

Versions of Antonia Pozzi



She was born on 13 February 1912 into an affluent Milanese family. Her father, Roberto Pozzi, was a lawyer who in 1936 was appointed by the Fascist Party to serve as *podestà* or mayor of a Lombard village; her mother, Lina Cavagna Sangiuliani, was related to the Romantic poet Tommaso Grossi, an associate of the great nineteenth-century novelist Alessandro Manzoni.

Antonia Pozzi received the fine education that befitted her class. She attended the best schools, learned languages, studied music and art, practiced such sports as tennis, horseback riding, skiing, and mountain climbing. She visited various towns throughout Italy, especially winter and summer resorts, and traveled to England, France, Germany, Austria, Greece, and North Africa.

During the 1930s she was a member of an elite cultural circle, the friend of leading Italian writers and thinkers. At the University of Milan, she studied with the influential philosopher Antonio Banfi. Her classmates, all students of Banfi, included figures who later distinguished themselves in literary criticism (Luciano Anceschi), poetry (Vittorio Sereni), and philosophy (Enzo Paci). The thinking was modernist, in touch with recent German trends such as phenomenology and existentialism, socially engaged, and inevitably responding, in part, to the repressive, imperialistic agendas of Italian Fascism.

Under Banfi's tutelage, Pozzi wrote a thesis on Flaubert's literary development. She planned to write an ambitious historical novel about northern Lombardy, about the land and its people, starting in the 1870s and spanning three generations. She took artfully composed photographs of the Lombard countryside, the mountains and lakes, churches and fairs, the workers and the children in the villages.

In 1937 she began teaching at a Milanese technical institute and performed volunteer social work, visiting the poor and assisting in juvenile courts. A year later she underwent an appendectomy, and although she recovered, her fragile health was weakened. On 2 December 1938 her body was found on the outskirts of the city, near the abbey of Chiaravalle, in the snow. She had drugged herself and contracted pneumonia. She died the next day. The note she left behind refers to "something hidden

in my nature, an illness of the nerves that deprives me of every resistance and prevents me from seeing things in a balanced way." The official report, following the family's instructions but also reflecting a request in her note, describes the cause of death as a "sudden attack."

Among Pozzi's papers was found a set of notebooks that contained over three hundred poems. Her parents called this body of work "an intimate diary" that she kept "modestly hidden." Written between 1929 and 1938, the poems were known only to Pozzi's closest friends, particularly two women (Lucia Bozzi and Elvira Gandini) whom she had met in secondary school.

Pozzi's suicide at twenty-six, as well as her gender, made early critics uncomfortable, reluctant to pronounce her an important contemporary poet. So they decided that the case was moot, her talents unfulfilled. They searched for signs of "femininity" in her poems. Eugenio Montale, in a 1945 essay that became the preface to the early editions, preferred to read them as *poems* that everywhere evinced a "desire to reduce the weight of words to the minimum." And he shrewdly observed that "this desire already constitutes Pozzi's departure from the generic feminine gratuity that is the dream of so many male critics."

In 1939, within a year of Pozzi's death, her father arranged to have a substantial selection of her poetry (ninety-one texts) published privately in an edition of three hundred copies. Then in 1943, 1948, and 1964, expanded selections were issued in the prestigious series of contemporary poets created by the commercial publisher Mondadori (the series was called "Lo specchio: I poeti del nostro tempo"—the mirror, poetry seen as a reflection of its historical period). Until 1989, however, selections of Pozzi's poems were based on texts edited by her father, who was proud of his daughter's literary achievement but undoubtedly wanted to craft a respectable image of her.

From the 1939 selection, for instance, he excluded poems that are explicitly sexual, such as "Innocenza" and "Pan." In "Odore di fieno" ("Scent of hay") he revised the line "[le lacrime] tremolano nella mia anima impura" ("[tears] tremble in my impure soul") by deleting the word "impura." He deleted the phrase "Dopo il

bacio" ("After the kiss") at the beginning of "L'allodola" ("The skylark"), a poem about a lovers' rendezvous. He retitled a poem to prevent any suggestion of suicide: "Fine" ("End") became first "Mare" ("Sea"), then "Imbarco" ("Embarkation"). And he removed dedications from poems addressed to her first lover, Antonio Maria Cervi, whom he opposed.

