THE MULTIPLE SELF IN THE POETRY OF P.K. PAGE

Douglas Freake

> *Is it I who am forgotten, dismembered, escaped, deaf, uncollected? Already I have lost yesterday and the day before. My childhood is a series of isolated vignettes, vivid as hypnagogic visions. Great winds have blown my past away in gusts leaving patches and parts of my history and pre-history. No wonder I want to remember, to follow a thread back. To search for something I already know but have forgotten I know. To listen—not to but for.*
>
> P.K. Page, "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman"

With shield-like initials, P.K. Page has carried on her exploration of self behind a number of masks. As a poet and children's writer she is P.K. Page; as a visual artist, P.K. Irwin; as a novelist, Judith Cape. Known to her friends as Pat or P.K., and in childhood as Patsy, Patricia Page once said in an interview for The *Globe and Mail*: "I *am* multiple. P.K. Irwin is asleep; right now I'm not drawing much, though I always imagine I will again."[1] Describing her departure for Canada in *Brazilian Journal*, she wrote, "Sorry, too, to leave my Brazilian self, so different from my Canadian self—freer, more demonstrative"(238). The word "multiple" is a key not only to Page as a person—in particular to her several modes of artistic expression and to her embrace of other cultures—but also to a central concern of her poetry. The multiple self is a source of fragmentation and loss in some of Page's poems, but more characteristically it is a blessing; it gives her access to the multiple levels of reality.

In a 1969 essay entitled "Questions and Images," included in *The Glass Air* (1985; rev. 1991), Page provides a comprehensive account of what for her are the deepest mysteries of selfhood.[2] She formulates these mysteries as questions, crystallized in part by her experiences of life in Brazil and Mexico, and then by the shock

of her return to Canada. During her time in Brazil, Page did little writing. She turned instead to drawing and painting, partly because of the insistent and gorgeous images with which Brazil "pelted" her. Knowing little Portuguese, she wondered "what man is devoid of words. Where could wordlessness lead?" As she learned more of the language, she realized that she was gaining a new personality. "Who am I then," she asked, "that language can so change me? What is personality, identity?" Her sudden absorption in drawing rescued her from a wordlessness that is fatal to poetry but unimportant to the visual artist. Later, in Mexico, she confronted the "question of the mask," which struck her because of the Indian masks she saw and because she had become a recognized painter, thereby acquiring "another mask, another label." Like the other masks she had donned, this one "seemed to move me further from my own centre." Yet on reflection she could not separate her centre and her mask: "Which is the mask and which the self? How distinguish, let alone separate, two such seemingly interpenetrating matters?"

On returning to Canada, Page experienced an unexpected culture shock: "One returns different, to a different place, misled by the belief that neither has changed." This awareness made her question even more urgently the sources of her creativity, the relation between the conscious and unconscious parts of herself, and the possibility of reaching "another realm," beyond the world where masks are inescapable. She remembered the small pictures that as a child she had found in popcorn packages. They were covered with red and green celluloid filters that made parts of the picture disappear; these suggested to Page "the tyranny of subjectivity," which allows only partial glimpses of reality. "For the time being," Page said, "my primary concern is to remove the filters."

These three concerns—about the relations between identity and language, self and mask, and subjectivity and reality—all point to Page's interest in the problematics of the self. By "problematics," I mean the conditions in which selves are formed, experienced and conceptualized. These conditions are partly internal: what *are* the parts of the self and how are they related? What conflicts result from partition? They are also external, a matter of context. Many cultures have conceptualized the human being as multiple. Sometimes the division was between a waking and a dreaming self, or between an ordinary space-and-time-bound self and a spirit self

that could transcend those boundaries. Often the divisions involved a guardian angel, a daimon, or other forms of personal contact with the divine and the immortal. Christianity has emphasized the division between body and soul, and, since Descartes, Western culture has used and struggled with the dualism of body and mind.

In this century Freud laid out a new model of the divided self permanently at war with itself, and Jung sought ways of ending that war by "permitting" the self a return to dream, myth, religion and the collective unconscious, all of which modern rationalisms have tended to scorn. "Self" is the modern term for what used to be called the soul, although the soul was never doubted and dissected as rigorously and even cruelly as its modern counterpart. Psychology, philosophy, and art have made a blood sport out of the deconstruction of the Cartesian "disengaged" or (paradoxically) "unified" subject; as we will see, this is a game that Page has joined. Simultaneously, the twentieth century has glorified self-determination and authenticity as major goals of both individuals and groups. The search for the self and the flight from it form a central dialectic of modern culture.

