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White Desire: Pater and Race



SCHOLARS OF AESTHETICISM AND DECADENCE have lately been exploring questions of race. Of particular interest have been the afterlives of these movements, as they were embraced by artistic men and women of colour in Harlem and in avant-garde enclaves around the world in the early twentieth century.¹ Yet less has been said about race and the earliest philosophers of aestheticism, including Walter Pater.² Perhaps one reason for this lacuna is that Pater seems oriented towards an idealized whiteness—think of his ideal type in ‘Diaphaneité’, with its ‘clear crystal nature’ and ‘pure white light’.³ It is the privilege of whiteness to slip by, unnoticed. In fact, aestheticism might be said to cultivate a relentless whiteness, with a recurring emphasis on, and even fetishization of, the white body.

In this essay, I study Walter Pater’s essay ‘Winckelmann’, which has been important to a race theory of whiteness. Pater’s subject is Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), the famous German art historian of Greek antiquity. ‘More than any other single figure’, writes Stefano Evangelista, ‘Winckelmann ... was responsible, if not for inventing ancient Greece, at least for giving it a wholly new cultural significance’.⁴ Winckelmann studied the development of Greek sculpture in its different phases, celebrating Greek art for its classical ideals of *Heiterkeit*, tranquillity, and *Allgemeinheit*, unity. In popularizing the taste for Greek

sculpture and neoclassical values, Winckelmann played a key role in making the Apollo Belvedere into the face of the ‘perfect’ white race. As he writes, in an oft-quoted formulation, ‘Since white is the colour that reflects the most rays of light, and thus is most easily perceived, a beautiful body will be all the more beautiful the whiter it is.’⁵ Yet while Pater’s essay seems to be channelling Winckelmann’s neoclassical aesthetic in a normative fashion, I will suggest here that Pater actually reverses some mainstream Victorian assumptions about Greek sculpture—and white bodies—in order to present a subversive theory of art and aesthetics.

Scholars of white studies have looked to the Enlightenment for emergent ideologies of the white body. In particular, Winckelmann’s writings have been key, with their focus on the neoclassical, sculptural body. Several contemporary scholars have taken Pater as a transparent interpreter of Winckelmann’s aesthetic. Richard Dyer, in *White: Studies in Race and Culture*, quotes Pater on Winckelmann as the epitome of this neoclassical ideal: ‘That white light, purged from the angry, bloodlike stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the tranquil godship in him, as opposed to the restless accidents of life.’⁶ As Dyer argues, Winckelmann’s scholarship celebrated a pristine, marble-white body that was overlaid upon the racial identifications of whiteness. For Dyer, this racial formation occurred via a series of distinct intellectual moves discernible across Enlightenment thought, concentrated in Winckelmann’s research and encapsulated in Pater’s summation. One move was to align white marble with a universalized humanity, rendering the white race as both invisible and the default model of ‘the human’. Another was to take ancient Greek civilization as the pinnacle of humanity, implicitly deeming the Greeks a white race whose descendants populated modern Europe. And finally, Winckelmann made neoclassical whiteness connote a special, spiritual inwardness, what Pater calls ‘tranquil godship’ and what Dyer calls ‘a light within’.⁷

Other scholars have similarly seen Winckelmann as foundational to Western concepts of racial whiteness. Alex Potts notes the racial undertones when Winckelmann compares classical form to ‘the purest water taken from the source of a spring ... [T]he less taste it has, the more healthy it is seen to be, because it is cleansed of all foreign elements’.⁸ David Batchelor, in *Chromophobia*, writes that classical form is a

model of what the body should be like from *within*. Not a place of fluids, organs, muscles, tendons, and bones ..., but a vacant,

hollow, whited chamber, scraped clean, cleared of any evidence of the grotesque embarrassments of an actual life. No smells, no noises, colour; no changing from one state to another and the uncertainty that comes with it; ... no eating, no drinking, no pissing, no shitting, no sucking, no fucking, no nothing.⁹

While Batchelor's *outré* phrasing challenges scholarly conventions, his language serves to make an important point. Neoclassicism deprives the white body of its body-ness, stripping away the elements that a Christianized West deems shameful and animalistic. For many scholars, neoclassical whiteness entails a powerful ideology by which Western culture promotes its superiority over bodies that are foreign, feminine, dirty, working-class, racialized, or generally othered.

