

Walter Pater: Art for Art's Sake

Walter Horatio Pater (1839–1894) was an English essayist, literary and art critic, and fiction writer.

Walter Pater's Works

1. Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873)
2. Marius, the Epicurean (1885)
3. Appreciations (1889)
4. Plato and Platonism (1893)

Walter Pater (1839-1894) is one of the greatest critics of the latter part of the Victorian age; Mathew Arnold was in its middle phase. Pater is, indeed, the antithesis of Arnold.

Mathew Arnold is a moralist, he believes in the principle, "Art for Life's Sake".

Pater is not a moralist, he believes in the principle, "Art for Art's Sake".

Walter Pater's Method

- His methods of criticism are romantic impressionistic as contrasted with the objective-classical method of Arnold.
- Pater was a subversive who has rejected religious faith.
- For him, Art is the only means to stop time.
- Life should be lived 'as a work of art.'
- Intense experiences, feelings, and sensations.
- The artist should feel sensations.
- Art has no reference to life, has nothing to do with morality, and need not be didactic.

Walter Pater's Aestheticism

- Pater is associated with a literary movement in England known as the Aesthetic movement.
- Its followers believed in the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake; they regarded the worship of Beauty as the highest goal of life.
- The purpose of art is exclusively to impart aesthetic pleasure by the cultivation of Beauty. It had nothing to do with morality or with any other utilitarian considerations.
- Life is short; we live constantly under the shadow of death. So we must hurry to enjoy ourselves.
- The pleasure lies in one's sensations and experiences derived from the beautiful.

The Failure of Aestheticism

The Aesthetic movement gained ground in England during the nineties of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century. It failed for the following reasons:

1. The English mind is practical, but the movement cultivated a cult of beauty unconcerned with practical affairs of life and was dissociated from morality.
2. Its leaders were far from pure. Oscar Wilde, for instance, was immoral; he was fined on grounds of moral corruption and was sentenced to imprisonment by a law court.
3. The outbreak of World War I. People could not imagine themselves cultivating the cult of Beauty at a time when the dear sons of the country were killed in action.