STUDIES

"Why Am I Crying?": P.K. Page and the Mystery of Tears

by Sara Jamieson

Reviewing P.K. Page's first poetry collection, *As Ten As Twenty* (1946), Earle Birney identifies eyes as "a recurrent source of metaphor to the point of obsession" (88) and this remained so throughout her career. Page's lifelong fascination with the eyes' physiological and emotional capabilities is reflected in a number of poems that feature eyes in tears; this particular aspect of Page's "ubiquitous [...] ocular imagery," however, remains unexplored, even though tears and weeping figure prominently in some of her most talked-about poems (Winkler 92). The exception to the general neglect of the significance of crying in Page's work would have to be the tears that the poet cannot quite bring herself to shed in "After Rain" (1956), a poem central to the critical conversation about Page's work. "After Rain" describes the aftermath of a heavy rainfall, when the poet surveys a ravaged garden and represents her surroundings in a bravura series of arresting images. Becoming aware of the presence of the distraught gardener for whom the scene represents not aesthetic pleasure but the destruction of what he has laboured to bring into being, the poet reproaches herself for what Brian Trehearne identifies as her whimsical "tendency to fix her imagination on glimpses of beauty at the expense of sympathy with suffering and loss" (*Montreal* 44): "I find his ache exists beyond my rim / and almost weep to see a broken man / made subject to my whim" (*The Hidden Room* II 110).

Situating Page's work within a high modernist literary culture that associated women's tears with a devalued sentimentalism, Laura Killian reads the poet's unabashed emotionalism in these lines as a "very serious critique of modernism's anti-sentimental, anti-subjective stance," one that constitutes the first step in a risky but necessary move away from the aesthetic of impersonality that had dominated Page's poetry up until this point (98). For Killian, the move toward an openly emotional, empathetic vision in "After Rain" is central to its status as a "pivotal" poem in the Page canon (97). Such a reading implicitly relies on a pervasive understanding of crying itself as a kind of "pivotal" event, an advance beyond an unproductive

state of emotional blockage. Trehearne is less convinced that "After Rain" does represent an advance for Page, noting the poet's resignation at the end to the likelihood that her facility for making beautiful images will continue to interfere with her ability to empathize with others; nonetheless, this reading does not question the idea that crying involves the productive release of accumulated emotions and offers proof of one's sincere emotional engagement with others. The argument that "the poet's abashed acknowledgement of her various failings in the poem portends no ethical or aesthetic change," and "leads to no real release (she only "almost weep[s]") characterizes her failure to cry as indicative of her failure to move beyond her previous errors and become the sort of empathetic poet she desires to be at this point in her career (*Montreal* 45).

In *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*, Tom Lutz observes that this "cathartic" association of crying with emotional release has long permeated attempts to conceptualize the meaning of tears in Western culture, and continues to form the basis for the conventional wisdom that by "letting it all out" and "having a good cry," we can let go of pent-up emotions and get on with our lives; for all its persistence and apparent simplicity, however, the cathartic theory of crying rests upon "a very complex set of assumptions, not all of which stand up to scrutiny" (Lutz 120). These include the belief that crying has both physical and psychological benefits, that emotions accumulate within the body and are somehow stored there, awaiting elimination through tears, that tears offer proof of sincere feeling, and that crying constitutes an expression of one's "real" self.

In "After Rain," the poet's longing for emotional release and connection with others through the tears that she believes "are a part of love" articulates the powerful desires that accrue around cathartic theories of crying (*HR* II 110); in poems where weeping actually occurs, however, tears are rarely so uncomplicated, and it is in their complexity that these poems unsettle reductive orthodoxies about what tears mean. Contributing to recent efforts to expand discussion of Page's work beyond the boundaries of a strictly literary modernism, this paper situates her writing in relation to a variety of materials that represent crying, from popular scientific writings to paintings to workplace conduct manuals.[1] In contrast to a high modernist association of tears (especially those of women poets) with an uncomplicated sentimentality, Page's work lays claim to their expressive possibilities by exposing crying as a site of contention rather than consensus, never settling on a singular definition of what crying actually is: in Page's work, eyes "prick" ("Paradox"), tears "brim" and "well" ("Summer

Resort," "Reflection in a Train Window") bodies are shaken by sobs, and readers are invited to consider the variety of forms that crying can take, and their possibly differing relationships to emotional experience. Crying is at the heart of some of her most memorable but inscrutable images, such as the sea that forms a "dome of tears" trembling over the remains of a sunken ship, its "briny cabin" a place where once "women wept in mercury" ("In a Ship Recently Raised from the Sea," *HR* II 45), or the unhappy woman in "Portrait of Marina" whose "strange unlovely head" becomes "a kind of candelabra—delicate— / where all her tears were perilously hung" (*HR* I 73). In these poems, tears and weeping are imbued with a dreamlike quality that corresponds to the frequency with which scientific attempts to understand crying, especially in adults, resort to terms like "myster[ious]" and "inexplicable" (Walter 166). Despite a long history of proliferating attempts to explain it, there is something about crying that remains resistant to interpretation, and researchers are "compelled to admit that they really don't understand why we cry. They can only agree that we are the only animal that does" (Walter 165). In Page's poems, it is precisely this inexplicable aspect of tears that undermines the authority of common assumptions about who cries, how often, why, and to what effect.