The father's control of his daughter's writing began immediately after her death. He requested her letters from correspondents and then revised and recopied them. He even edited her suicide note, striking out phrases and writing at the top of the page: "Original burned. Reconstruction from Papà's memory."

Stylistically, Pozzi's poems are representative of hermeticism (*ermetismo*), the powerful combination of precise language, dense imagery, and free verse that dominated Italian poetry from the 1920s to the 1950s. She admired the first books of the major hermetic poets: Giuseppe Ungaretti, Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo. She underlined titles and phrases in their work. She understood it in the context of international modernist trends. She read T. S. Eliot, Paul Valéry, and Rainer Maria Rilke in the original languages as well as in Italian translations.

Ermetismo was initially a pejorative label affixed by critics, a swipe at the obscurity created by the modernist form of the poems, their avoidance of ornate diction and rhetorical tropes, their discontinuities and ellipses, their metaphysical silences. Yet this poetry came to dominance under Mussolini as a defense against Fascism, a withdrawal from hopeless political action to record personal experiences and revelations, at once dramatic and transitory. At a time when the Fascist regime was encoding linguistic and cultural forms with collective ideologies, both totalitarian and nationalist, poetry might be seen as a practice of resistance through intricate works of self-expression.

Pozzi wrote most of her poems during the 1930s when the regime was tightening its hold through censorship and propaganda. The year of her death, 1938, was climactic: in May Hitler visited Italy amid speeches celebrating the Rome-Berlin Axis; in August the Fascists instituted racial laws that led Italian Jews into hiding or exile. Pozzi was shocked when her friends Paolo and Piero Treves chose to emigrate with their family that summer. Her suicide note links her "mortal desperation" partly to the "cruel oppression that is exerted upon our faded youth."

It was also during this decade that Mussolini actively pursued his imperialist aspirations, capitalizing on the Italian colonies that had already been established in Eritrea and Somalia. In December 1934 Ethiopian troops attacked an Italian unit, providing him with a rationale for invasion. At the end of January 1935, Pozzi wrote a poem entitled "Africa," a sequence of awe-struck images about the desert, its monumentality, its timelessness, its endless uniformity of color. The poem ends:

o terra,
cielo vento—
libertà
di sogni.

o earth,
sky wind—

dream
freedom,

Hermeticism transforms geopolitical spaces into images of private transcendence.

Nonetheless, Pozzi's poetry glances at a more critical attitude toward Italian nationalism and its consequences. At the beginning of October 1935, when a huge Italian force invaded Ethiopia, she wrote a poem entitled "Le donne" ("The women") where the image of patriotic women "a tricolori abbracciate" ("hugging the tricolor") is juxtaposed to the first war casualties.

For the most part, Pozzi's poems are frankly autobiographical, intimately connected to decisive moments in her life.

These moments began at age five, when her parents purchased an eighteenth-century villa in Pasturo, a small village in the mountains of northeastern Lombardy, the Valsassina area. Then at fifteen she developed a strong attachment to Antonio Maria Cervi, a classics professor at her secondary school, with whom she ultimately fell in love. Cervi, who was fourteen years older, responded in kind, but her parents forbade her to marry him. Their opposition stemmed, most likely, from the fact that as her teacher Cervi occupied a position of authority and trust that he violated with his romantic involvement. He posed a threat because he challenged their control over their daughter, who was their only child.

When the affair was discovered in 1928, Pozzi's father intervened to have Cervi transferred from Milan to a school in Rome. Then the parents tried to distract their daughter by sending her on trips to England and the south of Italy. The lovers continued to correspond and met secretly. Cervi traveled to London on one occasion. The correspondence indicates that the relationship lasted for several years but buckled under the weight of the parents' opposition. There was also a significant cultural difference: Cervi was a devout Catholic who felt uneasy about Pozzi's agnosticism, a result of her secular upbringing in the Milanese bourgeoisie. In 1933 she apparently ended the relationship, even if the letters persisted into the following year, recriminating, yet still loving.

Because Pozzi seems to have regarded her poems as a diary, she dated all of them and assigned locations to many, sites where the scenes she depicted had unfolded and where the poems were written. Many record her deeply felt experiences in the Lombard mountains, presenting finely observed evocations of psychological landscapes. Others represent key moments in her frustrated affair with Cervi: memories of rendezvous, passionate and affecting; utopian hopes for their future, including her obsessive desire to bear his son; bleak expressions of thwarted love. When, near the end of her life, she worked among the poor in the tenements of Milan, this experience too entered a poem whose title she took from a street name: "Via dei Cinquecento."

