

Imaginary Portraits by Walter Pater, edited by Lene Østermark-Johansen. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014. 321 pp. ISBN 978-1-907322-55-6. £9.99; \$15.99.

I first came across Walter Pater's imaginary portraits while in graduate school, when J. Hillis Miller assigned "Apollo in Picardy" in my first seminar with him. Miller is the author of what I still consider the best brief introduction to Pater's work, "Walter Pater: A Partial Portrait" (1976), and he spent the better part of at least two class sessions working out a compelling reading of the relationship between this story and, of all things, Elizabeth Gaskell's short novel *Cranford*. I had never heard of Pater before, and upon my first reading of "Apollo in Picardy," I had something like the experience the fictional Prior Saint-Jean does in the story when he first encounters the sleeping Apollyon, an itinerant shepherd who seems to be the Greek god Apollo in disguise: a sense of discovery at once illuminating and disturbing. "Could that be diabolical, and really spotted with evil, which was so spotless to the eye?" he asks himself. Pater wrote with such restraint and in such "spotless" prose about murder, madness, and a violently interrupted sexual awakening. The story was at once deeply erudite and so very strange – I was immediately hooked, and ended up making the seminar paper I wrote on this story the final chapter of my dissertation.

Starting with a discovery story seems appropriate for a review of this new collection of *Imaginary Portraits*, since Pater so often used his invented hybrid genre to tell of characters who come unexpectedly upon some new book or work of art that brings about a revolution in their lives. Prior Saint-Jean discovers the classical world through the influence of Apollyon, much as the residents of Auxerre discover it through the brief residence of the god Dionysus in their town ("Denys L'Auxerrois"). Duke Carl (in "Duke Carl of Rosenmold") discovers his aesthetic and national vocation when he comes upon an old book of poetry dedicated to Apollo. The stories themselves are often framed by similar discoveries. The narrator of "Apollo in Picardy" comes upon Prior Saint-Jean's story in a manuscript taken from a monastic library during the French Revolution; the fragmentary portrait "An English Poet," unpublished in Pater's lifetime, begins with the discovery of an old Roman coin; the narrator of "Denys L'Auxerrois" is put on the trail of his own story by a find he makes in a bric-à-brac shop.

The experience of discovery that Pater makes central to these tales may be traced to the Roman practice of *sortes Virgilianae* (Virgilian lots), an ancient form of bibliomancy in which readers would light at random upon a passage of the *Aeneid* and see in it a prophetic boon or bane. Saint Augustine turned the practice to his particular autobiographical ends in the *Confessions*,