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THE VOICES OF HOMER'S WOMEN
Apostolos Athanassakis

SAPPHO OF LESBOS
Apostolos Athanassakis

EPITAPHS
Theony Condos

GREEK TRAGEDY
Francis Dunn

PYTHAGOREAN WOMEN
Dorota Dutsch

ARIS ALEXANDROU, ANTIGONE:
A CROSS-PRESENTATION OF THE PLAY'S TRANSLATION
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WORKING WOMEN
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EXILE; THE ANGELS, AND TRANSPLANTS
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GREEK JEWISH SONGS OF YANNINA
Apostolos Athanassakis

MARIA LAMPADARIDOU-POTHOU
Theony Condos

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PREFACE

For several years now The Charioteer has wanted to devote several hopefully consecutive volumes to Greek women. This wish does not come from a response to current ideological trends, rather it stems from a genuine feeling that the time has come for our journal to give special recognition to the achievements, as well as the joys and the sorrows of Greek women. Theirs is a very long history, from Homer's Andromache to the black clad women who mourn by gravesides to this day. Greece can indeed boast a very long tradition in which women have played a vital, indeed, an enormous role. Penelope is heir to millennia of grief that comes from separation. The Greeks took to the sea and to its endless pathways and therefore to trade and migration very early. This separated them from their families. Wives had to stay home and wait endless years before their husbands returned, and some of them never returned. Down to our days, the theme of xenitia, the web of the complex emotions that surround leaving home and the people one loves, dominates Greek folk song. So strong was the love of home and one's kin that the departure of a young bride from her home at the time of her wedding is treated like some sort of death. In a reverberation of the theme of Persephone forced to go to the underworld and become the wife of Hades, the young bride is leaving home to go to the mavra xena, to a strange land enveloped in blackness. Greek history is so long that one cannot talk about Greek women the way one can to some extent talk about American woman. One long period of history succeeds the next and the end of one millennium may mean significant changes in the lives of women. The women we encounter in the heroic society of Homer are as free as the women of the heroic society of the Vikings. We should not expect the women of Classical Athens to have the same freedoms. Homeric society was largely pastoral and founded on the fundamentals of unwritten law. Athenian society on the other hand, sent its men to war at all times but felt that the dignity of women was best nurtured at home. There were changes during the Hellenistic Age when Greek culture spread over most of the civilized world. During this age, there were many queens, many priestesses, many women healers. The end of the first millennium B.C. signaled the arrival of Christianity. This
event was preceded by the development of many humane values in several epicurean communities in the Hellenic Mediterranean. The women of the Greek New Testament act like Greek women. The topic should be researched. The conception and the birth of Jesus should also be studied within the complexities of Greek theology. Why is it that the Virgin Mary is addressed by almost 500 epithets throughout the Hellenic world? It is with the utmost respect and affection that the present editor of The Charioteer proposes a fresh look at the complexities surrounding the person of the all-holy Theotokos. Who were the women that served in the various very early New Testament churches? Most likely they were Jewish women. Most likely they were also culturally Greek women. The long period of the Roman occupation of Greece must be rich in stories about the lives of Greek women. Usually, we talk about Greek slaves teaching Roman children. How about searching for Greek women who in addition to looking after little Roman children also taught them the fundamentals of reading and arithmetic?

Greek women adopted the new faith and they founded monastic communities. Many of them were sainted by the church. All of the women saints are deeply revered by the Orthodox to this day. There are many relevant questions here. What were their origins and what was their education? What led them to their austere way of life and to self-sacrifice? Byzantium produced many remarkable women. The hallmark of almost all of them was education at a very high level. Theodora of Arta, Kassiani the great poetess, and Anna Komnene, the Classicizing historian, are some names that spring to mind. The Ottoman occupation was long, uneven, and complex. The contribution of women during this period was very great, but it has to be reassessed. The turbulent times that followed the war of independence, especially after 1821, are marked by the service and the great heroism of women to the new Greek nation. The twentieth century and the present times differ, of course, because, by degrees, Greek women entered all sectors of life. So much has been done that an account of this time has to be summary.

The Charioteer does not expect to cover all of the above with thoroughness, but rather to offer examples, and, above all, to produce awareness among Greeks and non-Greeks of the complex of the fascinating lives and achievements of Greek women throughout the ages.
THE VOICES OF HOMER’S WOMEN

The monologues of the women of the Iliad and the Odyssey, with rare exceptions, are not translations of the Homeric text. They are interpretive improvisations, which at all times try to stay close to the Homeric text and its very rich nuances. It is hoped that talented actresses will adopt these monologues and perform them with deep understanding of the poet’s intent and with passion.

BRISEIS: WOMAN CAPTIVE OF WAR GIVEN TO
ACHILLES AS A PRIZE. (Iliad 1.184; 19.282–300)

Then, Briseis beautiful
As golden Aphrodite—
Poured herself all about Patroklos and screamed—
Her fingers tore into her breasts—
Tore into her soft neck and her beautiful face—
She looked divine
As she wept “Patroklos
I am wretched—
You were most beloved to me—
You were alive
When I went away to Agamemnon’s quarters
Now, oh leader of armies,
I find you dead—
I find you dead upon my return—
One evil follows another for me. I saw the man
My father and my lady mother gave to me,
I saw him before the city
Cut up by the sharp bronze—
I saw three of my brothers
All of them born of my mother,
All of them protectors—
I saw them all follow their day of ruin.
You never let me, never never let me
Weep when swift Achilles killed—
When he killed my husband
And sacked the city of divine Mynes—
Yes you never let me weep but you told me—
That you would make me divine Achilles' tender wife,
That you would take me to Phthia on the ships,
That you would celebrate my wedding with the
Myrmidons.
For all this my weeping for you is endless—
So sweet is my love for you.”
She spoke as she wept
And the women groaned in response;
Patroklos was their pretext;
Every one of them had her own sorrows.
The old men of the Acheans
Gathered all about Achilles
They begged him to have dinner.
He said “No,” as he moaned. “I beg my friends
To listen to me.
Do not invite me to eat,
Do not invite me to drink—
To please my heart.
I am now in the grip of dreadful wrath.

ANDROMACHE’S LAMENT:
She is Hector’s wife. (iliad 24.719–745)

They took Hektor inside his renowned house on a
perforated bed,
And they seated singers beside him,
men leaders of lamentation
who raised the mournful song
who began the dirge.
The women groaned in response,
And among them, Andromache of the white arms led the
lament
As she cradled in her arms the head of man-slaughtering Hector:

“My husband, you died young on me,
You leave me a widow
In our house.
Our child is still a baby
The child born of us two,
Born of unhappy parents, for I do not think
He will reach youthful boyhood, for this city of ours
Will be sacked and razed to the ground
My protector, you are gone—
You watched over the city, you defended
Skilled wives and infant children
They will now all be carried away
On hollow ships—
And I will be one of them
And you, child, will
Either follow me to some place
Where you will do demeaning labor
Toiling in the presence of a harsh lord—
Or one of the Acheans
Will grab your arm
And throw you from the tower
To your pitiful ruin, angry because Hector
Had killed his brother,
Or his father or his son.
So many Acheans,
Slain by Hektor,
Bit the boundless ground;
Your father was not
a sweet man in gruesome strife.
It is for this that the people are grieving
Throughout the city
Hector, you have placed the curse of lamentation
On your parents;
You have heaped grief on them—
I inherit
Loathsome suffering.
You did not die on your bed—
You did not stretch your arms out to me—
You did not say a comforting word to me—
A word I could never forget
A word I could remember as I wept—
All the nights and all the days of my life.”
So she spoke as she wept
and the women wept in response.
Hecabe now began a ceaseless lament.
“Hector, by far dearest to my heart
than all my other sons—
When you were alive
You were dear to the gods
And they took care of you
But even you were claimed by death.
Swift-footed Achilles
Dispatched to their death
Many other sons of mine
Any one he could seize
Beyond the barren sea
To Samos, to Imbros, and to Lemnos.
When he took your life
With his long bronze spear
He dragged your body
Around the tomb of his friend
Patroklos. You killed him
And Achilles could not bring him back to life.
Now new-slain yet still so much alive
You lie in your house
Like someone whom Apollon of the silver bow
Attacked and killed
With his thick-falling shafts.”
So she spoke as she wept
and she raised the unending song of lamentation.
Then among them Helen was third
in leading the song of grief.
"Hector by much dearest to me,
Dearer in my heart than my brothers.
My husband is indeed
God-like Alexandros.
This is the twentieth year
For me
Since I came from the other side,
Since I left my fatherland.
I have never heard from you
A bad or harsh word. If in our house
Anyone else scolded me,
A brother or a brother's wife, or a sister-in-law through a
husband well robed
Or a mother-in-law—my father-in-law was like a father to
me, very gentle; you always found the words
By which to appease them
Through your gentle ways
And through your gentle words.
It is for this that I weep for you
And I am disconsolate in my grief.
There was no other man
In all of broad Troy
So gentle and so dear
I shivered before all of them," so Helen spoke as she wept
and countless people groaned in response—
Then old Priam
now spoke to the people.

EURYKLEIA: Beloved old nurse of Odysseus
(Odyssey 1.428-444; 19.467-502)

You are a stranger—
A foreigner—you don't belong here—
Go away—
Vanish—do not test our nightmares—
Your son hoped you'd never come back—
Mind you she is the best of women—
But what would she do with you?
War-scarred husband
Wanderer, alien, homeless man, what would Penelope do
with you?
To wash your feet is my job. I take pleasure in it. You see,
feet are tired, feet do the work, and old women like
me
Soothe the weariness in them.
Aahh I see a scar here!
I see the scar. I know, my child, you must be Odysseus. I
love you and yet I cannot say so, not now anyway. I
know who you are but does your wife know who you
are? She has slept endless nights without you. She has
hoped hopeless days without you. Odysseus, you
have been gone forever. Be careful, child. Penelope is
a perfect woman.

ANTIKLEIA: Odysseus’ mother. He meets her soul
in the land of the dead. (Odyssey 11.150–224)

My son how have you made it this way?
How have you journeyed through the fog, through the
mist and through the darkness?
You are now in the underworld. Your loving mother, the
one who played with you, the very one who breastfed
you, is now an insubstantial shade in the cold
vastness of the underworld but my son you have
come. You must have questions about
Your patient wife, Telemachos your dear son, Laertes your
father. This is your mother speaking to you.
It is Penelope you really care for. How she is. How she
thinks of you,
how she measures you against other men.
Lusty young men desire your wife
And they want your kingdom.
I must now go. I must obey the law of the shades. Penelope is the foundation of your house.

