

English Studies in Canada



P.K. Page's "Inebriate" A Gloss on a Glosa

Robert Lecker

Volume 45, numéro 4, 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1089958ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2019.0018>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE)

ISSN

0317-0802 (imprimé)

1913-4835 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lecker, R. (2019). P.K. Page's "Inebriate": A Gloss on a Glosa. *English Studies in Canada*, 45(4), 83–99. <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2019.0018>

P. K. Page's "Inebriate": A Gloss on a Glosa

Robert Lecker
McGill University

I AM INTERESTED IN POEMS ABOUT POEMS. What should we call them? They are obviously a kind of ekphrasis: art that comments on art. But the term ekphrasis is more commonly associated with poems about visual images than it is with poems about poems. In his frequently cited study of ekphrasis, James A.W. Heffernan stresses its pictorial focus. He says that ekphrastic literature can be understood as "the verbal representation of graphic representation" (299). It "typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of graphic art" what Heffernan calls "its embryonically narrative impulse." Through this kind of narrative deliverance, ekphrastic works "make explicit the story that graphic art tells only by implication" (301). In her commentary on John Ashbery's iconic and ekphrastic "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," Helen Vendler expands the conception of art about art:

in the code language of criticism when a poem is said to be about poetry the word "poetry" is often used to mean many things: how people construct an intelligibility out of the randomness they experience; how people choose what they love; how people integrate loss and gain; how they distort experience by wish and dream; how they perceive and consolidate flashes of harmony; how they (to end a list otherwise endless)

achieve what Keats called a “Soul or Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity.” (224)

ROBERT LECKER is Greenshields Professor English at McGill University. He is the editor of *Anthologizing Canadian Literature: Theoretical and Cultural Perspectives*; *Canadian Writers and Their Works*; and *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors*. His books include *On the Line: Readings in the Short Fiction of Clark Blaise, John Metcalf, and Hugh Hood*; *Robert Kroetsch; Another I: The Fictions of Clark Blaise*; *Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*; *Dr. Delicious: Memoirs of a Life in CanLit*; *The Cadence of Civil Elegies*; *Keepers of the Code: English-Canadian Literary Anthologies and the Representation of Nation*; and *Who Was Doris Hedges? The Search for Canada's First Literary Agent*.

In other words, poems about poems are poems about being. They are existential constructs that highlight the means through which identity comes to be known.

Poems about poems can be also be called meta-poems because they are often about the nature of their own construction. They may be seen, in a postmodern context, as self-referential, as figurative works that explore the formal problems inherent in their own conception. When a poem is about another poem, it also becomes a critical vehicle—a gloss—since any commentary on something, whether implicit or explicit, is inextricably a critical act. Yet poems about other poems are relatively rare. In this respect, P.K. Page’s two book-length collections of poems about poems are exceptional in their breadth of poetic reference. In 1994 she published *Hologram: A Book of Glosas*, followed by *Coal and Roses* in 2009. In both of these books, Page uses the intricate form of the glosa to pay tribute to many of the writers who have influenced her throughout her career.

In her biography of Page, Sandra Djwa explains that “it was Robin Skelton who provided P.K. with the poetic form, the glosa” (273), which was originally used by poets of the Spanish court in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Skelton had urged Marilyn Bowering to write a poem that embodied the glosa’s unique structure, described by Page in *Hologram* as “the opening quatrain written by another poet; followed by four ten-line stanzas, their concluding lines taken consecutively from the quatrain, their sixth and ninth lines rhyming with the borrowed tenth” (9). In response to Skelton’s challenge, Bowering produced “Letter from Portugal” and read it at a poetry gathering in Victoria attended by Page and another poet, Patricia Young. Djwa describes Page’s response to hearing Bowering’s poem through Young’s eyes: “she saw ‘P.K. almost visibly gasping. As though she couldn’t get home fast enough to write a glosa’” (274). By 1993, Page had found a publisher for the book of glosas she had produced over the past two years. Djwa notes that her editor at Brick, Jan Zwicky, “recognized the increasingly powerful cadences of P.K.’s voice and her mastery of the glosa form” (274). Zwicky said that “these poems are so generous, so visionary in their conception, and so exacting in their execution ... They’re true” (quoted in Djwa 274). Page felt that she had discovered a form that was “powerfully sensed, like an iceberg at night” (*Hologram* 9).