Page is keenly aware that the "total I" (100) cannot be known unless it escapes the self that she associates with "subjectivity." As she has said in an interview with John Orange: "I suppose one is born with an aspirational drive, with a sense of there being something higher than oneself. Since adolescence, this awareness has taken me on a search" (75). One result of this conviction is that Page is less interested in *what* the self is than in *how* it is. Do words liberate or destroy it? Do the senses express it or drown it? Is there an order in the universe that can order the self? In a brief commentary on Page's work, George Woodcock says that the "inner landscapes" of her early poems give way to "a mystical concern with the view out of the self towards images" (240). This is true as far as it goes, but suggests that Page takes "self," "seeing," and "images" as self-evident propositions, whereas her poetry in fact subjects each to searching analysis.

Page's poetry has both Romantic and Modernist elements. Many of her poems share with their Romantic forebears a concentration on the lost and lonely self, seeking and occasionally finding at-one-ness with the world. Modernism, which shies away from the explicitness of Romantic self-presentation and exploration, tends to see an emphasis on the self as the major obstacle to the

understanding of social reality, and, paradoxically, of the more complex and fruitful self that eludes the ego's narrow grasp. It demands an impersonal poetry: Eliot thought that the poet's subjectivity should be both hidden and transformed by means of an objective correlative; the Imagists advised their readers to empty the self in order to gain unimpeded vision of the being present in things; the Surrealists attempted to short-circuit the ego by presenting images drawn from the unconscious mind; Auden used traditional poetical forms that released him from self-consciousness and freed his lyricism and wit.

Since the Romantic period, the artist—both as social type and literary hero—has taken on an exemplary role as creator of meaning. Previously, the typical literary hero was an aristocratic leader of some type. When the writer himself is the central figure in a work—Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, for example—he, like the aristocratic hero, lives in a world that is "given" in the sense that a value system, based on both religious and social certitudes, is *there*, to be known and mastered by the writer but not needing to be created by him. Dante moves through hell, purgatory and heaven observing what God has made and eventually gaining a "God's eye view" of the universe. His job is to re-create through his reason and his imagination what God has already put in place. Along with this re-creative vision goes a transcendentalist ethos, whether transcendence is achieved through pagan heroism or Christian salvation.

The Romantic or post-Romantic artist lives in a world that is all too "given" in a sociological sense, but "ungiven" morally and theologically. Characteristically accepting some version of existentialism and the intuition that life is "absurd," the modern artist creates life's meaning by finding/imposing pattern. Furthermore, she does this within an "immanentist" ethos. That is, deprived of transcendent and absolute realities and values, she accepts that meaning must reside in matter, in this world, in time and in experience, the very entities rejected by transcendental models of existence. Twentieth-century artists emphasize their materials rather than pretending to transcend them. Form becomes content, matter is meaning. For writers, time is analogous to matter, in that it is the raw material out of which experience is made, and raw experience is what the artistic impulse shapes into a pattern or meaning. But if the only meaning is meaninglessness, if God is gone and the big questions are unanswered, even unaskable, then ex-

perience remains both the subject of writing and the stuff in which, rather than from which, redemption must be seized. The paradigmatic writer of the immanentist ethos was Wordsworth, whose *Prelude* is the epic of imagination's redemption of matter. Modern writers since Wordsworth have built on his ground. Page's work moves from an earlier emphasis on alienation as a condition of modern life to the discovery of a self that is related to the universe on levels that are discoverable through the heightened and intensified consciousness that poetry itself makes possible. She registers her Romantic and Modernist heritages, but goes beyond them to a new paradigm of the relation between self and world.

A casual reading of Page might suggest that she is not a poet who accepts an "immanentist ethos." In fact, the opposite would seem to be true. John Orange asked Page if she accepted the label "Transcendentalist." She said, "Well, as labels go, I would be pleased to have that applied to me. Surely the one thing in the world one wants to do is transcend" (72). Some critics have called her outlook Platonic. She is interested in mysticism, particularly Sufism. She can say of fairy tales: "they persuade me that another invisible world can manifest itself within our three-dimensional, daily one" (*Flask*, final [unnumbered] page). Yet, as she said to Orange: "I don't for a minute think of myself as a mystic." Her modest reason for refusing such a label is that "the mystic, if he talked at all, would have known what he was talking about, whereas I don't. Also he would have direct perception, whereas I don't" (72). But in spite of her conviction that a rationalist or naturalist understanding of perception misses large parts of reality, she has not accepted a particular body of theological knowledge. She told Orange, again with a characteristic guardedness: "I am inclined towards the idea of immortality. 'Believe' is a word I'm uneasy with even when I use it—or *especially* when I use it." Responding a moment later to a question about human beings' ability to evolve towards the One, she said, "I don't know that I believe it, but I like to think it" (73). Page loves the sensual world and responds passionately to it, and she seeks a pattern, often expressed in terms of shape, scale and geometric ordering, that is both inherent in and abstracted from the flow of impressions, but she never wishes to transcend the world. Or, more precisely, the transcendence she achieves is a recognition of the glory of immanence, as in the late poem "Kaleidoscope":

the yellow plastic
of my liquid soap—
a quatrefoil of buttercups—
unfolds
in four-leaf clovers on a field of gold. (182)

Page's sense of multiple selves and her version of the mystic search for a union between the One and the Many are among the most important subjects of her poetry. As I have mentioned, she, like so many modern writers, sees writing and visual art as her means of exploring inner and outer realities and as paradigms for the process of self definition. For example, she compares the "duologue" between parts of the self to "an effortless poem" (216).