**CHRYSEIS:** **WOMAN CAPTIVE OF WAR. SHE WAS GIVEN TO AGAMEMNON AS A PRIZE.** *(illiad 1.106–129)*

I am a beautiful woman. I am Chryseis of the beautiful cheeks. It was my misfortune that I became the prized possession of lordly Agamemnon. I am young. I am beautiful. It is clear he desires me. When the war is over he wants to take me back with him to his Mycenean Palace. He wants me to work the loom to produce marketable weft. Yet I must never speak. I am speechless.

Speechlessness is the lot of women captured in war. I know my father will come to ransom me. He is the priest of Apollon. I know that I will be delivered into my father's arms because Apollon is powerful.

**THE SIRENS:** **MONSTROUS CREATURES, HALF WOMAN, HALF BIRD.** *(Odyssey 12.36–58)*

We are the bird women. The vital half of us is bird, The upper part is woman. At least we have breasts. We can sing. We sing songs that are made of the sounds of the waves, the sounds of all the creatures that live in the sea, All the feminine sounds. We do not hate sailors. We do not hate men. We have to do our singing and they have to do their sailing. In us men seek Dreams they know would never come true. They are drawn to our desolate god-forsaken island. It's not love or sex or both. It is enchantment of sound they are drawn to.

They lie here as they are beaten down by the scorching heat of the sun

Fate has appointed us to our lot
To pray for the nameless.
THE WOMEN SERVANTS OF THE PALACE OF ODYSSEUS:
All fifty were hanged for treason. (Odyssey 22.446–472)

There are fifty of us. All hanged. All strung up like pieces of ham that is being cured. The question is: are we hanged by our necks or are we hanged heads down. We cannot even bite the dust:

We are suspended in eternal disgrace. We slept with Penelope’s suitors, all of them handsome young men. That was our crime.

We gave them a little sex. We harmed no one.

Odysseus has killed them all. They only wanted his kingdom and the bed he shared with his wife. We are dying for far less. They died for far more.

THETIS: MOTHER OF ACHILLES (Iliad 1.351–457; 18.35–147)

I am the mother of the greatest hero that ever lived, Achilles. He shall live forever in the hearts of men for whom honor crests the peak of all values. He had to go to war and he had to be the best. War is evil, yet all boys have to go to war. Every one of them has to be the best. This whole earth is strewn with our bones. The seas of this world are swelling with the tears of mothers.

Reader, you are a stranger to me. You may not know about tears. I am Thetis. Born of the loins of Ocean, I am made of water. Now Achilles calls on me. He needs me. He is my son. So water turns to fog, fog becomes a human body. Next thing I know I sit next to him. He is my beautiful boy, so manly, yet so distressed. I sit next to him, I touch him, and I call his name:

"Achilles, beloved son, what grief has come into your heart?
I am your mother. Speak to me. I want to know your feelings."

ARETE QUEEN OF PHAIKIA: WIFE OF ALKINOOS, mother of NAUSICAA. (Odyssey 7.54–77, 139–154)

We have a stranger here—
We have a homeless man—
He is knocking on our door
A suppliant—
To me Queen of Phaiakia—
and to you Alkinoos—
King of Phaiakia.
The stranger is sitting at our hearth—
He is next to our fire—
Next to the ashes of our fire.
Alkinoos, be a sweet man—
bid this stranger rise—
Have servants bring wine.
Dear husband, Zeus is the protector
of all suppliants.
We drink to this homeless man.
Alkinoos you are a great king—
You took the stranger by the hand—
You raised him from the fireside—
You had him sit on a splendid chair—
The chair you reserved
Only for your beloved son.
Water flowed from a golden pitcher—
And the basin below it was made of silver—
Then a well-polished table was set
Before the stranger—
A beautiful meal was served.
ARETE: “Who are you?
What kind of man are you?”
ODYSSEUS: “A long story!
I have no idea
As to what should top my list;
anyway, oh most respected queen,
women have plagued my life—
Kalypso was one of them.
She had a mansion—
On the island of Ogygia—
She offered to share her mansion
She offered to share all of Ogygia with me—
She gave me a place in which to hang my hat—
She offered me half of her bed and—true—
She cared for me far too much.
What do I know about goddesses?
I do know that Kalypso made me an offer
To be ageless and immortal
If I stayed with her
Quite a story, isn't it?
It would have been lovely—
But my heart was not in it—
So I sailed past her island."

THE GREAT WOMEN OF THE PAST (Odyssey 11.235-332)

The shades of the great women of the past appear before Odysseus but they do not speak to him. He cannot hear them as they speak.

Odysseus, we are speaking to you.
You cannot hear us. We now are in the great below—
Our beauty is no more.
Yes, queens, princesses, mothers of famous heroes,
    mothers of beautiful daughters. Tyro is here.
She loved to play in the waters of Enipeus,
Her favorite river. Then Poseidon rose out of the
    water and held her captive in his arms.
You know the rest of the story.
Antiope is here.
Zeus made love to her—
But that did not rescue her
From the bronze-fenced jail
Of the Underworld. The lord of the gods
Swept into Alkmene's bedroom
Like the fury of the storm. Herakles was born of the
    union.
She is here too.
Her divine lover made no special provisions for her.
Chloris, Leda, and Ephimeデa
Want you to greet them, Odysseus.
You cannot hear us.
It seems you cannot see us.
Zeus forced his passion
On us—we bore him splendid children,
But that did not save us from death.
Herakles ascended to Olympus,
But—Alkmene, his mother,
Descended
To the murky gloom.

TEIRESIAS: THEBAN SEE (10.492 and 11.90-137)

Odysseus, you do know me—
I am Teiresias, the seer.
The Theban seer—
Yes, I want to speak of the future
About your homecoming.
Of what follows it.
If you and your shipmates
Harm the cattle of Helios,
You will come out of that alive—
But every one of your men will die. I can see past the
mist of the underworld. Trouble is awaiting you
at home. Greedy and shameless men crave your
wife and your kingdom. You will kill them—
Penelope will be queen of your home again—that is
not the end. Homecoming is never the end. You
will go away again, you will meet mountain men
who have never tasted salt,
They will mistake your oar for a winnow-fan.
When this happens to you, drive your oar into the
ground like a spear-shaft. A ram, a bull and a boar
Must be sacrificed to Poseidon. Odysseus, pay
attention to me.
Yes, I was and am a man. I was also a woman for seven years. Twin insight—male and female—is in my prophetic vision.

**THE WOMEN OF THE ODYSSEY**

(Penelope is sitting at a simple loom. She is dressed in black. Directly behind her there is a drawing of Odysseus. When she speaks to him, she turns toward this picture. Next to Odysseus’ picture there is one of Telemachos as a little baby. Penelope’s voice must rise and fall, and where appropriate, must groan and moan and sigh.)

**PENELOPE**

I weave my longing into the long hours of the night; the lamp-wicks faint, my heart sinks into the wooden coffin I keep here just in case I die at the loom Or the ashes of my long-gone husband Are sent home in an urn. Telemachos is away to Pylos— Or is it Sparta? Where Helen, the beautiful bitch Is feeding her wimpy husband Sorrow-killing drugs from Egypt— They are a couple again, Blond Menelaus And Helen of the shimmering gowns. This palace here Now a shelter for the homeless Is crying for Odysseus,
Son of Laertes—
Odysseus,
Where are you?
What land, what tight-fleshed
Juicy young woman holds you hostage?
I am not alone
Tens and tens of lusty young men
Want me
Want to be kings
At least in their drunken and bloated dreams.
So full of vain hope they are!
Look at them
As they snore away
All over the front yard
Plotting to kill my son
To wipe out the seed
of Odysseus and Odysseus himself
When he comes home.

(Penelope has a little doll. The doll could be a little girl. She takes the
doll in her arms and speaks)

This is my true companion
Through the sleepless nights.
I rock her in my arms,
My second baby,
The baby girl I never had
Because Odysseus left me
Here on this rocky island.

(Penelope now reaches for a miniature warrior and speaks)

Oh, how much I would have loved you
These past twenty years
I wear on me the shroud
Of countless lonely nights.
Long-haired Achaeans
On journeys longer
For the longing
Black ships sail away
Black coffins float homeward
But Helen is back
To Sparta – Mrs. Bliss
Mrs. Win all – Take all

I am Penelope
Queen of Ithaka
The aged widow
Of Odysseus
Now the homeless king
Of beggars and strangers
Dead or alive
He'll come back
To me

The same nightmare
Visits me every night
Paralyzed with terror
I am forced by a
Theater director
To watch for stunning women
On some sort of stage
This is Helen, he says
She's a looker
This is Kalypso
The womb
And here we have Circe
She dopes up her animal
Turns men into pigs
Nausicaa is a country girl
She believes in God-watch out!
In the dream
The women join hands
And scream at me
Give up! Give it up!
Mothball your hollow ship
And your shrinking sails
You and your playboy husband
Are in a play now
Each one of us will tell her story
And you
Weaver of plots
Master actress

Tell our stories
To all those naive people
Who think you are Lady Loyalty

**KALYPSO: A Divine Nymph, Daughter of Atlas**
*(Odyssey 1.14, 52; 5.14–268)*

I am Kalypso
My navel is the center of the earth
And Odysseus is fascinated
By this
My island is the navel of the waters
A goddess by birth
Atlas is my father—
I have been stranded here
To tend to the needs
Of the homeless
My cave is spacious
My guest
Has seen the warning signs
Alder trees and cypresses
And black violets
He is a hero
His is a good lay
I am thinking
Of embalming him  
In a state  
Of a stiff and perennial  
Erection  
I am no necrophiliac  

Mind you  
But sex is the one hobby  
I never tire of  
Yes there are nymphs  
And yes some of them are maniacs  
You could have been immortal  
And forever young, Odysseus,  
But you chose Ithaca  
He can go —equality for all!—  
Tears is not my business  
Tears do not get you anywhere—  
I speak to Odysseus now  
You are heading home  
On a prefabricated raft  
Keep on smiling  
And you will get there  

CIRCE: Goddess Skilled in Witchcraft.  
She lived on the island of Aiaia  

Circe is my name  
And I feel fortunate—  
To have the great hero Odysseus  
As my partner for this year—  
I am content  
With the little I get—  
—everyone remembers how Kalypso  
hogged him for seven years—  
Mind you  
I’m so hot and sexy
Men become pigs for me.
I'm a decent lady—
I drug them—
And feed them—
There is no pain.
As for Odysseus,
He is so different
He is fun.
Every night he talks to me—
About home and sweet Penelope.
He's so cute, so adorable
Such bunk!
If he really wanted to make hay with her
Why on earth is he taking his sweet time to get to
Ithaca?
Men amuse me
They are such brilliant idiots
Yet, he is different
A restless mind
Captains his ship.
Penelope is the harbor.

