

# **GREEK STUDIES**

**A SERIES OF ESSAYS**

**BY**

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## PREFACE

THE present volume consists of a collection of essays by the late Mr. Pater, all of which have already been given to the public in various Magazines; and it is owing to the kindness of the several proprietors of those Magazines that they can now be brought together in a collected shape. It will, it is believed, be felt, that their value is considerably enhanced by their appearance in a single volume, where they can throw light upon one another, and exhibit by their connexion a more complete view of the scope and purpose of Mr. Pater in dealing with the art and literature of the ancient world.

The essays fall into two distinct groups, one dealing with the subjects of Greek mythology and Greek poetry, the other with the history of Greek sculpture and Greek architecture. But these two groups are not wholly distinct; they mutually illustrate one another, and serve to enforce Mr. Pater's conception of the essential

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unity, in all its many-sidedness, of the Greek character. The god understood as the "spiritual form" of the things of nature is not only the key-note of the "Study of Dionysus"<sup>1</sup> and "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone,"<sup>2</sup> but reappears as contributing to the interpretation of the growth of Greek sculpture.<sup>3</sup> Thus, though in the bibliography of his writings, the two groups are separated by a considerable interval, there is no change of view; he had already reached the centre of the problem, and, the secret once gained, his mode of treatment of the different aspects of Greek life and thought is permanent and consistent.

The essay on "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" was originally prepared as two lectures, for delivery, in 1875, at the Birmingham and Midland Institute. These lectures were published in the *Fortnightly Review*, in Jan. and Feb. 1876. The "Study of Dionysus" appeared in the same *Review* in Dec. 1876. "The Bacchanals of Euripides" must have been written about the same time, as a sequel to the "Study of Dionysus"; for, in 1878, Mr. Pater revised the four essays, with the intention, apparently, of publishing them collectively in a volume, an intention afterwards abandoned.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 220, 254.

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The text now printed has, except that of "The Bacchanals," been taken from proofs then set up, further corrected in manuscript. "The Bacchanals," written long before, was not published until 1889, when it appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* for May. It was reprinted, without alteration, prefixed to Dr. Tyrrell's edition of the *Bacchae*. "Hippolytus Veiled" first appeared in August 1889, in *Macmillan's Magazine*. It was afterwards rewritten, but with only a few substantial alterations, in Mr. Pater's own hand, with a view, probably, of republishing it with other essays. This last revise has been followed in the text now printed.

The papers on Greek sculpture<sup>1</sup> are all that remain of a series which, if Mr. Pater had lived, would, probably, have grown into a still more important work. Such a work would have included one or more essays on Phidias and the Parthenon, of which only a fragment, though an important fragment, can be found amongst his papers; and it was to have been prefaced by an Introduction to Greek Studies, only a page or two of which was ever written.

<sup>1</sup> "The Beginnings of Greek Sculpture" was published in the *Fortnightly Review*, Feb. and March 1880; "The Marbles of Ægina" in the same *Review* in April. "The Age of Athletic Prizemen" was published in the *Contemporary Review* in February of the present year.

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This is not the place to speak of Mr. Pater's private virtues, the personal charm of his character, the brightness of his talk, the warmth of his friendship, the devotion of his family life. But a few words may be permitted on the value of the work by which he will be known to those who never saw him.

Persons only superficially acquainted, or by hearsay, with his writings, are apt to sum up his merits as a writer by saying that he was a master, or a consummate master of style; but those who have really studied what he wrote do not need to be told that his distinction does not lie in his literary grace alone, his fastidious choice of language, his power of word-painting, but in the depth and seriousness of his studies. That the amount he has produced, in a literary life of thirty years, is not greater, is one proof among many of the spirit in which he worked. His genius was "an infinite capacity for taking pains." That delicacy of insight, that gift of penetrating into the heart of things, that subtleness of interpretation, which with him seems an instinct, is the outcome of hard, patient, conscientious study. If he had chosen, he might, without difficulty, have produced a far greater body of work of less value; and from a worldly point of view, he would have been wise. Such was not his under-

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standing of the use of his talents. *Cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo.* Those who wish to understand the spirit in which he worked, will find it in this volume.

C. L. S.

Oct. 1894.