Furthermore, not only in *Brazilian Journal* but also in stories like "Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . ." she is drawn to the journal form, which is personal but concentrates on the selection and ordering of external events. Her poems' history of publication also links them to a process of self-definition and redefinition. Her body of poetical work is not large, but she has made of it several editions of collected poems, with different editors helping her in the selection. In 1974 she brought out *Poems Selected and New* with Anansi (Margaret Atwood helped with the selection); in 1985 Oxford published *The Glass Air: Selected Poems* (Richard Teleky, Oxford University Press editor at the time, helped her with this selection); in 1991, a revised version of the latter appeared. Since 1974, Page has published only one book of entirely new work, *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies* (Oxford, 1981). This publishing history suggests that she sees her work not as a chronological record or as statements to be left to their moment, but as the material for an ongoing reshaping of the self. She constantly *selects* anew, and each selection has in fact been richer and more varied than the last, while giving a clearer focus (a favourite Page word) to her poetical centre.

Many of Page's early poems, such as "The Stenographers" and "The Landlady," which derive from Eliot's depictions of modern urban life and, more particularly, from works like Auden's "The Unknown Citizen," present the alienated self in fairly conventional terms. Often they describe unformed adolescents who exist most fully in their dreams, like "The Blowing Boy": "Waking from dreams sometimes he is a ship / without the crew or chart to master it." Later poems trace more complex types of alienation. I will comment on two, "Reflections in a Train Window," originally from *The Metal*

and the Flower (1954), which, as its punning title suggests, meditates on the types of alienation inherent in perception, and "If It Were You," a poem about loss of self that seems to come closer than any other in *The Glass Air* to personal confession.

In "Reflection in a Train Window" (47), Page describes travelling in a train at night and seeing a woman reflected in the window while from the outside lights and stars remain visible. An uncharacterized observer sees the "woman floating in a window— / transparent." The interpenetration of her image by lights from outside, including Christmas wreaths, makes her look like "a saint with visions," although these visions are immediately qualified to "stigmata, / marking her like a martyr." The reading lamps in the train carriage make her appear "haloed," and the frost that begins to cover the train window suggests a crown of thorns.

Except for two very short lines—in the first section the deliberately ambivalent adjective "transparent" standing alone to describe not only the window but the woman, and in the second "she drifts," which emphasizes the insubstantiality of the woman's image—the poem is a half-rhymed sonnet. Page has written about the experience of reading Donne, and the influence of the Holy Sonnets is evident here as in other of her poems, but while Donne's narrator agonizes over his separation from God, the woman reflected in the train window is separated from her self. Her "floating" image suggests a muted ecstasy, but not one in which the soul escapes from the body. It suggests rather a painful (note the pun on "pane") self separation: "in between her and herself the sharp / frost crystals prick the pane with thorns." The "transparent" wall between the woman and the world allows her to see both the world—or fleeting parts of it—and herself, but both are seen as in a glass darkly, and both are "floating" and "without substance." Physical and psychological reality mirror each other. The woman becomes part of a flattened image from which "perspective" and the separation of figure and ground are removed. To the narrator the woman and the world around her become a single mosaic:

> She without substance, ectoplasmic, still,
> is haloed with the reading lamps of strangers
> while brass and brick pass through her.

That blending of figure and ground is a martyrdom, relieved only

by the frost crystals that, as they cover the pane, cancel the self's reflection, making a blank that will signify the complete separation of "her" from "herself."

Then suddenly, in the last four lines of the poem, the narrator sees tears well in the woman's "unseeing eyes." The tears reveal a world of inner pain—counterpart and opposite of the outer pane of glass—that the image in the window did not reveal. It suggests a "self" that is not "transparent" (literally, it is not "visible across"). The rhythm of the poem changes at this point ("and from the sill / her trembling image falls, rises and falls") in imitation of the movement of the train and the movement of the woman's grieving body. The changing rhythm marks a release, not just of the woman's hidden pain but of the transparent but separating glass that divides observer from observed. Her tears come to "unseeing eyes" that in fact have seen nothing of what the narrator has recorded. Earlier the narrator had assumed knowledge of the woman as a divided self, symbol of the elusive "reflections" that are the interface of mind and world; now the woman is mysterious still, but somehow more real. She is present to herself, we feel, even if that presence is the result of pain.

