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Walter Pater: Personification at the Critical Threshold

For us, necessity is not, as of old, a sort of mythological personage without us, with whom we can do warfare. It is rather a magic web woven through and through us, like that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us with a network, subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world. Can art represent men and women in these bewildering toils so as to give the spirit at least an equivalent for the sense of freedom?

Walter Pater, 'Wincklemann' (2010, p.117).

The risk one runs in indicating that an author has 'overcome the boundary' between criticism and creation is of being tremendously *boring*, of lacking the interest either of art or of interpretation, and I wish to register my responsibility to avoid that tedious indistinctness. Angus Fletcher provides a framework for maintaining the enchantment of boundaries, for allowing them to matter at all whether we defend or oppose them, by examining the moment of transition or of crossing, the particular

state which he calls 'thresholdness'. In this essay I argue that Walter Pater is a liminal author both in his criticism and his literary art, an artist-critic of 'thresholdness' and so a valuable witness for examining the distinction, itself often a source of tedium, of creation versus criticism. Fletcher is primarily a scholar of the Renaissance, but his readings of thresholdness extend from Spenser to Ashbery via Milton and the Romantics, and as such this paper attempts to contribute to, and situate Pater within, a synoptic view of Romance in English imaginative literature, the Spenserian line. Examining the use of personification in Pater's work – an aspect which has gone unexamined in the critical literature – thus provides a mutual illumination between his work and the visionary artistic tradition in which it occurs. As I suggest at this essay's conclusion, Pater can also help us to negotiate the current waning of our distinction-blurring, boundary-overcoming, interdisciplinary academic era.

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The crucial idea for my argument is Angus Fletcher's notion that liminality is the source of personification: '[f]ormally', he writes, 'we can say that personification is the figurative emergent of the liminal scene' (Fletcher, 1972, p.158). The point of transition between one moment or place and another is essentially nothing, a boundary-line with zero width, and it is the confusion in the transitional experience of this nothingness, of what Coleridge calls 'Limbo' in the poem of that title examined by Fletcher, which allows the 'phantom person' of personification to emerge:

Above all the phantom must not exist. It must resist existence. To envision and realize the phantom person poetically the poet must empty his imagery of piety and sense, allowing in their place some measure of daemonic possession (Fletcher, 1972, p.159).

This occurs in the 'liminal scene' because it is emptied of 'piety and sense': it 'permits the greatest experiential intensity at the very moment when the rite of passage denies or reduces the extensity of either the temple or the labyrinth' (Fletcher, 1972, p.159). The temple and labyrinth are the romance tropes which represent order and chaos respectively – in the spiritual twilight between them the phantom person can emerge, with the uncanny intensity of daemonic possession.

Fletcher argues that the Renaissance practice of personification could be revived by Coleridge in the crisis of Romantic consciousness because personifications 'gain

animate life, if they have it, from their participation in the process of passage' (Fletcher 1972, p.158). Coleridge was able to revive personification as a vital poetic technique because the condition of Romantic imagination was not order or chaos but uncertainty, which is the liminal condition. This is why the Romantics found what Pater called 'an equivalent for the sense of freedom' specifically in the language of poetry:

Significant human integers – men as unique creatures with endowments of a yet universal nature – demand metaphor, because metaphor provides the freedom (not the chaos) of a momentary masking (Fletcher, 1972, p.161).

Thus Fletcher finds, as Pater did before him, that the Romantic crisis is a version of the explorative Renaissance imagination. In seeking a concept to unite them Pater found 'strangeness', while the more formalistic critic Fletcher decides on 'thresholdness'.

The liminality, betweenness or thresholdness which characterizes Pater's work has long been established in criticism, in most detail by Wolfgang Iser in his study of Pater *The Aesthetic Moment*, throughout which he characterizes this moment as one of absolute 'in-betweenness'. Geoffrey Hartman makes the point as well, observing that Pater's work is 'haunted by the possibility of transition, or of breaking into a new world of perception' (Hartman, 1975, p.252). Ian Fletcher, another important earlier critic of Pater, makes a useful summation of what is at once the glory and difficulty of Pater's work:

His work seems to lie in a twilight of categories between criticism and creation; between art and literary criticism, belles lettres, classical scholarship, the *journal intime* and the philosophic novel [...] It records in his own words "a prolonged quarrel with himself" (Ian Fletcher, 1959, p.5).

