

Eidolon

ALSO BY SANDEEP PARMAR

POETRY

The Marble Orchard

Myth of the Savage Tribes, Myth of Civilised Nations

(co-written with James Byrne)

CRITICISM

Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman

AS EDITOR

Hope Mirreles: *Collected Poems*

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Eidolon

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The Afterword is a revised version of a talk delivered at Queen Mary University—
I am grateful to Hetta Howes and the Department of English for inviting me.
Thanks are due to my family for the long journey from Nottingham to Troy.

This book is for James Byrne,
who gave me the courage.

'The earth may glide diaphanous to death;
But if I lift my arms it is to bend
To you who turned away once, Helen, knowing
The press of troubled hands, too alternate
With steel and soil to hold you endlessly.
I meet you, therefore, in that eventual flame
You found in final chains, no captive then—
Beyond their million brittle, bloodshot eyes;
White, through white cities passed on to assume
That world which comes to each of us alone.'

—Hart Crane, 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen'

i.

*It was not me, but a phantom
whose oath
 a variable star
mouldering in the reliquary
 is doubt.*

*I have not unsealed love, its taproot
 mouthing blackness
 nor seized the fairer woman
to purge from her her song—*

*This hell-house of primogeniture, bookish
 and pale quarterming what is also
its own and only rule
 this: fire
and the fire that comes from fire.*

ii.

Helen, dispirited

camera-bound Helen

fetching the paper from the front lawn in her dressing gown a lot of the time

and knowing when the phone will ring

seconds before by the click of its current

Demi-goddess—not woman, not god

disembodied like a bowl turned over and its loaf thumping out

Helen

Queen of never-mind-the-time, of *you can't run on gin for all the everlasting*

And such

moths, broiling airlessly in a sodium bulb

smell of it on her front porch

lights on home

iii.

Waking to a November morning
to pins running across a yardage of wool
or headaches the circular world
disfigured
by food
corn cobs in the sink gleam like teeth up her spine
Hurry up the bus goes
and its déshabillement goes loaming on after it

iv.

*I do not insist
I would*

ever, light

*that we retain the old names
know you*

as the seed

v.

Marketing the daylong détente for a sliver of profit
does not appear to bother the kingdom of saints

Ascetics her brothers—
Spartans whose only god is [insert here
the death of eleven days]

Wash the man by the road who turns
and seeing or not seeing
is soundless, animal
wash him
he is your brother
enter his encampment (of fuel-scarred fabrics)
and listen to his black pronouncements
void of exhaust
scramble up
the highway's escarpment
inviolable, good
wash him
or
be without brothers

vi.

Helen denuded Helen
a place of palor where
silk shrinks around her throat
exits the office

mindless purposeless walking
into and out of
through and over
up and around
into and out of
hands waving mindless purpose

metal tint to everything Stesichoros blinded
for watching her
cross the street
outside and into
the car, horn blaring

vii.

U.S. National Interests: Matters of vital interest to the United States to include national security, public safety, national economic security, the safe and reliable functioning of “critical infrastructure”, and the availability of “key resources”. [PPD (Presidential Policy Directive) 20, Top Secret]

*It has of course occurred to me that this conversation
is being recorded but what you say
does not anyway belong to me*

viii.

We are going—shall we go—let us go
and if we do go, knowing little of *where*,
who will put the lamp out as we leave?

*(But where is what I started for so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?)* [Whitman]

ix.

Tippeted old Colonial—
Uncle, his mustard handkerchief
like a standard raised to his lips
asks: 'If it's England vs. India
at the Cricket where do you stand?'

*In that unholy ditchwell
where there is no victory:
attrition warfare.*

'You don't need to know the rules' he sighs,
defeated, adjusting his cravat—burgundy,
printed with small pink elephants,
'We Indians, you know, don't hold a grudge'.

Primogenitor: 16th-century people of the riverbed
who wove baskets from the long leaves—

if it hadn't been for the British and their inexorable
management
no doubt we'd still be twisting ropes
along the Silk Road