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[1] At the end of the footnote, just '5' and '10' for the *Literature Compass* references if it is paginated per volume rather than per issue.

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PART 4

THE DISENCHANTMENT/RE-ENCHANTMENT OF  
THE WORLD: AESTHETICS, SECULARIZATION,  
AND THE GODS OF GREECE FROM  
FRIEDRICH SCHILLER TO WALTER PATER

A04771 Max Weber's oracular phrase 'Entzauberung der Welt' ('disenchantment of the world'), from his 1918 lecture 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' ('Science as a Vocation'), is often invoked as a shorthand for a particular narrative of Western secularization.<sup>1</sup> This narrative has acquired a proverbial status, and has a powerful imaginative appeal as a secularized version of the myth of the Fall and the expulsion from Eden: it accounts for the woes of the modern condition even as it hints that our fall into the secular might be understood as a *felix culpa*, necessary for our redemption as enlightened subjects.<sup>2</sup> It can be summarized thus: the rise of science and modern capitalism, coupled with the destruction of traditional forms of community, leached the world of its mystery and, by extension, its meaning. God dwindled, or disappeared, or died. Nature lost its visionary gleams and was exposed as a purposeless mechanism. Human life was reduced to calculable, material forces, and the cost was a pervasive sense of alienation, nihilism, and ennui.<sup>3</sup>

For several decades historians, sociologists, philosophers, and literary critics have been contesting and recasting the terms of what is now often characterized as the 'standard' or 'crude' secularization thesis: that is, the theory that the conditions of modernity inevitably—or at least irreversibly—relegate religion to the margins of social life and lead to a general decay of belief in traditional theologies, or in the supernatural broadly construed.<sup>4</sup>

QUERY [1]

<sup>1</sup> Originally delivered at Munich University in 1918 and published in 1919 by Duncker & Humblot, Munich.

<sup>2</sup> The imaginative link between the 'disenchantment' narrative of secularization and the myth of the fall is often remarked. See e.g. Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 84; and Jonathan Sheehan, 'When was Disenchantment? History and the Secular Age', in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. by Michael Warner and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 217–42 (pp. 217–19). The notion that secularization is desolating yet ultimately salutary—a kind of *felix culpa*, or fortunate fall—is central to Weber's work. As Jeffrey C. Alexander writes, for Weber 'rationalization is at once enervating disenchantment and enlightening empowerment [. . . It] is at once a terrible condition, the worst evil, and the only human path for liberation' ('The Dialectic of Individuation and Domination: Weber's Rationalization Theory and Beyond', in *Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity*, ed. by Sam Whimster and Scott Lash (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 185–206 (p. 187)).

<sup>3</sup> My summary here is extrapolated from Weber's argument, but as Bennett notes, his is only the most famous 'disenchantment tale' of secularization; for a more wide-ranging discussion see *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, pp. 56–90.

<sup>4</sup> The literature on this topic is vast and rapidly expanding. For a recent review essay which gives an

Although critiques of the secularization thesis are diverse in their motivations and theoretical commitments, they are generally united by a suspicion of what Dominic Erdozain describes as its ‘nomothetic hubris’:<sup>5</sup> the thesis seems to confer a dogmatic authority upon a phenomenon it affects only to name and analyse. Perhaps surprisingly, however, Weber’s disenchantment paradigm remains compelling for some important critics of the thesis, apparently because it constructs secularization in such grandly pessimistic terms. Most notably, the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor makes Weberian disenchantment key to his sweeping and influential rewriting of the secularization narrative, *A Secular Age* (2007). Although Taylor aims to problematize the equation between modernity and the decline of religion, he nonetheless draws upon Weber to clarify the distinction between premodern religiosity and modern secularity. Taylor distinguishes between a porous, premodern self, which was open to ‘enchantment’—that is, to ‘spirits, demons, cosmic forces’<sup>6</sup>—and, by extension, to religious faith, and the ‘buffered’ or ‘disenchanted’ nature of modern subjectivity, which encloses itself within an ‘immanent frame’ and is thus largely impervious to religious possibility (though Taylor emphasizes that many people remain committed or at least receptive to such possibility).<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, a flurry of recent books have sought to revise the secularization thesis not by challenging the idea that modernity is fatal to religion, but by contesting Weber’s identification of modernity with disenchantment. Unlike Taylor, these critics are not concerned to rethink the relationship between religion and modernity, but to argue for the value and plenitude of thoroughly secular forms of enchantment. Jane Bennett, Simon During, Joshua Landy, George Levine, and Michael Saler have suggested in various ways that modernity does not disenchant so much as yield new, often paradoxical, and perhaps superior varieties of enchantment, ones which inspire an ‘excited affirmation of things of this world’,<sup>8</sup> in Levine’s phrase; motivate ethical and political engagement, in Bennett’s account; or, in During’s and Saler’s similar models, are compatible with secular

illuminating account of the current debate in the fields of history and sociology see Dominic Erdozain, ‘“Cause is not quite what it used to be”: The Return of Secularization’, *English Historical Review*, 127 (2012), 377–400. For recent analyses of the implications of challenges to the secularization thesis for the study of nineteenth-century literature see Colin Jager, ‘Romanticism/Secularization/Secularism’, *Literature Compass*, 5.4 (2008), 791–806; and Charles LaPorte, ‘Victorian Literature, Religion, and Secularization’, *Literature Compass*, 10.3 (2013), 277–87.

<sup>5</sup> *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation, and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> For Taylor’s discussion of ‘enchantment’ see *A Secular Age*, pp. 25–27, 29–43; for his concept of a ‘closed’ immanent frame see pp. 542–57.

<sup>8</sup> Levine, ‘Introduction’, in *The Joy of Secularism: 11 Essays for How We Live Now*, ed. by George Levine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 22.

assumptions in so far as they reconstruct the supernatural as an aesthetic experience.<sup>9</sup>

This essay aims to clarify some of the ambiguities inscribed within the 'disenchantment' paradigm as it was formulated by Weber, and as it circulated as a theme in the Romantic literary tradition he was drawing upon. I trace the theme to its origin in Friedrich Schiller's 1788 poem 'Die Götter Griechenlands' ('The Gods of Greece'), through Heinrich Heine's 1827 poem of the same title as well as his prose work *Les Dieux en exil* (1853), both of which respond to Schiller's poem, before performing an extended reading of Walter Pater's imaginary portrait 'Denys l'Auxerrois' (1887), which responds in turn to Heine's *Les Dieux en exil*. I argue that the disenchantment theme, rather than being a conclusive and melancholic diagnosis of secularization, often served as a means of articulating a paradoxical impression of the extent to which Western culture was undergoing such a process, and of sustaining a carefully ironized ambivalence about the implications of the possibility. Charting some of the complex literary genealogy of Weber's disenchantment diagnosis also illuminates the extent to which the categories of the 'pagan' and the 'aesthetic' often both enable and destabilize secularization narratives. Weber's disenchantment paradigm was partly a gloss on the Romantic investment in the legacy of ancient Greece: specifically, on the topos of the displacement and/or return of the ancient Greek gods. The fact that the classical gods could be treated as purely imaginative constructs provided Romantic writers with potential scope for an oblique form of literary secularism, one that implicitly casts conceptions of divinity in ironic terms or gestures at a possible analogy between the demise of ancient Greek religion and the fate of religion in modernity.<sup>10</sup> However, this Romantic recourse to the classical gods only makes secularization representable in unstable, relativist terms: the gods operate as a *tertium quid* that confounds distinctions between the religious and the secular, and thereby keeps the character of secularization enigmatic.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life; During, Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-enchantment of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Saler and Landy, 'Introduction', in *The Re-enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, ed. by Saler and Landy (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–14.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Priestman suggests that Romantic poets sometimes pressed the classical gods into the service of an implicit secularizing agenda: see *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 44–45.