Hologram contains fourteen glosas, each of which is an homage to another poet. In the foreword, Page writes that “I enjoyed the idea of

writing the poem backwards—the final line of each stanza is, in effect, the starting line. You work towards a known. I liked being controlled by those three reining rhymes—or do I mean reigning?—and gently influenced by the rhythm of the original” (9). Page wanted to pay tribute “to those poets whose work I fell in love with in my formative years. I would pick four lines from Marvell, Blake, Donne, Yeats, Lorca, Rilke, Hopkins, Auden and Eliot and, as it were, ‘marry’ them.” However, she confesses that “read as I might, I could not find four consecutive lines in Marvell, Blake, Donne, Yeats, Lorca, or Hopkins that would ‘marry’ me” (10). Only as she practised the form did Page come to understand “what I needed from the borrowed lines.” They could not be enjambed. For Page,

They had to be end-stopped, or give the illusion of so being; as nine of my lines would separate them from each other, they had to give me nine lines’ worth of space; as well, their rhythm had to be one I could work with, *not* from the level at which one does an exercise—one can do anything as an exercise—but from that deeper level where one’s own drums beat. Finally, and vitally, they had to parallel in an intimate way my own knowledge, experience or—but preferably and—some other indefinable factor I could recognize but not name. (10)

Most of the glosas in *Hologram* are devoted to male poets with the exception of “Poor Bird” (which pays tribute to Elizabeth Bishop’s “Sandpiper”) and “Alone” (based on “The Midnight Poem” attributed to Sappho). One of the most intricate poems in *Hologram* is “Inebriate.” It is based on Leonard Cohen’s “I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries,” originally published in *The Spice-Box of Earth* in 1961 and frequently reprinted in literary anthologies. At a certain level, the two poems can be understood as the expression of a powerful metaphoric relationship between the two writers, especially because that relationship is more imagined than real. This relationship is physically apparent in Page’s poem, which integrates the selected lines of Cohen’s early work into Page’s glosa. In other words, the poem brings the writers together; they share the same poetic space. Or, as Page puts it, the glosa marries them. In an interview with Lucy Bashford and Jay Ruzesky, Page expands on this idea:

It’s a funny feeling of intimacy when you’re working with someone else’s lines. Lessing’s idea that poets are all one being, as are all people of any similar discipline, fascinated me and I think that there is some very great truth in it. It’s a very funny

experience to use other people's lines. It's more than just writing a poem. It's merging. (111)

Perhaps there is still another way of imagining this marriage. One could say that through Page's poem, the two poets become a version of each other. If that is the case, then Page's "Inebriate" suggests that the release associated with concepts of immanence and transcendence in both poems is also tied to a release from gendered notions of identity. Its originality is best understood in terms of the way it delivers an entirely different conception of Cohen's poem and its speaker. In this sense, the glosa functions not only as a beautifully crafted poem in its own right, but also as a critical act. Page's glosa may be tied to the rules of its own construction, but that very construction also catalyzes a deliberately interpretive meditation by one poet on another. In other words, every glosa implies a heuristic commentary, a gloss on the borrowed, or "married" poem.

Cohen's twenty-seven-line poem, in five stanzas, has not been the subject of much detailed inquiry. The poem begins with a repudiation of traditions aligned with various forms of belief, whether they be religious or literary. The speaker does not want to isolate himself in European monasteries, nor does he want to buy into concepts of transcendence associated with isolation and prayer. Perhaps he is thinking of Rilke, who was opposed to the conventional church and religious dogma. Yet when Rilke visited a Russian monastery as a young man, he was deeply attracted to the spiritual values it embodied; his *Book of Hours* was profoundly influenced by monastic rituals. Rilke's poems reflect the longings of an imagined monk. But even after that early collection, Rilke's poems continued to be suffused with a desire to grow in intimacy with the sacred dimension of the world.

Cohen rejects this spiritually ordered world, focussed as it is on transcendence. He refuses to find his inspiration there. But he also will not find it in the "tombs of knights." His deliverance is not linked to a pursuit of the Holy Grail or to Arthurian legends. In other words, his salvation will not be the product of some paradigmatic quest. Nor will he share the trajectory of his spiritual journey with the likes of Gawain, Perceval, Bors, Lancelot, or the Green Knight, all of whom, the poem offers, "fell as beautifully as their ballads tell." Nor does the speaker want to become the explorer who parts the grasses before him as if he were the discoverer of a new world or a participant in the rediscovery of a vanished utopian order.