NAUSICAA: YOUNG PRINCESS, DAUGHTER OF ALKINOOS, KING OF PHEACIA. QUEEN ARETE WAS HER MOTHER (Odyssey 6.17)

I'm eighteen
I want to go to college
I want to start dating
I said to my king father
Dad
Let me have a wagon
And mules and playmates
And let me go down to the river
To wash our linen
And maybe meet a stranger
We were playing our favorite ballgame
I want to tell everyone here
I want to talk to all the good people
I was innocent as they come
The girls were enjoying themselves
And then a god
This man
Came out of the sea
Holding a tree branch before him
And this man said to me
Oh you're beautiful, you're a goddess
I cannot come near you
I cannot touch you
And the more he talked
The more I fell in love with him
He was older
But so handsome
And so kingly
I made up my mind
Right then and there
That this man should be my husband
But the fates did not decree this
And he left the island
-Phaeacia of the good times-
I shall never forget him
He would have been my choice in life
But the gods are envious
And reserve choice to themselves
I am Nausicaa
The beautiful
The untouched.
I just lost my heart
To an older man,
A married man—
Hopeless!
HELEN: Queen of Sparta, Wife of King Menelaos.
She fell in love with the Trojan prince Paris and followed him to Troy (Iliad 3.121; Iliad 24.760–775)

I'm Helen
The stunning
Queen of Sparta
Wife of Menelaos—
And then
For quite a while wife
Of Paris, the Trojan prince—
I had married too young—
I was restless—
And the stranger prince came to visit us.
I fell for spicy eyes—
His tight saffron pants—
And his curly locks.
Menelaos my husband,
leader of armies,
shepherd of the people,
had no time
for the delicate provocations
that haunt
Oh so very precariously
a woman's body
The stranger came with excitement
I left my home and my only daughter
To follow Paris
I was the seductress
To my new husband
I was sex!!

I am not sex!!
I am fire
I am the allure
And the attraction
That produces desire
I am the black precipice
And the abyss
I am the wind
I am the mercy
When the dead revisit their graves
And the living revisit their homes
I am there to make it easy for them
My desire crawls
It cannot be contained
I am the beautiful Helen
Yes I survived the war
Yes I’m now back in my palace
I know all I have told you
This is why
I use drugs given to me
By the queen of Egypt

Listen everyone
Happy women do not leave home
Happy women do not follow strangers
To foreign lands.
Troy was a hellhole for me
My body was not mine in Sparta
At Troy it was foreign import
A heavily taxed luxury
A costly war this one
Thousands of men perished
Troy was torched
Razed to the ground
Surrounded by death
And ruined everywhere
It pains me
To talk about all this. Yet—it is all this—
My infamous love
For an Asian prince—
That made me famous.
SAPPHO OF LESBOS
620–550 BC

31

I count that man a god
the man who sits across from you,
ah so close, and turns submissive ears
to voice so sweet
to laughter so lovely.
All this, no lies here, drove the heart
in me into panic
if I just look at you
my speech is gone
my tongue is numb
in time shorter than one breath
a flirting fire runs
like a thief under my skin.
Cold sweat covers me
trembling takes all of me
paler than grass I am
and not far from death
but everything must be dared.

106
SAPPHO'S ODE 2

Come down from the sky
come to me from Crete
to this sacred temple
where for your sake
a grove of apple-trees
breathes enchantment
and incense hangs upon the altars.
In this grove
cold water trills song
through branches of apple-trees
roses spread their shade
over the whole place
leaves rustle
lead-heavy sleep
descends.

In this grove a horse-nurturing meadow
blossoms with flowers of spring
and breezes blow softly.

There, O goddess of Cyprus,
take goblets of gold,
fill them with nectar, mixed in delicate ways for our feasts,
and set them before us.

Some say a troop of horsemen
others a force of men on foot,
yet others a fleet of ships,
is the most beautiful sight
on the black earth,
but I say beauty. It is what you love.

It is so very easy to make everyone
understand this. Helen, the pinnacle
of human beauty, abandoned her husband,
noblest of men and sailed to Troy. But she
seduced herself
so frivolously
(so foolishly).
I now remember Anactoria
because she is not here-
I want to see the lovely way she walks
the way light quivers on her face
more than I want to see
Lydian Chariots
and foot soldiers
clashing in battle.

55

When you die you'll be forever dead.
There will never be a memory
of you, not even once, ever after,
for you have not known
the Roses of Pieria.
Not a glance
will be wasted on you
even in the house of Hades,
as you flit about
shuttling among the shades
from dimness
to gloom.

94

No guile in me
I want to die
she was sobbing
when she dumped me
of her many words this one stands out.

I'm really sorry, we've been through awful times,
Sappho, and I am leaving you
against my will.
Here's my answer to that:
Good-bye, do remember me.
You do know how we cared for you.

Then, again, you may not know.
Yet, I want to bring back to you
memories of good times.

110
*
Wreaths of violets and roses twined
you placed by my side
and many garlands
garlands of flowers
woven to fit soft necks
you anointed me with the extract
of myrrh worthy of kings.
And on a soft bed
tender bed
one clinging to the desires
of young women
there was no one,
there was nothing
off limits
nothing we did not do.
(there was) no grove
and no noise
(anymore).

LP34

The stars all about the beautiful moon
hide their bright faces
whenever she waxes full and her radiance peaks.
"Rich in designs is your throne. 
Immortal Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, 
weaver of intrigues, I pray you 
do not break my heart 
with deep and dull pains.
Mighty goddess. 
But come here, if at some other time 
you heard my voice, and from far away 
you listened to it. Then you left 
your father's house, you put 
your golden chariot to the yoke, 
and you came.

Swift and beautiful sparrows 
carried you all about the black earth 
wings rapidly churning 
from the sky 
through the gleaming air 
they soon reached the ground.
And you, blessed goddess, 
smiled all over your divine face, 
and asked what has happened to me 
again and why I am calling again, 
and what it is that I want the most 
in my frenzied heart."

"Whom must I persuade to return to 
your love / affection? Who wrongs you, Sappho?"
EPITAPHS

The following epitaphs range in date from the 7th century B.C. to Hellenistic times, and come from throughout the ancient Greek world. Included here are epitaphs in which the woman herself speaks, others in which the tomb speaks (i.e., the woman by metonymy), and others in which friends or relatives speak. The sentiments expressed in these epitaphs—affection for a departed spouse, parent or child, for a nurse, for women who died in childbirth—may be as formulaic as the sentiments expressed in Greece today at the death of a friend or relative. Several epitaphs purport to be standing on the tombs of historical figures (e.g., Homer, Sappho, the mother of Themistocles, various famous courtesans); others are humorous in nature. One may suppose that at least some of the latter group are literary exercises.

Of interest is the recurring theme of xenitia (the misfortune in this instance of dying far from one’s homeland) that was imbedded in the Greek tradition from ancient times and is echoed in Modern Greek folksongs and laments. It should be noted that it was—and still is—usual for Greek women upon marriage to join the household of their husbands, wherever that may be.

* * * * *

A Parian stone, I lie here in place of a woman
a memorial for Bitte, a tearful ache for her mother. (P4)

A stele, I stand on the tomb of Simos’ mother, Polynoe.
A sigh for the mother is bequeathed to the son. (P9)

Her father raised this lovely stele for the deceased
Learete. Alas, for no longer will we see her alive. (P20)

I am a bronze maiden and lie upon Midas' grave.
as long as water flows and tall trees grow
and the sun rises and the bright moon shines
and rivers rise and the sea flows round
remaining here on this much-mourned tomb,
I declare to passers-by that Midas lies here. (P.24)

Here Phil[—]los lay to rest the deceased,
modest Lampito far from her fatherland (P.53)

Tomb of Phrasikleia; I shall forever be called a maiden
having been allotted this name by the gods in place of
marriage. (P.61)

This is the grave of Archias and his sister Phile . . .
wise Phaidimos raised the stele over it. (P.62)

I am the grave of Myrrhine, who died of the plague. (P.68)

This is the grave of Metopis,
a good woman while she lived now lies here having died
(P.97)

Fire destroyed the eyes of Oneso's body
this flowery space contains her bones (P.99)

Out of sweet loyalty and the grace of friendship, your friend
Euthylla raised this stele over
your tomb, Biote. Keeping a tearful memory forever
she mourns your lost youth. (P.100)

Ampharete.
I hold this dear child of my daughter.
While living we watched the sunrise
I held her on my knees.
Even now when we are both dead I hold her. (P.104)
The shining tomb of the daughter of Kallimachos
who was the first to serve Nike's temple
as if by divine blessing she had the attendant's name
She was called Myrrhine truly by happy chance,
the first to serve the abode of Athena Nike
Myrrhine, favored by lot among all (P.109)

This is the grave of Anthemis.
Her friends laid wreaths around the grave
for her virtue and friendship. (P.112)

Here lies Aristylla,
the child of Ariston and Rodilla,
O prudent daughter. (P.113)

Far from my homeland I, Erseis, died in famous Athens.
Leaving behind yearning to my friends. (P.114)

Here is the grave of Mnesagora and Nikocharos
to show they are not living. Their fate was taken away,
leaving deep grief to both dear father and mother,
for they have gone, deceased, into the house of Hades.
(P.117)

I died an infant not yet reaching the bloom of youth
rather I came before woeful Acheron.
Her father Kleodamos, son of Hyperanor,
and her mother Korona
raised me as a memorial to their daughter Thessalia (P.139)

For Demotimos, his dear mother Amphidame wrought this
grave-stone,
For there were no children in the home;
and a tripod, which he won in a foot-race from Thebes,
she added for her son. (P.159)
Pythonax [raised] me as a tomb for his maiden sister, 
Daughter of Ar... (P176)

By this thoroughfare, Euopides raised this tombstone 
Over his noble deceased wife Aspasia; she was his wife. 
(P180)

This grave-stone her mother placed over 
Phanokrite who died, to please her child. (P181)

This dust covers Archedike, daughter of Hippias, 
a man who was the best in Greece; 
her father, husband, brothers and children were tyrants; 
she was not of reckless disposition. (P187)

I am the grave-stone of the daughter of Nadyos the Karian. 
Passer-by, stand here and have pity. 
This is the grave and stele of Parthenia, 
Who left behind the flower of youth 
And perished, being the only-born of her father. (P192)

I shall remember, for it is not fitting that the famous spouse 
of Archenautos 
lie here in death, 
Xanthippe, descendant of Periander, 
who once ruled over the boundaries of high-walled Corinth 
(P195)

As she, the maiden honey-bee, the new singer among poets 
was gathering the flowers of the Muses 
Hades carried off Erinna to marry her; rightly did she say 
"Hades, you are envious." (GA.7.13)

