

**Poetry**  
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**Lecture No. 61**  
**P.K. Page**

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**P. K. Page (1916-2010)**

Historical and Literary Context  
Patricia Kathleen Page  
"The Metal and the Flower"  
"Remembering"  
Analysis



Hello. We are going to deal with the poetry of P. K. Page from Canada in this lecture. First, we will see the historical and literary context, then look into the life of Patricia Kathleen Page often known as P.K. Page, then we will discuss two poems by this poet "The Metal and the Flower," "Remembering;" analyse these two poems and then offer our impressions.

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**Historical and Literary Context**

- Canada is a multicultural country with diverse groups of people from various lands, including Britain & France.
- Canadian literature in different languages
- The dominant literature is in English.
- **Traditional and Victorian poets:** W.H. Drummond, Robert Service, and John McCrae
- **Modernist poets:** Influenced by Pound and Eliot; known as the Montreal group; A. J. M. Smith, A. M. Klein, F. R. Scott, Robert Finch, and E J Pratt
- *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), an anthology
- **Modernist women poets:** Dorothy Livesay, **P. K. Page**, Margaret Avison, Miriam Waddington, Anne Marriot, and Anne Wilkinson



Let us start with the historical and literary context. As you know Canada is a multicultural country with diverse groups of people from various lands, including Britain and France. Naturally, Canadian literature is available in different languages, of course, the dominant literature is in English. When settlers came to Canada and started writing poetry, they followed the traditional English Victorian poets. We have some examples here W.H. Drummond, Robert Service and John McCrae, they followed the Victorian tradition. As it happened in the US and UK, some kind of reaction against the traditional poetry happened. So, we have modernist poets in Canada who were influenced by Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot. These poets were known as the Montreal group. We have some examples in A.J.M. Smith, A.M. Klein, F.R. Scott, Robert Finch and E J Pratt. These poets, together published one anthology called “Book of Canadian Poetry” in 1943 to represent modernist poets.

We also have a group of modernist women poets who were associated with these men in different ways. Some examples are Dorothy Livesay, P. K. Page, Margaret Avison, Miriam Waddington, Anne Marriot and Anne Wilkinson. Our poet P.K. Page belongs to this modernist women poets’ group. But then over a period of time, every poet matures and takes different shapes and colours.

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### P K Page (1916-2010)

- Author with multiple identities: **P K Page** (poet); **P K Irwin** (painter); **Judith Cape** (novelist)
- Born in England, raised in Canada, & lived in the world
- A military officer’s daughter trained to be independent
- Loved a married poet, and married a widowed diplomat
- Pursued marriage and career with a difficult balance
- **Books of poetry:** *As Ten as Twenty* (1946), *The Metal and the Flower* (1954) - the Governor General’s Award, and *Planet Earth: Poems Selected and New* (2002)
- Mixed arts: poems, paintings, drawings, essays, etc.
- Well-known poems include “Stories of Snow,” “After Rain,” “The Flower and the Metal,” “Deaf Mute in the Pear Tree”




P.K. Page was born in 1916 and she died in 2010. She was an author with multiple identities in her own name. As a poet she is known as P.K. Page, as a painter, she is known as P. K. Irwin, Irwin is the surname of her husband and then we have another name, Judith Cape for her novels. She wrote a novel with this name, Judith Cape. So, these multiple identities reflect the multiple identities we have in Canada.

She was born in England, brought to Canada and raised there and then she lived in the world, in the sense, along with her diplomat husband, she went to different countries- Australia, Mexico, Guatemala and many other countries, particularly, Brazil. It was in Brazil, she discovered her painting capabilities. She was born to a military officer as a daughter to be trained as an independent woman. But later on, she loved a married poet that is F.R. Scott. He was already married and he was senior to her by many years, more than 15 years.

But then, she was waiting for the marriage to happen with F.R. Scott, it did not happen and then later on, she married a widowed diplomat, who again, was much senior to her. She pursued this marriage and career with a difficult balance. She remained in marital life and also, she was able to become a good poet, a well-known poet. She published many books of poetry like “As Ten as Twenty” in 1946, “The Metal and the Flower” in 1954, the second volume won her the Governor General’s Award for her poetry.