This analysis helps to explain the oddly outsized role that Greek sculpture played in British race theories. How strange is it, indeed, that the Apollo Belvedere became the icon of the white race, even though it is an inorganic piece of marble. (For an especially egregious example of white race-thinking, see the infamous chart in Josiah Nott and George Glidden's *The Types of Mankind* (1854): at the top of the chart is the Apollo Belvedere's profile, followed by a 'Negro' profile in the middle, and, at the bottom, the face of a 'Young Chimpanzee'.) When Greek sculptures were unearthed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, having lost their original colourful paint, their whitened forms came to connote a high-art museum culture. Critics used the sculptures to align the superiority of the Greeks with the modern-day dominance of the European empires.¹⁰ While Winckelmann's writings themselves were layered and complex—and not merely avatars of a simplistic, racist message about Western culture—his theories nevertheless came to stand in the nineteenth century (and after) at the confluence of these developments in race, empire, aesthetics, and whiteness.

No wonder, then, that scholars like Dyer and Batchelor have taken Pater as a mouthpiece for Winckelmann's neoclassical theories. Yet Pater's 1867 essay, when it is read closely, actually works to ironize the discourse of classical whiteness. Pater manipulates the more common Victorian understanding of neoclassicism toward his own subversive aesthetic ends. 'To burn always with a hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life', he would notoriously announce in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*.¹¹ The lifepath seeking 'ecstasy', it turns out, also defines the biography of Winckelmann, in Pater's telling. In fact, the

essay ironically details how the lack of passion (*Heiterkeit*) that the German critic praised in Greek statues so clearly diverged from Winckelmann's own tumultuous, erotic personal life. Pater tells the story of how the German scholar travelled to Rome and seduced young men while researching Greek sculptures of beautiful male bodies: he cultivated many 'romantic, fervent friendships with young men'. Winckelmann 'has known, he says, many young men more beautiful than Guido's archangel'. Pater continues, 'These friendships, bringing him in contact with the pride of human form, and staining his thoughts with its bloom, perfected his reconciliation with the spirit of Greek sculpture'.¹²

Neoclassical whiteness hollows out the body and deprives it of sex or appetite. But for Pater, Winckelmann's Greek ideal is relentlessly physical and sensuous, an affair of 'instinct or touch' rather than a bloodless intellectual pursuit.¹³ Pater even deconstructs white 'colourless ... purity' into a rainbow metaphor, playing upon the Newtonian idea that white light consists of multiple colours—thus Winckelmann's Greek 'white light' blends together what Pater describes as 'intellectual, spiritual, and physical elements'.¹⁴ Pater's strategy is the one that he deploys for all of the essays in *The Renaissance*: under the veneer of a deadpan scholarly seriousness, he proposes ideas that are shocking to Victorian sensibilities. While he seems to agree with Victorian consensus opinion—that the classical is white and pure—he also proposes the opposite, showing how neoclassicism depends on the sensuous appreciation and 'handling' of the naked male form.¹⁵ He mirrors Winckelmann's homoerotic gaze by praising the Parthenon frieze of 'a line of youths on horseback, with ... their proud, patient lips, their chastened reins, their whole bodies in exquisite service'.¹⁶ Pater takes Winckelmann's Greek white statue and gives it a body, making it fleshly, penetrable, erotic.

