

Essays/Reviews in tandem with the special T S Eliot issue, Vol 51, No 3-4



Salvador Dali: The Persistence of Memory

Roula-Maria Dib is a university professor at the American University in Dubai where she teaches courses of English language and literature. She has published some poems, essays, and articles in magazines and journals such as *Renaissance Hub*, *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, and *The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism (ARAS)*. She is also currently finishing her PhD in Modernist Literature and Psychoanalysis from the University of Leeds in the UK. Her dissertation focuses on Modernist literature (namely the works of James Joyce, Hilda Doolittle, and W.B. Yeats) in light of Carl Jung's psychological theory of individuation, or spiritual transformation. The themes that pervade her work usually revolve around different aspects of human nature, art ekphrasis, surrealism, and the collective unconscious.

Roula-Maria Dib

The Waste Land: A Dali-esque Counterpart

While it has not been noted the T.S. Eliot was ever influenced by Surrealism (nor do I claim that he ever was), and despite the disjunction between the two mediums of poetry and painting, I do see a similarity in style between *The Waste Land* and some Surrealist artists' visual techniques, especially that of Salvador Dalí. At first glance, the connection is not so obvious. But then I glance – and listen – again. When T.S. Eliot asks, 'What are the roots

that clutch, what branches grow/ Out of this stony rubbish?’ (ll. 19-20) I cannot help but hear the answer, or at least a visual enactment of these verses in Salvador Dali’s ‘Three Ages,’ where there are tree roots grasping the dark soil near the illusion of a phantom of old age. The image of that desperate grasp of a war-torn root-hand is also rekindled by Dali’s ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans,’ where the self-destructive monster’s skeletal root-hands clutch at its dismembered parts and the dry sand. There is also a great invocation of the desert landscape, melting clocks, and dead tree branch in Dali’s famous ‘Persistence of Memory’ whenever I come across these verses from *The Waste Land*: ‘The dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/ And the dry stone no sound of water’ (ll. 23-24). In the melting cheese-inspired painting of ‘The Persistence of Memory,’ clocks liquesce away in the sun in a desert landscape, with ants (symbolizing decay) crawling along the surface of a pocket watch; the fluidity, relativity, and non-linearity of time depicts the same suppression of the laws of time that Eliot uses to make history and myth available to the here and now of the poem.

With the reconstitution of time and space to portray a sense of spiritual dryness of modern man, and within the contexts of deserts, ants, and melting clocks, I see how Salvador Dali’s paintings are mimetic of T. S. Eliot’s poetry. Looking at Dali’s paintings, notably ‘The Three Ages,’ ‘The Persistence of Memory,’ ‘Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee,’ ‘Isle of the Dead,’ ‘Portrait of Mae West,’ ‘Premonition of Civil War,’ ‘Anthropomorphic Cabinet,’ ‘Freud with a Snail’s Head,’ ‘Paranoiac Visage,’ and ‘Endless Enigma,’ one cannot help but hear the echoes of bangs and whimpers from Eliot’s *The Waste Land* resonating through their different graphical versions of Surrealist paintings. The re-integrated figments of Dali’s dream-like images renders his art another version of the poetry Eliot spoke of as being ‘...a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, and images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.’¹ While Surrealism’s eccentricity allows for the borrowing, breaking, and re-arrangement of the colourful contents of the unconscious, T.S. Eliot, in his spiritual epic, *The Waste Land*, picks up shards of fertility myths, Fisher King legends, ritual theories of Jessie Weston and Lord James Frazer, and combines the different personages of various stories into one new drama; hence ‘the heap of broken images’ (line 20). Within the framework of the theme of decline and renewal of faith and under the rubric of the early twentieth century’s spirit of protest, T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* and Salvador Dali’s paintings have a lot more in common than meets the eye.

Interestingly, the year when *The Waste Land* was published coincided with the time when the Dadaists were experimenting with automatic writing. The Surrealists believed that this was a new explanation for the idea of supremacy in art – the supremacy of image-forming and the unconscious’s organizing power, which is manifested not only through automatic-writing, but also through the exploration of dream images and conversation with people in trances. In other words, the Surrealists strove to explore psychic reality, perhaps as an artistic expression and adjunct of Freud’s theory of the unconscious mind. While the principles of Surrealism (calling for the unleashing repressed psychic energies and destroying established moral values) seemingly oppose those of T.S. Eliot, and despite the fact that in Eliot’s letter to Theodora Bosanquet he dismissed the importance of the movement altogether, claiming that he ‘cannot feel that the theories of the *surréalistes* are of sufficient importance to justify us in treating them with so much care,’² I can still spot how the latter’s poetry contains some motifs and style present in Dali’s paintings.

¹ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent,’ *Selected Essays* (New York, 1932), p. 8.

² Eliot’s letter to Theodora Bosanquet, 21 June 1926, in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber, 2012), III, p. 189.

Firstly, Surrealist artists first started their painting style with automatism, moving on to dream illustrations, and finally ending up with drawing enigmatic images that combine seemingly unrelated elements to form meaningful figures – the latter style which was adopted and mastered by Dali. It is that specific characteristic of Surrealist paintings that is found in some of Eliot's verses. For example, the image of the woman who pulls out her hair in 'What the Thunder Said' is combined with that of bats and babies:

A woman drew her long hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells. (ll. 377-384)

This combination of seemingly unrelated objects into a mysterious, grotesque whole establishes a Surrealist, dream-like quality of the scene in an 'Unreal city/ Under the brown fog of a winter noon' (ll. 207-209). In this image, the awkward combination of the woman, the bats, baby faces, upside-down towers, and voices from water wells leaves a grand impression of meaningfulness despite the inability to accurately interpret this menagerie – which is precisely what produces the true Surrealist quality of perturbing the viewer. This shares similarity with many of Dali's paintings, notably his 'Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening,' where the naked, sleeping Gala is surrounded by a whole range of seemingly unrelated objects: pomegranates, a fish, two tigers, two water droplets, a gun, Dali's signature long-legged elephant, and a bee all in a surreal landscape of a quiet sea. Moreover, in Dali's 'Portrait of Mae West,' with the woman's curtain hair, the wall and floor for the upper and lower parts of her face, poster eyes, clock nose, and lips sofa, portrays another example of Surrealist joining of incongruous elements together to 'produce a perceptible, but indefinable sense of relationship.'³ These examples depict how 'The Surrealist effect is like that of an image remembered from a dream; it embodies a profound emotional impression, but its meaning remains elusive.'⁴

