'Pavilions of Dreaming':
Bodies as Structures in Kay Sage's Demain, Monsieur Silber

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Born Katherine Linn Sage near Albany, New York, in 1898, Kay Sage is best known for her "architectonic" landscapes, described as her "private cloudland" in *Time* magazine.[1] Less well known are her four volumes of poetry published between 1957 and 1962, three in French, one in English. Although her paintings are devoid of living beings, with one notable exception, they are populated with structures and structural elements, which, in her poems, stand in for herself, for her own body, as a supplement to her painted work.[2] Her friend James Thrall Soby described the abstracted structures in her paintings as "pavilions of dreaming" that arise from somewhere "deep in memory," a description that serves as an corollary to the way Sage describes herself in her poems, as a person exposed to the elements, the worries and indignities of everyday life, in a gradually rigidifying body, as though she experienced her body as a kind of open garden "pavilion."[3] As a painter, Sage adhered to more automatism, suggesting rather than directly painting the figure in her work. André Breton confirmed this in his 1941 recapitulation of the surrealist project, "Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism": "[i]t is automatism…that presides over the tender, stripped down vision of Kay Sage."[4]

In Sage's paintings, strategically placed cloths, often twisted, successfully communicate fierce emotion, as though an absent human presence had just dropped or draped them, leaving behind traces of touch and scent. Sage's more significant self-portraiture occurred at the end of her life in her four volumes of poetry, three published in France—*Demain, Monsieur Silber* (Tomorrow, Mr. Silber; Seghers, 1957), in a limited edition of 500 copies; *Faut dire c'qui est* (Tell It Like It Is; Debresse, 1959); and *Mordicus* (Mordicus; pab, 1962), also in a limited edition of 253 copies—and *The More I Wonder* (Bookman, 1957), published in the United States.[5] A vivid personality emerges in her poems, steeped in despair yet leavened with dark humor. Her poetic voice surfaces out of sturdy yet vulnerable bodies typically represented as more

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architectural than human, ranging from a tree to an oyster, a tower, and a marble statue.

Sage positioned herself outside of mainstream culture through her participation in the surrealist movement, and then, by virtue of her sex, she was outside of the mainstream of Surrealism, on the "double margin," as Susan Rubin Suleiman argues about the position of women in the avant-garde.[6] With her barren, architectural forms and landscapes as venues for self-expression, she then stood even further outside the mainstream by distinguishing herself from those women in the movement who turned to self-portraiture as a way of showing what self-possessed, fully embodied female surrealists actually look like.[7] Breton famously thought Sage's paintings must have been made by a man when he first saw them exhibited in Paris in 1937.[8] Women surrealist artists, such as Leonora Carrington in *Self Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse*, 1937), Dorothea Tanning in *Birthday* (1942), and Leonor Fini in her *Self-Portrait* (1942-43), painted themselves partly in response to the disembodied way that Breton defined the word "Surrealism" in the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* as "psychic automatism in its pure state"—and partly as a way of contradicting the ephemeral depictions of women in poems by male surrealists such Breton's in "Sunflower" (1923), Paul Eluard in "Sequence" (1926), and Robert Desnos in "I have so often dreamed of you" (1926).[9] Inherited wealth also made it difficult for her to be accepted in the left-leaning group, as did the title "Princess" she technically retained after her divorce from the Italian prince she had married in 1925, despite her full-hearted embrace of Surrealism in her pursuit of independence and a career as an artist.[10] Breton never warmed to her, apparently, and never accepted her fully into the circle she had elected as her own, despite (or perhaps partly because of) her generosity towards him and his family. When he moved to New York at the outbreak of World War Two with his wife and daughter, Sage made sure they had a furnished apartment waiting in Greenwich Village, for which she paid the rent until Breton could find employment.[11]

While Sage's painting received attention in her lifetime, she only began to appear in critical studies of the surrealist movement in 1982, with Gloria Orenstein's landmark essay "Reclaiming the Great Mother: A Feminist Journey and Back in Search of a Goddess Heritage," followed by Whitney Chadwick's groundbreaking *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* in 1985 and Renée Riese Hubert's study in 1994, *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism & Partnership.*[12] Through haunting emotion expressed in both her paintings and poems, Sage asserts an original voice that reveals her inner experience in a way that is distinct from comparable work by surrealist men, and reveals a defiant sense of humor that anticipated 1970s feminism by at least ten years. Before the personal became political with the women's movements, Sage insisted upon making her personal experience public through exhibitions and publications. She was carefully intentional about her two final exhibitions in New York in 1960 and 1961 at the Catherine Viviano Gallery, and about the publication in

France of her final three books of poetry in French, in 1957, 1959, and 1962.

Not a surrealist "discovery," as Judith Suther explains in her critical biography, *A House of Her Own* (1997), Sage "herself discovered the Surrealists… and volunteered her loyalty to their artistic ideals."[13] In response to an exhibition she visited in Paris in 1935, where she first saw a painting by Yves Tanguy, *Je vous attend* (I am Waiting for you, 1934), she left her married life in Italy and moved to France. By 1938, she had exhibited her first surrealist paintings and met Tanguy, whom she married two years later. Together they settled in Connecticut in 1941, where he died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage fourteen years later on the 15th of January, 1955. After Tanguy died, in 1959, Sage attempted suicide, at a time when her health and eyesight were deteriorating. She succeeded four years later when she shot herself through the heart on 8 January 1963, almost eight years to the day after Tanguy's death.[14]

