

KATERINA GOGOU

From Now Let's See What You're Going to Do: Poems 1978-2002

TRANSLATED BY ANGELOS SAKKIS

1.

Our life is jack-knifings
in dirty dead-end streets
rotten teeth faded slogans
a basso backstage basement
smells of piss and antiseptic
and rotten sperm. Torn-up posters.
Upanddown. Upanddown Patisision.
Our life is Patisision Street
The detergent that won't pollute the sea
and Mitropanos* sang his way into our life
but he's been swallowed by Dexameni*
like all the expensive dames.
We stay with it.
A craven life we travel
always the same route.
Humiliation-loneliness-despair. And back.
O.K. We're not crying. We've grown up.
Only when it rains
we secretly suck our thumb. And we smoke.
Our life is
pointless panting
at pre-programmed strikes
stooges and patrol cars.
That's why I'm telling you.

Next time they'll let us have it
we shouldn't run. We should hold our line.
Let's not sell our asses so cheap, man.
Don't. It's raining. Gimme a smoke.

3.

My own friends are blackbirds
who play see-saw on roofs of crumbling houses
Exarchia, Patisia, Metaxurgio, Metz.*
They do whatever comes along.
Peddlers of cookbooks and encyclopedias
they build roads and connect deserts
barkers for Zinonos Str. dives
professional rebels
cornered in the old days and forced to
 drop their pants
now they swallow pills and alcohol to sleep
but they have dreams so they don't sleep.
My own women-friends are taut wires
on roof terraces of old houses
Exarchia, Victoria, Koukaki, Ghizi.
You've pinned on them a million steel clothes' pins
your guilt, party-meeting decisions, borrowed dresses
cigarette burn-marks, strange headaches
threatening silences, vaginitis
they fall in love with gays
trichomonas, late-periods
the telephone the telephone the telephone
broken glasses and no one for an ambulance.
They do whatever comes along.
My friends are always on the move
because you haven't given them an inch.
All my friends paint with black
because you've debased the red for them
they write in a symbolic tongue
because your own's only for ass-licking.

My friends are blackbirds and wires
in your hands. At your throat.
My friends.

17.

The 4 points of the horizon

Above. Below. Right. Left.

Above, the sky and the things we aimed for.

– They come at night and mock us
in our dreams.

Below, the earth and things aiming at us

– they shovel dirt over us even before we're done.

Right, tourist islands banks and rock

– offering us electroshock in the arms of
Raquel Welch.

Left, the ghost of Russia driving a Mig-25

is chasing us with a big rubber stamp

– and we collect tiny bits of our perseverance
for the party verdicts at the Moscow Trials.

.....
The neighborhood dime-store

to catch a breath

but even here I've got to pay

for the shopkeeper's tolerance

an ex-cop selling the "People's Struggle"*

I don't know what to buy so as not to be
an accomplice. Understand?

The 4 points of the horizon

Dressed as banks pilots Marxists nurses

are chasing us. I have to make a call.

What's the number?

Where can I stop and take a single breath?

They've set us up everywhere.

The cops trapped by the gun
women by their sex

Justice by the laws
organizations by their dissidents
doctors by electroshock.
Yes. Let's go to the Ilion movie theater tonight.
There the heroes have red cheeks
and always win in the end.

20.

Hired labor – capital
imperialism the supreme stage of capitalism
the betrayed revolution
ah, comrade, how much we miss you...
Time's gotten full of worms
nuclear tests, people's fronts, whorehouses
(and Portugal fallen too)
the super-productions of the Catholics and the Mafia
become multinationals, they don't let us love
comrade.

Stooges come up our stairs
soccer-field dogs, anytime they want to
they can pull our pants down and fuck us
peaceful co-existence and socialism in one country
ah, comrade, if you only knew the heavy load
 we're carrying...

No one could endure the Moscow trials
you were left all alone
and the people were tired, that's where they hit.
You know it, why tell you?
And then they finked. You know it, why tell you?
In China, January '77, they butcher workers
and that arrives here like a poem by Mao
(they put the blame on individuals again) ah, comrade
why weren't you more careful?
Here it's the same. People hide in their shells.
There are 2 K.K.'s and thousands the hermaphrodite
 "revolutionaries."