Furthermore, *The Waste Land*, in its structure, is double-layered, combining the banality of modern life with the wealth of dark, suggestive myth. Both Eliot and Dali use this two-layered structure as well, in their juxtaposition of the ordinary with the supernatural or mythological. For instance, Eliot adds in an allusion to Diana and Actaeon as a parallel scene with that of Sweeney as Mrs. Porter: 'But at my back from time to time I hear/ The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring/ Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring./ O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter/ and on her daughter' (ll. 196-200). The parallelism is drawn between Sweeney and Actaeon, for judging from Sweeney's roles in Eliot's previous poems, 'Sweeney Erect' and 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' he seems to be a rakish figure who approaches Mrs. Porter the same way Actaeon approaches Diana (by surprising her while she is bathing). Another paradoxical pairing appears with the Rhine maidens and the polluted river Thames, and the dull conversation of the non-communicative couple: 'I never know what you are thinking. Think./ I think we are in rats' alley. Where the dead men lost their bones' (ll. 114-116) with the description of Cleopatra in her chair, 'like a burnished throne' (line 77). On the other hand, Dali also mingles different, contradicting elements in many of

³ Jacob Korg, 'Modern Art Techniques in the Waste Land,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 18.4 (Blackwell, 1960), p. 461.

⁴ Ibid.

his works, notably in his 'Soft Construction with Boiled Beans' (also known as 'Premonition of Civil War') where he pairs murder scenes with beans, playing on the themes of war and food together (meat and beans/vegetables).

Another recurrent motif that appears in Dali's work is that of the set of drawers, which is often aligned with something completely different. For example, in his 'Anthropomorphic Cabinet' (1936), Dali gives the Louvre's famous Venus of Milo sculpture a set of drawers stretching from her chest to her pelvis (where there is a keyhole). The Venus he modifies is a reclining one with her head bowed, and the chest of drawers is a contradiction of classical beliefs about the human body, which are shattered with the advent of modern psychoanalysis; according to Dali: 'The only difference between immortal Greece and contemporary times is Sigmund Freud, who discovered that the human body, purely Platonic in the Greek epoch, is nowadays full of secret drawers that only psychoanalysis is capable to open.' The drawing itself is a metamorphosing of the drawers (the unconscious mind with its secrets and hidden memories) into the woman. Adding to the theme of psychoanalysis and arbitrary pairings is Dali's sketch of 'Freud with a Snail Head,' making the awkward connection between the two completely different figures, seeing how Freud's 'skull looked like a Burgundy snail.'⁵ Moreover, what both Eliot and Dali strive to do is to see what is hidden in the memory of the human race and express it in terms of the obvious in the present. However, Eliot seems to tackle the inherent collective memory (mythology) more than Dali, who appears to be more interested in the contents of the personal unconscious. So on a more Freudian note (rather than Eliot's more Jungian expression of the collective unconscious), Dali seeks to speak to Eliot's paradoxical pairings, albeit through a more personal approach and creates general collective motifs that stem out of his expressions of the subconscious mind.

From double layers I move on to the Surrealist idea of the 'double image' that is also found in Eliot's visual puns of *The Waste Land* in a way that pretty much resembles Dali's 'Paranoiac Visage' and 'Endless Enigma.' As a surrealist technique for achieving ambiguous effects, the idea of the double image allows a single form to assume more than one identity. In Dali's 'Paranoiac Visage,' for example, people are seated on the sand, with most of them facing a dome-shaped structure with some trees and a part of a wall behind it. However, the painting turns into a half-face of an anguished woman when we rotate it to the right. The people in the sand become the woman's facial features – like the paranoid mind, attributing different identities and secret functions to ordinary objects and people. Another example of Dali's paranoiac-critical method is in his 'Three Ages' (depicting old age, adolescence, and infancy) where he draws scenes of Port Ligat that appear through rock openings, simultaneously becoming faces with features comprised of mountains (eyes) and backs of people (noses and mouths). Similarly, in *The Waste Land*, Eliot tends to liquidize and metamorphose his episodes, characters, and symbols as they transform identities according to the changing contexts of the poem. For example, single-eyed Mr. Eugenides 'the Smyrna merchant' (line 209) becomes the 'one-eyed merchant' (line 52) in the Tarot cards and is also related to 'Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives...old man with wrinkled dugs' (ll. 218, 228), who later shifts into 'the young man carbuncular...with one bold stare' (ll. 231-232). Moreover, *The Tempest's* Ferdinand is also the wounded Fisher King that is imprisoned in the barren, arid industrial city: 'While I was fishing in the dull canal/ On a winter evening round behind the gashouse/ Musing upon the king my brother's wreck/ And on the king my father's death before him.' Eliot juxtaposes the Thames of the olden days with the mucky modern one when he describes the current filth of the river and includes a line from Spenser's 'Prothalamion': 'Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.' With that,

⁵ Salvador Dali, *Diary of a Genius*, (Solar, 2007), p. 145.

Eliot highlights the double nature of the river, which was once holy/fertile and has become filthy and barren:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear. (ll. 176-186)

Eliot, in *The Waste Land*, has a lot to say about the problem of weak spirituality in his time, something that Dali also strives to do through his medium of art. As rats crawl along the lines of *The Waste Land* and ants lurk and creep around in many of Dali's paintings, the state of spiritual corruption is acknowledged and reflected on both the personal (subconscious) and collective (racial memory) levels. However, not only is the subject matter of Eliot's poetry reflected by the themes in Dali's paintings, but the common styles of fragmentation/re-integration, sacralization of the ordinary, the spirit of protest, multiplicity of awareness, paradoxical pairings, and the joining of incongruous elements are expressive of the turn of the century's contributions in the scientific and philosophical values of the time through psychoanalysis. And although Eliot's first encounter with Surrealism was not exactly love at first sight, I see *The Waste Land* again in many of Dali's works, with a silent confirmation that this surrealist artist really is Eliot's contemporary in the graphic arts; in other words, that is the Eliot who eventually made friends with Surrealism a few years after he had denied publication of a manuscript on Surrealism in *Criterion* in 1926, the Eliot who ended up publishing several Surrealist works and attending the London Surrealism Exhibition in 1936. Perhaps Eliot's style and concepts of *The Waste Land* may live on through the visual just as well as through verse.