"Reflections in a Train Window" shows the self fragmented, lost, negated in a world that is more often its prison than its garden. It shows the subject's sense of itself as object and the temptation to turn other subjects into objects. It shows that vision, and vision translated into words, are the modalities of consciousness but also sources of alienation. Like many other Page poems, as we will see, it explores self in terms of space, centres of consciousness positioned, in this case, in the box of a train carriage that is moving through larger spaces and also through time. It shows, finally, a connection between two subjects, the narrator and the woman, a connection one-sided and partial, but nevertheless possible because of the mysterious "centre," described in Page's later poems, from which the woman's tears flow. These insights are characteristic of Page's tracings of the problematics of selfhood.

"If It Were You" (38) is one of Page's most powerful depictions of alienation and despair. One would hesitate to call it personal, but its direct address to the reader, only seemingly offhand ("If it were you, say, you"), demands immediate involvement in the experience of the speaker. The repeated rhetorical questions and the constant use of conditional clauses are followed by sections

of the poem that say exactly what *would* happen *if* the terrible breakdown elaborated by the speaker were ever to happen to the reader. The first two long sections of the poem are a single labyrinthine yet insistently coherent question: what would you do if you lost the "personal map" that was guiding you through life and, becoming bewildered, found yourself walking "a blind circle in a personal place"? The use of "personal" here suggests that the personal is a trap; personal maps are vulnerable, liable to blur when vision mysteriously fails. Then the line through life becomes the "blind circle" of a Dantean hell. In such a hell

> No ears would understand. Your friends and you
> would be practically strangers, there would be no face
> more familiar than this unfamiliar place
> and there would be walls of air, invisible, holding
> you single and directionless in space.

The speaker imagines this lost soul in a garden, implying perhaps that the map of the poem's second line is a guide to Eden, or, as certain details suggest, to Marvell's "Garden." The speaker's loss is a loss of love and of dreams (of Ariel and Eurydice in section four and of "the exquisite unborns of your dreams" in the second-last and least felicitous line of the poem). But the longing for the garden, or even the solitary experiencing of an attenuated garden in the here and now, seems to be the cause of the intense alienation that the poem registers: "Simply nothing but you and the green garden, / you and the garden." If you were to stay there forever, you would "slash your own wrists, commit / an untidy murder in the leafy lane."

The conclusion of the poem is disappointing after its striking opening. It suggests that this madness is the result of losing faith in "the person you call 'I'," the public persona ruled by "calendars and clocks" about which the lost self "grow[s] phobias." This section seems to contradict the earlier suggestions that the speaker's madness derives from the garden experience itself, not from the emptiness of the public world.

One of the most characteristic motifs of Page's poetry, which I will consider later, is present in "If It Were You." Feeling "directionless in space" is Page's most common metaphor for self-alienation, and, conversely, finding a centre from which to organize space is a primary means of being at home in the world.

Most of the poems in which Page describes a centred self directed in space come from later in her career. Several earlier poems are explicit analyses of the parts into which the self can be divided. In "Dwelling Place" (164), the body is described as a "habitation . . . where I reside." It is likened to a mobile, "a soft machine," and a bus. The mechanical images suggest the Cartesian mind/body split, as the witty series of verbs that describes what "it" does makes clear:

> It sleeps, it weeps, its poor heart breaks,
> It dances like a bear, it laughs, opines
> (and therefore is)

Here the Cartesian duality is undermined. The "I" (eye) that scrutinizes "it" through "some aperture / that gives me godsview" cannot be the mind, since the anticlimactic verb, not even given a subject, is "opine." The "*cogito, ergo sum*" is comically turned into "I am because I opine." The poem sends up the notion of the body as a feeling machine by exaggerating its unwieldy, vehicle-like bulk and by emphasizing its pains—from a pebble in its shoe to its broken heart. This robot thinks and feels; the "I" is explicitly not mind or body:

> I, its inhabitant, indweller—eye
> to that tiny chink where two worlds meet—
> or—if you so discern it—two divide.

Despite her parodying of the mind/body split, Page is making the serious point that the "I" is a meeting place between inner and outer world: typically, because of the Cartesian tradition, the modern consciousness has seen this meeting place as a gap or divide; Page prefers to see it as bridge.

