Rethinking the Cultural Divide: Walter Pater, Wilkie Collins, and the Legacies of Wordsworthian Aesthetics

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In discussions of the division between high art and mass culture, few notions have secured more consensus than that concerning the basis upon which we generally make such distinctions in the first place. In an argument that has proved exceedingly influential for our theoretical understanding of the so-called cultural divide, Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1979) described as the defining characteristic of elite aesthetics "a refusal of 'impure' taste and of *aisthesis* (sensation), the simple, primitive form of pleasure reduced to a pleasure of the senses."[1] On this (widely shared) account, the refusal of sensation represents not merely a site but the primary source of the cultural divide, which has both its origin and its strongest basis in the rupture between sensuous and reflective aesthetic experience.

If the distinction between elite and popular culture is now commonly regarded as having its theoretical basis in the refusal of sensation, critics are just as united in dating this refusal to the period of European Romanticism. In the widely cited "Postscript" to *Distinction*, Bourdieu finds the theoretical grounding for "high" literary aesthetics in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), particularly in Kant's insistence that the basis for the subjective universal validity of aesthetic experience resides not in bodily sense but rather in the higher cognitive

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1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1979; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 486.

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faculties.[2] Kant is thereby understood as having introduced a gulf between embodied aesthetic experience and the formal character of the reflective judgment—between "the taste of reflection" and "the taste of sense"—that would become the basis for all subsequent formulations of elite literary aesthetics.[3] Of course, Bourdieu is fully capable of observing how often "high" as well as popular literary genres do in fact make *aisthesis* integral to aesthetic response. While qualifying the notion that the distinction of high culture rests exclusively in the refusal of sensation, however, Bourdieu still views the aesthetics of disinterest as a normative model for how the products of high culture displace the sensuous content of art for the rarefied pleasures of its form. To the degree that the "high" literary aesthetics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seeks to promote a reflective response that undermines (if not altogether precludes) the pleasures of sense, Bourdieu concludes, it serves an essentially ideological function as an instrument of social distinction.

On the basis of Bourdieu's thesis, we should not be surprised that of all writers associated with this divide in English poetry, William Wordsworth is generally agreed to be its first major architect. Wordsworth's role as a consolidator of high culture is most frequently associated with the poet's notorious tirade, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), against a print public sphere that reduced aesthetic experience to mere sensation, providing violent stimuli at the seeming expense of the reader's powers of thought and judgment. Readers of Wordsworth's Preface are familiar with that poet's invective against the "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" that he believed characterized his age. So, too, we are well acquainted with the poet's diatribe against the popular literary genres—"frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse"—by which that stimulation was allegedly provided and provoked.[4] If these popular genres are primarily associated with the body

2. For influential accounts that, like Bourdieu's, date the emergence of the cultural divide to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), and Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

3. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu describes the process of "aesthetic distancing," or the process by which the bourgeois aesthete introduces "a gap—the distance of his distant distinction—vis-à-vis 'first degree' perception, by displacing the interest from the 'content' . . . to the form" (34). Bourdieu finds one source for this account in Kant's distinction between "empirical" and "pure" aesthetic judgment. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), 59–62.

4. William Wordsworth, "Preface," in William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge, 1963), 249. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Lyrical Ballads*.

and particularly with sensory experience, such accounts in Wordsworth's poetry of being "laid asleep / In body" are often read as efforts on the poet's part to impose a distinction between high art and mass culture.[5]

For over a decade now, Wordsworth's powerful antipathy toward sensationalist literary aesthetics has occasioned an impressive body of scholarship on the poet's role in the formation of the cultural divide, most of it explicitly beholden to Bourdieu's critique. Literary historians have persuasively established the indebtedness of Wordsworth's high Romantic utterance to popular literary forms such as the gothic novel, whose power is at once appropriated and marginalized by the poet. Overwhelmingly, these studies have focused on Wordsworth's "uneasy collusion with the nascent mass culture of the late 1790s," characterized most succinctly by Karen Swann as the poet's ambition to elicit a "meditated" rather than "stimulated" response from his reader—an aim, in other words, to supplant or "correct" the sensational effects of the gothic by appealing to an act of readerly reflection.[6] Such work has shed valuable light on Romanticism's often tacitly parasitical relationship to these popular genres. Just as significantly for our theoretical approach to the cultural divide, these sociological analyses of Wordsworth's poetry have tended to confirm Bourdieu's understanding of high culture as based in large part upon the vilification, suppression, or outright refusal of popular literary forms and pleasures.

Following the example of these critics, I wish to reopen the case of Wordsworth's role in the formation of the nineteenth-century cultural divide. Whereas existing approaches to this topic have generally emphasized Wordsworth's status as an author of this divide, however, I want to show how the poet might complicate our understanding of a distinction most often attributed to him. More broadly, then, I want to begin to rethink the protocol for approaching the "sociological" problem of the cultural divide through a consideration of its "aesthetic" basis. There is no doubt that *Distinction* represents one of the

5. Wordsworth, "Lines, Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," in *Lyrical Ballads*, 114.

6. Karen Swann, "Suffering and Sensation in 'The Ruined Cottage,'" *PMLA* 106 (1991): 84. See also Swann, "Public Transport: Adventuring on Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain," *ELH* 55 (1988): 811–34. For further characterizations of "high" Romanticism as the effort to refine, contain, and appropriate the gothic, see Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 111–18; E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 133–55; and Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 90–126.

most persuasive efforts to expose the discourse of aesthetics (and of aesthetic experience in particular) to rigorous sociological critique. Without diminishing the force of Bourdieu's insight, however, we might ask what it means to make aesthetic experience the basis for distinguishing between high art and popular culture in the first place. More pointedly, we can ask whether such endeavors might as plausibly reveal a critical role for aesthetic experience that Bourdieu's own study, and more recent applications of his work to the field of British Romanticism, neglect to take into account.[7]

Bourdieu is entirely right, of course, to point to the distinction between "the taste of reflection" and "the taste of sense" as crucial to any understanding of the cultural divide. As carried out under Bourdieu's authority, however, the sociological critique of the aesthetic often only goes so far as to conceive aesthetic experience as either the instrument or the symptom of this divide. If such studies have usefully foregrounded the importance of aesthetic experience as the expression (or more actively, the cause) of a schism between elite and popular cultures, that is, they have also neglected to explore the reverse possibility of an aesthetic experience that might contest or complicate the distinction between "high" and popular literary genres. Indeed, one might ask whether the conception of "high" literary aesthetics as entailing a refusal of *aisthesis* has not itself served as a justification for the critical refusal to see literature as engaging in any meaningful way with the problem of the cultural divide.[8] In contrast to Bourdieu, then, I want to show how attending to the status of sensation in Words-

7. In an alternative tradition of Marxist aesthetic theory, critics have offered a powerful account of the radical political potential of high aesthetic form, often reading Kant's third *Critique* as a crucial elaboration of art's critical character. To date, however, these studies have not extended to a reconsideration of the basis for the distinction between elite and popular culture. For the classic Marxist defense of "high" aesthetics, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). For further engagements with Adornian critical aesthetics, many of which take Kant's third *Critique* as a benchmark for discussion, see Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno; or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 1990); Anthony Cascardi, *Consequences of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Robert Kaufman, "Red Kant: The Persistence of the Third *Critique* in Jameson and Adorno," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): 682–724.