If you're a little bit loose you pass over to the other side.
But don't worry. We'll make it.

It's just that every so often I get tired too,
and I don't have a job, I feel like crying
 like right now
and that's when I miss you more than ever
when I "scold" you for not being more careful
and when I'm not ashamed to cry
and write poems
comrade, you who never betrayed
we're experiencing barbarity itself.

23.

A fully round sun of May
and a big wind
cross each other on my forehead
mixing political pamphlets
some extra pounds and years piling up
songs by, Savvopoulos*
my eyes – where are they? where are my eyes?
each day I'm learning to reject
what I believed in yesterday.
What will you shout dying
Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg
the Kronstadt myth and the myth of Sisyphus.
Flowers and colors
revolvers and homemade bombs
meaningless movements – the same food
 on my teeth –
five plastic fingers are squeezing my throat.
I'm going crazy from my own
and my friends' dreams, with repeated breakdowns
hysterical weeping, vomiting from drunkenness
 and loathing
suicide attempts and useless resolutions
about a different life.
An endless parade of barbiturates
maintain a sick balance
between you and me.
And up. And down.
And out back and on the side
the system – the rotten system's to blame
even my cat knows that

the system that squeezes
the money they spit
two by two they “turn on” and disappear
comrades got old waiting
the kids – what big eyes the kids have –
riot squads, drugstores, taxis, the monopolies
the imperialism between us
I can’t make love to you
or anybody else. I’m 3 years now on the list
 of the unemployed.
Let’s not kid ourselves.
If we don’t sign the paper they want
we won’t be able to make a single decision.
Night is falling.
The central committee
kowtows to the Maoists.
Night is falling.
The television commentator’s
winking at me.
Night is falling even more.
I’m still hanging in there.
I’m not signing.
Long live the 204th Internationale.

31.

Rotten. / Rotten themes / moldy volumes
devious libraries
bootlicking words slave words / frame-up jobs
fraudulent words
our life here is a bull
a thousand little fascist knives stuck in him
he vomits black our own blood
and you go on painting still-lives
and past-prime book editions making money for
the tourist office.
Political parties—punctuation marks
ecology—ancient forerunners show us the way
only on the reverse
the good ones are thrown in deep holes
the public works and illustrious signatures
pave with asphalt over them
a big round crate is the earth like a ballot-box
so we can throw our ballots in
whatever color the salamander takes
it's always rightwing.
Some drab acacias have undertaken Spring
roots aren't so that we may go back
roots are for generating branches
and if they don't
they're dead sticks firewood
roadblocks Forward Forward ever more!
That's what is needed
from submission to an uprising
from either all or nobody
from either everything or nothing

and us / they let us in through the service door
we eat their left-overs standing
wearing on our neck as an old-fashion scarf
the dead cat of civilization
but now I'm no longer alone
I've made I have connections
I'm not afraid of anyone
I pretend I'm living this life while I'm preparing
 the other one
in daytime high noon I'll grab bucket and brushes
we're going to tear the flagstones
I'll make a great downpour of leaflets
incitement slogans
bullet-words on paper
letters out of skin and blood
our poetry's psychosomatic—
no one of you is ever going to separate us
even my very life
and anyone who dares let him come this way
 hand grenade
with safety pin off.

43.

Yannis told me
not to lean my head on the wall
when reading or when smoking.
In prison he said
that's why they always had headaches.
In the evening an argument broke out about those
 who had signed a statement.
Chronis said
that if they had invented the statement
we had invented not signing.
I said endurance has its limits people are
 made of flesh and bone
I spoke about the Stalinists and the method
of executing the very best as traitors
who died screaming LONG LIVE THE PARTY.
Sifis said
the statement is only the beginning.
Then they will ask who are your friends.
Then where do they live.
I said shit a million people, why? For what party?
Yorgos said for the one we are going to make.
Around the table we were 3 laborers, 2 who had signed,
 Yiorgos unemployed
and I in privileged position I work this year. We smoked.
They were drinking. Yannis most of all
—how in hell's he going to ride the motorbike—
They didn't want me speaking like that.
Afterwards I left earlier I had a headache
again I'd been leaning on the wall. They didn't know
 I knew.