Later on, she shifted her temperament sensibilities to other concerns affecting mankind. The title ‘Planet Earth’ reflects this kind of environmental awareness in her poetry. Throughout her career, she was involved in many art forms like poetry, painting, drawing, writing essays, novels and things like that. The poems which are well known are “Stories of Snow,” “After Rain,” “The Flower and the Metal,” “Deaf Mute in the Pear Tree.”

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**“The Metal and the Flower”**

Intractable between **them** grows (who)  
a garden of barbed wire and roses.

...

Dare **they** meet, the blackened wire 5  
tears the intervening air.




First, let us see this poem, The Metal and the Flower. For copyright reasons, we are not able to have the whole poem here. But you can find this poem in the Poetry Foundation page and also in the textbook that we have, Norton Anthology of Poetry. We will read some lines, some selected lines from this short poem,

“Intractable between them grows  
a garden of barbed wire and roses  
...  
Dare they meet, the blackened wire  
tears the intervening air.”

We have omitted some lines in between that is why we have used these 3 dots. In the very first stanza, we have this problem of this unidentified “them.” When we come to the discussion, we will see that.


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**“The Metal and the Flower”**

Trespassers ...  
Dogs ...

While **the two** who laid **it** out                      (who, what)  
find the metal and the flower  
fatal underfoot.



The second stanza, we have here, there is a garden in which trespassers and dogs can enter and the people who have built this garden, who have established this garden, we have some comment on that, in the 3 lines we have,

“While **the two** who laid **it** out  
find the metal and the flower  
fatal underfoot.”

The people who built this garden, they have this metal and the flower which becomes fatal for them, but trespassers and dogs, they just come in go without much difficulty. That is why we have this trespassers and dogs in contrast to the owners of this garden.

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### “The Metal and the Flower”

Black and white at midnight glows  
this garden of barbed wire and roses. 15  
...  
beneath a rainy moon or none  
silver the sheath on barb and thorn.



Then we have another stanza here with some lines omitted,

“Black and white at midnight glows  
this garden of barbed wire and roses 15  
...  
beneath a rainy moon or none  
silver the sheath on barb and thorn.”

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### “The Metal and the Flower”

Change the garden, scale and plan; 20  
wall it, make it annual. (who is the speaker?)  
... [flower and wire]...  
While they sleep the garden grows. (who)  
deepest wish annuls the will: 25  
perfect still the wire and rose.



Some kind of shift in tone takes place in the first 2 lines we have here. That is why we have highlighted them and ask this question- who is the speaker? There is a speaker who narrates the poem but then when it comes to these 2 lines, we have some shift in tone,

“Change the garden, scale and plan;                    20  
wall it, make it annual.”

Then, we have a reference to flower and wire throughout the poem, here, also we have it.

“While they sleep the garden grows.  
deepest wish annuls the will:    25  
perfect still the wire and the rose.”

Who? The question of who remains.

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### Leading Questions

1. What does the title indicate? Hard metal & soft flower
2. What does the “them” in line 1 refer to?
3. Is the garden out of bounds? Why?
4. Why does the speaker say “change the garden”?
5. How does the “wish” contrast with the “will”?
6. How is the garden perfect with the wire and the rose?
7. How does the speaker transfer the meaning of the metal and the flower to the wire and the rose at the end?
8. What feminist experience (awareness) do we find in the poem?



We have a number of questions. With these questions, if you read the poem, you will be able to get much better understanding. What does the title indicate? It refers to a metal and flower. The metal is hard and the flower is soft. So, two opposite qualities are brought into this poem. What does the “them” in line 1 refer to? That is the question we have, unidentified, we have to infer. Is the garden out of bounds? For whom? Why? Why does the speaker say “change the garden?” How does the “wish” contrast with the “will?” Deepest wish, is it something unconscious desire, welling from the heart? And then, the will which is conscious.