It is important to recognize this quarrel because it is the difference between the caricature of Pater as a talented sybarite and the truth, that he was a searching, nuanced and profoundly original author. William E. Buckler says 'he was as bold as Nietzsche' and only 'different in his choice of strategies' (Buckler, 1987, p.58). Pater did shrink to some extent from the controversy his early publications caused, but this resulted as much from disappointment at being weakly misinterpreted as from the strength of the moral outrage in some quarters; he famously regretted being labelled

a 'hedonist' because 'it gives such a wrong impression to those who do not know Greek'. This quip is probably apocryphal but appears in every book about Pater because it is too exquisite to ignore. It sounds like Wildean provocation, but Wilde's mode is not Pater's (to the credit of Wilde's originality). If Pater had in fact said this he would have meant that the word 'hedonism' has lost, in its busy everyday usage, its 'finer edge', the sharper and more nuanced distinction a word performs when its whole history of meaning is considered in uttering it. Thus, he says that anyone who wants to write with 'style' will need a certain amount of scholarship, and that

as the scholar is nothing without the historic sense, he will be apt to restore not really obsolete or really worn-out words, but the finer edge of words still in use: ascertain, communicate, discover – words like these it has been part of our 'business' to misuse (Pater, 1889, pp.12-13).

The etymology of the word 'hedonism,' a word which continues to be applied to Pater, reinforces Pater's position, which is that a hedonistic project is futile if not coupled with a hedonological one. Greek *hedone*, glossed in the OED entry on 'hedonism' as 'pleasure', comes from *hedus*, referring in Homer not to pleasure as an abstraction but describing particular sweet sensations of taste, smell, hearing. After Homer it came to refer also to persons who are either welcome or glad: the word refers to the experience of being pleased, gladdened, in relation to a particular sweet sensation or a gladly received person. It additionally signalled inclination, what one would be glad to do or would rather do. In later philosophical use *hedone* lost its sense of sweet entirely, and came to refer instead to flavour, good or bad. (I have referred here and elsewhere to the Liddell-Scott lexicon.) What an awareness of the Greek root of the word 'hedonism' gives us is a larger meaning in which sensual pleasure, the sensuous distinctness of particular flavours, smells etc., and interpersonal sympathy are all three found inextricably together.

In a similar move Pater rescues the word 'aesthetic' from its Kantian terminological pigeonhole and restores its 'finer edge': *aisthesis*, from which we get our words 'aesthetic' and 'aesthete', means perception by the senses, a sensation. As William Shuter points out, Pater actually prefers 'Epicureanism' to 'hedonism' because he always bore in mind the fact that 'the philosophy of pleasure, like every philosophical tradition, had its development, its rethinkings' (Shuter, 1997, p.49). We can see in this the same impulse to vitalize extant culture which motivates Pater's

restoration of 'the finer edge' of words.

A clarified hedonics, then, would be the project of discriminating varieties or variations of good perception where the meaning of 'good' incorporates 'distinct', 'sweet' and 'sympathetic'. Pater, between the preface and the more famous conclusion to his early masterpiece *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (first published 1873), sets out his hedonics of the individual, at once a hedonism and a hedonology, at once an activity of the individual critic and one which is directed investigatively toward individualities – be they men and women or books and canvases – beyond himself. 'In aesthetic criticism', he writes in the preface, 'the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly' (Pater, 2010, p.vii). In the conclusion, he advises us to 'catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems, by a lifted horizon, to set the spirit free for a moment', be this 'the work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend', and warns us that

not to discriminate some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliance of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening (Pater, 2010, p.120).

I intend to show that such aesthetic discrimination is in Pater's work inseparable from the process of personification.

II

Pater loved to discriminate transitions taking place in the history of the mind, or of a mind, and to make fine distinctions between these transitions:

The wholesome scepticism of Hume [...] [is] an appeal from the preconceptions of the understanding to the authority of the senses. With the Greeks [...] the sceptical action of the mind lay rather in the direction of appeal from the affirmations of the sense to the authority of newly-awakened reason (Pater, 1893, pp.24-5).