This is no return to the Garden. The speaker is non-committal about how to make his world signify. It is on the verge of becoming a symbolic

universe that he resists naming. He hasn't "parted the grasses," to find some form of deliverance (invoking Whitman), but neither has he "purposefully left them thatched." He is not a mystical being; he does not contain multitudes. The natural world will not provide him with solace or with a vision that will deliver him from the constraints of the physical world he inhabits. He has not worshipped "wounds and relics" because they have no significance to his present. For the same reason, he rejects the idea of gaining insight through the recognition of saintly bodies that are "wrapped and burnt in scrolls." He also refuses to seek redemption through any form of transcendence associated with mountains that might symbolize a higher order of perception: "I have not released my mind to wander and wait / in those great distances," he says, in what is perhaps a reference to Shelley's "Mont Blanc" and to the identification it makes between height and insight. As Shelley writes:

Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,
On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains
Teach the adverting mind

The poem's speaker may not want to embrace the idea of wisdom associated with the heights, but he also rules out finding any source of inspiration with the "fishermen" whose pursuits lie "beneath the moving water." There is no truth there either. And certainly, he rejects the idea that his mind might be transformed by an encounter with God or by waiting for a vision that will reward an imagined asceticism. He does not need God or visions:

I have not held my breath
so that I might hear the breathing of God,
or tamed my heartbeat with an exercise,
or starved for visions.

All conventional forms of transcendence and belief are rejected, as are the birds and fish that might share their transformative powers with the speaker. He will "not become the heron" who will allow him to leave his body "on the shore," and he will not become "the luminous trout" who will leave his body "in the air." This poem is not about transcendence; it is about living in the world we know, which is the world that Cohen brings us at the end of the poem. He does not dwell on eternity or lament the passing

All
conventional
forms of
transcendence
and belief are
rejected.

of time. Instead, his world is functional and practical, a place where he laughs, sleeps, and eats, where things unroll as expected:

I have not been unhappy for ten thousand years.
During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.
My favourite cooks prepare my meals,
my body cleans and repairs itself,
and all my work goes well.

There is not much detailed commentary on “I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries.” In his early study of Cohen (1970), Michael Ondaatje argues that Cohen “rejects the world of enigmatic heroes in the poem.” He is “turning away from historical romance to the romance of the artist, for the artist has a more important role than the hero. He can make the dying world eternal; if he is silent, we rot without the panacea of eulogies” (16). Ondaatje’s perspective seems to undermine itself. Although he casts the persona in Cohen’s poem as someone who embodies the “romance of the artist,” that romance is untethered from reality; it does not partake in the quotidian because the persona’s voice—his very existence—affirms that the dying world can be made eternal through poetic intervention. Yet this view of an eternity that transcends death is strangely grounded in the immediate present. Cohen’s anti-hero is not focused on “ten thousand years” but on each day and each night and the processes attached to pedestrian life: eating, cleaning, repairing, sleeping. There is no eternity or atemporality here; in fact, what was initially presented as an archetypal and symbolic universe aligned with literary forms and models of spiritualism are replaced in this instance with the mediocre and the mundane.

By the end of the poem—in the four closing lines that Page chooses as the opening quatrain of her glosa—we find that nothing special is happening: the speaker’s “work goes well” in the direct absence of symbol and myth. He is happy. He is laughing. He has “favourite cooks.” He can hire them. He has the money to do so. The smug sense of satisfaction conveyed in the closing lines has nothing to do with conventional models of redemption or transcendence. Those lines convey the attitude of a man who has found happiness and laughter precisely because he has rejected the modes of deliverance promised by romance, literature, or spiritual quests. He knows about those modes and he can name them. But they are just worn-out ideas to be tossed off through a series of eight anaphoric negations; the speaker defines himself by giving voice precisely to all that he is not. This is not the expression of an integrated being who has found

transcendence or some kind of wholeness or wisdom. By the end of the poem, he has even detached himself from his own body, which “cleans and repairs itself.” Machine-like, it resists his subjectivity. It has a life of its own.

