composed in 1879. I quote the poem in full, along with its accompanying note:

For Spring By Sandro Botticelli (In the Accademia of Florence.)

What masque of what old wind-withered New-Year
Honours this Lady?* Flora, wanton-eyed
For birth, and with all flowrets pranked and pied:
Aurora, Zephyrus, with mutual cheer
Of clasp and kiss: the Graces circling near,
‘Neath bower-linked arch of white arms glorified:
And with those feathered feet which hovering glide
O’er Springs brief bloom, Hermes the harbinger.

Birth-bare, not death-bare yet, the young stems stand,
This Lady’s temple-columns: o’er her head
Love wings his shaft. What mystery here is read
Of homage or of hope? But how command
Dead Springs to answer? And how question here
These mummers of that wind-withered New-Year?

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben, “Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 102.

*The same lady, here surrounded by the masque of Spring, is evidently the subject of a portrait by Botticelli formerly in the Pourtalès collection in Paris. This portrait is inscribed “Smeralda Bandinelli.”⁴²

In his note, Rossetti refers to the portrait by Botticelli he himself owned (**fig. 60**), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. He attempts to bring Botticelli’s painting into the orbit of his more intimate experience. Rossetti, the great translator of Italian poetry, never actually stepped foot on Italian soil, and he knew the *Primavera* only from reproductions. Chiefly, he seems to have relied on what his brother described as a “well-sized” photograph sent by a friend towards the end of the 1870s.⁴³ One senses, I think, the presence of that photograph—its colorless distance from the original—in the texture of Rossetti’s poem, with its listless round of questions and of actors’ names. (“[W]ith all flowrets prankt” provides the poem’s only flash of color and light.) The sonnet’s first and final lines both end with the “wind-withered New-Year,” as if Rossetti were determined to perform the melancholic futility of his approach to the painting via the photograph’s chill grayness. He puts himself outside its world, tracing a wintry circle of artifice rather than enacting the seasons’ cycle of renewal. Indeed, the poem seems to be largely about this disconsolate mediation—about the emotional distance engendered by photographic reproduction, through which the painting’s belated forms emerge miniaturized and only half-available to the poet’s weary scrutiny, in his twilit late-nineteenth-century world.

Positioned as they are in Warburg’s text, these lines cast their mood over the whole. They present a set of aestheticist questions—“What mystery here is read?”; “how question here / These mummers of that wind-withered New-Year?”—to which Warburg may seem to offer scholarly rebuttals. Or does the thesis rather offer responses in kind? The epigraph raises the issue of whether decadent questions might elicit anything other than decadent answers. Set somewhat apart, Rossetti’s lines also assume a special place within the ghostly circuitry of quotations that makes up most of Warburg’s text. Late-nineteenth-century ekphrases sit alongside Poliziano’s fifteenth-century ones. Rossetti’s poem serves as a metonym for Botticelli’s importance to the social and aesthetic networks that made up English Aestheticism. Its quotation brings that world to bear on Warburg’s text.

That Warburg himself understood Rossetti’s poem as evoking the spirit of his age is borne out by a note he appended to his own copy of his dissertation sometime later (most likely towards the end of 1890s). The note quotes from an obscure, anonymous French novel associated with the pseudonym “Marc Széleny” (the name of the story’s protagonist):

Dilettantes (Paris, 1894), 86. The speaker is Marc:

He will have too much sense to be distracted from his creative ecstasy by a term [“modern”] that I myself perhaps interpret as erroneously as anyone—since to me Botticelli’s *Spring* is more modern than some of the paintings in the most recent Salons. The great realist of the fourteenth century [sic] had the same vision of

⁴² Quoted in Horne, *Botticelli*, xviii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

man that we envisage at the end of the nineteenth; more beautiful, perhaps, and yet already tinged with sadness, with the secret terror that hangs over us.⁴⁴

It is hard to imagine Warburg perusing so undistinguished a piece of fiction. Nonetheless, he seems to have taken great interest in matters of late-nineteenth-century taste. Disapproving allusions appear throughout his essays, and studies such as Léon Rosenthal's skeptical analysis of Botticelli's place in contemporary taste, *Sandro Botticelli et sa réputation à l'heure présente* (1897), made their way onto his growing library's shelves. (I discuss Rosenthal's response at greater length below.) Here Warburg fixes on a brief mention that stands not simply an example of the cult, but that self-consciously evokes the moods and the peculiar feeling for history that became attached to Botticelli. So attached, in fact, that by the early 1890s they could be knowingly caricatured in a throw-away aperçu within a mediocre novel about the artistic life. All these elements prove important to Warburg's sense of Botticelli's place in culture, as well as to Horne's. Both were interested in the social and aesthetic circuitry of Aestheticism as it spread to the continent, making Botticelli a staging ground for decadent affectation and poses of exquisite self-regard. Both also recognized with unease the brooding sense of historical belatedness that Botticelli had increasingly come to evoke. Finally, they both were haunted by—and perhaps found themselves implicated in—the decaying, nihilistic tone that the cult of Botticelli began to take on as it became increasingly imbricated in the exaggerated temporality of fashions and fads.

For in the aftermath of Pater's essay, Botticelli became ever more closely associated with a particular set of artistic preferences and poses. Horne summed those associations up tersely: "With the 'Aesthetic Movement' and the classic epoch of '1880', the name of Botticelli grew to be a catch-word among persons for whom early Italian Art could never possess any real significance."⁴⁵ Fifty years later, Michael Levey engaged the same theme:

Pater's essay is not only the beginning of the literary cult of Botticelli. It was also the end, for what followed was chiefly pastiche of Pater's manner and feeble repetition of his matter.... The Aesthetic Movement made out of Botticelli a rallying cry and a code word. Only after 1870 did the public become aware of the cult: Botticelli's name now stood for something precious and exotic, it was something to be murmured—even if one didn't know what it meant.⁴⁶

And sure enough, the name was spoken, as Aestheticism's most hostile chroniclers attest. In du Maurier's caricature of 1881 (**fig. 124**), Prigsby casts his discerning eye on a

⁴⁴ "Il sera trop sensé pour être troublé dans son extase artistique par un terme < « moderne » > que j'interprète moi-même peut-être aussi mal que beaucoup d'autres, puisque pour moi le *Printemps de Botticelli* est plus moderne que certaines toiles des derniers Salons. Le grand réaliste du XIV^e siècle [sic] a eu la vision de l'homme tel que nous l'envisageons à la fin du XIX^e, plus beau peut être mais toutefois déjà atteint de tristesse, de la terreur secrète qui plane sur nous." Warburg, *Renewal*, 411.

⁴⁵ Horne, *Botticelli*, xix.

⁴⁶ Levey, "Botticelli," 304.

painting we cannot see: “Oh, no! Pardon me! It is *not* a Botticelli,” he says; “Before a Botticelli I am mute.” In Gilbert and Sullivan’s opera *Patience* of the same year (their satire of the Aesthetic Movement), Lady Saphir sighs in affected rapture: “How Botticellian! How Fra-Angelican! Oh, Art, we thank thee for this boon!”⁴⁷ In 1893 (the very year Warburg published his dissertation), the young Aubrey Beardsley executed an imaginary portrait of Botticelli (**fig. 125**). Basing it neither on any available likeness of the artist, nor on features of Botticelli’s style, Beardsley constructed a pure projection of the quattrocento artist’s personality: melancholy, androgynous, all hooded eyes and sensuous lips. And as if confirming Botticelli as a formidable contemporary, George Moore attached an essay on him to the second, 1898 edition of *Modern Painting*, portraying him as a creature of infinite refinement and affectation: the “king of clasped hands and almond-eyed Madonnas”; “he who conceived and designed that enigmatic Virgin’s face”; “he who placed that long-fingered hand on the thigh of the Infant God.”⁴⁸

By the 1890s—and here we come to the “dilettantes” of Warburg’s addendum—the taste for Botticelli was no longer peculiarly English. As Léon Rosenthal put it:

Le nom de Botticelli était, il y a quelques années, ignoré de ceux qui n’avaient pas fait de l’art italien une étude spéciale ou qui n’avaient pas accompli le pèlerinage d’Italie. Aujourd’hui la mode s’en est emparée : tout un art, toute une littérature se réclament de lui ...

*Un article de la Vie parisienne n’est complet s’il n’y est parlé de Botticelli, nos actrices se coiffent à la Botticelli, nous avons des petits et des petites Botticellistes.*⁴⁹

Late Pre-Raphaelite painting was by this point a major component of the Parisian art scene, and on its coattails *le nom de Botticelli* had come to France.⁵⁰ References to the artist became integral to fin-de-siècle artistic culture. “*Ah, les bouches de Botticelli,*” Zola has his decadent connoisseur say in *Rome* (1896), “*ces bouches charnelles, fermes comme des fruits, ironiques ou douloureuses, énigmatiques en leurs plis sinueux.*”⁵¹ The face of *Primavera*—*ironique ou douloureuse*—appeared in photographs, prints, even decorative plates (**fig. 127**) in drawing rooms around Paris. Like Burne-Jones, Botticelli became a totem for the artists of Rose + Croix; Symbolists such as Armand Point (1861-1932) and Elisabeth Sonrel (1874-1953) incorporated his work into theirs (**figs. 127-8**);⁵²

⁴⁷ W. S. Gilbert, *Patience, or, Burthone’s Bride: A Comic Opera in Two Acts*, music by Arthur Sullivan (New York: J. M. Stoddart, 1881), 34.

⁴⁸ George Moore, “Long Ago In Italy,” *Modern Painting*, second edition (London: W. Scott, 1898), 282-3.

⁴⁹ Léon Rosenthal, *Sandro Botticelli et sa Réputation à l’Heure Présente* (Dijon: Librairie Générale Felix Rey, 1897), 5-6.

⁵⁰ On the European reach of second generation Pre-Raphaelitism, see most recently Susan P. Casteras, “Symbolist Debts to Pre-Raphaelitism: A Pan-European Phenomenon,” in *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism*, ed. Thomas J. Tobin (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005): 119-44.

⁵¹ Émile Zola, *Rome* (Paris: G. Charpentiere and E. Fasquelle, 1896), 228.

⁵² Point, who showed in five of the six Rose + Croix exhibitions organized by Joséphin Péladan, also published a strange, manifesto-like text about the *Primavera*. In it, Botticelli’s painting

the Decadents claimed him for their own. In his role as a critic, Joris-Karl Huysmans echoed Walter Pater in his assertion of the likeness between Botticelli's Venus and his Virgins —“the same physiognomy, the same languid and distressed air.”⁵³ For Huysmans, Botticelli was the painter of “dangerous angels sometimes open[ing] the door onto blamable territory.”⁵⁴

The case of the writer Jean Lorrain (pseudonym of Paul Duval, 1855-1906) is of special interest here.⁵⁵ Notorious for his dandyish flamboyance, the viciousness of his journalism, and his ostentatious homosexuality—“truly...Sodom's ambassador to Paris,”

becomes a vehicle for Point's own inwardness: “Florence. Botticelli. La Primavera.” *Mercur de France* 17 (January 1896): 12-16. Point writes:

“My eyes, disquieted and trembling because of the revelation of my own self in the presence of the unknown, first opened up for Botticelli's *La Primavera*, a painting I already loved through having seen it in an engraving, which haunted my work, seducing me toward the sickly grace of delicate souls, [those] captivating sisters of the frail irises that die from a kiss.

