In a note to the third edition of *The Renaissance* (1888) Walter Pater stated that he was restoring the "Conclusion," suppressed in the second edition because "it might possibly mislead some young men," for he had "dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* [1885] with the thoughts suggested by it." Although nearly all of Pater’s critics and biographers have remarked on the connection, none has convincingly demonstrated the precise link between the two. In my view it is the idealist doctrine of becoming, eternal change without telos, that informs the novel, which in turn elaborates the "Conclusion," and marks it as a work of romantic irony.

Pater sees Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher of the sixth century B.C., as the avatar of the philosophy of change, his notion of perpetual flux having come to be the dominant philosophical doctrine of modern times:

The entire modern theory of "development," in all its various phases—what is it but old Heracliteanism awake once more in a new world, and grown to full proportions? / *Panta chorei, panta rei.* —It is the burden of Hegel on the one hand, and on the other hand of Darwin and Darwinism, for which "type" itself properly is not but is only always becom-
The Heracliteanism of Marius the Epicurean

The bold paradox of Heraclitus is, in effect, repeated on all sides. Nay, the idea of development is at last invading one by one, as the secret of their explanation, all the products of mind, the very mind itself, the abstract reason. Gradually we have come to think, or to feel, that primary certitude.

(Plato and Platonism, pp. 19-21; Greek transliterated)

Pater's own adherence to Heracliteanism, although understood imperfectly at first, is reflected everywhere in his works. The "Conclusion" to The Renaissance, originally part of a review of William Morris's Poems in the Westminster Review for October 1868, is prefixed by a quotation in Greek from Plato's Cratylus: "Heraclitus says that all things give way and nothing remains.' Here, however, Heracliteanism is mainly a philosophy of carpe diem. "While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment" (p. 237). Not the fruits of experience but experience itself, there "our one chance lies," and so we must aim at "getting as many pulsations as possible into a given time" (p. 238). In short, the "Conclusion," which in fact had little relevance to the preceding essays or, for that matter, to the review of which it was originally a part, expresses Pater's firm belief that this is a world of perpetual flux in which what is "irresistibly real and attractive for us" is real "for that moment only" before it fades into nothingness (p. 236).

In the later 1870s and early 1880s Pater discovered, to no small degree from Browning, that his understanding of Heraclitus's philosophy had been faulty to the extent that he had been unable to conceive of the flux as being indeed perpetual, not ending with the individual's life but extending, in some form or other, beyond the grave to some other realm where, as Browning phrased it in the "Epilogue" to Asolando, the individual is to strive and thrive "there as here." Whether Pater himself literally believed in an afterlife cannot be determined, but in Marius the Epicurean he was concerned to show through the medium of
fiction that, given credence lent to the philosophy of becoming, belief in a kind of immortality is—perhaps in addition to being a psychological necessity—a logical sequence. Marius thus develops “the thoughts suggested by” the “Conclusion.” For in it Pater carries the doctrine of becoming, limited to a kind of sensationalism in the earlier work, over into the field of religion.

“We are all condamnés,” Pater wrote in the “Conclusion” to The Renaissance, quoting Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables, “we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve” (p. 238). And echoing this in the last paragraph of Marius he wrote of his eponymous hero, “He had often dreamt he was condemned to die” (2:223). How to escape the death sentence becomes the central problem explored in the novel; and though apparently framed in Christian terms, the answer is fundamentally a reformulation of the Heraclitean philosophy of becoming that Marius sees as having been perverted by the followers—the Cyrenaics or Epicureans—of the Ephesian philosopher.

Between the publication of Studies in the History of the Renaissance and Marius Pater had produced his first piece of prose fiction, “The Child in the House” (1878), also about a boy who, haunted by awareness of death, turns his sights from Epicureanism to the “sacred ideal” of Christianity. As Mrs. Humphry Ward noted in her review of Marius, “The Child in the House” was unsatisfactory as fiction because its “autobiographical matter” had been insufficiently disguised. What the author needed was a form or manner of presentation that was “more impersonal, more remote.” This, she said, Pater discovered in Marius, but she also remarked that “no one can fail to catch the autobiographical note” (Seiler, pp. 130, 131).