In his 1978 study of Cohen, Stephen Scobie makes a similar point when he says that the poem consists of the rejection of the old roles and attributes of the Romantic poet. But in this rejection, there is another kind of “lingering.” The “flat, objective closing statement” (“all my work goes well”) is “obviously inadequate to account for the poetic imagination which has produced the first part of the poem.” Scobie concludes that “the anti-poetic tone becomes so ironic that the poem contrives to mean the opposite of what it says” (30).

Most of the critics writing on this poem attempt to reconcile its discordant poetics; what seems to haunt their interpretive ethos is the idea that in order to reject the various epistemologies articulated throughout the poem its speaker must clearly have understood those epistemologies enough to dismiss them repeatedly, forcefully, almost maniacally. He cannot stop repeating how much he disdains what he has learned and what he knows. As Michael Q. Abraham puts it in a 1996 article, the poem constitutes “a catalogue of renunciation. The speaker describes in eloquent detail everything he has not accomplished. Similarly, each ideal image in *The Spice-Box of Earth* is countered with a negative vision: Cohen is mourner and murderer, cuckold and lover, resident and traveller, priest and apostate” (110). Abraham argues that “traditionally romantic images of poetic inspiration are rejected even as they are indulged. The poem concludes with an image of insipid happiness, seemingly content but devoid of exhilaration” (110).

In a more recent commentary, Christopher Wang observes that “the negative refrain, ‘I have not,’ which the persona uses in the first three stanzas” are there “to dismiss various institutions: European culture, mysticism, religions, and so on.” But Wang points out that the double negative in the final stanza (“I have not been unhappy for ten thousand years”) does not necessarily give voice to a sense of release from tradition, or genre, or influence. On the contrary, Wang writes that “Cohen uses the double negative and the hyperbole in the final refrain to disrupt the reader, prompting the reader to question the validity of the persona’s ideas and tranquillity and forcing a closer and more contrarian reading of the previous refrains.”

The predominant interpretations of “I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries” have practically nothing in common with Page’s understanding of the poem as it is expressed in her glosa, “Inebriate.” In keeping with the glosa form, Page chooses the final four lines of Cohen’s poem as her

opening and italicized quatrain, which functions as a kind of epigraph. In the glosa tradition, these italicized four lines are known as the *texto* or *cabeza*. As Annie Finch notes, in a glosa “each stanza elaborates or explains one of the four lines in the *cabeza*, and incorporates it (sometimes in the final line, like a refrain)” (34–35). Here is the *cabeza*:

*During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.
My favourite cooks prepare my meals,
my body cleans and repairs itself;
and all my work goes well.*

The remainder of Page’s poem is the glosa proper. It is constructed in four ten-line stanzas with “their concluding lines taken consecutively from the quatrain; their sixth and ninth lines end-rhyming with the borrowed tenth” (*Hologram* 9):

Here is eternity as we dream it – perfect.
Another dimension. Here the ship of state
has sprung no leaks, the captain doesn’t lie.
The days are perfect and each perfect minute
extends itself forever at my wish.
Unending sunlight falls upon the steep
slope of the hillside, where the children play.
And I am beautiful. I know my worth
and when I smile I show my perfect teeth.
During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.

A dreamless, healing sleep. I waken
to everlasting Greece as white and blue
as music in my head –
an innocent music.
I had forgotten such innocence exists,
forgotten how it feels
to live with neither calendars nor clocks.
I had forgotten how to un-me myself.
Now, as I practise how and my psyche heals
my favourite cooks prepare my meals.

I am not without appetite, nor am I greedy.
My needs are as undemanding as my tastes:
spring water, olives, cucumber and figs
and a small fish on a white plate.
To lift my heart I have no wish for wine –

the sparkling air is my aperitif.
Like Emily I am inebriate.
Rude health is mine – and privilege. I bathe
in sacred waters of the river Alph.
My body cleans and repairs itself.