“My anxious hesitation in this sanctuary of silence, shadow, and inner concentration for a moment darkened my thoughts. Unwilling to believe that this was disillusionment, I was frightened by my lack of understanding....”

Symbolist Theories of Art, ed. Henri Dorra (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 273.

⁵³ “...et ils sont relativement rares, cuex qui, comme Botticelli, ont la franchise d'avouer que leurs Vierges sont des Vénus et leurs Vénus des Vierges.” Huysmans, *Écrits sur l'art, 1867-1905*, ed. Patrice Locmant (Paris, 2006), 461. “...la Vénus de Botticelli, du musée de Berlin, pour en citer une, a la même physionomie, le même air languissant et navré que ses Vierges...” Huysmans, *Écrits sur l'art*, 536.

⁵⁴ “Qu'est-ce que cet être énigmatique, cette androgyne implacable et jolie, si étonnamment de sang-froid quand elle provoque ? elle est impure mais elle joue franc jeu ; elle stimule mais elle avertit ; elle est tentante mais réservée ; elle est la pureté de l'impureté « puritas impuritatis », selon l'expression de Juste Lipse, elle est en même temps l'instigatrice de la luxure et l'annonciatrice de l'expiation des joies des sens ; d'autre part, elle est certainement un portrait car l'on ne crée pas une fillette si parfaitement vivante sans un modèle ; mais quel artiste alors a peint ce chef-d'œuvre, car cette peinture se détachant, claire, sur un fond noir, est admirable ; le dessin est incisif et très souple, d'une force extraordinaire sous son apparente grâce ; la couleur resplendit d'un éclat inaltéré, semble soudaine ; les plus grands portraitistes de tous les âges n'ont pas serré la nature de plus près et mieux rendu la vie discrète du sang dans les réseaux du derme ; nul surtout n'a mieux reproduit l'âme d'un regard dont l'acuité est telle qu'il vous poursuit au travers des salles et vous ramène quand même à lui ; on le sent dans le dos où qu'on aille et les plus belles œuvres du musée ne paraissent que des peintures, au sens strict du mot, en comparaison de celle-là qui va plus loin, qui est autre chose, qui pénètre, pour tout dire, dans le territoire de cet au-delà blâmable dont les dangereux anges de Botticelli entrebâillent parfois les portes.” Huysmans, *Écrits sur l'art*, 532.

⁵⁵ On Lorrain, see principally the recent biography by Thibaut d'Anthonay, *Lorrain: Miroir de la Belle Époque* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); see also Phillipe Julian, *Jean Lorrain, ou Le Satiricon 1900* (Paris: Fayard, 1974); Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900*, tr. Derek Coltman (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), passim; the chapter on Lorrain in Jennifer Birkett, *Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France, 1870-1914* (London: Quartet, 1986); *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 230 (April-June 1993), a special issue on Lorrain; Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, ed. T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002), 117-22.

one of his biographer's has written⁵⁶—Lorrain turned often, in his criticism, novels, and poems, to Botticelli's "demonic" force. A close-cropped photographic reproduction of Spring's face in the *Primavera* served as the frontispiece of his 1883 collection, *La Forêt Bleue* (fig. 129). (It was published by A. Lemmere, the same house that would issue *Dilettantes* ten years later.) In its transfer from painting to photograph to print, the figure's face has been given a darker, more knowing air, a quality particularly noticeable in the shading around her eyes and brow. Lorrain returned to Botticelli's Spring again and again. In *Monsieur de Bougreton* (1897), he notes her "vampire face—for she is a vampire and perhaps worse," which "kept [us] in a state of anguish, fever, and frenzy through the ambiguity of her sex."⁵⁷ His 1897 collection, *L'Ombre Ardente*, included a sonnet "D'après la Primavera de Sandro Botticelli" which rhapsodizes over the "sorrowful head," the "eyes of a bad angel," the "charm of a virgin and of a boy perverse."⁵⁸

The stance Lorrain takes towards his objects, here and else, comes close to self-parody. It almost mocks of the kinds of "intensity" (to use that favorite word of English aestheticist criticism) with which decadent viewers engaged pictures of the past. This was Lorrain's way. In an especially unforgiving passage of his great study of decadence, Mario Praz describes Lorrain as "carr[ying] the fashions of the period to the degree of paroxysm":

—the passion for unhealthy perverse young men (he, too, was attracted by the Androgyne), for the satanic Primitives (Botticelli's *Primavera* was at that time considered 'satanique, irrésistible, et terrifiante'), for Gustave Moreau and the Pre-Raphaelites, for flowers of strange and equivocal shapes (cf. the phallic

⁵⁶ Julian, *Jean Lorrain*, 3.

⁵⁷ Jean Lorrain, *Monsieur de Bougreton* (Paris: Borel, 1897), 31; cited in Haskell, *Rediscoveries*, 177.

⁵⁸ *Au fond d'un vieux palais toscan enseveli,
C'est un portrait sinistre à force d'être étrange,
Tête idéale et folle aux yeux de mauvais ange,
Visage ovale et fin d'adolescent pâli,*

*Le cou frêle et trop long penche, comme affaibli,
Sous le poids du front haut, mi-voilé d'une frange
De raides cheveux longs d'un blond roux, presque orange,
Et semés d'iris bleus, signés Botticelli.*

*La tête douloureuse, ardente et malade,
A dans le morne attrait de sa grâce native
Le charme d'une vierge et d'un garçon pervers.*

*Favori de prélat ou savante Ophélie,
Son énigme est souffrance, entraînement, folie
Et comme un philtre noir coule dans ses yeux verts.*

Jean Lorrain, *L'Ombre Ardente* (Paris: Charpentiere, 1897), 47.

flowers of des Esseintes), for *faisandage* and all kinds of combinations of lust and death.⁵⁹

In his writings and in his person, Lorrain was one of the period's great chronicler of fashions. As fads petered out and gave way to each other, he seemed to be counting rapidly down to age's end. In 1895 (with memories of the "Bourse crash" of the Parisian markets in 1882 still somewhat fresh), Lorrain gleefully celebrated the over-saturation of the aesthetic "market" with his own idol, writing of "*le krach des Botticelli*"—a phrase he duplicitously attributes to someone else ("*Le krach des Botticelli... le mot est de Dannat, William Dannt, le peintre américain*"):

*Après le krach des Burne-Jones, le krach des Botticelli, oui, de Botticelli lui-même, désormais démodé, devenu suspect et compromis grâce aux Maurice Denis, à Madame Jeanne Jacquemin et à M. Armand Point.*⁶⁰

Lorrain manages to be for and against Botticelli at once. A chronicler of fickle fashion, he performs his own enslavement to the ephemeral.

Lorrain's stance takes us to the heart of Decadent aesthetics. One of the strangest aspects of the literature of Decadence, and one of those most recalcitrant to critical restatement, lay in its production of texts so radically unbounded and unserved. States of absolute singularity—heights of individuality—subsist serenely beside the possibility of total anonymity and complete absorption into a social milieu. Texts like Lorrain's constantly cite, quote, even cannibalize those of others in service of constructing a Decadent "self." Gabriele D'Annunzio (whom Warburg met and disliked) was far from alone in being constantly accused of plagiarism. Indeed, perhaps no practice speaks better to the peculiar homogeneity that Decadent aesthetics enjoined, as if the productions and appreciations of a whole social milieu were constantly available to each of its only ever provisionally individuated members. One might almost suggest that the Decadents took more seriously and perversely than anyone before or since that bedrock tenet of Kantian aesthetics, that the judgment of taste which is most intuitively "mine" is most universal—most belongs to everyone else. This has consequences for approaching—and imitating—the art of the past. In "Long Ago in Italy," George Moore transposes this dynamic to artistic creation within the school of Botticelli, and Florentine painting as a whole:

Among these painters Botticelli was the incontestable master; but about him crowd hundreds of pictures, pictures rather than names.... [Artists] were content to merge their personalities in an artistic formula; none sought to invent a personality which did not exist in himself. Employing without question a method of drawing and of painting that was common to all of the, they worked in perfect

⁵⁹ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, second edition, tr. Angus Davidson (1951; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 353.

⁶⁰ "Pall-Mall Semaine," *L'Écho de Paris*, 11 May 1895, in Jean Lorrain, *Chroniques d'Art 1887-1904*, ed. Thalie Rapetti (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 267. Léon Rosenthal picked up on the striking phrase: "...et je crois ce journaliste sagace qui annonçait, il y a peu de jours, 'le krach des Botticelli.'" Rosenthal, *Botticelli et sa Réputation*, 7.

sympathy, almost in collaboration. Plagiarism was then a virtue; they took from each other freely; and the result is a collective rather than individual inspirations.⁶¹

It strikes, for Moore, no discordant note that “[n]ow and then genius breaks through, as a storm breaks a spell of summer weather” or that the “miraculous handicraft Filippo Lippi is always distinct, soft as the dawn, mysterious as a flower.”⁶² In his eyes, these are not absolute distinctions, but merely moments within the same general trend.

And so, critique gives way to continuation. The movement amounts to an aesthetics of autophagy—a self-cannibalizing impulse, which lavishly appreciates the very fads it professes to scorn. Lorrain derides his own treasured object in 1895 only to avow it again in 1897. In 1896, meanwhile, Octave Mirbeau (ever *au courant*) publishes “Botticelli proteste!” As the author wanders through a garden that suspiciously looks ahead to his own *Jardin des supplices* (1899), he comes upon the shade of Botticelli, who protests the caricatured use to which art has been turned by dreamy, effeminate moderns.⁶³ Nothing proves more decadent than the criticism of decadent taste.⁶⁴ We need not claim there is no outside to the Decadent text, or foreclose the possibility of its critical analysis, in order to see just how porous its boundaries are—how difficult to define, how liable to slip away beneath even the most scientific, self-disciplined criticism’s feet. The cult of Botticelli’s most vociferous critics could thus be those closest to its center. Mirbeau may be Warburg’s other face.

Horne’s Virile Air

Horne’s involvement with the culture of Aestheticism ran even deeper than Warburg’s. Saxl’s biographical sketch barely scratches the surface. Thanks largely to the research of Ian Fletcher (regrettably left incomplete at his death), we now know a good deal more about Horne’s friendships, movements, and intellectual affinities.⁶⁵ Beginning in the

⁶¹ Moore, “Long Ago in Italy,” 285-86.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Octave Mirbeau, “Botticelli proteste!” *Le Journal*, 4 and 11 October 1896, in Mirbeau, *Combats esthétiques*, ed. Pierre Michel and Jean-François Nivet (Paris: Nouvelle Editions Séguier, 1993), 2:153-64.

⁶⁴ Indeed, as in the aesthetic debates between James McNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde in the wake of Whistler’s “Ten O’Clock Lecture” of 1885, the theatricality of critique itself proved central to the public definition of the artist’s professional stance. As David Peters Corbett puts it, “Reading through the various moments in this combat, it is obvious that intellectual antagonism has here become commodified its own account as professional advantage.” Corbett, *The World in Paint* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), 116.

