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STUDIES

Imported Impersonalities: On P.K. Page's Reception of T.S. Eliot

by Emily Essert

A significant issue for critics and scholars of P.K. Page is her period of public silence in what was otherwise a very prolific career. Her poetry first appeared in periodicals in the late 1930s, and she continued to produce new work almost until her death in 2010, but she published no writing between 1956 and 1967. Emily Ballantyne and Michèle Rackham Hall have argued persuasively that Page did not in fact have a prolonged period of creative silence because during these years she began to paint and draw, drafted the materials that would later become her travel journals, and sketched some poems that she would later finish and publish. Their research helps us understand Page's career in all its fullness and complexity, and indicates that Page discovered new modes of expression during the late 1950s and early 1960s. But the fact remains that there was an eleven-year hiatus in her publication of poetry, a lapse that Page's critics, including Brian Trehearne (*The Montreal Forties*), Dean Irvine, and Laura Killian (among others), typically attribute to (in varying degrees) the concept of impersonality.

Building upon the work of these critics, this paper revisits the issue of Page's public silence as it relates to her reception of Eliotic impersonality. By examining Page's comments about Eliot and impersonality, and by considering references to Eliot in Page's poetry, I argue that, *pace* Trehearne's suggestion that Canadian poets "[c]ar[ed] little for the theorization of poetics" (71), Page at least was invested in a careful, dialogic consideration of Eliot's theory of impersonality—the role of imagery, the use of the first-person pronoun, and the importance of perspective in achieving objectivity—as it related to her own poetics. Page's creative struggles were precipitated, in part, by the particular version of impersonality that she received: that is, by a common misreading of the theory that was, and continues to be, popular. My reconsideration of Eliot's prose shows a very different version of impersonality, one which makes ample space for the integration of personal experience and promotes emotional connection between poet and reader. In my reading, then, impersonality is not a monolithic doctrine, but a theory that is subject to interpretation and has been practiced or applied

in a multitude of ways. I will demonstrate, furthermore, that the version of impersonality I identify in Eliot's prose is also found in Page's later work. Though she continued to misinterpret Eliot's theory of "impersonality" as exclusive of subjectivity at this late point in her career, her better understanding and admiration of his "objective correlative" enabled her to develop an embodied imagery blending subjective and objective elements aligning closely with Eliotic Impersonality. Page, therefore, remained an impersonalist poet throughout her career; Eliot's theory, and Page's misreading of it, may have provoked her silent period, but impersonality was also integral to her return to poetry and her development of a new poetics of embodied objectivity.

Trehearne has already demonstrated that Page's early poetry was "committed to the impersonality that regulated the poetry of the 1940s in Canada" (73). A number of early poems by Page, moreover, go beyond employing the techniques associated with Eliotic impersonality; they also allude to Eliot's poetics, engage with his theoretical concepts, and challenge its supposed premise of the excision of subjectivity. First published as "The Traveller" in December 1942, "Cullen" would be the first in a series of semi-autobiographical poems in which Page presents this male alter-ego.[1] In the poem's fifth stanza, Page makes an allusion to *The Waste Land*, followed by a direct reference to Eliot, when the speaker reports that Cullen "Tried out the seasons then, found April cruel— / there had been no Eliot in his books at school— / discovered that stitch of knowledge on his own" (42–4).[2] In an interview with Sandra Djwa, Page recalls that her first meeting with the *Preview* group (in early 1942) was also an introduction to Eliotic theory: "I didn't know what they were talking about. They had all kinds of incredible theories about T.S. Eliot. I had read a bit of Eliot, but not much, and I certainly didn't have any theories" (41). When pressed, Page affirms that she had read "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, but says "I hadn't understood them. I was fascinated by the form he was writing in, the language he was using. It was very exciting. I suppose understanding was a sort of slow osmosis. I gradually began to see the world a bit more and realized that Eliot was talking about that world" (42). In light of such claims, the passage from "Cullen" is interesting for the way that the invocation of Eliot is followed by a kind of disavowal—read self-referentially, these lines suggest that Page may have bristled somewhat at the dominance of Eliot among the *Preview* crowd. A partial understanding of Eliot's theories, in combination with his prominence, might have prompted her to assert that this titanic figure was not the only source of poetic knowledge. As I show in what follows, Page, like most who have read or received