Poised between Earth and Heaven, here I stand
proportions perfect – arms and legs outspread
within a circle – Leonardo's man.
So do I see the giddy Cosmos. Stars
beyond stars unfold for me and shine.
My telephoto lens makes visible
time future and time past, and timeless time
receives me like its child. I am become
as intricate and simple as a cell
*and all my work goes well.*¹

IN THEIR COMMENTARY on the glosa form, Kate Braid and Sandy Shreve note that “one of the glosa’s challenges rests in the process of writing toward the borrowed lines so that when they appear, they seem inevitable. In expanding on these lines, the poet is working with something intrinsic to the other writer’s words, something both share” (85). In “Inebriate,” the first stanza is written toward the first line of the *texto*: “*During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.*” What is it that Page shares with Cohen in these lines? Cohen’s speaker has worked his whole confession toward the assertion that he is happy, that his sleep is uninterrupted, that he has reached a state of grace in the here and now.

Much of Cohen’s poetry seeks this state of grace. Page focuses her first stanza on her desire to achieve such grace, but this desire is expressed through projection. She assumes the persona of Cohen’s speaker, accentuating the chief element that defines grace: the ability to escape mortality, the idea that perfection can only be achieved when the bonds of time are broken. Imperfection dwells in temporality. In creating her glosa, Page imagines that, however briefly, the creative act itself can be seen as something that defies the passage of time, even though that defiance may be momentary and illusory. Is creativity the route to eternity? Page’s glosa addresses that central question. Through the poem she enters an illusory world in which perfection is defined as a form of consciousness that has escaped both temporality and mortality: “Here is eternity,” Page’s persona

1 I am grateful to Brick Books for their permission to reproduce Page’s poem.

claims; here “each perfect minute / extends itself forever at my wish”; here there is “Unending sunlight.” No darkness. No endings. No death.

The poem itself is born and reborn through its very conception. All of this weightless eternity is tied to “Another dimension” that is “perfect” as “we dream it.” The desire for this kind of perfection becomes obsessive. The word “perfect” appears four times in the opening stanza. The dream of eternity is “perfect.” The days are “perfect.” Each minute is “perfect.” Even the speaker’s teeth are “perfect.” And since this is a perfect and eternal realm, everything is also true: “the captain” (the writer?) “doesn’t lie” because she inhabits a dream world that keeps the body and mind whole; or as Page puts it, “Here the ship of state / has sprung no leaks,” perhaps an allusion to Cohen’s song “Democracy”:

O mighty ship of state
To the shores of need
Past the reefs of greed
Through the squalls of hate
Sail on, sail on, sail on, sail on

The speaker knows that in this dream of perfection the ship sails on, unimpeded, while the speaker can say, in all innocence, “I am beautiful,” “I smile,” and time extends itself “at my wish.”

There is an incantatory presence to these lines. The intentional repetitions become hypnotic, lulling the reader into a pause, a moment of comfort, as if the mere repetition of the word “perfect” becomes a mantra. Yet even as the reader is invited to dwell in this suspended moment, the desire for an ending draws us on. That ending (“*During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep*”) is the seductive fantasy driving the entire glosa—the idea that all is well, that one can laugh and sleep, that the stanza does not have to end, that I am perfect so long as I am involved in the act of reading. It would be nice to travel through Page’s poem like this. To think you could just move from line to line and arrive at an untroubled ending. I am reminded of the lines from Gwendolyn MacEwen’s “Dark Pines under Water”:

Explorer, you tell yourself this is not what you came for
Although it is good here, and green;
You had meant to move with a kind of largeness,
You had planned a heavy grace, an anguished dream.

In Page’s poem, that dream is undermined by the unavoidable presence of time. Page’s speaker may affirm the continuing presence of perfection

and eternity, but that affirmation is always set against a backdrop that is pointing to the insistent present with the repetition of the word “here.” Is it possible to assert that “here is eternity”? It’s an oxymoron. The sunlight in the stanza may be “Unending,” but it “falls upon the steep / slope of the hillside where the children play” (perhaps an allusion to the “dark slope of Mount Royal” that dominates the closing pages of Cohen’s *The Favourite Game*). In the midst of eternity there is a precipitous fall. The children play on this steep slope, they are right in the middle of it; their postlapsarian fate is imminent, immanent.