⁶⁵ See principally Ian Fletcher, *Rediscovering Herbert Horne: Poet, Architect, Typographer, Art Historian* (Greensboro, NC: E.L.T. Press, 1990); and Fletcher, “Herbert Horne: The Earlier Phase,” *English Miscellany* 21 (1970): 117-58. For other accounts, see Julie F. Codell, “Chelsea Bohemian: Herbert Percy Horne, the Critic as Artist” (PhD diss., Indiana Univ., 1978); Codell, “Horne’s Botticelli: Pre-Raphaelite Modernity, Historiography and the Aesthetic of Intensity,” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 27-41; Denys Sutton,

early 1880s, Horne worked for A.H. Mackmurdo (1851-1942), the arts-and-crafts architect and Ruskinian social reformer, before going into partnership with his employer by the end of 1883. Involved with the Century Guild from its inception (Mackmurdo's loose association of architects and artists), Horne edited the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* between 1886 and 1891, and its successor *The Hobby Horse* (1893-94).⁶⁶ As careful in its construction—hand-made paper, specially designed typography, decorative embellishments by Horne himself—as in its contents, *The Hobby Horse* proved a major vehicle of artistic pursuits in the period. Horne was a member of the Rhymers' Club along with Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, John Gray, Edward Dowson, and, most famously, William Butler Yeats. In *The Hobby Horse*, Horne published his own poems as well as those of his friends, and commissioned works of art from like-minded visual artists. (These included works by Lucien Pissarro and several drawings by the destitute and, in the wake of his 1873 trial for sodomy, nearly friendless Simeon Solomon; Horne was an important collector of Solomon's work—at one point, he owned nearly forty of the artist's works on paper—and one of his few supporters during the long decline of his later life.) Meeting him in 1888, Bernard Berenson declared Horne—architect, typographer, designer of textiles, poet, aesthete, editor—"the great man of the next generation."⁶⁷ His circle included major figures of the century's end: Yeats and Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater and Selwyn Image, Alfred Dolmetsch (Horne commissioned one of Dolmetsch's first clavichords, decorating it himself) and the Sapphic partnership of "Michael Field," the "double-headed nightingale."⁶⁸

It was this world that Horne began to leave behind when his life took its ascetic, scholarly turn. The early fruits of this shift were published in 1901, an examination of Uccello's battle scenes. For the first time, Horne portrayed the paintings in London, Paris, and Florence as part of a coherent program—the Battle of San Romano—made for Cosimo Medici's palace. He ends the study on a curious, reflective note:

I have been obliged to confine myself entirely to the historical aspect of these paintings; but their artistic aspect is undoubtedly of still greater interest and value. Perhaps, at another time, I may find some opportunity to return to the study of these splendid pictures, by the earliest of really modern painters, of

"Herbert Horne: A Pioneer Historian of Early Italian Art," *Apollo* 122 (August 1985): 130-56, which includes correspondence between Horne and Roger Fry; *Herbert Percy Horne e Firenze*, ed. Elisabetta Nardinocchi (Florence: Edizioni della Meridiana and Fondazione Herbert P. Horne, 2005); and most recently Caroline Elam, "Herbert Horne: 'A Kind of Posteritorious Distinction,'" and Antonella Francini, "Herbert Horne and an English 'Fable' for Botticelli," in *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, ed. Rob Hatfield (Florence and Syracuse: S.E.I. and Syracuse Univ. Press, 2009), 169-203, 227-41.

⁶⁶ On the Century Guild, see Peter Stansky, *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s, and the Art and Crafts* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985), 69-118.

⁶⁷ Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), 62.

⁶⁸ For their part, "Michael Field" [Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper] described Horne as a "tea-sop—mild, effeminate, with an art aroma, a choiceness." Michael Field, *Works and Days: From the Journal of Michael Field*, ed. T. and D.C. Sturge Moore (London: John Murray, 1933), 118.

tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,
Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds,
Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights⁶⁹

As the displacement of poetic utterance onto another already implies—the lines of verse come from Milton (*Paradise Lost*, IX.34-6), filling a role later occupied by Dante in Horne's monograph—that other time was never to come. The “historical aspect” of paintings, increasingly, became his primary focus, subordinating the “artistic” one. Indeed, Horne dreamed, under his appreciation of the “artistic” would give automatically onto the historical, embodying history in some other form.

I concentrate here on the factual matters of Horne's career in part because the developments his personality and sense of self underwent during these early years are so difficult to grasp. Those who knew him could never agree. In 1933, Edgar Jepson could write that he “have never known a man colder and more reserved and self-centred, a purist of purists.”⁷⁰ According to Arthur Symons, in notes composed in 1924, Horne was a decadent, bisexual beast: “at once a hard liver, a Sadist and a Pervert.”⁷¹ Horne himself spoke of “the frigid and the torrid interwove” in describing the paradoxical geography of passions.⁷² In the late 1890s, he could still apply a period eye to Botticelli, describing an Italian mistress as “like a Madonna of Botticelli, only the healthy creature, with none of the Botticellian morbid sentiments about her; none of the maladies of the soul, in short, no one damned virginal thing in her whole self;”⁷³ though it is difficult to tell from the context whether her deviation from the Botticellian prototype was the source of pleasure or disappointment. By contrast, Yeats would remember the pronounced scholarly air Horne displayed with regard to the artist during the 1890s. “All things, apart from love and melancholy, were a study to us,” he recalled: “Horne already learned in Botticelli had begun to boast that when he wrote of him there would be no literature, all would be learning.”⁷⁴ It seems fitting that, from the retrospective vantage of the early 1900s, Horne would look on his English life with intense awareness of the belatedness of his cultural moment, and a wistful, historicizing self-consciousness at its now being lost. “I do not even belong,” he writes,

to the already remote and classic epoch of “1880.” My period, alas, is a whole decade later. My contemporaries (and, as I fondly hope, I along with them) may be said to have flourished in the last years of the Victorian era. Since then, English letters, and indeed the world at large, have taken quite another turn. But despite our good opinions of ourselves, I and those same contemporaries have become old fashioned, we are not of date, *démodé*. We must disappear, and lie by

⁶⁹ Herbert Horne, “Uccello in the National Gallery,” *The Monthly Review* 5 (October 1901): 136.

⁷⁰ Edgar Jepson, *Memories of a Victorian* (London: V. Gollancz Ltd., 1933), 223.

⁷¹ Arthur Symons, *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s*, ed. Karl Beckson (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1977), 127. Also quoted (from Symons's manuscript at Princeton) in Fletcher, “Herbert Horne: The Earlier Phase,” 128.

⁷² Saxl, “Three ‘Florentines,’” 335.

⁷³ Fletcher, “Herbert Horne: The Earlier Phase,” 154.

⁷⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies: Reveries over Childhood, of the Trembling of the Veil* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 375.

forgotten for a time, before we can become really old, and enjoy a veritable antiquity. 'Tis the old story: "credette Cimabue nella pittura tener lo campo. Ed ora ha Giotto il grido."⁷⁵

Horne's background lends special relevance to a remarkable feature of his monograph. The book opens with a discussion of the English cult of Botticelli itself, as if Horne wished to situate his own efforts outside or after that peculiar cultural formation. Like Warburg, he quotes from Rossetti. He also quotes, as we have seen, both Ruskin and Pater. And turning from the cult to advances in "scientific criticism," he locates his own scholarship, at last, in relation to Morellian connoisseurship, in which "a new spirit was introduced into the criticism, not only of Botticelli, but of all early Italian Art."⁷⁶

Not that Horne's appropriation of the new could be anything but complex. When he first reviewed Horne's monograph in 1908, Fry noted that its author seemed "not a critic in the modern sense at all": Horne, he said, was

either incapable or contemptuous of all that delicate analysis of the spiritual and temperamental components of a work of art, all that subtle exposition of the artist's intentions, that illustration of the work of art by means of analogy and simile, which makes up so large a part of the best modern critical literature.... There is something bracing in this austerity...⁷⁷

Almost twenty years later, this austerity seemed still to need situating. Fry returned to his friend's work, describing its relation to a cultural moment in which, Fry says, "Paterism was almost synonymous with Botticellianism":

Herbert Horne was brought up in this sectarian atmosphere, and it is a measure of the force of his intellect and his objectivity that his great work on Botticelli betrays no direct trace of this attitude: is, indeed, just by its reticences and abstentions, an eloquent protest against such a view. The excessive austerity and dryness of that book is dictated, no doubt, by an aesthetic ideal, but it is no longer the Paterian ideal. With Pater, feeling found its end in an exuberant richness of expression; with Horne, a profounder, more passionate feeling must be translated into patient research and the dry, precise statement of hard-won facts. Horne was a poet who, out of a kind of Quixotic bravado, posed as a dry-as-dust.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Extract from an autobiographical note written after 1903: "Memorie autobiografiche di H. Horne," ms. 54, H.VI.4, 24. Quoted in Antonella Francini, "Herbert Horne," 238. Horne writes out Dante's lines, it seems, from memory: "*Credette Cimabue nella pittura / tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido, / sì che la fama di colui oscura.*" Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, tr. John Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), *Purgatorio*, XI.94-6.

⁷⁶ Horne, *Botticelli*, xx.

⁷⁷ "Mr. Horne's Book on Botticelli," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 13 (May 1908): 84.

⁷⁸ Roger Fry, "Sandro Botticelli," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 48 (April 1926): 196.

Such an account is unfair to Pater, of course—to the haunting negativity to which his criticism gave voice. Yet it does capture the flavor of Horne's text. Amplifying its protest against Aestheticism, Fry also, more importantly, fleshes out the perversity of Horne's self-discipline, the strange, almost alchemical "translation" of the poet into the scholar. In the strange, self-negating, ultimately personal aesthetic of Horne's monograph, we find the dark undertow Pater transformed, operating in more circumscribed spheres. In place of Pater's radically negative criticism—as ghostly and self-cancelling as one can imagine artwriting to be—we find a field of discrete, carefully managed effects. Pater's world-historical sweep gives way to a web of small, locally calibrated negations of previous writers' work.

The major figure for these processes was the erasure of *la bella Simonetta*. "I will attempt to dispel a legend," Horne writes fifty pages into his book, in his discussion of the *Primavera*:

which has grown up about this, and other paintings by Botticelli, according to which these pictures contain the portraits of Simonetta, the mistress of Giuliano di Piero de' Medici. I will not trouble to trace this legend beyond a note by a Mr. Tyrwhitt, which was published by Mr. Ruskin in 1873, in his "Ariadne Florentina." In that note, Mr. Tyrwhitt sought to prove that Simonetta Vespucci, after the death of Giuliano, "must have been induced to let Sandro draw from her whole person undraped, more or less"; and that she is represented in the "Spring," the "Birth of Venus," the "Calumny," and other paintings by Botticelli. This legend was afterwards revived by Signor Venturi in the "Archivio Storico dell'Arte," amongst other writers; and more recently by Dr. Richter in his "Lectures on the National Gallery." According to the last writer, the painting of "Mars and Venus," in the National Gallery, is among those pictures which contain portraits of Simonetta and Giuliano de' Medici. But what is it that we really know about Simonetta and Giuliano?⁷⁹

"What is it that we really know?" says Fry, "is the question always on Mr. Horne's mind."⁸⁰ Simonetta had come to stand for the excesses of late romantic reading-in, delivering an unwarranted and all too easy point of stability for Botticelli's depictions of the female figure. The author seems to take special relish in her demolition.

Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (c. 1453-1476) had been celebrated by Giuliano de Medici (Lorenzo's younger brother) at the famous *giostra* of 1475, where he also carried a banner depicting Pallas Athena by Botticelli. In scholarly retrospect, it has emerged as a key event in the development of Medicean courtly life. On 26 April of the following year, Simonetta died. Scholars have long connected these events to Poliziano's *Giostra*, and a longer tradition, beginning with Vasari himself, had also connected Simonetta more intimately with Botticelli, as the subject of portraits. Swinburne and Pater both refer to it in their essays. As Horne notes, Ruskin included a long footnote to one of the appendices of *Ariadne Florentina* on the matter. There, Ruskin quotes from a letter Tyrwhitt had sent him, summarizing the fruits of his research. The substance of the discussion is as Horne

⁷⁹ Horne, *Botticelli*, 52.

⁸⁰ Fry, "Mr. Horne's Book," 84.

describes it, although he leaves out—again, the text’s “abstentions” seem critical—Tyrwhitt’s almost novelistic tone:

Now I think she must have been induced to let Sandro draw from her whole person undraped, more or less; and that he must have done so as such a man probably would, in strict honour as to deed, word, and *definite* thought, but under occasional accesses of passion of which he said nothing, and which in all probability and by grace of God refined down to nil, or nearly so, as he got accustomed to look in honour at so beautiful a thing. (He may have left off the undraped after her death.) First, her figure is absolutely fine Gothic; I don’t think any antique is so slender. Secondly, she has the sad, passionate, and exquisite Lombard mouth. Thirdly, her limbs shrink together, and she seems not quite to have ‘liked it,’ or been an accustomed model. Fourthly, there is tradition, giving her name to all those forms.⁸¹

On its own, Tyrwhitt’s note is a middling example of the exuberance of late nineteenth-century erudition. It assumes significance within the particular context of Ruskin’s engagement with Botticelli. Tyrwhitt speaks of Botticelli having “come already, by [1478], to that state in which the sight of her delighted him, without provoking ulterior feelings”; parenthetically he adds that “I cannot help thinking Zipporah is impressed with her.”⁸² Here we reach the heart of the matter. For Tyrwhitt’s note was meant at once to curry favor with Ruskin, appealing to the peculiar nature of his investment in Zipporah as a displacement of Rose, transposing Ruskin’s fraught seeing-as into the historical situation of the painting in Botticelli’s own (supposed) biography. And possibly also to tame the free-associative folly of that investment, to which Ruskin had already admitted (see his letter to Tyrwhitt, quoted in Chapter Two). Tyrwhitt’s notice may be taken as his response to Ruskin’s madness. Ruskin, in turn, files it away, a footnote to an appendix, accepting the identification without admitting it to full relevance.

The legend of Simonetta was meant to serve a curiously similar stabilizing function in Warburg’s writings. The final section of his dissertation concerns itself with “Poliziano’s nymph Simonetta”:

If we suppose that Poliziano was asked to point out to Botticelli how to enshrine Simonetta’s memory in a pictorial allegory, that he must have had to take account of the specific mythological characters, in order to suggest to the painter the idea of a more clearly defined and therefore more readily paintable single figure, that of Venus’s companion, Spring.⁸³

⁸¹ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-12), 22:483-84.

⁸² Ruskin, *Works*, 22:484.

⁸³ “Nimmt man an, daß von Polizian verlangt wurde, Botticelli die Wege zu zeigen, in einem Sinnbild das Andenken der Simonetta festzuhalten, so war Polizian gezwungen, auf die besonderen Darstellungsmittel der Malerei Rücksicht zu nehmen. Das veranlaßte ihn, die in seiner Phantasie bereitliegenden Einzelzüge auf bestimmte Gestalten der heidnischen Sage zu übertragen, um so die fester umrissene und deshalb für die Malerei leichter zu verkörpernde

There follows a long, labyrinthine disquisition in which Warburg attempts to locate Simonetta in the *Primavera*—not simply as some idealized transposition, but in Flora’s very features. He turns to two portraits supposedly of Simonetta associated with Botticelli, one in Frankfurt and one in Berlin, (**figs. 130-1**). Descriptive attention, as usual, gravitates to the hair:

Both show the head of a woman in profile. The neck long, and the shallow arch of the chin begins almost at right angles to it. The mouth is closed; the lower lip droops very slightly. The nose, again, is almost at right angles to the steep slope of the upper lip. The nose turns up slightly at the tip, and the nostrils are crisply outlined; this, and the drooping lower lip, lend the face a look of resignation. The high forehead, fronting a long skull, gives the head a square look. Both women wear a fantastic “nymph coiffure: parted in the center, the mass of hair is partly woven into beaded braids, partly left to hang loose on the temples and the nape. A lock of hair flies out behind, unmotivated by any bodily movement.⁸⁴

Warburg takes the Frankfurt painting to be a workshop picture: “The picture gives the impression of having been painted in Botticelli’s workshop, perhaps later than the Berlin Simonetta, as a reproduction of a popular head,” again referring to the workshop to imply the social circulation of Botticellian types.⁸⁵ Even so, Warburg uses the paintings to extend his identification to Botticelli himself, in the *Birth of Venus*:

If we compare the profile of the Spring figure in the *Birth of Venus* with the two Simonetta portraits just mentioned, there is nothing to prevent our concluding that the painting shows us not simply an idealized depiction of Simonetta as a nymph but the likeness of her very face.⁸⁶

Simonetta begins appearing everywhere in what follows: in the lyrics of Poliziano (who, Warburg says, as if we needed reminding, “seems to have had a particular fondness for

Gestalt der Frühlingsgöttin, welche die Venus begleitet, dem Maler als Idee nahezu legen.”
Warburg, *Renewal*, 133; *GS*, 45-6.

⁸⁴ “Beide zeigen einen Frauenkopf im Profil; auf einem langen Halse setzt, fast in einem rechten Winkel, das flachgewölbte Kinn an. Der Mund ist geschlossen, nur die Unterlippe hängt ein wenig nach unten. Die Nase setzt wiederum fast rechtwinklig an die steile Oberlippe an. Die Nasenkuppe ist etwas aufgeworfen, die Nasenflügel scharf durchgezogen; hierdurch und durch die überhängende Unterlippe bekommt das Gesicht einen resignierten Ausdruck. Die hohe Stirn, an die sich ein langer Hinterkopf ansetzt, gibt dem ganzen Kopf ein quadratisches Aussehen.

“Beide Frauen haben eine phantastische ‘Nymphenhaartracht;’ die in der Mitte gescheitelte Haarmasse ist zum Teil in perlenbesetzte Zöpfe geflochten, zum Teil fällt sie frei an den Schläfen und im Nacken herab.” Warburg, *Renewal*, 134; *GS*, 47.

⁸⁵ Warburg, *Renewal* 136; *GS*, 48.

⁸⁶ “Vergleicht man das Profilbild der Frühlingsgöttin auf der ‘Geburt der Venus’ mit den beiden genannten Bildern der Simonetta, so steht dem Gedanken nichts entgegen, daß wir auch auf dem Gemälde nicht nur die zur Nympe idealisierte Simonetta vor uns haben, sondern auch das Abbild ihrer Gesichtszüge.” Warburg, *Renewal*, 136; *GS*, 48.

women's hair");⁸⁷ in the sonnets of Lorenzo de Medici; in Piero di Cosimo's fantastic "profile portrait [fig. 132] with the inscription *Simonetta Januensis Vespuccia*," where she "is shown as Cleopatra, at the fatal moment when the asp strikes."⁸⁸

As if bringing such diffusion under some sort of control, Warburg focuses on the measurements of the depicted body itself. He appeals to "study of proportions" for "conclusive proof" of Simonetta's presence in the *Realm of Venus*:

Proof of the relatedness of all the various images of Simonetta can be supplied, ultimately, only by a thorough study of the influence of antiquity on proportions—a pendant to the present work. The point of departure for this second essay is once more supplied by Botticelli (in the Frankfurt painting of Simonetta)...⁸⁹

—in, that is, a painting that Warburg cannot see as stemming from Botticelli's hand. Warburg's point here is somewhat obscure. It seems that he was preoccupied throughout the 1890s with the symbolic and history of proportions in the Renaissance. The material includes several sketches of the Frankfurt portrait overlaid by grids, of which I reproduce one (fig. 133). According to Spyros Papaetros, these little-studied sketches "are replete with minute mathematical proportions and 'secret geometries' likening the profile to a column capital in the manner of Francesco di Giorgio."⁹⁰ The import of these connections is mysterious. We seem to be skirting close to a territory in which scholarship tips over into private obsession. What I wish to note is that whatever "secret geometries" Warburg may have been pursuing, they would not exhaust the peculiarity of the drawing itself. The study of proportions would only establish a relation between the various portraits, and between them and other sorts of artistic phenomena—they do not even need to be iconic ones, as the example of the column capital attests. It would not establish their being of Simonetta. In the drawing, however, Warburg seems to be feeling for the skull beneath the skin. He has outlined in dark pencil the schematic contour of the bone, giving his drawing the air of a forensic, biometric exercise, like those of the 1880s, for instance, which attempted to establish the "real" self-portrait of Raphael based on the

⁸⁷ Warburg, *Renewal*, 135; *GS*, 47.

⁸⁸ Warburg, *Renewal*, 136; *GS*, 49. Warburg is undeterred by problems surrounding the painting's date. It "would be a fair basis for comparison, had it not been firmly attributed to Piero di Cosimo, who was born in 1462; it cannot, therefore have been painted from life. Nonetheless: "Even the poor reproduction in *L'Art* (1887, 60) makes it clear that the type in this case is the same, except that the rendering is softer; the coiffure is again 'fantastic' and adorned with pearls, but it starts further back on the head, and there are no flying locks of hair." Warburg, *Renewal*, 136; *GS*, 49.

⁸⁹ "Der Nachweis, wie die verschiedenen Simonettabilder zusammenhängen, kann jedoch erst durch eine eingehende Untersuchung über den Einfluß der Antike auf die Proportionen—ein Gegenstück zur vorliegenden Arbeit—geführt werden. Den Ausgangspunkt für diesen zweiten Versuch gibt wiederum Botticelli (in dem Frankfurter Bild der Simonetta)...." Warburg, *Renewal*, 140; *GS*, 53.

⁹⁰ Spyros Papapetros, "The Eternal Seesaw: Oscillations in Warburg's Revival," *The Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2003): 172.

measurements of his recently exhumed remains (**fig. 134**).⁹¹ With this difference, however: Warburg does not have Simonetta's skull. He cannot appeal to the material anchor that would stabilize the exercise, or confirm his backward projection of Simonetta's actual body at the origin of the system of representations he wishes to insist is real.