Pozzi wrote poetry that was at once personal and pastoral, that figured her complex emotional life in simple aspects of nature. This dimension of her work, revealed in a lyric expressiveness that ran counter to hard-edged hermeticism, is more suggestive of certain late-nineteenth-century trends: the *scapigliatura* (*scapigliato* means "disheveled"), a bohemian movement that resorted to heightened, Gothic depictions of love and beauty, and *crepuscolarismo* (*crepuscolo* means "twilight"), a loosely affiliated group that favored introspective, somewhat pessimistic musings on everyday events. Yet Pozzi's forms and themes can also be illuminated if Giovanni Pascoli is included among her diverse influences.

A classics professor jailed on several occasions for his socialist politics, Pascoli wrote poems about the Italian countryside that are at once Virgilian and suffused with his own melancholic experiences. Here is a brief poem entitled "Pianto" ("Weeping") from

his collection *Myricae* (1891–1903), along with a free rendering that aims to give some sense of its prosodic effects:

Più bello il fiore cui la pioggia estiva
lascia una stilla dove il sol si frange;
più bello il bacio che d'un raggio avviva
occhio che piange.

More lovely is the flower where a summer shower
distills a drop that bends the sun awry;
more lovely is the kiss that brightens with bliss
a tearful eye.

As the poem suggests, Pascoli was a master of traditional stanzaic forms, metrically regular and rhymed, occasionally with a refrain. Their influence can perhaps be glimpsed in a poem like Pozzi's "Echi" ("Echoes"), where she used a repetitive, song-like structure to organize her jagged free verse.

Although Pascoli was not a modernist, he promoted what he called a "modernization of the poetic lexicon to renew Italian poetry." In practice this meant extracting subtle resonances from plain yet precise language. He also pursued a poetic experiment that was likely to be attractive to Pozzi: onomatopoeia, sound effects designed to mimic natural phenomena, like birdsong or thunder. He assigned poetry a metaphysical aim: to release the hidden music of things.

As Montale quickly saw, Pozzi's poetry is comparable to "canzonieri d'oggi," latter-day reinventions of Petrarch's sonnet sequence which aim to "give a full portrait of a 'person.'" Like numbered sonnets, her poems sketch the history of a love affair, and they evoke a voice that resonates with psychological nuances.

As in the Petrarchan tradition, furthermore, the theme of memory assumes considerable importance in Pozzi's work, particularly because of her severed relationship to Cervi. Her poems recall the beloved at significant moments in the past, sometimes detaching a physical detail and charging it with emotion, a smile or tone of voice, eyes or lips. Yet this fragmentation of the beloved never underwrites a subjective integrity in the poet-lover, who remains equally fragmented by desire. Verb tense and mood become crucial components here, useful in representing a future projection or a life in the subjunctive. In poems such as "Con-

vegno" ("Rendezvous") and "Certezza" ("Certainty"), abrupt temporal shifts juxtapose an encounter that has yet to occur with memories that compensate for a present feeling of emptiness.

The psychological emphasis that Petrarchism is likely to bring to any poetry was revised by Pozzi's modernism. Like such poet-theorists as Eliot, she occasionally described poetic self-expression in biological terms. In 1933 she wrote to her friend, the poet Tullio Gadenz, that "because of an experience that burns through my entire life, because of an innate, irrevocable adherence to the most profound existence, I believe in poetry. And I live on poetry the way veins live on blood." Biology was her metaphor for a philosophical understanding of poetry that suggests Nietzsche and Heidegger and is sometimes couched in theological language. Poetry, Pozzi wrote to Gadenz, released the "divine flow" of life by "shattering" the "determinate forms" that "shackle" it. What received expression in poetry was transindividual, finally, a way of "living deeply" in language, an authentic existence.

Pozzi's modernist lyrics are not conversational but dramatic, not coherent but fractured. The voice she evokes is usually constructed out of rapid descriptions and analogies, and therefore it is always decentered by the landscape, the weather, a season, a time of day, a quality of light—as well as a wide range of events and emotions. Partly this technique reflects the excruciating sensitivity that characterized her mode of address to the world. In a diary entry from 1935, she described her "disorder" as the feeling that "everything for me is a wound through which my personality is on the brink of gushing, surrendering itself."