<sup>11</sup> For convenience, I am here classifying Pater as a 'Romantic' writer, though his literary career belongs to the late Victorian period (he was actively publishing from 1866 until his death in 1894). He is often read as a 'late Romantic': see e.g. Catherine Maxwell, *Second Sight: The Visionary Imagination in Late Victorian Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 68–113.

*Weber*

Although Weber's claim about the 'disenchantment of the world' is often treated as a synonym for Western secularization, for Weber there was in fact no simple correlation between the two processes. Firstly, as is clear from *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905), Weber thought that Christianity, at least in the form of Protestantism, was a key matrix of modern disenchantment: Weber believed that Protestantism had been extraordinarily successful at ridding the world of pagan magic, spirits, and demons, and that science only took over the ascetic, rationalizing work that Protestantism had begun. Secondly, Weber's elaboration of the 'disenchantment' paradigm in 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' often turns upon convoluted references to the ancient Greek gods, which, while perhaps partly intended as rhetorical flourishes, also exemplify how the concept of the 'pagan' often both underpins and complicates secularization narratives.

In 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' Weber persistently constructs modern conflicts between science and religion as struggles between ancient gods. In particular, he suggests that modern culture, in so far as it is constituted by a plurality of value systems, resembles the polytheistic culture of ancient Greece:

Es ist wie in der alten, noch nicht von ihren Göttern und Dämonen entzauberten Welt, nur in anderem Sinne: wie der Hellene einmal der Aphrodite opferte, und dann dem Apollon und vor allem jeder den Göttern seiner Stadt, so ist es, entzaubert und entkleidet der mythischen, aber innerlich wahren Plastik jenes Verhaltens, noch heute.<sup>12</sup>

We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the modern world is defined by relativism; we no longer repose in the ideal of a 'letzte[ ] Stellungnahme' ('ultimate standpoint', WaB, p. 28=trans., p. 148) as we did when our habits of thought were grounded in monotheistic religion, but are instead confronted by a multitude of competing truth systems, just as the ancient Greeks worshipped a variety of gods. However, Weber draws this comparison only to emphasize the vast gulf between an enchanted world of polytheism and the modern age. We still make apparently irrational sacrifices to forces that exceed our control and comprehension (Weber is thinking principally of the vocation of science, which he suggests

<sup>12</sup> Max Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1967), pp. 5–37 (pp. 27–28). All subsequent references to this edition are identified by the abbreviation WaB.

<sup>13</sup> Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 129–56 (pp. 147–48). All subsequent English translations refer to this edition.

demands a quasi-religious kind of dedication despite being unable to satisfy a religious desire for ultimate meaning). However, where the ancient Greeks enjoyed many varieties of spiritual fulfilment and moved fluidly from one cult to another, modern people are afflicted by a sense of an ‘unlösliche[r] Kampf’ (‘irreconcilable conflict’, WaB, p. 27 = trans., p. 147). Commenting on this passage, Fredric Jameson observes:

The metaphorical language of pantheism [. . .] underscores the way in which for Weber the religious phenomenon is the very hypostasis of value in general, value seen from the outside by the man who no longer believes in any values and for whom such living belief has thus become a kind of mystery [. . .]. In this Weber takes his place in that modern tradition of an aesthetic valorization of religion.<sup>14</sup>

The extent to which Weber’s vision of secularization is underwritten by a distinctive and highly self-conscious aesthetic sensibility is also suggested by how frequently this lecture—ostensibly about the vocation of science—digresses into reflections on literature, the obvious source of his baroque secularization metaphors. Weber clearly thinks that the disenchantment of the world produces what we tend to identify as ‘decadence’ in the realm of aesthetics: modern art, epitomized for him by Baudelaire’s poetry and, he suggests, most incisively theorized by Nietzsche, has not only prised apart the theological identification of beauty with goodness, but revived the apparently pagan insight that ‘etwas heilig sein kann nicht nur: obwohl es nicht schön ist, sondern: weil und insofern es nicht schön ist’ (‘something can be sacred not only in spite of its not being beautiful, but rather because and in so far as it is not beautiful’, WaB, p. 27 = trans., pp. 47–48). Like other spheres of modern life, then, art is disenchanted in so far as it bears witness to a fragmentation of values; and yet, Weber suggests, this same fragmentation might also be construed as a rebound to a pagan imaginary, and perhaps thus as a form of—*re*-enchantment. Weber’s oscillation between two poetic figures for the modern fragmentation and secularization of values—on the one hand, it is a disenchantment of the world; on the other, it is a return of the pagan gods—seems to enact the very relativism that he seeks to describe.

Weber goes on to extend his polytheism metaphor, and again the effect is disorienting, since, although he seems to be drawing an analogy between the ancient and the modern, he does so less in the interests of revealing similarity than of revealing difference—and of sharpening our awareness of the distinction between enchantment and disenchantment:

Der großartige Rationalismus der ethisch-methodischen Lebensführung, der aus jeder religiösen Prophetie quillt, hatte diese Vielgötterei entthront zugunsten des ‘Einen, das not tut’ — und hatte dann, angesichts der Realitäten des äußeren und inneren Lebens,

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber’, *New German Critique*, 1 (1973), 52–89 (p. 62).

sich zu jenen Kompromissen und Relativierungen genötigt gesehen, die wir alle aus der Geschichte des Christentums kennen. Heute aber ist es religiöser 'Alltag'. Die alten vielen Götter, entzaubert und daher in Gestalt unpersönlicher Mächte, entsteigen ihren Gräbern, streben nach Gewalt über unser Leben und beginnen untereinander wieder ihren ewigen Kampf. (WaB, p. 28)

The grandiose rationalism of an ethical and methodical conduct of life which flows from every religious prophecy has dethroned this polytheism in favour of 'the one thing that is needful'. Faced with the realities of outer and inner life, Christianity has deemed it necessary to make those compromises and relative judgments, which we all know from its history. Today the routines of everyday life challenge religion. Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanting and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another. (pp. 148–49)

Modernity, then, marks both a return of paganism—old gods ascend from their graves—and a disenchantment of the world; no sooner do the gods return than they are stripped of their divinity and consigned to the status of impersonal forces (although, even in this rationalized form, they seem to participate in some kind of mythic struggle). Weber invokes the pagan gods in order to underscore the extent to which an apparently secular modernity is pervaded by thoroughly worldly forms of irrationalism; he was keen to stress that the process of rationalization is not, as Johannes Weiss puts it, 'a zero-sum game of "rationality versus irrationality": rather, it is a matter of recognizing conflicting developments, including frequent reversals'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Weber's insistence upon the disenchanting nature of the gods raises the question of why he is determined to use the metaphor at all—he seems to mobilize it only in order to underline its awkwardness, its basic incommensurability with the cultural conditions he seeks to anatomize. The fact that the classical gods are at once summoned and banished when Weber seeks to describe a process of secularization, or to articulate the nature of the conflict between science and religion, perhaps partly attests to his sense of tact.<sup>16</sup> In the passage quoted above he segues from a discussion of modern Christianity into an invocation of ancient polytheism, which was perhaps intended to soften his depiction of Christianity as a beleaguered force—though it also produces the strange suggestion that Christianity's efforts to answer modern challenges have the effect of resurrecting pagan gods. Weber's classical metaphors may also be understood as part of the wearily erudite and often ironic tone of the lecture, and to reflect his keen awareness of the extent to which differences between Christian and pagan forms of spirituality were often elided within

<sup>15</sup> Weiss, 'On the Irreversibility of Western Rationalization and Max Weber's Alleged Fatalism', in *Max Weber*, ed. by Whimster and Lash, pp. 154–63 (p. 155).

<sup>16</sup> As Bruce Robbins notes, Weber's focus on the concept of pagan magic 'whether for reasons of diplomacy or not [. . .] certainly takes the emphasis off divinity' ('Enchantment? No, Thank You!', in *The Joy of Secularism*, ed. by Levine, pp. 74–94 (p. 75)).