The tomb holds the bones and hollow name of Sappho. 
Her masterful words are immortal. (GA.7.16)
The Libyan shores, on the banks of the Nile, cover Lamiska who breathed her last in childbirth, with her twin infants. She was Samian by birth. Maidens, bring gifts to the girl, as one who safely delivered, and shed warm tears over her cold tomb. (GA.7.166)

Call me Polyxene, wife of Archelaus, daughter of Theodektos and ill-starred Demarete, and a mother. Fate overtook my child before it reached twenty days. I died at eighteen—briefly a mother, briefly a bride—all in all short-lived. (GA.7.167)

You came to the dark house of Acheron, dear Demokrateia, leaving behind grief for your mother. She, when you died, cut the grey hairs from her aged head with newly-honed shears. (GA.7.181)

I am the tomb of the maiden Helen; in grief, too, for her brother who predeceased her I receive double tears from their mother. I left common pain to her suitors, for the hope of all mourned equally her who was not yet anyone’s. (GA.7.184)

Just now the sweet flute was echoing in the bridal chamber of Nikippis, and the bridal hymn rejoiced in the clapping. But a lament burst into the bridal hymn. And the poor girl, not yet a wife, was dead. Tearful Hades why did you separate bridegroom and bride, you, who delight in ravishing? (GA.7.186)

The aged Niko placed a garland on the tomb of the maiden Melite. Hades, did you judge rightly? (GA.7.187)

I hold the courtesan from Colophon, Archeanassa; Sweet Eros settled even on her wrinkles. Ah lovers who plucked the fresh flower of her youth in its first bloom, what a blaze you traversed! (GA.7.217)
I, Kallikrateia, bore twenty-nine children
and did not see the death of even one;
I lived one hundred five years
without placing a shaking hand on a staff. (GA.7.224)

The writing will proclaim what tomb this is and who lies
beneath.
I am the tomb of the one named Glauka. (GA.7.262)

Your tresses still drip salt water, Lysidike, ill-fated girl,
shipwrecked and drowned in the sea.
For when the sea became stormy, fearing its
assault, you fell from the hollow ship.
The tomb proclaims your name and your homeland, Cyme,
but your bones are washed up on the cold shore,
a bitter grief to your father Aristomachos, who, escorting
you to your wedding, brought neither daughter nor corpse.
(GA.7.291)

Alas! It is worst of all when men mourn both a dead
bridegroom and bride, Eupolis and modest Lykainion,
whose wedding chamber collapsed on the first night,
extinguishing their marriage.
There is no other grief as this by which you
Nikis wept for your son, or you, Theodikos for your daughter.
(GA.7.298)

I was a Thracian woman; but I say that
I bore the great Themistocles for the Greeks. (GA.7.306)

I, the renowned woman, lie under this stone
who loosed my girdle for one man alone. (GA.7.324)

I am Myrtas who drank many a cup of strong wine
by the holy vats of Dionysos;
no thin layer of dust covers me, but a wine-jar,
symbol of my cheerfulness, lies over me—a pleasant tomb.
(GA.7.329)
My husband Phroures gave me this tomb, a worthy prize for my piety; I leave behind in the halls of my husband a chorus of renowned children, faithful witness to my modesty. I die the wife of one man, but live still in ten lives, having enjoyed the fruit of prolific wedlock. (GA.7.331)

Mother, even among the infernal deities, you should not be deprived of the gifts we owe to you. And so Nikomachos and your daughter Dione raised this tomb and grave-stone for you. (GA.7.333)

Noble passer-by, do not hurry past this tomb on restless feet; but look at it and ask, Who are you and whence? You will learn that I am Harmonia, whose race is illustrious in Megara. All that brings renown to mortals—lovely nobility, mild character, modesty—gaze on the tomb of such a one; for her soul, having cast off the body, looks to the heavenly paths. (GA.7.337)

Marathonis placed Nikopolis in this tomb, raining tears on the marble coffin. but it was of no profit; for what is left but grief for a man alone on earth, when his wife is gone? (GA.7.340)

Not by this solemn oath of the dead did we daughters of Lykambes, who have received an evil name Disgrace our virginity, or our parents, or Paros, towering above the sacred islands. But Archilochos, poured on our family awful reproach and a bad reputation. By gods and demons we swear that we never set eyes on Archilochos,
either in the streets or in the great sanctuary of Hera. If we had been wanton and wicked, he would not have wanted to sire lawful children by us. (GA.7.351)

This is the tomb of grey-haired Maronis, on whose grave you see a kylix carved in stone. She, the lover of wine and chatter, does not grieve for her children nor for the grieving father of her children; one thing she bewails even in her tomb is that the symbol of Bacchus on her grave is not full. (GA.7.353)

I am a woman of Athens, for that is my city, but the belligerence of the Italians once drove me out of Athens and made me a citizen of Rome; and when I died the island of Cyzikos covered my bones. Hail, land that nourished me, and land that drew my lot thereafter and land that at last received me in your bosom. (GA.7.368)

I wept for the loss of my Theonoe, but the pain was lightened by the hopes I had for our child. And now envious Fate robbed me of my son; alas, I was cheated even of the child that was left me. Persephone, hearken to the laments of a father: place the child in the embrace of its dead mother. (GA.7.387)

When winter snow melted on the roof, her house collapsed and killed old Lysidike; her fellow villagers did not make a tomb of dug up earth, but placed the house itself over her as tomb. (GA.7.402)

Stranger, do not wonder at seeing on Myro’s tomb a whip, an owl, a bow, a grey goose and a swift dog.
The bow proclaims me a well-strung leader of my house, the dog, a true guardian of my children, the whip, stranger, that I was not a harsh or haughty mistress, but a just punisher of fault; the goose, that I was a careful guardian of my home, the owl that I was a faithful servant of owl-eyed Pallas. In those things I took pleasure; and thus my husband Biton carved these symbols on my grave-stone. (GA.7.425)

His Spartan mother slew the Spartan Demetrios for transgressing the law. Lunging with her sharp sword she said, gnashing her teeth like a Lakonian woman: “Die, evil dog, evil piece; die, go to Hades; one not worthy of Sparta is not my son.” (GA.7.433)

Demaineta sent eight sons against enemy forces and buried all of them under one grave-marker. She did not shed tears in mourning, but only said: “O Sparta, I bore these children for you” (GA.7.434)

Mikkos looked after his good nurse, Aischra from Phrygia, when she grew old. And when she died, he erected her statue, so that future generations might see how he thanked the old woman for her milk. (GA.7.458)

The daughters of Samos often miss garrulous Crethis, who was so good in games, most sweet play-fellow, always chattering; she sleeps here the sleep that all must sleep. (GA.7.459)

Satyra, about to give birth, was carried off by Hades; the soil of Sidon covers her; her homeland, Tyre, grieves. (GA.7.462)
This one is Timokleia, this one Philo, this one Aristo, this one Timaitho, daughters of Aristodikos; All of them died in childbirth. Their father Aristodikos died after raising this grave-stone. (GA.7.463)

... Stranger, I am Aretemias, my homeland Knidos; Euphron was my husband; I was not without the pangs of childbirth. Giving birth to twins, I left one behind to aid my husband in old age; the other I took with me, as a reminder of my husband. (GA.7.465)

Artemidoros, this is the lament of your mother, as she mourned your death at twelve years old: “All my pains have turned to fire and ashes, all your father’s efforts have perished together with the sweet delight of you. You went to the land from which there is no return or homecoming; nor did you reach adolescence, my child; a grave-stone and silent dust is left for us. (GA.7.467)

Heliodora, I send you tears through the earth to Hades, The last gift of my love; Tears hard to shed; and upon your much-mourned tomb I pour them, a memorial of longing and affection... (GA.7.476)

Philainis, do not let this weigh on you, that the earth in which it was your fate to lie is not by the Nile, but that your tomb is in Eleutherna; for the road to Hades is equidistant from everywhere. (GA.7.477)

I, Rhodope, and my mother Boiska did not die of disease nor by the enemy’s sword; but we ourselves elected a brave end when war destroyed our homeland of Corinth. My mother slew me with the butchering knife,
nor did she, poor thing, spare her own life,
but fastened a noose around her neck. For a free death
was preferable to us over slavery. (GA.7.493)

Zosime, who was once a slave only in body,
has now found freedom for her body too. (GA.7.553)

Passer-by, I pray you, tell my dear husband
when you come to my homeland Thessaly:
"Your wife died and, alas, lies in a tomb by the
shore of the Bosporus.
But raise a cenotaph there, near you,
So that you may remember her who was once your wife."
(GA.7.569)

This is the tomb of Rhode. She was a Tyrian woman. She left
her homeland
and came to this city to look after her children.
She graced the marriage bed of ever-memorable Gemellos,
who was a professor of law once in this city.
She died in old age, but should have lived thousands
of years; we never have a surfeit of the good. (GA.7.575)

Your sweet husband, Rhodo, raises a marble sarcophagus
and a
tomb for you—and gives alms to the poor for your soul;
in return for your dying early and giving him freedom.
(GA.7.605)

Why do you remain by my tomb, grieving in vain?
There is nothing worthy of lament among the dead.
Husband, end your lament and my children,
farewell; preserve the memory of Amazonia. (GA.7.667)

I am a new Alcestis; I died on behalf of my good husband,
Zeno, the only man I received to my embrace,
whom my heart preferred to the daylight and to my sweet children.
My name is Kallikrateia, admired by all. (GA.7.691)

You see the face of modest Kassia.
although dead, she is known by her virtues, the beauty of her soul rather than of her body. (GA.7.695)

Passer-by, I was once priestess of Demeter, then of the Cabiri, and later of Cybele, I, the old woman who is now dust . . .
I was the protectress of many young women; I had two sons and died in their arms at an advanced age. Depart rejoicing. (GA.7.728)

We were two old women of the same age, Anaxo and Kleno, twin daughters of Epikrates. In life, Kleno was priestess of the Graces and Anaxo of Demeter. We were nine days away from our eightieth year . . . we loved our husbands and children and we, the old women, came to Hades before them. (GA.7.733)

"Phokaia, renowned city," these were the last words uttered by Theano as she descended into the barren night; "Alas, I the ill-fated one; Apellichos, my husband, what sea are you crossing in your swift ship? Death stands beside me. How I would like to die holding your dear hand in mine." (GA.7.735)

Phanostrate, midwife and physician lies here; she caused pain to no one, now dead she is missed by all. (K.45)

This grave contains the kind nurse of Diogeitos' children, Malicha from Cythera in the Peloponnesos. (K.47)
Far from my country, I died in illustrious Athens
Erseis, leaving yearning to all who knew me. (K.91)

Tell, woman, who you are, your parentage, your homeland
And from what grievous malady you died.
My name is Praxo of Samos, stranger, and was the offspring
Of Kallitelos. And I died in childbirth.
Who raised your tomb? Theokritos, whom they
Gave me as husband. What age were you?
I was twenty years old. Did you have children?
I left Kalliteles, a three-year-old son at home. (Page, p. 7)

Having placed her lips on the lips of four wine-jars
Silenis drank all the wine
Lovely-haired Dionysos, she did not taint you with water,
But as you first came from the vineyard
She toasted you, with lavish vessel until
She went to the sand of the dead. (Page, p. 59)
GREEK TRAGEDY

SONG OF THE CORINTHIAN WOMEN
(Euripides, Medea: the first choral ode)

The holy rivers are running back to their sources, and justice and all the world are in reverse. It is men who plan deception, men who lack allegiance to the gods. Reputation will reverse my life, will grant it glory—honor is coming to the female race, and women's repute will be slandered no more.