Eliot's theory, seems to have believed that impersonality demanded the complete excision of personal experience and emotions, and the avoidance of the first person singular. This common misreading is particularly excusable in Page's case, given that her knowledge of the theory seems to have been acquired second hand from members of the *Preview* group.

In an interview conducted in the late 1990s, Page remarked: "I feel that until you can reach beyond the self, you haven't a great deal to say" (Bashford and Ruzesky 115). Throughout her career, the theory of impersonality offered Page a way to "reach beyond the self" in her poetry. In her foreword to *The Filled Pen* (2006), Page makes clear the significant influence of Eliotic impersonality on her work: "Imprinted by Eliot's 'objective correlative' in my twenties, his influence is with me still. Re-reading this manuscript, however, I realize that the self, like a child who has been put to bed before the party, cannot resist creeping downstairs" (xi). This statement indicates that Page's position on the role of personality in poetry, at least late in her life, was similar to Eliot's position as articulated here—both understand the return or manifestation of the self in the literary work as inevitable. And yet, the comment implies that Page used to believe in, and associates Eliotic impersonality with, a complete banishment of the self.

It is significant that, in this passage from Page's foreword, Eliot's objective correlative and his theory of impersonality are taken to be nearly synonymous.[3] Eliot defined the objective correlative as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked (*Selected Prose* 48). While it is a crucial aspect of his theory of impersonality because it offers a way to capture or present an emotion that redirects the emphasis away from the speaker—the focus is instead directed toward the object, situation, or event which created, or which will evoke, that emotion—the objective correlative does not itself constitute impersonality.[4] For Page, the objective correlative formed the Eliotic idea from which all else follows, because it is the technique that enables the poet to displace, diminish, or "reach beyond" the self (Bashford and Ruzesky 115). Page's conflation of the objective correlative and impersonality may help to explain why, despite her belief that it demanded the complete removal of the self from the poetry, Page still found impersonality attractive.

For Page, the search for the adequate correlative required that the poet consider an emotion or event from multiple perspectives in order to find a symbol that will be complex enough to signify to a diverse audience; the

reward, ideally, is poetry that transcends interpersonal barriers and communicates authentically. As both process and product, the objective correlative would therefore have been useful to Page for addressing her concerns about the limits of subjectivity. Page was deeply concerned about what she referred to as "the tyranny of subjectivity": the fact that perception is always subjective and therefore limited, such that an authentic relationship to the world and to our fellow humans demands the cultivation of another kind of vision or selfhood (*Filled Pen* 41–2). Jane Swann's analysis of tropes of vision in Page's poetry draws attention to the way Page thematizes the problems of perception in her poetry, while Douglas Freake has discussed the "multiple self" as a focal point for Page's "interest in the problematics of the self" (95). In her poetry, the main device Page uses to explore these problems of perception and selfhood is the objective correlative, which often takes the form of metaphors so complex as to resemble metaphysical conceits—as in "Paranoid" or "Mystics like Miners"—or the form of the rapid juxtapositions which Trehearne has labelled the "a of b" formula (*Montreal Forties* 81)—as in "The Bands and the Beautiful Children" or "The Stenographers." And yet, as the critical work on Page's *lapsus* makes clear, this was not an entirely adequate solution; the critical distance required to find the adequate symbol often left Page feeling too far removed from her subject.