In her observation of the autobiographical nature of the novel Mrs. Ward was joined by her fellow reviewers and has been joined since by nearly all of Pater’s critics and biographers, sharing the belief that, as Michael Levey puts it, “Marius both is and is not Pater.” Yet it is not merely that many of the events and ideas depicted in the novel are coincident with those in the author’s life,
not merely that Marius is a reflection of Pater; it is, rather, that the process of representation is subjected to a still further remove. For Pater not only looks at himself in Marius but also, more importantly, looks at himself in Marius looking at Marius. The novel thus is an example of that self-mirroring of which Friedrich Schlegel spoke when attempting to define romantic irony (A 238, KA, 2:204); it is like that series of receding images noted in the chapter on Vanity Fair.

To Marius the world is the stage for a drama in which he has a part but of which he is chiefly a spectator; which is to say that he is both an actor in and observer of the drama that is his life, or, to put it slightly differently, that he is the active reader of the text of the drama of his life and the witness of the enacted play. What he reads is a text that, in his words, “presented me to myself” and what he sees is, in the words of the author, “a self not himself” (2:173, 67). As a child, “even in his most enthusiastic participation” in the world, he was nevertheless “essentially but a spectator” (1:46). Likewise in Rome he was wont “to conceive of himself as but the passive spectator of the world around him” (1:125). In his experience of Christian worship “he found himself a spectator of this new thing” (2:129). Even on his deathbed he continued to be primarily a witness of himself in action, with feelings “such as he might have experienced himself standing by the deathbed of another” (2:219).

Because he existed “much in the realm of the imagination, constructing the world for himself in great measure from within,” his life was “like the reading of a romance to him” (1:24–25). Dissatisfied with the reality of the given text, he is concerned to rewrite it in order to live in “a world altogether fairer than that he saw” (1:45). This meant shaping life into a work of art in which “everyday life” is relieved of “the mere drift or débris, and “the ideal or poetic traits” come to be the sole reality (1:53, 54). “How like a picture!” says the narrator as he describes the setting in which Marius and Flavian lie reading The Golden Ass. “and it was precisely the scene described in what
they were reading” (1:55). And when Marius eventually meets the author of the book, Apuleius “was come to seem almost like one of the personages in his own fiction” (2:76). Life translated into art, “nothing seemed to be its true self” (1:58)—because it seemed better than its true self. As his aestheticized existence progresses from romance to romance and picture to picture, Marius is ever looking for the ampler art form “which should take up into itself and explain this world’s delightful shows, as the scattered fragments of a poetry, till then but half-understood, might be taken up into the text of a lost epic, recovered at last” (2:20). Finally the “ampler vision” is provisionally attained, although, spectator as Marius is, it comes to him and not he to it; and regarding the text in which his life is inscribed, Marius in his dying moments “read surely, now, that his last morning was come” (2:219, 224).

Throughout the novel Marius feels that his life is partly determined and partly free. That is why he regards himself as both the writer of the drama of his life and an actor, a kind of puppet, in it. Projecting himself into the play, Marius is constantly peering into windows and entering through doorways opening onto new scenes. At the shrine of Aesculapius on his last morning there his “special director” lifts a panel permitting the boy to look out onto what “might have seemed the very presentment of a land of hope.” This was Pisa? “Or Rome, was it? asked Marius, ready to believe the utmost” (1:40). When he goes to Rome, however, he finds the imperial city disappointing because it does not live up to his imaginative preconception of it. He then enters into new settings in hope always of the “ampler vision.” But it is never solely through his own will and determination that he attains other scenes, for he is always guided by some “special director” of his life drama. Though he can envision new settings and new situations, his imagination must be localized or incarnated so that the drama can occur. Thus his various flirtations with religions and philosophies: the religion of Numa is associated with his mother and his home, White-nights; Epicureanism with Flavian and the
academy at Pisa; Stoicism with Marcus Aurelius and the emperor's chambers; Christianity with Cornelius and Cecilia's home. The roles he creates are nevertheless enacted under supervision and at the prompting of others.