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If the tears in "After Rain" are the ones in Page's work that have received the most attention, then perhaps the most overlooked are the ones in "The Stenographers" (1942), one of Page's best known poems, drawn from her experience working as a filing clerk in Montreal war offices in the early 1940s. As the poem tracks its eponymous office workers through a typical work week, their crying emerges as their most salient characteristic. It is the only detail about them that is mentioned twice: they cry at work, in more sequestered areas of the office ("they weep in the vault"), and at home they cry themselves to sleep: "Their beds are their oceans—salt water of weeping / the waves that they know—the tide before sleep" (*HR* I 102-3). As Dean Irvine has noted, Page's office poems are concerned with the feminization of clerical labour in the first half of the twentieth century (140); I argue that the preoccupation with crying in "The Stenographers" is central to Page's critique, since it participates in the kinds of debates about women, emotional control, and changing standards of workplace behaviour that accompanied this process.

The revelation of the stenographers' hidden tears to the reader is only one example of the poem's concern with their inner emotional lives. From the beginning, the poem foregrounds the difference between the self that

each shows to her superiors in the office and the self that emerges when she is away from it, and this latter self is consistently identified with tumultuous emotional states. The work week is described as a surrender to an office environment that requires the suppression of powerful feelings: "in the forced march of Monday to Saturday [their eyes] hoist the white flag [. . .] haul it down and crack in the midsun of temper" (*HR* I 102). Page suggests here that office work involves an ongoing struggle to control outbursts of temper, yet these women do manage to confine any cracking of the veneer of outward calm to the time of "midsun": a morning coffee break, perhaps, or the lunch hour? These lines introduce the first in a series of contrasts differentiating work time from free time, when departures from norms of workplace decorum might be more easily overlooked. In "the pause between the first draft and the carbon," they relax their concentration and allow their minds to drift among memories of childhood; in the "terrible calm of the noon," an "anguish" surfaces from which the routine of the office might actually provide a welcome distraction (*HR* I 102). Their episodes of furtive weeping are thus part of a range of emotional states that make visible the standards of conduct to which the stenographers are expected to conform.

Page's poem depicts an office environment that appears to discourage more vehement forms of emotional expression, and this corresponds to a similar preoccupation with emotional conduct in the kinds of advice literature directed at clerical workers between the end of the First World War and the middle of the twentieth century. In his work on twentieth-century emotional history, Peter N. Stearns traces a shift in emphasis from earlier clerical conduct manuals that had prioritized the importance of qualities like trustworthiness, responsibility, honesty, and punctuality, to an increasing concern in those produced after the 1920s with the importance of "temper control" (124), "emotional stability" (Leffingwell 440), and "good manners" (Cloutier 5). In contrast to a nineteenth-century workplace culture that valued, in controlled circumstances, the expression of potentially dangerous emotions like anger, jealousy, and fear as motivating forces and spurs to productivity, Stearns argues, the twentieth century workplace was characterized by an increasing preoccupation with discouraging this kind of demonstrative emotion, which had come to be seen as more straightforwardly negative. This development has been attributed to a number of factors: an expanding service sector that created a demand for qualities like "poise" and "people skills" in its workers (Stearns 214), the growing influence of scientific management and industrial psychology which stressed the importance of "disposition" as a factor in determining which individu-

als were best suited to particular workplace tasks (Leffingwell 386), and the rise of "commercial education programs directed at girls, especially daughters of immigrants," who were perceived as needing special instruction in "the proper American demeanor in a business office" (Fine 175).

Canadian clerical advice literature from the same period is marked by a similar concern with encouraging standards of emotional conduct. *A Secretary's Secrets* by Sheila Ward, published in Toronto in the 1950s, addresses itself primarily to stenographers aspiring to become secretaries, and also to the executives who employ them, and is intended to clarify expectations on both sides regarding acceptable behaviour. The book indicates how much could be at stake in meeting these expectations, especially for female office workers. In a section called "What Does the Boss Really Think of You?" an executive complains: "My gal's fault is her temperament, and she's got lots of it. She's mad, she's elated, she's depressed, she's wildly enthusiastic, she's energetic, she's listless [...] But what I hate most of all are the tears. I swear the next crying session will be the last" (21). This provides an illuminating context for reading Page's poem, where it is easy to see how the stenographers' discretion in confining their tears to their off-hours or to the hidden recesses of the office is indicative of the kind of emotional labour exacted of twentieth-century office workers. Like Ward's book, the poem does not delve into the question of why these women are crying. Possible causes range from the repetitive nature of the work to mistreatment at the hands of men outside the office ("the boyfriends of blood" [*HR* I 102]). Because the poem remains vague about the causes of the women's tears, it effectively conveys an office environment that does not inquire into the source of their distress, but simply asks that it be kept hidden, and regards female workers' problems as less important than those of men in authority.