"The Selves" (171) also analyses the self, but here the division is the traditional tripartite one, familiar from divisions of the psyche into reason, appetite and will, or into id, ego and superego. The poem is actually divided into four sections, even though it describes three selves: an "invalid" self, a "fit" self, and a third "somewhere in between the two." The invalid self is given two long-lined seven-line stanzas while the seven lines describing the fit self are much shorter, but the two selves are carefully contrasted in regard to imagery and phrasing. The invalid "I" brushes her hair out like a silver fan, while the fit "I" has hair like

a golden sun. The sick "I" is "lackadaisical O lackadaisical," the healthy one "enviable O I am enviable" (and capable of saying "I"). The invalid self is "servant and serf" to illness, personified as a queen. The fit self, on the other hand, is active rather than passive and subject to no one and nothing: she "strikes roses from a bush" and causes rare plants to blossom within her eyes. Will and action are one; subject and object are joined. As usual with Page, the image of the strong self is one of ordered movement within centred space, in this case "planets circling." The third self is sparely characterized, although in four equally long lines the reader is told that this "third" wishes to speak but cannot. It is "unmoving, mute, invisible" (like God, perhaps) but has "a bolt of lightning in its naked hand." It seems to be an angel or guardian spirit. Considering the value that Page puts on both muteness and invisibility in other poems, this self is clearly the most powerful one, living somehow beyond the senses, which register illness and fitness, but ready to break into consciousness with a blast of power.

I have suggested that, although Page is interested in the constituent parts of the multiple self, she is even more interested in the self's relation to the world. To escape "the tyranny of subjectivity" that can trap the personality in the sort of labyrinth described in "If It Were You," the space between subject and object must be collapsed. But certain aspects of reality, in particular the very means by which we apprehend it, prevent that collapse. Page knows that both words and vision, the media of her chosen arts, involve an automatically objectifying activity. "Only Child" (4) explores the time and the mental space before or beyond words. The boy described in the poem is overwhelmed and threatened not only by his mother's insistence on sharing "his private world with her" but by her words, which destroy the immediacy of things. The son feels at one with birds because of "their feathers and a shyness like his own." The mother observes and then names them—"'Observe, / the canvas-back's a diver'"—but for the boy the naming kills: "Birds were his element like air and not / her words for them." Naming, or words, goes with looking; both are opposed, in this poem and throughout Page's work, with feeling, with breathing, and with the kind of sight that is vision or dream rather than observation.

Page complicates the relationship between words and things in "Cook's Mountains" (71). She imagines Captain Cook approach-

ing the coast of Queensland and gazing at mountains that are, for him, unnamed. He uses his eyeglass to see the mountains more closely; they shine, partly because of the glass itself, and he has a name for them: "He saw / the Glass House Mountains in his glass. / They shone." Both his eye and his naming transform reality. His gaze "glazes the mountains," and his imagination, the source of "paradox and metaphor," as the last line of the poem says, gives them a name: "By naming them he made them," or remade them, since they were there before but "not the same." Here the word, which is linked to the eye, produces something strange, "the sum of shape and name." This strange and almost monstrous thing, the mountains and their name, are an unholy alliance, the product of the "dark imagination": the "sum of shape and name" is "two strangenesses united into one / more strange than either." The speaker in the poem repeats Cook's experience, seeing the mountains, which she describes as "sudden, surrealist, conical," before she hears their name from her driver. Then the name Cook gave to the mountains affects her imagination and her vision:

> Like mounds of mica,
> hive-shaped hothouses,
> mountains of mirror glimmering
> they form

This second description of the mountains explodes with metaphor and alliteration. Out of the meeting—and clashing—of word and thing comes poetry, itself a "glass house."

Yet Page wants at times to move beyond the poetry of naming and of images in order to reach a poetry of the deaf, mute, and blind. As a child gazing at a baby says in "Stefan" (159), "*When he thinks it must be pure thought / because he hasn't any words yet.*" She seeks a poetry than can unite the senses into a supra-sense, or she experiments by denying the eye and by evoking sounds rather than words. Two poems about replicas of human beings, snowmen and figurines in plasticene, show how the plastic arts can reveal aspects of the inner self less accessible to poetry and painting.

The first poem has distinctly sinister overtones. In "The Snowman" (114), which Page has said is one of her favourite poems, the speaker contrasts one snowman with a multitude, come like "a plague" to infest every yard in the neighbourhood. The "innocent single" snowman is like the child's first image of a man

drawn on paper, a "white double O," now made three-dimensional. It is "Abstract. Everyman," the incarnation of a Platonic idea, and yet so "personal" that, when he starts to melt, the child wants to "call [him] back . . . from the thaw's invisible attack."

The single snowman is "a bright omen—a thunderbolt of white." But the speaker suddenly remembers seeing snowmen in all the yards in the neighbourhood, and her awareness that the creative act can be replicated endlessly leads her to characterize them as a "stock-still multitude / and all stone-buttoned, bun-faced and absurd." The next day, in spite of their apparent stillness, she suspects that they have moved a few inches from where they had been, yet they look "numb, unmoving." Overnight, too, the snowmen seem to have destroyed or devastated two benign presences in the air, angels—the snow is "scarred" with the marks of their wings—and birds, whose feet have left marks "like twigs broken" upon the snow. The snowmen also seem to obliterate all sounds, except for a "round / kind of an echo without end."