Page's comments not only indicate her debts to Eliot and her particular understanding of impersonality, but also suggest how that understanding developed as her career progressed. For example, when asked by Bashford and Ruzesky about continuity across her career, Page responded:

> It's one of the complaints I get now; that my poetry is too impersonal. And yet it always was. I was looking out. I was looking at the man with one small hand, or the old man in the garden, or the stenographers, typists. It wasn't often that I was looking at myself, although I suppose in some sense I was the man with the small hand, the old man in the garden, etcetera, etcetera. (120)

Again in this passage, Page associates impersonality with not writing about herself, and with looking outward, rather than inward, for her poetic subjects. Page's observations suggest a basic continuity in her poetic approach across her career ("it always was"), but also highlight a significant development. Her comments here are those of an older self reflecting on her earlier work: it is only in retrospect that she can see aspects of her own personality in "the man with the small hand, the old man in the garden …the stenographers, typists."[5] In referring to criticism of her work as "too impersonal," Page is also obliquely referencing her own concerns about

the detachment, coldness, or lack of empathy which have been identified as possible adverse outcomes of the impersonal method. While many critics have drawn connections between Page's poetic silence and impersonality, Page's later insight that she "was in some sense" her poetic subjects or speakers, not only captures what her earlier understanding of the theory of impersonality missed, but also suggests that a reconsideration or reframing of the theory may have helped her to resume writing. As we will see, her later work integrates personal experience and emotions more clearly and directly than does her earlier poetry.[6]

Page's struggle with impersonality is evident in much of her early poetry, but several poems containing references to Eliot are particularly illuminating. As mentioned above, Page's comments to Djwa suggest that her introduction to the *Preview* group in 1942 also constituted an introduction to Eliot, and thus to theories of impersonality. Page wrote at least two strongly Eliotic poems that year: "The Traveller," and the unpublished "Diary," dated February 1942.[7] The latter poem opens with a chronographia (personification of time) resolving into zoomorphism (depiction of a person or thing as an animal) in a manner reminiscent of Eliot's early work (perhaps especially of "Prufrock" and "Portrait"):

> Winter has wandered here and stands among us—
> a bitter creature torturing hands and feet—
> walks like a stray but familiar dog and snuffles
> the tidy timelessness of Sherbrooke Street.
> (1–4)

The poem's final lines involve the type of synecdochic fragmentation of the body so often found in Eliot's early poems: "Dance then, dance on, dance madly, knowing only / the eyes, the mouth, the hands, you run to meet" (189–90).[8] It is therefore unsurprising to encounter a stanza largely about Eliot's poetry:

> I should have brought my Eliot to breakfast
> and read of out-worn disillusionment
> that found a sort of weary exaltation
> much later at the Anglo-Catholic font.
> I should have swallowed Wastelands with my porridge
> and Mr. Sweeney with my eggs and bacon;
> the mood is definitely nineteen-twenty,
> T.S. was in my mind when I awakened.
> I lift my coffee spoon—at once remember
> his image that concerned a coffee spoon

> and though the hour is breakfast I become
> a paper figure leaning on the moon.
> (lines 45–56)

The rather hackneyed reference to the coffee spoon aside, this passage is interesting for its complex invocation of the elder poet, much like the passage from "Cullen" discussed above. The repetition of "should have" emphasizes that the speaker did not read Eliot at breakfast, but feels she ought to have done so, suggesting again that Eliot is *de rigueur* for her circle but not a poet she appreciates. Most literally, the speaker rejects Eliot by not reading him, while "Out-worn disillusionment" and "weary exaltation" indicate a slightly disparaging attitude in keeping with this gesture. And yet, in addition to its mentions of *The Waste Land* and Sweeney, the stanza concludes with a lunar image reminiscent of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and other Eliot poems in his early Laforguian manner. The extended invocation of Eliot, coupled with "T.S. was in my mind when I awakened," ultimately suggests that his poetry has moved her in some important way.[9] Given Trehearne's observation that Canadian poets often believed that impersonality demanded the excision or avoidance of the first person (*Montreal Forties* 71), Page's use of the first person here creates a pointed contrast between her own work and Eliot's. The ambivalent representation of Eliot in this poem (and in "Cullen") indicates Page's vexed early relationship to the figure of Eliot or to impersonality as she understood it. Even at this early stage, Page may have been aware of the costs of impersonality, and of the potential value of a more subjective or personal style.[10] At the same time, this unpublished poem makes clear that Eliot's methods—and certainly his imagery—were also attractive to the young Page.