So, the deepest wish, the deepest desire annuls or destroys the conscious, rational thought process. How is the garden perfect with the wire and the rose? The wire is manmade, rose is natural. How are they perfect together in the garden? Then, we have this question, how does the speaker transfer the meaning of the metal and the flower to the wire and the rose at the end of the poem? And most importantly, what feminist experience or awareness do we find in this poem on ‘The Metal and the Flower?’

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### Thematic Contrast

- **Metal and Flower**
- Wire and Rose
- Boundary and Trespassing
- Innocence and Experience
- Black and White
- Light and Darkness
- Garden and Wild
- Human Beings and Plants/Nature
- **Man and Woman**
- Them and Us (unidentified ‘them’ and ‘the two’)



Perhaps, when we look into the thematic contrast between many opposites given in this poem, we can get some understanding, get some answers to these questions. The title starts, ‘metal and flower.’ Then throughout the poem, we have this wire and rose or flowers. Metal and flower, wire and rose, boundary and trespassing, innocence and experience, black and white, light and darkness, garden and wild: garden is not natural, it is manmade, and the wild grows on its own. Human beings and plant are nature, man and woman, them and us. The big question that we have is- what does this “them” refer to? unidentified “them” and “the two” is also mentioned here. Who are these two? Who are they?

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## Poetic Devices



- **Symbol:** the metal and the flower (title, 12)
- **Simile & Metaphor:** Burning briars like flames devour their too innocent attire. (3-4)
- **Transferred Epithet:** innocent attire (4)
- **Simile:** Dogs like arrows moved along pathways that their noses knew (9-10)
- **Alliteration:** find the metal and the flower (11)
- **Hyperbaton:** Black and white at midnight glows this garden of barbed wire and roses. (14-15)
- **Metaphor:** Doused with darkness roses burn
- **Simile:** coolly as a rainy moon: (16-17)



A number of poetic devices we have in this poem. The metal and the flower appeared to be symbolic of male and female qualities- hard and soft qualities. We have a simile and metaphor in these 2 lines,

‘Burning briars like flames devour  
their too innocent attire.’

We have this transferred epithet in ‘innocent attire;’ the attire, itself, is not innocent. The attire worn by the people or this symbolically the briars with flames, that is innocent. That is why we have contrasted innocence with experience. We have again a simile in,

“Dogs like arrows moved along  
pathways that their noses knew.”

Some kind of awareness we have in the roses. The dogs come from outside and the trespassers come from outside, they do not have any problem, the roses are aware of them. ‘Dogs like arrows moved along pathways that their noses knew.’ We do not have this problem for dogs, they can get in. We also have another alliteration here, “find the metal and the flower.” Then we have hyperbaton,

“Black and white at midnight glows  
this garden of barbed wire and roses.”



We will have normally a sentence like this, ' this garden of barbed wire and roses, glows black and white at midnight,' but we have this disorder in this line. Then, we have this metaphor, "Doused with darkness roses burn." Also, it has a simile in the next line, "coolly as a rainy moon;" one is metaphor, another is simile, doused with darkness. We douse fire and here, this doused with darkness roses burn. There is an element of fire in roses. How do we explain this? Roses are soft, cool, but then how do they burn? And again, we have this 'rainy moon,' this rainy moon may be like transferred epithet. The moon itself is not rainy, rain does not affect the moon at all. Maybe rain in moonlight, that is a context we may have.

So, many of these poetic devices from symbol to metaphor to simile, they all contribute to some kind of mysterious awareness in this poem between the metal and the flower. What is this metal? What is this flower?