[2] In the footnote, for completeness can you give the full page extent of the Introduction?

[3] In the footnote, I have attempted to correct the reference to the *Sämtliche Werke*, but only from a quick Internet search. Please check and alter as necessary.

the tradition of German Romanticism: he makes a number of mordant references to the youth of Germany who shrink from the rigours of scientific reason and crave other, perhaps Christian, perhaps vaguely Romantic or pagan, modes of “Erlebnis” (‘personal experience’, WaB, p. 12 = trans., p. 137). Yet Weber’s suggestion that modernity is defined by the return of the pagan gods in disenchanted guises also simply reflects the fact that he borrowed his concept of ‘disenchantment’ from a Romantic poem: Schiller’s ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’.<sup>17</sup>

QUERY [2]

### Schiller

In English the word ‘disenchantment’ sounds as if it refers to an affective state—a disillusionment, disappointment, or embitterment—and the phrase ‘disenchantment of the world’ is often used to gesture broadly at modernity and its discontents, especially the notion that the loss of religious frameworks confronts modern people with a stark and unprecedented crisis of meaning. Certainly, in ‘Wissenschaft als Beruf’ Weber suggests that modernity empties out traditional sources of meaning, and his concept of ‘disenchantment’ is part of his pessimistic vision of modern life as a rationalized ‘stahlhartes Gehäuse’ (‘iron cage’).<sup>18</sup> Yet the German word *Entzauberung* more precisely suggests the de-magification of the world, and Weber apparently extrapolated it from a moment in Schiller’s ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’ that refers to the un-godding or de-divinization of nature (‘Die entgötterte Natur’ (SGG, l. 112)).<sup>19</sup> Schiller’s poem does not identify the un-godding of nature with the decline of Christianity or with the waning of religion more broadly; he is specifically referring to the demise of a pagan, or animistic, apprehension of nature. Schiller’s poem is an elegy for the Greek gods and for the sense of harmonious relationship between the human and the natural that Greek polytheism supposedly fostered. The Greeks, according to Schiller, perceived the cosmos as holistic and magical, suffused with divinity, and this enabled them to experience the pleasures of the body without guilt and to be insouciant in the face of death. Like Weber, Schiller attributes the disenchantment of the world to both Christianity and modern science: Christianity purged the Greek pantheon in the interests of concentrating worship on a single, tran-

QUERY [3]

<sup>17</sup> See Gerth and Wright’s ‘Introduction’ to *Essays in Sociology*, pp. 0–00 (p. 51).

<sup>18</sup> Weber, *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, ed. by Dirk Kaesler (Munich: Beck, 2004), p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> All German references are to the second, amended version of the poem in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Gerhard Fricke and Herbert Göpfert, 5+1 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1965), 1, 169–73, identified by the abbreviation SGG; for the first, longer version see pp. 163–69 in the same volume. All English translations refer to Edgar Alfred Bowring’s translation in *Complete Poems of Schiller*, ed. by Henry D. Wireman (Philadelphia: Kohler, 1879), pp. 64–69; for Wireman’s translation of the first version of the poem see pp. 69–75 in the same volume.



scendent God, while Newtonian physics reduced nature to a ‘tote[r] Schlag der Pendeluhr’ (‘pendule-clock’s dead, hollow tone’, SGG, l. 110). However, Schiller’s disenchantment narrative concludes with an optimistic flourish: he suggests that what has been lost as pagan religious experience can be recuperated as modern aesthetic experience. Art can save the pagan from the ‘Zeitflut’ (‘Time-flood’, SGG, l. 125); while a sense of nature’s divinity may have perished as a belief, it retains an immortal life in song or in poetry (‘unsterblich im Gesang soll leben’, SGG, l. 127), and the gods live on at least as fertile poetic conceits. This logic bestows an equivocal status upon the category of poetry, or of the aesthetic, in Schiller’s vision of a disenchanted world. On the one hand, the aesthetic seems like an agent of re-enchantment, compensating (however inadequately) for the pagan magic that has been lost. On the other, there is the possibility that the aesthetic, no less than science or Christianity, colludes in modern disenchantment: it seems to require the death of the gods to consummate itself: ‘Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben, | Muß im Leben untergehn’ (‘All that is to live in endless song, | Must in Life-Time first be drown’d!’), SGG, ll. 127–28). Moreover, the fact that Schiller characterizes the bygone age of enchantment as a fundamentally poetic phenomenon—it was when ‘der Dichtung zauberische Hülle | Sich noch lieblich um die Wahrheit wand’ (‘the magic veil of Poesy | Still round Truth entwined its loving chain’, SGG, ll. 9–10)—renders the poem’s lament circular: what has been irrevocably lost is a poetic vision of the world; now only poetry, which thrives by loss, can compensate us for the loss of that poetic vision.

Schiller’s poem caused a scandal upon publication. Most notably, he was attacked by a fellow poet, Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg, who suspected that his elegy for pagan enchantment was really a covert form of atheism: he accused Schiller of espousing ‘the sad relation of the naturalist to the deity’.<sup>20</sup> As Jeffrey L. High observes, Stolberg’s attack marks only the beginning of a long ‘ideological struggle for Schiller’s *Geist* (the appropriately ambiguous German term for soul, spirit, mind, and intellect)’: Schiller’s reception history is fissured by controversies over the nature of his religious belief, or his lack of it.<sup>21</sup> I am not concerned here with the truth of Stolberg’s accusation—certainly Schiller denied the charge, and amended the poem in response to it<sup>22</sup>—but it is worth noting that the poem’s lament for an enchanted world in which divinity was fully immanent in nature could resonate among his contemporaries not as a complaint about the secularized nature of modernity, as Charles Taylor suggests in a recent essay on the concept of enchantment, but as the

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Jeffrey L. High, ‘Judex! Blasphemy! and Posthumous Conversion: Schiller and (No) Religion’, *Goethe Yearbook*, 19 (2012), 143–64 (p. 153).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> For an account of the controversy and Schiller’s response see Lesley Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thought and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 97–106.

very opposite: a thinly veiled celebration of atheism.<sup>23</sup> The reasons for this interpretative instability are complex, but may be suggested briefly here. As Taylor himself has shown, and as some of the essays in Levine's collection *The Joy of Secularism* bear out, modern secularism often constructs itself as a bid to dispense with theistic models of transcendence and affirm *this* world as the locus of 'enchantment', which is used as a poetic term for a sense of wonder or well-being.<sup>24</sup> With this logic in mind, Schiller's poem can be read as a celebration of a 'pagan' secularism that affirms the fulfilments of this world, and which apparently prevailed before Christian concepts of transcendence alienated us from nature and from ourselves; in this reading the classical gods are ciphers for a subversive, secularizing message. At the same time Taylor characterizes the perception of an immanently enchanted world (albeit one that also points beyond itself to a higher, theistic reality) as the originary religious experience that the process of secularization has eclipsed. From this perspective Schiller's poem reads as a sincere lament for a sacralized vision of the cosmos, teeming with divinity and spirits, which obtained before modern reason alienated us from nature and from ourselves; the classical gods are metaphors for an authentic religious experience, desired despite its apparently anachronistic status. The fact that Schiller's poem divides the blame for modern disenchantment between religion and reason seems designed to allow and to destabilize both readings. Schiller uses the disenchantment theme at once to announce that secularization has occurred—there has been an irreparable rupture between the epoch of enchantment and rationalized modernity—and to render its stakes uncertain: what has been lost is a mysteriously 'pagan' way of being which does not answer to conventional distinctions between the religious and the secular (though it perhaps answers to that other ambiguous concept, the 'aesthetic').