Two of Page's poems from the 1950s provide further evidence of Page's relationship to an impersonality that demanded the elimination of the personal. Each contains an allusion to Eliot, further indicating that Page associated him with the poetics that troubled her. Unlike "The Traveller" and "Diary," her "Portrait of Marina" (1951) clearly suggests a critique or interrogation of Eliot's methods and theories, as though Page now possessed sufficient confidence to disagree with the senior poet.[11] By attempting to re-write a familiar story—the tale of Pericles—from the point of view of a female character, it participates in a feminist trend legible elsewhere in Page's early work (especially in her poems about female office workers). In this poem, Page represents the story from the perspective of Pericles's daughter Marina, in what is likely a reply to Eliot's "Marina."[12]

While the title of Eliot's poem suggests a focus on Marina, she is, as John Timmerman observes, practically absent: "No actual Marina figure as a living personality enters the poem. She is the beatific figure who nonetheless, in the narrator's experience, obliterates the past with its horror and transforms the present" (145). The sins listed in the second stanza of "Marina" are "By this grace"—that is, by the grace of the rediscovered daughter—"dissolved in place" (16). Serving simply to absolve and redeem her father, Eliot's "Marina" has no life of her own.

As both Marilyn Russell Rose and Geoffrey Durrant have astutely observed, "Portrait of Marina" is more interested in versions of reality and questions of perspective than in family drama. The father's worldview is captured by the image he embroiders of a ship at sea (which is all that fits within his frame, or all that matters to him), and by his wish that Marina become "a water woman, rich with bells" (line 15). His behaviour toward her—his oaths, summons, and demands—suggests that his daughter is little more than a servant to him. The poem offers another perspective, that of the inheritor of the embroidered picture who idealizes her "great-great-grandpappa" and is unaware of Marina's suffering (line 25). But the poem also offers Marina's own perspective, from which the consequences of such treatment are figured as physical pain: "all his stitches, interspersed with oaths / had made his one pale spinster daughter grow / transparent with migraines" (lines 7–9). The poem's second section provides an extended portrait of her suffering, while its last section makes clear the flexibility and fluidity which she has lost as a result of her too-circumscribed life. As Durrant observes, "the very vividness of a world imaginatively perceived [represented by the deep sea] is feared by a woman deprived of her vitality, since perception is more radically disturbing, and dangerous, than action in the world" (175). Reading "Marina" in this way, as a poem about perspective and perception, can sharpen our sense of how Page is writing back to Eliot by challenging his choice of frame and focal point.

In "Portrait of Marina," Page attends to what Eliot neglected, using the impersonal method to critique the important gaps in his vision, and so to address significant misgivings about the theory of impersonality itself. Miranda Hickman has observed that "as Page struggles to overcome the 'tyranny of subjectivity,' she encounters the possibility that the very impersonal techniques to which she has subscribed early in her career…themselves promote a kind of tyrannical subjectivity, which in turn precludes sympathy of the kind she seeks" ("'O My Daughter'" 9). Hickman suggests that Page's interest in perspective and perception in this poem may

be a kind of self-analysis, and Page's critique of Eliot is likely also a self-critique.[13]