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## Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter

- Rhyme:
  - **End rhyme:** attire, wire; plan, ran; grows, rose; knew, grew
  - **Half-rhyme:** grows, roses; devour, air; through, knew; out, foot; glows, rose; burn, moon; none, thorn; annual, will
  - **Unrhymed:** petals, along, flower
- Rhythm: Dominant trochaic; discordant note
- **Meter:** tri and tetra meter
- **Caesura, Enjambment and End-Stopped Lines:**  
Change the | garden, | scale and | plan;  
wall it, | make it | annual. (20-21)



We will wait for that answer further. We have some rhyme in this poem, some of the end rhymes are half rhymes. So, we have divided them into 2 groups: Attire, wire; plan, ran; grows, rose; knew, grew. They are all perfect rhymes. Then, when it comes to half rhymes we have grows, roses; devour, air; through, knew; out, foot; glows, rose; burn, moon, none; thorn; annual, will. Then we have some unrhymed words like petals, along, flower.

The rhythm appears to be trochaic dominantly and there is an element of discordant note in this poem. Throughout the poem we have this tri and tetra meter, that means 3 feet and 4 feet alternately. Then we have caesura, enjambment and end-stopped lines. We have some example here-

“Change the garden, scale and plan;

Wall it, make it annual.”

All these underlined words appear at the beginning, so, the first word takes the stress, the second word does not have the stress that means, stressed- unstressed: trochee. That is why this trochaic element is dominant in this poem.

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### Overall Impression

- It is a modernist poem with its deliberate difficulties.
- The garden of barbed wire and roses reflecting the title unravels the complicated emotional states of the two people, perhaps a man and a woman.
- It proves fatal for the owners, not trespassers and dogs, though it glows in midnights and rainy seasons.
- The reticent speaker suggests a change of garden, scale, and plan, by walling it annually.
- But the owners' deepest wish destroys their will and allows the garden to grow perfectly.
- Images and symbols flow in the poem but interrupted by periods at the end of every, second, or third, line.
- The symmetrical seven or eight syllabled lines reveal a suffocative garden for the people, especially the woman, suggesting a cemetery burying their will.



When we come to this overall impression, we will get some answers to the questions we raised earlier, particularly the question of this symbolic meaning in this poem. It appears to be a modernist poem with its deliberate difficulties. This reference, what is it? That complexity, that difficulty we feel when we read the poem. The garden of barbed wire and roses reflecting the title unravels the complicated emotional states of two people, that is what we guess, the two people perhaps a man and a woman. It proves fatal for the owners, that is why fatal underfoot we have in the poem. It proves fatal for the owners, not trespassers and dogs, though it glows in midnight and rainy seasons.

The reticent speaker suggests a change of garden, scale and plan, by walling it annually. Walling in or walling it, putting up walls every year. It reminds us of Robert Frost's Mending Wall. Repairing the wall every year, but the owner's deepest wish destroys their will and allows the garden to grow perfectly.

Images and symbols flow in the poem but interrupted by periods at the end of every line or every second line or every third line in the poem. We have many full stops in the poem, that

means that the flow is interrupted. The symmetrical 7 or 8 syllabled lines reveal a suffocative garden for the people, especially, the woman suggesting a symmetry burying their will.

This is a poem of life, garden, flower, but then, it also has some underlying feeling of this suffocation, underlying feeling of death. That is why this poem is prominent, very important and this is the title poem for her volume, 'The Metal and the Flower,' which won her the Governor General's Award.

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### "Remembering" - I

Remembering you and reviewing  
our **structural love**  
the past re-arises alive  
from its smothering dust.



Let us move on to the second poem, 'Remembering.' Here also, we have some extracts from this poem:

"Remembering you and reviewing  
our **structural love**  
the past re-arises alive  
from its smothering dust."

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## “Remembering” - II



For memory, which is only decadent 5  
in hands like a miser's  
... [collectors] ...  
new the sometimes appallingly ancient present  
and sting the sleeping thing (internal rhyme)  
to a sudden seeing.



“For a memory, which is only decadent  
in hands like a miser's

then we have a reference to collectors. So, we have incorporated collectors in between, omitted some lines. Let us read the whole passage now:

“For a memory which is only decadent  
in hands like a miser's,  
... [collectors] ...  
new the sometimes appallingly ancient present  
and sting the sleeping thing  
to a sudden seeing.