At the time when Page was writing this poem, women already constituted the majority of clerical workers, and the fact that changing expectations regarding office demeanor overlapped with their entry in increasing numbers into what had previously been the all-male space of the office has sometimes been interpreted as evidence of women's uniformly tearful nature. Stearns, for example, cites the "finding" that women workers are particularly likely to cry when "exposed to supervisory ire" as a factor in generating "new appeals for restraint" on the part of men in positions of authority (122). The implication here is that men are more capable of controlling their anger than are women of controlling their tears, and it is therefore incumbent on them to do so in order to create an office environment conducive to productivity. In contrast to this essentialist reading of

emotion and gender difference, *A Secretary's Secrets* draws attention to how that difference is socially constituted, implying that women clerical workers are no more naturally emotive than the men they work for, but are instead held to a very different standard of emotional conduct. The book defines a good secretary as one who is able to "leave her personal troubles and grievances at home" as "she knows these have no place in an office" (3). Compare this with a statement from another of Ward's interviews with executives:

> I would like my girl to realize that I can't always be charming and easy-going. Often there are problems at the office and at home that she can't know about, that are worrying me. I want to be able to be myself in my office [… and] she should know that there's nothing personal in my moods." (19)

Together, these two excerpts suggest that the expression of emotions like anger and hurt in the office environment have less to do with workers' innate ability to restrain them, than with social expectations based on power and the gendering of the office hierarchy. Far from feeling any compunction to restrain his emotions, this boss sees it as his prerogative to give vent to whatever he may be feeling in "his" office, regardless of how it may affect female clerical workers, whose obligation to keep their feelings hidden is an expression of their subordinate status. The boss who sees his own emotional expression as tantamount to "being himself" exemplifies a process that Joel Pfister calls "yourselfing" (25), whereby the white middle class subject draws upon the concept of an inner "psychological depth" in order to envision his "conflicted [and] vastly absorbing 'human nature' as more human, more universal, yet more individual and more complex" than that of others (36). By contrast, the undifferentiated and anonymous stenographers in Page's poem indicate that women's indulgence in emotionally demonstrative behaviour does not confirm their individuality, but instead makes them indistinguishable from one another. Their relationships to their own emotional lives are defined by their lowly position in the office hierarchy. The preoccupation with the issue of emotional control in "The Stenographers" is thus central to its critique of the transformation of clerical work in the twentieth century into a pink-collar ghetto with limited opportunities for upward mobility.

The kind of office environment that expects women workers to leave their "personal troubles" at home, yet at the same time accept that there is "nothing personal" in their bosses' emotional outbursts corresponds to the gender bias implicit in the high modernist aesthetic of impersonality that "still made for a powerful orthodoxy" in Montreal literary circles in the

early 1940s, and that identified impersonality with masculinity (Trehearne, *Montreal* 72). Situating a poem like "The Stenographers" within the context of mid-twentieth century advice to office workers reveals that the code of emotional restraint in which it participates is not simply something that Page absorbed from her introduction to modernist literature, but also constitutes an important aspect of the lived experience of clerical work. Acknowledging the extra-literary influences that shaped Page's depiction of the emotional politics of office work in "The Stenographers" suggests a new way of approaching what many readers have perceived as a troubling inconsistency between the poem's claims upon the reader's sympathy and the poet's impersonal absorption in her own image-making. Killian asserts this view when she argues that the poem's "impersonal, objective stance…[does] much to undercut the human(ist) element" of its appeal for sympathy with the stenographers' psychic pain (91); but if we read the speaker as someone who has learned to conform to office standards of impersonal conduct, then the poem's use of a dispassionate, observing persona is not inappropriate. Irvine characterizes this persona, who does not emerge until the final lines, as a "credible witness" to the stenographers' unhappy lives: "In their eyes I have seen / the pin men of madness in marathon trim / race round the track of the stadium pupil" (*HR* I 103). Because these lines are spoken by someone who apparently has an intimate knowledge of the office environment, and whose authority is at least partially derived from Page's own experience of office work, then the "impersonality" of the poem as a whole is surely central to the speaker's credibility, since it suggests someone who has been affected by the code of impersonal conduct developed in twentieth-century offices, perhaps to the point of being psychologically damaged, like the stenographers themselves, by the necessity of suppressing her feelings.