Simonetta recurs in Warburg's brief 1898 essay on Botticelli. Here she figures a divide between what Warburg takes to be the two divergent modes of the artist's production. On the one hand, in Botticelli, we encounter an art of "melancholy stillness" [*stiller Schwermut*], embodied in the *Madonna of the Magnificat*, and associated with the homoerotic attachments of the *der Botticelli-Gemeinde*:

The inner indifference [*innere Gleichgültigkeit*] of these Florentine choirboys is deepened, through Sandro's art, into dreamlike sentimentality [*träumerischer Sentimentalität*]: it reaches the viewer not as apathy, but, on the contrary, as a personal and enigmatic melancholy [*Schwermut*]*—*the pious enjoyment of which has now become an act of worship for the adherents of the Botticellian cult.⁹²

Aestheticist cult-worship focuses representations of beautiful, melancholy, effeminate male youths, Warburg says. If the aesthetes gather before Florentine choirboys, however, true scholars—the "minority of Sandro's admirers"—turn to more serious things, attending to the "*Realm of Venus*." There, "[i]n the courtly Garden of Love, where the troubadours once went a-Maying, Sandro has set up an antique icon"—an "image of Simonetta Vespucci, who had died young, and whom both Lorenzo and Giuliano had loved with all the chivalrous reverence that Dante felt for Beatrice or Petrarch for Laura, . . . captured in the consolatory symbol of Dame Venus."⁹³ Lest we miss the insistent sexual coding of all this, Warburg makes it even more explicit:

The melancholy stillness [*die melancholische Stille*] is disturbed by a scene of amorous pursuit. Zephyrus chases Flora, from whose lips flowers spring. This curious detail in itself is a sign of an unexpectedly close adherence to Ovid, whose *Fasti* provide the only authority for this particular magical ability of Flora's, imparted by the touch of Zephyrus; what is more, the group of the fleeing Flora and the pursuing wind god is exactly modeled on Ovid's description, right down to the detail of the agitated accessory forms of hair and clothing.⁹⁴

⁹¹ See the study by Hermann Welcker, "Der Schädel Raphael's und die Rafaelporträts," *Archiv für Anthropologie* 15 (1884): 417-40. On the nineteenth century's fixation on Raphael's skull, see David Alan Brown and Jane Van Nimmen, *Raphael and the Beautiful Banker: The Story of the Bindo Altoviti Portrait* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), 108-18.

⁹² "Die innere Gleichgültigkeit jener Florentinischen Chorknaben ist durch Sandro's Kunst zu träumerischer Sentimentalität vertieft, die nicht mehr als Teilnahmslosigkeit, sondern gerade im Gegenteil als geheimnisvoll und persönlich begründete Schwermut den Beschauer anzieht und die andächtig zu genießen heutzutage zur sakralen Handlung der Botticelli-Gemeinde geworden ist." Warburg, *Renewal*, 158; *GS*, 64 (translation modified).

⁹³ Warburg, *Renewal*, 158-59; *GS*, 65.

⁹⁴ "Eine erotische Verfolgungsszene bringt in die melancholische Stille stürmisch bewegtes Leben. Zephyr verfolgt Flora, deren Munde Blumen entspringen; zeigt schon diese sonderbare

Warburg returns to the scholarly ground he covered five years earlier in order to emphasize the intimate connection of scholarship, classical learning, and the gendered dynamics of “amorous pursuit.” In the tangled syntax of a single sentence, he finds a way to refer no less than three times to the dyad of wind-god and nymph—passive female fleeing before the male’s active aggression—and to attach it to detailed knowledge of the Ovidian text. With a level of exaggeration symptomatically related to the same-sex aestheticism he had evoked a moment ago, Warburg asserts a heterosexual poetics of scholarship.⁹⁵

Its point, I think, lay in imagining the work of art as profoundly other to the art historian—as a mysterious, foreign, but still flesh-and-blood entity whose difference should be at once respected and overcome. The dynamic could at times give an unruly, sexualized pathos to the art historian’s task. In a paragraph of his essay “On *Impresse Amoroſe* in the Earliest Florentine Engravings” (partially excised from the Italian version, published in 1905), Warburg includes a passage that reads like *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

I was thus left facing an apparently insoluble riddle, and my excavations in the dark tunnel of Medicean courtly love seemed hopelessly blocked, when I was relieved to hear a knocking from the far, Italian, side of the blockage.

My friend Giovanni Poggi was there before me. He, too, deep in the Lucrezia riddle, was looking for a way out of the obscure depths of the *vita amorosa* of the Medici. One winter day in 1902, in the Archivio di Stato in Florence, he saw the light: not through any artistic vision, but as a result of methodical industry, it fell to him to reduce the mysterious two Lucrezias to one. Poggi discovered that the Lucrezia in Alessandra’s letters was not a Gondi, as Guasti had unwarrantably supposed, but a Donati. As the records confirm, she was the wife of Niccolò Ardinghelli, whom she married when she was about fifteen years old, on 26 April 1465.⁹⁶

Einzelheit eine unvermutet enge Anlehnung an Ovid (der in seinen Fasten der einzige Gewährsmann für diese durch Zephyrs Berührung entstandene zauberhafte Fähigkeit Floras ist), so überrascht uns noch mehr die Tatsache, daß die Gruppe der fliehenden Flora und des verfolgenden Windgottes bis auf die Einzelheiten des bewegten Beiwerkes in Haar und Gewandung der Schilderung Ovids genau nachgebildet ist.” Warburg, *Renewal*, 159; *GS*, 65.

⁹⁵ These pages of Warburg’s essay seriously call into question claims that have been made for his “postmodern feminism” *avant-la-lettre*: on which see, Margaret Iversen, “Retrieving Warburg’s Tradition,” *Art History* 16.4 (1993): 541-53. For the now classic feminist critique of Botticelli (focused on the gruesome Nastagio panels, but also treating the *Primavera*), see Susanne L. Wofford, “The Social Aesthetics of Rape: Closural Violence in Boccaccio and Botticelli,” in *Creative Imitation*, ed. David Quint and others (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 189-238.

⁹⁶ “Damit saß ich vor einem anscheinend unlösbaſen Rätsel, und meine Bohrarbeiten im dunklen Tunnel des Mediceischen Liebeswesens waren gleichsam in hoffnungsloses Stocken geraten, als ich es zu meinem Troste auch auf der andern, italienischen Seite klopfen hörte.

Freunde Poggi meldete sich; auch er, von dem Rätsel der Lucrezia umstrickt, suchte einen Ausweg aus dem dunklen Reich der Mediceischen *vita amorosa*. An einem Wintergarte

For all its familiar air of “dry-as-dust” scholarly correction, the passage also gives form to a strange archaeological drama that seems to hover just beneath its surface, voiced as a first-person narrative. Warburg is “blocked” in the midst of his penetration of the “dark tunnel of Medicean courtly love”—his exploration of the “obscure depths [*dem dunklen Reich*] of the *vita amorosa*.” A more experienced Italian friend, “there before me . . . deep [*umstrickt*: lit., entwined] in the Lucrezia riddle,” comes to Warburg’s aid. As the metaphors unfold, we are delivered into lurid Freudian territory: an imagination of the dangerous, enticing, all-enveloping interior of the female body itself. The fearful possibilities of such smothering self-loss are traded for the lighter, homosocial bonds of collegiality—ties that take the form of mildly affectionate fellow-travelers who have helped tame the biological mysteries of heredity with the rational order of a genealogy of names.

Such eeriness is wholly suppressed in Horne’s serene text. Its last remnants exist in Simonetta’s erasure:

At the time of Simeontta’s death, none of the pictures which are said to contain her portrait were painted, or even invented: and at the time of Giuliano’s murder, in 1479, only one, the “Spring,” could possibly have been begun. All historical evidence is thus entirely opposed to this legend: but there is one circumstance which is more damaging to this pretty fiction than any such historical evidence; and that is that none of these paintings contain a single portrait. Indeed, the explanations of Signor Venturi and Dr. Richter are pictorially not less absurd, than are historically Mr. Tyrwhitt’s conjectures.⁹⁷

It is her negation—a type for Horne’s subtractive practice as a whole—that allows his text to emerge as its nearly seamless whole. He casts a cold eye on paintings and colleagues alike. “Everything is put on an equal footing,” as Fry notes: “There are no notes, no headings, no chapters, no index. All the knowledge about Botticelli that Mr. Horne has accumulated in years of patient study is here poured out in one continuous and equable stream.”⁹⁸ As with Pater’s dialectical sweep, here the unstable territory of sameness and difference that made up the long history of Botticelli’s rediscovery has been displaced by small, parsimonious acts of acceptance and rejection of “evidence”—ripples defining the contour of the text’s “equable stream.”

Horne employs two main strategies for the containment of difference in his monograph. One is to transform the projects of Ruskin and Pater (in many ways, his main “sources”) into the likeness of his own. At the end of his discussion of the *Madonna of*

1902 ist ihm dann die Erleuchtung im florentinischen Staatsarchiv gekommen; nicht durch eine künstlerische Vision, sondern durch planmäßig angewandten Fleiß war es ihm beschieden, die rätselhafte doppelte Lucrezia auf eine zu reduzieren: die Lucrezia in den lettere der Allesandra war keine geborene Gondi, wie Guasti ohne stichhaltigen Grund behauptet hat, sie war vielmehr eine Donati und, wie urkundlich feststeht, die Ehefrau des Niccolò Ardinghelli, den sie, etwa fünfzehnjährig, am 26. April 1465 geheiratet hat.” Warburg, *Renewal*, 432; *GS*, 335.

⁹⁷ Horne, *Botticelli*, 53.

⁹⁸ Fry, “Mr. Horne’s Book,” 84.

the Magnificat, he takes on Pater directly. He quotes from the crucial section of Pater's description—"the young angels, glad to rouse her for a moment from her dejection, are eager to hold the inkhorn and support the book; but the pen almost drops from her hand..."—and offers a rejoinder:

It may seem a little late, at this hour, to take this exquisite, personal revery as so much matter-of-fact criticism; yet, in a sense, as criticism it was put forth, and as criticism it has gone to determine, more than any other single utterance, the interpretation which is currently put upon the sentiment of Botticelli's paintings.⁹⁹

As a more true interpretation of "the sentiment with which Botticelli informs his conception of the Virgin" he quotes from Dante's *Paradiso* (XXXII.88-99) before offering an additional gloss:¹⁰⁰

In striving to express aspirations and joys of the spirit as transcendental as these, by actual, physical shapes and forms, it is no wonder that Botticelli should have lent to them, consciously or unconsciously, something of the melancholy and lassitude which follows upon great passion.¹⁰¹

The sense of melancholy, in other words, is an effect of pictorial representation's standing only ever to one side of—"after"—the ecstasies that Botticelli wishes to signal. The mode of feeling that Pater describes is not so much wrong, for Horne, as in need of nuanced supplementation. It cannot be allowed to stand as a feeling merely sensed in the picture, embodied by the configuration in itself. Rather, we need to move closer to Botticelli's world.

Horne's procedures here are somewhat elusive, but they are characteristic of his approach as a whole. He turns consistently to Pater and Ruskin for modes of criticism,

⁹⁹ Horne, *Botticelli*, 122.

