

TEXTUAL TIME ZONES AND FIGURES OF RELIEF  
IN *MARIUS THE EPICUREAN*

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Is Walter Pater the Marianne Moore of nineteenth-century English literature? Her poetry features small scraps of language from here and there, high and low, framed within quotation marks. These quoted fragments are set off, ostentatiously displayed, and yet they are also “absorbed” within her poems, in order to show that any kind of written discourse can be taken up into poetic form, even “business documents and / school-books,” a phrase she quotes from Tolstoy (Moore, “Poetry” 17-18; Tolstoy 84).

Or is Pater a Victorian Augustine? Into the autobiographical books of the *Confessions*, Augustine weaves hundreds of quotations from the Bible. As the so-called “New Testament” often models its stories on or even quotes from the “Old,” and thus, through a long historical process of intertextualization the anthological Christian Bible forms itself in part through its typological ordering – just so, Augustine makes it clear that the story of his own individual spiritual development falls under the aegis of this master text.

Or does Pater form his intertextual practice on the model of Montaigne’s essays? As a matter of style, Montaigne’s musings turn on large, chunky blocks of quoted material. A block-quoted passage both illustrates and anchors his own train of thought – yet also allows it to spin off in a new direction. The block quote, in other words, provides Montaigne with a pivot point for the mobility of his evolving thought, and shows that thinking seeks both within and outside the self, through an interchange between introspection and reading. In the “Suspended Judgment” chapter of *Gaston de Latour*, Pater’s Montaigne speaks of himself as a “traveller” against the “background” of doubt (104). Here Pater figures Montaigne’s thinking as travelling, and he figures doubt as the “ground” or surface over which his thinking moves (106, “concession to others ... of a certain great possibility” (113). And Pater finds a way to end *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) with a similar gambit that is specific to his late nineteenth-century historicism.

My quick comparison of Moore with Augustine is meant to suggest an