Yet she also knew that a disjunction exists between feeling and word, that self-expression in poetry is not so much achieved as complicated by the process of self-construction in language. Art is not life, she argued, but a compensation for frustrated desire. In another letter to Gadenz from 1933, Pozzi explained the "sublime task" of poetry:

to take all the pain that rages over us and shatters our souls, and to soothe it, to transfigure it into the supreme calm of art, just as rivers flow into the blue vastness of the sea. Poetry is a catharsis of pain, as the immensity of death is the catharsis of life.

Here poetry is likened to death. It is a cultural practice wherein the desire to be free from pain is satisfied, offering a release from the forms that constrain life, creating a higher life that answers to, but is so different from, material realities.

For Pozzi, poetry was the place where her identity was hopelessly conflicted. In letters to Vittorio Sereni during 1935, she compares herself to Tonio Kröger, convinced more than ever of the "incompatibility of poetry and life." For Thomas Mann's character, "life" comes to mean marriage to a childhood sweetheart, a path that Kröger chose not to take because of his writing; for Pozzi, it means being "a real woman," a wife to a husband like her classmate, the philosopher Remo Cantoni, adapting to the "practical life" she so much resisted, "losing the most true and least banal part of myself." She imagines a grim fate in which she is neither wife nor poet: "Perhaps my destiny is truly to write beautiful books of fairy tales for children I will never have." Like Kröger, Pozzi entertains a writerly fascination with what he calls "the bliss of the ordinary," *den Wonne der Gewöhnlichkeit*—in her case, not only marriage and motherhood, but the mountains in Lombardy, the land, its simple people. Yet she is unable to lead an ordinary life because of her interest in poetry. Pozzi, unlike Kröger (or Mann), understood this contradiction in the light of the social constrictions she faced as a woman.

Her divided feelings towards her poetry are most apparent in the ways that she revealed its existence. Of course Pozzi sent Cervi poems that she had dedicated to him; she even wrote an early poem about copying some for him "in a school notebook." Her letters and diary entries also indicate that she showed her poems to friends and classmates at the university, to the Treves brothers, Remo Cantoni, Enzo Paci. She made a particular effort to show her poems to poets whose work she admired: Tullio Gadenz and Vittorio Sereni. Sereni even read certain poems that remain unpublished today, and some of her phrases so impressed him that he echoed them in later poems of his own.

All the same, Pozzi's poetry had a very limited circulation. And she seems always to have treated it with extreme modesty. The title she had written on her notebooks was devoid of literary pretensions: it was simply "Parole" ("Words"). In "Copiatura" ("Copying"), dedicated to Cervi, she refers to her work as "le mie poesiucole," my poetic trifles. In a memoir published in 1941 Gadenz recalled the day when, "in making me read several of her most beautiful compositions, she presented them as the songs of an unknown poet."

With others, self-effacement metamorphosed into harsh self-criticism. In February 1935, after mentioning her poetry to her teacher Antonio Banfi, she wrote in her diary: "Why did I tell him that I write horrible verses?" She was very much aware

of his doubts regarding hermetic poetry; in fact, she recapitulated them in the conclusion to her thesis on Flaubert, where she asserted that the discontinuous form typical of hermeticism led to an "intuitive arbitrariness," giving contemporary poetry "the character of an evasion and an internal retreat, no longer a comprehension and resolution of the complete life." After reading her poems, Paci advised her, "Write as little as possible," perhaps in agreement with Banfi's views. This response also precipitated a crisis of self-confidence. In her diary Pozzi asked herself:

What authorizes me to attribute any importance whatsoever to an activity that until yesterday I considered not a duty, but a spiritual pleasure, not hard work, but a consolation? What right have I to think that I am somebody?

It seems significant that Pozzi's ambivalence toward her poetry was displayed in her interactions with men. Her poetic models, her teachers, her classmates were, with few exceptions, men. The most decisive figures in her life were men. She showed them her poetry but at the same time felt that it prevented her from being a proper wife, "a real woman," or even a good student, especially in their eyes.