### *Heine*

Weber's paradoxical vision of secularization as the disenchanting return of the gods in 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' is one way of condensing the ambiguities of Schiller's 'Die Götter Griechenlands'. Another is Heinrich Heine's poem of the same title, from his 1827 collection *Buch der Lieder* ('Book of Songs'). Heine partly reprises Schiller's elegiac tone and his image of ancient Greek religion as luminous, sensual, and life-affirming—his speaker imagines

<sup>23</sup> 'Disenchantment-Reenchantment', in *The Joy of Secularism*, ed. by Levine, pp. 57–73 (pp. 62–63).

<sup>24</sup> For Taylor's analysis of the tendency of modern secularism to frame itself as an effort to affirm the world see *A Secular Age*, pp. 546–48, 606–07. In Levine's volume see especially Paolo Costa's 'A Secular Wonder', pp. 134–54, and Rebecca Stott's 'The Wetfooted Understory: Darwinian Immersions', pp. 205–24.

[4] The second line reference at the end of the following German quotation must be wrong: you give ten lines, not nine as implied by 85–93.

a time when the gods ‘freudig die Welt beherrschten’ (‘joyously ruled the world’, HGG, l. 11)<sup>25</sup>—but the poem pivots upon one of his signature ruptures of mood, known as *Stimmungsbrechung*,<sup>26</sup> and unfolds into a critique of Schiller’s disenchantment narrative. Heine suggests that Schiller’s exaltation of Greek religion springs less from an earnest desire for a vibrant pagan spirituality than from a perverse impulse to mourn whatever is irrevocably lost. His poem challenges the Romantic logic that reflexively idealizes lost causes, defunct religions, and vanished cultures without interrogating the nature of what is being idealized: the Greek gods, Heine points out, would have disdained such sympathy with history’s losers, and Romantic repining after ancient Greek religion thus essentially falsifies what it purports to mourn.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Heine’s speaker flaunts his own cynicism; he is willing to adopt a supplicatory attitude towards the Greek gods only because such supplication is transparently an empty gesture, except as an act of irreverence towards Christianity. After expressing a mournful piety towards the classical gods, he abruptly announces that he actually finds ancient Greek religion as odious as Christianity, and is willing to pay homage to the former only out of spite:

QUERY [4]

Ich hab euch niemals geliebt, ihr Götter!  
 Denn widerwärtig sind mir die Griechen,  
 Und gar die Römer sind mir verhaßt.  
 Doch heiliges Erbarmen und schauriges Mitleid  
 Durchströmt mein Herz,  
 Wenn ich Euch jetzt da droben schaue,  
 Verlassene Götter,  
 Tote, nachtwandelnde Schatten,  
 Nebelschwache, die der Wind verscheucht —  
 Und wenn ich bedenke, wie feig und windig  
 Die Götter sind, die Euch besiegten,  
 Die neuen, herrschenden, tristen Götter,  
 Die Schadenfrohen im Schafspelz der Demut —

<sup>25</sup> Heine, ‘The Gods of Greece’, in *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version*, trans. by Hal Draper (Boston: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982), pp. 152–54; all subsequent English references are to this edition. See also Heine, ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’, in *Buch der Lieder* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1827), pp. 358–62; all subsequent German references to the poem are to this edition, identified by the abbreviation HGG.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Youens defines Heine’s characteristic technique of *Stimmungsbrechung* (literally ‘breaking the tone’) as follows: ‘at the ends of poems, he swerves abruptly in another direction, addresses someone or something other than the audience had thought was there all along, and alters the verb tenses, thereby changing poetic time zones’ (*Heinrich Heine and the Lied* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 32).

<sup>27</sup> As E. M Butler notes, Heine’s poem is a ‘slashing criticism’ not only of Schiller’s ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’ but of ‘Homer’s pantheon of gods as interpreted by Winckelmann, Herder, [and] Goethe’ and of the ‘tyranny of Greece’ over the German literary imagination (*The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 257).

SARA LYONS

883

O, da faßt mich ein düsterer Groll,  
 Und brechen möcht ich die neuen Tempel,  
 Und kämpfen für Euch, ihr alten Götter,  
 Für Euch und Eur gutes, ambrosisches Recht,  
 [. . .]  
 Denn immerhin, Ihr alten Götter,  
 Habt Ihr's auch eh'mals, in Kämpfen der Menschen,  
 Stets mit der Partei der Sieger gehalten,  
 So ist doch der Mensch großmüth'ger als ihr,  
 Und in Götterkämpfen halt ich es jetzt  
 Mit der Partei der besiegten Götter.  
 Also sprach ich, und sichtbar erröteten  
 Droben die blassen Wolkengestalten,  
 Und schauten mich an wie Sterbende,  
 Schmerzenverklärt, und schwanden plötzlich.  
 (HGG, ll. 64–80, 85–93)

I have never loved you, you ancient gods!  
 For the Greeks are repulsive to me  
 And even the Romans are hateful.  
 But holy compassion and terrible pity  
 Flow through my heart  
 Now when I see you up there,  
 Forsaken godheads,  
 Dead night-wandering shadows,  
 Feeble as mist that flees from the wind,  
 And when I consider how craven and hollow  
 The gods are that conquered you,  
 The new, sad gods that rule in your places,  
 That float over woe, in sheep's clothing of meekness—  
 Oh, then black rancour seizes my soul,  
 And then I would smash the new-raised temples  
 And fight for you, you gods of old,  
 And for your good old ambrosial cause,  
 [. . .]  
 For though it is true, you ancient gods,  
 That in the battles of men, of old  
 You have always taken the side of the victor,  
 Yet man is more generous than you,  
 And now in the battles of the gods I take  
 The side of the gods that were vanquished.  
 Thus did I speak, and they visibly reddened,  
 Those pallid cloud-figures floating above me,  
 And gazed at me with a dying air,  
 Transfigured with pain, and suddenly vanished.

Heine points out that we now adopt the same attitude of amused superiority towards the Greek gods that they famously adopted towards humanity. In

effect, he asks, who's laughing now?—'Das unauslöschliche Göttergelächter' ('the inextinguishable laughter of the gods', HGG, l. 63)<sup>28</sup> has long been silenced, or at best reduced to a Homeric allusion. At the same time, the allusion to Homer underscores the way in which the 'inextinguishable laughter of the gods' was always already reduced to a literary trope; the fact that imagining humanity as the plaything of the gods is a poetic cliché with an ancient origin paradoxically confirms that the gods were always the playthings of the poets. In this way, Heine's poem celebrates its own bad faith and implicitly accuses Schiller's poem of being in bad faith, too: he suggests that Schiller does not sincerely lament the inaccessibility of pagan enchantment but actually revels in the complexities of his own disenchanting posture; he pretends to regret the death of paganism but really affirms that it was well lost because, once lost, it can achieve its true vitality as an object of nostalgia (and as a sly weapon against Christianity).

We are perhaps meant to perceive that it is a Christian compassion for the weak and outcast that disposes Heine's speaker to ally himself, however flippantly, with the vanquished gods: his vision of the gods as dying and 'Schmerzenverklärt' ('transfigured by pain', HGG, l. 94) jarringly confounds the demise of ancient Greek religion with the Crucifixion of Christ. The ironies of this Romantic tendency to invest the Greek gods with Christian pathos are also key to Heine's prose work on the same theme, *Les Dieux en exil*, first published (in French) in 1853. Heine, born to a Jewish family, had converted to Christianity two years before he wrote 'Die Götter Griechenlands', though it is plain that this was a conversion of convenience, not conviction.<sup>29</sup> The precise date of composition for *Les Dieux en exil* is uncertain, though the year of publication would seem to indicate it was written after the watershed of 1848.<sup>30</sup> After this time, illness confined Heine to his famous 'mattress grave', and, repudiating the atheistic tendencies of his earlier work, he turned towards God. The nature of Heine's second conversion—whether it was a turn, or return, to Judaism, to Christianity, to a less definable and more idiosyncratic faith, or only the last of his mordant ironies—is a matter of interpretative controversy, and not only because of Heine's mercurial, relentlessly self-reflexive style.<sup>31</sup> No less than in the case of Schiller (or in the case of Pater, as discussed

<sup>28</sup> The 'inextinguishable laughter' of the gods is a common rendering of the phrase *asbestos gelōs* from Book 1, l. 771 of the *Iliad*; see Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Alexander Pope (London: W. Bowyer, for Bernard Lintott, 1715), p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> On Heine's 'insincere' conversion to Christianity see Robert C. Holub, 'Troubled Apostate: Heine's Conversion and its Consequences', in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. by Roger F. Cook (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), pp. 229–50 (p. 230).