Let us look at his various roles in different settings and the roles in which he views others. At White-nights, about which there is something "spell-bound, and but half-real" and where he enjoys "the charm of exclusiveness and immemorial authority, which membership in a local priestly college conferred upon him," he cultivates the "ideal of priesthood" in his role as hierophant of the archaic religion (1:20, 15, 25). The religion of Numa was "a year-long burden of forms," its liturgy composed of words whose "precise meaning was long since become unintelligible" and intoned by priests clad in "strange, stiff, antique vestments" (1:6–7). Taking "a leading part in the ceremonies," Marius loved it as theater, a "spectacle thus permitted on a religious pretext" and stimulating "much speculative activity" (1:8, 9). His experience of White-nights "lent the reality of concrete outline to a peculiar ideal of home" and his observation of his mother in this setting made her "the very type of maternity" (1:22). During these formative years Marius learns "a lesson in the skilled cultivation of life," which is to be ever careful of his role and not to confuse it with others, "to discriminate, select form from what was less select" and, should anything repugnant intervene, "disentangle himself from that circumstance at any cost" (1:31, 33).

When he moves to Pisa, the time "when he played at priests" is past. He becomes fascinated by Flavian, who, "like a carved figure in motion," was "an epitome of the whole pagan world" (1:133, 50, 53). Marius turns to something resembling closet drama, "replacing the outer world of other people by an inward world as himself really cared to have it." To play any kind of part "in that outer world of other people, as though taking it at their estimate, would be possible henceforth only as a kind of irony" (1:133). It would be a kind of Pirandellian situation, as if a char-
acter in one play were suddenly translated into another. For the most part, however, he acted in his own dream play, at this time "lived much, mentally, in the brilliant Greek colony" of the Cyrenaics, which "hung, for his fancy, between the mountains and the sea," and "had almost come to doubt of other men's reality" (1:134, 169).

He is recalled from this world of fancy by "a vivid personal presence," the soldier Cornelius, whom he sees as the type of "some new knighthood or chivalry" and behind whose dramatic mask he perceives "some secret, constraining motive" (1:169, 170, 232). With his new friend Marius journeys to Rome, where he seems to enter the giant theater of the old pagan world with its "magnificent spectacles" (1:188), pageants, and grand public shows, such as the triumph of the emperor, in which "the world passed by dramatically, accentuating, in this favorite spectacle, its mode of viewing things" (2:199). But once again his role is not entirely congenial, for Marius feels to some degree that he is acting in a play with a brief run. He cannot throw himself fully into his part: aware of its factitiousness, he "feels all the while that he is but conceding reality to suppositions, choosing of his own will to walk in a day-dream, of the illusiveness of which he at least is aware" (1:213).

The other actors on the enormous stage also play their parts. The empress Faustine, "the most beautiful woman in the world" (1:218), is a star, as is the co-emperor Lucius Verus, "a popular figure on the world's stage" (2:30). Marcus Cornelius Fronto, having long played the role of orator, "had become the favourite 'director' " (1:222). The chief player is clearly Marcus Aurelius, who wears the dramatic mask of "outward serenity, which he valued so highly as point of manner or expression" yet beneath which Marius observes "some reserved internal sorrow" (1:190–91). With him "every minutest act was considered" and had "the character of a ritual" (1:192). Although he knew "how to act in union with persons of character very alien from his own" (1:194), he was often given to soliloquy and monologue, either
holding "conversations with himself" or seeming "to have forgotten his audience, and to be speaking only to himself (2:37; 1:201). In his pose of "pontifical abstraction," the world being "to him simply what the higher reason preferred to conceive it," Aurelius watches "impassibly" and seems "indifferent" to the evil in his midst (1:193, 219, 240). Conceiving, like Marius, of life as a drama, he speaks of early death as one’s not having "played five acts" although "three acts only make sometimes an entire play" (1:210-11).