8. Compare Bourdieu's characterization of bourgeois aesthetics as a "refusal of 'impure' taste" with what he describes as his own "deliberate refusal" to engage the topic of the cultural divide from the perspective of literary aesthetics (*Distinction*, 485). For one provocative effort to revise accepted accounts of the relationship of popular and privileged art-viewing practices in nineteenth-century Britain, see Judith Stoddart, "Pleasures Incarnate: Aesthetic Sentiment in the Nineteenth-Century Work of Art," in *Aesthetic Subjects*, ed. Pamela R. Matthews and David McWhirter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 70–98.

worth's conception of aesthetic experience—and in the work of some nineteenth-century authors who can be read as responding to it—might complicate our sense of an antagonism between the modes of sensuous and reflective aesthetic response, as well as between the genres to which these responses are thought to correspond. Thus I mean to assert a dialectical function for aesthetic experience on both sides of this divide—one that disrupts as fully as it supports existing distinctions between privileged and popular literary forms.

The effort among nineteenth-century authors to restore *aisthesis* to aesthetic experience has lately been described as signaling an evolution in the history of the cultural divide and a movement toward its explicit critique.[9] In the following essay, however, I locate a source for this conception not in the critique of the cultural divide, but rather in the work of one of its principal founders. It's no secret that Wordsworth frequently expresses a wish to supplement or elevate sensation through the exertion of the reflective judgment. Far from having divorced sensation from aesthetic response, however, or reflection from its basis in sensation, Wordsworth's conception of poetry as a "science of feelings" reserved a vital role for the senses in aesthetic experience, even while committing readerly response more thoroughly than ever before to the rigorous demands of reflection.[10] From this effort to accommodate bodily sensation within reflective mental activity, I will argue, Wordsworth inaugurates a dialectical conception of aesthetic response that survives in writings among Victorian authors on both sides of the cultural divide. Indeed, despite the poet's frequent efforts to reassert a distinction between bodily affection and "higher" feeling, Wordsworth's poetry blurs even as it attempts to enforce this distinction, thus paving the way for the further erosion of this antinomy in Victorian literary culture.

Focusing on attempts among a few prominent Victorian authors to negotiate this distinction between the forms of popular and elite readerly enjoyment, I want to call attention to an ambivalence that marks the cultural divide in the period of its emergence and that is most plainly visible in literature that engages, often critically, with a broadly Wordsworthian conception of aesthetic experience. My central exhibits include an unlikely pair of nineteenth-century authors, Walter Pater

9. See, for instance, Allison Pease's account of a "transition in the modern period from aesthetics in the tradition of Shaftesbury and Kant, which privileged cognitive response, to a modernist, twentieth-century aesthetic, which incorporated and demanded, even as it regulated, an embodied response" (*Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* [Cambridge University Press, 2000], xv).

10. William Wordsworth, "Note to 'The Thorn'" (1800), in *Lyrical Ballads*, 289.

and Wilkie Collins, and the genres—of aesthetic criticism and sensation fiction, respectively—associated with them. While most obviously emblematic of a cultural divide just beginning to come into full view in midcentury, Pater and Collins have in common one important trait beyond their contemporaneity: both authors strenuously endeavored to make *aisthesis* newly central to aesthetic experience. Nor is it only in hindsight that we may see aestheticism and sensationalism as "torn halves of an integral whole," to invoke a famous phrase of Theodor Adorno's;[11] in fact, Victorian readers clearly recognized a kinship between these genres and were often acutely conscious of the difficulties that this similarity presented for any straightforward distinction between "high" and "low" literary pleasures. While revisiting the sources of the cultural divide, then, the work of Pater and Collins frequently reveals a counterhistory that shows this distinction as having been from its inception ambivalent, open to contesting readings and applications from within as well as between the categories of "high" and popular literature.

My argument begins with Wordsworth's formulation, in *The Prelude* (1805), of an issue that will structure debates on the cultural divide for the century to come, namely, the question of whether sense-experience is principally conceived as a stimulus to reflection or as an end in itself. In sections following, I discuss Pater's aesthetic criticism and Collins's sensation novel as important engagements with this central concern of Wordsworthian aesthetics. Beginning with the chronologically later example of Pater as the more obviously accepted author of Wordsworthian descent, I attempt to show how the work of both writers reflects, in very different ways, an indeterminate relationship between the forms of privileged and popular aesthetic experience. That Pater's aesthetic criticism finds its inspiration in Romantic literature is hardly revelatory, especially in view of Pater's lifelong interest in Wordsworth's poetry. Yet far from seeing Wordsworth as a predominantly reflective poet, Pater identifies in Wordsworth's poetry a quality of sensuousness unrecuperable within his own theory of embodied aesthetic experience. In addition to serving as an ambivalent model for Pater, I will argue, the poet's account of how moments of vivid sense-experience assume significance and value furnishes a background for Collins's ironic revisitation of this theme in a central episode of his

11. I refer to Adorno's remark (in a letter to Walter Benjamin dated March 18, 1936, and repeated elsewhere in his work) that high art and mass culture represent "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up." See Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 130.

sensation novel *The Moonstone* (1868). In what, after Harold Bloom, we might call *The Moonstone*'s "strong" reading of Wordsworthian aesthetics, Collins asserts an embodied basis for aesthetic experience that is at once modeled after the "high" literary aesthetics of the previous generation and sharply critical of it.

WORDSWORTH, *AISTHESIS*, AND AESTHETIC VALUE

Wordsworth's status as a poet of reflection has been a well-established topic of criticism at least since Arthur Henry Hallam's famous characterization of the poet in his 1831 essay.[12] Far from dismissing experiences of powerful sensation, however, Wordsworth's most characteristic work attests to the centrality of sensation even within the most purely reflective acts of mind. It is true that Wordsworth repeatedly warns against enslaving the mind to the bodily senses and, in a related critique, condemns popular literary genres such as the gothic for "blunt[ing] the discriminating powers of the mind" through an exclusive appeal to sensation (*Lyrical Ballads*, 249). Accustomed as we are to thinking of Wordsworth as a primarily reflective poet, though, it is easy to forget that the poet explicitly conceived his work as an experiment in embodied aesthetic response—a project, as he wrote in the "Preface," in fitting to poetry "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" so as to impart pleasure to the reader (*Lyrical Ballads*, 241). Wordsworth's aesthetics therefore represents an attempt to realize, in the comparatively abstract medium of print, the material, sensuous basis of poetic language. Such statements obviously belie the familiar portrait of Wordsworth as a poet of reflection *tout court*.[13]

In fact, critics of Wordsworth's role in the formation of the cultural divide have often observed how the poet intends for his work to produce an embodied response in the reader. These critics have generally interpreted the most patently sensational elements of Wordsworth's poetry in the context of an effort to appropriate a preexisting audience for the gothic while distancing his own work from the violent

12. Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," *Writings of Arthur Hallam*, ed. T. H. Vail Motter (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1943).

13. On Wordsworth's complicated relationship to the eighteenth-century poetries of sensibility and sentiment, see Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford University Press, 1996); and for an account richly attentive to the materialist dimensions of Wordsworthian poetics, see Alan Richardson, "A Beating Mind: Wordsworth's Poetics and the 'Science of the Feelings,'" in his *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 66–92.

sensationalism of these popular fictions.[14] Inasmuch as this criticism neglects to consider the interdependence of "high" and "low" as anything but the occulted content of Romantic poetry, however, these critical approaches have tended to reify the very distinctions that they intend to get beyond. Not only is Wordsworth's poetry almost ritually invoked as the source of a cultural divide, but the relationship between the modes of aesthetic response corresponding to that divide—between "stimulation" and "meditation," in Swann's terms—is discussed only in the context of Wordsworth's appropriation of these popular literary genres.