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Sammons writes, 'I suspect [*Les Dieux en exil*] may have been conceived around [1846], especially as the commitment to pagan sensualism and its irreligious affect are stronger than they became after 1848. However, the actual writing may have been done in 1853' (*Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979), p. 319).

<sup>31</sup> For an account of the ambiguities of Heine's second conversion see Joseph A. Kruse, 'Late

[5] In the footnote, just '31' if the periodical is paginated per volume rather than per issue.

[6] Confirm that the omission points here are part of the original text?

below), the reception history of Heine's work is a struggle for the 'Geist' of a writer who used the legacy of ancient Greece to construct contradictory fables of modern secularization which programmatically destabilize distinctions between the religious and the secular. As Willi Goetschel observes, Heine 'casts secularization as a process that sheds light on the complicities and hidden affinities between a fully emancipated rationalism and its other, that is, religion, tradition, even superstition'.<sup>32</sup>

*Les Dieux en exil* is an extended *jeu d'esprit* that pivots on the conceit that the Greek gods were entirely real and have endured, not in a transcendent realm impervious to mortals, but in the secret places of the world or as apparently ordinary citizens of modern Europe. Heine here constructs the pagan gods as objects of pity because they have been displaced and vilified by Christianity. Yet, as is the case in his 'Die Götter Griechenlands', this fantasy has a paradoxical logic: the fact that Christianity has triumphed over paganism means that the gods have assumed a Christlike status as suffering gods; their persecution within Christian civilization partially humanizes them and means that they share in Christ's paradoxical status as a deity who comes down to earth and experiences human suffering. Thus Heine invites us to sympathize with the gods as 'ces émigrés olympiens, qui n'avaient plus ni asile ni ambroisie, [qui] durent avoir recours à un honnête métier terrestre pour gagner au moins de quoi vivre'.<sup>33</sup> If the Greek gods in their humbled, sorrowful condition vaguely resemble Christ, their experience of exile and dispersal across Europe also clearly parallels the Jewish diaspora. The fact that Heine's exiled gods invite a range of conflicting allegorical interpretations—they resonate by turns as Jewish, Christian, and secularized—seems to encode his sense of Western culture as a comedy of failed supersessions, with each new dispensation—Hellenic, Judaic, Christian, secular—uncannily inhabited by all it has sought to pass beyond. Heine also uses the notion of the gods in exile to allegorize a shift from the traditional enchantments of the romance genre to the secularizing conventions of modern realism: once glorious pagan gods are now forced to 'travailler comme simples journaliers chez nous . . . , et de boire de la bière au lieu de nectar' (*DE*, p. 241). He parodies the literal-mindedness underpinning realist conventions by literalizing the idea that paganism has in some sense survived within modern culture; here what survives of the pagan

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Thoughts: Reconsiderations from the "Matratzengruft", in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. by Cook, pp. 315–38. As Sammons notes, Heine's 'refusal to keep a straight face or a solemn tone when discussing his religious "regression", as he put it, has made it difficult for many people to believe that any substantial transformation took place' (*Heinrich Heine: The Elusive Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 353).

<sup>32</sup> 'Heine's Critical Secularism', *boundary 2*, 31.2 (2004), 149–71 (p. 152).

<sup>33</sup> Heine, *Les Dieux en exil*, in *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, vol. IX, ed. by Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1987), p. 241. All subsequent references are to this edition, identified by the abbreviation *DE*.

is no mere cultural legacy or archaic residue within modern consciousness, but reified forms of the apparently fabulous objects of ancient religious belief, which continue to intervene in human affairs despite belief in them having long passed away. More broadly, Heine's suggestion that the Greek gods lived on and people simply failed to notice may be read as a satire on the metaphysical blindness of a modern, secular rationalism, which occludes the divine by reducing it to anthropological or empirical forces, or by exiling it to the realm of the imagination. Heine lampoons this tendency in his preface to the tale, where he suggests that the Enlightenment campaign against gods, beliefs, and traditions ('dieux, croyances et traditions', *DE*, p. 227) has been so remorseless that belief in the existence of the moon has come to be despised as a superstition in some parts of the world. At the same time Heine's suggestion that the gods have been subject to a humiliating process of secularization seems to confirm the secular view that their status is entirely contingent upon human perception.

Crucially, the fates of Heine's Greek gods are diverse—some meet realistic fates and appear to have been utterly secularized; others seem to be responsible for the continuing vitality of enchantment within modern, Christian civilization, as well as for outbreaks of superstition and Gothic violence. For example, Apollo, who takes up employment as a shepherd in Austria, has his real, pagan identity exposed by a monk and is delivered over to the ecclesiastical courts (*DE*, p. 241). Heine here draws attention to the ambivalent status of art within the modern, Christian imagination: Apollo plays his lyre so enchantingly that he causes his audience to weep; and yet this aesthetic rapture also induces fear and hatred, and leads the community to transfix him with a stake as a vampire (*DE*, p. 241). Meanwhile, Dionysus integrates himself seamlessly into the Church: he is the superior of a Franciscan monastery who is noted as a skilled exorcist and practitioner of corporal punishment (*DE*, pp. 245–46). The suggestion that paganism persisted within Christianity under various disguises, some prosaic, others retaining a magical potency, has complex implications. On the one hand, Heine invites us to relish the notion that Christianity was always inhabited by an antithetical force—wild, sensual, joyous, and magical—that subverted it from within. On the other, he implies that many of the Greek gods adapted themselves so fully to the contours of modern, Christian civilization as to be entirely indiscernible within it; their very success at concealment suggests that in some respects there no longer exists any meaningful distinction between the Christian and the pagan. Heine has it both ways: he implies both the vital, subversive presence of the pagan within the Christian *and* that the Christian has diffused and diluted the pagan to the point of neutralizing it. For Heine as for Weber, Christianity has

[7] Confirm  
'cortège' accented thus?

and has not vanquished the pagan gods, and modernity is both thoroughly disenchanted and yet still enchanted after all.<sup>34</sup>

In the opening of the essay Heine playfully legitimates his gods-in-exile conceit by reference to Christianity. He points out that historically, Christianity did not simply debunk the pagan deities but reinterpreted them as evil spirits (*DE*, p. 230). Christianity thus preserved paganism by investing it with real, malign power. At the same time, however, Heine calls attention to the extent to which the disturbing power of paganism within the Christian imagination has become secularized and turned into a banal literary trope. In the middle of the essay he suddenly accosts the reader, who is presumed to be a decadent sophisticate, too inured to the modern fetishization of all things Greek to be truly receptive to pagan enchantment:

Mais, cher lecteur, j'oublie que vous avez fait vos classes et que vous êtes parfaitement instruit; vous avez donc compris dès les premières lignes qu'il est question ici d'une bacchanale, d'une fête de Dionysos. Sur des bas-reliefs ou dans des gravures d'ouvrages archéologiques, vous avez vu assez souvent le pompeux cortège qui suit ce dieu païen. Versé comme vous l'êtes dans l'antiquité classique, vous ne seriez pas trop effrayé, si à minuit, au milieu de la solitude d'une forêt, la magnifique et fantasque apparition d'une marche triomphale de Bacchus se présentait tout à coup à vos regards, et que vous entendissiez le vacarme de cette cohue de spectres en goguettes. Tout au plus éprouveriez-vous une espèce de saisissement voluptueux, un frisson esthétique, à l'aspect de ces gracieux fantômes sortis de leurs sarcophages séculaires et de dessous les ruines de leurs temples pour célébrer encore une fois les saints mystères du culte des plaisirs! Oui, c'est une orgie posthume: ces revenants gaillards, encore une fois, veulent fêter par des jeux et des chants la bienheureuse venue du fils de Sémélé, le rédempteur de la joie; encore une fois, ils veulent danser les danses des anciens temps, la polka du paganisme, le cancan de l'antiquité, ces danses riantes qu'on dansait sans jupon hypocrite, sans le contrôle d'un sergent de ville de la vertu. (*DE*, p. 244)

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Heine's critique here is two-pronged and unstable. Most obviously, he is mocking the modern reader who fails to recognize the real wildness of the Dionysian revels and fancies that paganism is no more than a source of conventionalized aesthetic pleasure. He goes on to suggest that the believing Christian has a more profound insight into the nature of ancient Greek culture

<sup>34</sup> Robert Button has provided an insightful analysis of Heine's 'proto-Weberian sensibility', particularly his anticipation of Weber's disenchantment paradigm. However, his reading of *Les Dieux en exil* emphasizes that the gods are fully assimilated into 'routinized, disenchanted, rational modernity', and suggests that whatever vestiges of magic they retain attest only to the negative enchantments of modern capitalism. While I agree that this aspect of Heine's tale anticipates Weber, I emphasize that the disenchantment concept in both writers is also an effort to convey the 'polytheism' of modern life, that is, its pluralism and relativism; the fact that some of Heine's gods, such as Apollo, remain authentically 'other' and disturbing to the social order conveys Heine's equally 'Weberian' view of secularization as an ambiguous and variegated process, not simply a rationalized 'iron cage'. See Button, 'A Note on Thematic Affinities in Max Weber and Heinrich Heine: Disenchantment, Devaluing Reversal, and the Demonic', *Max Weber Studies*, 12 (2012), 95-119 (pp. 114, 111).



than does the secular intellectual: where the latter merely derives a mild aesthetic thrill from the notion of Dionysian ecstasy, the Christian who believes his soul is in danger is properly alive to its power (*DE*, p. 245). Where Schiller claims that poetry remains in contact with the pagan and can therefore redeem the disenchantments of both modern science and Christianity, Heine highlights the extent to which modern literary culture conventionalizes all bids at pagan re-enchantment and reduces them to a set of high-culture affectations. At the same time, Heine appears to ironize a critique of Christianity he had often ventured in his earlier work: namely, that it drove sensual, pagan gaiety out of the world and entrenched a life-denying moral code. Arguably, Heine ventriloquizes this point of view with such gusto that it seems to exceed irony: he hints that such critiques of Christianity and efforts to rehabilitate the pagan have authentic substance, even if articulations of this position have become stale.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, however, *Les Dieux en exil* ventures no coherent critique or position—Heine mocks both the Christian morality that demonizes paganism and the more secular literary sensibility that valorizes it as an alternative to Christianity. For Heine, we err in taking the gods seriously, and we err in failing to take them seriously. The discrepant fates of the Greek gods in modernity allegorize not just the fissured, partly Judaeo-Christian, partly pagan character of Western culture, but the extent to which irony and authentic desire, aesthetic and religious experience, are often hard to distinguish in an unevenly secularized age. Heine claims that while modern sailors will laugh at a pantomime Neptune, they never really doubt the existence of the god and often pray to him in extremity (*DE*, p. 251). Likewise, Heine self-consciously pivots between reverence and irreverence towards the legacy of ancient Greece, and articulates hope for a pagan re-enchantment of modernity even as he punctures such hopes. The mixed generic mode of *Les Dieux en exil* also attempts to capture this disorienting co-implication of scepticism and belief, enchantment and disenchantment: Heine's text is at once a fable and a critical essay; at once a full-blown exercise in, and a trenchant critique of, Romantic Hellenism.

### *Pater*

It is well known that Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* were partly inspired by Heine's *Les Dieux en exil*.<sup>36</sup> Pater appropriates not only Heine's return-of-the-

<sup>35</sup> As Paul Reitter writes, Heine's early work had called, 'at times ironically, yet often ardently, for the gods' rehabilitation'. Noting the absence of Venus from *Les Dieux en exil*, Reitter argues that the tale attests to Heine's growing pessimism about the extent to which Hellenism could promote an emancipatory sensualism in the modern world. See Reitter, 'Heinrich Heine and the Discourse of Mythology', in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. by Cook, pp. 201–26 (pp. 213, 214–24).

<sup>36</sup> The importance of Heine's gods-in-exile theme to Pater's entire oeuvre has been a critical

gods conceit but his rich conjunction of fictional and non-fictional literary modes: Pater writes four essayistic fables which at once analyse a moment of historical rupture and suggest the resurgence of mythic or pagan forces, or even the ancient gods themselves, in ostensibly Christian and modern contexts. Yet critics often suggest that Pater adopts Heine's theme while dispensing with his satirical bite and freewheeling ironies. For instance, Jeffrey Wallen remarks: 'there is no evidence of a sense of humor in Pater, which makes his great appreciation for Heine [. . .] all the more striking'.<sup>37</sup> There is good reason for perceiving a serious intent behind Pater's handling of the myth of the returning gods in his *Imaginary Portraits*. From the late 1870s Pater had been composing essays such as 'A Study of Dionysus' (1876) and 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone' (1876), which would later be collected in the posthumously published volume *Greek Studies* (1895), and which address the subject of ancient Greek religion in a tone of wistful solemnity. Yet Pater absorbed more of Heine's ironic spirit than is often recognized. In particular, he inherits and extends Heine's tendency to foreground and ironize the interplay between the Christian, the pagan, and the secular in modernity. Like Heine, Pater was notorious for having espoused a neo-pagan form of religious scepticism, though his *Imaginary Portraits* were composed during a period when he appears to have been contemplating a return to religion.<sup>38</sup> The extent to which Pater re-embraced Christianity in his later work is an intricate question, and here I wish to note only that, like Heine before him, Pater invokes the Romantic disenchantment theme—that is, the gods-in-exile theme—in order at once to posit a process of secularization and to render its terms equivocal.

Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* focuses not simply on moments of dramatic cultural change, but more specifically on moments that seem to mark a transition from a religious to a secular imaginary. 'Denys l'Auxerrois' is in a sense an anomaly in the volume: it dramatizes not a culture on the cusp of modernity or the collision between Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress and older, mythic and religious modes of consciousness, but the return of the god Dionysus to the French town of Auxerre in the late Middle Ages. Unlike 'The Duke of Rosenmold', which may be considered the companion piece in the collection, this tale focuses on a confrontation between Christianity and ancient Greek religion proper, rather than upon a modern, secularized effort

commonplace since John Smith Harrison's article 'Pater, Heine, and the Old Gods of Greece', *PMLA*, 39 (1924), 655–86.

<sup>37</sup> 'Alive in the Grave: Walter Pater's Renaissance', *ELH*, 66 (1999), 1033–51 (p. 1048).