Five of Sage's poems from her first volume in French, *Demain, Monsieur Silber,* published when she was in her late 50s, focus on the poet's intensely interior experience of automatism, in a manner comparable to poems by her male peers, published in their shared youth in the 1920s. These poems also reflect on mortality in a way that refers autobiographically to her personal process of ageing while simultaneously echoing the preoccupation with mortality evident throughout the movement, beginning with the foundational automatic text, *Magnetic Fields,* co-authored by Breton and Philippe Soupault in 1920, in which a ghostly, war-scarred Paris is evoked as a landscape of "dead stars" viewed by eyes "without hope," and pavements marked by our "shadows of the day before"—literally our "dead shadows."[15] In the *Manifesto*, Breton announced that "Surrealism will usher you into death, which is a secret society," whereas Desnos reflected on mortality throughout his work, beginning in the first chapter of his 1924 novel *Liberty or Love!,* in which he identifies himself in terms of his mortal limits, as "Robert Desnos, Born in Paris, 4 July 1900. Died in Paris, 13 December, 1924, the day on which he wrote these lines."[16] Desnos's version in particular dwells characteristically on the instantaneity of automatism, the moment of inspiration, with a present-focused awareness of being alive, poised between birth and death.[17]

In the five poems from *Demain, Monsieur Silber*, Sage's voice expresses an increasing sense of vulnerability with a concurrent awareness of a mounting feeling of entrapment and enclosure within her ageing body. Sage elaborates the trope of the automatic voice emerging from a body imagined as a contained space, in a manner comparable to the bottle in Desnos's "If you knew" and the house in Eluard's "The Word," both from 1926.[18] In Desnos's poem "the night bottle of the poet" captures a falling star. Through this image of the "night bottle" Desnos conjures his own consciousness, disembodied and released by automatism, allowing him the distance needed to witness his body from the outside, to see poetry erupting within him, through the metaphor of a constellation exploding against the bottle's

inner glass walls: "Far from me, a falling star falls in the night bottle of the poet. He corks it instantly to watch the star enclosed within the glass, the constellations come to life against the sides."[19] In Eluard's poem, the titular "word" drifts down through the house-container as though through a body and awakens the poetic voice buried deep within. Only in the final line is the house revealed as the poet's body, over which the setting sun draws a shadow "down from the depths of the windows" that nonetheless "spares the dark heart of my eyes." Although born within five years of one another—Eluard in 1895, Sage in 1898, and Desnos in 1900—Desnos and Eluard's poems were published when they were both in their twenties, a good thirty years before Sage published hers. By the time Sage published her five poems dramatizing automatism as a comparable experience of tension, caught between containment and poetic release, she was 59 years old. Her poems reflect the resignation of age, of a heightened sense of mortality, and recent loss. Her poetic body-container grows more rigid over the sequence, although no less exposed to life's suffering, and metaphorically communicates the poet's increasing fatalism about her newly solitary existence and declining health. Her poetic voice, however, remains fully vital.

All of Sage's poems in French are written in the slang she shared with Tanguy throughout their years together.[20] It was "the only French I really know," she explained in a letter to Marcel Duhamel, one of Tanguy's housemates from Paris, who helped her publish her books in France. The poems were written in the French she had "heard and talked for the past 17 years with Yves," she explained. "Yves was my only friend who understood everything," she wrote another friend.[21] She opens *Demain, Monsieur Silber* with the claim that it is her "turn to speak": "La parole est à moi" (literally, The word is mine).[22] In the remainder of the short poem she uses a strategy of reversal to challenge the social expectation that a woman's thoughts and voice lack social importance: "What I think / has no importance / what I say / does" (*Demain,* 9). Clearly for Sage, what she thinks matters as much as what she has to say. She does not adhere to the old adage that children (and women) should be seen and not heard. She insisted these three books be published and to that end, partially subsidized their publication.[23] She was not helped by her old friend Duhamel, who "was willing to stand by Sage and see two volumes of her unsaleable poetry through to print," as Suther notes, but "did not suggest his prestigious employer, Gallimard, as a publisher, or his well-known colleague, [Raymond] Queneau, as a reviewer."[24] It is not surprising that Sage's books received little or no critical response.[25] One reader, however, greatly appreciated the poems in *Demain, Monsieur Silber*: Jean Dubuffet, who contributed a frontispiece for the volume at Sage's request, and sent her a letter of appreciation once he had read the poems. Dubuffet writes that she captures something in the poems that is "extremely ordinary, on the one hand, and extremely unknown, on the other, because it is so difficult to extract from its environment (this element is the uncontrolled, the unseen

that vanishes as soon as one attempts look at it), like those fish that inhabit such great depths that no one has ever seen them fully."[26] He later laments the fact that Sage's books were not appreciated at the time they were published, commenting that the French public tends to ignore everything that lies "outside of cultural norms" and expectations.[27]

In "Tree," "Tower," "Acrobatics," "Armor," and "Monuments," Sage positions the speaking voice with or within a natural object such as a tree or an oyster shell or a manmade construction such as an ivory tower or a marble statue. These poems express emptiness and grief. They tend to be read biographically as supplements to her major work, the paintings, and have been translated by Chadwick, Hubert, and Suther, as well as Régine Tessier Kreiger in her 1977 catalogue of Sage's work.[28] The words in the poems spring from a deep interior and resonate with Surrealism in two ways— on the one hand they concretize the juxtaposition within surrealist thought and practice between consciousness and the unconscious mind from which creativity flows, and on the other, they do so with imagery that suggests rather than represents the body, just as bodies in Sage's paintings are suggested without assuming human form.