Eventually Marius tires of his part in the Roman theater mainly because of the limitations of the play and of his role in it. With his "hatred of what was theatrical" (1:124) he is put off by the posturings and attitudinizings of the chief actors. Strongly attracted by Aurelius and his Stoic philosophy, Marius nevertheless comes to perceive that, for all the apparent discrepancy between the mask and the man, Aurelius does not transcend his role: his mask of detachment is indeed the outward manifestation of his real indifference to suffering and evil. Startled into feeling by the cruelty of the public show, Marius sees Aurelius as his inferior because of the emperor’s lack of feeling. And with his altered opinion of the protagonist in the Roman drama Marius notes a change in the play itself, a transformation into a kind of Manichaean melodrama in which is enacted "a fierce opposition of real good and real evil" (1:241). In the new modality Marius will of course require a new role.

At this point of intermission Marius pauses to take stock of his own Epicurean philosophy. Cyrenaicism, says the narrator, is the characteristic philosophy of the young because "the inevitable falling of the curtain is probably distant." If the young Cyrenaic does consider the final curtain, he says to himself that the monk who has renounced the pleasures of life "really acquiesces in that ‘fifth act’ as little as I ; though I may hope, that, as at the real ending of a play, however well acted, I may already have had quite enough of it" (2:18). Marius, however, cannot put the last act, whether it be the fifth or third, out of mind. At Pisa he
The Heracliteanism of Marius the Epicurean had become a Cyrenaic living in the here and now, but on his way to Rome, when a huge stone from a rock slide just missed him and he felt its touch upon his feet, he dimly recognized that against death Cyrenaicism offers no defense (1:165–66). In Rome itself he sees how the emperor's Stoicism is inadequate in the face of death when Aurelius's son dies (2:56). Further, both Epicureanism and Stoicism are, in dramatic terms, extremely limited in that both are characterized by monologue and a lack of sympathy that is the basis of all true drama. Insisting on a monologic "exclusiveness," neither has the extra dimension of dialogue provided by "complementary influence" (2:19). Based on "loyalty to a mere theory that would take nothing for granted, and assent to no approximate or hypothetical truths," each philosophy demands "the sacrifice of a thousand possible sympathies, of things to be enjoyed only through sympathy" (2:22). Neither Epicureanism nor Stoicism takes account of the world of change and the unlimited possibilities it offers. "The spectacle of their fierce, exclusive, tenacious hold on their own narrow apprehension, makes one think," says the narrator, "of a drama without proportionate repose" (2:24).

It is precisely the dialogue, sympathy, and repose of the spectacle of Christianity that initially draws Marius into it. At Cecilia's villa it was "in a sort of dramatic action, and with the unity of a single appeal to eye and ear, that Marius about this time found all his new impressions set forth, what he had already recognised, intellectually, as for him the most beautiful thing in the world" (2:128). The ceremony was a "wonderful spectacle," the participants "answering one another, somewhat after the manner of a Greek chorus,' "like a single piece of highly composite, dramatic music" (2:130, 132, 135). It was the height of drama, all done "in perfect order" and leaving Marius "satisfied as never before" (2:137, 140). Cecilia, with her "expression of pathetic care" (2:105), is herself the incarnation of that sympathy so characteristic of Christianity and so lacking in the Epicurean and Stoic philosophies. Through her and Cornelius, Marius learns
that sympathy, which can envision an open, as opposed to a closed, world of possibilities, leads to a larger self, a more engaging role, because those in possession of it "have something to hold by, even in that dissolution of self" that is death (2:183). "In the mere clinging of human creatures to each other, nay! in one's own solitary self-pity," says Marius, "I seem to touch the eternal" (2:184). "Identifying himself with Cornelius," he seemed "to touch, to ally himself to, actually to become a possessor of the coming world" (2:209–10).