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of Pater's early scepticism and later, more sympathetic attitude to Christianity see Gerald Monsman, *Walter Pater* (Boston: Hall, 1977), pp. 17–47, 102–04. Lesley Higgins gives a subtle account of Pater's later stance towards Christianity in 'Doubting Pater: Religious Discourse and "the conditions of modern life"', *English Literature in Transition*, 38 (1995), 285–303.

to recuperate ancient Greece for aesthetic purposes. Although all four of the *Imaginary Portraits* contain fairy-tale elements and sometimes suggest parallels between their protagonists and ancient Greek deities, 'Denys l'Auxerrois' is much more overtly a fable than the other tales, and, like Heine's *Les Dieux en exil*, it literalizes the notion that the pagan persists within the Christian by imagining the return of the god Dionysus.<sup>39</sup>

'Denys l'Auxerrois' embeds its return-of-the-gods theme within a modern frame narrative. The narrator, like that of Heine's *Les Dieux en exil*, is an aesthete with a taste for the esoteric and recherché aspects of history. At the opening of the tale he is a tourist in search of historical curiosities in modern Auxerre, and he duly finds himself beguiled by two medieval art objects: a fragment of stained glass and some tapestries.<sup>40</sup> Both objects originally formed part of the decorations of the town cathedral, but the narrator is struck by the fact that they seem to depict a lurid and profoundly un-Christian scene, which he identifies as a Dionysian revel. The embedded narrative consists of the narrator's fanciful attempt to account for this incongruous presence of the Dionysian within officially Christian art: he imagines that medieval Auxerre witnessed not just a cultural efflorescence of paganism that insinuated itself into local customs and religious practices, but the return of the god Dionysus himself. Like Heine, Pater both affirms and ironizes the notion that Christianity has always been inhabited by antithetical, pagan energies, which periodically overwhelm its ascetic ideal and liberate a repressed sensuality. Although the embedded tale vividly pursues the implications of this idea, the presence of the frame narrative draws attention to the extent to which it constitutes a modern fantasy, the wish-fulfilment of a particular type of Romantic antiquarianism that prizes the pagan as a source of non- or anti-Christian varieties of enchantment. The story is thus a self-reflexive fantasy, one which does not simply temper its imagination of ancient paganism with irony, but reveals how such an ironic posture itself gives rise to distinctive kinds of fantasy.

The paradoxical implications of the gods-in-exile theme in Heine's handling—the pagan is posited both as an alien, subversive element within Christian culture and as a phenomenon that is difficult, even impossible, to distinguish from it—are also central to Pater's story. 'Denys l'Auxerrois' is ostensibly about the return of Dionysus to a medieval Christian town in the form of a mysterious and charismatic young man named Denys. However, as

<sup>39</sup> For an analysis of the mythic resonances of the *Imaginary Portraits*, especially Pater's creative use of the Dionysus/Apollo opposition, see Gerald Monsman, *Pater's Portraits: Mythic Pattern in the Fiction of Walter Pater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); and Anna Budziak, *Text, Body, and Indeterminacy: Doppelgänger Selves in Pater and Wilde* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Pater, *Imaginary Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1887), pp. 56–60. All subsequent references are to this edition, identified by the abbreviation *IP*.

[8] In the footnote, just '34' if the periodical is paginated per volume rather than per issue.

Stefano Evangelista's and Ellis Hanson's suggestive readings both imply, Pater constructs the narrative so that it may also be read with the key elements transposed: that is, as a fable about the return of Christ to a medieval pagan town.<sup>41</sup> As he does in 'A Study of Dionysus', Pater accentuates the parallels between Dionysus and Christ, dwelling upon their shared status as gods who suffer and who undergo death and resurrection, as well as upon the wine symbolism associated with both figures.<sup>42</sup> While Denys obviously brings a Bacchanalian spirit to Auxerre, unleashing an ecstatic sense of community, new social freedoms, and a new identification of the sacred with the sensual and the earthly, he clearly triggers a Christian revival at the same time. Crucially, the arrival of a Dionysian spirit in Auxerre does not undermine but actually enhances Christian worship in the town, which is underscored by the fact that Denys bolsters community enthusiasm for the decoration and completion of a great cathedral (*IP*, pp. 79–80). What is more, Denys displays the moral qualities that are often thought to mark off the Christian from the pagan: he demonstrates a special compassion for the sick and unfortunate, as well as a particular sympathy with children. Ironically, it is these, his most Christ-like attributes, that ultimately lead the people of Auxerre to turn on him and suspect him of witchcraft. In other words, the apparently Christian townspeople respond ecstatically to what seems distinctly pagan about Denys, but demonize what seems more distinctly Christian about him (*IP*, pp. 70–71). Pater further spells out the Christian aspects of the apparently Dionysian Denys by having him undergo a period of religious repentance and join a monastery towards the end of the story (*IP*, p. 79). In a further irony, it is only after Denys has repented of his apparently Dionysian powers that he becomes the victim of a Bacchanalian frenzy, and is torn limb from limb by the community in the middle of a pageant. Pater means us to notice that the initial justification for this pageant was a Christian ceremony, and that Denys, now in a monk's habit, resembles the crucified Christ or at least a martyred saint as much as he does Dionysus (*IP*, pp. 86–89). Yet these ironies are all unstable: while, by the end of the tale, the god Dionysus certainly seems more authentically Christian than the members of the medieval Christian community, the overall effect is dizzying, with each new detail and event in the story charged with both Christian and Dionysian significance.

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At precisely the point where the tale reaches its gruesome climax, Pater abruptly returns us to the frame narrative. We remember that the tale is a kind

<sup>41</sup> Stefano Evangelista, 'A Revolting Mistake: Walter Pater's Iconography of Dionysus', *Victorian Review*, 34.2 (2008), 200–18 (pp. 211–13); and Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 222.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of Pater's emphasis upon the parallels between Christ and Dionysus in 'A Study of Dionysus' see John Coates, *The Rhetorical Use of Provocation as a Means of Persuasion in the Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: Mellen, 2011), p. 182. See also Evangelista, 'A Revolting Mistake', pp. 211–13.

of hallucinatory exercise in ekphrasis: the notion that Dionysian ecstasy inevitably descends into decadence and barbarism is itself part of the narrator's daydream. Pater's tale does not simply expose the limits of modern fantasies about pagan enchantment by revealing, as he puts it, the 'dark or antipathetic' side of the Dionysian (*IP*, p. 75). Rather, he underscores the extent to which this revelation of darkness is intrinsic to such fantasies. The narrator is initially captivated by the tapestries and the stained glass not simply because they depict scenes of gaiety and sensual abandon, but because they include an image of a 'tortured figure' (*IP*, p. 60) amid the revelry, and thereby suggest a kind of primordial nexus between ecstatic pleasure and suffering (which is also, we are clearly meant to infer, the submerged point of contact between the Christian and the Dionysian). The notion that the medieval and/or pagan past discloses the real agonies of the human condition—as well as the real savagery of human nature—compels the narrator at least as much as the vision of a golden age (indeed, he says that he relishes not only the 'quaint dreams' of the Middle Ages, but its 'quaint nightmare[s]' as well: *IP*, p. 54). The word 'quaint' here is telling: the narrator allows himself to feel the temptations of the pagan and the medieval—and even suggests that they represent the deepest truths of human experience—only to affirm his enlightened distance from them. The tale actually begins with his assertion that modern people cannot earnestly desire a return to a more primitive phase of culture—they can entertain this idea only in a self-consciously ironic spirit. Pater raises the possibility that it is this very modern self-consciousness that introduces a decadent quality to the narrator's imagination of the past:

Almost every people, as we know, has had its legend of a 'golden age' and of its return—legends which will hardly be forgotten, however prosaic the world may become, while man himself remains the aspiring, not quite contented being he is. And yet in truth, since we are no longer children, we might well question the advantage of the return to us of a condition of life in which, by the nature of the case, the value of things would, so to speak, lie wholly on their surfaces, unless we could regain also the childish consciousness, or rather unconsciousness, in ourselves, to take all that adroitly and with the appropriate lightness of heart. (*IP*, p. 51)

As is the case with *Les Dieux en exil*, an ironic, decadent enjoyment of the notion of the pagan is, to an ambiguous extent, itself an object of irony here. Pater leaves open the possibility that the story is actually a provocation to take the notion of premodern enchantment in general, and the entanglement of the Christian and the Dionysian in particular, more seriously than the narrator does. Arguably, by the end of the story the narrator's own fantasy of the past has overmastered him, and the medieval artefacts that he initially contemplated in an ironic spirit have taken possession of his imagination. Certainly the tale ends with the narrator confessing that on 'days of a certain

[9] I corrected the Dowling title (British spelling 'Archaeology'), and have given the journal reference as 31.2 after finding it on JSTOR (which I can't access in full); but just '31' if the periodical is paginated per volume rather than per issue.

atmosphere, when the trace of the Middle Age comes out, like old marks in the stones in rainy weather, I seemed actually to have seen the tortured figure there—to have met Denys l'Auxerrois in the streets' (*IP*, p. 88).