Sage's vision of the body aligns more with the manufactured or constructed container vision of the body expressed by Desnos and Eluard than with a recognizable human body. What is unique to Sage is this view of the container-self as something like an open air structure, a "pavilion" according to her friend Soby. For unlike Desnos's bottle, open only on one end, or Eluard's enclosed house marked by eye-like windows and doors, Sage's painted and poetic pavilions are distinguished by greater exposure to the outside world within which a vulnerable consciousness expresses emotions of wonder, loss, and awareness of impending mortality, the kind of emotions that often arise "deep in memory" or in dreams. This vulnerability is represented in the paintings by the twisted cloths visible mostly within structures reminiscent of house frames or scaffolding—cloths that bodies have worn, dropped or draped, that remain redolent of the human body that held them and that body's sudden disappearance, cloths that are often twisted, representing visually wrenching emotions of sadness, loss, loneliness. In the poems this sense of vulnerability within a structure that stands open to the outside world comes through in the raw voice that surfaces within them—an intimate, conversational voice that provides the poetic corollary to the emotionally visceral cloths familiar from her paintings. This vulnerability of a person who exposes herself to the outside world in the manner of an open-air "pavilion" is at times balanced by the dark humor typical of some of her poems involving animals. In "The Other Side," for instance, a poem in which a squirrel makes the foolish decision to leave home to cross a road, Sage fatalistically yet humorously concludes: "Either you stay put / Or Bam! You're a smudge."[29]

The first of the five-poem sequence in *Demain, Monsieur Silber*, "Tree,"

establishes the poet's love of and ambivalence about words. She describes them as "like falling leaves" (*Demain,* 12). The poem's speaker, identified by the plural pronoun "on," best translated here as "we," tumbles sensually into the pile of word-leaves the way a child might: "We gather them, we pick them up, / we heap them, / we throw ourselves into them," the first stanza concludes. With the verbs "gather" and "heap," she could be describing the recipe for making dada poetry explained by Tristan Tzara in the "Seven Dada Manifestoes" as cutting up words from newspapers and advertisements and putting them into a bag from which the poet draws at random to assemble the poem.[30] Or, she could be describing the process of creating the *exquisite corpse* game devised by her husband with his housemates Duhamel and Queneau in their house in Paris after Tanguy joined the surrealist group in 1925.[31] Each player added a section of a sentence, or a body part to a drawn figure, without seeing what went before; the game took its name from the first sentence created this way, "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine." "Tree" evokes the pleasure of the way words can produce other words, as in a game created by a group participating in a shared activity signaled by the inclusive pronoun "we" and reminiscent of Breton's description of how group automatic practice works: "words make love."[32]

The second stanza of "Tree" reminds the reader of Sage's paintings, because the attention shifts from the fallen leaves and the impulse to play they arouse back to the bareness of the now denuded tree. The poetic voice concludes with a question: "but haven't we already seen / how beautiful / a naked tree can be?" Together the two stanzas present a diptych of Sage's sensibility as a poet—playful, slangy, yet intentional—and as a writer who paints—mindful of the seen, of what is "beautiful." She presents a "naked tree," a living being open to the world, as an aesthetic ideal that verges on the abstract, not unlike the aesthetic she produced in her characteristically empty yet constructed landscapes, starting in the 1940s. Although the poetic voice does not directly compare herself to the tree, the poet from whom words "fall" and who then stands "naked" of them may be seen as comparable to the tree in its bareness, who now experiences silence following the once rich bounty of words the tree as a stand-in for herself had previously shared with Tanguy during their life together. The bare tree, whose newly denuded branches stand exposed to the gaze of others, also stands in for the poet's exposed body in the poem. Naked of leaves, of words, the tree is nonetheless "beautiful" as an abstract shape. In reality, the naked tree serves as a metaphor for the way life ends in bare stillness, even though in nature, the tree will flower again (Fig. 1).

The most likely visual corollary to "Tree" may be found in the painting *I Saw Three Cities* from 1944, in which a drapery-wrapped pole stands tall in the foreground, evocative of a tree, and also of a female figure devoid of human characteristics except that the top of the drapery stretches outwards to the left in a way that suggests waves of human hair or outstretched arms leaning leftwards, leading

Fig. 1. Kay Sage, *I Saw three Cities* (1944) © 2022 Estate of Kay Sage/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Princeton University/Art Resource, NY

outside of the painting. The draped figure stands alone; at its feet three-dimensional geometric shapes litter an otherwise empty landscape against a low horizon, above which a cloudy green-yellow background rises.[33] In the distance a faraway city stretches along the horizon. The draped figure harks back to statues of ancient goddesses, while the suggestion of a city in the distance looks more contemporary. A critic writing in *ARTNews* in 1958 saw Sage's paintings as commentaries "on what is happening all around—the city moving into the country, landscapes becoming man-made."[34] The declarative assertion of the title, *I Saw,* together with the classical shape of the dominant figure, point to an ancient augur predictive of twentieth-century expansive urbanism and the persistence of ancient geometric forms.[35] The draped figure, like the bare tree in the poem, suggests the human female body of the poet with its curves, as if the cloth had only just been vacated by a human form filled with longing. The emotion emanating from the form renders it beautiful in a way that is nonetheless simple, whereas the elements around her, like the words in "Tree," lie ready to be reassembled into new creations capable of complexity—as sculptures, buildings, or poems.