"Arras" (1954) is another self-reflexive poem that includes both an allusion to Eliot and a consideration of the limits of impersonality as Page understood it at the time. Zailig Pollock notes that in "Arras," as in "After Rain," Page "analyzes with great precision the increasing, and increasingly disturbing, gap between her art and the world around her" ("Introduction" 13). Of the peacock in "Arras" (1954), Page said: "It may not be clear in the poem, but I generated it. Or the persona, whoever that persona is, generated it. I think of it as the life force. The creative force" (Djwa "A Biographical Interview" 47). Within the poem, however, the speaker is first unwilling to admit that she created the beautiful bird: "Through whose eye / did it insinuate in furled disguise / to shake its jewels and silk upon that grass" (lines 5–7). At this juncture in her career, Page appears to have believed that impersonality demanded a complete excision of the self from the poetry, and involved an understanding of the poet as a medium, receiver, or recorder rather than as an active producer of art. But "Arras" represents the limited and passive conception of poet-as-medium as a significant impediment. Until the poet is willing to claim agency over her creative force (represented by the peacock)—that is, until she is willing to insert herself, as creator, into the work—"nothing moves," and she "fear[s] / the future on this arras" (lines 21, 23–4). The creative impasse is resolved by a dramatic admission: "I confess: // it was my eye. / Voluptuous it came" (lines 25–7). The drama is heightened by the poem's typography, which sets "I confess" on a line of its own, followed by a stanza break, which creates the impression of suspense or hesitation. Once the poet has proclaimed herself the origin or possessor of this creative force, the poem is able to move forward to a sensuous description of the peacock. Significantly, the peacock is "maculate" (line 32). This rare adjective calls to mind the first stanza of Eliot's "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," [14] and thus provides further prompting for reading the poem as metapoetic or self-reflexive. And yet, the speaker's description is in some sense futile, because it does not attract the attention of the others in the garden: "they stand / as if within a treacle, motionless, / folding slow eyes on nothing" (lines 36–8). This suggests that even if the poet does manage to access the divine or transcendent, it may be difficult to articulate such an experience, or there may be no audience for it. Moreover, the final lines suggest that the speaker lacks total control of her creative powers: "another line has trolled the encircling air, / another bird assumes its furled disguise" (lines 40–1). Thus, Page's claims of agency in her interview with Djwa are not quite borne out by the

poem, which registers some anxiety that the poet is merely a vessel or medium, and not a creative agent. This poem, written not long before her *lapsus*, dramatizes Page's artistic struggle, and foreshadows some possible solutions, but does not resolve the issue of the place of the poet within the poem.

Page's comments about impersonality and Eliot, and her poetic references to Eliot, clearly indicate that she struggled with a version of impersonality that demanded the complete excision of personal experiences and emotions. In revisiting Eliot's own statements about impersonality, I discovered a version of impersonality in which personal experience is in fact central to the creative process. Significantly, it is this type of impersonality that I see in Page's later work. For that reason, I will discuss Eliot's statements in some detail before considering examples from Page's later poetry.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot famously claimed that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (*Selected Prose* 43). This claim has often been understood as advocating for the complete excision of the poet—all of those feelings, opinions, and experiences of the human being or body which fall into the vague category of "personality"—from the poem, so that only general or universal experiences remain. And yet, earlier in the essay, he writes: "What happens is a *continual* surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a *continual* self-sacrifice, a *continual* extinction of personality" (*Selected Prose* 40, emphasis mine). In Eliot's theory, the poet cannot divest himself of his/her personality once and for all. Instead, he/she perpetually struggles, each and every time he/she writes, to leave behind as much of himself/herself as possible.[15] Eliot's statement makes clear that impersonality is a process, not an end-point; it also suggests that personality is crucially important, because it is the thing that must be surrendered and extinguished, again and again, in order for poetry to be possible. In Jewel Spears Brooker's reading, Eliotic impersonality does not entail avoiding emotional expression, but rather submitting to a dialectical process whereby personal experience is transformed, *via* the annihilation of "the self as an all-sufficient whole," in order to achieve "the greater end of realizing the self in writing" (42–3). Thus, the creative dialectic begins with, and so depends upon, the personality, because there can be no impersonality, on which such poetry relies, without personal experience to begin from.