The anthologies of age-old poets will stop extolling my faithlessness. And if Phoebus Apollo, the Lord of Song, had given us women the godly gift of lyric verse, we would have echoed songs against the race of men. The length of time has much to say concerning women and of men.

You, Medea, sailed from your father's house, maddened with love, and cut straight through the Clashing Rocks; but now you live in a foreign land, your marriage ruined, your bed betrayed, and are driven—poor woman—into exile and dishonor.

Gone is the grace of holy vows, and decency remains no more in Greece—vanished in air. For you in your misery no father's house stands ready, a refuge from troubles, but another queen—trumping your bed—rules the roost.
PAIN AND PROTEST
(EURIPIDES, Ion: CREUSA'S MONODY)

My soul, my soul, how can I keep silent?
But how can I reveal that dismal
mating—and so lose all my modesty?

But what is left to stop me now?
Who must I convince of my virtue?
And hasn't my husband turned traitor?

I am cheated of home, cheated of children,
and gone are the hopes I once had
of setting things straight
by burying in silence that union
and the birth of my child in a flood of tears.

So I swear by Zeus' starry throne,
by the goddess on our acropolis,
and by the sacred shore
of Triton's limpid lake:
I will hide the rape no more, and once I have
lifted it from my chest, I will have relief.
My eyes drip tears
and my soul endures the viciousness
of humans and gods,
who are—I will prove—
treacherous traitors of a woman's bed.

You—who sing with the din
of the seven-toned lyre,
resounding with musical sounds
from the lifeless horns of animals—
it is your disgrace, Apollo,
that I now expose to the light of day.
You came to me gleaming with
gold in your hair as I was gathering
in the folds of my robes
crocus blossoms that glinted gold.
Glued to my tender wrists
as I shrieked out “Mother!”,
you the lover god
dragged me into your bedroom cave,
doing the duty of
shameless Desire.
In my misery I bore you
a son and then, with a mother’s fear,
left him on the sordid spot
where you once mated
and mistreated me.

Agh! Right now your son
and mine is gone, snatched away—
a feast for vultures.
And you just clang on your lyre, you
brute, singing triumph songs.
Ho! I call on you, Apollo,
who parcel out prophecy
from your golden throne
at the center of the universe:
I proclaim aloud to all the world—
evil fornicator!—
for my husband who did
you no favor, you are housing
a son in my home.

But my child and yours, you deadbeat,
is gone, plundered by vultures,
stripped of his mother’s swaddling.
Your own Delos hates you, and the laurel
sprigs by the soft-haired palm tree
hate you, where Leto once gave holy birth
to you, the seed of Zeus.
[interrupting] Mother, hear
what I am saying. I can see your anger at your
husband
is getting nowhere—we can’t expect to do the
impossible.
Yes, it is right to applaud our friend’s devotion,
but take care that the army not turn against him
while we achieve nothing and he finds disaster.
Mother, hear what struck me as I thought things over:
I have decided to die. And I want to do this
gloriously, casting aside everything menial.
Mother, look and see if what I say rings true:
all Greece, everywhere, now gazes at me,
and the sailing of ships, the sacking of Troy depends
on me;
women of the future—if foreigners try to assault
them—
will be snatched no more from prosperous Greece
but will have revenge for the ruin of Helen, seized by
Paris.
My death will prevent all this, and my fame
will be saintly for setting Greece free.
In deed, there’s no reason I should cling to life:
you gave birth to me for all Greeks alike, not you
alone.
And now thousands of men putting on armor,
thousands taking up oars when their country is
attacked—
shall they dare to charge the enemy and die for
Greece,
while my life, just one, can prevent all this?
What could I honestly say in rebuttal?
So I welcome it. It’s not right for our friend
to fight the other Greeks and die for one woman.
Better for one man to survive than a thousand women.
And if Artemis is determined to take my body,
shall I, a mortal, stand in the goddess's way?
That cannot be. So I give my body to Greece:
Make sacrifice! Sack Troy! This in the length of time
is my memorial, my children, my marriage, my reputation.
It is right for Greeks to rule foreigners, but not for foreigners,
Mother, to rule Greeks. One are slaves and the others free.
PYTHAGOREAN WOMEN

Among the Pseudo-Pythagorean texts published by Holger Thesleff (1961), there is a small corpus of letters, treatises, and apothegms allegedly authored by women of this school and sect. The letters are usually addressed to other women and offer practical advice on problems that middle-class matrons in any Hellenistic city would have encountered—selecting wet-nurses, clothing, dealing with maidservants, and accepting husbands' infidelities.

MELISSA

Melissa, the author of this letter written in Doric dialect, is otherwise unknown. Vocabulary and style suggest the second century CE as the most likely date of the letter's composition.

Melissa sends greetings to Kleareta

You seem to me to be blessed by nature with many excellent qualities, for your desire to obtain guidance in the matter of feminine morality gives me hope that you want to age in virtue.

This, then, is my advice: a wise and righteous woman must come to her lawful husband attired decently, without ostentation; she should be wearing a white dress, clean and plain, not expensive or extravagant. She must renounce those clothes that are transparent or shot with purple or gold. These are good for the hetaeae who pursue many men, but a woman who seeks to please her own husband, should be adorned by her good qualities rather than her clothing, since a righteous woman should seem beautiful to her own husband not to the neighbors. Therefore, you should wear modesty rather than read paint, and goodness, orderliness, and self-restraint, rather than gold and emeralds.

A woman aspiring to virtue should not be preoccupied with luxuries but with the management of her household. And, for the husband's wishes should be for a righteous woman an
unwritten law by which she must live, she should please her husband fulfilling his wishes. She should also consider self-restraint the most beautiful and greatest dowry she can bring into her husband's house. One should trust the beauty and richness of the soul not of appearance and possessions, for envy and disease can deprive us for the former, while the latter remain with us till death. Farewell.

MYIA

In the doxographic tradition, Myia is name of Pythagoras' daughter (or one of his daughters). The present letter was most likely composed in the second century CE.

Myia sends greetings to Phyllis

Since you have become a mother of children, I advise these: choose a suitable and clean wet nurse, but also decent and not inclined to fall asleep or drink. Such a nurse would be judged best for bringing up freeborn children if she also has nutritious milk and does not go easily persuaded to sleep with her husband.

For this part of education—that the nurse should take good care of the child—is of the foremost importance because it affects the rest of the child's life. Schedule will be of great importance. She should nurse and feed the child not haphazardly, according to a plan; only in this way will she nurse the infant in health. And she will sleep not when she needs but when the newborn wants to rest. This will benefit the child greatly. And let the nurse be neither prone to anger nor talkative nor indiscriminate in her choice of food, but well organized and prudent, and if such a possibility exists, not barbarian, but Greek.

It will be best if the newborn is put to bed after having drunk milk; such indulgent feeding is pleasant to newborns and good for (their) digestion. When other food becomes necessary, the simplest should be supplied.

One must avoid wine altogether or to give sparingly as an admixture in the evening milk soup.
As for baths, they should not be frequent; spare use moderate temperatures are preferable. Fresh air is, likewise, suitable when it contains a mixture of hot and cold and the indoor should be neither too drafty nor too covered. The water should be neither too hard nor too soft and bedding not too narrow but the fitting the body.

In all these matters indeed nature not luxury determines what is fitting.

These things were then useful to write concerning your present needs, since you placed your hope in [my] advice on how to care for an infant.

With god’s help, soon we will share general and particular advice on the education of an older child.

Farewell.

THEANO

In the doxographic tradition (going back as far as the fourth century BCE), Theano was Pythagoras’ wife and disciple. The present letter was most likely composed in the first or second century CE.

Theano sends greetings to Kallisto

As soon as you are married, the law gives you young women the right to run your own household. We older women are always there to offer you useful advice. You need to learn about everything from scratch, so it will feel natural to take instruction from an experienced woman. A young soul has to be initiated from her earliest girlhood into a wife’s foremost domestic responsibility: supervision of slave women.

My dear, the most important thing in dealing with your slaves is their motivation to serve you. You can’t buy their loyalty and devotion when you purchase their bodies. A slave’s goodwill is created afterwards, through the good wife’s thoughtful management. There is no other way to obtain it than from fair use: slaves should never be worked to the point of exhaustion, and they should never be kept in conditions so harsh that they cannot work. By nature they are, after all, human beings.
Some women believe they can somehow profit by taking what is in fact the least profitable approach. They mistreat their slaves by overworking them, yet restricting their rations. But while they save themselves a few pennies in this way, they also incur massive losses in the form of their slaves’ ill will, resentment, and disloyalty. Keep it simple when it comes to the daily feeding of your slaves: just make sure that they get more food when they spin more wool.

When the time comes to discipline your slave women, go on the basis of what best serves your own needs, not what might be more convenient for them. You have to make sure that a slave who deserves punishment gets it. Now, while cruelty certainly brings no gratitude to a slave woman’s soul, you can make your displeasure known equally efficiently through reasonable treatment. If, however, you should find it impossible bring one of your maidservants to heel, you must absolutely drive that malice out of the house by selling the offending slave woman. If she is no use to you, get rid of her. When it comes to punishment, be sure to condemn the offense, first of all, and secondly, match the punishment to the crime. Now, a mistress who is forgiving and kind towards a slave woman who has committed some small offense can diminish the harm done. Some wives, my dear, stupidly whip their slaves like dogs, letting jealousy and anger get the better of them. Never try to write your rage on a slave woman’s back.

Some slave women get worked to the bone. Others save themselves by escaping. And some end their own lives, exchanging life for a self-imposed death. Their mistress finds herself alone and unserved, bewailing her lack of judgment when it is too late to profit from a change in approach.