The fable of the second poem about the creation of plastic forms is given its title, "In Class We Create Ourselves—Having Been Told to Shut Our Eyes, and Given a Piece of Plasticene With Which to Model a Person" (1985 edition only, 172). Although the instructor has told the class to model a "person," the speaker feels that each student makes "a nearly identical twin / in miniature." The modellers shut their eyes and create the small figures by means of touch; they are blind demiurges, creating images of themselves, as God did Adam, but these are images that are not made decent by the censoring formal restraint of the eye. The long-lined stanzas of the poem, most lines containing three separate impulses ("We made them . . . with shut eyes . . . —little figurines"), mimic the working of hands shaping plasticene. The surprising objects created by hand alone are described in short abrupt phrases—"A naked woman / the size of my hand. Flesh-pink. Blind."—to express the eye's shock at what the slowly moving hand has wrought.

Since Page dedicates this poem to a friend, she clearly gives us permission to read it as an unusual sort of self-portrait. She herself sees the figure she has made as naked and blind. Possibly the figure is cradling a child. We note the suggestion of *mise-en-abyme* that Page elsewhere associates with images of the self. The man next to her thinks that the figure is "sleeping. / Possibly self-

protective." She think that his image is "crucified or crying, 'Help me!'—spare, / male, square, as if cut with a tool." Page's reaction to what she has made is similar enough to the man's, but we are not told whether he realizes that he has made a rather shocking exposure of his vulnerability and pain.

The penultimate stanza has longer lines than the others, and in it Page asks the questions provoked by the strange experience of "creating ourselves" as the title of the poem insists. These distorted, almost repulsive figures are not *images* of ourselves, but are ourselves, somehow truer than the "we" who made them or "expressed" them. The Biblical metaphor of creation as the fashioning of clay is dominant in the poem, but there are counter-metaphors of creation as birth: the not-fully-gestated figures "struggled out of use," being born while the conscious "I" thought it knew what it was *fashioning*. In answer to her own question, "Who made them?" Page answers: not "we who observed them," but "somebody deeper, detached."

Page also asks, "who was it we fashioned? Which self was the self we created?" These forms are indeed more accurate aspects of ourselves than the "we" who fashioned them, and what makes them so would seem to be their very incompleteness. The recognition that the poem records—one that needs the eyes—is the recognition of the usually hidden self that in spite of, or even because of, its malformation is nevertheless what we are. The surprising last line of the poem says that that self bears a "curious message—*noli me tangere.*" Why not touch that baby, vulnerable self that seems in need of further shaping? The quoting of Christ's words to Mary Magdalen suggests that this self is somehow sacred: having been touched into existence, or, more precisely, having manifested itself through touch, it cannot now be touched because of the danger that the rational mind may be tempted into either improvement or destruction. The creator-discoverer of this self is in touch with deep levels of reality, levels accessible to touch but hidden in the world in which the eye is dominant but also enslaved.

In "Questions and Images," the 1970 essay included in *The Glass Air*, Page refers to *The Savage and Beautiful Country*, a book by the British psychiatrist Alan McGlashan that draws heavily on Jung and Eliade. His title is a description of "the inner life of the mind" (2), which is invisible to cool reason but reveals itself to

what McGlashan calls "that numinous guardian of our symbolic life, the Dreaming Mind" (104). He defines the Dreaming Mind as follows:

> There is in all men, irrespective of age, race, or intellectual power, a function, curiously neglected except for immediate and therapeutic purposes, which is largely independent of human limitations of time and space, and of human structural necessities of thought. I refer to the *Dreaming Mind*. Within this peculiar function, I suggest, there may be concealed the means by which once more the whole world of human consciousness can be levered into a new position (115). . . . I invite you to regard the dreaming mind as a *file* smuggled into the space-time cell where man lies captive; a cell whose walls and ceiling are our five senses, and whose warders are the inflexible concepts of logic. (122)

Page repeats McGlashan's questions about the Dreamer, but adds that "merely posing [these questions] moves more furniture" (216). She seems to agree with him that the dreamer within can rescue one from what she calls, in the phrase quoted previously, "the tyranny of subjectivity." As McGlashan puts it, "the Dreamer constantly and effortlessly performs the rationally inconceivable feat of being both the experiencing subject and the observed object at the same moment and to the same degree" (127). Drawing on the myths of "Stone Age man" as well as on Jung, McGlashan concludes that "the Dreamer may be some *supra-personal mode of experiencing*, and the dream process, when attended to by the conscious mind, may be a unique form of colloquy between the personal and the supra-personal" (127). This passage may have been in Page's mind when she writes, in "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman,"

> One longs for an art that would satisfy all the senses—not as in opera or ballet where the separate arts congregate—but a complex intermingling—a consummate More-Than. This is perhaps just another way of saying one longs for the senses themselves to merge in one supra-sense. (184-5)

This supra-sense would, of course, have to belong to a consciousness that was, by some means, a supra-self, no longer divided or even multiple.