It is also important to notice that, for Eliot, the notion of personal experience includes sensual, physical, or embodied experience. When Eliot dis-

cusses personal experience in his critical prose, his examples are often perceptual experiences that rely upon our physical senses. In "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot contends that the mind of the poet is one in which experiences, like falling in love or reading Spinoza, can combine with "the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking" to form "new wholes," thus suggesting that embodied experiences are significant poetic material (*Selected Prose* 64). Just as the chemistry analogy so central to "Tradition" indicates that there can be no chemical reaction without the shred of platinum that is the mind of the poet, the mind of the poet must include physical experiences, along with emotional and intellectual ones, in order for those experiences to coalesce into poetry. An observation in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) also suggests Eliot's understanding of how embodied experiences make their way into a poet's work:

> There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might lie dormant in his mind for twenty years, and re-appear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure. (70)

By this account, the poetry that is eventually produced depends upon the embodied, sensory experience of seeing this remarkable creature;[16] it is emphatically not a sufficient condition, but it appears to be a necessary one. In other words, the personal experiences that are to be transmuted into poetry often rely upon the body, in so far as they are physical sensations or impressions.

Several statements from elsewhere in Eliot's prose indicate the importance of personal experience more explicitly. In an essay on Philip Massinger (1920), Eliot observed that "great literature" is "the transformation of a personality into a personal work of art, their lifetime's work, long or short" (*Selected Essays* 217). In "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (1927), he declared: "What every poet starts from is his own emotions. [...] Shakespeare, too, was occupied by the struggle—which alone constitutes life for a poet—to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal" (*Selected Essays* 137). He goes on, in that essay, to write of Shakespeare and Dante's "brave attempts to fabricate something permanent and holy out of [their] personal animal feelings" (*Selected Essays* 137). Thus, Eliot had no delusions about removing the poet *entirely* from his poem, or separating *entirely* the creative mind from the embodied aspects of an individual. Moreover, these comments indicate that personal experience or

personality play a crucial role in the creative process. Having parsed Eliot's statements on impersonality to reveal his version of that theory, it remains to consider Page's poetry to show how her later uses of personal experience correspond to the uses recommended by Eliot.

I have argued that Eliotic impersonality is really about transforming personal experiences so that they may become accessible to readers. Several of Page's most successful early poems clearly derive from her own lived experience, but they also exhibit a very high degree of detachment from or objectivity about those experiences. "The Stenographers," for example, is based on her experience of office work during the Second World War, as are "Offices" and "Shipbuilding Office." But the speaker of "The Stenographers" stands at a distance from the women she observes, appearing only in the surprising first person singular of the poem's final sentence. Page invents in Cullen a character who reflects her experience and personality only obliquely; this angle would continue to be useful, from time to time, throughout her career. In a poem like "The Landlady," she represents her experience of boarding-house life, but from the perspective opposite to the one she lived. Many of her early poems about marginal figures—such as "Man with One Small Hand" or "Outcasts"—may be read as expressions of her own feelings of alienation, but the link is tenuous rather than obvious. These poems include Page's lived experience only indirectly, by capturing essential emotions through other characters, or employing a point of view quite different from her own. This would be in keeping with Eliot's theory—both as I have presented it and as typically understood. But this level of distance from her subjects and her own emotions, this cooler objectivity, proved unsustainable for Page. In order to continue writing, as Trehearne suggests, she needed to find a way to integrate her lived experience more directly, while still making it general enough that she could "get beyond the self" and be accessible to her readers. [17]