This analysis helps to underline the subversive elements in one of the essay's most famous passages, a touchstone for *The Renaissance* as a whole. Here Pater describes Winckelmann's rapturous first encounter with classical sculpture:

Hitherto he had handled the words only of Greek poetry, stirred indeed and roused by them, yet divining beyond the words an unexpressed pulsation of sensuous life. Suddenly he is in contact with that life, still fervent in the relics of plastic art. Filled as our culture is with the classical spirit, we can hardly imagine how deeply the human mind was moved, when, at the Renaissance,

in the midst of a frozen world, the buried fire of ancient art rose up from under the soil. Winckelmann here reproduces for us the earlier sentiment of the Renaissance. On a sudden the imagination feels itself free. How facile and direct, it seems to say, is this life of the senses and the understanding, when once we have apprehended it! That is the more liberal life we have been seeking so long, so near to us all the while. How mistaken and roundabout have been our efforts to reach it by mystic passion, and monastic reverie; how they have deflowered the flesh; how little they have emancipated us! Hermione melts from her stony posture, and the lost proportions of life right themselves. There is an instance of Winckelmann's tendency to escape from abstract theory to intuition, to the exercise of sight and touch.¹⁷

The passage concentrates some of the essay's overarching motifs, especially in its stark contrasts: frozen versus fiery, grey versus coloured, abstraction versus touch, Christian versus pagan, stone versus flesh. The aesthetic experience bursts upon the critic like lava exploding out of a volcano. The moment when 'Hermione melts from her stony posture' and comes alive is perhaps the essay's defining transformation. As the statue becomes human, art is superimposed upon life—whether for the Greek artist, the German critic, or the Victorian essay reader. The sculpture's white marble softens into human flesh, an alteration that inevitably produces a coloration or staining.¹⁸ Pater alludes to Hermione, the queen from Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, long lost and presumed dead; at the play's climax, the queen's sculpture comes to life, revealing itself to be the woman herself, very much alive. Hermione incarnates a longer mythic tradition, going back to the Greeks, of a sculpture brought to life. The story of Pygmalion tells of the artist who falls in love with his own sculpture and begs Aphrodite to make her a living woman. Winckelmann himself might be seen to operate as a kind of Pygmalion, queering the myth, when the critic provides a lengthy, admiring ekphrasis of the Apollo Belvedere; he rhapsodizes over the Apollo's 'alluring virility' and the 'soft tenderness' playing 'upon the lofty structure of his limbs.'¹⁹ As Stefano Evangelista notes, Winckelmann endows the statue with traits that seem more human than sculptural.²⁰ Pater's passage follows in this long mythic tradition, making

Winckelmann's erotic engagement with a nude male sculpture into a symbol for 'the Renaissance' as a whole.²¹

Pater's implicit enemy throughout the famous passage above is a Christian discourse that sees the body as degraded and corrupt. Instead, he promotes a 'pagan' notion of embodiment as sacred, artistic, 'unsinged' and innocent.²² These elements highlight the essential strangeness of his essay's major premise, which is that the neoclassical values of tranquillity and unity (*Heiterkeit* and *Allgemeinheit*) are conducive to a freer life, especially a life of physical and sexual pleasure. At times, Pater seems to acknowledge the unlikelihood of this project with quiet irony: in fact, the 'pulsations of sensuous life' seem inherently exciting, no matter how much Hellenistic tranquillity might frame them.

Pater's beautiful white male bodies make sexuality itself into a kind of embodiment. The erotic, queer touch between men works as a kind of physical marking or colour, solidifying the formerly transparent white body into a materialized, visible site of difference. The essay's recurring motif of male pregnancy, by which Winckelmann is said to have 'laid open a new organ for the human spirit', makes a critic's work into an embodied handling of the past, a birthing that allows male critics unusual physical congress with their subjects as well as their predecessors.²³ Winckelmann's trysts with young men have their metaphoric issue in the 'pregnancy' that gives birth to Goethe, to Hegel, and to Victor Hugo in the nineteenth century.²⁴ Critical influence is imagined as a series of touches over time, concrete ideas passed between thinkers in instinctive rather than abstract ways; thought itself is like sex, a sensuous spawning across generations. When Pater eroticizes the white male body using tropes of staining, colour, fire, primitivism, and male pregnancy, then, he undercuts the abstraction and seeming universalism of the white neoclassical ideal.