Given how often Wordsworth denigrates the sensationalism of popular literary forms, and how frequently he describes elevated moments of sublime mood as marking a watershed in his own mental development, we might be surprised to observe how persistently the poet testifies to the value of experiences that seem to have nothing at all to do with reflection. As even a cursory glance at *The Prelude* will show, Wordsworth frequently attests to the vital importance of such experiences in early childhood, celebrating their power to stimulate and cultivate the mind's powers even without a conscious act of reflection on the child's part. Thematizing the relative value of sensuous and reflective experience, *The Prelude* raises in an epistemological register questions that will later emerge as central to the theoretical determination of the cultural divide. In an important passage of book 1, for instance, Wordsworth claims to have enjoyed moments of vivid sensory experience that, despite their unreflective character, remained important to his mental development. "Often, in those fits of vulgar joy," Wordsworth writes,

> . . . I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield. The earth
> And common face of Nature spake to me
> Rememberable things . . .
> . . . yet not vain,
> Nor profitless, if haply they impressed
> Collateral objects and appearances,
> Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep
> Until maturer seasons called them forth
> To impregnate and to elevate the mind.
> —And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
> Wearied itself out of the memory,

14. In her reading of "The Ruined Cottage," for instance, Swann draws attention to Wordsworth's "insistence . . . on the near disembodiment of the tale's human forms," associating the poet's stance with his "assertion of the poem's difference from the literature of sensation" ("Suffering and Sensation," 89).

> The scenes which were a witness of that joy
> Remained, in their substantial lineaments
> Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
> Were visible, a daily sight.[15]

Here as throughout *The Prelude*, such episodes of "vulgar joy" (a phrase Wordsworth twice repeats in the passage) are closely associated with moments of vivid sensory experience and the power that such moments hold over the human mind.[16] By virtue of being strongly felt, these experiences leave impressions in the mind even after the actual content of the experience is forgotten. These impressions survive as scenes "depicted on the brain" whose "substantial lineaments" are, as the phrase suggests, at once formal and substantive. While a common reading of the cultural divide is to see "high" literary aesthetics as entailing a displacement from the sensuous content of art to its form, Wordsworth here admits of no such distinction; on the contrary, he pays tribute to sensory experience as a form-giving medium in the mind. Nor at this stage in the child's development is this process of formalization conceived as the result of any purposeful or reflective activity on the child's part. Rather, as Wordsworth tells us, the senses have "impressed" upon the child experiences, which in turn will eventually imbue his mind with more powerful meaning.

In lines following, the poet explains how these experiences might at last be credited with elevating the mind:

> And thus
> By the impressive discipline of fear,
> By pleasure and repeated happiness,
> So frequently repeated, and by force
> Of obscure feelings representative
> Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,
> So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
> Though yet the day was distant, did at length
> Become habitually dear, and all
> Their hues and forms were by invisible links
> Allied to the affections.
> (1.630–40)

Wordsworth's claim, of course, is that these nonreflective experiences are nevertheless capable of laying the foundations for the eventual elevation of "vulgar joy." Here as elsewhere in his poetry, Wordsworth

15. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1:609–30. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by book and line number.

16. See, for instance, the final book of the poem, where Wordsworth warns against enslaving the mind to "the laws of vulgar sense" (13.140).

reveals his deep indebtedness to the associationist philosophy of the eighteenth century, particularly to its account of how general ideas develop out of the elementary data of sensation.[17] In Wordsworth's account of this process, scenes once immediately and powerfully experienced come to be associated with meanings more profound and permanent. Wordsworth thereby foregrounds the process by which those scenes once visible to the eye are ineffably dematerialized, to complete the process of their maturation as "invisible links" to the affections. To this extent, we might see in this early passage an anticipation of those elevated moods when Wordsworth claims, in the penultimate book of *The Prelude*, to have "exercised / Upon the vulgar forms of present things . . . / A higher power" (12.360–63).

Wordsworth's claim that the poet is capable of formally abstracting from and exerting control over the immediacy of "vulgar" sense-experience has often been read as the signature proposition of Wordsworthian aesthetics and a crucial expression of its ideological character. Over the past two decades, historicist critics have read the openly associationist trajectory of Wordsworth's most characteristic poetry—the passage from particular sensations to general ideas—as a figure for the ideological work of aesthetic culture.[18] More recently, David Lloyd and Paul Thomas have argued that Wordsworth's poetic epistemology at once reproduces and abets the civilizing process by abstracting individuals out of their sensuous concrete identity, converting diverse impressions into an orderly unity.[19] And in a similar vein, historians of the cultural divide have shown how Wordsworth, distancing the contemplative intent of his poetic tales from their sensational content, maintains a distinction between his own work and the genres of sensationalist literature. By imposing a reflective distance from the

17. For the classic interpretation of Wordsworth's indebtedness to the associationist philosophy and especially to the work of David Hartley, see Arthur Beatty, *William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations*, 3rd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950).

18. See, for instance, two landmark historicist essays on "Tintern Abbey," both of which take the passage from sensations to ideas in that poem as a figure for the ideological character of Wordsworth's thought: Marjorie Levinson, "Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey,'" in *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14–57; John Barrell, "The Uses of Dorothy: 'The Language of the Sense' in 'Tintern Abbey,'" in *Poetry, Language, and Politics* (Manchester University Press, 1988), 37–67.

19. "The narrative by which poetry transforms the disintegrative effect of the multiplying shocks of modern experience into a principled phenomenology of perception in turn replicates the universal history of man's progression from 'savage torpor' to true culture" (David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* [New York: Routledge, 1998], 78).

disorderly welter of sensory experience, these critics argue, Wordsworth attests to the poet's capacity to formally contain or purge such experiences of "vulgar joy" through an act of reflection.

As a closer look at this passage will show, however, Wordsworth takes pains to establish that the elevation of these joys is not exclusively the work of the reflective judgment. Indeed, such moments of "vulgar joy" are transfigured not in the first instance through reflection but rather through the process of their own repetition. Through pointed verbal repetitions—"By pleasure and repeated happiness, / So frequently repeated"—Wordsworth enacts as well as describes the process by which "feeling comes in aid / Of feeling," as the poet memorably asserts in a later book of *The Prelude* (11.326–27). As Wordsworth claims throughout the poetry of this period, perhaps most famously in "Tintern Abbey," such primary experiences of powerful feeling can be revisited, renewed in memory and imagination, and made the basis of more profound conditions of mind. Wordsworth's passage therefore extols the virtue of experiences that both are their own reward and, by virtue of their replication, make possible higher forms of experience altogether.[20] These are unreflective experiences not purified of their vulgar content through reflection, but rather by being repeated, as John Keats would later write, "in a finer tone."[21] For all their formal character, that is, these "forms . . . [a]llied to the affections" retain throughout the process of their maturation a close relationship to the immediacy of the senses.

By considering the value of vivid sensory experiences, Wordsworth's passage takes up an issue that is closely associated in this period with the distinction between elite and popular literary pleasures, and that, in more explicit calculations of the relationship between *aisthesis* and aesthetic value, will emerge as increasingly central to the determination of the cultural divide. In fact, *The Prelude* is far from the only poem of Wordsworth's to address the process by which experiences of vivid sensation become, in the poet's economistic phrase, "habitually dear." Wordsworth's account of this process (originally included in the two-part autobiographical poem of 1799) anticipates a still more famous reckoning of the value of sensation in the celebrated daffodils

20. In her discussion of this passage, Anne-Lise François captures well this process of gradual transmutation: "The most unreflective moments remain open to the influence of intervening time, and are capable of being conflated with other moments, permeated finally with a meaning not (solely) their own" ("To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 7 [1994]: 156).