As both Trehearne (*The Montreal Forties*) and Irvine ("Giovanni") have noted, we see the beginning of a new direction in "After Rain," and "Giovanni and the Indians," which directly represent her experiences as ambassador's wife, though they focus on other actors in the scene. Page's post-hiatus poetry pursues this direction further, and more often. The first person speakers are often actors in the scene, and tend to be women much like Page. The poems are more frequently based on her biographically verifiable, lived experiences—a feeling or hunch that we can now authenticate in many cases, thanks to Djwa's biography. One example of this clear integration of the personal is Page's "Domestic Poem for a Summer After-

noon" (1977), which may be her only published poem to refer to her husband by name. As in other late poems, Page refers to her time spent abroad (in this case, in Brazil) and to the lush garden of her home in British Columbia. In this poem, her husband Arthur "dozes" just as the ducks doze (lines 3, 10). She notes that the ducks "Might be decoys, these wild water birds / unmoving as wood" (lines 11–12), and the harmony and likeness between birds and humans is made clear in the poem's repetition of this image in the final stanza:

> We are so motionless we might be decoy
> placed here by high hunters who watch from their blind.
> Arthur asleep has the face of a boy.
> Like blue obsidian the drake's head glints.
> His mate and I are brown in feather and skin
> and above us the midsummer sun, crown of the sky
> shines indiscriminate down on duck and man.
> (lines 23–9)

By noting physical similarities between the humans and the ducks—a point further emphasized by "His mate and I are brown in feather and skin"—and by the concluding lines about the sun, Page casts birds and humans as kin, or as members of the same community. This passage is interested in the bodies of both birds and humans, and in the pleasant bodily experience of a warm, sleepy afternoon in the garden. Thus, Page integrates personal experience into her poetry, and presents a first-person speaker who, though she resembles the poet, does not alienate readers. Any reader may relate to the feelings of peace and tranquility conjured by the poem's speaker. She also represents humans and other creatures in harmonious coexistence, which I read as correlating with a harmony between objective and subjective, or of intellectual and embodied experience.

Given the importance of embodied experience in Eliot's theory, other late poems in which Page expresses a stoic acceptance of our frail bodies also provide further evidence of this harmony or balance of objectivity and subjectivity. In "Dwelling Place" (1976), Page develops the conceit of body as house:

> This habitation—bones and flesh and skin—
> where I reside, proceeds through sun and rain
> a mobile home with windows and a door
> and pistons plunging, like a soft machine.
> (lines 1–4)

This poem meditates on, and thereby integrates, embodied experience. Through this conceit, the first-person speaker describes a feeling of alienation from her body: “I scrutinize it through some aperture// that gives me godsview” (lines 8–9); “I plot its course// and watch it as it moves—a house a bus/ I, its inhabitant, indweller” (lines 16-18). Significantly, through the use of figurative language and by the intellectual consideration of an emotional experience, the feelings are depersonalized so that they become accessible to a wide readership. Page’s “Custodian” (1981) operates much the same way by developing the conceit of the body as treasured object: “I dust, I wash, I guard / this fading fibre” (lines 4–5), “Yet mend I it and darn/ and patch” (lines 17–18). The speaker’s metaphors for self-care effectively communicate embodied personal experience while allowing it to become universally intelligible. We feel strongly here the kind of warmth and empathy that Page may have felt was missing from her earlier work: the “I” is both herself and every (w)oman, for we all share this basic experience. The poem concludes with a poignant comment on mortality: when the time comes, “the Auctioneer” “for nearly nought / will knock [us] down / from his block” (lines 23–25). These are but three examples culled from many instances in which Page’s later work considers and embraces embodiment, or celebrates humans in communion with other creatures. Such images of acceptance and harmony correlate with the delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity, and the direct integration of personal experience, which characterize Page’s later work.

Page’s later poetry, therefore, is as impersonal as her earlier poetry: it is simply employing a different version of impersonality—an embodied impersonality. It is worth emphasizing that Page’s later form of impersonality is not a “better” or “more developed” version than the earlier. I have argued that it aligns closely with Eliot’s formulations of the theory because it includes more of her personality more transparently. Ironically, Page may have believed that she was distancing from Eliotic impersonality through this inclusion, when in fact she was approaching it more closely. I have found no evidence that she read or studied the prose essays from which I quoted, and so she may have arrived at this variety of impersonality by another route. Nonetheless, it is abundantly clear that his theory, and his poetry, were a central influence on her work, and that by understanding that influence we gain greater insight into her poetic silence and her later poetic style