In the last two lines, we have this internal rhyme- sting, sleeping, thing, sleep and see. They have some kind of internal rhyme within these two lines. There is an element of memory, remembering and this memory is decadent, it is it's not coming out fully like a miser's. In patches, now and then, they come. Some memories or evaluated like a collector who collects art materials from the past. That is why this ancient present, that is again something like an oxymoron, ancient present and there is an element of sting which is not positive, biting.

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### “Remembering” - III



And as a tree with all its leaves relaxed  
...[still waters]...  
so I, remembering from now to then,  
can **know and see** and feel again, **as jewels** 20  
must when held in a brilliant branch of sun.

[Epic simile: and as a tree ... so I]



Let us go to the next section: “And as a tree with all its leaves relaxed,” then we have a reference to still waters, that is why we have it here. It is a long passage. It is an example of epic simile; the whole passage is an example of epic simile.

“And as a tree with all its leaves relaxed

... [still waters] ...

So, I remembering from now to then,

can **know and see** and feel again, **as jewels**

must when held in a brilliant branch of sun.”

A comparison is made between a tree and this remembering. As a tree with all its leaves relaxed, so, I remembering from now to then, this past and present. From the leaves which are relaxed and the still waters which are in the pool, know and see and feel again. And again, we have one more simile here as jewels must when held in a brilliant branch of sun. We cannot help it when we remember, when we recall in even in patches, we are able to understand something it brings us some awareness and understanding.

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## Thematic Contrast

- Remembering and Forgetting
- Past and Present
- Love and Hate
- Miser and Donor
- Ancient and Modern
- Now and Then
- Clarity and Obscurity



We have the thematic contrast naturally between remembering and forgetting. Remembering the past in the present, forgetting certain things. This remembering has more to do with our love and hate experiences which are presented to us in the images of a miser and a donor. The comparison is implicit comparison is made. Ancient and modern, now and then, and finally, clarity and obscurity. This clarity of understanding or obscurity of not understanding.

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## Poetic Devices

- **Alli & Asso:** Remembering you and reviewing (1)
- **Metaphor:** the past re-arises alive from its smothering dust (3-4)
- **Allusion & Simile:** Allusion to the art for arts' movement  
For memory, which is only decadent  
**in hands like a miser's**  
loving the thing for its thingness, (5-7)
- **Metaphor & Alli:** and **sting** the sleeping thing to a **sudden seeing**. (12-13)
- **Simile & Asso:** And as a **tree** with all its **leaves** relaxed
- **Simile & Conso:** the still waters of a pool recall (16),
- **Simile, Alli & Metaphor:** as jewels  
must when held in a **brilliant branch of sun** (21)



What are the poetic devices we have in this poem? We have alliteration and assonance in the first line- 'Remembering and reviewing.' We have highlighted alliteration by underlining and assonance by red colour. Then we have metaphor in the lines 3 and 4:

“the past re-arises alive

from its smothering dust.”

The dust is actually like a killer that is why we have it here. Allusion and simile, we have in this poem. There is an allusion to the art for arts’ sake kind of movement. The thingness, we have one reference to the thingness. The thing is valued for its thingness. ‘Art for arts’ sake,’ like that we have one movement in poetry which we have seen.

Let us read these 3 lines, we will understand it better. For memory, which is only decadent, the decadent art movement and here also, the decadent past that comes from the memory:

“For memory, which is only decadent  
in hands like a miser’s  
loving the thing for its thingness”

Then, we have metaphor and alliteration in

“and sting the sleeping thing  
to a sudden seeing.”

We refer to internal rhyme as well. Simile and assonance, we have in, “and as a tree with all its leaves relaxed.”

Then simile and consonance in “the still waters of a pool recall.” We have simile, alliteration and metaphor in the last line,

“as jewels  
must when held in a brilliant branch of sun:”

“as jewels” that is the simile, alliteration we have in “brilliant branch;” metaphor, “branch of sun,” “the ray of sunlight” giving us clarity and understanding.