Page's poetry gives many hints about such a state of con-

sciousness. She shows, by injunction and by the example of her poetical forms, how the self can be integrated and its parts set spinning in harmonious movement. I will approach Page's resolution of the problematics of the self by considering first her emphasis on centredness and ordered space and, second, the implication of the phrase that she kept as the title of her last two collections—*The Glass Air.*

Page almost always describes the epiphanic moments in which the self becomes a "total I" (in the striking phrase from "Cry Ararat!") in terms of space. This space is organized by the I/eye that makes itself into a centre, and is held "at-tension" by "the focus of [that] total I." The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self,* a book about the modern identity, notes an "essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space. . . . There are signs that the link with spatial orientation lies very deep in the human psyche" (28). Page has frequently commented on how *scale*—that is, the perfect proportioning of space—can magically suggest some higher and otherwise imperceptible harmony. As she says in "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman," it gives access to "a dimension where worldly senses are inadequate": "The struggle is to fit the 'made' into the 'sensed' in such a way that the whole can occupy a world larger than the one I normally inhabit. This process involves scale. Poem or painting is a by-product" (208). Describing Bahia cathedral in *Brazilian Journal,* she writes: "There is an infinite mystery about this interior which may be mathematical. Here the whole is unquestionably greater than the sum of its parts . . . all [of which] combine to focus the eye and with it the mind, perhaps even the heart" (130).

"Another Space" (122), which in 1978 Rosemary Sullivan called Page's finest work, concentrates on space organized and centred, but moving. "Its subject," as Sullivan says, "is a dream in which the poetry sees a mandala: a personal vision of the archetype of the cosmic dance—the poet, a solitary viewer, is reeled into a human circle connected by an invisible axis to a starry spool." "Dot" (118), a poem which echoes Donne's "Holy Sonnet: Batter My Heart," seems to address itself to the universe, demanding that the self be set spinning with such cosmic energy that it can see that "dimension where worldly senses are inadequate":

> With lightning stagger me so I may stand
> centred as never otherwise. In stock-
> stillness, dizzying movement find.
> Spinning, a dot . . .
>
> Harry me. Hurry me to spaces where
> my Father's house has many dimensions.
> Tissue of tesseract.
> A sphered sphere.

"A Backwards Journey" (134) describes the fascination of Page's seven-year-old self with the picture on a can of Dutch Cleanser: the picture of the Dutch Cleanser woman holding a can of Dutch Cleanser on which there is a picture of the Dutch Cleanser woman holding a can. . . . This classic, if commonplace, *mise-en-abyme* absorbs the "serious attention" that the child still has available to give to "everyday objects." She realizes that her contemplation of the picture is not a game, and is more than a mental exercise. "The eye of the mind" is led backwards until the woman is "the smallest point / my thought could hold to." The combination of wonder, produced by infinite regression, with the escape from time that moments of intense absorption seem to achieve produces a powerful awareness: that "that tiny image [the dot that is the smallest imaginable image] / could smash the atom of space and time." The trick of space that a *mise-en-abyme* involves is also a trick of time, since the attention is sucked out of the temporal, as it were, into some realm beyond the space/time box in which consciousness is normally held. The bold image of smashing the atom implies that the self's absolute concentration on a single image, here an image reduced to a dot, can explode normal perception of space and time. Typically, Page's self is not centred on some point "within" but on an outer scene, image, or geometrical structure. Page calls this poem "A Backwards Journey" to indicate that her adult concentration on her earlier insight overcomes time by uniting her to her earlier self, in accordance with the Wordsworthian, and Proustian, paradigm that I mentioned earlier. Page uses the same image to talk about her own writing: "The idea diminishes to a dimensionless point in my absolute centre. . . . It is from here that I write—held within that luminous circle, that locus which is at the same time a focussing glass, the surface of a drum" (208).

The poem that Page places last in the 1985 edition of *The Glass Air*, "Deaf-Mute in the Pear Tree" (178), achieves both ingeniously and movingly a sort of mute poetry that shows the reader how to exist in a proper relationship to the world. The deaf-mute gardener whom the narrator watches pruning a pear tree is himself a "golden fruit." He has the innocence of the silent and of the deaf, and his lack of words seems to let his body, "clumsy" as it is, make firmer and weightier contact with his environment. His trunk and the tree's are together ruddied by the sun and "[t]hrough palm and fingertip he knows the tree's / quick springtime pulse." The narrator both hears and imagines not hearing the birds: "Spring finches sing / soundlessly in the leaves." The gardener hears nothing, but he is in fact not mute. He makes "small inarticulate mews" as he works, and in reaction to the sight of his wife, who arrives suddenly and looks up at him, the stone that the narrator has imaged lying in his ears and on his tongue "dissolves" and from his throat "feathered joy / flies screaming like a jay." This inarticulate but expressive sound is like, one might think, the language of Paradise; this earthy Adam, seeing his Eve, speaks the thing itself, his joy, but needs no words to do so: in the beginning was the. . . . The stone of words is on the narrator's lips but does not seal them completely, since she has managed to transmit something of the deaf-mute's experience and even to share in his innocence. Like "Domestic Poem for a Summer Afternoon" (155) and "Kaleidoscope" (180), this poem transforms the ordinary into the visionary.