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Roland John has had a long association with *Agenda* as a contributor and reviewer. *Agenda Editions* published his first full collection *Believing Words Are Real* in 1985. His prose books include *A Beginner's Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, his latest poetry collection is *A Lament for England*. He is currently working on a new collection.

Roland John

Posthumous Cantos Edited by Massimo Bacigalupo Carcanet 220pp £14.99

In 1917 Pound published his first three cantos in *Poetry* (Chicago), the start of his long poem that he would work at for the next five decades. All of the elements and many of the characters that will inhabit *The Cantos* are already here in this false start that he will rearrange and edit for *A Draft of XVI Cantos* in 1925. The retelling of Odysseus' descent into the underworld in the original Canto III becoming the poem's true start. The troubadours are here, along with Confucius, Catullus, Wyndham Lewis and all of Pound's enthusiasms for history, even the obscure John Heydon makes his appearance. He will not turn up again until Canto LXXXVII.

After the uncertain start Pound became more confident and the cantos follow on charting his life and interests. These new cantos were selected and edited from his notebooks leaving a wealth of material that he did not use in *The Cantos*, but keeping the notebooks suggests that he might have made changes in future editions, after all many of the publications were published as 'drafts. Bacigalupo's book offers a selection based on quality and coherence. It is a look into how Pound worked rather than actual missing or new cantos.

The material is presented in chronological sections, Part IV for example being 'Voices of War' covering 1940-45. Apart from a few references to Mussolini the war is almost absent. There are workings from Confucius and Erigina, the latter talking in a stage Irish 'sure he's over there on the other soide wid dh Christians/but he will be running off down into the owld pagody/every now an then' as well as some fine observations of the natural world.

But here in Tigullio
emerald over sapphire
 april birds thru stillness
when the fig swells in a fortnight
a far clack of bamboo poles shaking down olives

That last line would be slightly altered for the fragment in *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX – CXVII*.

Probably the most significant section covers the period 1944 -1945, these are the drafts that Pound wrote in Italian. After the Italian cantos LXXII and LXXIII Pound had thought about writing a decad in Italian and produced extensive drafts, some of the ideas, phrases and images ended up in *The Pisan Cantos*. Bacigalupo has done an excellent job in rescuing these drafts and producing readable English versions.

The section covering Pound's incarceration at the US Army's Disciplinary Training Centre at Pisa in 1945 reveals his editing of what would become *The Pisan Cantos*. Canto LXXXIV which ends this group of cantos with the couplet 'If the hoar frost grip thy tent/Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent.' was originally longer and more meandering.

Pound said that he wanted the poem to end with the line 'To be men not destroyers.' but he also wrote in a fragment dated 1966.

Her name was Courage
& is written Olga.

These lines are for the
ultimate CANTO

whatever I may write
in the interim.

Appropriately the last section contains fragments written for Olga Rudge his long-time companion. These are moving love poems honouring the woman who loved and protected him in his later years. '& that she would not relinquish hope/& that here was a will to go on living'.

There is nothing unexpected in these extracts from his notebooks, what they reveal is what he left out showing there is more coherence in *The Cantos* than some critics would allow. They show his talent for the memorable phrase and his observation of the natural world. Pound is an exceptional nature poet. Whilst some of this material has been published elsewhere, it is valuable to have this generous selection in one place, particularly the false start of the first three cantos. There are useful notes describing the conditions of the fragments often explaining how Pound used these drafts in finalised cantos. It is perhaps a glimpse at a poet working. This is a valuable book for anyone interested in the mechanics of writing a major poem.

William Bedford's poetry has appeared *Agenda*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Encounter*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The John Clare Society Journal*, *London Magazine*, *The Malahat Review*, *The New Statesman*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Tablet*, *Temenos*, *The Warwick Review*, *The Washington Times* and many others. Red Squirrel Press published *The Fen Dancing* in March 2014 and *The Bread Horse* in October 2015. He won first prize in the 2014 *London Magazine* International Poetry Competition.

William Bedford

Abegail Morley's *In the Curator's Hands*

Abegail Morley has already given us several of the most original collections of poetry of recent years, the power of her achievement frequently coming from her use of ordinary domestic situations to create a disturbing sense of threat, using immense technical control to explore experience most of us would find intolerable. Hugo Williams was one of the first critics, in his review of *How to Pour Madness into a Teacup*, to celebrate her gift of lifting 'the painted veil of everyday life' to allow us a glimpse of the truth that lies beneath appearances. With *In the Curator's Hands*, the metaphorical texture of her work takes on a wider political dimension, clearly expressed in the publisher's blurb, where she is celebrated for using 'the voices of books, paper, documents, photographs and characters to create and curate a dystopian archive.'

In 'voicing' these 'books, papers, documents, photographs, characters' she creates a frightening 'dystopian archive,' as the blurb claims, and as the first stanza of 'The Depository' sets out, with the victims 'assembled sheet by sheet' like the victims of some totalitarian holocaust, where the 'curator swears he never catalogued us,/throws up his arms in shock.' Is the curator god/or some sort of Aristotelean first mover? The epigraph to the very next poem 'Fonds' – '*The entire body of records created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator.*' - invites that interpretation. But however one reads the metaphor/allegory, in reality this curator 'can crease us,/snap open our spines,' while 'We rot in tattered boxes.'

The victims curated here – and in history – receive no answers, like the 'bygone women' in 'Lifting the Lid.' 'They're archived too, shelved by age, arranged by date.' This library curator is as efficient as the men who organised the concentration camps of the last century. 'Lifting the Lid' is both very specific – I saw my own grandmother in those 'scoured steps' and bleeding knuckles – but also universal, inviting us to make the connections. And given the tightness of the imagery – the thematic unity which is there throughout the entire collection – we immediately remember the curator of the first poem who *might* intervene, qualified here in 'Lifting the Lid' by the poet's chilling: 'But he doesn't.'