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## Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter

- **Rhyme:** thing, seeing (12-13), recall, fall (16-17)
  - **Rhythm:** The lines flow from 5 syllables to 12 syllables  
Common speech rhythm
  - **Meter:** Polymetrical; 2 feet to 6 feet
  - **Caesura, Enjambment, and End-Stopped Lines:**(19-21)
- so I, | reme | mbering | from now | to then,  
can know | and see | and feel | again, | as je | wels ➤  
must when | held in | a bri | liant branch | of sun.
- Primary: iamb; Secondary: trochee



Let us see the rhyme, rhythm and meter. We have rhyme in thing, seeing, recall, fall. We have the rhythm from the beginning to the end which is indicated by the lines which flow from 5 syllables to 12 syllables. These lines indicate the common speech rhythm. Meter of this poem is polymetrical because of variations from 2 feet to 6 feet, wide variation we have.

When we come to caesura, enjambment and end-stopped lines, we have this example which we can understand these qualities: “so, I,” we have a caesura there; “so, I, remembering from now to then, can know and see and feel again, as jewels,” enjambment we have. “As jewels must when held in brilliant branch of sun” End stopped line at the end we have full stop. The primary rhythm in this poem is iambic, we also have secondary rhythm, trochee rhythm in this poem.



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### Overall Impression

- It is an anti-modernist sentimental poem in free verse.
- It recalls an experience of “our structural love.”
- It evokes a bitter feeling of complaint about the literal assessment of things and objects.
- Using the similes of a tree with relaxed leaves and “still waters of a pool,” with their shivering and shaking, the poet shows how the speaker recovers from remembering the past.
- When jewels are held in the sun, they display brightness. Similarly, when the speaker recalls her past in the present, she understands it well.
- The speaker’s act of remembering takes place gradually from 9 and 5 syllabled lines to 10 and 12 syllabled lines at the end.



To give an overall impression of this poem, we have these following observations. It is an anti-modernist sentimental poem in free verse. Modernist poetry is not that much sentimental, but here, sentimentality is obscured by the kind of many images we have in the previous poem, *The Metal and the Flower*. But this one is sentimentally open. It is an anti-modernist sentimental poem in free verse. It recalls an experience of our “structural love.” So, the thematic thrust is on love and hate. Memory that is recalling of the past event.

We have to remember that this poet, P.K. Page loved a senior poet, F. R. Scott but she could not marry him. Some kind of calculation must have been done, which failed in her case. It evokes a bitter feeling of complaint about the literal assessment of things and objects. Using the similes of a tree with relaxed leaves and “still waters of a pool.” with their shivering and shaking, the poet shows how the speaker recovers from remembering the past.

When we get memories, our own whole body will shiver. When jewels are held in the sun, they display their brightness. Similarly, when the speaker recalls her own past memories in the present, become very clear to her, that is why she understands her past experience well. The speaker’s act of remembering takes place gradually from 9 to 5 syllabled lines to 10 and 12 syllabled lines at the end of the poem.

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## Summary



- Historical and Literary Context
- Patricia Kathleen Page
- "The Metal and the Flower"
- "Remembering"
- Analysis



Let us see the summary now, we looked into the historical and literary context of Patricia Kathleen Page, a Canadian poet. We wanted to give a representation from Canada for feminist experience, that is why we chose her. There are other poets who are much more popular than P K Page, but we have to remember that she was one of the best poets from Canada. 'The Metal and the Flower,' 'Remembering,' these are the two poems we discussed to understand the complicated relationship between a man and a woman both in The Metal and the Flower and also Remembering. This second poem, Remembering, specifically mentioned about this theme of structured love. And that has given lot of opening for us to understand a different dimension of love as presented by P K Page in her poems.

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We have some references now. The second reference by Killian will give us more understanding of this gender question in P K Page. The gender of impersonality. She was much influenced by modernism that is why the feminist feelings are not expressed so openly as we have in Adrienne Rich or Sylvia Plath. Thank you!