"Tower" more directly identifies the poetic voice with the first-person pronoun "I" and reminds the reader familiar with her paintings of Sage's propensity for manmade constructions: "I have built a tower on despair," the four-line poem begins (*Demain,* 15).[36] It surrounds and encloses the poetic voice more fully and presents a darker version of the poet's "pavilion"-body. Inside the tower it is dark, too, without the translucent light often present in Sage's paintings. The poem echoes with poet's cries: "you can't hear anything, there's nothing to see; / There's no answer, when, black on black, / I yell, I yell in my ivory tower." The ivory tower harks back to the beauty of the beloved in "Song of Solomon" to which an "ivory tower" typically refers. The ivory tower symbolizes female beauty.[37] It also evokes educated seclusion, as we often refer to academia as an "ivory tower" that exists separate from the rest of society. The poet clearly describes an exterior space that is isolated, separated from community, a body that houses an emotion-filled interior space that serves as a common metaphor for the surrealist unconscious—unknowable, non-rational, yet full of instinct, feeling, and susceptible to impressions. In this poem, the tower stands in for the body of the poet, the way the bare tree did in the earlier poem. Whereas the tree symbolized the human poet as silent and bare once shed of her words, the image of the tower represents her as enclosed, constructed, isolated, yet vitally alive: sturdy on the outside while vulnerable on the inside, as expressed by her unanswered cries.

The visual and emotional dimensions of "Tower" remind the reader of her many depictions of constructed tower frames made of natural materials, which often include enclosed drapery as a signal of a recent human presence, such as in her painting from 1955, *Tomorrow is Never*, which depicts similarly manmade towers in a misty landscape (Fig. 2).[38] The three towers that are most visible look more like

Fig. 2. Kay Sage, *Tomorrow is Never* (1955) © 2022 Estate of Kay Sage/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Princeton University/Art Resource, NY

wooden scaffolding than completed constructions. Within them, columns of drapery twist and turn, suggesting feminine forms and the kind of painful emotions depicted by the voice trapped in the "Tower" of the poem. The forms in this painting are heightened by what Stephen Robeson Miller identifies as the "ominous stillness" of her work, while the towers themselves suggest more "pavilions of dreaming."[39] Sage wrote "Tower" around the time she made this painting, shortly after Tanguy's sudden death. The poem adds voice to those draped forms, trapped yet exposed within the scaffolding.

"Acrobatics" opens with the image of a tightrope, which parallels the image of thin ice with which she opens her posthumously published memoir, *China Eggs* (1996), and which also appears in an unpublished journal entry from 1955, both in English.[40] All three, the poem in French and the memoir and journal entry in English, were begun shortly after Tanguy's unexpected death.[41] In the journal entry she writes: "I'm walking very fast on a thin sheet of ice. Underneath, the lake is deep. I'm alone. There's nothing, even on the horizon. If I stop, even for a second, the ice breaks and I go under. I catch myself and go on—why? I could just stop walking for good."[42] *China Eggs* opens with a dialogue that includes a variation on the journal: "I am walking very fast on a thin sheet of ice. I can either keep on walking

or I can stop. If I stop, the ice will break."[43] "Acrobatics" substitutes a tightrope and imagines an interlocutor in the opening line, with the use of the French pronoun "on." Although "on" maybe be used interchangeably as a substitute for "one" or "we," or for one of the components of "we"—either "I" or "you"—here it is best translated as "you."

"Acrobatics" opens conversationally by describing what happens when walking a tightrope: "When you walk / along a tightrope / at the slightest, unexpected, thing / you can get crushed." This first part extends the dry humor of "The Other Side" and shows the poet self-mockingly reminding herself of the danger of exposing herself to the judgments of others. As with thin ice, a tightrope requires masterful physical balance and control in order to be navigated successfully. In the second half of the single sentence poem demarcated by a semi-colon, Sage switches from the humorously friendly warning embedded in the first lines to a strong appeal to be left alone: "Leave me then / to figure it out / for myself." The focus switches abruptly from benevolent advice suggesting trust in a conversation with another about risk to a categorical rejection of interaction with anyone, embedded in the assertive impatience of the adverb "donc," best translated here as "then": "leave me, then," upon which the poet finds herself alone. The body on the tightrope is performing for an interlocutor, as if in a circus tent. The vulnerability of exposure is even more intense here than in the word-leaves under the naked tree or enclosed within the tower. Tightrope walking is a concentrated physical activity in which the body that risks it must be completely centered. As a metaphor, the image evokes a poet whose every gesture, every utterance and work of art are planned and yet make her feel at risk, not only of failure but of death. Getting crushed as a metaphor describes how an artist may feel after an opening or a poet upon publication. The body in this poem, however, also seems real, filled with the adrenaline of attempting an almost impossible physical feat. This body is fully poised between birth and death, not unlike Desnos's cheerful morbidity from 1924, when he was only twenty-four years old.

The visual parallel to "Acrobatics" may be found in *Danger, Construction Ahead* (1940, Fig. 3), painted fifteen years earlier, Sage's first "large and ambitious painting," according to Miller.[44] A visual plank resembling a tightrope extends to a point over an abyss. If a person were to walk that plank, the risk of tumbling onto the lunar landscape below would seem inevitable and probably fatal. The twisted rocklike formations resembling stalagmites through which the plank juts are cast in shadow, while a greenish, cloudy light stretches into the distance, the mesas and sand dunes below, and projects the sense of a landscape in outer space, in which no human has ever ventured before. The plank is reminiscent of childhood pirate stories yet fits naturally in the alien environment Sage has depicted, eerily reminding the viewer of familiar adventure yarns held "deep in memory" and featuring fantastical human beings. This painting conforms to the notion of a surrealist dreamscape with a high

Fig. 3. Kay Sage, *Danger, Construction Ahead* (1940) © 2022 Estate of Kay Sage/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York /Yale University Art Gallery/Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh J. Chisholm, Jr. B.A. 1936

horizon of the sort Tanguy created, but without the biomorphic forms he used that might have more clearly linked the barren landscape to natural life on earth.