¹⁰⁰ "Io vidi sopra lei tanta allegrezza
piover, portata ne le mentis ante
create a trasvolare per quella altezza,
che quantunque io avea visto davante,
di tanta ammirazion non mi sospese,
né mi mostrò di Dio tanto sembante;
e quello amor che primo li discese,
cantando 'Ave Maria, gratia plena,'
dinanzi a lei le sue ali distese.
Rispuose a la divina cantilena,
da tutte parti la beata corte,
si ch'ogne vista sen fé più serena."

"I saw such gladness rain down upon her, borne in the holy minds created to fly through those heights, that all I had seen before had not held me in such wonder and suspense nor shown me such likeness to God, and that loving spirit which had first descended on her singing, 'Ave Maria, gratia plena' spread his wings before her. On all sides the blessed court sang responses to the divine canticle, so that every face turned brighter for it." Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXII.88-99.

¹⁰¹ Horne, *Botticelli*, 123.

even treating their writings as a kind of partial evidence. Yet a few pages before this passage, Horne discusses what may be taken as his key piece of descriptive evidence, a fragmentary late fifteenth-century document. In the late 1890s, a report by an agent of the Duke of Milan on the painters of Florence was found in Milan's state archives.¹⁰² Horne offers the text in an appendix, and translates in the body of the book itself: "Sandro di Botticelli, a most excellent painter, both on panel and wall; his works have a virile air [*aria virile*], and are [executed] with the greatest judgment."¹⁰³ After discussing the historical situation of statement, Horne offers a long, extraordinary description of its import for the kind of criticism he wishes to undertake:

The report of the agent of the Duke of Milan possesses even greater value as a piece of contemporary criticism upon the painters named in it, than as a record of their frescoes at Rome and Volterra. Botticelli is placed first on the list; and in spite of the agent's protest that it is impossible to say which of the four painters bears off the palm, the rest of his report amounts to an admission that Botticelli was held to be the first painter then living at Florence. Of his strange, bizarre conception of things, of the peculiar sentiment which runs through his work, a sentiment as some writers have thought "of ineffable melancholy," this reporter has nothing to say: he notes only in Botticelli's work the "aria virile," that virile air, his "optima ragione et integra proportione," the great judgment and fine sense of proportion shown in his works. The former is an expression which the modern critic would have used in characterizing the manner of Andrea da Castagno, or Antonio Pollaiuoli; the latter that of Domenico Ghirlandaio or Leonardo da Vinci. For us, Botticelli is a visionary painter, who sees and depicts more than meets the outward eye. May not, then, the secret of his greatness lie in the fact that our modern view of him, and the view of his contemporaries, are, in their measure, and from their several standpoints, equally true? Of Filippino, the agent reports that in comparison with his master, Botticelli, his works have a sweeter air, but not so much art. Perugino he especially extols as a painter of fresco, and characterizes his manner as "angelica et molto dolce": and Ghirlandaio he characterizes as the able master, skilled alike in the painting of walls and panels, a "man of expedition," of infinite business, who, as Vasari tells us, boasted that no one, no matter how trifling his wants, left his workshop unsatisfied. In laying stress upon the business capacities of Ghirlandaio, the agent probably had in his mind what had reached him concerning Leonardo da Vinci, whose brooding and delays may well have occasioned the Duke of Milan to seek out another painter at Florence, who would carry out with greater expedition the numerous works which he desired to have executed. The criticisms of the Duke's agent, according to the usage of his age, are brief and trite; but the more deeply the student of Florentine art becomes versed in his subject, the more, I think, while elaborating or refining upon the agent's sentences, will he come to endorse his judgments.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² It was first published in Paul Müller-Walde, "Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Leonardo da Vinci," *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstmuseen* 18 (1897), 165.

¹⁰³ Horne, *Botticelli*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

Horne's carefully weighing judgment here looks ahead to Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (1972), so measured is his use of text to reconstruct a "period eye."¹⁰⁵ At first, it may seem that Horne offers the words of the Duke's agent as a corrective to the vagaries of Ruskin and Pater. One quickly sees, however, that Horne offers something more complex. For here we come upon the faint, residual Hegelianism of Horne's text, lingering on even in this most austere of positivists. The passages offers a dialectical overcoming of difference. He is after some gentle synthesis that might take up these seemingly contradictory viewpoints and totalize them—make them complementary aspects of the same seen thing. "Botticelli" is both the agent's *aria virile* and the modern's sentimental eye. He encompasses competing modes of evidence in a wholeness that brings interpretation balance, a kind of provisional calm.

Botticelli's personality looms so large in the history of art because these contradictions never entirely go away. Division migrates inward, constituting the singular character of the artist himself:

Botticelli was typically a Florentine; and his art constantly reveals the ever-shifting colours of the Florentine temperament. If his paintings display the keen sense of expressive beauty, the bizarre imagination, the amatorious sweetness and tenderness of the age in which he lived, they display, also, much of the feeling which is more distinctively characteristic of an earlier age of Florentine art. If, like Dante, he can faint with love, he inherits, in common with the naturalist painters, no small a portion of the virility, the energy, the directness, and at times the gloom, or even some tincture of the cruelty of the Florentine temperament; qualities which live for all time in the "Divina Commedia." Such divergent, or, as it may seem to us, discordant traits, were neither incompatible nor contradictory, in a Florentine of the fifteenth century: they were the current obverse and reverse of the Florentine character.¹⁰⁶

Horne's monograph is full of objectified figures for Botticelli's divided self. He is melancholy and agitated; the painter of the past and of the present; of turbulent accessories and the sweetness of the still. Perhaps the greatest of these evocations can be found in the final paragraph of Horne's description of the *Calumnia* (**fig. 135**):

That tendency which I have elsewhere remarked in Botticelli, to render his figures more and more vivacious in movement and expressive in action, is carried to its height in this painting; and both action and movement here become agitated and even feverish. The restless search after expression which produced this trait, has everywhere left its mark on the picture. It is to be seen in the nervous and accentuated drawing of the figures, especially in the joints and extremities; as well as in those strange contrasts of mood and colour, which constantly occur in

¹⁰⁵ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹⁰⁶ Horne, *Botticelli*, 334.

Botticelli's work, but which here seem to have been used with definite intention. The contrast of the unruly and insistent rout which throng this sumptuous hall, with the serene calm of the cloudless sky and untroubled waters which lie beyond, and of the stormy passions which impel the actors in this scene, with the clear sunlight in which it is bathed, are employed here with such strange and inscrutable effect, that they appear to be an integral part of the painter's conception of the allegory; as though he intended to symbolize by them something of the contradictions of "this unintelligible world." Indeed, so far is the search after expression carried in this painting, that the figurative and generalized character which is proper to an allegory, is almost lost in the individuality with which its figures, and the passions which actuate them, are represented.¹⁰⁷

It is a measure of the intelligence of Horne's eye that he can see both the claustrophobic agitations of the painting's foreground and the haunting, inhuman blankness that unfolds behind it. The fever-dream of allegory on the one hand, and all that is empty in the world on the other, are held together as a striking visual totality—an "individuality." Horne's description of the painting seems so careful, so tactful, so attentive to the work's strange visual presence, that one feels intrusive to suggest the place of autobiography here. And yet, this is the self of Horne's long essay, a self that exists, like Simonetta, under erasure: utterly rapt before the painting, utterly determined not to abandon itself to rapture. Thus, at times, the brittleness of Horne's careful text. It is unleavened by the digressions and free-associations that had, for forty years, been at least half of artwriting's work. "Let us now turn...", he is always saying, and "But I stay too long...."

Coda

Warburg's eccentricities, it seems, have once again become timely. He has recently been reconstituted as a key, unruly intelligence at the opening of modern art historical practice—and increasingly divorced from the institutional legacy Saxl and others consolidated for him after his death. In the recent Warburg revival, marked by a series of translations and an ever-expanding body of monographic studies, it has been precisely those aspects of his practice—the intuitive, the pathological, the insights bordering on madness—considered most suspect by followers like Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Gombrich that have been retrieved for celebration.¹⁰⁸ The Warburg who emerges in the writings of Philippe-Alain Michaud, Spyros Papapetros, and Georges Didi-Huberman, to name only the finest of his recent interpreters, is an almost Dionysian force: the vertiginous chronicler of "phantoms" and "symptoms," of snakes and whirling Maenads,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 262-3.

¹⁰⁸ On the "exorcism" of Warburg by these figures, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), 91-102; and Didi-Huberman, "L'Exorciste," in *Relire Panofsky*, ed. Fabrice Douar and Roland Recht (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2008), 71-87.

of atavistic survivals and spirals through time.¹⁰⁹ (“Warburg 2000,” Papapetros sardonically calls the object of Didi-Huberman’s study, though it might equally—and not uncharitably—describe aspects of his own.)¹¹⁰

Warburg, that is, has become a name to conjure with. And this has as much to do with essential features of his thought as with recent academic fads. Through careful attention to the cultural affinities of Warburg’s own moment, as well as his anticipation with later thinkers, these authors have amplified the most radical (perhaps the most quixotic) dimensions of his work. Most successfully, the essential strangeness of his understanding of the *Nachleben der Antike*—the “afterlife” of antiquity, or even its “survival,” in an anthropological and evolutionary sense—has newly come into view. As Didi-Huberman describes it, Warburg’s concern with the past’s savage hold on the present entails a dynamic conception of history as non- or even anti-linear. In his work, time folds over on itself. Rather than the placid relations suggested by words like “tradition” or “classicism,” or by a naturalizing vocabulary of cultural blossoming and decay, Warburg points to something else: a paradoxical temporality made up, as Didi-Huberman puts it, of “*strates, blocs hybrides, rhizomes, complexités spécifiques, retours souvent inattendus et buts toujours déjoués.*”¹¹¹ With the courage of his symptoms, Warburg—“*notre fantôme*”—dismantles art historical complacency from within.

The Warburg who has emerged over in course this chapter is in some sense a figure of a different kind—more anxious to keep up appearances, and less sure of his success, the victim of a symptomatology rather than its seer. My intention, however, has not been to neuter one of art history’s strangest figures (the field has few enough radicals, God knows) so much as to set him in a different light. And in the end, it seems to me, the differences of approach are complementary, and the contradictions pointed to, Warburg’s own. As the Warburg revival has amply demonstrated, it goes on being a productive uncertainty as to whether what most matters in Warburg’s example derives from his “obsessions” or his efforts to contain them—to make them over into a system. And how else, we might ask, could Warburg have felt his way toward historical dynamism than through his enmeshment in the cult of Botticelli? In a way, Warburg’s concern with cultural survivals might be seen as an attempt to project a sort of historical “depth,” and even a kind of profoundly anterior intentionality, behind the “superficial” anachronisms of *der Botticelli-Gemeinde*. And thereby to leave those superficialities, at last, behind. With consequences we perhaps only now have begun truly to feel, Warburg’s paradoxes of *Nachleben* offered a way to make something of these specific phobias, and wrest meaning for his moment’s scandalous involvement with Botticelli.

¹⁰⁹ Michaud, *Aby Warburg et l’image en mouvement* (Paris: Macula, 1998), translated by Sophie Hawkes as *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004); Spyros Papapetros, “On the Animation of the Inorganic;” Didi-Huberman, *L’image survivante*. The three sections of Didi-Huberman’s study are entitled *l’image fantôme*, *l’image pathos*, and *l’image symptôme*.