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## A STUDY OF DIONYSUS

### THE SPIRITUAL FORM OF FIRE AND DEW

WRITERS on mythology speak habitually of the *religion* of the Greeks. In thus speaking, they are really using a misleading expression, and should speak rather of *religions*; each race and class of Greeks—the Dorians, the people of the coast, the fishers—having had a religion of its own, conceived of the objects that came nearest to it and were most in its thoughts, and the resulting usages and ideas never having come to have a precisely harmonised system, after the analogy of some other religions. The religion of Dionysus is the religion of people who pass their lives among the vines. As the religion of Demeter carries us back to the cornfields and farmsteads of Greece, and places us, in fancy, among a primitive race, in the furrow and beside the granary; so the religion of Dionysus carries us back to its vineyards, and is a monument of the ways and thoughts of people whose days go by beside the winepress, and

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under the green and purple shadows, and whose material happiness depends on the crop of grapes. For them the thought of Dionysus and his circle, a little Olympus outside the greater, covered the whole of life, and was a complete religion, a sacred representation or interpretation of the whole human experience, modified by the special limitations, the special privileges of insight or suggestion, incident to their peculiar mode of existence.

Now, if the reader wishes to understand what the scope of the religion of Dionysus was to the Greeks who lived in it, all it represented to them by way of one clearly conceived yet complex symbol, let him reflect what the loss would be if all the effect and expression drawn from the imagery of the vine and the cup fell out of the whole body of existing poetry ; how many fascinating trains of reflexion, what colour and substance would therewith have been deducted from it, filled as it is, apart from the more awful associations of the Christian ritual, apart from Galahad's cup, with all the various symbolism of the fruit of the vine. That supposed loss is but an imperfect measure of all that the name of Dionysus recalled to the Greek mind, under a single imaginable form, an outward body of flesh presented to the senses, and comprehending, as its animating soul, a whole world of thoughts, surmises, greater and less experiences.

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The student of the comparative science of religions finds in the religion of Dionysus one of many modes of that primitive tree-worship which, growing out of some universal instinctive belief that trees and flowers are indeed habitations of living spirits, is found almost everywhere in the earlier stages of civilisation, enshrined in legend or custom, often graceful enough, as if the delicate beauty of the object of worship had effectually taken hold on the fancy of the worshipper. Shelley's *Sensitive Plant* shows in what mists of poetical reverie such feeling may still float about a mind full of modern lights, the feeling we too have of a life in the green world, always ready to assert its claim over our sympathetic fancies. Who has not at moments felt the scruple, which is with us always regarding animal life, following the signs of animation further still, till one almost hesitates to pluck out the little soul of flower or leaf?

And in so graceful a faith the Greeks had their share; what was crude and inane in it becoming, in the atmosphere of their energetic, imaginative intelligence, refined and humanised. The oak-grove of Dodona, the seat of their most venerable oracle, did but perpetuate the fancy that the sounds of the wind in the trees may be, for certain prepared and chosen ears, intelligible voices; they could believe in the transmigration of souls into mulberry and laurel, mint and hyacinth; and the dainty *Metamorphoses* of Ovid

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are but a fossilised form of one morsel here and there, from a whole world of transformation, with which their nimble fancy was perpetually playing. "Together with them," says the Homeric hymn to Aphrodite, of the Hamadryads, the nymphs which animate the forest trees, "with them, at the moment of their birth, grew up out of the soil, oak-tree or pine, fair, flourishing among the mountains. And when at last the appointed hour of their death has come, first of all, those fair trees are dried up; the bark perishes from around them, and the branches fall away; and therewith the soul of them deserts the light of the sun."

These then are the nurses of the vine, bracing it with interchange of sun and shade. They bathe, they dance, they sing songs of enchantment, so that those who seem oddly in love with nature, and strange among their fellows, are still said to be *nympholepti*; above all, they are weavers or spinsters, spinning or weaving with airiest fingers, and subtlest, many-coloured threads, the foliage of the trees, the petals of flowers, the skins of the fruit, the long thin stalks on which the poplar leaves are set so lightly that Homer compares to them, in their constant motion, the maids who sit spinning in the house of Alcinous. The nymphs of Naxos, where the grape-skin is darkest, weave for him a purple robe. Only, the ivy is never transformed, is visible as natural ivy to the last, pressing the

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dark outline of its leaves close upon the firm, white, quite human flesh of the god's forehead.