It is through the psychological damage suggested by the final image of madness that the poem challenges the popular assumption that crying is a form of cathartic release that is necessarily beneficial to emotional health: despite the office rules against it, the women in Page's poem do find ways to shed their tears, yet each episode of weeping simply leads to the next one, and ultimately, to insanity. The compulsion to hide their feelings is something that Page's female office workers experience as an oppressive aspect of their jobs, but she does not go so far as to argue that to express themselves more openly would be liberating for them. Indeed, the poem implies that "suppression" may not in fact be the most accurate way to conceptualize the way in which the workplace shapes the emotional lives of its subjects. Pfister has shown how the expectation that workers refrain

from giving open expression to potentially disruptive emotions has contributed to the "much publicized and highly acceptable common sense that capitalism's workplaces, technology, and mass culture attempt to standardize humanity into robots" by demanding the repression of the feelings that represent people's "real" selves (36). Page's poem actually departs from this model, suggesting instead that the office does not so much require the control of a "real" self that precedes each woman's entry into the workplace, so much as it creates the perception that she has an essential self that can be controlled in the first place. The poem does this by emphasizing the contrast between the women's adult occupational identity and their childhoods. The stanzas detailing their memories of the "smooth hours when they were children" are significantly devoid of the kind of emotional turmoil that defines their adult lives in the office (*HR* I 102). The fact that they apparently don't cry as children but do as adults departs from the behaviorist view, prevalent in mid-twentieth-century culture, that associated excessive crying with infants and children who could only become well-adjusted adults if their tears were strictly disciplined or ignored.[2] In this poem, then, tears do not function as the sign of a "natural" self that the women must struggle to keep under control while in the office, but instead coincide with their entry into that office. The fact that the stenographers do not appear to think of themselves as having emotional "inner" selves until they become stenographers typifies the way in which the workplace "actively transforms them into highly emotional, psychological subjects" (Pfister 36). By drawing attention to how the women's tearfulness does not precede the office environment but is instead produced by that environment, the poem undermines the assumptions that women are naturally prone to crying, and that crying signifies the liberating release of an inner, emotional self.

"The Stenographers" is not the only text in which Page questions the way in which crying appears to confirm the association of emotion with interiority. In a short story written at around the same time, a woman begins to cry during a quarrel with a lover: "Sobs started from an unbelievable depth, broke and left her with a rarefied sensation in the top of her head as if oxygen was being released beneath her skull" ("The Glass Box" 114). Here, something is being unleashed from within the self yet simultaneously contained beneath the skull in a way that both evokes and undermines the theory that crying is cathartic. With words like "unbelievable" and "rarified," the story defamiliarizes the mundane image of a woman crying, and suggests that her tears signify something more complex than the release of pent-up emotions stored within the body. Page's concern

with how the bodily act of crying can mediate our own and others' perceptions of our emotional lives in ways that can be misleading offers one way of accounting for why so many of her poems represent tears as entirely disconnected from particular bodies. In "Summer Resort" (1943), for example, vacationing office workers "lie on beaches," relax in deck chairs, and "scan the scene for love" (*HR I* 108). Once they succeed in finding it ("the kiss is worn like a badge upon the mouth" [*HR* I 108]), they accept one another's ecstatic congratulations while the whole resort environment appears to celebrate in pathetic fallacy, including "the enormous pool" which "brims like a crying eye" (*HR I* 109). More than "The Stenographers," "Summer Resort" (1943) exhibits to a certain extent the "condescending tone" that Jane Swann identifies as characteristic of Page's early poems about groups of indistinguishably tearful women (182). The women in the poem do seem to function as satirical examples of the kind of "tear-jerking banal conformity" that Birney sees as characteristic of the time and praises Page herself for avoiding (88). The poem participates in the modernist denigration of women's tears as sentimental, as signs of a lack of proportion between emotion and experience, by suggesting that there *is* something disproportionate about the contrast between the "enorm[ity]" of the "crying eye" and the women's absorption (during wartime, as the date of composition indicates) in romance and the consumption of leisure. At the same time, it is important to remember that the women themselves are not the ones doing the crying here: the displacement of tears from their bodies onto the pool throws into question an uncritical association of crying with women, or of women's crying with the "banal conformity" that it is so often understood to signify.

Other poems challenge the kinds of negative assessments that crying can elicit by making the relationship between tears and the eyes that cry them so cryptic that the reader is invited to ponder the way in which crying always to some extent resists interpretation. "To a Portrait in a Gallery" (1951) details repeated emotionally charged encounters between the speaker and an anonymous photographic portrait. In these meetings, the poet alternates between feelings of total identification ("Which lines are mine?" [*HR* II 32]) and such an alienated awareness of the difference between "flesh" and "photograph" that every encounter ends in tears:

> Oh, heart's sweet ace
> is smudged with weeping.
> For us no greeting without bleeding,
> no meeting without weeping.
> (*HR* II 32)

Developing an analogy established earlier that equates the face with the highly valued ace card in the suit of hearts ("If hearts are suit / then face is ace" [*HR* II 32]), the poem suggests our readiness to accept facial expressions as evidence of heartfelt emotion; the supposed clarity of a facial phenomenon like crying, however, is undermined by the tears that actually smudge and obscure the face in the poem, helping to make its significance difficult to interpret. The supposed correlation between face and heart in crying is further destabilized in this poem by the way in which both are so completely disembodied. Do the heart and face belong to the person in the portrait or to the speaker? Whose portrait is this, and why does the speaker find it so moving? What is the context for its expression of despair? In its refusal to yield these details, the poem characterizes crying as a totally private act the meaning of which is unavailable to anyone but the person doing the crying. Rather than signifying an empathetic engagement with the world, crying here is an inscrutable act that indicates a complete withdrawal from it.