21. Keats to Benjamin Bailey, November 22, 1817, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1:185.

poem of 1804 (first published 1807), where the speaker's recollection of his experience is again described in explicitly fiduciary terms: "I gaz'd—and gaz'd—but little thought / What wealth the show to me had brought."[22] This well-known couplet of Wordsworth's lyric constructs in its first line a clear opposition between simple sense-perception (gazing) and advanced cognitive activity (thinking), only to complicate that opposition in the speaker's subsequent attempt to calculate the worth of that experience, or, "What wealth the show to me *had brought*" (my emphasis). Is this a reward tendered at the moment of perception, or only at a later moment of retrospection and blissful solitude? While surely the fullest experience of this reward is reserved for moments of "pensive mood" (line 14), Wordsworth suggests a complementary relationship between the initial act of gazing upon the sight and the recreation of this image in memory, and he intimates that both experiences are expressions of the "wealth" that he feels himself to have gained.[23] As in the passage from the first book of *The Prelude*, then, Wordsworth gestures toward an understanding of such experiences of primary *aisthesis* as valuable—"beauteous and majestic," as the poet writes—"in themselves."

By paying tribute to these moments of vivid sensation both for their intrinsic value and for the elevated moods that they will later enable, Wordsworth artfully evades the question of whether these experiences are valuable in themselves or only to the extent that they serve to enable reflection. Such moments of "vulgar joy" thus bear a close resemblance to experiences that Wordsworth, earlier in the same book of *The Prelude*, calls "Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense / Which seem, in their simplicity, to own / An intellectual charm" (1.578–80). While clearly those episodes of "vulgar joy" assume their greatest worth only in relation to the more profound meanings that they will eventually assume, the agency of their transfiguration is not substantially different than that of their inception. Such experiences can be considered ends in themselves inasmuch as they are also agents of their own eventual transformation.

22. William Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 208.

23. As in the passage quoted above from *The Prelude*, Wordsworth explicitly dissociates the mental activity described in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" from that of purposeful reflection. In an 1815 note to the poem, Wordsworth describes its subject as "rather an elementary feeling and simple impression . . . upon the imaginative faculty than an *exertion* of it" and further describes the experience as being similar in nature to that of the *ocular spectrum*, the phenomenon of optical hallucination discussed at length in Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia* (*Poems, in Two Volumes*, 419).

PATER'S WORDSWORTH AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF FEELING

Far from privileging reflection at the expense of sensation, then, Wordsworth attests at once to the necessity of raising lofty thoughts out of "vulgar" sense and to the continued importance of sensation as furnishing both the occasion for and the substance of reflection. Wordsworth's strong faith in the persistence of primary feelings within reflective habits of mind reminds us that it was precisely as a poet of feeling that Wordsworth was marked out for posterity by his Victorian readers. Consider, for instance, Matthew Arnold's well-known lament in the "Memorial Verses," composed on the occasion of the poet's death in 1850:

> Others will teach us how to dare,
> And against fear our breasts to steel;
> Others will teach us how to bear;
> But who, ah who, will make us feel?[24]

Throughout the "Memorial Verses," Arnold conceives the poet's "healing power" (line 63) as closely tied to his ability to "make us feel." Accordingly, he describes Wordsworth's capacity to elicit feeling as a last line of resistance to an anaesthetized social condition: "He found us when the age had bound / Our souls in its benumbing round: / He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears" (lines 45–47). As in Arnold's famous 1879 essay on the poet, however, Wordsworth's capacity to "make us feel" appears here not primarily as evidence of the poet's close connection to the life of the senses, but rather of his standing as a moral instructor.[25] Moreover, while identifying Wordsworth as the century's foremost poet of feeling, Arnold's testimony is marked by considerable ambiguity as to what it means for the poet to "make us feel" in the first place. In that same poem, after all, Arnold pointedly distinguishes Wordsworth's "healing power" from Byron's strong but undisciplined capacity to stimulate the reader, though he leaves open the question of how precisely to distinguish between these modes of feeling. Of course, "feeling" is a word with an exceedingly wide range of meanings in Wordsworth's poetry; like "sense," a term that William Empson long ago revealed to be among the most complex in Wordsworth's poetic vocabulary, it is used variously to signify forms of somatic, emotional, imaginative, or moral response, often indeed

24. Matthew Arnold, "Memorial Verses," in *Poems*, ed. Kenneth Allott (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), 195. Hereafter cited by line number in the text.

25. Matthew Arnold, "Wordsworth," in *Selected Prose*, ed. P. J. Keating (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 366–85.

at once.[26] In what then did Wordsworthian feeling consist to his nineteenth-century readers? Was Wordsworth capable of being read as a poet of sensation in anything more than a figurative sense?

In fact, Wordsworth was hailed as a vitally sensuous poet by one of the foremost Victorian advocates of sensation in aesthetic experience. For a later effort to renew Wordsworth's commitment to the sensuous foundations of aesthetic response, we need only consult Walter Pater's reading of the poet in work that established Pater's reputation as the first and most celebrated "aesthetic" critic. If there is one nineteenth-century figure who most influentially asserted the centrality of sensation to aesthetic experience, of course, it is Pater. "All art has a sensuous element," Pater proclaimed in the *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), a book widely regarded to be the founding text of British aestheticism.[27] Throughout that seminal text, Pater rings countless changes on this theme. In the preface to *The Renaissance,* Pater put the determination of (and differentiation between) varied pleasures of sense—the act of knowing "one's own impression as it really is"—at the center of the critic's task: "The aesthetic critic," he writes, "regards all the objects with which he has to do . . . as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind" (*Renaissance*, xix–xx). So central is the sensuous dimension of aesthetic response to Pater's criticism that one scholar has characterized the overarching project of Paterian aestheticism as the effort to effect "the social transformation of Victorian life through an enlarged and emboldened sensuousness."[28] Far from being the suppressed element of aesthetic experience, that is, *aisthesis* emerges in Pater's work as its defining feature.

Beyond merely declaring a sympathy with the poet's occasional praise for "the mighty world / Of eye and ear" ("Tintern Abbey," *Lyrical Ballads*, 116), Pater found Wordsworth's poetry to be a model for his own critical endeavor. Of course, Pater's indebtedness to British Romanticism is considerable and unmistakable and has been a familiar topic of criticism at least since Graham Hough's study of late

26. William Empson, "Sense in *The Prelude*," in *The Structure of Complex Words* (New York: New Directions, 1951), 289–305.

27. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 167. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Renaissance*. See also Pater's assertion from the opening paragraph of "The School of Giorgione": "art addresses not pure sense, still less the pure intellect, but the 'imaginative reason' through the senses" (*Renaissance*, 102).

28. Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlotttesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 76. For a suggestive reading of the rhetoric of literary "impression" in Pater and others, see Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

nineteenth-century literary culture, *The Last Romantics* (1947).[29] After all, Pater's first published essay, "Coleridge's Writings," appeared in print just two years before he wrote the paragraphs eventually incorporated into the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance.* Though that inaugural essay is notable for containing Pater's first insistence that "art is the triumph of the senses and the emotions," in the same essay Pater criticizes the excessively abstract character of Coleridge's thought, arguing that "[he] withdraws us too far from what we can see, hear, and feel."[30] Only a few years later, however, Pater would find the perfection of sensuousness in Coleridge's fellow poet Wordsworth, whom he praises in his famous essay of 1874, later revised and published along with the Coleridge essay in *Appreciations* (1889): "in Wordsworth, such power of seeing life, such perception of a soul, in inanimate things, came of an exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear, and was, in its essence, a kind of sensuousness. At least, it is only in a temperament exceptionally susceptible on the sensuous side, that this sense of the expressiveness of outward things comes to be so large a part of life."[31] Pater's praise of Wordsworth's sensuousness is most readily understood in the context of his critique of aesthetic theorists who define "beauty in the abstract" (*Renaissance,* xix). Whereas Coleridge most often writes with this philosophical end in mind, Wordsworth's poetry retains a more immediate relationship to the senses and so is more ultimately congenial to the task of the aesthetic critic. Because Wordsworth appears to regard experiences of vivid sensation not only as an anticipation of more elevated thoughts to come but also as vitally significant in themselves, his poetry serves as a model for Pater's attempt to reassert the importance of embodied aesthetic experience. Thus Pater purports to share with Wordsworth not only a preoccupation with the "inward world of thought and feeling" (*Renaissance,* 187), but—in seeming contrast to Arnold's appreciation of the poet—with the specifically physical modes of "feeling" made possible through aesthetic experience.[32]

29. Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (1947; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961). For more recent accounts of Pater's reading of Wordsworth, see J. P. Ward, "An Anxiety of No Influence: Water Pater on William Wordsworth," in *Pater in the 1990s,* ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro, NC: ELT, 1991), 63–75; and Kenneth Daley, *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 30–50.