My dear, remember how off the strings of a musical instrument sound when they are too loose, and how they break when strung too tight. The same holds true with slaves. Because excessive leniency puts discipline off-kilter, and severity inevitably disrupts life. One more thing: remember to be moderate in all things. Farewell.
ARIS ALEXANDROU, ANTIGONE: A CROSS-PRESENTATION OF THE PLAY'S TRANSLATION

“There is no Muse of translation”
(Walter Benjamin)

Alexandrou’s Antigone begged to be translated because the free adaptation is about as creative a reworking of Sophocles’ original drama as was possible in postwar Greece. On the other hand, the modern play is harsh and restrictive for placing heavy ideological burdens on its Antigone, while keeping the reader in suspense as to whether the new heroine will buckle under the pressure of the long struggle of the Occupation and the Civil War. The Greek Civil War set in motion a complex process of contextualizing ancient Greek tragedies, which deserves further study. This essay introduces the classicizing adaptation of Sophocles’ Antigone written by Aris Alexandrou (bellicose pseudonym for Aristotelis Vassileiadis, 1922–1978), a longtime victim of the repression by the Greek Left as well as by the Right.1 Alexandrou wrote the first draft of his Antigone in exile on the island of Lemnos in 1949, but he later destroyed his manuscript (Raftopoulos 1996: 222). His play took the form in which it is now preserved after the author had been interned on Makronisos and At Stratis (Pehlivanos 2004: 328, 343). Alexandrou is, of course, better known for his poetry and for his Civil War novel, The Mission Box (To kivotio). It was while composing his Antigone, however, that the one-time playwright discovered many of the themes that grew to

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1 For more background information on Alexandrou, see Gourgouris (2000: 47–49); I Lexi 77 (September 1988); Ricks (1989). For a more comprehensive study of Alexandrou’s play in the context of the theater productions that were staged on the prison islands of the Greek Civil War and its aftermath, see Van Steen (2011b, with further bibliographical references). This volume includes a chapter (ch. 6) featuring the original modern Greek script accompanied by a translation into English (all page numbers that appear in parenthesis in this essay refer to this recently published translation, pp. 239–306). Alexandrou’s play, however, was not staged until 2003, when it was rediscovered by Victor Ardittis and the State Theater of Northern Greece. On this modern production, see Van Steen (2011a).
maturity in the acclaimed novel. This essay therefore focuses on the threads that make Alexandrou's *Antigone* of 1951 such a thematically rich but also deeply tragic play: it lays out some important connections that tie together the seemingly disparate characters and narrative details of the plotlines of the two-act play. This approach to Alexandrou's work will make a bigger picture emerge: that of the kaleidoscopic value of the tragic heroine Antigone for the life of the marginalized idealist and/or political prisoner, in Greece or elsewhere.

This analysis that presents the play’s themes across the canvas of its translation holds further interest as well. Alexandrou worked as a translator himself and left hints for the translator of his own work: his repeating of themes, often cast in the same phrases, makes the translator’s work slightly easier. Repeated cues expand our knowledge of Alexandrou’s thinking by providing multiple contexts to similar ideas—and by questioning or confirming our choices of words once (we think) we have cracked his dense, staccato language. Alexandrou’s bold script leaves very little to narrative voices (other than in short and functional stage directions) but, instead, shifts all its weight onto punctuated dialogues and even monologues. The speech patterns of the various characters grow more and more distinct throughout the play, as do the occasional dialectical touches. The text is further riddled with dashes and unspoken or unspeakable thoughts, leaving the reader or listener to ponder the gap between what is said and what is being suppressed—and why. Alexandrou’s modernist expression and his overuse of dashes reveal Proustian influences. This idiosyncratic language, however, surges into an extended moment of a more poetic style in the play’s intermezzo, which juxtaposes the idyllic worlds of childhood and of quiet nature to the dark realities of adult and supposedly mature life.

In a Brechtian fashion, Alexandrou’s theater builds consciousness through the dialectics of the stage and reenacts the tumultuous history of the Greek 1940s without becoming overly time-specific. His *Antigone* consists of two acts that relate to but that also problematize one another,
because frequent reversals create tension between the two parts. Both of the acts could stand autonomously as one-act plays, but together they deliver a double and shifting picture of a Kafkaesque guerrilla warfare that the Left waged first against the Germans during the Nazi Occupation and then against its right-wing opponents in the Civil War. Alexandrou unmasks the abusive communist leadership of the Greek Civil War in the aftermath of the Nazi Occupation, on which he, most audaciously, sheds a similar negative light. He thus discloses the fallacy of those who, in their debating and memory-making, kept avoiding the realities of the Civil War by returning to the Resistance. The playwright exposes how it served the Left as well as the Right better to simply fall back upon a “safe,” militant discourse, one that had long conceived of the other side as morally inferior, without questioning the inconsistencies or contradictions of such views. Both the Right and the Left were caught, however, in the pitfalls of a broader moral-political dialectic that held sway for most of the twentieth century. This dialectic fueled ethical oppositions between the two camps and distinguished those who “promoted” the sociopolitical order from those who “undermined,” “infected,” or “betrayed” it. Both sides were obsessed also with plot—technically, the blueprint of a theatrical fiction but also the basis of conspiracy theory and plot psychosis (all of which color Alexandrou’s notion of “plot”). The Right convinced itself that the Left’s plotting was part of an international as well as a domestic conspiracy. Both sides contrasted the rhetorical “lies” of the others to their own nontheatrical “truths.” Each camp’s own line of “patriotic” action promised to defeat insubordination and lead to a “deserved triumph” of Greek moral supremacy—and to its own political primacy. Both sides had, in effect, integrated a discourse of dramatic victory that was normally reserved for battles against exterior enemies.\(^3\)

Alexandrou’s *Antigone* is not a play without center. However, while the conventional focus on the protagonist has been much diluted, a central axis reemerges in the dialectic of personal episodes and (at first sight) dramatically insignificant details that become the plotlines of

\(^3\)For further introductions to the contested Greek Civil War, see Carabott and Sfikas (2004); Close (1993, 1995, and 2002); Fleischer (2003); Hatzivassiliou (2006, with focus on the Cold War); Iatrides and Wrigley (1995); Iliou (2004); Koutsoukis and Sakkas (2000); Mazower (2000); Nikolakopoulos et al. (2002); Panourgia (2009: 81–116, or her chapter 5); and Van Boeschoten et al. (2008).
decisive events and historical encounters. A fatal sense of interchangeability also pervades Alexandrou's work. The play does not offer the comforting steadiness of the protagonists' names, and the fates of Antigone, Andronikos, and Nikodimos keep shifting. These shifts mark changes in the power structures of the Left, which are ruled by personal ambition, overt strife, and party intrigue. “Weaker” members of the Left, such as Antigone, remain in extremely fragile positions, while their youthful idealism is easily exploited. Small wonder that some partisans will do anything to stay in the good graces of the leaders; their worst fear is to be expelled from the group and this fear guides their every action. Alexandrou has further eroded the act of naming, or the presumption that one knows what names, faces, ideals, and words in general stand for. However, the name of Antigone, who keeps on searching for meaningful political action in the midst of a climate of distrust, still raises suspicions in the mind of the (all-monitoring) male leadership, and it precipitates a dark drama of inevitability twice over.

Power strife is at the core of Alexandrou's Antigone: it is the driving and destructive force behind the loosely dialogic progression of the play, in which the burden of the past, of the tragic myth, and of the very names of the heroes do—paradoxically—not confine but, instead, open up a new canvas. This antagonism, however, is not the typical one that fuels the opposition of Left versus Right: it is the much more corrosive rivalry within the leftist group. Alexandrou is uninhibited in his depiction of this dynamic and its disastrous consequences of damaging suspicions and false accusations. Only his Antigone remains unaffected by this nefarious climate: she constitutes, in fact, a threat to leftist dogmatism and mistrust. She herself merges with the larger, lost generation of young Greek leftist idealists of the Occupation through the Cold War. Therefore, she may be seen as a foil for the playwright, who confirmed his sympathy for the tragic heroine on multiple occasions. 

*"It would have been peculiar," Dimitris Raftopoulos, Alexandrou's biographer, contended, "if he had not written an Antigone. Which other incarnation would better express what he had to say?" (1996: 222). Kaiti Drosou, Alexandrou's wife and lifelong partner, poet, and journalist, claimed that the playwright fully identified with his Antigone (Ardittis, interview with the author, Athens, 4 January 2008). Raftopoulos agreed that "the life and work of Alexandrou overlap almost entirely" (2003: 8). Alexandrou himself declared: "The poet is always on the side of Antigone and never on the side of Creon" (quoted by Pehlivanos 2004: 323).
Discussions (and stand-offs) pertaining to military ranks, medals, and battle stars recur frequently in Alexandrou's text (pp. 245, 248, 249, 258, 280, 295), and instances of "pulling rank" are not uncommon, either (pp. 273, 287–288, 293–295). These distinctions and decorations appear to bedazzle many in the leftist camp, but not Antigone, as in the following dialogue with Andronikos, her superior and lover (of Act 2), who is unwilling to accept military defeat and continues to risk his troops' lives in vain:

ANDRONIKOS
(With bowed head, he pushes her away. Then, slowly, he gets angry.)

Of course, you, you don't have much to lose, hardly anything. But I, I want my stars. I earned them with my sweat, with my blood. That's how you throw out a whole life? . . . I am ashamed to have entrusted a weapon to you. So then? What are you waiting for? Why don't you go and shout out to them that they are the defeated? They'll pelt you with stones. . . . Go and tell them. I am chasing you out. I am kicking you. I am spitting on you for you to leave. What are you still waiting for?

ANTIGONE
(After a pause.) May you be right, Andronikos. (She leaves.)

ANDRONIKOS
(After a long pause.) Klearchos! Klearchos!

KLEARCHOS
(He enters.) Your orders, General.

ANDRONIKOS
Sit down. (They sit down.) Do you trust me, Klearchos?

KLEARCHOS
I would go through fire for you, my General.

ANDRONIKOS
Would you believe whatever I told you?

KLEARCHOS
Whatever, my General.

ANDRONIKOS
As it happens—I just now got confirmation—Antigone is an enemy agent.