While my focus here is on Pater's Winckelmann essay, one could argue that other artworks in the Aesthetic canon depict transgressive white bodies. For instance, James McNeill Whistler's 1862 painting *The White Girl*, retitled in 1867 as *Symphony in White, No. 1*, gained a notorious reception when it was first displayed. The painting is famous in the history of visual modernism for its formal experiment, superimposing different shades of white. I would argue that Whistler creates, again, not a transparent neoclassicism, but a textured variety of whites, exactly the idea suggested by a symphony.²⁵ The thickly layered pigment, applied to an almost life-size portrait, creates the woman as an imitative body, layered in her

whiteness, even off-white.²⁶ The impasto brushwork creates a receptive, sexualized whiteness without firm boundaries, suggestively open-ended—a quality attacked by Victorian reviewers, who called the painting ‘sketchy’ and ‘incomplete’.²⁷ Moreover, the painting’s racialized whiteness is heightened by the anonymous girl’s brilliant red hair, connoting an Irish background. (The model, Jo Hiffernan, was in fact Irish). Hiffernan’s Irish appearance would have been striking in a moment when Irish-Catholic peasants were insistently racialized in England.²⁸ In other words, the white-on-white elements that inscribe this painting into the history of modernism can also be read as a part of the sexualization, commodification, and racialization of whiteness in the later nineteenth century.

During the 1860s, when Whistler was painting *Symphonies in White* and Pater composed his *Winckelmann* essay, dramatic world events were making Victorian spectators startlingly aware of race. The Indian uprising in 1857 had challenged imperial rule and supplied the British imaginary with racist fantasies of white women being raped by Indian sepoys.²⁹ The American Civil War arrived at the culmination of the long British debate about slavery. And, in 1865, Jamaican rebels challenged British landowners at Morant Bay, only to be brutally suppressed by Governor Eyre. Alongside the more predictable imagery of racial fear and hatred provoked by these global events, there also appeared a new Victorian vision of the white body. This whiteness that was not the disembodied purity of classicism, but was embodied, textured, layered, touchable, consumable, even penetrable. The white body was both desirably and anxiously materialized.

The discussion raises some key questions about Pater’s politics. Is he in fact challenging British imperial ideology? When he gives the Apollo Belvedere a white, fleshly body, is he critiquing the cultural-racial hierarchy? Here it seems important to maintain a broader view and to answer these questions decisively in the negative.³⁰ Pater’s transgressive aesthetics paves the way for forbidden encounters between men, but he also still draws upon a stereotypical white Englishness with positive valences. The stereotype is evident when he whitens the bodies of Roman men so that they blur into white sculptures or, more implicitly, pale-skinned Anglo or German men. Whiteness as Englishness is an important subtext to the *Winckelmann* essay and to *The Renaissance* as a whole. Pater pursues all forms of exquisite distinction and rarefied perfection, of which the sculpted white male body is the pinnacle—elevating whiteness in quite a normative sense. This norm accompanies *The Renaissance*’s conservative project to uphold the

Western canon, celebrating Michelangelo, Leonardo, Winckelmann, and other ‘great men’ of the Western tradition.

Nevertheless, Pater’s white embodiments undermine the English neoclassical ideals that buttressed the colonial enterprise. The British empire proceeded on the idea that the people it colonized were dangerously embodied, prone to irrational, animalistic, heathenish behavior, in a way that British people themselves were not. Race science affirmed the link between beauty standards, embodiment, and national type. Peoples of European descent imagined their race as represented by a white statue, ostensibly escaping the fleshed body and its primitive ways. When Pater re-embodies the statue, then, as part of his larger project to re-primitivize the Greeks, he implicitly challenges imperial assumptions by highlighting the irrational and carnal strains of his own Victorian culture. His new vision of Greek culture and neoclassicism exemplified his investment in cultural relativism, a radical idea that he proposed and implied throughout the *Renaissance*. This relativism, in my reading, is a central value that locates Pater far beyond the norms of the Western canon he seems to be upholding. While Pater’s life was organized around elite coteries of young Caucasian British (and occasionally Irish) men, the values that he proposed in his essays, especially in ‘Winckelmann’, point toward a broader relativism, in which all humans live in bodies from which they cannot escape.