Pater distinguishes here between different versions of skepticism, discriminates their passionate attitudes. They differ less in their conclusions than in their respective spirits, the particular strangenesses of their differently lifted horizons. We might say that Pater moves toward sketching the 'spiritual forms' of these intellectual

transitions. The term ‘spiritual form’, ‘the expression I have borrowed from William Blake’ (Pater, 1895, p.32) as Pater happily admits, is used in Pater’s *Greek Studies* to describe the relationship between the gods and the sense perceptions of their worshippers – thus Dionysus is the spiritual form of the vine and of ‘fire and dew’, Apollo of sunbeams, etc. To discriminate a spiritual form is a kind of personification or *prosopopoeia*, literally ‘person-making’, as in Blake’s own powerful, idiosyncratic pantheon. The contemporary classical scholar Emma Stafford has examined the cultic worship of personified abstractions in the Greek world, and distinguishes between on one hand the worship of abstractions that are given personhood, and on the other hand the worship of divine persons such as Dionysus or Apollo who embody or personify certain things, her interest being in the former and not the latter. My own interest being aesthetic rather than anthropological, I note in contrast that the emergence of ‘spiritual form’ can originate either in the person or in the thing being personified – the distinction, aesthetically speaking, is not decisive. This suggests that the process itself is what is significant, which is what we should expect if, as Fletcher claims, it is process or passage which brings personification about. Personification can daemonically promote a thing toward personhood, but the same process can daemonically demote a person toward thinghood, toward the automatic and pre-organic.

Pater memorably concluded his ‘Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance* by praising ‘art’ on the grounds that ‘art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake’ (Pater, 2010, p.121). The outcome of this personifying ‘frankness’ is Pater’s post-Blakean kind of aesthetic religion. Until the eighteenth century the English word ‘frank’ was more or less a synonym for ‘free’, and Pater, a lover of etymology, would seem to be saying that works of art (or exquisite personalities viewed aesthetically) are in the old phrase ‘frank and free’, uncannily willful benefactors arriving in our lives almost uninvited. His dual tenderness in the ‘Conclusion’ for the human face (‘the face of one’s friend’) and for this *prosopopoeia* might recall to us that the Greek word *prosopon* meant a face, visage, countenance, mask, show or outward appearance before it came to mean, via the sense of a dramatic role, a ‘person’. If ‘art comes to you professing frankly’ its freedom of speech, its freedom *to speak*, would seem to be at least a kind of equivalent, though ideally not a replacement, for ‘the face of one’s friend’.

Pater was a not infrequent employer of *prosopopoeia*, although he only allows himself to make persons when composing in a heightened or sublime mood, as here in *Plato and Platonism* describing the Platonic Forms or Ideas:

One after another they emerge again from the dead level, the Parmenidean tabula rasa, with nothing less than the reality of persons face to face with us, of a personal identity. It was as if the firm plastic outlines of the delightful old Greek polytheism had found their way back after all into a repellent monotheism. Prefer as he [Plato] may in theory that blank white light of the One [...] the world, and this chiefly is why the world has not forgotten him, will be for him, as he is by no means colour-blind, by no means a colourless place. He will suffer it to come unto him, as his pages convey it in turn to us, with the liveliest variety of hue (Pater, 1893, pp.46-7).

Pater's interpretation of Plato's doctrine of the Forms is sweetly idiosyncratic, a word I choose because 'idiosyncrasy' (from *idiosynkrasia* – literally 'one's own distinct commixture') underwent in English a similar change to that of *prosopon* in Greek: a person's idiosyncrasy was firstly his physical peculiarity, and only later took on the senses of peculiarity of outlook or of style. Buckler notes the parallel between this reading of Plato and Pater's own person-centric practice:

Pater's characteristic use of the biographical mode – his persistent habit of seeing ideas as emanating from the spirits of various particular kinds of men working under different but specific conditions – has its correspondence in what he describes as Plato's strong temperamental tendency to perceive ideas as something very like "persons" (Buckler, 1987, p.34).

For Pater – as we see in his description of Plato's Forms – strangeness, distinctness and personhood are intimately related attributes, so that, as he explains in the preface to *The Renaissance*, the individuality of a painting, a poem, a concept, a word, makes of these things individuals, to be encountered therefore 'face to face'.