Caught in time, yet unaware of it, the children continue to play. They will grow into temporal consciousness. They will become aware of death. They will also be “here.” As will Cohen’s speaker, who arrives at an ironic endpoint. In the closing lines of “I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries,” he blithely asserts that “During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.” In her glosa, Page picks up on this paradoxical line. Cohen’s “perfect” speaker, the one who asserts that “each perfect minute / extends itself forever,” discovers that this is not the case. He has learned to separate day from night, waking from sleep. The dream comes undone. He is “here.” This is no atemporal realm, and it is not perfect. The lines of Page’s poem draw us to this time-bound ending, as if such an ending were like the seductive lover you rejected in the moment of your most intense love. The poem is drawn to that ending. It wants to embrace it, to undo this idea of perfection it has pursued with such passion. Finally, there will be time, and finally, there will be death.

WHAT DOES PAGE THINK of Cohen’s speaker and his endless dreams of perfection? Those dreams are built on another dream: that one can escape oneself and one’s presence in time. In the first stanza of Page’s glosa, the speaker’s embrace of an “eternity” in which “each perfect minute / extends itself forever” is predicated on the elimination of the time-bound ego. Page’s second stanza portrays an individual who believes (or tries to believe) that her ego has melted into the “dreamless” and “healing sleep” of her experience in “everlasting Greece.” There is purity here in this vision of Hydra, the Greek island that Cohen discovered in his youth. For Cohen, it represented a respite from being known in public, a release from his persona as an aspiring poet in Canada. He had obtained a Canada Council grant to enable him to complete his first novel. After spending some time in a cold and rainy London, he accepted an invitation to attend a wedding on Hydra, which he left for immediately.

But Page will
not allow him
that easy escape.

Soon after he arrived, in 1960, Cohen became friends with Charmian Clift and George Johnston, whom Polly Samson describes as “the undisputed king and queen” of the colony of artists living on Hydra at the time. Their friendship—and the model of living by one’s writing they inspired—had a profound impact on Cohen. Samson observes that “on Hydra, Johnston took a pen to the fresh manuscripts that young Leonard brought him, and taught him the value of fierce editing.” Cohen wrote “I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries” during his first visit to Hydra. It was as if he had found a renewed innocence there, a purity tied to the “innocent music” that Page’s speaker calls the “music in my head.” To live on the island was to discover a timeless world connected with an ideal of creativity tied to the transcendence of time and ego:

I had forgotten such innocence exists,
forgotten how it feels
to live with neither calendars nor clocks.
I had forgotten how to un-me myself.

Rosemary Sullivan comments on the significance of Cohen’s early years in Greece:

With Leonard Cohen, Page conjures the perfect days of Greece, where Cohen retreated to write: “I am become / as intricate and simple as a cell.” She recreates that telescoped moment when writing was an inebriation, a pure and sustainable act, a facility which is necessarily lost in the long maturation of a life of writing. Page is generous to Cohen, turning his irony into pure celebration.

Page seems attracted to the claim—implicit in “I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries”—that one can escape the past or the unalterable features of one’s identity. But she seems to be equally attracted to this claim in order to show that it is deceptive. One can no more “un-me myself” than one can eliminate one’s past or the aesthetic forms associated with history and tradition. That is what Cohen’s speaker tries to do in the first two stanzas of the poem through his anaphoric negations. But Page will not allow him that easy escape. Her speaker has not perfected the elimination of the ego, although she can “practice” how to do it. The reminders of the present—and of the speaker’s inescapable affluence—cannot be dismissed. After all, this individual lives in a privileged world: “*my favourite cooks prepare my meals.*”

WHAT KIND OF MEALS does this self-satisfied speaker partake in? Page presents those meals in their elemental simplicity. Her speaker requires only “spring water, olives, cucumber and figs / and a small fish on a white plate.” There is “no wish for wine,” odd in a poem titled “Inebriate.” Yet this is not your typical inebriation. Rather, it is a form of spiritual drunkenness meant “To lift my heart.” The speaker’s “aperitif” is nothing other than “the sparkling air” because, as the speaker says, “Like Emily I am inebriate.” The reference is to Emily Dickinson’s “I taste a liquor never brewed,” first published in the *Springfield Daily Republic* in 1861. The newspaper titled the poem “The May-Wine,” but Dickinson herself left it untitled, so it is usually referred to by its first line. It is helpful to see the poem in full:

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of air – am I –
And Debauchee of Dew –
Reeling – thro’ endless summer days –
From inns of molten Blue –

When “Landlords” turn the drunken Bee
Out of the Foxglove’s door –
When Butterflies – renounce their “drams” –
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –
And Saints – to windows run –
To see the little Tippler
Leaning against the – Sun!