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NOTES

- ¹ For scholarship on aestheticism/decadence and race, see, among others, Ian Christopher Fletcher, ‘The Soul of Man under Imperialism: Oscar Wilde, Race, and Empire’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 5 (2000), 334–41; Regenia Gagnier, ‘The Global Circulation of the Literatures of Decadence’, *Literature Compass*, 10 (2013), 70–81; Kristin Mahoney, ‘Taking Wilde to Sri Lanka & Beardsley to Harlem: Decadent Practice, Race, and Orientalism’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 49 (2021), 583–606; and Michèle Mendelssohn, ‘A Decadent Dream Deferred: Bruce Nugent and the Harlem Renaissance’s Queer Modernity’, in *Decadence in the Age of Modernism*, ed. by Kate Hext and Alex Murray (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), pp. 251–75.
- ² An important recent exception is Dustin Friedman, ‘“Sinister Exile”: Dionysus and the Aesthetics of Race in Walter Pater and Vernon Lee’, *Victorian Studies*, 63 (2021), 537–60. I discuss this essay further below.
- ³ Walter Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1913), pp. 253, 254.
- ⁴ Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 26.
- ⁵ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. by Harry Mallgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), p. 195. While Winckelmann today connotes a celebration of

whiteness—a reputation that was cemented in the nineteenth century—his writings also reveal an overlooked fascination with the colouring of Greek sculpture. See Oliver Primavesi, ‘Artemis, Her Shrine, and Her Smile: Winckelmann’s Discovery of Ancient Greek Polychromy’, in *Circumlitio: The Polychromy of Antique and Mediaeval Sculpture*, ed. by Vinzenz Brinkmann, Oliver Primavesi, and Max Hollein (Frankfurt am Main: Schriftenreihe der Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, 2010), pp. 24–77.

- ⁶ Walter Pater, ‘Winckelmann’ (1867); quoted in Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture. Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, [1997], 2017), p. 207. Dyer notes that Pater’s words are ‘a condensation of what has been much discussed in this book’ (p. 207).
- ⁷ Dyer, *White*, p. 208. I summarize these threads from Dyer’s book, especially from the first chapter, ‘The Matter of Whiteness’ (pp. 1–40).
- ⁸ Quoted in Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 164.
- ⁹ David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 19. Batchelor also quotes the same passage from Pater that Dyer does to exemplify Winckelmann’s aesthetic.
- ¹⁰ Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 138. Jenkyns does not mention ‘whiteness’ as a racial category, instead emphasizing the Victorian links between white marble sculpture and museum culture. Peter Martindale strongly critiques Jenkyns’s conclusions in *Pater the Classicist: Classical Scholarship, Reception, and Aestheticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 5. Martindale notes that Pater was not, as Jenkyns has it, a transparent promoter of the neoclassical ‘stress on whiteness and purity’; instead, Pater highlighted ‘the complex materiality of early Greek artefacts: the use of wood, terracotta, ivory, metals ... and colour’ (p. 5). For a definitive study of the reception history of the Greeks—and how they came to connote a ‘white’ race—see Martin Bernal, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985*, vol. 1 of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
- ¹¹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. by Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 189.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145. The word ‘handling’ recurs throughout *The Renaissance*. See Teukolsky, ‘Walter Pater’s *Renaissance* (1873) and the British Aesthetic Movement’, *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga, Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net. https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=rachel-teukolsky-walter-paters-renaissance-1873-and-the-british-aesthetic-movement.
- ¹⁶ Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 174.
- ¹⁷ Pater, *The Renaissance*, pp. 146–47.
- ¹⁸ Charlotte Ribeyrol observes how Pater’s ‘Winckelmann’ essay hosts a lurking chromophilia, even while it rehearses Winckelmann’s classical celebration of Greek sculpture as ‘pure form’. Pater eroticizes white marble sculpture, but he also delights in the materiality of Greek arts adorned with metals, ivory, and other coloured media. This chromophilia, Ribeyrol argues, was an expression of Pater’s larger project to seek the Dionysian or Chthonian elements in Greek culture that were minimized by more conservative Hellenophiles. See Ribeyrol, ‘“A world of material splendour”: Walter Pater and the Paradox of Greek Sculptural Polychromy’, *Kermes: la revista del restaro*, nos. 101–02 (2016), 89–98. Also relevant is Lene Østermark-Johansen, *Pater and the Language of Sculpture*, esp. ch. 5, ‘Pater and Greek Sculpture’ (pp. 213–76). Østermark-Johansen explores Pater’s interest in Greek sculpture’s sensuous materiality, including its background in decorative arts and its Ionian influences, among others. The chapter ties Pater’s interests to those of late-Victorian

British sculptors, including Alfred Gilbert and Frederic Leighton, whose works depicted nude male figures from the classical tradition.

