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The Renaissance

Walter Pater

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Walter Pater : The Renaissance before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Renaissance:

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Pater is sui generisBy giocondaI repurchased this book because I enjoy Pater's writing style. It will be apparent to those who read and understand this book that "art for art's sake" (never said by Pater) did not sanction the labelling of the kitchen sink as art. His standards are quite exacting. This edition is limited to the lectures themselves and a short preface and conclusion. The typeface is clear and well spaced. There are no annotations to assist with the occasional foreign phrase. 19 of 28 people found the following review helpful. Impressionism in criticism...travel at your own risk...By A CustomerThis work by Walter Pater, published in

1873, as a volume of collected (previously published) essays along with an essay on "Winckelmann", a Preface, and a Conclusion was [and perhaps still is] an extremely influential work of aesthetic criticism. The volume helped shape [influence] the perceptions, the attitudes, and the approaches of many youthful readers in the late 1880's and 1890's. It is very interesting to read, immensely engaging to consider and muse about, but also offers cautions to the overenthusiastic, easily influenced [or persuaded] disciple. This volume consists of an Introduction [by the editor, Adam Phillips], a Preface [by Pater], 9 chapters, and a Conclusion (in this particular edition by Oxford Classics there is also a chronology, a Selective Bibliography, an Appendix titled "Diaphaneite," and Explanatory Notes in the back. The chapter titles (after Pater's Preface) are: Two Early French Stories; Pico Della Mirandola; Sandro Botticelli; Luca Della Robbia; The Poetry of Michelangelo; Leonardo da Vinci; The School of Giorgione, Joachim Du Bellay; Winckelmann; and Conclusion. * * * * * What's the problem here? Well, unfortunately, Pater is not completely reliable as an objective perceiver or critic. He tends to be a bit eccentric in his individualistic perceptions and interpretations of the art works, but he goes ahead and defends this approach in a very "modern" sounding fashion -- which seems to include a bit of "situational perceptions," subjective impressions of perception and response, and subjective criticism. Which makes for extremely engaging [sometimes irritating] reading, but leaves something to be desired as far as objective and judicious thoughtfulness and truthfulness. Pater seems to believe that it is acceptable to "bend" or even create facts to further his own it-pleases-me-to-think-that-this-is-or-should-be-so desires. We know that we are on a slippery critical slope [though it will sound all too familiar to modern ears and modern apologetics] when the editor Phillips informs us: "In Pater's first published writing, his essay on Coleridge of 1866, he had suggested that -- 'Modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the "relative" spirit in place of the "absolute" ... To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions.'" It doesn't take much time to realize that such a critical position is going to lead to an end-position of aesthetic, critical, and moral relativism ("You can't tell me I'm wrong, because there is no one set way of seeing, analyzing, believing, or evaluating." -- the spoiled, indulged child's self-justification for the validity of its own ego supremacy and authority against that of any parental or adult restrictions. Such a position usually means a lack of any meaningful in-depth self-questioning or objective evaluating of personal motives, and a welcoming of lack of restraints in the pursuit of pleasure and non-self discipline. And this, of course, is the critical negative refrain that often comes against the decadent followers of Pater's credo.] The second fall-out effect of Pater's evaluations and pronouncements is that some of his disciples [self-styled] went farther than even he was willing to approve with their hedonism and purposefully shocking lifestyles and "decadent" behaviors and aesthetic appetites. But it came from statements like this, which Pater may have meant one way, but which their subjective, individualistic perceptions took another way: "The aesthetic critic, then, regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing PLEASURABLE SENSATIONS [caps are mine], each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind. [We value them -- he says] for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique, impression of pleasure. Our education becomes complete in proportion as our SUSCEPTIBILITY to these impressions increases -- in depth and VARIETY." Let the perceiver and the critic -- and the experiencer -- proceed with extreme caution and good judgment. * * * * *

26 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Pater and the Renaissance: Aesthetic Self-Help By A Customer This book has changed many lives in a very peculiar way: although its evaluations are quite wrong at times, particularly the chapter on the School of Giorgione (if you care, check out the edition with an introduction by Kenneth Clark), Pater's Renaissance still shines with the very same light that made it a cult among Victorian youngmen. The "gemstone flame", the pervasive feelings of which Pater invited us to share have not vanished (in spite of the attempts of the so-called modern art), and the book's invaluable lesson is that you simply do not need a fancy objet d'art to see what true beauty is all about. So basically this is what I have to say: if you have ever derived aesthetic pleasure from anything at all in life, you should read this little book tomorrow. If you never felt any such pleasure, you must read The Renaissance right now, or you'll simply let the good things pass you by. I mean it.

Pater's graceful essays discuss the achievements of Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and other artists. Included is his celebrated discussion of the Mona Lisa in a study of Da Vinci. This book concludes with an uncompromising advocacy of hedonism, urging readers to experience life as fully as possible. His cry of "art for art's sake" became the manifesto of the Aesthetic Movement, and his assessments of Renaissance art have influenced generations of readers. Oscar Wilde called this collection of essays the "holy writ of beauty."

From the Publisher 7 1-hour cassettes About the Author Walter Pater