This thematic 'Obsession' – to glance forwards to the final poem – helps me see why Karen Dennison's cover design is so frighteningly right, capturing a 'ghostly' haunting that is not about ghosts – or not *only* or *deeply* about ghosts – but truly moving, showing a woman trapped inside a dystopian nightmare, which may be physical, may be spiritual, may be psychological, but is a shocking haunting.

Yet what I finally want to suggest is that in *In the Curator's Hands* the poems do offer an answer to their own anxieties, most powerfully in the collection's final poem 'The Curator's Obsession': 'When I reach for her, the box is dumbstruck, limbless.' I read this as the poet's – and indeed the language's – familiar problem: how do we transcend language and talk about the things words resist. When Wittgenstein said 'Of that which we cannot speak, we

should be silent,' he wasn't saying that ethics, aesthetics, religion, love can't be talked about. He was saying they couldn't be talked about in the language of logical positivism, the language of proof and scientific verification. Some things are beyond such verification. Music and poetry take us there, and I believe that is the truth Abigail Morley is trying and succeeding to show us.

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In the Curator's Hands (Indigo Pamphlets) 2017

Michael Loveday's debut poetry pamphlet *He Said / She Said* was published by HappenStance Press (2011). His book reviews have previously appeared in *Magma*, *Envoi*, *London Grip*, *Write Out Loud*, *Eyewear* and *The North*.

Michael Loveday

Myra Schneider, *Persephone in Finsbury Park*, (Second Light Publications, 2016), £7.95

One of Myra Schneider's gifts is to hold an awareness of polarities – positive and negative, outside and inside – as she celebrates life's ordinary miracles and conflicts. In her fourteenth collection *Persephone in Finsbury Park* (Second Light Publications, 2016), Schneider continues to mine this trademark territory with verve and agility. Here are the consolations of the sensory world which are seen so often to alleviate anxiety: 'the lucidity of a crescent moon emerging above the beech trees | in the front garden calmed her down and somehow filled her | with hope.' ('Persephone in Finsbury Park', Part One, p.31). 'To combat | thumping pain and racing fear, I picture | a Matisse-red room with French windows,' ('3 AM', p.13). Here too is Schneider's urgent fear that solace will not last, or that reality – with 'its granite layers' ('How to Find Weightlessness', p.12) – brings too much accompanying darkness:

[...] all that blue
which insists it won't end – you don't want it to.
[...] You try to pretend wrangling, bombing,
destitution are thousands of miles away.
(‘Aldeburgh in August’, p.15).

The collection is structured into three parts – beginning with poems about what might be called commonplace miracles; a middle section comprising portraits of womanhood; and a concluding narrative poem rewriting the Persephone myth into contemporary London. Within it are poems about sleeplessness, breathing and relaxing, modern urban housebuilding, encountering a dog in a local park, images of wings, a gift of preserve, alongside elegies and praise poems to friends, family, or figures from history (Anne Cluysenaar, Anne Askew, Mrs. Beeton, a grandmother, an elderly mentor, a neighbour).

Schneider's keynote throughout the book, as elsewhere, might be the balancing of threat and consolation. External reality may menace - as in this image of birds:

[...] they'll swoop,
scrawny necks outstretched, wrap themselves
round your body, squeeze
your breath and their beaks will pierce
your flesh to the heart.
(‘Wings’, p.10)

But rarely does Schneider's worldview exclude hope: transcendent images of escape or weightlessness repeatedly recur:

[...] I let go
of distress and feel such lightness of being
I could lift off into the blue like a damselfly.
(‘3 AM’, p. 13).

Her mode is perhaps most often visual, expressing painterly rhapsodies in celebration of the seen: 'Suddenly I see those hallelujahs of luminous gold || which stream from sun and horizon in a late Turner watercolour' ('His Gift from Brazil', p.18). Indeed, so closely do Schneider's narrators connect with the world's ordinary joys, they can achieve a kind of neo-Romantic bodily communion – as here, where the speaker immerses herself into the flower like Basho's bee, seemingly reluctant to emerge: 'I too enter the nectar-laden chambers and feed.' ('The First of Spring', p.9).

Another of Schneider's virtues is a charming humility. Of the ordinary Swede, she claims: 'I admire it for making | no pretence to be other than it is.' ('The Swede', p.16), then proceeds:

[...] I begin to wonder why
[...] we keep
trying to crack the secret which began the universe.

Better to consider the casserole we're having for supper,
('The Swede', p.16).

Nevertheless in other poems, especially the poems about women, Schneider celebrates fierce and ambitious intellectual striving. In the portrait 'Anne Askew' (p.23) a chiming 'I shall remember her' refrain carries home the message: 'For [...] striking out on her own path, | for her quick educated mind, her ability to discourse with learned men, | I shall remember her.' ('Anne Askew', p.23)

As well as the comforts of the natural world, cherished friends or family may offer consolation, even when only ghostly presences - as here in the poignant elegy to Anne Cluysenaar:

[...] there you are breathing

in the budding warmth, freed from the last
of October now and that distressed message
you sent before your life was snatched.
('The First of Spring', p.9).

Occasionally, Schneider's poetry can veer away from distilled, compressed language into territory that is more expository:

[...] I also learnt she'd suffered
several miscarriages, bore two children who died in infancy,
[...]
For all the thousands of pages this woman produced
in her short life, the real Mrs Beeton didn't leave
a single word about what she thought, felt, endured.
('The Real Mrs Beeton', p.25).

Yet this is offset by the many moments when vocabulary startles and ideas leap with exactly that organic aptness that Coleridge claimed was evidence of true Imagination. Here is one thrilling example:

I'm moonless as tonight's sky, helpless
as a rabbit's blind and furless kits
and in my body's cave misgivings hang
from the walls like folded wings.
(‘3 AM’, p.13).

It is notable throughout that whenever Schneider's instinctive gentleness feels it might err into excess delicacy, she undercuts the mood with depictions of disturbance, stress, ugliness or unease.

The poems in this collection fiercely resist negativity, oppression, and low self-esteem: ‘I rebelled against the weight of her disapproval,’ (‘The Real Mrs Beeton’, p.24). ‘Now a voice in her head | rapped: *smartass, you're a nothing, will never stand on your own feet* [...] she defied it,’ (‘Persephone in Finsbury Park’, p.32). In particular this book celebrates female independence and achievement in the face of oppression, continuing Schneider's work from previous collections such as *What Women Want* (Second Light Publications, 2012). Schneider also develops the approach used in her previous long poem ‘The Minotaur’ (*The Door to Colour*, Enitharmon Press, 2014, pp.67-79) and rewrites classical myth, this time turning the story of Persephone into a modern feminist narrative about achieving independence while balancing parental and romantic bonds, which is among her most ambitious work.