Sage's "Armor" harks back to "Tower" because the poet's voice seems to speak from within an enclosure, although this time numbness has replaced despair.[45] In the second of the two stanzas, this enclosure takes the shape of an oyster that shuts over a pearl: "The oyster has closed her shell / for good / with the pearl inside." The once open shell blends the natural rigidity of the "ivory" in the "ivory tower" from "Tower" with the solitary bareness of the tree in "Tree." The shell is only like a "pavilion" when it is open; once shut, "for good," the outcome for the body and spirit of the poet looks grim, except for one detail: the "armor" of the shell contains the "pearl" of the poetic voice enclosed within, a voice that has the potential to be beautiful like the living yet bare tree in the earlier poem. The sensations expressed are far from beautiful, however. The speaker describes having lost all mortal feeling or physical sensation, as though she, too, were completely enclosed in armor, like the pearl within the oyster: "I'm neither hot nor cold / I don't care about good and evil / everything that happens around me / is just the flickering of images on a screen," she writes. The options for survival are presented as more precarious here than in "Tower," since a constructed "ivory tower" could be escaped

Fig. 4. Kay Sage, *Small Portrait* (1950) © 2022 Estate of Kay Sage/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York /Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY/Art Resource, NY

and the cries within suggest a will to survive its isolation. The despair expressed in "Tower" has been replaced in "Armor" with indifference, except for the presence of the solitary pearl, which still retains value and beauty. The question posed in "Tree" remains implicit here in this poem, as well: "but haven't we already seen / how beautiful / a naked tree can be?"

The visual companion to "Armor" may be found in Sage's *Small Portrait* from 1950 (Fig. 4). The painting represents the head of a mannequin, one of only two humanoid figures to be found in her surrealist paintings. This head is constructed of man-made materials with a plume of what looks like bright red human hair or birds's feathers. The head tilts upwards and the wood or metal webbing across the part of the "portrait" that constitutes the face resembles the webbing of a fencer's mask.[46] Despite its encasement, as if in armor—which Mary Ann Caws identifies as "a thicket of self-obliteration by slats and structuring"—the head's tilt suggests a slight hopefulness that goes well beyond the figure's disguise.[47] It is as if the recognizably human figure were looking up and out through the webbing, beyond the well-protected inner being, in an echo of the hopefulness already suggested in the earlier poem "Armor," by the poem's pearl.[48]

"Monuments," the following and penultimate poem of *Demain, Monsieur Silber,* returns to the image of a tree as a natural ideal, a possible model for how to be in the world, a living being capable of cyclical renewal.[49] A young girl appears in the first of the two short sentences that constitute the poem. She is eager to watch a seed grow. In the second sentence, that seed has become a tree, a natural symbol of beauty for Sage, as we have seen, whereas the girl has become "a woman made of marble":

> A little girl
> she got the idea
> she wanted to see
> A seed grow.
> The seed
> it became a tree,
> and the little girl,
> a woman
> made of marble. (*Demain,* 64)

Here, the tree as the open "pavilion" stand-in for the poet's body separates from the poet in the poem's second half, leaving her behind, entrapped and enclosed in a body that has rigidified into stone. This marble "monument" of an adult woman follows the poet's previous evocations of a human self, trapped within a construction—whether an ivory tower or an oyster shell—and adds a new dimension. The poetic voice that was alive with grief in "Tower," then neutralized

by numbness in "Armor," has been fully silenced by its transformation into a stone sculpture. "Monuments" overlaps with "Tower" in that they are both constructed by the poet herself, and yet this time there is no possibility of escape, since there are no cries that might yet be heard, with rescue as a possible outcome. Read together, the transformation in "Monuments" appears more deliberate, part of a process that moves from an open "pavilion" to a semi-open structure, to a sealed vault without possibility of release, even into dreams, except into death. Mortality has asserted itself irrevocably here. Dreaming is no longer an option for a woman "made of marble." The inner transformation of feeling also moves from a child's curiosity about nature's life cycles in the first part of "Monuments" to numbness to complete loss of sensation with only the superficial appearance of human identity through carving of external human features, an evolution that could be read as following the process of human ageing to the point where the body rigidifies and becomes something else, no longer alive, no longer human.

The juxtaposition of the two halves of "Monuments," where the subject in the two parallel sentences switches from the "little girl" to "the seed," sets up equivalences between the child and the seed, on the one hand, and the tree and the marble "monument" representing a woman, on the other. These elisions are facilitated by the odd, parallel interjection of the redundant pronoun "le" in French in both stanzas, referring first to the girl and second to the seed, and, in my English translation, represented by the grammatically unnecessary pronouns that repeat the preceding noun—"she" and "it." Although the woman into which the girl may have grown might have become the corollary of the tree from the poem "Tree," by the end of this poem and this entire sequence in *Demain, Monsieur Silber,* that woman comes closer to becoming an inert and lifeless marble monument. Sage's vision was failing when she wrote this poem. Read biographically, it depicts grief and mourning together with the alarming sensation of becoming a body deprived of the ability to feel and see, completely, irrevocably trapped.