It is this access to the eternal, this hope of life beyond the grave, that ultimately brings Marius into the greater drama of Christianity, discovering there the true Heraclitean doctrine of becoming obscured by the Epicureans. Heraclitus had begun with a philosophical irony, namely, that everything is in process of change even at the moment that a viewer perceives it as stable. In "that ceaseless activity" in which all things are "ever 'coming to be,' alternately consumed and renewed," the "divine reason consists" (1:129, 130). As conceived by Heraclitus, "in this 'perpetual flux' of things and souls, there was a continuance, if not of their material or spiritual elements, yet of orderly intelligible relationships, like the harmony of musical notes, wrought out in and through the series of their mutations" (1:131). But over time Heraclitus's teaching came to be misunderstood, and Heracliteanism became identical with the doctrine (expounded in the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance) that the individual's momentary sensible apprehension was the only standard of what exists or does not exist; Heracliteanism became in fact the authority for the philosophy of the despair of knowledge. Accepting the debased Heracliteanism, Marius (like the young Pater) became a skeptic, doubtful of anything beyond his own ideas and sensations. "Life as the end of life" was his goal, as he sought through refined perception and receptivity "the vision—the 'beatific vision'—of our actual experience in the world" (1:143).

He is, however, never comfortable with the precept "Be perfect in regard to what is here and now" (1:145). For the
worship of perfection of the moment does nothing to relieve death of its sting. Such a creed of course foresees a “fifth act” and “the inevitable falling of the curtain” (2:18), having, like the dramatist of a pièce bien faite, a firm notion of closure; but in its emphasis on the moment, the present action, it puts out of view the play’s approaching end. Marius, on the other hand, obsessed by death since his earliest days at White-nights, has borne the last act at the forefront of his consciousness and noted the efforts to promote the ideal of a “secondary existence” (1:21) after the close of the curtain. Thus when he is introduced to Cecilia’s villa, he is startled to discover, amidst the plague-ridden Campagna, images of hope “snatched from that jaded pagan world” such as the “escape from the grave” foreshadowed in the tale of Cupid and Psyche (2:103). In Christianity he encounters that “bold paradox” (2:102), that philosophical irony, of a true Heracliteanism that treats death as birth. With its emphasis on continuity, tradition, and community it inculcates the principle of becoming, “the old way of true Renaissance—. conceiving the new organism by no sudden and abrupt creation, but rather by the action of a new principle upon elements, all of which had in truth already lived and died many times” (2:95–96). Here at last was what subconsciously he had been looking for, “all the lessons of his experience since those first days at White-nights . translated here” to this place of life in death (2:97).

Christianity having unearthed for him the principle of becoming that lay hidden beneath Epicureanism, Marius is now moved to reconsider his notions about the drama of his life. Far from being the well-made play, the drama, he sees, is not one of enclosure, where all the loose strands are tied up and all the mysteries are explained in the end. True drama, like “true philosophy,” does not display that “complete accommodation of man to the circumstances”: it does not show man’s attainment of “Truth” because in light of the doctrine of becoming truth is always in process of realization, always in advance of any formulation of it. Rather it embraces the Browningesque philosophy
of the imperfect and shows its protagonist maintaining "a kind of candid discontent, in the face of the very highest achievement," and having "the consciousness of some profound enigma in things, as but a pledge of something further to come" (2:220). With this new perspective on dramaturgy Marius is ready for death, which, "he reflected, must be for every one nothing less than the fifth or last act of a drama, and, as such, was likely to have something of the stirring character of a dénouement" (2:209).

Almost actively seeking death (and thereby the enactment of the "bold paradox"), he returns to his childhood home, "dreaming now only of the dead before him." As he goes to the family tomb, "it was as if they had been waiting for him there through all those years" (2:204). Marius's circular movement, from leaving White-nights to his return there, does not mean however that the "fifth act" is designed to make the drama circular in form. For, looking back upon his life as but the portion of a play, he experiences a desire to get on with things, "to enter upon a future, the possibilities of which seemed so large" (2:221). The drama is therefore to be figured as linear or spiral in form as the protagonist looks forward to entry into what earlier he had envisioned as "that new, unseen, Rome on high," there, as "one [who] belongs to a system," to join in the communion of those who have gone before (2:11, 26).