Schneider is a significant and much-loved poet – in whose work a critical despair at the state of the world is balanced by hope, consolation, attention and celebration.

Anita Money worked for several years as an editorial assistant and treasurer for *Agenda*, one of the best known and highly respected poetry journals founded in 1959 by Ezra Pound and William Cookson. Since 2001, she has been working in public sector education. Her father, John Bicknell Auden worked for the Geological Survey of India until just after India's Independence. Her mother, Sheila Bonnerjee, a painter, was the granddaughter of W.C. Bonnerjee, the First President of the Indian National Congress. Born in Calcutta in 1941, Anita studied English at St. Hugh's College, Oxford.

Anita Money

Imagine: New and Selected Poems by Shanta Acharya

HarperCollins Publishers, India. 2017 (250 pages)

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Imagine is dedicated to Shanta Acharya's parents and the title plays a dual role, both overall title of the poems selected from five previous collections and the title given to a collection of new poems forming the last section of the book. These poems span a period from 1994 (when Acharya's first collection, *Not This, Not That*, was published in India by Rupa & Co) until 2016, and are arranged chronologically, retaining the identity of each collection with its original title and introductory quotations that act like sign posts to understanding. It is interesting to read through, notice evolving thoughts, variations and experimentation, but there is a basic familiar pattern created by Acharya's particular concerns.

Metaphysical thinking and myth are essential to Acharya's understanding of life and shape her poetry. She does not strain after virtuosity but finds words, rhythms and forms to express her emotions and thoughts, as noted by Nissim Ezekiel. What is idiosyncratic and adds a particular character to her poetry is her ironic sensibility and a practical and playful awareness which blends with the more abstract thinking and deeper emotions, providing a lighter register. She roams freely through Indian and Western culture sharing as she does with so many Indians a dual heritage. In 'Loose Talk' from *Numbering Our Days Illusions* (1995), there is an interesting reflection on her mother tongues.

You can hold your peace all on your own
if you can learn to hold your tongue.
And, if anything is not to your liking, it is best
to take the name of the Lord, *Hari Om*,
for that is not in vain – with some such words
my tongue-tied grandmother gifted away
the treasures of her wisdom to her daughter.

My mother, sharing her legacy, taught me yoga –
how to bend my body like a bow, raise it like a snake,
roar like a lion, stretch my tongue as far as my nose .
I encouraged my mother to loosen her tongue,
it was her story I yearned to hear
in her words, unfurling like the national flag
on Independence Day to the anthem we sang together.

My mother tongue is Oriya –

mysterious as Chilika, lyrical as Konarka.
I grew up in English, inhabiting words
from a distant island that took me home.

Myth, Art and Literature trigger further invention and Acharya has many poems in response to exhibitions and paintings – Anish Kapoor at the Hayward, Damien Hirst at Tate Modern, Belshazzar's Feast in the National Gallery, Matisse's L'Atelier Rouge among others. Characters in literature and legend also elicit a new life, whether an entertaining resume of Chekov's *The Seagull*, inspired by some remarks overheard from members of the audience at a production, 'Mrs Kafka's Dilemma', a fantasy projection, or 'Eurydice's Story' where we meet both Isis and Krishna.

Technology also provides a witty take on matchmaking in 'Dear Tech Support' and 'Shaadi.com' sending up the whole business of marriage and the inflated hopes of humans, the anonymous programming instructions an inflexible purveyor of reality reducing expectation step by step.

Though Acharya lives in London she visits her family in Orissa yearly. Her attachment to India is intellectual, spiritual and emotional. It is revealing that her doctorate thesis at Oxford was on the influence of Indian thought on Ralph Waldo Emerson. She relates to reality, as has been remarked by the poet, K. Satchidanandan, in a deeply Indian way without being insular. She is drawn to ideas which are Indian in origin, though they have entered a universal, cultural, common ground – the perennial wisdom which attracted the poet Kathleen Raine among others.

I first read Shanta Acharya's poems in 1997 when working at *Agenda* and editing an anthology issue which had, among its intentions, the wish to celebrate India's 50 years of Independence. She was one of several Indian poets writing in English whose poems appeared in that issue. I later reviewed two of her collections – *Shringara* published in 2006 and *Dreams That Spell the Light* published in 2010. The word 'Shringara', as she pointed out to me, had many meanings – bodily adornment, beauty, art, but also love, decorum and harmony and this interplay of meanings is something you find in her poems.

In the selection from *Shringara*, there are moving poems in memory of her maternal grandfather and her father. In 'Coconut Milk', for example, cooking prawn curry triggers memories of her father. The poem shows something of Acharya's style and is an affirmation of life in our memory of the dead.

Moving to the rhythm of old Hindi film songs
you loved to hear, I savour your presence, father.
The sun retires behind trees
swaying to the *raga* and *rasa* of life –

teaching me that like the sun, moon and stars
you are always there, though briefly revealed.

'My Good Luck Home' from *Looking In, Looking Out* (2005) describes objects from around the world – India, China, Japan, Egypt – which guard her in her adopted homeland.

leaving us with the legacy of an understanding –
the knowledge of what it means
to carry a whole household in oneself,
to be so perfectly self-contained, poised
at the centre of all manner of creatures unsheltered.

From the same collection, 'Of Magic and Men' (the play on Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* should not be lost on readers) is about faith, superstition, rationality and human instinct.

In a Hindu world of fantasy and fable,
myths, legends, gods and demons,
irrationality appears reasonable

The clear light of day obfuscates while chaos enlightens

.....

Tough Seshan's degree in physics does not free him.
Sai Baba bends his mind with a navratna ring,
out goes his hard-headed, Harvard training.

Both sides remain united in the struggle.
God's in heaven and all's wrong with the world –

except miracles unfurl daily to the faithful
not impervious to the mystery of the universe.