The question of whether tears signify empathy or escape is one that Page grapples with in "Paradox" (1944), a poem that addresses the disastrous consequences of the failure to defeat fascism in the Spanish Civil War. In the poem, a couple seeks peace and privacy within a "Catholic close," a place that ultimately serves as a reminder of the complicity of the church in fascist atrocity:

> let us stand here close,
> for death is common as grass beyond an ocean,
> and, with all Europe pricking in our eyes,
> suddenly remember Guernica
> and be gone.
>
> (*HR* I 135)

These tears are clearly shed in sympathy with the war effort, but the poem is marked by uncertainty about what, if anything, they can actually accomplish. While the couple's tears are initially hidden within a sequestered space where their impact on others is negligible, they also seem to provide the impetus for leaving the close and returning to the world outside its walls, although the poem does not say exactly what kind of action the couple intends to take once they leave. At the end, they are simply "gone." Through its hopelessly disproportionate juxtaposition of "all Europe" and the tearful eyes of two individuals, the poem suggests that crying, while it can be a sign of sincere engagement with the world, is unlikely, in and of itself, to change anything; at the same time, with the verb "pricking," the

poem captures the moment when tears are just beginning to form but can still conceivably be controlled, demonstrating the sincerity of the couple's commitment to the war effort without necessarily overwhelming their ability to act on it.

"Paradox" further explores the uses and limitations of tears in wartime by alluding to other texts that foreground crying as a response to war. Given Page's interest in contemporary painting, it is hard not to read the sudden remembrance of Guernica at the end of the poem as a reference not only to the Spanish town bombed by German planes in 1937, but also to *Guernica*, the mural by Pablo Picasso that commemorates and protests this atrocity. Among Picasso's preliminary sketches for *Guernica* are several bust-length portraits of women with agonized, contorted faces and tears streaming from their eyes. The figure of the weeping woman engaged Picasso's interest for months after the mural's completion, during which time he executed paintings, drawings, and etchings, eventually producing the nearly sixty images of women in tears that have become "inextricably linked to [his] mammoth anti-war canvas" (Freeman 14). In *Pictures and Tears*, art historian James Elkins identifies *Guernica* as one of the most wept-over paintings in twentieth-century art, one that goes to show that "crying and the word 'cubism' are not wholly incompatible" (Elkins 164). The covert reference to *Guernica* in "Paradox" can be read as an example of the kind of "segue from a verbal to a visual medium" that elsewhere "enables [Page] to visualize alternatives to the repetition of the poetic crises of her modernism" (Irvine 177-78). In their overt emotionalism, Picasso's images of weeping women represent an alternative to an "impersonal" modernism, and provide an intriguing context in which to situate Page's critique of the ways in which tears are depicted and interpreted in twentieth-century texts.

In the companion book to the 1994 exhibition *Picasso and the Weeping Women*, Judith Freeman argues that for Picasso, the weeping woman "represented the victims of Guernica. She was the grieving mother, the terrified peasant, the stunned survivor" (68). A reviewer of the exhibit moves beyond this historical context to attribute to these images a universal significance: they are "Everywoman," signifying Picasso's "ability to transmute the specific to the general, to elevate his private emotional sufferings to a universal plane to stand as metaphors for all human suffering" (Gibson 2). The comment is an example of how readily concepts of "universality" and "humanity" are invoked in discussions of crying, and it also alerts us to the gender politics underlying their apparent neutrality and inclusiveness. In a move that simultaneously grants and denies their humanity, the

women's tears are read as signifiers of the universality of the male artist's "private emotional sufferings," producing an equation of humanity with masculinity in which the suffering of the women themselves is disturbingly erased (Gibson 2). The idea that these images are universal, that they are not just about Guernica, but about any and all wars, places them within a long tradition of wartime texts that posit weeping as the required reaction of women with respect to war; according to Nancy Huston, the "regularity with which [...] women's tears are mentioned in every variety of war narrative is both impressive and frightening" (275). In this reading, women's tears are at least accepted as evidence of their own losses, but in a way that allows them no other role but that of passive sufferer.