Finally the moment of the dénouement arrives. Yet it is not at all like what Marius had anticipated. The "great crisis," he fancied, "is to try what is in us." The agon of the lonely hero "can hardly be one's self" represented there on the stage. What in fact occurs is that when "the great act, the critical moment itself comes," it comes unawares. The "great climacteric point" is passed before one is fully conscious of what one has been about (2:212–13). Nevertheless, having bribed the guards to let Cornelius go and thus having "delivered his brother, after the manner he had sometimes vaguely anticipated as a kind of distinction in his destiny," he "felt only satisfaction" at having played his part.
so well. Marius's only disappointment with the last act is that, now become a romantic ironist, he is allowed no farewell speech, "an eloquent utterance, on the irony of men's fates" (2:213, 215).

The narrator is concerned, however, to disallow Marius the role of hero: "he was, as we know, no hero, no heroic martyr—had indeed no right to be" (2:213–14). For to the end Marius remains essentially a passive spectator, even of "that mysterious drama" of Christianity (2:218). As the Christian faithful gather around his deathbed and place the mystic bread upon his lips, "his unclouded receptivity of soul was at its height" (2:220). Reflecting upon the doctrine of becoming, the "true philosophy," and hearing the voices of the people bidding farewell to the "Animula Christiana," he passes out of the dramatic text *Marius the Epicurean* into a new, as yet unwritten text, "the tablet of the mind white and smooth, for whatsoever divine fingers might choose to write there" (2:220)."\(^{10}\)

As for the text just completed, the ministering Christians have a different interpretation from the narrator. They hold Marius's death "to have been of the nature of a martyrdom" (2:224), and theirs is the last word. Which interpretation then is correct, the narrator's or the Christians'? The answer is both. Marius was in no doctrinal sense a Christian, his strategem for the release of Cornelius was merely an act of friendship, his death was owing to no persecution but to his weakened condition, he sought no martyrdom and did not believe that plenary grace would be granted those visiting his grave—and the narrator is right not to regard him as any kind of heroic martyr. Yet, on the other hand, Marius did in fact give his life that his friend might live, did embrace the Christian hope of an afterlife, did believe in the Christian commitment to sympathy and community—and the people who buried him were right to regard him as a martyr and his martyrdom, as the church held, a kind of sacrament with plenary grace. The case is indeterminate, an instance of the "profound enigmas in things" (2:220) that Marius, forgoing closure and certainty, had come to regard as characteristic of the world of becoming.
Very little in the novel is definite and certain. To Marius things always "seem." To envisage, to dream, to imagine, "he had always set above the having, or even the doing, of anything." Vision "was, in reality, the being something" (2:218). To the narrator the phenomenal world is a qualified one of "perhaps." Even his own fiction is to him problematical. He is not sure of the thoughts of his protagonist: "The fame he conceived for himself at this time was that of a poet perhaps" (1:47). Moreover, he is not even certain of his setting, asking the reader to "pardon me if here and there I seem to be passing from Marius to his modern representatives—from Rome, to Paris or London" (2:14). For hardly an instant does the narrator allow the reader to forget the unreality of the fictional world with which he is asked to engage. This putative "biography" is, as the epigraph in Greek says, no more than "a winter dream, when nights are longest." It is pure artifice, and to keep his reader aware of it he constantly breaks the fictional illusion. He alludes to himself in propria persona: "the time of which I am speaking" (1:27). He is at pains to invite comparison between the Roman world of the second century A.D. and the modern age: "the new era, like the Neu-zeit of the German enthusiasts at the beginning of our century" (1:48). He tells of the documents on which he depends for his fictionalization: "certain of [Aurelius's] letters still extant" (1:221); "a strange piece of literary good fortune, at the beginning of the present century, has set free the long-buried fragrance of this famous friendship [between Fronto and Aurelius]" (1:223–24).