Pater's most famous single passage is probably his description of perhaps Europe's most famous face, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, which concludes:

The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea (Pater, 2010, pp.70-1).

In reading this passage, Carolyn Williams refers to Pater's 'poetic figure' of Lisa, playing on the word 'figure' as 'both a poetic trope and a representative person', serving as a 'reminder that his aesthetic is based on the romantic correlation of personal memory and the cultural past' (Williams, 1989, p.124), whether this past is ancient or modern. Pater's tendency toward *prosopopoeia* or person-making, toward 'face to face' (our equivalent of the Greek phrase '*kata prosopon*') encounters with 'spiritual forms,' the 'firm plastic outlines' of ideas, is, as Williams says, Romantic. But we are left to wonder why personification is associated not with the Romantics or their ephebe Walter Pater, but rather with eighteenth century poets whose personifications were explicitly rejected (in theory) by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Perhaps if we look directly at this more immediately identifiable, Augustan form of personification itself we can find a clue.

III

The clearest form of personification in English literature is that of eighteenth century poets such as Alexander Pope and Thomas Gray, though this clarity has won it relatively few admirers in the last two centuries. It is partly to defend the eighteenth century practice of *prosopopoeia* that Donald Davie chose 'Personification' as the title and theme for his 1981 FW Bateson Memorial lecture. Davie, expanding on observations made by Bateson, argues that 'personification is inherent in the very grammatical structure' of the English language. As Bateson put it in 1965, 'the specifically Augustan personifications simply exploit [...] a grammatical characteristic of the English language, viz., that a single noun, however abstract or general, must be followed by a verb in the third person singular' (Bateson, 2009, p.99). In such circumstances there will always be 'some degree' of personification, so that what Fletcher thinks of as a kind of daemonization, and what according to Davie supposes 'a universe – a "Nature" – driven through and determined by impalpable forces', full of things which 'seem active quite outside the reach of human control or perhaps of human consciousness' (Davie, 1992, pp.231-2), is an inherent aspect of our daily language. Davie observes that if there are indeed '*degrees* of personification' then it seems that in practice 'we cannot always be sure, and will not always agree among ourselves, when we have a personification and when we haven't' (Davie, 1992, p.223). Davie points to the phrase 'inclement weather' to show that the degree of personification in a phrase can rest as much on the meaning of the modifier as on the

structure of the sentence, and that, therefore, personifications will multiply the more shades of meaning one can find in verbs and adjectives – ‘clement’, of course, means ‘merciful’. If etymology – restoring the finer edges of words, ‘construing Latinisms’ in Davie’s example – multiplies personifications in this way, perhaps Pater’s habit of encountering ideas and sensations ‘face to face’ is not unconnected with his relish for these ‘finer edges’. Agency, as Freud teaches, is inextricable from individuation. The finer the edge, the sharper the personality.

Angus Fletcher makes similar observations about how much more widespread personification is than we usually suspect (Fletcher, 1964, p.31). Fletcher, like Coleridge before him, argues that a character in an allegory – a knight in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* for example – is not so far off from a personified abstraction, and that there are various degrees between a fully realised dramatic character and the simplest *prosopopoeia*. His concern in his study of allegory is with the zone in the middle of this scale, the figures in which he compares psychologically with people possessed by daemons.

These heroes do not choose, they do not “deliberate” but act on compulsion, continually demonstrating a lack of inner control. This is most interesting in psychological allegory, in Spenser or in Kafka, for example, where the author shows over and over that men suffer from a primary illusion when they imagine they are in control of their own actions. This prideful imagination may be called a sin, but it is also a psychological fact, as common experience tells us (Fletcher, 1964, p.64).

Personification in Davie’s analysis implies just such a universal lack of human control, and Fletcher helps us to see that this cuts both ways: the monstrous personifications in Gray’s ‘Eton College’ poem for example represent the inescapable destinies of the boys on the playing field, but these personifications are themselves figures who cannot choose. A scale with various degrees stretches between a person and a force, and whether we see a personified force or a forced, possessed person may depend as much on the direction in which we cross the scale as where we are upon it at a given moment. Buckler highlights the way in which such existential, psychological allegory marks both Pater’s fictional and critical works:

Whether his writings were imaginatively critical, as in the essays, or critically imaginative, as in the fictions, he sought always to explore the dynamic interactions or experiential dialectic between a highly individualised but symbolically representative persona, real in either the historical or the created sense, and an

environment that conditions and makes relative the choices available to him (Buckler, 1987, p.5).