The poem's evocation of a woman turned into stone complements one of Sage's most well-known but also one of her most unusual paintings, *The Passage,* from 1956 (Fig. 5). In a letter to Germaine Duhamel, Sage described the painting as "strange" and highly personal, leading Suther to suggest that Sage saw it as an "indulgence, separate from any work destined for exhibit."[50] Nonetheless, this work opened her 1960 show at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York, as though it "had somehow slipped in over Sage's objections," according to Suther.[51] It depicts a female figure from the back, seated on unnaturally geometric rocks. Her slumped posture denotes melancholy, a mood reinforced by the darkening green-tinged sky stretching over abstracted fields below. Although the head's tilt here indicates contemplation more than despair, there is little here to suggest hopefulness.

If Sage's portrayal of the poetic voice encased within a metaphorical body-container contrasts with Eluard and Desnos's more playful depictions, this is

Fig. 5. Kay Sage, *The Passage* (1956) © 2022 Estate of Kay Sage/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Photo courtesy Sotheby's London

partly because she had outlived them both by the late 1950s. World War Two had intervened, separating the earlier from the later poems. Sage's view of herself was necessarily more retrospective than theirs or even hers would have been in 1926. Yet she was still very active in those postwar years. While she was publishing her four books of poems, she was simultaneously completing a comprehensive catalogue of Tanguy's paintings, in addition to organizing two major exhibitions of her own paintings and object-collages in New York, mounted in 1960 and 1961. For an individual plagued by sensations of vulnerability and hyper-awareness of the risks of exposure, she showed tremendous courage in her final effort for her work to be seen and read in art exhibitions in New York and book publications in Paris. The body "pavilion" in which she lived psychologically was solidly constructed despite remaining exposed, for all to see into, as her actions and the sensibility on display in her poems confirm. Her fears were matched by her determination. The first art exhibition was a retrospective of 59 paintings from 1937 through 1958 that opened with *The Passage* (1956) and concluded with *The Answer is No* (1958). The second, *Your Move,* focused on object-collages, which were easier to make with her failing eyesight. In the exhibition the object-collages were presented as a game, partly in tribute to Tanguy, who filled their Connecticut house with games, including a billiards table and a chess set that may be seen in photographs.[52]

Sage died five years before the political upheavals of May 1968 in France, which, as Alyce Mahon has persuasively argued, were influenced by the surrealist movement.[53] Her death pre-dated by ten years the French feminist appropriation of the subversive force of surrealist automatism noticeable in the groundbreaking theoretical essays of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. [54] In addition to her allegiance to Surrealism, she asserted her right to self-expression as a woman. Sage defied social expectations for how widows should express their grief by not keeping it to herself and not shirking her public persona as a cantankerous widow living alone with cats.[55] Her one volume in English, published in the same year as *Demain, Monsieur Silber*, has a short poem entitled "Literature," in which she again asserts her right to write and her pleasure in it: "We were reading different books; / well, what of it? / You liked yours-- / I *wrote* mine / and I love it."[56] Although Sage did not represent women as connected to one another the way 1970s feminist writing tended to do, she personally enjoyed enduring friendships with women throughout her life—from Flora Whitney, a friend from childhood, to her neighbors in Connecticut Friedl Richter and Régine Tessier Krieger.[57]

With her four volumes of poetry published in quick succession over five years and their consistently irreverent tone, Sage anticipated Cixous's call to women to write themselves out of the silence that the dominant culture had assigned to them.[58] She also wrote about her personal experience in ways that revealed what it felt like to live in her shoes, in her body, as a poet and painter who was older and also female. By the time Sage published *Demain, Monsieur Silber,* she was an ageing widow

expressing socially unseemly feelings and insisting on publishing poems in which she expressed these feelings in the public sphere, despite the fact that these poems were not called for and the public sphere showed no interest in them, once they were published. Beyond her painted "pavilions of dreaming," Sage's poetry anticipates contemporary assertions by women of their right to self-expression and their right to live lives free of expectations imposed upon them by a patriarchal society. Sage should be more visible to us today than she was in her own time. As we reread her in the twenty-first century through the lens of a growing recognition that women's voices still lack an adequate platform in the arts, her claim to the right to be heard on her own terms seems more relevant than ever.