However, Pater's tale is organized around an irony that undermines the distinction between the enchanted, premodern past and a 'prosaic' modernity established in the frame narrative. His narrator is partly fascinated by ancient Greek religion and by medieval Christianity because he imagines that both cultures enabled a more exalted perception of the powers of art. He is intrigued by the tapestries and the stained glass because they depict scenes of music inducing communal rapture, and he ascribes a pagan identity to the figure of the organ-builder to account for this apparently magical effect (*IP*, pp. 59–60). And yet the fable he constructs to satisfy his own curiosity about this convergence of the pagan and the Christian, the religious and the aesthetic, the spiritual and the sensual, only partially affirms that the premodern past enabled any such ideal experience of reconciliation. As M. F. Moran observes, medieval Auxerre itself seems 'marked by a secularized consciousness'; 'despite the grand churches and elaborate religious liturgy [. . .] there is little sense of the transcendent'.<sup>43</sup> This is surely because the medieval inhabitants of Auxerre are as obsessed with excavating the past as the narrator himself—the story repeatedly shows them exhuming graves and searching for relics in an apparently desperate effort to come into contact with the sacred. Pater means us to notice the parallel between the narrator's own fetishization of the remnants of the pagan and the medieval, and the medieval Christian veneration of relics, which, within the logic of the story, mirrors or even encodes a pagan reverence for the material, the sensual, and the chthonic.<sup>44</sup> Pater lays heavy emphasis upon these continuities: the ceremonial exhumation of a saint's body inspires 'a wonderful curiosity' in Denys which recalls the modern narrator's curiosity about historical artefacts (*IP*, p. 85). The exhumation of the saint also inspires Denys to exhume his mother's body and rebury it in consecrated ground, an act which seems to symbolize the fluid conversion of pagan impulses into Christian ones, and vice versa (*IP*, p. 85). Pater suggests the morbidity of this transhistorical preoccupation with disinterring the past by lingering over the grotesqueness of the disinterred saint's body, and the sensual grandeur of the exhumation ceremony (*IP*, p. 78). He also dramatically underscores the extent to which the enchantments of the premodern past have more than a residue of barbarity: the exhumation of the

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<sup>43</sup> 'Pater's Mythic Fiction: Gods in a Gilded Age', in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991), pp. 169–88 (p. 177).

<sup>44</sup> Critics often remark upon what might be termed Pater's 'chthonic imagination'—that is, his preoccupation with graves, relics, and the materiality of the earth. See Linda Dowling, 'Walter Pater and Archaeology: The Reconciliation with Earth', *Victorian Studies*, 31.2 (1988), 209–23; and Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 93–98.

saint's body is paralleled by the accidental discovery of a skeleton under a bridge—apparently the remains of a child who had been buried there alive to ward off evil spirits (*IP*, p. 83). Pater's tale thus seems to critique Romantic nostalgia for a premodern enchantment—whether it takes the form of a longing for ancient Greece, or for medieval Christianity—on two different grounds. Most obviously, the tale dwells upon the dark side of premodern enchantment, its proximity to superstition and its more macabre energies. At the same time, Pater emphasizes that enchantment is always imagined as a lost or buried object: even at the height of the at once Christian and pagan golden age of Denys, the community at Auxerre—as well as Denys himself—is gripped by a compulsion to disinter the past. This makes the fantasy of the golden age of Auxerre appear spurious not simply because it culminates in horror, but because the fantasy implies an infinite regress, with every apparent golden age striving to retrieve a prior golden age through artefacts and relics. Disenchantment, and the desire for re-enchantment through an encounter with a historical object, turns out to be an ancient and medieval phenomenon as much as a modern one. And yet these threads of critique are compromised by the fact that they emerge only from the logic of the narrator's fantasy.

### *Conclusion*

Weber's suggestion that modernity witnesses the return of pagan gods in disenchanted form is in some sense an inspired reading of a Romantic literary tradition that fantasizes about the persistence or return of paganism within modernity while gesturing self-consciously at the artificiality, literariness, or darker implications of this fantasy. As I noted in my introduction, Michael Saler has recently contested the Weberian identification of secular modernity with disenchantment by celebrating the vitality of the ironic imagination in modern literature, which he defines as a provisional, 'as if' form of imagining that enables writers to reconcile rationality with a sense of the magical or marvellous.<sup>45</sup> In her book *The Enchantment of Modern Life* Jane Bennett also secularizes and aestheticizes the concept of 'enchantment' in order to dispute Weber's thesis. She notes that: 'the word *enchant* is linked to the French verb *to sing: chanter*. To "en-charm": to surround with song or incantation; hence, to cast a spell with sounds, to make fall under the sway of a magical refrain, to carry away on a sonorous stream.'<sup>46</sup> Bennett makes a passionate case for the tenability of modern, secular forms of enchantment, and even characterizes these as 'perhaps neo-pagan [. . .] enchantment[s]'.<sup>47</sup> Yet Bennett's very attachment to the word 'enchantment' leaves her open to the common charge

<sup>45</sup> *As If*, pp. 8–13.

<sup>46</sup> *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

that secularity is a parasitic condition, one that prospers only by dissimulating its debts to the older, religious forms of consciousness it disavows.<sup>48</sup> Although the possibility of a purely aesthetic experience—of a song sung, or a refrain repeated, just for its own pleasing sake, rather than to conjure spirits or work supernatural effects—is embedded, even at an etymological level, in the concept of ‘enchantment’, the appeal of the secularized interpretation of the term surely relies on the magical aura which hovers around it as a connotation. Bennett’s impulse to label these secular-but-enchanted experiences ‘pagan’ only returns us to the ambiguities of Weber’s thesis and of Schiller’s seminal poem.

Heine and Pater certainly frame their explorations of the notion that paganism maintains a potent life in modernity with ironic detachment—but this irony often seems to return upon itself, so that a sceptical, merely aesthetic enjoyment of the enchantments of paganism becomes the object of critique. The notion that the Greek gods were real and continue to exert influence in subterranean ways enables Heine and Pater to articulate dissatisfaction with a modern tendency to gloss the supernatural in purely aesthetic terms, or to treat the West’s classical inheritance as merely an archive of beguiling poetic conceits. And yet the apparent implication of this critique—that the enchantments of the pagan are more than figurative, and that they remain both viable and desirable—is ventured only equivocally, from within the protection of an ironic frame. Like Weber, Heine and Pater invoke the gods of Greece to underscore the thoroughly ‘prosaic’ and disenchanting nature of modernity *and* to suggest that this is not the whole story—that there is perhaps some enchanted remainder after all. The status of this remainder—how far it affirms the survival of the pagan or a sense of magic in modernity, and how far it just attests, as in Schiller’s poem, to the immortality of a metaphor—is no clearer in Pater’s and Heine’s work than it is in Weber’s.

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<sup>48</sup> The claim that modern secularism imitates or remains captive to the religious frameworks it apparently rejects is at the centre of debates about secularization. For a subtle discussion of this subject see Vincent Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 1–61.



896 *The Gods of Greece from Schiller to Pater*

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