Mythology reveals linking patterns in cultures and one can find Indian equivalents to Greek and Roman Gods, but Acharya goes a step further in her prose piece 'Eurydice's Story' (from the last section of new work) and with a certain humour, underlying her serious intent, draws Eurydice into an Indian and Egyptian world where, in her search to give Orpheus a decent burial, she meets both Isis and Krishna, the latter a musician like Orpheus, making music with his flute. In an earlier poem 'Highgate Cemetery' (from *Shringara*) Krishna is imagined talking to Marx.

The universal nostalgia for home and childhood that reflects a more complex yearning for home surfaces in unexpected ways. In 'Return of the Exile' (from *Dreams That Spell the Light*) with its quotation from the Qur'an – 'We are all returning', you have a *cri de coeur*:

Nourished under alien skies,
I come looking for certainties,
a child alone woken by nightmares,
unable to drift back to a land of dreams.

Gone is the mansion, the garden I grew up in,
gone are my people, landscape of my childhood.

But in 'Wishes' from the same collection, after a humorous list of the exertions she and indeed humans in general make in the desperate hope of realising wishes –

Having tied strings on trees, walls, stones,
wished on the new moon, fallen eyelashes,
tossed coins into rivers, fountains, wells,
sometimes over my head and shoulder
in more places than I can care to remember,
circled several times the sacred scarab,
climbed mountains, hugged pillars, statues;

.....

she concludes:

I have learnt that wishes are milestones
 on our journey back home.
Nothing disappears without a trace,
only our pilgrimage transforms as we learn
to celebrate our brief passage with grace.

There are many lines in her poems which make a point simply and often with a quiet irony, and it is this quality that I enjoy most about her work. In 'Italian Prayer' (from *Dreams That Spell the Light*) she compares the temple of Jagannatha and the basilica of San Marco:

How does one accustomed to the cold candour of stones
bend one's knees in reverence to the opulence of marble?

or visiting the 'Mosque of Wazir Khan' –

Once a celebration of magnificence,
a thriving enterprise between commerce and learning
the mosque has now lost its calling.

.....

Moving from one world into the next,
I enter paradise on earth, I am blessed.

Acharya has an active interest and concern with what is happening in the world and there are numerous poems which reflect this. 'Remembering Gandhi' (from *Shringara*) with its subtle balancing refrain – 'transformed you into a saint, to a shrewd politician' – reminds us without overstatement of the inglorious effects of Empire and the appalling aftermath of Partition. 'Ashoka' in the last section of the book is a long poem, demanding concentration and comes with explanatory notes. What interests Acharya is how Ashoka developed from a warrior king to a true leader, who through Buddhism came to a realisation of the limitations of violence and war, finally making ahimsa state policy. It is a subject relevant to modern day politics, but also makes one reflect on a superior concept of Empire and brings to mind an older India where for a period something really good was achieved. As Acharya notes: 'His achievement lay in transforming *dharma*, the highest form of social responsibility, into state policy.'

'Knowing Infinity', also from the last section, is about Ramanujan, the Indian mathematician, who said: 'An equation for me has no meaning unless it expresses a thought of God'. She has a deep sympathy for his short life facing professional disbelief from both Indian and English mathematicians and surviving loneliness, prejudice and ill health at Cambridge.

unable to decipher the hieroglyphics
of your imagination, the great Unknown your life
was etched on, art created in a language of symbols –
your inspiration, dancing gods, rejoicing in
spaces infinitesimally large and small.

Imagine offers a perspective on the imaginative forces which create Shanta Acharya's 'secondary world' and her continuing quest for spiritual equilibrium and faith in something higher – the 'You' she addresses in the last section.

When I was lost you came to my rescue
I wanted to thank you, but could not see you.
Not knowing what you looked like, I called you –
by all your names, the ones I knew

It seems fitting to end with the first verse of 'Shunya' (from *Shringara*) which neatly encapsulates a concept first born in India:

It took centuries
the journey from cipher,
invisible wedge, a thing of no importance
to zero, point of reckoning –

Acharya in introducing her new poems expresses gratitude 'For Life, Art, Friendship – all who made this journey possible'. *Imagine: New and Selected Poems* invites us to share in the journey and respond with our own imagination.

W S Milne is a regular contributor to *Agenda*. He has just completed a play on the Scottish communist, John Maclean. His play about a fishing tragedy, *Sheddaes ower the Sea*, is to be published in the next issue of *Lallans* magazine.

W S Milne

Digging Deep

Josephine Balmer: *The Paths of Survival* (Shearsman Books, 2017); *Letting Go: Thirty Mourning Sonnets and two poems* (Agenda Editions, 2017).

Although at first sight these two books by Josephine Balmer seem very different in content and style, on a second or third reading similarities emerge. I hope to tease out both the contrasts and comparisons over the course of this review. Let us start with the elements they share. The clearest and most obvious similarity is the stress on grief – in the first instance, in *The Paths of Survival*, we encounter a dramatic re-enactment of Aeschylus' lost play, *Myrmidons*, which imagines Achilles' suffering at the death of his warrior-friend Patroclus, and in the second, in *Letting Go*, we have a record of Balmer's grief at the death of her mother. Grief then is viewed, in its elegiac mode, as an eternal human verity, bridging the millennia, both fictively and non-fictionally. The second similarity is a stress on classical learning – in *The Paths of Survival* it is Aeschylus' work which is reconstructed, in *Letting Go* the poet's grief is viewed from the standpoint of texts by (amongst others) Homer, Heraclitus, Sappho, Virgil, and Livy.

The method (if one can call it that – it is not at all systematic) is a constant redefinition and re-establishment of classical standards and models, applied within a modern poetic context, demonstrating the continuity of experience, what Balmer calls a strategy of 'connecting past and present, both distant and recent, in an urgent, common chain of humanity', reconfiguring texts which are (in her own words) 'lost, disputed, fragmented, often requiring more reconstruction than translation'. So it is in *The Paths of Survival* she is interested in telling the tales of those involved in the remaking of a classical text over the centuries: the archaeologists, custodians, excavators, editors, scavengers, translators, anthologists, scribes, annotators and copyists who worked on *Myrmidons* – unearthing each 'displaced scrap of frayed papyrus' which reveals the pristine clarity of the play's language (what T S Eliot called 'fragments against our ruin', and Balmer 'dividing cells, bare blocks/of collective memory'). She is fascinated by what might be termed the archaeology of the word: 'lost worlds... retrieved/in the flash of forceps, sifting piece/on tiny piece, word on broken word', the scholarly care taken over the intricate process of collation. One is reminded of Basil Bunting's words on Pound's *Propertius*: 'London or Rome, does the name, the ostensible date, much signify? We are amongst contemporaries, listening to a contemporary, the difficulties are the difficulties of our own lives' – or of Geoffrey Hill's words on Yeats' work: 'The poet is hearing words in depth and is therefore hearing, or sounding, history and morality in depth'.

