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Introductory Note

After P.K. Page's death on January 14, 2010, poets, scholars, and the Canadian community mourned her passing and celebrated her life with remembrances in prose and poetry. Page's passing has also prompted the scholarly community to reconsider her place in Canadian letters and expand the genres and methodologies in and through which we come to know and understand her work. In the past, scholarly attention has largely emphasized her image-rich poetry and experimental prose. Thanks to a large final donation to the Library and Archives Canada by Page's Estate, new archival and personal documents have become accessible that allow us to interpret her career through new lenses. This accession, combined with the ongoing editorial work of the *Collected Works of P.K. Page* project, directed by Zailig Pollock and his co-editor Sandra Djwa, also highlight critical lacunae in the study of Page's contributions to a variety of fields, including: life writing, visual arts, spirituality, and eco-criticism, among others. Our goal in this special issue is to read across Page's *oeuvre* in order to consider thematic intersections and productive disjunctions throughout her literary career.

Page is certainly one of Canada's best-loved writers. She is celebrated as the "Grand Dame of Canadian Letters," (CBC) and "English Canada's most important poet of the last fifty years" (McNeilly). Her work is unparalleled in its capacity to render visual splendor into carefully crafted verse and prose, and—as the artist P.K. Irwin—into captivating geometric and biomorphic abstractions. She is also one of the most-studied poets of her generation, having prompted hundreds of scholarly essays, several special issues and collections, and an entire conference. Her life has also been the subject of Sandra Djwa's recent Governor General's Award-winning biography, *Journey with No Maps* (2012). Outside of the academy, her work has inspired a documentary (*Still Waters* 1990), an anthology of *glosas*, *A Crystal Through Which Love Passes* (Ferguson 2013), and a music and dance program based on her poetry, *The Muted Note* (2014). And yet, while her passing prompted popular and creative reflections, reminiscences, and responses to her work, there has been comparatively scant publication of critical and scholarly writing; many facets of her work are waiting to be recovered.

This special issue is particularly remarkable for the many directions in which it expands Page scholarship: south—with new treatments of Page's representations of Brazil and Mexico in poetry, prose, and paint; inward—

with careful rearticulations and reframings of Page's poetic silence in the 1950s; outward—with precise readings of Page's engagement with other artists and aesthetics; and finally, skyward—with a new eco-critical analysis of her poetry and prose's celebratory embrace of the night sky. These avenues of inquiry offer new insight into the thematic and aesthetic qualities of Page's poetry, prose, and art as well as the historical and cultural contexts in which she painted and wrote.

At the same time, the papers gathered here reveal a continued scholarly fascination with inconsistencies and lapses in Page's career. In particular, many of these papers draw attention to Page's turn to the visual arts in her middle age and her prolonged period of silence as a poet. After successfully winning the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1954 for *The Metal and the Flower*, Page stopped publishing poetry. Whether this break is due to her change in position and location—she and her husband Arthur Irwin had moved to Australia in the previous year as Irwin began a diplomatic career—or due to an aesthetic crisis, a failed synthesis, or a series of personal problems including a change in her health, is the subject of intense inquiry in this issue. Instead of reading Page's silence as a break in her cultural production, the authors challenge these views and redirect the study of this period to examine Page's alternative forms of artistic output: life writing and visual art. Close examination of these creative modes in Page's career yields important discoveries about her poetics both before and after her silence.

We have chosen to group the criticism thematically and loosely chronologically. The first two essays reevaluate Page's early works and the significance of impersonality to her early writing. In "Importing Impersonalities: On P.K. Page's Reception of T.S. Eliot," Emily Essert reveals Page's ongoing engagement with, and misreading of, Eliot's theory of impersonality and his objective correlative. She argues that Page's inability to remain impersonal and objective, and her misreading of Eliot, may have played a part in provoking her poetic silence. After exploring various allusions to Eliot in Page's poetry, Essert provides a careful reading of Eliot to reveal a new kind of impersonality—an embodied objectivity—which characterizes Page's later poetry.