David S. Reynolds explains that this well-known poem:

shows the poet adopting and transforming images and themes of popular temperance reform. This transforming process is visible in the opening verse, where she presents an “I” who is a wonderfully fresh avatar of the intemperate temperance advocate. The speaker is both completely drunk and completely temperate. She can exult in her drunkenness because hers is a liquor “never brewed,” filling tankards “scooped in Pearl,” an image suggesting the pearl-like whiteness of the air she loves and the extreme preciousness of her love of nature. (172–73)

Dickinson's poem celebrates the kind of inebriation Page initially finds in Cohen's work: a spiritual intoxication with the natural world apprehended as a route to transcendence. As Reynolds explains,

Dickinson has carried popular temperance images to a truly new, transcendent space, a fact she enforces in the poem's closing conceit of seraphs and saints celebrating the "little Tippler" for her intoxication over nature's bounty emphasizes the poem's metaphysical dimension. The playful oddity of the hat-swinging angels, the gaping saints, and the girl leaning against the sun gives the poem a metaphorical energy that leaves the reader intoxicated, as it were, with the poet's imaginativeness. (173)

In "Inebriate" this "imaginativeness" takes many forms. It expresses Page's attraction to Cohen's apparent ability to fly in the face of time, as if his speaker can abandon the backdrop of history or myth and still survive and prosper. In "I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries" his happy narrator does not need monasteries, or ballads, or "snowy mountains," or Shelley's vision of power in tranquility associated with "the infinite sky" of Mont-Blanc. He does not need to be inspired by "the breathing of God" or by the transcendental symbolism of the natural world. He is merely content to exist in the present, inhabiting a robotic body that "cleans and repairs itself," just like his profession succeeds without any kind of intervention: "all my work goes well."

Although Page might be attracted to Cohen's spiritual bravado with its focus on the quotidian ("During the day I laugh"), it is not a route to enlightenment or creativity she can readily embrace. Her speaker embodies the figurative artist who believes that an exclusive focus on the present subsumes the kind of eternity that can be embodied in a work of art. There are two conflicting visions here, neither of which Page can fully accept. One is of the creative act as a force that transcends the moment. This is the vision of eternity and perfection and "Unending sunlight" that dominates the first stanza of Page's glosa. The other is a vision of the creative act as a force that can deny time by focusing on the "inebriate" release provided by the physical body inhabiting the immediate world. This is the "Rude health" and "privilege" enjoyed by Cohen's speaker, uncomplicated by dreams of eternity or perfection. Page may admire Cohen's ability to imagine a speaker who is not "starved for visions." She may see in his denial of time a paradoxical mastery of it, but to deny temporality is not the same as transcending it.

Page cannot ignore time. The more she enters Cohen's poem, the more she feels in conflict with it, until her idea of imaginative freedom begins to suppress Cohen's own. Her speaker tries to sustain the vision of immediacy offered by Cohen's speaker, but she keeps returning to the concepts of myth and symbol that imply a broader canvas. For her speaker, the creative act is tied to a symbolic universe that affirms the ongoing force of literature and art. By the end of the third stanza the speaker has stepped back from the self-satisfied world envisioned in the closing lines of Cohen's poem. Instead, she turns to the world of imagination by invoking Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." She tells us that "I bathe / in sacred waters of the river Alph." And having metaphorically bathed there, the speaker identifies herself with Kubla and his dream of a "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!"

THE LAST STANZA of Page's "Inebriate" presents a final attempt to reconcile the two contrasting visions that have been presented in the poem. The speaker is now positioned in a liminal stance, "Poised between Earth and Heaven" or in the centre of a circle and a square, reaching out to touch its periphery—"arms and legs outspread / within a circle – Leonardo's man." This is a reference to da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man"—an illustration of the proportions of a human body inhabiting two spaces at the same time. But it is also a reference to the much more immediate "Leonard" who is at the centre of the poem. Page's speaker continues to imagine spaces that reconcile past, present, and future: "My telephoto lens makes visible / time future and time past, and timeless time." As Brian Bartlett notes, this is an example of the way in which Page's poems frequently present "magnifying devices" that becomes "compatible with inner worlds" (96).