"Address at Simon Fraser" (201), written in 1990, is Page's most direct and summary statement of her values. Its style is sometimes comically or wittily colloquial, sometimes passionately eloquent. Page expresses her concern for the health of the physical environment and her belief that one can be changed by art, and she sees an important connection between the two. Echoing Rilke, she concludes: "Art and the planet tell us. Change your life." Speaking of her thrill at hearing that scientists think space is honeycombed, she says: "[This idea] so matches with some image in my head / that when I read the story in the press / I shouted 'snap,' and saw, as in a flash / the whole hexagonal geometry." When she speaks of art, she imagines it as organizing our inner space:

> If we'll but give it time, a work of art
> 'can rap and knock and enter in our souls'

> and re-align us—all our molecules—
> to make us whole again.

At another point in her address Page says playfully to her audience:

> I hear you say—(who are you, by the way,
> so quick to interrupt me. Are you me
> disguised, a kind of phantom limb,
> equipped with larynx and a point of view?
> or, to reverse the question, am I you?)

These responses to the mysteries of selfhood and identity—acceptance of the ways in which one consciousness blends into another and a sense that an "alignment" with the world around us is the key to a centred existence—are the fruits of Page's long concern with the problematics of self. Her poetry records her own growing knowledge of these characteristics of a fulfilled consciousness and offers, however unassumingly, guidance to readers who, in a secular age, may seek wisdom from the questing poet.

Since 1991, when the last edition of *The Glass Air* was published, Page has concentrated on a particular type of poem, examples of which have been published in *The Malahat Review*. At a reading given at York University in Toronto on 25 October 1993, she referred to her recent outburst of poetical productivity as miraculous, especially to herself. What is striking in relation to the argument I have been making is that the majority of Page's recent poems have been of a type called a "*glosa*," especially popular in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Spain. "Loosely, the *glosa* is any poem expanding on the theme presented in the opening stanza and usually repeating one or more lines of that stanza" (Preminger 323). Page has chosen four continuous lines from favourite poems and used them as her text, concluding the stanzas of her poem with the four lines taken in order. A poem entitled "Love's Pavilion,"[3] for example, is woven around four lines from Dylan Thomas, and Page has also written *glosas* on lines by Pablo Neruda, T.S. Eliot, and George Seferis. This type of poem fits perfectly the attitudes to self that I have been outlining in Page's earlier poetry: Page not only relates herself directly to other poets by making their poems a part of her own, but she sets her own poems in a certain alignment with those of fellow poets, so that she is centred within the university of poetry. It seems to me little wonder that Page's poetic inspiration has been released by her discovery of this old poetical form.

Page continues to be creative in poems that have become marvelously direct, relaxed and assured, and she seems more and more clearly to be a significant and lasting poet. Perhaps her greatness is evident to readers in the 1990s not just because of her long and continuously developing poetical career, but also because the 1990s are marking a shift from a world dominated by the nation-state paradigm to one that, in spite of the proliferating number of "nations," will have to take seriously the idea of a global consciousness. In any period, the concept of the individual is congruent with the form of political organization. For example, hierarchically organized states, ruled by a king or equivalent, contain hierarchically organized individuals, governed by reason. The model of the individual dominant during the nation-state period was the disengaged, autonomous subject philosophized by Descartes (and often resisted by the poets). Page's increasing popularity is connected, I think, with the fact that Canadian culture is leaving a period in which it sought out writers who could be mined for their Canadian content. For a number of reasons, including the accident of having lived in and fallen in love with other countries, Page has never felt herself, or her self, bound by nationality. The multiple self that is born from her poetry—open to the world, embedded in it but capable of seeing all levels of its reality—is the self of a post-national world. The kaleidoscope is one of Page's images for the perception, originating of course in the individual self but expanding from it: "Nothing is what it seems. / Through this glass eye / each single thing is other — / all-ways joined / to every other thing" (180). We and the world to which we seek the truest relation are "the perfect, all-inclusive metaphor" (180).

NOTES

[1] Val Ross, "Rifling Through the Page," *Globe and Mail*, 23 December 1991: C-1.

[2] All citations of these two essays and of Page's poems are followed by page numbers of the 1991 edition of *The Glass Air*, except for the few poems, indicated in the text, that are published elsewhere.

[3] *The Malahat Review* 104 (September 1993): 16-17.

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