That I was never going to sign.

Not for any party.

That I had only thrown a jacket—January '79—
over the freezing cold carried by those who signed...

52.

SHE IS DANGEROUS – WHEN GOD THROWS A THUNDERSTORM WITH HAIL AND A DOWNPOUR SHE COMES OUT TO THE STREET HAVING NO SOCKS ON SHE WHISTLES TO MEN THROWS STONES AT PATROL CARS ROOSTS LIKE A SQUIRREL UP ON TREES AND LIGHTS HER CIGARETTE WITH A LIGHTNING.

LAST TIME SHE WAS SPOTTED AT THE SAME MONTH SAME YEAR AND SAME HOUR IN THREE DIFFERENT LOCATIONS – ACCORDING TO RELIABLE INFORMATION THE BLOWING UP OF A BRIDGE IN MANHATTAN THE SUPPLY OF ARMS TO ANARCHO-COMMUNIST MOVEMENTS AS WELL AS THE THEFT OF TOP SECRET NATIONAL DOCUMENTS ARE ALL ATTRIBUTED TO THE SAME INDIVIDUAL. SHE IS KNOWN TO WEAR A BLACK OR RED MILITARY SWEATER CHILDRENS' PEARLY COMBS IN HER HAIR AND HAVING HER HANDS IN THE POCKETS OF A BORROWED OVERCOAT.

DATE OF BIRTH: UNKNOWN

GENDER: UNKNOWN

ADDRESS: UNKNOWN

RELIGION: ATHEIST

COLOR OF EYES: UNKNOWN

NAME: SOFIA VICKI MARIA OLIA NIKI ANNA EFI ARGYRO

APB. TO ALL PATROL UNITS. ATTENTION ARMED. DANGEROUS. ARMED. DANGEROUS.

THEY CALL HER SOFIA VICKI MARIA OLIA NIKI ANNA EFI ARGYRO AND SHE IS BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL MY GOD...

61. AUTOPSY REPORT 2.11.75

“...the body lay face-down in a parallel
connecting to the Vatican.
One of his hands full of blood gestured in open palm
as insult to CPI*
and the other clutching his genitals
to the culture specialists.
Blood clotting on his hair as leeches
on the veiled homosexual syndromes
of all men of earth throughout the realm.
His face disfigured by the framework of
the class he denied
a black and blue volunteer of the ragtag proletariat.
The fingers of the left hand
broken by social realism
thrown away to floodlit trash.
The jaw broken
by the uppercut of a union organizer
a hired thug.
The ears chewed by a sonofabitch who couldn't
get an erection.
The neck broken and severed from the body
on the basic principle of independent function.
The mother everywhere.

That was the death of the communist and homosexual PAZOLINI,
who every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, riding a small 50cc
bike, ran to make sure the cinemas would play the movies in
Egaleo, in Liverpool and most importantly in Ostia, he ran holding
tightly against his body the cans of movie reels and of rundown
neighborhoods. Also the little striped flag of poetry.

Goodbye.

93. THEY WILL COME

The signal will be in the air
the white the gray the brown
jackets of the insane without sleeves
that will be snapping empty on the
fence-wires of Leros*.

They will unhitch by themselves
with their pulled-out fingernails
the hook that hung them
on the ceiling of your earth.
They'll have a uniform bruised color
and lobotomies instead of ears.
Out of sewers and prison cells
they will advance slowly.
They will enter with the slow step
with which terror proceeds
and glory bound together
brothers in blood
a bloody thread
will be bringing the news.

*Translator's notes:

1. Dimitris Mitropanos – working-class Greek singer who became a big star and married the daughter of the Secretary of State (1948-2012).
Dexameni – fashionable district in Athens, somewhat like Nob Hill in San Francisco.
3. Exarchia, etc. - lower-middle class districts of Athens.
23. Dianysis Savvopoulos – a very influential writer and singer of rebellious soul-songs, b.1944
61. CPI – Communist Party of Italy.
93. Leros – Island of the Aegean, place of detention for many political prisoners in the Junta years.