Notes

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1 Cullen was first published in *Contemporary Verse* 6 (Dec. 1942): 7-9. The autobiographical aspect of this poem may help explain why it was not collected until *Cry Ararat!* (1967).
2 Unless otherwise specified, Page's poems are quoted as they appear in *Kaleidoscope*.
3 She made the same link in a 1987 interview with Eleanor Wachtel: "I don't really like confessional poetry. This probably has something to do with having been bought up on Eliot's 'objective correlative' which can, after all, enlarge the boundaries of the poem" (63).
4 As Timmerman observes, "the crafting of the objective correlative constitutes the process of impersonalisation" (32).
5 Page refers here to the subjects of some of her most frequently anthologized poems.
6 The synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity, or of the personal and the universal, is also captured by Page's concept of the visionary "total I," which appears in "Cry Ararat!" (1966). As Rosemary Sullivan explains, "The expression describes emotional integration as though consciousness comes into contact with deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substrata of being and to which we rarely penetrate" (40).
7 Page has dated the poem "Feb. '42." My thanks to Zailig Pollock for sharing a scanned copy of these pages.
8 On Eliot's frequent fragmentation *via* synecdoche of the human (most often female) body, see Melita Schaum, Michael North (*Politic Aesthetic*), and Carol Christ. These lines are especially resonant with Eliot's "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," line 27, *The Complete Poems and Plays*).
9 In particular, the passage suggests that Eliot's poetry offers some solace in wartime. Interestingly, line 52 implies that the speaker's wartime feelings of anxiety and ennui (manifested throughout the poem) are best captured by Eliot's *Poems* (1920), written in the aftermath of the previous war, rather than by Eliot's later work.
10 Dean Irvine has amassed convincing evidence to support such a reading of Page's career in his "The Two Giovannis."
11 In an unpublished conference paper, Miranda Hickman has offered a more detailed account of the case of considering Eliot's "Marina" as intertext, and argues that Page confronts the elder poet as an equal.
12 In Shakespeare's play, Pericles leaves his infant daughter Marina with the rulers of a neighbouring country so that he may return to Tyre and reclaim his kingdom. Many years later, when he returns to find her, Pericles is told she is dead when in fact she has been sold into prostitution. The play's ending is a neat and happy one: father and daughter are reunited, and Marina, having almost-miraculously remained virtuous, is married. As this plot summary suggests, Marina herself is more an object signalling Pericles' failure and redemption than a significant character in her own right.
13 I follow many of Page's critics here in reading Page's poetry of the 1950s as offering an explanation for her poetic silence. And yet, it is also important to heed Trehearne's caution that "the silence is not a sufficient context": "I think it highly likely that later creative frustration will be anticipated to some extent in poems written earlier, but I re-

ject linear causal analysis which would point *all* effects of *all* poems forward to that *lapsus*" (*Montreal Forties* 46).

14 "Apeneck Sweeney spread his knees / Letting his arms hang down to laugh, / The zebra stripes along his jaw / Swelling to maculate giraffe" (lines 1-4, *The Complete Poems and Plays*).

15 See also Trehearne's observations in "Impersonality, Imitation, and Influence: T.S. Eliot and AJM Smith."

16 Eliot proves his own point here, for (as Trehearne reminded me), this passage calls to mind the image of a crab in a pool in Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night."

17 Trehearne argues that the pre-*lapsus* Page was engaged, along with other Canadian poets of the decade, in a "post-Imagist search for new means of coherence and 'wholeness'" (*The Montreal Forties* 73); Page, however, could not at that time accept the "new subjectivist *integritas*" that other poets, such as Irving Layton and Louis Dudek, employed to satiate this desire for wholeness. Her inability to find an adequate means of integrating the subjective and the objective in her poetry, Trehearne implies, contributed to her silence.

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