Page's war poem references but also diverges from this tradition by describing a tearful response to war that is apparently shared between a man and a woman. Rather than reproducing a binary of female crying as a response to male aggression or heroism, these tears suggest a common sense of helplessness against the magnitude of total war, and also the possibility of a shared resolve to take some sort of action in support of the war effort; despite this, previous readings of the poem have tended to reflect the deeply entrenched notion of crying as the archetypal feminine response to war. Appearing in *As Ten As Twenty*, "Paradox" is perhaps the poem that Desmond Pacey had in mind when he said that the collection "expressed [...] a sensitive woman's response to the world of war, want, and fascism" (167). While the poem itself implies that tears are an appropriate and potentially productive response to the war for both men and women, Pacey's comment reinscribes them as particularly feminine. The poem may attempt to redefine the common conception of tears as signifiers of "humanity" in a way that includes both genders, but interpretations like Pacey's indicate that the presence of male tears does not reliably alter the way in which women's tears will be received. Maurizia Boscagli reads masculine tears as representative of "the shift from the particular to the universal which characterizes the discourse of Western humanism. The individual case of a man crying [...] is elevated to the dignity of the universal exemplum and made into an essence, the inner quality of masculinity, where masculinity equals humanity once again" (71). By contrast, women's tears trace a trajectory from the universal back to the personal. Despite the claims made for the "universality" of Picasso's weeping women, one has to wonder why, given his apparent obsession with this figure at the time, he chose not to include one in his finished mural (while several of the its figures have tear-drop shaped eyes, the streaming tears of the weeping woman portraits are notably absent). This, combined with the

weeping women's clear resemblance to particular women in Picasso's life, suggests that he perhaps did not consider them "universal" enough to contribute effectively to the political commentary that *Guernica* undertakes. Similarly, the reduction of the shared tears in "Paradox" to a "sensitive woman's response" undercuts the woman poet's authority in the area of war writing, and would seem to prove Boscagli's point that while a man who cries is a "human being, a woman who cries is a woman" (75). While the poem attempts to draw upon the pervasive association of tears with humanity as part of its anti-fascist message, its reception demonstrates the extent to which access to this "humanity" is not in fact universally available.

The exclusion of the tears of particular people (namely women) from the category of "humanity" is not the only negative consequence to arise from the pervasive perception of crying as "a human universal" (Lutz 17). Throughout the literature of crying, the "humanity" of tears is repeatedly invoked as a way of distinguishing *homo sapiens* from the rest of the animal world. William Frey's 1985 study *Crying: The Mystery of Tears* is typical in its insistence that "emotional weeping is one of the few physiological functions that separates humans from other animals" (113). In their study of animal emotion, *When Elephants Weep*, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy speculate that the status of crying as a uniquely human activity accounts for why emotional tears are not regarded with the same disgust as other bodily secretions that serve to remind us of what we share in common with other species. The political efficacy of invoking the humanity of tears is an issue that Page revisits much later in her career in a way that exposes how easily the celebration of tears as uniquely human can slide into the assumption that animals, because they cannot cry, have no feelings, and can therefore be exploited with impunity.

In "Leviathan in a Pool" (1971) the poet uses a documentary style that incorporates quotations from newspapers and popular texts on marine biology in order to record the delight and the reservations that she feels watching a show at Sea Land, an aquarium located in her home neighbourhood of Oak Bay in Victoria BC. The principal performers are Haida, Nootka, and Chimo, the three captive wild orcas that were Sea Land's main attractions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Between 1964 and 1976, the practice of capturing wild orcas off the northwest coast of North America and training them to entertain human audiences coincided with the growing momentum of the "cognitive revolution" in psychological thought that opened the door to the possibility of research into the emotional lives of animals (Soper-Jones 270).[3] Interest in the topic of animal emotion

inspired several attempts to determine whether animals other than humans were capable of shedding emotional tears, and marine mammals figured significantly in efforts to answer this question. Elaine Morgan's book *The Aquatic Ape* promotes the theory, first developed in 1960 by marine biologist Alistair Hardy, that emotional tears are an evolutionary holdover connecting *homo sapiens* to primate ancestors who were forced to adapt to water when their territory was flooded by the sea by secreting a watery mucous that protected their eyes from seawater, an ability their descendants retained once they returned to dry land. While it is true that marine mammals like seals, dolphins, and whales can all produce ocular secretions that can sometimes overflow due the lack of an adequate drainage system, the theory that these "tears" bear any relation to the emotional tears of humans, or that they are indicative of emotional weeping in animals, continues to be met with widespread skepticism in the scientific community. Whether or not she was familiar with the aquatic ape theory by the time she came to write about whales, Page had long been fascinated by evolutionary metaphors that account for human behaviour by locating it in watery origins; think of the adolescents "like porpoises" in the early poem "Young Girls," whose excessive weeping is a stage they pass through *en route* to the dry land of maturity (*HR* II 12). "Leviathan in a Pool" abandons this association of tears with immaturity and reclaims crying for adulthood in order to make the point that while there may not be an evolutionary connection between the captive whales' "crying" and the poet's own tears, there is certainly an ethical one.