Balmer herself writes (in her monograph, *Piecing Together The Fragments*, 2013): 'The discovery and subsequent publication of new Sappho fragments, in particular, was one factor in the creation of Imagism in the 1910s, which was partly inspired by the clarity and minimalist beauty of fractured Greek lyrics'. Those Imagist poets she argues (I think rightly) were looking for 'a clearer, cleaner, more sparse poetic', and that I would argue is precisely what Balmer achieves in her own work. She also notes that 'William Carlos Williams was

later to include versions of Sappho in his epic poem sequence *Paterson* (1946–1958)'. Here we have the intellectual roots of her own poetic technique.

The Paths of Survival is a reconstruction built from very scant materials. Balmer's translation of the lines (vestiges, traces) that have come down to us by scattered means provide the trigger for the poet's imagination, marshalling what we know of Aeschylus' play itself, in addition to material from Aristophanes' comedic plays *Frogs*, *Peace*, and *Assemblywomen*, the Oxyrhynchus fragments, Athenaeus in his *Supper Sophistries*, Lucian in his *Erotic Tales*, Photius in his *Lexicon*, documents in the libraries of Baghdad and in the monasteries, museums and libraries of Europe. Balmer's debt to these precursors is clear throughout the sequence, unravelling, untangling the threads of the poetry, creating a new mosaic. The precariousness of the text is analogous to the vulnerability of life itself, represented in the poem by Patroclus' death, and Achilles' dirge for his lover:

*How could you forget the solemn bond
We forged together, thigh wrapped
Around thigh?
Let me honour
Our passion, such sacred communion
Between the thighs*

a lament voiced as he cradles Patroclus' corpse, adding

*Yet for me, there is no stain, no sin –
I am
absolved because I loved him –*

his sorrow clinched with the emphatic line: *Soon I will follow you into darkness.*

Balmer hints that the overt homosexuality of Aeschylus' play may have caused it to be censored or banned in Christian times, and may have been the primary cause of its almost total loss to tradition. A similar fate, after all, befell Sappho's poetry, as Charles Simic has argued: 'It took extraordinary malice and determination over the centuries to destroy nearly every extant poem of Sappho's' (and Balmer herself is one of our best translators of Sappho's verse). At various junctures in the poem we find the classical text being destroyed by scribes who think it anti-Christian:

I had to choose which to save and which
to burn. Those that spoke of God I kept,
The rest, as ordered, went into the furnace...
...left them there for the rats to soil
Like any piece of discarded refuse...
On the shelf I replaced each space
with Paul's *Epistles*, all the *Gospels*...
Who needs poetry or philosophy
when you have faith, orthodoxy?

Achilles' homosexual love for Patroclus provides the background for grief in Balmer's poem. One has the sense that this theme of homosexuality was of current interest at the time of the play's composition (very sensitively discerned by Balmer in her poem), and was of interest to the Athenian audience for whom Aeschylus was writing, the playwright attempting to establish the proper relationship that should exist between a male lover and a male loved

one. The larger motifs we associate with Aeschylean tragedy (divine dispensation, justice, the actions of ancestors, the dictates of fate, the hero's downfall) are all missing in this play (what we have left of it, that is). Balmer's intimation in the poem is that Aeschylus thought Homer's time more open-minded than his own on such matters as homosexuality, and this point he is trying to communicate to his audience.

In Balmer's re-imagining of *Myrmidons*, Achilles' actions are more than just the manifestations of a vendetta as they are in the *Iliad* – they demonstrate a deep love for his friend Patroclus. Aeschylus (in Balmer's figuration) is aware of Achilles' sensitivity, and it is possible that she is concentrating on the word *panaōrios* Achilles applies to himself in the Priam scene in Book XXIV of the *Iliad* – a word which suggests someone out of the ordinary, someone different, and it is possible Aeschylus thought this also defined Achilles' homosexuality, his freedom to break convention openly in line with his other actions in Homer's poem. Unlike Hector, Achilles has no family or friends near him apart from Patroclus, his fellow-warrior and bosom-friend. Achilles is an individualist in all things, a breaker of codes and traditions. Still he is an intense heterosexual lover of Briseis (how did Aeschylus deal with that in his play? is a question we can ask), a type of obdurate anti-hero who has a marked propensity for isolation. At one point in the *Iliad* Achilles wishes that he and Patroclus alone will survive the war, and that the whole of the Achaean army will perish – an extreme position, to say the least. So it is Achilles represents a heightened form of humanity, even in his homosexuality. Such a characterisation makes the warrior more human, perhaps, and again one suspects that Balmer thinks Aeschylus may have been attracted to this idea of the warrior's fallibility. The intense wailing for his friend at his funeral (in the *Iliad*) emphasises the degree of love Achilles had for his friend, the foundations of Balmer's narrative thereby founded on solid scholarly research.

Balmer, the twenty-first century poet, unearths not coins or shards but words – vestiges of an ancient culture, what she terms 'the hoard of forgotten worlds'. ('Worlds' here is deliberately close to 'words', one feels, the poet sensing that a way of life is belatedly revealed through the culture's lexis. 'Hoard' also suggests the homonym 'horde', the mass of 'barbarians' responsible for destroying cultural heritage – one has only to think of ISIS in Palmyra in this regard, with their recent depredations across the Middle East):

Where they had cruelty, we had culture.
Where they had greed, we had Greek.