¹⁹ Quoted in Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece*, p. 29.

²⁰ Ibid. Evangelista quotes at length from Winckelmann's description of the Apollo Belvedere.

²¹ In fact, many late-nineteenth-century artists and writers engaged the Pygmalion myth to promote an aesthetic counterculture. Charlotte Ribeyrol writes of how figures as diverse as G. F. Watts, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Jean-Léon Gérôme reimagined Galatea, the female sculpture come to life, by portraying the beauty of a statue tinted with colour. Sculptural polychromy added colour to whitened marble, hinting at nude body rendered with a scandalous realism and contributing to a controversial 'fleshly' aesthetic. See Charlotte Ribeyrol, 'From Galatea to Tanagra: Victorian Translations of the Controversial Colours of Greek Sculpture', in *Hellenomania*, ed. by Katherine Harloe, Nicoletta Momigliano, and Alexandre Farnoux (New York: Routledge, 2018), n.p.

²² Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 177.

²³ Ibid., p. 141.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In 'Whistler and Whiteness', Caroline Arscott argues that Whistler's symphonies in white reflect on a new industrial bleaching process, referencing 'the accelerated time of industrial textile processing' (65). Arscott too observes how Whistler layers different shades of white paint: 'Arguably white is not being shown as empty but as being full of colour, passion, ferocity, and drama [in] the wild area at the woman's feet' (63). For Arscott, this layering in white ultimately connotes a memory system along the lines of Freud's palimpsestic writing pad (63–64). The essay appears in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (London: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 47–70.

²⁶ I make a version of this argument about Whistler's painting in Teukolsky, 'White Girls: Avant-Gardism and Advertising after 1860', *Victorian Studies*, 51 (2009), 422–37 (p. 435).

²⁷ See Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1911), p. 72.

²⁸ Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 111. Daly suggests that race is an important subtext to Whistler's painting for its creation during the American Civil War, in which the artist's brother was a Confederate officer. His book analyzes a fascinating array of racial sensations in the 1860s, including a chapter devoted to blackface minstrelsy in England. Yet his argument ultimately moves in a slightly different direction: he sees the women in white of the 1860s to be ethereal, disembodied, and contrasted to darker racial others that included the slave, the minstrel performer, even the gorilla. By contrast, I see the woman's whiteness itself to be compromised, problematic, racialized, and sexualized.

²⁹ The rape imagery surrounding the Indian Mutiny is explored by Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

³⁰ Here I diverge from Dustin Friedman, who finds that Pater was a more radical thinker when it comes to race. Friedman argues that the myth studies of Pater and Lee challenge mainstream Victorian racial essentialism. 'By exploring the survival of an ostensibly premodern, primitive phenomenon' in the myth of Dionysus, Pater and Lee 'challenge the tendency toward teleological thinking that dominates post-Kantian aesthetics'. ... [The] 'ecstasies and barbarities' [of Dionysian experience] affirm the universal aesthetic and ethical value of embodied experiences that are typically deemed unbeautiful and distasteful—i.e., rapture, irrationality, subjectlessness, and the loss of self-control. The dominant culture, moreover, understood such experiences as marking racial others as primitive, hopelessly mired in particularity, and unable to attain the heights of universal reason' (Friedman, "'Sinister Exile'", p. 545). Friedman's essay valuably shows how Pater celebrates Dionysian aesthetics, which are racialized as Asian, Jewish, and generally Other. Yet it seems important to also acknowledge how Pater maintained some quite mainstream Victorian ideas about race and whiteness, especially in the way he centred British subjectivity.