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The Quest for Insight and a Congenial Philosophy in Lieu of Materialistic Comfort: Marius the Epicurean as an Alternative to the Victorian Realist Novel of Formation

Abstract: The novel of formation, or the Bildungsroman, is among the most popular types of fiction in Victorian England, especially with realists. Opposing realism and representing one of the most influential late-nineteenth-century avant-garde trends is aestheticism. Its mentor, Walter Pater, is mainly known and appreciated as the theoretician of this innovative movement rather than a fiction writer. His novel Marius the Epicurean is written in the tradition of the Bildungsroman, but, by its thematic and narrative elements, the text departs from the socially and morally concerned realistic novel of formation. Having found no congenial philosophy and ending prematurely his life, the protagonist fails in his formation, but his continuous search and sampling of different philosophical systems reify Pater's aesthetic doctrine and the belief that "success in life" is "to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions" and to maintain the spirit connected to the intense but fleeting chain of impressions as powerful but transitory moments of experience. To reveal the literary significance of the novel, to disclose its non-realistic pattern and to explore the ways in which Pater employs the tradition of the Bildungsroman as a means of engaging with philosophical and aesthetic issues represent the aim of the present study.

Key words: *Aestheticism, impressionistic criticism, Realism, Bildungsroman.*

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