

RETORTING RUSKIN'S AESTHETICS: WALTER PATER'S ROMANTICISM IN "SEBASTIAN VAN STORCK"

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Walter Pater's silence regarding his indebtedness to John Ruskin has been an intriguing issue for Victorian scholars, an issue Kenneth Daley summarizes well in *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin*. Daley tells how Marcel Proust was puzzled by Pater's failure to acknowledge the influence of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens* (1882) on his "Notre-Dame D'Amiens" essay (1894).¹ Pater's opposition to his elder aesthete can be inferred by his systematic endorsement of the Renaissance spirit in *The Renaissance*, a spirit Ruskin condemns in *The Stones of Venice* as immoral. Critics have discussed Pater's rivalry with Ruskin, especially in relation to their different views on art.² Daley recommends Harold Bloom's essay as one of the most insightful studies of the literary relationship between the two writers (11).

A striking aspect of Bloom's analysis is his discussion of the contrasting interpretations of Wordsworth's poetry by Ruskin and Pater. Bloom argues that while Ruskin dismissed Wordsworth's "spots of time" as "dubious triumphs of the pathetic fallacy" (Bloom 169), Pater embraced the poet's idea to establish his own aesthetic theory of "epiphanies," most notably in *Marius the Epicurean*. Bloom's study sheds light on Pater's silence towards Ruskin by framing it within their different inheritances of Romantic poetics. Furthermore, Daley sees "Pater's theory of romantic art as a response to Ruskin's more ambivalent theory that regards the modern period as a perversion of the romantic ideal," and concludes that "their theories reflect that tension between the transcendental and the empirical that is an important legacy of romantic philosophy" (Daley 2, 7). Both Bloom and Daley make valuable contributions by highlighting how the two aesthetes' different approaches to Romanticism shaped their divergent aesthetics.

Building upon these studies, I seek to further investigate the relationship between Ruskin and Pater by focussing on a specific expression of Wordsworth: his use of the word "repose."³ I argue that their implicit aesthetic dispute over this term is at the heart of Pater's creation of "Sebastian van Storck," a literary work that reflects the Romantic spirit Pater articulates in