1 Stephen Robeson Miller, "The Intersection of Art and Fate in the Lives of Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy" (13-41), *Double Solitaire, the Surreal Worlds of Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy,* ed. Nancy Wallach (Katonah, NY: Katona Museum of Art, 2011), 23. "Serene Surrealist," *Time* magazine 55.11 (13 March 1950): 49. I thank Stephen Miller with gratitude for his generous correspondence with me about this essay. This essay began as a talk delivered in 2017 as part of day of tribute to the career of Gerald Prince. I want to thank Gerry for his sustaining mentorship and friendship over the course of my career, starting with my enrollment in the University of Pennsylvania doctoral program.
2 Miller, "Intersection," 23. "Serene Surrealist," *Time* (1950), 49.
3 James Thrall Soby cited in Jonathan Stuhlman, "Double Solitaire: Kay Sage's Influence on Yves Tanguy" (34-53), *Double Solitaire, the Surreal Worlds of Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy* (Katonah, NH: Katona Museum of Art, 2011), 45.
4 André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting,* trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), 82.
5 Sage also published a volume of poetry in Italian, "Piove in giardino" (It's raining in the garden) under her married name, K. di San Faustino, in Milan in 1937. My sincere thanks to Stephen Robeson Miller for this reference and for sending me a photocopy of the book (e-mail exchange 5 July 2018). An extended poem in fragments, presented as a kind of game, was also incorporated into her final exhibition of object-collages from 1961, "Your Move."
6 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant*-Garde (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Her chapter on women in the surrealist movement was originally published as an essay, "A Double Margin: Reflections on Women and the Avant-garde," in a special issue of dedicated to *The Politics of Tradition: Placing Women in French Literature*: *Yale French Studies* 74 (1988): 148-74.
7 For examples of self-portraits by surrealist women, see Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985). See also Susan Aberth, *Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2010); Victoria Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning, Transformations* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020), and Peter Webb, *Sphinx: The Life and Work of Leonor Fini* (New York: Vendome Press, 2009).
8 Judith D. Suther, *A House of her Own, Kay Sage, Solitary Surrealist* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 68.
9 See my *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) for more on the response of women to representations of women in male surrealism. André Breton, *Poems of André Breton,* trans. Jean-Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws ((Boston: Black Widow Press, 2014); 74-75; Paul Eluard, *Capital of Pain,* trans. Mary Ann Caws, Patricia Terry, Nancy Kline (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2006) 21; and Robert Desnos, *Essential Poems and Writings of Robert Desnos,* ed. and trans. Mary Ann Caws (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2007) 149.
10 I am indebted to Stephen Robeson Miller for his advice via e-mail and for his indispensable *Kay Sage, Biographical Chronology and Four Surrealist One-Act Plays* (New York: Gallery of Surrealism, 2011), hereafter *Chronology*.
11 Jacqueline Lamba Breton noted that Sage "saw to finding the apartment and furnishing it just the way André liked it." Miller, *Chronology,* 39.
12 Gloria Orenstein, "Reclaiming the Great Mother: A Feminist Journey and Back in Search of a Goddess Heritage," *Symposium* 36.1 (1982): 45-69. See also Whitney Chadwick, who, in turn, followed Linda Nochlin's precedent in such essays as "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," *Art-NEWS* (January, 1972): 22-39. Renée Riese Hubert also translates "The Tower" in "The Silent Couple: Kay Sage & Yves Tanguy," *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism & Partnership* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).
13 Suther, 101.
14 Her neighbor Régine Tessier Krieger describes the day she went to visit Sage and discovered she was dead in Régine Tessier Kreiger, "Kay Sage," *Kay Sage, 1898-1963* (Ithaca NY: Herbert John-

son Museum of Art, 1977) np. Miller also provides accounts of this day by friends of Sage's in the *Chronology,* 76-78.

15 André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *The Magnetic Fields,* trans. David Gascoyne (London: Atlas, 1985) 25 and Breton, *Oeuvres complètes,* t. 1 (Paris; Gallimard, 1988) 53 for the original French, "nos ombres mortes de la veille."

16 Breton, *Manifestoes,* 32; Robert Desnos, *Liberty or Love!,* trans. Terry Hale (London: Atlas, 1993) 37.

17 A good example may be seen in Desnos's daily poems from the 1930s. See my '« Délicieux présent » : le quotidien de Desnos' about a poem dated 21 March 1936, one of the the recently discovered and newly published « poèmes forcés » daily poems from the mid-1930s in *L'Etoile de mer* 2021.

18 Robert Desnos, *Essential Poems and Writings of Robert Desnos,* ed. and trans. Mary Ann Caws (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2007) 154-57; Paul Eluard, *Capital of Pain,* trans. Mary Ann Caws, Patricia Terry, Nancy Kline (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2006) 22-23, translation modified.

19 Desnos, *Essential Poems,* 157.

20 Suther quotes extensively from interviews conducted by Stephen Robeson Miller between 1972 and 1979 on microfilm reels nos. 2886-88 at the Smithsonian in "Separate Studios: Kay Sage & Yves Tanguy," *Significant Others,* ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993) 137-53.

21 Suther, 161-62.

22 All translations are my own, except for "L'Autre côté," which I cite in the translation indicated, by John Monagan.

23 Suther, 179: "Sage swallowed her pride and offered to have the poems published. . . . Sage advanced the five hundred dollars stipulated by Seghers as a condition of producing a bound book."

24 Suther, 185.

25 I recently purchased a copy of *Demain, Monsieur Silber,* which initially came from the rare art and book seller Lucien Goldschmit in New York, number 64 out of 500, and only the title page had been cut. The rest of the book remained uncut.

26 Letter from Dubuffet to Sage, 30 September 1957, my translation. Correspondence held at the Fondation Dubuffet in Paris. I thank Mme Sophie Webel, Director of the Fondation, for permission to consult the letters.

27 Letter from Jean Dubuffet to Stephen Robeson Miller from 29 December 1974 stored at the Archive of American Art, Stephen Robeson Miller materials. Roll 2886, frame 322-23.

28 Chadwick translates "The Tower" and "Acrobatics" in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement,* 102. Hubert also translates "The Tower" in "The Silent Couple: Kay Sage & Yves Tanguy," *Magnifying Mirrors,*196. Suther translates many poems in *A House of Her Own,* including "The Tower" (188-89) and 'Monument' (236-37). Kreiger translates "Acrobatics," "Monuments," and "The Tower" in *Kay Sage,* np.

29 This translation is by her attorney, John Monagan, and figures in the Preface he wrote to her posthumously published memoir, *China Eggs,* ed. Judith Suther (Charlotte, NC: Stafbooks, 1995), v-vi. The original poem is in *Demain, Monsieur Silber* (Paris: Seghers, 1957), 43. The poem's humor is typical of the black humor of Breton's *Anthology of Black Humor* (1940), which Breton defined as "the mortal enemy of sentimentality." Breton characterizes black humor as "full of effervescence" generated by the reversals inherent to "Hegel's concept of the dialectic and Freud's concept of humor" in "Lightening Rod," his preface to the *Anthology,* trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1997), xix, xii, xviii. For more on Sage's animal poems see my "Kay Sage Alive in the World," *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration,* ed. Anna Watz (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2021) 122-41.