¹¹⁰ Papapetros, “Eternal Seesaw,” 170.

¹¹¹ Didi-Huberman, *L’image survivante*, 27.

Conclusion

My purpose here is to provide a glimpse at several ways in which the rediscovery of Botticelli came to an end. That it did end—that the volatile energies attracted to Botticelli in the period largely dissipated, or entered narrower, more discrete channels of specialized attention—is beyond dispute. As the twentieth century wore on, Botticelli largely ceased to function as an engine for innovative artwriting, at least with the kind of force explored in the preceding pages. Nonetheless, the tradition did have a kind of an afterlife, a *Nachleben* of its own. Warburg and Horne had already (with mixed feelings) arranged themselves against it, attempting to sublime the cult of Botticelli into a set of methodical, self-disciplining procedures for art-historical scholarship. Adapting Michael Levey's remark about Pater and the "literary cult of Botticelli," we indeed might say that Warburg and Horne were not only the beginning of the twentieth century's sustained scholarly concern with Botticelli: they also marked its conclusion.¹ Ambitious, complex, and even moving accounts of Botticelli continued to emerge as the century wore on. But the creative ferment of the earliest engagements with the artist was largely gone. The paradigms of scholarship set by Horne and the school of Warburg were elaborated upon rather than replaced.

Nonetheless, such historical breaks are never clean. Remnants of the old ways always survive. As Arnold I. Davidson writes of conceptual shifts in the category of sexuality:

Automatisms of attitude have a durability, a slow temporality, which does not match the sometimes rapid change of conceptual mutation. Mental habits have a tendency towards inertia, and these habits resist change that, in retrospect, seems conceptually required.²

Botticelli could become a refuge for such inertia. His study could stand for the kinds of engagement with works of art that art history was rapidly leaving behind. In 1913, for instance, the poet and scholar of art Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), newly named Keeper of Oriental Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, published a lavish study of the artist.³ Binyon saw it as a supplement to Herbert Horne's monograph of five years before. "Mr. Horne," he writes, "has told all that is known about Botticelli":

but his aim has been to present the art of the master as it appeared to his Florentine contemporaries, and to clear his presentment of it modern sentiment

¹ "Pater's essay is not only the beginning of the literary cult of Botticelli. It is also the end...." Michael Levey, "Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 3-4 (July-December 1960): 304.

² Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 91.

³ On Binyon, see John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon: Poet, Scholar of East and West* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); and David Peters Corbett, "Laurence Binyon and the Aesthetic of Modern Art," *Visual Culture in Britain* 6, no. 1 (2005): 101-19.

that has coloured the view of our own generation. My aim in this essay has been rather to discover what the art of a Florentine of the Quattrocento means for us today and for our own art....⁴

On the far side of the facts painstakingly won by scholarship, Binyon wishes to retrieve for Botticelli something of the import—the ethical consistency and force—he had taken on in the artwriting of Ruskin and Pater. The title of Binyon’s first chapter gives a fair measure of his goals: he sought to establish “Botticelli’s Significance for Modern Art.” Within the cyclical cultural returns that are “always haunting our culture,” Binyon says, we must find “once again...the art of Botticelli significant for us, and in the vicissitudes of time resuming a kind of contemporary relation to ourselves.”⁵

That relation was to be critical, laying out the blueprint of a modernist practice that escaped from the “materialism” of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting, recently come to English shores in exhibitions organized by Roger Fry.⁶ For Binyon, Impressionism was “the cult of the empty mind”—a slave to scientific modernity.⁷ It needed to be replaced by an art that might retrieve the imaginative force and spiritual significance of qualities of rhythm and line. He had looked for an alternative model first in the arts of China and Japan, with their “formal expressiveness,” as David Peters Corbett puts it, and their “integration of art and life,” structured by the deep continuities of artistic tradition.⁸ Now he also looked to Botticelli for an exit from the mindless automatism and shallow time-scales of modernity, in which “the up-to-date is always out-of-date.”⁹ Binyon based his appeal on the expressive quality of Botticelli’s line, and on the complex historicity that had long been found in his art. “There are always,” Binyon wrote,

those who cry that to be honestly ourselves we should accept the tendencies of our time, that we are the products of our age and should reflect its current ideas and nothing more. The voice of experience rejects this shallowness. We are made up not only of what circumstances force upon us, but of wants, desires, rebellions, and it is these which are the most vital and motive parts of ourselves, it is these which have won all mankind’s victories.¹⁰

Botticelli’s unbelonging, then, the displacements performed by his “wants, desires, rebellions,” were to be made timely. “That sense of displacement or loss which seemed to Pater to haunt the figures of Botticelli’s paintings” reflected “something in the painter’s

⁴ Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli: An Essay in Pictorial Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1913), viii.

⁵ Binyon, *Art of Botticelli*, 17, 37.

⁶ *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, held at the Grafton Galleries, London, opened in November 1910; the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* followed in 1912.

⁷ Binyon, *Art of Botticelli*, 37.

⁸ Corbett, “Laurence Binyon,” 104. For his views, see especially Laurence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East* (London: Edward Arnold, 1908); and Laurence Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon* (London: John Murray, 1911).

⁹ Binyon, *Art of Botticelli*, 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

inner nature, which was never wholly at home in the world in which he found himself.”¹¹ It also figured his deep affinity with the spiritual homelessness of the early twentieth century, as well as the means by which that homelessness could be made habitable.

In order to give shape to these possibilities, Binyon imagines a painting the artist never actually made. He expresses his hopes for an integral future of art by means of a composite, fictional figure made up of survivals and returns:

Of all the array of divine and half-divine beings that people the Greek myths, it is Persephone whom he should have painted; the Maiden, rapt from the flowers of Sicily to dwell in the underworld, and returning to the earth and to the arms of her great Mother, with what joy in the almost forgotten sunlight warming and thrilling her, yet also with what strangeness of new knowledge, the difference bought by acquaintance with the world of pain and longing! Indeed it is with an aspect like what we imagine of Persephone’s return that Botticelli’s Venus comes to earth out of the seas. Maiden and innocent, yet with knowledge in her eyes of the things that suffer and are not satisfied, she comes, fugitive rather than triumphant, as to shelter. She is the spirit of Beauty, rapt from the flowers and sunny vales of Greece, who has dwelt through the Dark Ages away from lovely companionship, away from youth, and now with the reawakening of the world again emerges to Italian air, shyly and half-afraid. In the ‘Spring,’ too, she reappears, how grave and with what pensive eyes ! as if aware of the pain that comes with birth and of the sorrow that is entwined with human rapture. Not otherwise has Botticelli painted his Madonnas. ‘Reanimate Greek’ we may say of him; but by no means pagan, in the customary connotation of the word. Again, his Venus and his Flora in their garden-close, planted round with glowing orange-trees, tread grass that is all starred with the field flowers of Tuscany, painted with the delicate intimacy and love that medieval artists spent so lavishly on the coloured borders of their manuscripts. With all his kindling to that breath of beauty from the antique world, then so new and strange, Botticelli has no thought of abandoning his natural inheritance of the Middle Ages.¹²

Binyon personifies the strange, sad atmosphere of Botticelli’s paintings (their “mixed and uncertain condition” Pater had called it)¹³ in the figure of Persephone: the maiden reborn but shadowed by death; dying, yet promising a future of “breath” and “beauty.” In doing so, Binyon recapitulates the tradition we have been considering. Pater’s morbid dialectics, Ruskin’s famous phrase (“reanimate Greek”): in Binyon’s text, they take one more turn. Walter Crane’s Botticellian *Fate of Persephone* hovers somewhere in the background. It is as if Botticelli’s continuing relevance to art—to how it might cease being merely an “iridescent oil over the muddy waters of our civilization” and become a

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Walter Pater, “A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli,” *The Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 8 (August 1870): 157.

central force within twentieth-century social life¹⁴—depended on the resuscitation of this particular critical tradition. His second life within modernity requires a return to—a retrieval and remotivation of—a melancholic, late nineteenth-century mode.

* * *

From the vantage of the present, Binyon's Botticelli seems anomalous, part of a world already, in 1913, being left behind. It is thus curious to note with what frequency that line of writing about Botticelli was cited by mid-twentieth-century art historians, if only to be ridiculed as out of date. Indeed, it is as if such writing needed continually to be portrayed *as* outmoded, the phantom of its "Botticelli" continually erased. Nowhere does this prove more true than among Warburg's followers. The process can be found, for instance, in Edgar Wind's brief essay on Botticelli's so-called "*Derelitta*" (fig. 136). "The painting called 'La Derelitta,'" Wind writes,

first ascribed to Massacio, then to Botticelli, then to that amiable fiction *L'Amico di Sandro*, and recently regarded as part of a series of cassone panels executed by the young Filippino Lippi after designs of Botticelli, is a source of discomfort not only to the connoisseur, but also to the student of iconography. The subject is as enigmatic as the authorship. A young woman, shut out from a palace, sits "derelict" on the doorsteps and cries. This is the sort of pathetic story which would appeal to a nineteenth century novelist because it arouses reflections as to what happened before and what will happen after the scene represented. In the mind of a fifteenth century painter it would be, to say the least, an anachronism. At that time, the themes of pictures were not meant to occasion more or less fanciful flights of the imagination. They formed part of a precise set of ideas. An attempt to reconstruct the correct connotations of the picture called "La Derelitta" may help to dispel the false sentiment which the false title, most certainly of fairly recent invention, suggests.¹⁵

Implicit here is an appeal to the visual character of the picture itself, countermanding a set of verbal associations—the "anachronism" of "pathetic story" and "false title"—that conceal it. Wind promises revelation to his readers. He connects the panel (following an intuition of Horne's) to a series of marriage-chest panels depicting scenes from the Book of Esther, undercutting whatever singularity the painting had been invested with. Then he deals the effeminate sentimentality of the late nineteenth century a final blow. For its "fanciful flights" have obscured, he says, the fact that we are looking at a man:

¹⁴ Laurence Binyon, "Two Ways of Art," *Saturday Review* 106 (15 August 1908), 200. Quoted in Corbett, "Laurence Binyon," 101.

¹⁵ Edgar Wind, "The Subject of Botticelli's 'La Derelitta,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (1940-1941): 114.

In the Book of Esther, one—and only one—person is described as sitting on the doorsteps of the palace. That is Mordecai....

I shall leave it for the reader to decide whether the garments lying on the steps in the picture are those which Esther sent out for Mordecai or those which he tore off when he dressed himself in sack cloth. In either case I feel certain that, however shocking the suggesting must appear at first, the figure clothed in sack cloth and crying on the steps of the palace is Mordecai—the same Mordecai whom we see triumphant in the corresponding panel. He has the same dark and curly hair, and students looking closely at a good reproduction may even discover that the lamenting figure has the same dark beard.¹⁶

Wind's moment of pointing is indeed "shocking" in its quiet force, his build-up to the figure's "beard" seductive and urbane. Without quibbling with this interpretation, I wish simply to note the way it defines itself against that "feminine" Botticelli of "false sentiment" so dear to the unscholarly, undisciplined members of the artist's nineteenth-century cult. For ultimately, the essay seeks not to anchor interpretation to the potential ambiguities of visual detail (*is* it securely a beard which peaks out from behind the figure's forearm?), but rather to secure it within a totalizing and indeed diagrammatic reconstruction of iconography and theme (**fig. 137**). "Mordecai covered with sack cloth and rending his heart as he has rent his garments" is but one term of Wind's real object:¹⁷ the total, linguistically determined (and, indeed, patriarchal) cultural motif. Within the structure of the marriage-chests' refined management of sexuality, the painting must assume its given place. Visuality collapses into textuality. The pictorial specificity of "*La Derelitta*"—its status as a unique, involving configuration—is left behind.