(pp. 301–302)
The reaction of the subordinate Klearchos, who shows signs of rebelling but then quickly complies, when his commander turns up the pressure:

**ANDRONIKOS**

And I advise you: the sooner you convince yourself, the better, before your stance leaves me suspicious, because, of course, whoever tries to provide cover for an agent—

**KLEARCHOS**

... [S]ince you order me to believe it, I believe with all my heart that Antigone is an agent. And, besides, why are orders even needed, since you, her man, are the one telling me? And then, I, of course, I don’t want to isolate myself at all. Oh, no, wouldn’t that be something that goes against the group, wouldn’t that be against the interests of the people? Isn’t it true? No, what would happen, indeed, if they all went their own way? Not one step would we be able to—But why am I sitting here, then? Antigone might already have begun her corrosive work. I need to run. I’m off. The orders will be carried out to the letter. *He leaves in a hurry.*

(pp. 302–303)

Antigone is the only one who is not afraid of being called a coward or, much worse, a “defeatist” (*ittopathis*) (see also pp. 293, 300) and, therefore, of being shunned by the group (p. 301). Others, however, are terrified of being exposed and expelled as cowards. This fear drives their

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5 During and after the Civil War, Greek communists tried hard to eradicate attitudes of defeatism and passivity among its cadres and rank and file. Expressing defeatism meant breaking ranks with the leadership of the Left and came with painful forms of exclusion. Being called “the defeated” was a particularly emotive issue, which tended to isolate the “defeatists” for many years of their lives (Voglis 2002: 174, 214, 217, 218, 227–231, 232–233, 234). The Left “took the line” on Alexandrou that he was “defeatist and suspect” (Raftopoulos 1996: 160). Andronikos conjures up how Antigone will be pushed into isolation if she goes against his wishes and divulges the truth of the guerrillas’ military demise:

What are you waiting for to remain all alone? You who are so needy of me, of the others, you pursue the path of loneliness like a madwoman. You who have such a need to give, you won’t find even one person willing to accept your words. Go then, trample on your fallen body yourself. Go and tell them. (p. 301)
brazen eagerness to assist in the public denouncements and even in the actual executions of fellow partisans who have fallen victim to the group leaders' suspicions and allegations (pp. 259–260, 302–303). The horrible “side scene” that ends Act 1 reads as follows:

SECOND SOLDIER
He cannot kill a traitor. He is afraid of blood.
ALL
He is afraid. (They laugh.)
FOURTH SOLDIER
No, he is my brother, my twin brother and—
FIRST SOLDIER
Your brother? So, you're trying to save him. So you, too—
FOURTH SOLDIER
No, I know that he is a traitor. Because of him, my cousin also died. Nevertheless, why should it be me? Why should the lot fall to me?
THIRD SOLDIER
Hey, hang on. He chickened out, I tell you. He chickened out at the last moment . . .
FOURTH SOLDIER
No, I am not afraid. I will kill him. (He pulls out his pistol.)
SECOND SOLDIER
(Seizing his pistol.) Weapons are for men. You are not good enough for us.
FOURTH SOLDIER
(Pulling out a knife.) With my knife I will stab him in the heart.
FIRST SOLDIER
Knives are for those who have a heart. You are a coward. (He takes the knife from him.)
FOURTH SOLDIER
With my teeth. Let me cut his throat with my teeth.
THIRD SOLDIER
Cowards have their teeth only to chatter them from fear. You don't need them. (He punches him in the mouth and throws him down.)

(pp. 271–272)
In this climate of distrust and intimidation, the only good suspect is a dead suspect. "A corpse is the only sure thing," is the motto of the closing lines of the play (p. 306), a motto for which Alexandrou has carefully prepared his reader (pp. 255, 259). Everything else is subject to doubt. The lines between certainty and uncertainty become blurred, as do the lines between reality and illusion (pp. 250, 253, 255, 257, 259, 265, 267, 302). The characters struggle with properly naming things and keep looking for the right words (e.g., p. 261). They also try to articulate truths (e.g., p. 266) and definitions of, for instance, the catch phrase of "the interests of the people" (pp. 254, 262, 303). They seek the answer to the question of whether different circumstances and decisions will lead to different outcomes. They ponder choices in agonizing nightly scenes marked by masks (such as Act 1, Scene 6 corresponding to Act 2, Scene 5) or by the unsteady light of candles (such as Act 1, Scene 7 corresponding to Act 2, Scene 6). Masks prove to be particularly effective in disclosing the hypocrisy of hiding behind falsehoods and excuses. Pretext reins and constantly undermines stated motivations. In Scene 7 of Act 1, Nikodimos even suggests that the power of the mind can greatly facilitate the process of construing justifications for immoral deeds (p. 254). The worst of the leaders' logic of political expediency is, of course, captured by the blank pieces of paper, which are supposed to deliver directives to the troops sent on dangerous missions but, instead, merely drive home that these missions are futile—a theme that prefigures the plot of Alexandrou's Mission Box (Act 1, Scene 10 [prepared by Scene 5] corresponding to Act 2, Scene 6 [extended into the confrontation between Andronikos and Antigone of Scene 8]). But the most morally offensive pretexts are those of the young mother, Maria, who smothers her sick child, so she and her husband Stratis will be free to join the partisans on the mountains: they will again be able to enjoy uninhibited sex together (p. 287), and the husband will be empowered by wielding a gun (p. 284); besides, they can just lie about how the child actually died and present its death as the result of the Left's dire oppression by the Right (subtly implied on p. 291). The shallowness of Maria's motivations resurfaces in Act 2, Scene 7, whereas the opportunism of Stratis shows in Act 1, Scenes 2 and 4, and again in Act 2, Scenes 3 and 9 (with allusions to his unreliability and possible treachery on p. 245 and p. 306).
In Scene 5 of Act 2, Andronikos further tries to convince Antigone of the altruistic motives that sustain him in the guerrilla war that he is waging. He even claims not to be seeking any "posthumous glory" (ysterofimia) and invokes the symbolic image of the "spiti," the Greek home as well as the (material) house:

ANDRONIKOS

It is enough for me to see the others free of worries. To hear them speak like we speak today at the illegal meetings, in the detention cells, on the mountain, so that they may at last say out loud that bread means sweat and that hope is their bread. It is enough for me that I'll know that they are at any moment ready to sing. For themselves, Antigone. Me—they may have forgotten me, and let it be. They may never have known me to then forget me, because I, I have found my home in the home of the others.6 (p. 291)

These declared noble ideals, however, are belied by Andronikos's relentless quest for power and recognition (see above). Only Antigone can successfully—and effortlessly—resist the temptations of power and glory—even though her mythical name has already given her (the burden of) a legacy of fame. Antigone altruistically exchanges masks with the Ismene-like Maria to go out and bury a fellow partisan. She is thus not even claiming her own "later glory" (pp. 288, 299). The heroine foregoes the affirmation of her trademark identity when she lives up to her mythical name in sheer anonymity. She is willing to become another, cowardly person (Maria) in what Alexandrou unequivocally depicts as a name and fame-driven struggle. As a corollary of Alexandrou, this Antigone breaks through the ideological ceiling of dogmatic oppression and tries to reform consciousness. Thus she delivers the most positive and democratic message of all about the Greek 1940s.

Living in the world of the mind, Alexandrou wrote his version of Sophocles' Antigone to lead away from political and military action to

6In Act 1, Andronikos admits that he is seeking a new home for himself (pp. 253–254). His stated motivation, however, is misinterpreted by a jealous and vengeful Nikodimos who takes these words literally: he accuses Andronikos of being a "selfish invidualist" for aspiring to possess a comfortable new house (p. 258).
contemplation and soul-searching. He fragmented the source text and its known values to then re-create an intricate dialectic with the sensibilities of the original that also haunted his contemporaries. The playwright's Antigone makes for an intriguing mixture of Greek antiquity and Greek modernity, which has necessarily provoked thought and criticism but which was eminently worthy of translation. The work debunked a dialectic of absolutes in an environment made of political absurdities, and it withstood the perils of the common reduction of ancient tragedy to paradigmatic characters, messages, or slogans. Rather, the play set the terms for a complex moral discussion that moved forward and backward in time but that took decades to be discovered on the actual stage. The 1951 Antigone made a bold statement about the moral as well as the military defeat of the Greek leftist leadership long before such a view could be publicly discussed among the Left. However, Alexandrou refused to politicize his play on the level of party politics, and his Kafkaesque work is not strictly defined by Greece of the 1940s—unfortunately not.

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Athens: Themelio.


The women of Greece always worked hard. None worked as hard as the women of the Greek mountains. The terrain is rough, sloping. To go anywhere you have to climb or descend. To fetch water from the spring, a woman’s duty, you have to be physically fit. The women of the lowlands also did heavy labor. Their predicament was even worse because in times past they had no refuge against the merciless heat and the water they drank offered them no refreshment.

“Mother, you gave me away to an awful marriage.
Mother, you married me off, you sent me to the lowlands
Mother, I cannot drink warm water”

Little girls and little boys started working very early. They tended small herds of sheep and goats. Frequently, they stayed up all night, directing the course of the water into the thirsty fields. Little girls, more so than little boys, were instructed to be modest at all times. Mothers and grandmothers would remind them of modesty if they sat or moved like boys. Shame they would cry each time. Let it be known here that shame is the most powerful force in Greek society. Its power governed the lives of men, but the burden of shame fell heavier on women. I don’t remember people being harsh on little girls. I remember Greek men, men who were fathers, being devastated by the illness or, worse yet, the death of a daughter.

I went to elementary school with many little Greek girls. I remember them all very fondly. They were all treated very well. They were also very pretty, but the boys never got too close to them. There was this feeling that one must not in any way presume undue familiarity with young girls. However, our teacher rained his strictness equally on the boys and the girls. Sweet Evangelia was humiliated before all of her classmates for committing a heinous crime. She stole eggs from a neighbor’s chicken coop.

The truth must be told. Up in the high mountains the birth of little girls was not always greeted cheerfully. Their grandmothers—not all of them—might lower their black kerchief to show grief. My grandmother
did that when my sister was born. There were reasons. Women had to be defended. Aggressors were always around. In the past, some of them were Greeks and others were Turks. Kidnapping for a forced marriage was a threat to the family. Muslims coveted Greek women and sometimes they hounded them down so they could send them to the harems of their superiors. In the case of my own people, the people of the proud mountains of Epiros, there was reason never to relax. Our women were very beautiful. Now they are all dispersed everywhere in Greece and even outside the country. They left the proud mountains to become servant women or factory workers in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Nothing in the world, but absolutely nothing in the world pains me this much.

I'm always talking about women of the Greek countryside because that is the society I know best. I respect all others but all others were different. When our girls reached puberty, something obviously happened. We, the young boys, didn't have a clue as to what happened. That did not make us so very unhappy but at that point in their lives, girls were ahead of us. They started being overly conscious of themselves, overly shy, always looking for a way to be proper about everything. There was no word in the language for menstruation. The code word "clothes" sufficed. "She may be having her clothes," meant that a young woman might be having her period. No more was said. Families wanted to marry off their daughters when they were young. Eighteen to maximum twenty-five was an ideal age. Young women spent a great deal of time weaving. They wove cloth for clothing, heavy fabric for heavy blankets, and felt for the great black capes shepherds wore. The products of their skill were displayed on the two days which preceded their wedding. This was part of their dowry. Small flocks of sheep and goats and cash in gold might also be part of their dowry. At this point one might well raise the question of courtship and engagement. There was very little courtship. Engagements were short. Families feared that long engagements might lead to disagreement and failure. Their business was the cementing of matrimonial alliances, carved in stone forever. A woman's supreme duty was to bear children, many children. Today society is so different. There may be good reasons for that, but the arrival of say, ten children may not be greeted so cheerfully. I came from a family of twelve children. Times have changed. Pregnant women looked beautiful. They
simply blossomed. Eventually they gave birth. There were no doctors to visit. Usually older women provided information and comfort. The birth of a new child was greeted with awe and joy. Of course women nursed their children. There was no option, but mother's milk in the Greek language introduces the idea of sanctity.