Michèle Rackham Hall's "The Visual Arts and the Conflict of Modernist Aesthetics in P.K. Page's 'Ecce Homo' and *The Sun and the Moon*" identifies the significant role of the visual arts in Page's early poetry and prose writing. Hall places Page's early writing into the broader context of modernist art, suggesting that her interest in biomorphism, while not previously acknowledged as part of poetic modernism in Canada, could be

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traced to her readings of European modernist artworks. Hall identifies the conflict between masculinist abstraction and feminist biomorphism as an unresolved tension, both literally and metaphorically, in Page's poetry and her early novella. This aesthetic conflict, she argues, resulted in Page's defeated attempt to synthesize the two concepts in "After Rain" and contributed to her resulting silence.

Both Essert and Hall briefly tackle some of the root causes of Page's poetic silence, including her growing discomfort with the limitations of impersonality and her inability to integrate conflicting aesthetics in her work. However, in "P.K. Page's Poetic Silence," Laura Cameron carefully reads Page's poetry from her lapsus as expressive of her desire to write, emphasizing how Page's feelings about and interpretations of her writer's block are linked to a "crisis of poetic authority." She suggests that Page is unable to move past the order modernism offers her poetry. When confronted by the chaos of modern life, and in particular, by the aesthetic excesses of life in Brazil, she is overcome by powerlessness and subsequent poetic lapse.

Wendy Roy's "Visual Arts and the Political World in P.K. Page's *Brazilian Journal*" continues this detailed exploration of Page's time abroad and her increasing engagement with visual art. She argues for Page's growing awareness of an incompatibility between politics and impersonal forms of artistic production in her retrospective *Brazilian Journal* (1987) and its accompanying artwork. She considers the relationship between Page's silence, her turn to the visual arts, and her own growing critiques of her tendency to aestheticize Brazil in her life writing and artwork to reveal Page's complex, ethical response to her aesthetic practices.

While Roy's work emphasizes Page's critical engagement with her aesthetic practice, Suzanne Bailey and Margaret Steffler's essay "Brazil and Mexico: Light and Shadow, Strands and Gaps" explores inconsistencies with and revisions to Page's life narratives in the published and unpublished versions of *Brazilian Journal* (1987) and *Mexican Journal* (2014). As two of the editors of the newly released editions of these works with Porcupine's Quill, Bailey and Steffler reflect upon their editorial practice to map out some of the main narratives, tropes, and revisions that have retrospectively governed Page's explanations of this period in her autobiographical life writing.

In the final essay, "The Beautiful Script: P.K. Page as Stargazer, David Hickey explores Page's fascination with the natural world in her late writing career. He uses an eco-critical framework to argue that Page celebrates the wonder of the night sky to foster community engagement and environ-

mental change. Instead of taking up an elegiac approach that may overemphasize mourning before loss becomes permanent, Page, Hickey suggests, “presents delight as a renewable resource.” Page’s poetry and prose, he argues, continually return to this idea to captivate and charm audiences into action. Bringing together the dark sky movement, astronomy, and the Whole Earth movement, this article seamlessly incorporates a rich analysis of environmental advocacy with what he calls Page’s “artful astronomy” in an attentive reading of Page’s engagement with the night sky.

This issue also contains Emily Ballantyne’s parallel-text edition of the poetry Page wrote while living in Brazil. In this transcription of a file of unpublished poems deposited to Library and Archives Canada, Ballantyne presents a genetic interpretation of how Page struggled to write poetry during her first year in Brazil. It is this project of “editing silence” that speaks to Page’s discomfort with and inability to completely abandon her primary creative outlet during the period in which scholars had previously agreed that she did not write poetry. This edition complements the many essays in this volume that attend either directly or indirectly to Page’s poetic silence.

When we first conceptualized this special issue, it was to mark the incredible diversity and talents of Page in light of her recent death. However, we also wished to acknowledge that this work would not have been possible without the support, knowledge, and insight of our colleague, Dr. Zailig Pollock. Thus, we conceptualize it as a *festschrift*, to acknowledge our own debts of mentorship. We would like to dedicate this issue to Pollock, as one of Page’s closest readers and longtime collaborators, and his ongoing engagement with her work. As the General Editor of the *Collected Works* and its digital companion *The Digital Page*, editor of *The Filled Pen* (2007) and *Kaleidoscope* (2010), and Page’s literary executor, Pollock has devoted the rest of his life to studying Page and promoting Page scholarship. And even that, he worries, may not be enough. For his dedicated work as a teacher, scholar, editor, and mentor—this issue is for him.

Works Cited

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