In its earliest form, then, the religion of Dionysus presents us with the most graceful phase of this graceful worship, occupying a place between the ruder fancies of half-civilised people concerning life in flower or tree, and the dreamy after-fancies of the poet of the *Sensitive Plant*. He is the soul of the individual vine, first; the young vine at the house-door of the newly married, for instance, as the vine-grower stoops over it, coaxing and nursing it, like a pet animal or a little child; afterwards, the soul of the whole species, the spirit of fire and dew, alive and leaping in a thousand vines, as the higher intelligence, brooding more deeply over things, pursues, in thought, the generation of sweetness and strength in the veins of the tree, the transformation of water into wine, little by little; noting all the influences upon it of the heaven above and the earth beneath; and shadowing forth, in each pause of the process, an intervening person—what is to us but the secret chemistry of nature being to them the mediation of living spirits. So they passed on to think of Dionysus (naming him at last from the brightness of the sky and the moisture of the earth) not merely as the soul of the vine, but of all that life in flowing things of which the vine is the symbol, because its most emphatic example. At Delos he bears a son, from whom



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in turn spring the three mysterious sisters Cœno, Spermo, and Elais, who, dwelling in the island, exercise respectively the gifts of turning all things at will into oil, and corn, and wine. In the *Bacchæ* of Euripides, he gives his followers, by miracle, honey and milk, and the water gushes for them from the smitten rock. He comes at last to have a scope equal to that of Demeter, a realm as wide and mysterious as hers ; the whole productive power of the earth is in him, and the explanation of its annual change. As some embody their intuitions of that power in corn, so others in wine. He is the dispenser of the earth's hidden wealth, giver of riches through the vine, as Demeter through the grain. And as Demeter sends the airy, dainty-wheeled and dainty-winged spirit of Triptolemus to bear her gifts abroad on all winds, so Dionysus goes on his eastern journey, with its many intricate adventures, on which he carries his gifts to every people.

*A little Olympus outside the greater*, I said, of Dionysus and his companions ; he is the centre of a cycle, the hierarchy of the creatures of water and sunlight in many degrees ; and that fantastic system of tree-worship places round him, not the fondly whispering spirits of the more graceful inhabitants of woodland only, the nymphs of the poplar and the pine, but the whole satyr circle, intervening between the headship of the vine and the mere earth, the grosser, less human



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spirits, incorporate and made visible, of the more coarse and sluggish sorts of vegetable strength, the fig, the reed, the ineradicable weed-things which will attach themselves, climbing about the vine-poles, or seeking the sun between the hot stones. For as Dionysus, the *spiritual form* of the vine, is of the highest human type, so the fig-tree and the reed have animal souls, mistakeable in the thoughts of a later, imperfectly remembering age, for mere abstractions of animal nature; Snubnose, and Sweetwine, and Silenus, the oldest of them all, so old that he has come to have the gift of prophecy.

Quite different from them in origin and intent, but confused with them in form, are those other companions of Dionysus, Pan and his children. Home-spun dream of simple people, and like them in the uneventful tenour of his existence, he has almost no story; he is but a presence; the *spiritual form* of Arcadia, and the ways of human life there; the reflexion, in sacred image or ideal, of its flocks, and orchards, and wild honey; the dangers of its hunters; its weariness in noonday heat; its children, agile as the goats they tend, who run, in their picturesque rags, across the solitary wanderer's path, to startle him, in the unfamiliar upper places; its one adornment and solace being the dance to the homely shepherd's pipe, cut by Pan first from the sedges of the brook Molpeia.

Breathing of remote nature, the sense of which

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is so profound in the Homeric hymn to Pan, the pines, the foldings of the hills, the leaping streams, the strange echoings and dying of sound on the heights, "the bird, which among the petals of many-flowered spring, pouring out a dirge, sends forth her honey-voiced song," "the crocus and the hyacinth disorderly mixed in the deep grass"—things which the religion of Dionysus loves—Pan joins the company of the Satyrs. Amongst them, they give their names to insolence and mockery, and the finer sorts of malice, to unmeaning and ridiculous fear. But the best spirits have found in them also a certain human pathos, as in displaced beings, coming even nearer to most men, in their very roughness, than the noble and delicate person of the vine; dubious creatures, half-way between the animal and human kinds, speculating wistfully on their being, because not wholly understanding themselves and their place in nature; as the animals seem always to have this expression to some noticeable degree in the presence of man. In the later school of Attic sculpture they are treated with more and more of refinement, till in some happy moment Praxiteles conceived a model, often repeated, which concentrates this sentiment of true humour concerning them; a model of dainty natural ease in posture, but with the legs slightly crossed, as only lowly-bred gods are used to carry them, and with some puzzled trouble of youth, you might wish for a moment