

*Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy* by Kate Hext. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013. 220 pp. ISBN 978-0-7486-4625-8. £70; \$120.00.

Kate Hext's monograph on Walter Pater is an extremely ambitious project, not quite *The History of the World in Ten ½ Chapters*, but Pater and Individualism in ten chapters. Hext tackles empiricism, subjectivity, Hegelianism, Darwinism, aestheticism, impressionism, time, the body, the self, and the moment within less than 200 pages. Carried along by an engaging and profound love of Pater and his writings, Hext takes the reader through Pater's involvement with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy – both insular and continental – through one school after another, in her creation of the portrait of a “post-philosophical writer” who refuses to be schooled. An eclectic Pater who picks and chooses, yet remains uncommitted and undogmatic till the very last, is the figure who emerges from the book: a great, complex modern individual who is a product of society, but remains the romantic outsider. Paterians familiar with Pater's serpentine prose style, which proposes, and subsequently withdraws or modifies, may recognize the intensely Paterian nature of Hext's portrait: Pater is, or may appear to be, and yet he is not. He is the great master of the *non-finito* – the man who became known for his “Conclusion” but who was himself unlikely to conclude anything. He is his own Marius, the eponymous hero of Pater's only completed novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), travelling through schools of philosophy, yet subscribing to none. Hext's Pater is quite uniquely his own, an argument persuasively carried through the entire book, as we sip a little of his extraordinarily large learning within the fields of pre-Romantic and Romantic philosophical thought.

In her book, Hext is thus taking a clear stance against the convention in Pater studies, first voiced coherently in Anthony Ward's *Walter Pater: The Idea in Nature* (1966), of seeing the writer as one of the great Hegelians who emerged from under the wings of Benjamin Jowett in the 1860s. More recently, William Shuter, Kit Andrews, Giles Whiteley, and Andrew Eastham have continued this tradition, but Hext argues that first of all Pater is far removed from the Hegelian social self, and secondly that the Hegelian system of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is profoundly unPaterian and not to be found in his writings. Within the German schools of thought, Pater is more aligned with Immanuel Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds, the world as matter and as perceived through the senses. In chapter 6, Hext stresses the revolutionary position given to the individual in Kant's universe: the sentient subject is the pivot around which everything revolves, and nineteenth-century subjectivity is the exploration of the full implications of this revolution.