

On December 2, 1938, Antonia Pozzi lay down in a field on the outskirts of Milan and swallowed poison. She died the following day, leaving behind diaries, notebooks and loose pages of poetry, documenting her twenty-six years of life. From these, her father Roberto Pozzi, a Milanese lawyer, selected and edited her first collection, publishing it as *Parole* the following year. References and dedications to her lover and classics tutor, Antonio Maria Cervi, were eliminated, titles were changed, lines were cut. It was reissued in 1948, still pockmarked by paternal censorship, but with a preface by Eugenio Montale. Subsequent volumes have restored much emotional and erotic honesty to the poems. Editions by Alessandra Cenni, Onorina Dino and other female scholars from the mid-1980s onwards have tempered what Peter Robinson describes in the introduction to his new translation of Pozzi's poems as the "saccharine", while a collection by Lawrence Venuti, *Breath: Poems and letters* (2002), modulated her northern European pitch to chime with American women modernists such as H. D. and Amy Lowell.

In 1955, Nora Wydenbruck was the first to translate into English *Parole* and selected poems from *La vita sognata*, a short sequence set out by the poet in her notebooks, but which was bowdlerized by her father after her death. Working from his texts and staying in the Pozzi family home, Wydenbruck produced a sanitized version. A reviewer in the *TLS* wrote: "nobody who likes Montale should be misled into thinking that any spark of his fire may be found in her work . . . They convey the not very unusual emotions of a college girl holiday-making in the Dolo-

With impure lips

THEA LENARDUZZI

Antonia Pozzi

POEMS

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mites". Robinson hopes that his versions will "sound as near to the Italian in English as possible" and that they will return her to the *linea lombarda*, where she "properly belongs", alongside her close friend Vittorio Sereni, whose poem "Diana" was found on her unconscious body. *Parole* makes up most of Robinson's selection, too, and ordered by date (between 1929 and 1938) and place of composition, it is as much a chronicle of Pozzi's life as it is an example of the poetic localism of her Lombard contemporaries.

These are poems about "frosty fields, silver trees, fair chrysanthemums", about "Night's falling", sleep and "the final loophole / in the shadow", as well as about winds that sweep across the foggy plains and high pastures she climbed. She writes about her affair with Cervi, from whom she was separated by her father in 1932, and the fear of not realizing her potential and of what that potential might be: "io credo e temo che una vera donna non sarò mai, che anzi, cercando malamente di esserlo, finirei col perdere la parte

più vera e meno banale di me", she wrote in a letter to Sereni in 1935 (I think and fear that a real woman I will never be, that indeed, in trying hard to be one, I will end up losing the most real and less trivial part of myself). Longing and attrition are everywhere. When she is away from them, she craves the mountains only to quiver at their chill that "penetrates right to the wrists". In winter, she writes of summer; in springtime, she evokes "the yellowed leaves of autumn" only to dread these signs of transition in "Premature Autumn", written in August.

Robinson reinforces this edition with new translations from *La vita sognata*. Written in 1933, during the final stages of her relationship with Cervi, it describes her lying "prostrate / as if you were a saint", and calling out to him "with impure lips" (this last image was excised in Roberto Pozzi's edition and in Wydenbruck's translation). She mourns their "holy parable", the motherhood she would never experience and, in "You'd Have Been", the child that she yearned to carry but which "stayed down there / with the dead, / the unborn". The winds have given way to stillness, "limpid sky", rain and "a single cloud / going faraway".

Robinson is the first to translate into English five unedited poems, including "Song of My Nakedness" and "Trifles", which were written in pencil and scored or rubbed out in Pozzi's manuscripts. The title of "abbozzo" (draft), he notes, is in lower case. Dated "mar-

zo-agosto 1933", it shows Pozzi at her most risqué, seeming to transmute her self-consciousness to the level of calligraphy. An extended metaphor likens her to a tree from which a mythical Firebird has flown, and which "writhes in its intimate sinew", waiting for "black night with no stars no fountains", when

in a final blinding flash
there'll rise there'll run through its trunk
far as the tip of its fronds –
its only good –
the burning memory of the Bird –

(in un balenio estremo accecante
sorgerà correrà per il fusto
sino alla cima delle fronde –
unico bene suo –
il ricordo infuocato dell'Uccello –)

Robinson's translation is faultless, the rush of her desire preserved in the words and syntax, so that further explanation is unnecessary, but – if only to acknowledge Pozzi's daring – it is worth pointing out that *uccello* is slang for penis.

"Prayer to Poetry" and "A Fate" suggest that Pozzi expected too much of her craft; "La poesia è una catarsi del dolore, come l'immensità della morte è una catarsi della vita", she explained in a letter to a friend. In the year before her death, Mussolini was at the height of his power and war was inevitable. Her output dwindled as though this combination of personal and political pressures overwhelmed her. Timed to coincide with the centenary of her birth this month, Peter Robinson's volume will revive interest in Pozzi's legacy and lend new weight to her words: "now you accept / you're a poet".