In a comment on "Inebriate," Andy Verboom points to the poem's focus on resolving opposing temporal perspectives: "With 'Stars / beyond stars unfold for me and shine,' Page practically handed me the paradox that Heinrich Olbers actually posed—that the universe can't be both infinite and eternal (eternally static, that is) because if it were the night sky would be completely chocked with starlight."

In the final lines of the glosa, Page recognizes that her ideal is to regain the timeless realm that Cohen seems happy to negate. While his speaker is inebriate in the moment and finds no need for divine inspiration ("I have not held my breath / so that I might hear the breathing of God") she continues to search for the "proportions" that will balance diverse temporal modes. But she also understands that in apprehending Cohen's poem—by marrying its world—she has experienced a temporal devolution, a return to the vision of youth pictured via Cohen's life in Greece, where there was

“an innocent music” tied to poetry or the “music in my head.” She confesses that “I had forgotten such innocence exists.”

By transporting herself to Greece, Page and her speaker might manage to evade time and all that it signifies. There, she might “live with neither calendars nor clocks.” Page’s atemporal dream reveals all that she has lost—the sense of being a child, unaware of the clock. But she cannot regain that consciousness, try as she might to replicate Cohen’s sense of time, even though her speaker asserts that “timeless time / receives me like its child.” She would like to believe, with Cohen, that “*all my works goes well*” and that in entering the poem her speaker has “become / as intricate and simple as a cell.” That “cell” represents an elemental building block that contains within it an embryonic seed of time; it is a starting point. Or as Page says in her commentary on the glosas in *Hologram*, “reality is glimpsed not only by addition—courtesy of ‘the perfect, all-inclusive metaphor’—but by subtraction as well” (10–11).

Much of the beauty of Page’s poem results from her expressions of temporal desire. She does not find “eternity” here. She does not find “Another dimension.” And she does not find a way to make the days “perfect” with “each perfect minute.” Although her desire for transformation remains unsatisfied, it is the sensual expression of this longing that catalyzes the poem. By reading Cohen’s poem through her poem, Page also reads herself and her aesthetics. I am reminded of her belief that in creating the glosas in *Hologram* Page was trying to “marry” those poets “whose work I fell in love with in my formative years.” Like most marriages, this one reveals the lyrical tension between two partners that makes their private worlds shine.

Works Cited

- Abraham, Michael Q. “Neurotic Affiliations: Klein, Layton, Cohen, and the Properties of Influence.” *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 38 (1996): 88–129.
- Bartlett, Brian. “For Sure the Kittiwake: Naming, Nature, and P.K. Page.” *Canadian Literature* 155 (1997): 91–111.
- Bashford, Lucy, and Jay Ruzesky. “Entranced: A Conversation with P.K. Page.” Rogers and Colebrook Peace. 110–28.
- Djwa, Sandra. *Journey with No Maps: A Life of P.K. Page*. McGill-Queen’s UP, 2012.

- Finch, Annie. *A Poet's Craft: A Comprehensive Guide to Making and Sharing Your Poetry*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Heffernan, James A.W. "Ekphrasis and Representation." *New Literary History* 22.2 (1991): 297–316.
- Page, P.K. *Hologram: A Book of Glosas*. Brick Books, 1994.
- Reynolds, David S. "Emily Dickinson and Popular Culture." *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*. Ed. W. Martin. Cambridge UP, 2002. 167–90.
- Rogers, Linda, and Barbara Colebrook Peace, eds. *P.K. Page: Essays on Her Works*. Guernica, 2001.
- Samson, Polly. "Bohemian Tragedy: Leonard Cohen and the Curse of Hydra." *The Guardian*. 30 March 2020. www.theguardian.com.
- Scobie, Stephen. *Leonard Cohen*. Douglas and McIntyre, 1978.
- Sullivan, Rosemary. "Celebration of Canadian Poetry." Brick Books. www.brickbooks.ca.
- Vendler, Helen. *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics*. Harvard UP, 1988.
- Verboom, Andy. "Echolocation." 29 May 2012. echolocationmag.wordpress.com.
- Wang, Christopher. "Ten Thousand Years: The Punishment of I Have Not." <http://wanglophile.com>.