It is this combination of individuation and representativeness which makes Spenser's allegorical persons so compelling: they are uniquely possessed by the forces which possess us all, and struggle toward their own equivalents for the sense of freedom.

What Fletcher calls the 'prophetic moment' in Spenser, Coleridge or any liminal artist, is a crossing (in either direction) of the threshold between the labyrinth and the temple, chaos and order, where 'moment' and 'threshold' name the same crossing in time and space respectively.

The main dynamic quality of the threshold is an elusive betweenness [...] A whole cluster of unstable 'Conradian' states would pertain to this experience: transience, vacillation, fluidity and rushing fluency, drop-off, falling, wavering, hovering, simple mobility, vertigo perhaps, even mere restlessness (Fletcher, 1971, pp.45-6).

Joseph Conrad, we can note, was an ephebe of Pater; his manifesto prefacing *The Nigger of the Narcissus* for example is from start to end an exact impersonation of Pater's 'Conclusion' to which all of these unstable states are appropriate. Personified abstractions 'come alive the moment there is psychological breakthrough, with an accompanying liberation of utterance' (Fletcher, 1972, p.158), and it is this breakthrough to which the Conradian or Paterian flux forms the background, the landscape to its figure. In examining one of Pater's tales (which he called 'Imaginary Portraits') it will become clear that this 'psychological breakthrough' is, in Pater at least, the breakthrough *into* the psychological, the personification of consciousness, the fiction of a personal self. Pater shows us that this fictiveness cuts both ways: it deprives the self of epistemic crutches, but releases it also from epistemic assaults, thereby gaining a form of self-evidence.

IV

One of the stories published in *Imaginary Portraits* (1887) has for its titular hero a young man in seventeenth century Holland, Sebastian van Storck. The portrait commences in a kind of metaphorical *ekphrasis*, as Pater describes a real scene as though it were a painting: 'a winter scene, by Adrian van de Velde, or by Isaac van Ostade'. Soon enough our hero appears:

Sebastian van Storck, confessedly the most graceful performer in all that skating multitude, moving in endless maze over the vast surface of the frozen water-meadow, liked best this season of the year for its expression of a perfect impassivity, or at least of a perfect repose. The earth was, or seemed to be, at rest, with a breathlessness of slumber which suited the young man's peculiar temperament (Pater, 1910, p.81).

Pater puts us immediately on the scent of Sebastian's daemon. Summer, displeasing the *ascetic* power which possesses him, 'seemed well-nigh to suffocate Sebastian'. Pater begins by positing a grace of combinations in Sebastian, a pastoral co-existence of elements; for example he is of mixed Dutch and Spanish heritage, and one can hear Pater's pleasure in the Southern warmth evoked by Sebastian's darker complexion on the Northern ice. But indications of a kind of obsessively pure rigour are there from the start, in Sebastian's refusal to allow his portrait to be painted. This rigour eventually becomes a mania, causing Sebastian to forsake the world, committing for the sake of what he calls 'duties toward the intellect' (p.100) what Pater elsewhere calls the 'moral suicide' of 'the negation of the self' (1893, p.41), a single-minded and almost unadulterated *ascesis*.

Sebastian makes a b-line for his own limit; what he calls 'wisdom' is 'the suppression of ourselves' (p.107). He initiates this by shutting himself away in his room:

From the midst of the busy and busy-looking house, crowded with the furniture and the pretty little toys of many generations, a long passage led the rare visitor up a winding staircase, and (again at the end of a long passage) he found himself as if shut off from the whole talkative Dutch world, and in the embrace of that wonderful quiet, which is also possible in Holland, at its height all around him. It was here that Sebastian could yield himself, with the only sort of love he had ever felt, to the supremacy of his difficult thoughts. – A kind of *empty* place! Here, you felt, all had been mentally put to rights by the working-out of a long equation, which had zero equals zero for its result. Here one did, and perhaps felt, nothing; one only thought (Pater, 1910, pp.89-90).