30. Pater, "Coleridge's Writings," *Westminster Review* 85 (1866): 124.

31. Pater, "Wordsworth," in his *Appreciations* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 48. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as "Wordsworth."

32. Stephen Gill has observed a similar discrepancy in the estimation of Wordsworth by Arnold and Pater (*Wordsworth and the Victorians* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1998], 213–14).

Given the obvious importance of *aisthesis* to Pater's aesthetic criticism, however, it is all the more surprising to observe the tendency in Pater's writings to problematize, and indeed at times to denigrate, the sensuous character of Wordsworth's poetry. Pater's ambivalent response to Wordsworth's sensuousness first becomes evident in the context of his discussion of an internal division in the poet's oeuvre. Reflecting in his essay on the Romantic distinction between fancy and imagination, Pater speculated that this hierarchy of lower and higher orders of imaginative power might be applied to the estimation of Wordsworth's poetry as well, namely, in the manner in which that poetry combines elements of the beautiful and profound with something of the "tedious and prosaic" ("Wordsworth," 40). It is on the basis of this duality in Wordsworth's work that Pater sees the poet as the ideal pedagogical case for the aspiring aesthetic critic, for whom the reading of Wordsworth would constitute "an excellent sort of training" toward the delineation of and distinction between different orders of aesthetic experience (41).[33]

I think that no reader of Wordsworth will have difficulty relating to Pater's discovery of something "tedious and prosaic" in the poet's work. Yet Pater locates a further source for what he calls Wordsworth's "absolute duality between higher and lower moods" in a conflict or discrepancy between "higher and lower degrees of intensity" in the poet's work ("Wordsworth," 41)—degrees that Pater most clearly identifies with moments of reflection and of sensation, respectively. In a later passage of the essay, Pater returns to the analysis of this duality in the poet's work, describing it as an alternation between "moments of profound, imaginative power" and "periods of intense susceptibility, in which he appeared to himself as but the passive recipient of external influences" (55–56). Though ostensibly praising Wordsworth's sensuousness, Pater is compelled to acknowledge that in giving itself to these "periods of intense susceptibility" Wordsworth's poetry is estranged from the source of the highest literary value. Accordingly, Wordsworth's "exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear" is rejected in favor of those moments of "sudden passage from lowly thoughts and places to the majestic forms of philosophical imagination" (57).[34] Far from being read as a poet of reflection, in

33. In a similar vein, see Pater's famous paragraph on Wordsworth in the preface to *The Renaissance*, xxi–xxii.

34. Denis Donoghue makes a similar point, observing that "Pater is willing to emphasize Wordsworth's sensitivity to the world of sight and sound, but as the essay goes on he makes even more of those passages in which that world seems to dissolve, displaced by the poet's imagination in its most daring autonomy" (*Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* [New York: Knopf, 1995], 238). See also F. C. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1986), 180–81.

other words, Wordsworth is seen as a poet of excessive sensibility even by such a forceful defender of embodied aesthetic experience as Pater. Echoing the logic of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, Pater conceives the aesthetic as at once the perfection and the sublime cancellation of sensation and sees Wordsworth's most explicitly sensuous writing as unrecuperable within this scheme.[35]

Though purporting to find in Wordsworth's poetry the model for a sensuous aesthetic experience, Pater's tendency to find an "absolute duality" in this poetry has the effect of placing Wordsworth's susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear at a remove from the sources of "true aesthetic value" in his work ("Wordsworth," 40). Surprisingly, then, the nineteenth-century apostle of literary sensuousness finds in Wordsworth's commitment to sensuous detail something inimical to "true" poetry. In a further irony, Pater associates Wordsworth with an excessive attachment to the senses that Wordsworth himself associates with those popular literary forms from which he seeks to distance his work. Though Pater posits the aesthetic as the site of reconciliation between matter-body and form-soul and sees the best moments of Wordsworth's verse as effecting such a reconciliation, his analysis tends as much to aggravate as to diminish a conflict between the sensuous and reflective dimensions of aesthetic experience. While seeking to overcome a distinction between "the taste of reflection" and "the taste of sense," Pater just as clearly reinforces these antagonisms. For Pater, that is, Wordsworthian "feeling" is but an ambivalent property of aesthetic experience, at once a stimulus and an obstacle to the work of reflection.

THE PULSATION PHILOSOPHY

Thus seeking to get beyond the conflict between sensation and reflection and reinscribing that conflict in his own work, Pater's aesthetic criticism supplies an important precedent for the phenomenon to which Andreas Huyssen drew our attention some time ago, namely, the tendency of the cultural divide to survive, often indeed to be reinforced by, opposition from within high culture itself.[36] To his contemporary reader, however, Pater's emphasis on the centrality of sensation to aesthetic experience could be read as a significant threat to the orderly distinctions of the cultural divide; indeed, the critic's

35. Pater taught Hegel's *Aesthetics* at Oxford and cites or alludes to his work throughout *The Renaissance*, particularly in the essay on Johann Winckelmann; see, e.g., 141, 180.

36. Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," in *After the Great Divide*, 16–43.

advocacy of embodied aesthetic experience was on occasion described as a scandalous blurring of the lines between elite and popular readerly activity. Pater's critique of Wordsworthian sensuousness is therefore ironic not only because of the prominent role of *aisthesis* in his aesthetic criticism, but also because Pater's own work was liable to the charge of appealing to the same forms of embodied aesthetic experience as did the popular literary genres of the same period.

Of course, no popular genre seemed more fully to promote embodied aesthetic experience as an end in itself than the wildly successful sensation novels of the 1860s. Similarly insisting on the centrality of sensation to aesthetic experience, that genre must be seen as a dialectical twin to Pater's aesthetic criticism, a popular counterpart to Pater's vision of refined aesthetic experience. In fact, the kinship of Paterian aestheticism with the sensation novel did not go unnoticed by early readers of Pater's work. In 1873, a reviewer for the *Examiner* writing under the pseudonym "Z" dissected Pater's advocacy of a garden-variety hedonism whose ultimate inspiration was the skeptical philosophy of the Greeks, but whose more immediate kinship, as the reviewer perceived, was with the sensation novel: "Get your self-contained pleasure, cried Aristippus; get your 'pulsation,' cries Mr. Pater. Yet, but we surely need a criterion of 'pulsations.' The housemaid who revels in the sensation novels of the 'London Journal' holds with Mr. Pater—only less consciously—that it is the pulsations that make life worth the living; and the question is whether the pulsation philosophy is not as fully realised by the housemaid with her Miss Braddon, as by Mr. Pater with his Winckelmann."[37] Espousing the pursuit of sensation as the foremost end of the aesthetic critic, Pater—that "apostle of the artistic apotheosis of lotus-eating"—reduces aesthetic enjoyment to a mere "pulsation" or vivid sensory experience unmoored from any foundation in moral thought and conduct.[38] In addition to designating Pater as a decadent aesthete (an increasingly common characterization of British aestheticists), the author of this review just as clearly identifies Pater's "pulsation philosophy" with middle-class—and conspicuously feminized—forms of popular aesthetic enjoyment: not

37. "Z," "Modern Cyrenaicism," *Examiner* (April 12, 1873), in *Walter Pater, The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. M. Seiler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 75–76. "Z" is responding to Pater's insistence, in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, that the aim of life is to get "as many pulsations as possible" into our brief interval of existence (198). In *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater describes the Cyrenaic philosophy in terms strikingly similar to those of the "Conclusion" (*Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, ed. Ian Small [Oxford University Press, 1986], 83–90).