Or look to Ernst Gombrich's 1945 essay on the mythological paintings of Botticelli, principally the *Primavera*.¹⁸ "Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle" retraces the terrain of Warburg's doctoral thesis, furthering that work's displacement of attention from the pictures themselves to a posited humanist "circle"—a circle, that is, made up of carefully selected and interpreted texts. Like Wind, Gombrich appeals at first to the visual, likening his own process of interpretation to some chemical restoration of the painting's surface, which might clear away "the residue of [conflicting] interpretations, both sound and fanciful, [that] has come to cover the picture like a thick coloured varnish."¹⁹ "A brief analysis of its main ingredients," he says, "is necessary for its removal."²⁰ The agent of removal will be Gombrich's own acid skepticism. Decrying first the "suggestive" but "somewhat inaccurate" power of Vasari's description, and then the "spell which Poliziano's *Giostra* has exercised over...interpreters," he turns to "the legend of the 'Bella Simonetta.'"²¹ He

¹⁶ Wind, "La Derelitta," 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁸ E. H. Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8 (1945): 7-60; reprinted in E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 31-81, from which I quote.

¹⁹ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

writes of the “long-cherished romance which linked Botticelli with the Swinburnian beauty who died of consumption at the age of 23 and was mourned by Lorenzo and his circle in verses of Petrarchan hyperbole.”²² Even after Horne’s monograph, this creature of “romantic constructions” must continue to be put at arm’s length.²³

Most of all, however, students must beware of Botticelli’s pictures themselves. “[C]ertain qualities in Botticelli’s art,” Gombrich says, “easily lend [themselves] to the most contradictory interpretations”: “Botticelli’s physiognomies” have a “haunting character” that “not only permits but demands interpretations.”²⁴ And yet, these demands have ensured past interpretations’ downfall:

These puzzling and wistful faces give us no rest until we have built around them a story which seems to account for their enigmatic expression. The literature on the ‘Primavera’ provides ample illustration of this interesting psychological fact. The gestures and expressions of its figures have given rise to the most varied explanations and the conviction with which these contradictory readings were put forward never deterred the next writer from putting his own musings on paper with similar assurance. The fifteen texts assembled in a note show that the whole gamut of emotions from sadness to joy has been read into the pretty features of Venus. Some pondered over her ‘melancholy’, others detected in her face the typical symptoms of pregnancy or of consumption, while others described her as ‘smiling’ or even ‘laughing’. The gesture of her right hand was similarly made to express anything from the ‘welcoming of Spring’ to ‘beating time to the dance of the Graces’, from an expression of ‘awe’ to that paradox of a gesture ‘half blessing, half defensive’. Small wonder, therefore, that the picture lent itself to such diverse interpretations as ‘The awakening of Simonetta in Elysium’, ‘The Marriage of Menippean Satire with Mercury’, ‘The mystery of Womanhood’, ‘The return of the Medicean Spring’, or ‘Two Gods conspiring to arrange the meeting of lovers’.²⁵

The note to which Gombrich refers offers a rogues’ gallery of “contradictory readings,” often highly emotional in tone. The apparently conflicting descriptions of Pater, Binyon, and a host of others are juxtaposed in order to disprove the interpretive power of describing pictures at all. Gombrich dismisses these readings as “physiognomic,” warning darkly in an adjacent footnote (which also praises Wind’s “discovery of the true subject of the ‘Derelitta’” and dismisses Tyrwhitt, “who launched the Simonetta legend”) of the “lengths the ‘physiognomic’ interpretation of works of art can go... even when they are controlled by a sensitivity as keen as Binyon’s.”²⁶ Description, based on an actual experience of viewing the painting and ungrounded in textually determined method, can never lead to good.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 38.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 203-4, n. 27.

Instead, Gombrich says, we must turn to “the ‘iconological’ approach of historical scholarship” in order to ground the inherent ambiguities of seeing, and the concomitant unruliness of writing about art. The passage stands as one of iconology’s most intriguing defenses:

The conclusion to be drawn from these efforts is that the aesthetic approach of the impressionable critic is no safer guide than the romantic vision of the imaginative historian in fathoming the secret of Botticelli’s art. In the best of cases expression in pictorial art remains an ambiguous language. Its elements need a context to acquire a well-defined meaning. In the case of Botticelli this general difficulty is greatly increased.... The beautiful pages which have been written by masters of prose on the emotional import of Botticelli’s figures remain purely subjective unless the context in which these figures stand can be established by outside means. The ‘iconological’ approach of historical scholarship has often come in for attack on the part of those who want to defend the autonomy of artistic sensibility. These attacks overlook the fact that it is only in the interaction of theme and treatment, of situation and gesture, that expression springs to life.²⁷

Gombrich’s justifications of method are noble. “Expression,” however, is hardly what “springs to life” in the pages that follow. Instead, Gombrich inundates the reader with texts—Ficino, Apuleius, Pico, Lucian, Lucretius, Plato; with “cultured visitors” to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s Castello;²⁸ with ghostly “author[s]” of “hypothetical programme[s].”²⁹ Pleasure—“artistic enjoyment”—takes place in “twists of exegetic ingenuity,” and an “aura of potential application and still-to-be-discovered meaning” ratified by exceptionally learned interpreters.³⁰ It does not happen in experience of the paintings as pictures. Exiled from the Garden of Love, Botticelli is resettled in Ficino’s Platonic Academy.

I do not wish to portray Gombrich as a villain. His essay is full of innovative interpretive moves, and its central claim—essentially it goes back to Burckhardt and Pater—that in Botticelli’s paintings we see “the opening up, to secular art, of emotional spheres which had hitherto been the preserve of religious worship” still seems to me profound.³¹ And the essay is of historical interest in its own right, assuming a place of importance within the history of iconology, within the mid-twentieth-century fashion for the Neo-Platonic readings of Renaissance artworks, and (most interestingly) within the development of Gombrich’s investigations of pictorial ambiguity, issuing in what he came to call a “psychology of pictorial representation.”³² What intrigues me, however, is

²⁷ Ibid., 39.

²⁸ Ibid., 60.

²⁹ Ibid., 46.

³⁰ Ibid., 60.

³¹ Ibid., 64.

³² On the fading of the Neo-Platonic fashion in art history, see Horst Bredekamp, “Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus,” *Kritisch Berichte* 14, no. 4 (1986): 39-48. For Gombrich’s development, see E. H. Gombrich *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960); and E. H. Gombrich, “Aims and Limits of Iconology,” *Symbolic Images*, 1-25.

the extent to which such methodological developments seem to depend on a refusal of Venus's visual charms. One cannot help but be struck by the lengths to which Gombrich goes to de-eroticize the painting that is his object. For him, it has little to do with love: "Venus 'means' *Humanitas*," he says.³³ "Visual symbols have a way of asserting their own presence," Gombrich writes somewhat mournfully, and his text seems to retrospectively fear that postlapsarian moment in which interpretation lost control, and "exegetic meaning...began to pale."³⁴ These phrases come from Gombrich's description of a later period of Renaissance learning—a decadent moment, perhaps—which came in the *Primavera*'s wake. Yet they point to Gombrich's anxieties, as well. "The image gained ascendancy over the text, Venus conquered her commentators."³⁵ Cool as Gombrich's tone may seem, one can still make out this commentator's worried wish not to submit to the allure of the picture, or risk the erotic humiliation it still, in 1945, so enticingly promised.

Fifteen years later, Erwin Panofsky dedicated several pages of *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* to his own Neo-Platonic interpretation of the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus*. There, he disagrees with detail after detail of Gombrich's essay, offering a different reconstruction of the world of learning in which the paintings took part.³⁶ Eschewing Gombrich's wish to disperse the force of these works into a vast body of learned mythological subjects, Panofsky sets the two great Uffizi pictures apart. They both concern Venus, Panofsky reminds us, and he seeks to gloss their special subjects in terms of the goddess's particular humanist associations: *The Birth of Venus* as "*The Advent of the Celestial Venus*," the *Primavera* as "*The Realm of the Natural Venus*." Iconology as usual, it would seem. From these premises, however, Panofsky reaches an unexpected conclusion:

We do not need Ficino's letter *Prospera in fato* (though its testimony is particularly welcome in our context) to learn that Mercury—the *Ἑρμῆς λόγιος* of the Greeks—signifies Reason. Discursive reason, now, differs from the contemplative mind in that it has no direct access to the sphere of the celestial Venus; but it differs from imagination and sensory perception in that it is not involved in, or is even hostile to, the activities of the natural Venus. Reason is, by definition, both beneath the supra-rational and above the infra-rational. Thus Botticelli's Mercury [**fig. 138**] would seem to symbolize the limitations as well as the possibilities of what human reason—"mere human reason," as a Neo-Platonic would say—can do. Impervious to the fiery arrow of Cupid and turning his back not only upon the dance of the Graces, the fragrant gifts of Spring and the caresses of Zephyr and Flora but even upon Venus herself, he can dispel but not transcend the mist which befalls the "lower faculties" of the soul: he may be said

³³ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ In Gombrich's 1970 "A Postscript as a Preface," accompanying the republication of the essay, puts a brave face on this: "Erwin Panofsky...was very critical of many details but not only accepted a Neo-Platonic reading but acknowledged the relevance of the main text from Ficino, on which my interpretation had been pivoted." Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 31.

to express the dignity, but also the loneliness of the one psychological power which is excluded from the precincts of *Amor divinus* and excludes itself from those of *Amor humanus*.³⁷

Perhaps we are to detect in this description of Mercury a gentle satire of Gombrich's position: Gombrich had placed Ficino at the center of own reading of Botticelli, and certainly looked away from Venus. Whether or not we do, however, it seems unmistakable, within the passage's affective logic, that his treatment of Mercury as the plaintive figure of Reason touches the ever-reasonable Panofsky, too. The air of melancholy—the atmosphere of sadness and moody sensuality—which had for so long been attached to Botticelli has been transposed into the wistful “dignity” and “loneliness” of discursive reason. Withdrawn to the sidelines, Panofsky seems to say, Reason—Scholarship—must keep the mind trained upwards, his technology poking at clouds, his gaze averted from his own awkward, ephebic body, his back turned on Venus and her realm. In Panofsky's description we find one last figure of Botticellian belatedness: the late-born work of scholarship itself. Minerva's owl takes flight; the writing of art history begins. Adepts of discursive reason, “we” must acknowledge as well as enforce our own exile, too self-conscious, now, too responsible to ever forget that the painting belongs to the past: a fossil of humanism, not a world of human love.

³⁷ Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960), 200.

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