It was in her poetry, however, that Pozzi gained a particular kind of control over her life. She took charge of its representation. She celebrated the pleasure and managed the pain of her relationships with men, including the male poets who influenced her. And she seems to have shared the greatest number of her poems with women who, she believed, could understand the psychological traumas it represented. In an intense letter to Cervi, one of her last to him, she made clear her feeling that only a woman could comprehend her unsatisfied desire to bear his child.

It is appropriate, then, that a woman who was one of her closest friends proved to be instrumental in preserving her poems. Pozzi made a habit of slipping manuscript versions into Lucia Bozzi's pockets, and not only did Bozzi save these loose sheets but she recopied other poems into her own set of notebooks. Pozzi's editors subsequently relied on these copies to restore the texts that her father had altered and to establish the definitive edition of her poetry.

The aesthetic that informed Pozzi's writing developed in the course of her brief life. Poetry was joined by prose, the lyrics by

a historical novel, self-expression by social engagement. She worked on these projects during the same period and saw them as causing an unsettling shift in consciousness. Writing in 1934 to Tullio Gadenz, she notes, "While I was thinking of new problems whose existence I had hitherto ignored (society, politics, individualism and collectivism) I lost my true being, the tone and equilibrium of my personality: the reign of dreams and poetry collapsed." She concluded her thesis on Flaubert by suggesting that prose was an effective vehicle to "resolve the crisis of the incompatibility between art and life suffered by various Tonio Krögers, by the latest *poètes maudits*."

Thus Pozzi began to draft chapters of a novel that explored class divisions in late-nineteenth-century Lombardy. Her letters to her maternal grandmother, Maria Cavagna Sangiuliani, reveal the nature and depth of her interest in this project. Pozzi's requests for information encompass chronologies, farming techniques, the local convent school, and the sort of sensory details that distinguish her poetry, "the color of the ponies you tamed, the smell of the dormitory rooms, the fabric that was used to make your aprons." Her imagination dwelt on the ordinary and turned political, leading her "towards more democratic constructions, towards the simple, elementary sense of the land and its poor people."

It might be argued that Pozzi's cushioned life in the bourgeoisie prevented her from developing the social consciousness that motivated her plan to write a historical novel. The emphasis on private experience in her poetry, the strong autobiographical tendency, seems to have further insulated her thinking, preempting "democratic constructions." Her poetry does in fact contain images of the working class and the poor. Yet a poem like "La disgrazia" ("Mishap"), where she depicts a dairy boy's injury, avoids any social representation to express compassion, even sentimentality; and in "Echi" ("Echoes"), a poem about women mowing, labor is submitted to the abstraction of poetic form. In other poems, interestingly, class relations obtrude on the aestheticized landscape. "Sera a settembre" ("September evening") accumulates several delicately atmospheric images that are finally disturbed by the lament of gypsies. "Cervino" is even more explicit: the Alpine mountain is likened to the "ribellione di massi" ("revolt of the masses"), a phrase in which the word "massi," referring to size or bulk, puns on the word "masse," referring to crowds or the common people.

Despite Pozzi's growing social consciousness, she never

stopped writing powerful poetry in the hermetic style. After presenting her thesis late in 1935, she produced roughly fifty more poems in the last three years of her life. And when her body was found in 1938, her hand was grasping a sheet of paper where she had copied Vittorio Sereni's poem "Diana," an affectionate invocation of the classical goddess moving through contemporary Milan.

If Pozzi's approach to poetry remained deeply personal, did she see herself in this poem by an intimate friend? Was she aware that Sereni had addressed it to Maria Luisa Bonfanti, who was studying literature at the University of Milan and would soon become Sereni's wife? Was Pozzi's suicide immediately precipitated by another disappointment in love?

In 1955 the British publisher John Calder issued a bilingual selection of Pozzi's poems rendered into English by Nora Wydenbruck, a translator of Rilke. Wydenbruck presented them as a record of Pozzi's experiences with Lombardy, imbued with the sadness that led to her tragic end. A family friend contributed a memoir of the "late poetess."

Wydenbruck's interest was welcomed by the Pozzi family. In her preface she thanks the poet's father "for his kind and patient help in elucidating obscure passages." She translated the texts that he had edited: her version of "The skylark" reflects his deletion of the opening phrase, "After the kiss." She also tried to efface the modernist style of the poems by smoothing out the discontinuities. A reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* described her translation as "overscrupulous sometimes in its purpose of making the original as intelligible as possible."