38. "Z," "Modern Cyrenaicism," 76.

only are the readers of these novels female, but Mary Elizabeth Braddon is identified as the representative producer of such fictions. In calling attention to a secret kinship between these "high" and "low" literary pleasures, then, the review also illustrates the gendered terms in which the cultural divide has long been asserted.[39] By equating Pater's aestheticism with sensation fiction, "Z" ironically effaces the distinctions that one might make between these genres, conflating the critic's elevated sensuousness with a voguish, violent sensationalism, and Pater's rarefied model of aesthetic enjoyment with the mass-cultural aesthetics of shock.

Though not all of Pater's reviewers went so far as did "Z" in identifying the logic of aesthetic criticism with the founding impulse of the sensation novel, early responses to *The Renaissance* persistently reflected the difficulty of drawing any firm distinctions between a sensationalized popular culture and a sensualized cultural elite. On the one hand, critics certainly did not shrink from attacking Pater's lapidary prose style and ethos of refined aesthetic sensitivity as clear signs of cultural elitism; to J. A. Symonds, for instance, Pater appeared a man "indifferent to common tastes and sympathies, careless of maintaining at any cost a vital connection with the universal instincts of humanity."[40] While readers thus routinely criticized Pater's snobbery and social withdrawal, however, this was felt to be a tendency not opposed to but rather derived from his emphasis upon the pursuit of intensified sensuous experience. In an 1874 essay published in the *Quarterly Review*, W. J. Courthope characterized Pater as one among a number of "critics who reject the natural standards of common sense in favor of private perceptions derived from books."[41] As Courthope asserts, this critical school of thought—a school whose origins in England he provocatively attributes to Wordsworth—confounds the dictates of right reason by "plac[ing] the value and true nature of external objects in the states of feeling that these produce in the individual."[42] According to his critics, then, Pater's philosophy of aesthetic impression was grounded in a doctrine of refined hedonism that put the

39. See Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," in *After the Great Divide*, 44–62.

40. J. A. Symonds, *Academy* (March 15, 1873), in Seiler, *Walter Pater*, 57. In a November 1873 review for *Blackwood's*, Mrs. Oliphant responded in similar terms, characterizing Pater's book as one of the more offensive "productions of a class removed from ordinary mankind by that ultra-culture and academical contemplation of the world as a place chiefly occupied by other beings equally cultured and refined" (unsigned review, in Seiler, *Walter Pater*, 86).

41. W. J. Courthope, "Modern Culture," *Quarterly Review* 137 (1874): 415.

42. Ibid., 409.

author at once in clear opposition to "the vulgar doctrine that 'life is all beer and skittles'" and implicitly in league with it.[43] Pater's tendency to make criticism, in Courthope's words, "a matter of feeling and not judgment" could consequently be described as both opposed and strangely akin to the sensation novel, which was equally liable to be read as an effort to reduce all of human experience to the pursuit of mere "pulsation."[44]

Indeed, the idea that sensation fiction elicits a "self-contained pleasure" inimical to readerly reflection has proved resilient in the years since "Z"'s review. In many recent critical accounts of the sensation novel, cultural historians have described this genre as defined by a tendency to substitute an extreme somatic response for any sort of reflection on the reader's part. As one recent critic has argued, Wilkie Collins's immensely popular fictions of the 1860s made possible a model of aesthetic experience that bypassed reflection altogether, encouraging instead "a direct physiological response that was prior to, and perhaps in many cases more powerful than, self-conscious thought."[45] If Pater's aestheticism is characterized both by the pursuit of exquisite sensations and by their rigorous "discrimination and analysis" (*Renaissance*, xx), the principal characteristic of sensation fiction is taken to be the reduction of mental experience to its basis in sheer physiological response. Thus both past and present readers of the sensation novel see the genre as promoting modes of aesthetic experience that are exclusively, aggressively "sensational."

Ironically, however, this understanding of sensation fiction as demanding a pre- or even nonreflective aesthetic response misses or simply ignores how often readers have seen this genre as reflecting on its own sensational devices. Take, for instance, the well-known scene of Anne Catherick's appearance in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859–60), often regarded as the first novel in the sensation genre. In her 1862 review essay on the sensation novel phenomenon, Margaret Oliphant read this episode as the first and most effective "sensation-scene" of the novel. As Oliphant shrewdly perceived, Collins's depiction of Walter Hartright's encounter with the Woman in White—"every drop of blood

43. "Z," "Modern Cyrenaicism," 75.

44. Courthope, "Modern Culture," 409.

45. Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 324. For accounts of the reception of sensation fiction among its contemporary readers, see Walter C. Phillips, *Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists* (1919; reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), and Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 142–65.

in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me"—epitomizes the way in which the sensation genre itself aims, as Collins put it in his preface to the novel, to "lay a strong hold on the attention of readers."[46]

What makes this episode, for Oliphant, "a sensation-scene of the most delicate and skilful kind" is its purposeful externalization of the novel's own sensationalism.[47] For Collins's episode is not solely meant to present a sensational scene to the reader; just as significantly, Oliphant observes, it asks to be recognized as such. That countless readers since Oliphant have cited this episode as uniquely representative of the sensation genre testifies to Collins's success in this endeavor. While epitomizing the sensationalism of the genre, such episodes just as clearly draw attention to the formal qualities of their own sensationalism. Collins's interest in making the sensational content of his fiction a topic of readerly reflection must in this respect be seen as an effort, like Pater's, to isolate and dilate upon those transitory moments of sensory experience. Without explicitly inviting the "discrimination and analysis" of such sensational effects, in other words, Collins's metacommentary upon his own artistic practice does clearly raise questions in terms similar to those of Pater's aesthetic criticism: "What is this song or picture . . . to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me?" (*Renaissance*, xix–xx). This similarity between the modes of popular and refined aesthetic experience suggests a basis for "Z" 's perception of an underlying kinship between Pater's work and that of the sensation novel. For such ambiguities trouble the very distinctions that this reviewer would wish to preserve. If the architects of elite aesthetic experience frequently drew power and interest from the immediacy of physical sensation, it is equally the case that popular literary authors such as Collins define the sensational effects of their art in terms (Wordsworthian in theory if not in practice) that suggest a mutually supportive relationship between the forms of sensuous and reflective aesthetic response.

In comparing aestheticism's "pulsation philosophy" to the literary sensationalism of the 1860s, my aim is not solely to demonstrate, with

46. Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20, 4.

47. Margaret Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," *Blackwood's Magazine* 91 (1862), in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 118. Numerous critics have since drawn attention to the metafictional quality of this scene: see, e.g., Walter M. Kendrick, "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*," in *Wilkie Collins*, ed. Lyn Pykett (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 76–77; D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 152–53; Winter, *Mesmerized*, 322–26.