What at first seems a tactic designed to give the fiction the look of realism turns out to have exactly the opposite effect, in that the reader is left with an impression of wordiness and pedantry. Cramming into the novel all kinds of disparate material, the narrator creates an arabesque of fact and fiction. Among the items interpolated are the tale of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* in chapter 5; Aurelius's oration taken from the *Meditations* in chapter 12; Fronto's discourse based on his *Epistolae* in chapter 13; the reading from "the composition of
Lucian” lifted from the *Halcyone* in chapter 20; the long colloquy extracted from Lucian’s *Hermotimus* in chapter 24; and the lection of the Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne adapted from Eusebius in chapter 26. Employing a medley of documents, Pater, like his protagonist “partly under poetic vocation,” wished his invented world “to receive all things, the very impress of life itself, as upon a mirror; to reflect them; to transmute them into golden words” (1:180–81). He wished, in other words, to be mimetic. Yet, at the same time, he knew that there “are little knots and waves on the surface of the mirror” that “may distort the matter they seem but to represent.” Language is inadequate for the job of representation. What is called “‘common experience,’ which is sometimes proposed as a satisfactory basis of certainty, [is] after all only a fixity of language” (1:138); and language, essentially protean like all phenomena in a world of flux, will not suffer fixity.

Throughout *Marius* Pater tries to make plain that his fiction is essentially a work of rhetoric, dealing with “the era of the rhetoricians,” when “the work, even of genius, must necessarily consist very much in criticism” and when “the rhetorician was the eloquent and effective interpreter of the beautiful house of art and thought which was the inheritance of the age” (1:152–53). The freshness of the early world has disappeared. Homer could make the simplest incident poetic, could speak constantly with “ideal effect,” but “that old-fashioned, unconscious ease of the earlier literature could never come again” (1:101, 56). In these late days, when the burden of the past weighs heavily on the young writer’s shoulder, when in fact there seems nothing left to do, rhetoric itself having reached the height of excellence, even Aurelius, “with an extraordinary innate susceptibility to words—la parole pour la parole, as the French say—despairs, in presence of Fronto’s rhetorical perfection” (1:224).

With love of words Pater shapes the self-conscious linguistic construct that is *Marius the Epicurean*, less a believable fiction
than a "reflection," "criticism," and "interpretation" of a certain period of transition in history much like the age in which the author lived. Ostensibly mimetic, it tacitly admits to belonging among "the doubles, or seconds, of real things" (1:13). For ultimately it confesses to be no more than the "golden words" of the author, who at the end of his fiction has his alter ego read "the precise number of his years" on his father's mortuary urn and to reflect, "He was of my own present age" (2:206). That Pater completed *Marius* soon after his forty-fifth birthday and that his father had died at the age of forty-five is, as it were, the final signature of the author who, inscribing himself into the text, enters into and departs from this work claiming to be—and not be—fiction.

To be and not to be: this is, in a sense, the essence of the philosophy of becoming. Espousing it, Pater could shunt aside forever those unsettling questions about absolutes that immobilized the Cyrenaics and resulted in the despair of the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*. Like Marius, who learned that all embodiments are necessarily imperfect representations of the thing itself, he could now accept "approximate or hypothetical truths" (2:22) and, forsaking any idea of "complete accommodation of man to the circumstances," accept, not despairingly but joyfully, the "profound enigma in things" (2:220). "Heraclitus says that all things give way and nothing remains": the epigraph of the "Conclusion" expressed the hopeless, elegiac mood of Pater in the late sixties and early seventies. "In this perpetual flux" there was, as Heraclitus conceived, a continuance of orderly intelligible relationships, ordinances of the divine reason, maintained throughout the changes of the phenomenal world"; these words from *Marius* (1:131) indicate how by the 1880s Pater had gone beyond the notion that "Heracliteanism [meant] that the momentary, sensible apprehension of the individual was the only standard of what is or is not, and each one the measure of all things to himself" (1:131–32). Because he could conceive of Christianity as a philosophy of becom-
ing, as, in brief, a new form of Heracliteanism, Pater was able to write a fiction in which his hero passes from a pagan despair to a glad acceptance of life and death formulated within a Christian framework. What basically happens is that his hero, like his creator, has graduated from a Darwinian theory of flux to an idealist doctrine of becoming. No longer the de Manian ironist of negativity, he has become a romantic ironist and maybe—or maybe not—a Christian believer.