The inference here is that the loss (or discovery) of one letter (either 'd' or 'k' in this case) in a text can alter meanings hugely. One thinks of Geoffrey Hill's image of 'a disciplined scholar piecing fragments together'. Throughout the course of the poem we find how responses to the broken text have changed over the millennia, annotators changing the text or corrupting it, 'sometimes unwittingly, for better, for worse, but always with passion' as the cover to the book informs us. Particularly interesting in this regard are the lines:

gilt horse-cockerel mastheads...
crafted with care, are melting, drip by drip,
in the corrosive fires of burning ships..

initially interpreted by scholars as the Athenians being drunk, until properly understood by Callimachus in the second-century BCE as the Trojans burning the Achaean warships. Balmer has us understand how serendipitous the survival of texts is by providing a glimpse of a bureaucrat getting bored at his desk:

And find myself scribbling on the reverse
a line or two, maybe from Aeschylus;
as Achilles, war-scarred, in *Myrmidons*,
cried out at last: *We need more weapons...*

a phrase that survives on a scrap of paper recovered from the rubbish tip at Oxyrhynchus two thousand years later – ‘those dark words scarring the papyrus’ – poetry escaping ‘oblivion by a hair’s breadth’ as Balmer terms it.

So it is what might at first seem like an alien culture is brought back to life, resuscitated almost, to make the poetry current – the poets’, scholars’ and archaeologists’ domains overlapping, pitching themselves against history’s cruelty and contempt. The words stand out ‘in luminous detail’ against the darkness of the centuries, finding clarity amongst all the confusion, all the attrition of time and war. Balmer’s technique (in its full sensuous life and detail) ensures that classical poetry belongs to everyone, not just professional scholars. As D.S Carne-Ross has argued persuasively: ‘Ancient literature must always be re-created... The sentence, sometimes the word, has to be dissolved, atomized, and its elements then reconstituted in a new form’. This is the very method Josephine Balmer has followed imaginatively in *The Paths of Survival*, ensuring an intellectual precision and emotional breadth which stands out amongst contemporary poets:

What matters now is what survives;
what time corrodes and what it spares...

Cry for the living not for the dead
Everything we had is lost...

As outlined earlier, there is a similar tone evinced by a similar method in *Letting Go*, a sustained elegy (consisting of thirty sonnets and two poems) for the poet’s mother, based on incidents (or inspired by) quotations from texts by Cavafy, Virgil, Aeschylus, Livy, Ovid, Thucydides, Homer, Hesiod, Ibycus, Plato, Heraclitus, and Pausanias – incidents that provide analogies for Balmer’s grief, a resetting, or recreation, of old tales and myths. At one point in the sequence Balmer imagines herself as a belated suppliant of Aeschylus (from the play of that name) speaking ‘only/in laments, the savage language of hurt./strangeness of mourning’. The title of the collection is borrowed from Emily Dickinson’s famous poem ‘After great pain, a formal feeling comes’:

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the
letting go –

She writes of ‘Things We Leave Behind’ (a translation from Cavafy), of a favourite table where she and her mother used to sit together to eat, to drink, to talk, now given to charity and rediscovered in a local café – and so it is that ‘*those worn-out things we leave behind*’ turn out to be not so ‘worn-out’ after all, but live on after us as traces or vestiges. But still, grief hits hard. She realises now that her mother is ‘missing’ forever as she draws up a ‘To-Do’ list: ‘Decide sandwiches for the caterers./Get order of service to the printer./Look out a photo for cover picture./Talk to the priest about bidding prayers’ – a litany of actions which

she hopes will forestall her grief. She thinks of words which she could have shared with her mother, but never did, regretting those earlier ‘halcyon’ days:

Looking back, what hurts more than the knowing
is the not knowing. That this was the calm
before the gales and the wild, storm-blown rain –
the halcyon days that would now be mine
forever, would always carry my name.

The difference between *The Paths of Survival* and this book is that the poet is now writing of a single life-span, not of centuries or millennia, concentrating on a subjective arena of experience. What I like about Balmer’s style is that she always acknowledges her sources, not hiding them, celebrating debts to others that are a consolation in her sorrow, gifts almost. Her footnotes are always serious, containing none of that silly parodying one often finds in Eliot or Geoffrey Hill, for instance.

We find the poet wondering at the incongruous delivery of a pair of gloves to her mother after her death, choosing from her mother’s jewellery, feeling sorry for her father at the funeral, everyone ‘benumbed, trapped. Out of reach. Ice-bound’. The inwardness of the poet’s pain is partially overcome by working on that ‘formal feeling’ Dickinson writes about, writing these ‘mourning sonnets and poems’ to cope with her grief, to comprehend, to surmount the sorrow. She recalls ‘that lost moment/before she [her mother] grabs her bag, locks the car door,/runs up the path to ring my bell once more’, their last trip together, of ‘the pact’ between mother and daughter – ‘the pact/of the living and the dead’ – analogous to the literary history Balmer is studying. The poet feels some guilt that she has survived serious illness in a way her mother hasn’t, grasping at shadows, dreaming of ghosts, this ‘quagmire grief’ as she calls it, dwelling on memories of phoning home from Rome and Paris stricken with homesickness, months in bed with depression, ‘no pleasure in wine... hunched under the sheets as lethargy creeps,/up and on, a hard ball of crushing lead’ – but knowing this will pass (‘slowly, the weight will lift’), the burial, ‘The soft, relentless hiss of soil on wood.’

For Balmer then ‘*The dead are our friends,/our colleagues, our fellow conspirators./They, too, shape our waking world.*’ So it is she digs deep into literary history to make the present bearable, making what might at first sight seem archaic material come alive, straddling the centuries, making the personal and impersonal coalesce in her art. So what might have been a mere literary exercise becomes fine poetry:

In my dream you were still here, up ahead
in your best hat and coat. *It’s Jo* I said
as you turned round, perplexed, testing the word
on your tongue as if one you’d never heard
but know you should remember. *Jo? Ah. Yes.*
Pale as a splintered moon scudding through clouds
we catch – or think we catch – at falling dusk,
you were frowning, flinty, a stranger cast
in Penwith granite. I woke drenched in sweat,
back from the Underworld like Aeneas
stepping out of the sedge and dank morass.
Now I saw that here was the other path
you might have taken the night you left us.
The one that would have splintered our hearts.

And so it is 'the things we leave behind', including poems, artefacts of memory, which commemorate those we have loved.

I recommend these two books by Josephine Balmer to all those who take an interest in both contemporary poetry and that of the past as a legacy which challenges the ravages of time and barbarism.