Wydenbruck herself wrote that "English is perhaps the language best adapted to imitate the terseness and render the delicate overtones of Antonia's diction." But this observation seems to have had little effect on her translating. With the poem "Sole d'ottobre" ("October sun"), for instance, where Pozzi's Italian reads simply "bianca bellezza" ("white beauty") or "in quella [veste]" ("in that [clothing]"), Wydenbruck's English inflates and exoticizes: "white, dazzling splendour," "under his veils."

Against the backdrop of British and American poetic traditions, Antonia Pozzi conjures up suggestive resemblances, some more

telling than others. Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath come readily to mind: the woman whose unsettling poetry is dubiously edited by friends and relatives is now a familiar figure in our literary history. The mark of a compelling translation, however, is its impact on the native literary traditions that it must use to rewrite the foreign work. Pozzi offered me an unusual opportunity to test the expressive possibilities of modernist poetry in English—and to make it a little less familiar.

Relying on recent editions of the Italian texts that return to her notebooks and manuscripts, I have tried to recreate precisely those features that Wydenbruck perceived in the poems. When I read the Italian, however, I heard the stripped-down classicism of H.D. and the angular but mellifluous rhythms of Lorine Niedecker, performances in modernist poetic idioms (imagism, objectivism) quite like *ermetismo*. I even recalled specific poems, like H.D.'s "Wine Bowl" (1931) or Niedecker's suite, "In Exchange for Haiku" (1959), which contains this piece:

July—waxwings
on the berries
have dyed red
the dead
branch

The sound effects that I have sought were not so much in the Italian as inspired by its abrupt musicality, now resonant with Anglo-American poetics.

Especially those written by women. My reading of the Italian texts was mindful that women have played a significant role in building modernist poetic traditions in English: H.D., Amy Lowell, Mina Loy, Lorine Niedecker seem most pertinent to Pozzi in form and theme. My translation affiliates her poetry with theirs in order to reproduce her hermetic style. Yet in establishing this connection the English supplies what she lacked in Italian: a tradition of modernist women poets.

My strategy has guided my choice of poems to translate. I wished to create a selection that respected the important autobiographical dimension of Pozzi's work, especially her relationship with Cervi, but without letting her life displace her interest in poetic form. I have therefore tended to include poems that better lend themselves to a modernist idiom. Very few overlap with the selection in Wydenbruck's version, where the poet's life takes precedence over her poetry.

A translation that draws on resemblances between the foreign poems and poetries in the translating language inevitably highlights differences—of tone and music, diction and syntax, theme and discourse. Pozzi's poetic lexicon includes words like "cuore" ("heart") and "anima" ("soul," "spirit"), which were not trite in her moment but have come to seem so today, especially in English. Ezra Pound referred to this problem in 1929 (the first year of Pozzi's poetic diary) when introducing his versions of the medieval poet Guido Cavalcanti. "Derivative convention and loose usage," he wrote, "have obscured the exact significance of such phrases as: 'The death of the heart,' and 'The departure of the soul.'"

Pound felt that in such cases of linguistic and cultural difference a translation experimentalism was warranted because "the modern audience must in some measure be made aware of the mental content of the older audience." And so he not only retained words like "heart" and "soul" but resorted to occasional archaisms, obsolete words and phrases, whereby his translations helped to situate the poems stylistically in the past.

I have found Pound's example useful, especially in signaling the trace in Pozzi's poems of a turn-of-the-century figure such as Giovanni Pascoli. Not only have I occasionally translated into archaic diction and syntax, but I have sometimes departed from the prosodic freedom of the Italian texts to create quasi-stanzaic structures and rhyme schemes, usually off-rhymes. These strategies might be seen as injecting a Pascolian note into an otherwise modernist style. Readers of contemporary American poetry might also be reminded of projects like Robert Creeley's *For Love* (1962), where modernist poems deeply indebted to William Carlos Williams's plain-language free verse are modeled on the rhyming stanzas of Elizabethan love lyrics.

Of course, no reader is likely to confuse the poetries that this translation puts into play. On the contrary, Pozzi's Lombard landscape, her personal dramas, her shattering experiences, her tragic death all ensure that any resemblance to poets living or dead is purely . . . uncanny.