For Masson and McCarthy, captive marine mammals seemed like an obvious place to start their research into animal emotion, since their performances and interactions with their human trainers can generate such a powerful impression that they take pleasure in what they are doing (xviii). Watching the show at Sea Land, Page too is immediately struck by what appears to be the whales' contentment: "Tongue lolling like a dog's / after a fast run / pleased with itself and you / it seems to want to be petted / rears its great head up" (*HR* II 93). The comparison of whale to dog likens a recently captured wild animal to a species that has been domesticated for thousands of years and reinforces the sense that the whale's emotional life is readily understandable in human terms. The emphasis on the whales' happiness becomes more pronounced as the poem continues:

> At sea they will sometimes sing for thirty minutes
> cadences recognizable series of notes songs which carry
> hundreds of miles Sing together Sing singly
> Here in a small pool they vocalize on command

joyous short toots calls

Why am I crying?
(*HR* II 93-94)

The indeterminacy of the poet's question invites a reconsideration of the relative certainty of her previous impressions of the whales' happiness. If she has to ask herself why she is crying, if her own emotional responses are so mysterious even to herself, then on what authority can she make assumptions about what a wild animal might be feeling? While the question "Why am I crying?" might seem to reinforce the anthropocentric idea that tears are the products of a human emotional life that is more complex and more difficult to comprehend than that of animals, this is undermined by the poem's insistence on the complexity and expressive range of the whales' communications with one another in the wild.

This emphasis on the orcas' songs as a form of language is important, since it poses a challenge to the common prejudice that "only humans can think and feel because only humans can communicate thoughts and feelings in words, whether written or spoken" (Masson and McCarthy 17). "Leviathan in a Pool" begins with an epigraph by Roger S. Payne, the biologist who, starting in the late 1960s, made several groundbreaking discoveries about humpback whales' ability to communicate over extraordinary distances through songs characterized by repetition and variation on recognizable themes. The epigraph quotes Payne's description of an encounter with the mutilated body of a beached porpoise; its flukes had been cut off, initials had been carved into its side, and someone had "stuck a cigar butt in its blowhole" (*HR* II 92). Payne recalls: "I removed the cigar and stood there a long time with feelings I cannot describe" (*HR* II 92). Payne's inability to articulate what he is feeling challenges the centrality of language as a factor in distinguishing human emotions from those of animals: just as his research shows certain animals to have more sophisticated systems of communicating than previously thought, the fact that he can feel what he cannot describe points to the possibility that emotion in humans is not an entirely discursive phenomenon.

While the poet challenges the view that the exploitation of sea mammals is justified because they are incapable of feeling anything but enjoyment, she hesitates to position herself as an authoritative interpreter of their expressions of distress. When Nootka is loaded onto a plane for transport to another aquarium, Page quotes from an unnamed source describing her suffering: "And in those four hours / 'she flailed about only once' / and high and small / as a flying gull / 'cried only occasionally'" (*HR* II 97). By

including this quotation, Page acknowledges the powerful rhetorical appeal of the idea that whales, like humans, can cry when they are hurt or frightened or sad: Nootka's cries echo the poet's question "Why am I crying?" in a way that draws attention to the significance of Page's choice of the verb "crying" over "weeping," the one she usually favours. While the use of "cry" stresses the possibility of common ground between poet and animal, it also emphasizes their difference, since the word has multiple meanings, not all of which involve actual tears. While it may be tempting to see them as signifying her closeness to humans, Nootka's cries reinforce her animal strangeness by sounding as remote as the call of a gull. Following Nootka's departure and Chimo's death, a grief-stricken Haida refuses to eat, and Page prefaces her account of his "heartbreak" with a newspaper quote: "*We still don't know how much of Haida's / problem is physical and how much emotional*" (*HR* II 98). Borrowing from journalistic and scientific discourses of objectivity, the poem does not hesitate to acknowledge that the whale clearly has an emotional life, but backs away from claiming to understand very much about it, preferring instead a pose of respectful humility in a world where no-one's feelings are totally knowable.

In its exploration of the uses of tears in the context of animal rights politics, "Leviathan in a Pool" can be situated in relation to a Canadian tradition of sentimental animal writing that uses pathos to generate readers' sympathetic awareness of the problems that beset animal existence.[4] In the case of marine mammals, crying provides the poet with a uniquely effective means of protest: drawing upon scientific speculation that claims an evolutionary link between human and cetacean tears, she invites us to sympathize with captive whales because of their similarity to us, while at the same time warning us not to embrace that similarity too uncritically, since to do so can lead us to overlook or ignore their particular needs; however, the poem does not ultimately sustain this attitude of caution. The poet's conviction that Haida has experienced "heartbreak" overrides her previous reticence in claiming to understand what he is feeling, and her emphasis on the mysterious and intractable qualities of tears comes into conflict with the poem's own reliance on emotional appeal as a form of persuasion. The poet ends by attempting to mobilize support for the return of captive orcas to the wild: "O wise men who look / in treatise and book / for remedy / had you thought of the sea?" (98). While the phrasing characterizes returning whales to the wild as the obvious solution, the idea has always been controversial, and in fact met with very limited success when it was eventually attempted in the late 1990s.[5] Failing to acknowledge the role of captivity in making the whales unfit for survival in the wild, the poet's emotional

appeal on the orcas' behalf does not adequately address the complexity of the situation, and is an example of the limitations of the sentimental tradition that she invokes. Succumbing to the fallacy that sharing in the whales' pain and crying tears of sympathy can lead us to a workable solution to the problems we have created for them, the poem ultimately reflects the problems that can arise in attempting to take cathartic theories about the transformative properties of crying from a personal to a social level.