30 Tristan Tzara, "How to Make a Dadaist Poem," *Seven Dada Manifestoes and Lampisteries,* trans. Barbara Wright (London & New York: Calder Publications & Riverrun Press, 1992), 39. This "recipe" was published by Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault in *Littérature* 15 (July 1920). See the *Oeuvres,* notes, 703.

31 See Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement,* trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002), 122. See also, Adam Biro and René Passeron, *Dictionnaire general du surréalisme et ses environs* (Paris: PUF, 1982), 74.
32 André Breton, *The Lost Steps,* trans. Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1996) 102, translation modified.
33 Orenstein sees evidence in the figure of the "annihilation of the powerful female principle from all forms of contemporary civilization" (53). Chadwick sees "a metaphor for political reality . . . as inseparable from psychic reality" in Sage's "desolate" landscapes (163).
34 Soby in Stulhman, 45.
35 Richard Stamelman reads in these forms a continuous process of "building and unbuilding . . . making and unmaking," typical of Sage's work," in "Kay Sage (1898-1964): *Page 49,* 1950," *American Dreams: American Art to 1950 in the Williams College Museum of Art,* ed. Nancy Mowll Matthews (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, NY, 2001), 186.
36 It is used to illustrate Sage's grief-stricken state of mind in Chadwick and Hubert's studies of her work. See Chadwick, 102 and Renée Riese Hubert, 196.
37 In Chapter Seven, verse four of the "Song of Solomon," the poet extolls the beauty of his beloved with the image of an ivory tower: "Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim: thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus." As an epithet for Mary, the ivory tower appears in a sixteenth-century "Litany of the Blessed Virgin."
38 Hubert sees this landscape as situating the viewer "outside time and perhaps beyond space." Hubert, 178.
39 Stephen Robeson Miller, "The Surrealist Imagery of Kay Sage," *Art International* (September-October 1983): 34.
40 Sage, *Demain,* 50.
41 Published posthumously, *China Eggs* begins with a vivid depiction of her mother's morphine addiction and ends with her move to Paris before she met the surrealists. The first chapter begins with her parents' divorce when she was about ten. She closes the first paragraph with the memory of taking "the bullets out of my mother's revolver which she had put, loaded, on her dressing table. I think I was ten the first time she made me give her a hypodermic of morphine." Kay Sage, *China Eggs,* ed. Judith Suther (Charlotte, Seattle: Starbooks, 1996), 28.
42 In Suther, 161.
43 Sage, *China Eggs,* p 26.
44 Miller in an e-mail, 11 April 2018. Miller sees the influence of Wolfgang Paalen on this work in "In the Interim: The Constructivist Surrealism of Kay Sage," *Dada/Surrealism* 18 (1990): 123-47.
45 Sage, *Demain,* 63.
46 This latticed face mimics or suggests "the process of "'onstructing' a composition," as Stuhlman has observed , 44.
47 Mary Ann Caws, "Kay Sage: Passing Through," *Kay Sage,* eds. Stephen Robeson Miller and Jessie Sentivan (Munich: Delmonico-Prestel, 2018) 36.
48 The upward tilt appears to confirm what Orenstein's observation that the painting uncovers "a startling new awareness of the truth of a woman's inner life" (54).
49 Sage, *Demain,* 64.
50 Suther, 197-98.
51 Suther cites a letter from Sage to Germaine Duhamel from the summer of 1956, in which she writes about this "strange painting that I'm doing for my pleasure—which doesn't get me anywhere for the fall shows. Too bad, I can't help it." This comment suggests that the painting had somehow slipped in over Sage's objections, that she considered it an indulgence, separate from any work destined for exhibit (197-98).

52 See Elizabeth Sherman, "Kay Sage's *Your Move* and/as Autobiography," *Journalism of Surrealism and the Americas* 5:1-2 (2011): 120-33. For photographs of her house, see Suther, *A House of her Own,* between pp. 138 and 139. Tanguy had been one of the inventors of the "exquisite corpse" game in Paris, along with Duhamel.

53 Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 12.

54 See Luce Irigaray's "Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un" (1974) and Hélène Cixous' "Le Rire de la Méduse" (1975). See also my *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

55 See testimonials by Matthew Josephson, Miriam Gabo, Aube Breton Elléouët in Miller, *Chronology,* 43-52. The Sage Papers in the Archive of American Art contains a registration form to the Cat Fanciers' Association in Sage's name from 1956 (Box 1, Folder 9). A neighbor described her as "a remote and private person with a quite unexpected flash of humor. See Audrey Skaling, in Miller, *Chronology,* 56.

56 Kay Sage, *The more I wonder* (New York: Bookman, 1957) 59.

57 Sage dedicated an object-collage in *Your Move* and personally dedicated a copy of *Mordicus* to Tessier Kreiger, confirmed by Miller in an e-mail from 11 July 2018. Dorothea Tanning described herself as a friend of Sage's in a conversation with the author on 27 May 1998. Miller however argues that they never saw one another after 1953, whereas Frieda Richter, a neighbor, was much closer to her. Jacqueline Lamba apparently thought little of Sage, which surely contributed to the reputation Sage had for not being liked. The inscription of the object-collage to Tessier Krieger may be seen in the catalogue to *Your Move* (1961, n.p.).

58 "It is by writing … that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence"; Cixous, 881.