Pater notes admiringly that in Holland one finds contrasting elements of talkativeness and quiet, for contrasts deepen the soul by tending to produce individuation, idiosyncrasy. There is a transition in Pater's description from, in Fletcher's terms, a labyrinth (the busy, crowded house marked by the trivialities of passing generations, with numerous long passages and a winding staircase) to a temple (Sebastian's sanctuary, emptied of trivialities, put to rights in a perfectly

ordered equation which amounts to an empty tautology, in which thought is prayer). But Sebastian does not seem to heed this transition, this threshold. We discover him in thought, body and will already on the far side, a personification of that side's virtues. It is Pater himself, in making this contrastive image of the threshold of Sebastian's rigour, who experiences the in-between state of thresholdness, of in Hartman's words 'transition into a new world of perception', out of which Sebastian emerges.

Pater's winding, elaborate prose functions much like the stanza Spenser invented for *The Faerie Queene*, which is 'the poetic mechanism by which this instantaneous crossing is [...] dilated, as if the instantaneous prophetic moment could be reduced to extreme slow motion' (Fletcher, 1991, p.124). Slow motion, we can note, is usually a property of *ekphrasis* as well, and Sebastian's resistance to painting, especially of himself, is a resistance to the dilated moment because that moment performs the paradox of lingering over change, and Sebastian cannot abide paradoxes or change. It is this kind of dilated prophetic or aesthetic moment, the image of transition from the busy house to the empty sanctuary, which Pater uses to show us Sebastian's world, in contrast with Sebastian's own preferences. We can see that in Pater's stories as much as in his criticism it is usually Pater's own experience of thresholdness, of transition, to which the aesthetic reader responds, rather than that of his essayistic or his narrative subjects, ancient or modern. Pater does not give us Sebastian's experience but his own experience as Sebastian emerges from the liminal scene of Pater's reverie.

When Sebastian is courted by a girl of 'ruddy beauty', 'for a moment the cheerful warmth that may be felt in life seemed to come very close to him, - to come forth, and enfold him'. But her 'little arts of love' fail to live up to 'that ideal of a calm, intellectual indifference, of which he was the sworn *chevalier*' (my emphasis). He is (or, as Pater's irony indicates, harbours an ambition of being) the Knight of Abstraction. Sebastian cannot fall in love with any *person* because he is betrothed to his own mask, his *persona*; and, possessed by a single virtue, quality or power, sends this girl

a cruel letter [...] rejecting her – accusing her, so natural, and simply loyal! of a vulgar coarseness of character – [which] was found, oddly tacked on, as their last word, to the studious record of the abstract thoughts which had been the real business of Sebastian's life, in the room whither his mother went to seek him next day, littered with the fragments of the one portrait of him in existence (Pater, 1910, p.103).

Pater remarks: 'odd transition! by which a train of thought so abstract drew its conclusion in the sphere of action'. Because his cruel rejection is acted in his role or *persona* of the 'sworn chevalier' or Knight of Abstraction, it is really *chivalrous*, from Latin *caballarius*, horseman or cavalry – that is to say, it is an act of combat. Sebastian finally retires to a coastal house just as the greatest storm in half a century causes the whole area to flood, and in this storm he perishes, found with a sleeping child 'swaddled warmly in his heavy furs' whom Sebastian had saved in his final act. His quest has failed because he has died in action rather than in abstract contemplation, but this 'odd transition', in Fletcher's words a 'psychological breakthrough', has its allegorical result in the sleeping child, a traditional emblem of hope for mankind, and here more particularly of what Harold Bloom has called the 'humanizing hope' of the 'internalized quest Romance' (Bloom, 1970, p.20) which Pater did so much to transmit beyond the nineteenth century to the various quest-romances of Conrad, Woolf, Joyce, Beckett, Yeats, Stevens, Hart Crane, Edward Thomas, and many more.

In the twilight of our waning, boundary-overcoming, interdisciplinary era in which, as Hartman put it in 1975 and with undiminished relevance,

we step bravely over totally unguarded thresholds or try with comic desperation to find a threshold sacred enough so that crossing it would count as a trespass
(Hartman, 1975, p.251),

Pater's suggestion that we approach writers and their works as individuals or persons, *kata prosopon*, may provide us with the *personae* which our own interpretative quests need to encounter in order to continue.

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