"Z," Pater's unwitting complicity in the popular literary aesthetics of his age. Rather, by attending to how elite as well as popular literary authors negotiate the fluid distinctions between simple *aisthesis* and refined response, either policing or exploiting the borders between them, I wish to demonstrate how fully both Pater and Collins engage with the "high" literary aesthetics of the previous generation. Of course, it would be foolish to regard Wordsworth—a friend of Wilkie's father William, the painter and (from 1814) member of the Royal Academy[48]—as an explicit inspiration to Collins in the way that he obviously is for Pater; in fact, Collins's writing on the subject of the cultural divide often suggests a wish to maintain the very distinctions that Wordsworth, from the other side of this divide, helps to instantiate. Though discussion of sensationalism's contexts generally extends no further than to its sources in gothic fiction, however, Collins's sensation fiction reflects a powerful engagement with the "high" literary aesthetics of the late eighteenth century as with the popular genres of the same period. Indeed, while exploiting far more thoroughly than Wordsworth and Pater the notion of sensation as an end in itself, Collins's strong critique of elite literary aesthetics draws to a surprising extent on a Wordsworthian conception of aesthetic response.

To find in Collins's work an approach to the topic of aesthetic experience that exploits the increasingly porous borders between bodily affection and "higher" feeling, we need look no further than to a central episode of another of Collins's sensation novels, *The Moonstone*. The episode to which I refer concerns the physiological experiment conducted by the physician's assistant Ezra Jennings on the protagonist Franklin Blake. Having learned that Blake stole the diamond known as the Moonstone on the evening that he was unwittingly drugged, Jennings proposes a "bold experiment" designed to replicate the conditions that gave rise to Blake's unconscious act, thereby producing a repetition of the result.[49] As the main purpose of Jennings's experiment is a success and Blake's innocence is established as a result, the episode marks the first significant resolution to the plot of detection; thus, as Collins asserts in the preface, the experi-

48. On William Collins's friendship with Wordsworth, see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A. With selections from his Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (London, 1848), 1:131–32. Wilkie later presented a copy of the *Memoirs* (his first book) to the elder poet, acknowledged by Wordsworth in a letter to Collins dated December 10, 1848; see *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth,* 2nd Wilkie Collins, vol. 7, part 4, *The Later Years, 1840–1853*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 882.

49. Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. Anthea Trodd (Oxford University Press, 1982), 431. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Moonstone*.

ment "occupies a prominent place in the closing scenes" of the novel (*Moonstone*, xxxi).

It is on account of this episode's obvious prominence in *The Moonstone* that critics have often identified Jennings's character as not only the most profound figure of detection in the novel, but as a figure for its author as well.[50] While identifying Jennings as an authorial figure within the novel, though, critics have been unaccountably silent on the subject of how Jennings's most significant act, the staging of his physiological experiment, might reflect upon Collins's own authorial practice. For if Jennings occupies the position of author within the novel, his experiment must surely be understood as a figure for the author's own experiment in aesthetic response. Like the celebrated sensation-scene of *The Woman in White*, Jennings's experiment is meant to be uniquely representative of the sensation genre itself, offering a figure for how such narrative experiments affect their readers. Numbering among those effects which, as Collins boasted in a letter of 1868, "have never been tried in fiction before," the scene of Jennings's experiment is therefore "experimental" in more than one sense.[51]

While readily suggesting Collins's familiarity with Romantic accounts of opium use, Jennings's experiment is clearly about as far removed from the stuff of Wordsworth's poetry as is the mixed-race, opium-addicted Jennings from the rusticated, teetotaling poet himself.[52] Though Jennings pointedly refers Blake to Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), even this "far-famed" Romantic text is regarded less as an imaginative work than as a medical primer for the experience that Blake is to undergo (*Moonstone*, 434).[53]

50. See, e.g., Ross C. Murfin, "The Art of Representation: Collins' *The Moonstone* and Dickens' Example," *ELH* 49 (1982): 653–72; and Tamar Heller, "Blank Spaces: Ideological Tensions and the Detective Work of *The Moonstone*," in Pykett, *Wilkie Collins*, 244–70.

51. Collins to Harper Brothers, January 30, 1868, in *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, ed. William Bates and William M. Clarke, 2 vols. (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 2:305. Winter has similarly characterized the sensation novel as an experiment in physiological response (*Mesmerized*, 326–27).

52. Thus while Heller identifies Jennings as a "Romantic" figure within Collins's text, for instance, she sees him as more closely associated with De Quincey and Keats, among other second-generation Romantic authors ("Blank Spaces," 262).

53. Beyond Jennings's citation of De Quincey, there are clear biographical sources for Collins's connection of opium use with Romantic authors. Collins's father was a close friend of Coleridge in Wilkie's youth and a witness to the poet's frequent struggles with opium addiction; years afterward, the novelist vividly recalled conversations between Coleridge and his parents on the subject of the poet's opium use. For background, see Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins*, 1:134–35, and Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: The Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 24.

Indeed, Collins professed no great love for Wordsworth's poetry. Writing in 1850, the year of Wordsworth's death, Collins acknowledged that he considered him "greater . . . as a moral teacher than as a poet"—an opinion suggesting how far the novelist, like Hallam, regarded Wordsworth as a poet of reflection rather than of sensation.[54] Not surprisingly, Collins's tastes in poetry were most deeply congenial to the sensationalism of the genre he popularized. "[The poet] *must* please me," Collins asserts in a letter of 1884, "he *must* excite some feeling in me, at a first reading, or I will have nothing to do with him."[55] While in that same letter Collins strikes an Arnoldian note in demanding a poetry that "makes me feel," he just as clearly rejects Arnold's claim to find this resource of feeling in Wordsworth, the poet who repeatedly distances his own work from a "vulgar" sensationalism by insisting upon the reader's cooperating exertion of thought.[56]

There is little to surprise us in Collins's preference for poetry that achieves immediate sensational effects, or in his antagonism toward a poet who is widely remembered for having decried such sensationalism. Given Collins's commitment to the immediacy of sensation in aesthetic experience, however, it is striking to observe how significantly the experimental scene of *The Moonstone* deviates from that logic. Indeed, Collins depicts this sensational episode in terms strongly suggestive of the "high" literary aesthetics that he otherwise rejects. While offering a figure for the sensational effects of the genre, for instance, Collins's episode just as conspicuously foregrounds the pivotal agency of reflection in re-eliciting a vivid sensory response.[57] Whereas Blake's first use of opium is experienced purely as an unconscious physiological response (though secretly administered by Dr. Candy), the experimental episode, plotted in both senses—that is, planned and narrated—by Jennings, is more consciously intended to serve the purposes of detection. Thus, Collins renders Blake's experience first as a criminal act (though unseen by the reader) and second as an act cal-

54. Collins to R. H. Dana, June 17, 1850, in *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 1:63.

55. Wilkie Collins to Paul Hamilton Hayre, July 16, 1884, in *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 2:469–70.

56. Ibid., 2:470. I allude in the latter part of this sentence to Wordsworth's famous insistence on the necessity of "the exertion of a cooperating *power* in the mind of the Reader" ("Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," in *Selected Prose*, ed. John O. Hayden [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988], 409).

57. So much, indeed, is consistent with the reputation of *The Moonstone* as being among the least openly "sensational" of Collins's sensation novels. See, for instance, Alison Milbank's assertion that *The Moonstone*, in contrast to Collins's earlier fictions of the 1860s, "eschews sensational effects" (*Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* [New York: St. Martin's, 1992], 54).

culated to prove his innocence—first as an unconscious, purely somatic experience, and then in the context of a controlled experiment in which Blake is himself a willful participant. Deriving its inspiration from the delirious ramblings of Dr. Candy, Jennings's experiment converts the circumstances of Blake's first opium experience into a useable and intelligible form and thus proves to be the basis for illuminating the mystery that has shrouded the theft of the Moonstone.