Something that distinguishes the tears in "Leviathan in a Pool" from all of the ones that I have examined over the course of this essay is the fact that the poet admits to shedding them herself. In contrast to poems like "After Rain," "Young Girls," and "The Stenographers" in which tears are ascribed to subordinate, immature, or mentally unstable others, and in contrast to other poems in which tears are involved in fanciful abstractions entirely divorced from actual bodies, the crying "I" of "Leviathan" signals a change that is sustained in subsequent references to tears in Page's writing. Perhaps this new openness is attributable to Page's mid-career sense of herself as a mature artist with an established reputation, one who no longer needs to worry about the consequences of her tears attracting disparaging epithets like "sensitive woman" or "sentimental poetess." Or perhaps the post-1960s resurgence of the idea of crying as therapeutic helped to bring into being a cultural atmosphere generally tolerant of public weeping, one in which Page could, in a 1997 interview, admit unselfconsciously to "burst[ing] into tears" in a public library on first reading Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* back in the 1930s (Djwa 80). Curiously, though, as Page's representations of tears become simpler and more straightforward, they also become much less frequent. As if in acknowledgement of how crying threatens to oversimplify the complex issues at stake in a poem like "Leviathan in a Pool," Page's subsequent environmentalist poems such as "Address at Simon Fraser" and "Planet Earth" refrain from using tears to arouse readers' sympathy. Even when Page weeps openly in the context of more private troubles, her tears are still shadowed by skepticism about their usefulness and uncertainty about their relationship to emotional life. In "Phone Call From Mexico" (1976), the poet listens to a "weeping" female friend describe the difficulties of aging and illness while picturing in her mind the woman's garden. While there is no question that the poet is sincerely moved by her friend's distress, her thoughts nonetheless register the way in which there is something about being confronted by another person's crying that makes us uncomfortable. The contrast between the garden's orderly walls and "brick walks" and the unruliness suggested by its "wild dahlias," acts as a kind of metaphor for an emotional discipline

that the woman has violated, its "raised ladies' flowerbeds" representative of a code of polite behaviour that her tears of rage threaten to exceed. Whereas in the first stanza the woman's weeping resonates with "all the winds and waters of / America," the contrast between this vast landscape and the cramped garden space "crammed with lobelias" and diminutive "little red-eyes" (*HR* I 173) reflects the conflicting cultural meanings that tears signify: are they powerfully persuasive, or simply overblown and immature? Haunted by the sense that there is something about crying that is essentially infantile, the poet tries to find a way to tell the woman to "lay [her] head down gently / like a quarrelsome / tired child" (*HR* I 175). It is an image that perhaps comes inevitably to hand in a culture that "has not learned to go beyond the issues and images of infancy in assessing the causes of crying or developing a range of responses" (Hoover-Dempsey 23). That the poet cannot in fact bring herself to articulate such a condescending message directly to her friend suggests her sense of its inadequacy. Rather than instruct her in how she should cope with her grief, the poet can finally do nothing but try to share it by crying herself:

> How do we end
> this phone call
> Elinor?
> You
> Railing and roiling
> over miles and years
> And I
> in tears.
> (*HR* I 176)

As the poem's last word, these tears mark the culmination of the lachrymal dimension of Page's poetry, and are a fitting envoie to this discussion, a point at which the mystery of crying has simply to be accepted rather than explained. Signifying her profound pain at her friend's distress and her total helplessness to alleviate it, her tears are a lapse into inarticulacy, but she nonetheless cannot bring herself to conclude the conversation and hang up the phone. Her tears thus supply the poem with an ending that does not end, with a connection that remains, even when the possibility of communication is lost.

Notes

1 Recent approaches that examine how Page's work has been shaped by influences other than, or in addition to, Anglo-American literary modernism include Shelley Hulan's es-

say on Page's interest in the neurological basis of emotion, and Brian Trehearne's on Page and Surrealism.

2 For an overview of behaviorist interpretations of tears, see Lutz, chapter 3.

3 When the practice of capturing whales was outlawed in North American in 1976 collectors continued to satisfy public demand by moving operations to Iceland. See Lazarus, chapter 7.

4 For an overview of the Canadian tradition of sentimental animal stories and its contemporary manifestations, see Soper-Jones.

5 To date, the only attempt to return a captive orca to the wild is the one undertaken in 1998 involving Keiko, the star of the film *Free Willy*. According to Sarah Lazarus in *Troubled Waters*, Keiko failed to integrate into a wild pod and, seeming to prefer the company of humans, remained in the fjord where he was first released. Keiko died in 2003.

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