Depicting the scene of Jennings's experiment as an experiment in aesthetic response, Collins offers more than a figure for the sensation novelist's own task; his climactic episode also enacts a distinctly Wordsworthian logic. In a gesture that amounts to nothing so much as a travesty of Wordsworthian aesthetics, Collins at once revisits and parodies the poet's account of the process by which moments of vivid sensory experience assume significance and value. Describing the rationale for his experiment, Jennings refers Blake to William Carpenter's hypothesis that every sensory impression, once perceived, remains in the subconscious and is capable of being revived at a later date (*Moonstone*, 432–33). Yet Jennings's account of memories forgotten but not altogether absent from the mind recalls nothing so much as those scenes that, as Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude*, "Remained, in their substantial lineaments / Depicted on the brain." Like those "feelings . . . [o]f unremembered pleasure" that sustain and enrich the speaker in the intervals of his visits to Tintern Abbey (*Lyrical Ballads*, 114), these are experiences capable both of being renewed in the present and of eliciting more profound experiences in the future. If the reproduction of Blake's opium experience thus suggests the process by which vivid sensory experiences are revisited and redeemed, however, Collins's episode just as clearly subverts that logic. Indeed, his account of Blake's redoubled opium experience offers a sharp parody of Wordsworthian aesthetics, a "spot of time" accessed not as an occasion for sublime meditation but rather as sheer physiological affect.

I have so far sought to characterize *The Moonstone*'s experiment in aesthetic response as at once an ironic revisitation of Wordsworthian poetics and a pointed commentary on the inability of "high" literary aesthetics to contain the distinction between simple *aisthesis* and refined aesthetic feeling. In reading Jennings's experiment as a parody of the Wordsworthian process by which vivid sensory experiences are purged of their "vulgar" content, however, I do not mean to overlook how Collins's metafiction introduces a very different understanding of aesthetic repetition, namely, one suggested by the serialized form of the sensation novel itself. While on the one hand Jennings's experiment offers a wry parody of the Wordsworthian process by which

"feeling comes in aid / Of feeling," it draws as well on a strikingly serial logic, represented by Jennings's aim to revive Blake's physical and mental condition from exactly one year prior. Conceiving readerly sensation not principally, in Wordsworthian terms, as a prop to reflection, but rather as an end in itself, the experimental scene of *The Moonstone* thus revisits the formal logic of "high" literary aesthetics only to support the "gross and violent stimulants" that Wordsworth deplored.

Writing *The Moonstone* in 1868, Collins surely would have been aware of charges that the repetitive shocks of sensation fiction would damage the sensibilities and stultify the minds of its readers. If much of Wordsworth's poetry explains how experiences of powerful feeling are capable of being revisited and thereby enabling more profoundly tranquil habits of mind, readers such as Mrs. Oliphant very differently perceived the effects of serial fiction on the reading public. While otherwise praising Collins's fiction, Oliphant thus strongly cautioned against the malevolent effects of its serialization: "The violent stimulant of serial publication—of *weekly* publication, with its necessity for frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and startling incident—is the thing of all others most likely to develop the germ, and bring it to fuller and darker bearing."[58] As Oliphant insisted, the danger of serialization arises both from its incessant repetitiveness and from the tendency of the novelist to provide ever-greater stimulants to the story, which "naturally increases in excitement as it goes on."[59] It is in reference to this tendency of sensation fiction to provide increasing sources of shock that we might read the fact that Jennings, though frequently emphasizing the necessity of exactly reproducing the conditions of Blake's surroundings (*Moonstone*, 432, 434), confesses to having slightly increased the dose of opium administered to Blake (459). Conceived as an experiment in aesthetic response, that is, Jennings's experiment suggests both the Wordsworthian purification of vulgar experience and the popular aesthetics of shock.

Thus calling at once on a logic associated with "high" literary aesthetics and with mass-cultural reading practice, Collins parodically blurs the distinction between bodily affection and refined feeling while criticizing the privileged role of the latter within elite literary culture. In Jennings's assessment of the books approved for placement at Blake's bedside—a host of eighteenth-century texts calculated rather to sedate than to excite their readers—Collins reflects powerfully on the denigration of *aisthesis* in prevailing conceptions of aesthetic value. Jennings's assessment of these books, written in his journal

58. Mrs. Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," 115.
59. Ibid., 116.

in the moments before his experiment is tried, provides as well a fitting commentary on the relation of these "classical works" to the popular literary aesthetics of the present (*Moonstone*, 464). For while "(of course) immeasurably superior to anything produced in later times," Jennings remarks sardonically, these texts most importantly share "the one great merit of enchaining nobody's interest, and exciting nobody's brain" (464). As the authorial figure within *The Moonstone,* Jennings might well be expected to hail novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740–41) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771)—paradigmatic texts from the so-called age of sensibility—as works uniquely congenial to his own experiment in sensation; indeed, Wordsworth himself identified in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747–48) and other works of its kind a dangerous tendency to carry readerly sensation "beyond its proper bounds" (*Lyrical Ballads*, 264). Yet Jennings significantly reverses Wordsworth's judgment, emphasizing instead the sedative, even anesthetic properties of these aesthetic texts. The obvious effect of his appraisal is to draw a contrast between those "classical works" and texts with a still greater capacity to excite their readership. Collins's ironic eulogy for "the composing influence of Standard Literature" (*Moonstone*, 464) must therefore be seen not only as a way of distancing his work from that of his precursors, but of radically redefining what it means for literature to "make us feel."

CONCLUSION

I have shown how fully a few nineteenth-century authors on both sides of the cultural divide negotiate, with reference to the Romantic past, an increasingly unstable antinomy between bodily affection and refined response. Moreover, I have suggested that this dialectical antagonism between elite and popular literary aesthetics might be understood as the legacy of an equally dialectical conception of aesthetic experience that has its origins in British Romanticism. For while conceiving sensation as more properly a stimulus to reflection than an end in itself, Wordsworth's example blurs as fully as it enforces distinctions between the genres to which these responses are thought to correspond, disclosing alternative legacies that the poet himself could not have foreseen. Nor is this solely a claim on behalf of the radical political potential of high culture to undermine the ideological positions attributed to it; as I have shown, authors on both sides of this divide frequently complicate ready-made distinctions between popular and elite culture, often indeed despite their explicit statements in defense of such distinctions. Thus both in Pater's qualified allegiance to Wordsworthian sensuousness and in Collins's revisitation and strong critique of the

"high" literary aesthetics of a previous generation, we are able to track how fluid were the lines that separated "high" from "low" literary forms and pleasures.

In this, at least, we might find a reason to take seriously aesthetic experience as a category of critical analysis. Though this is a topic much in vogue in these days of the "aesthetic turn," historians of the cultural divide have been slow to ascribe anything more than a symptomatic function to the topic of how works of art make us feel and think the way we do. By the same token, recent efforts to foreground the phenomenology of aesthetic experience have so far neglected to investigate the fraught relationship between elite and popular forms of readerly enjoyment, thereby missing an opportunity to put this distinction in a new light.[60] At a time when debates over the priority of aesthetic and sociological approaches to literature threaten to divide the field of literary studies as such, it seems more than ever necessary to reconcile sensation and reflection in our own critical practice, bringing the forms of ideology critique into a productive relationship with the more patently "aesthetic" registers of literary texts. Our sociological analyses of the cultural divide neglect this dimension at risk of losing what might be the strongest basis for overcoming this divide in the first place. In our engagements with art, it may be well worth bearing in mind a lesson that the Romantics themselves offer, and which every critic must, at heart, already know: that the way we think about aesthetic objects reflects, though often imperfectly, the way we felt—and feel—about them.

60. Among many recent efforts to trace the somatic and cognitive dimensions of aesthetic experience, see especially Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).