Marriage was very painful for Greek women. It tore them away from their families and transplanted them into other families in which they would have to earn their dignity. A new bride would have to be respectful to the in-laws at all times and keenly aware of the fact that any mistake she made, even just the wrong word at the wrong time, might reflect ill on the honor of that family. Greek mountain communities revolved around the concept of honor. A new bride started earning her medals when she gave birth to a child, especially to a boy. She added very significantly to her service credit when she looked after sick relatives but, most of all, when she nursed her father-in-law and mother-in-law in their old age. Greece is a country where age is respected. If—I'm still talking about the Greek mountains—a man or a woman neglects their parents in their old age, he and she are nobodies, worthless people.

Not all was so grim and austere. Greek mothers made playthings for their children and they sang lullabies for them. They held them close to their bosom so much of the time. At night they slept next to them. There was joy in all the games and the songs and the jokes of everyday family life. When girls reached eighteen or twenty mothers thought about marriage. When their sons reached that age, they did not have to do as much thinking. The men had to serve in the Greek army.

Greek women worked very hard. They followed their husbands when their husbands plowed the fields all day long. They did not plow but they scattered the seed on every furrow. When evening came, the women were just as tired as the men. They went home where a frugal meal by the fireside put them to sleep. Plowing was followed by the growth of wheat and barley. When the time to reap came in late May or in some places in early June, the women worked together with their men. The harvest was accompanied by many beautiful songs and the women usually took the lead. Reaping was followed by threshing and threshing was followed by winnowing. The women provided energy and labor in all these activities. They also fed their men. The seasons
dictated everything. Late August came with the rutting season. All of a sudden, nature rebelled. Sheep and goats absolutely had to mate. Male goats, the great big bucks, left the herds in search of adventure. The rams never left their flocks. They just fought to death with one another. It was a beautiful time. Clearly women witnessed all this and they came to have a profound understanding of the power of sexual desire. When the grapes were harvested in September, women did a great deal of the labor. They also trod on the grapes to produce wine. They frequently assisted in distilling the grape skins, the stems, and the wine lees into a potent clear liquor. This now would be, sometime in late November. Women would have to do a lot of work to harvest the chestnuts. Chestnuts can be put into pits, last all winter, and provide very good food for everyone. On November 21, the feast of All Seeds, it was women who cooked for this festival. December came with all the great holidays. December fourth is the feast day of St. Barbara in my village. I asked my mother how did she follow the liturgy when she was a little girl. She said that she was up in the women's space and there was a railing in front of her so she could not see what the priest in fact did. She also said that she had faith. Every time the older, much older women crossed themselves she also crossed herself.

I remember our women. I remember how in the church they were on the left-hand side of the congregation. Older women were all dressed in black. Each one had lost someone to war or to illness or to premature death. Distinctions did not matter. Death was a fact. It sealed their lives forever and they made a commitment not to forget that. When the liturgy ended and we met the black clad women—they were all so very sweet to us. I found out from my mother, Yanoula Athanassakis that her grandmother, Ioulia, gathered the women and prepared them for the long fasts of the Orthodox Church. Before they baked bread which was used in the church, they had to bathe and pray. This is great grandmother Ioulia to me. It is so sad that she was killed during the Greek Civil War in 1947 at the age of 107 years.

This is no news to anyone. Greek women were very devout. In so many ways, they were the keepers of the culture. They gave birth, they observed all the holidays, and they sang the laments. The human heart cannot take the Greek lament. Scholars write about it but that's not the same thing. One has to have heard Greek women lamenting the dead at
a cemetery. The words are powerful. The sound is primordial. It is the sound of the human soul lamenting its predicament:

My sweet and brave young man,
Your grave is overgrown with weeds;
No one has come to lament for you,
Where are you now?
How are the misty lands of the dark underworld treating you?
Do you dance there?
Do you go to feasts there?
Do you see the blooming young women?

My sweet daughter, how could you have done this to us?
How could you have left us and gone to black alien lands,
To death?
You were so pretty,
You were the joy of our lives; yet, you celebrated no wedding
You gave birth to no children.
You are now lost in the haze, in the darkness of the world below.

Greek women, especially women of the mountains spent so much of the winter months weaving. The loom is complex. Even the distaff and spinning yarn from it are almost forgotten now. Yet, Greek women worked at the loom throughout the long winters for endless hours. They wove the great black capes and the heavy thick blankets. At Christmas they made Christmas bread. Later on came the great forty day Easter fast. They cooked the special food for this long holiday which led the people to the celebration of Easter. All schoolboys and schoolgirls learned how to sing the passion of Christ. The celebration of Easter is always in the spring. The blossoming almond trees and all the joyous talk of resurrection culminated into beautiful festivals. Music, song, and good food elevated the mood of the people. Women, especially young women, showed their beauty and their physical fitness in the very traditional dances of the community.
Greek men dance vigorously. A friend of mine, long dead now, danced on four sturdy glasses. Others drank plenty of wine, and danced the traditional dances for long, long hours. There was wild abandon and ecstasy. Men were determined to dance all night. Their women, mostly sisters and cousins, but of course also friends, joined in. At a certain time of the night the violin and especially the clarinet went wild, played music unrecorded by anyone in the world. Old memories joined new ones. Life pulsed. People were divinely happy. Deep down they knew that the sweet happiness they experienced exceeded extraordinary measure and was as close to immortality as a human could be. At age fifteen I attended the feast of St. George. I was so young and such an amateur photographer that I could not be in the same place as the great dancers. Yet, it was at the feast of St. George that I saw this beautiful young girl that was exactly my age dance with phenomenal grace and passion. I never saw her again. Yet, I shall never forget her. Easter did not come easy to us. Even in those lean times we had to fast, that is to abstain from eating meat and milk products for the forty days that precede Easter. We did not feel deprived. We simply observed the fast. We were lean and healthy. Some of us school boys memorized and sang the passion of Christ. We did sing them at the long services on Good Friday. All pupils of our elementary school spent the day gathering violets for the decoration of Epitaphios, the tomblike structure of Jesus Christ. In the evening the church was packed. Everyone was there. We sang for the Virgin Mary:

“Oh my sweet spring
Oh my sweetest child
Where has your beauty gone?”

I know this image appears in several places in my writings. It is with awe that I repeat it here once more. We came back from church at two o’clock in the morning. We saw the blossoming almond trees. We were ready for the great service of the resurrection. Let us remember that this was at a time of war. We had no shoes. My mother wove shoes for us. The soles were made of pig or goat skin. These shoes were so precious that we carried them to church and then we put them on before entering church. Our church was absolutely filled with people. Long hours
of chanting and of reading the scriptures preceded the splendid event of
the resurrection. There was great suspense in our church. Emotions
reached their limits. Then at precisely twelve midnight, the priest
appeared before the congregation and sang, “Christ is Risen”. It was
magnificent. A reassurance that Christ had risen came to this small
community. The announcement of the resurrection of Christ was fol-
lowed by powerful explosions of dynamite crafted by the blacksmith of
the village. There was a happiness in the air. People embraced and
kissed each other and wished each other many years. The priest prayer-
fully recited the names of all the deceased of the community in all
recorded memory. People walked around the church three times and
then reentered. For another two hours some of the most beautiful
hymns of the Orthodox Church were sung. When I was a child, people
left the church and went home at about three o’clock in the morning.
They rose to celebrate the great Easter feast. More beautiful food, more
music, more dance. Easter is the most important Greek holiday. It is
always celebrated in the spring when nature is blossoming and its per-
fumes fill the air. The resurrection of Jesus gives people hope. The feast
gives them a reason to celebrate, gives young women the opportunity to
show their beauty in terms that the culture honors, admires, and pro-
motes.

There is nothing more sacred then plowing the earth. Spring plow-
ing may begin at different times depending on whether land is in the
southern or northern part of Greece. The plowman arrives with his team
of oxen, his plow, and all the accessories to it. The plowman goes early
to his work. His wife follows him. When he plows, his wife follows him
and scatters the seed. She does so for every furrow he plows. It is heavy
labor for both of them. The plowman and his wife come home. It is now
evening. She uses kindling to make a fire. There are no elaborate prepa-
rations for dinner. Cheese and leftover bean soup are very good food.
There is fire; there is food. Husband and wife are together. They cross
themselves three times and they eat a modest meal. They gently fall
asleep. The fire itself falls asleep. There is peace and quiet in their little
house. They need a full night’s sleep so that the next day they can get up
early in the morning and return to more plowing.

There were pretty young girls in our school. I don’t remember that
any of them ever spoke to me or to any of the boys. There was no regu-
lation about that. I suppose they were very shy. We saw them in church, especially on the great Easter holidays. They did not speak to us. They came alive when they danced on the various feast days that followed Easter. Even though they were so very young, they were encouraged to dance with members of their family and to join in with the entire community. I now reflect on the fact that since I left Greece to come to the U.S. at nineteen I never saw any one of them again. I know where Vasiliki, Evangelia, Iphigenia, Stavroula, Theologia, Eleni, Angelo, and Nike are. I hope to meet them again. The women of my community are scattered all over the place. I myself am in the U.S. To me, all this is tragic. We all belong to a small community, but now we hardly know one another. Chances are that we will die without ever meeting again.

Theologia died a young woman. She died when I was already in the U.S. Her father planted a Cypress tree on her grave. That cypress tree is now tall and moves with the wind. It is so very sad for me to know that Theologia, my sweet classmate, lies below this beautiful tree. Where are our young women? Where are they?

My memory of Theologia and of all my other classmates precedes the end of the school year in 1947. Summer followed. The plums were as dark blue and tasty on that summer as on every summer before. I remember the labor of harvesting, threshing and winnowing. It assured the regularity of life in the Greek mountains. At the beginning of August, the grapes started to blush. We knew that it would not be long before we could eat them. Our flocks of sheep and goats were restless. About mid-August rams fought ferocious duels over the domination of flocks of sheep. Male goats were crazed. They were overcome by aggressive hormones. They broke ropes, they chewed their way through wooden fences. They went on a mating rebellion. They were possessed. They made sure that female goats could smell them miles away. It was then at this time on August 19 of 1947 that my mother and my grandmother received the disturbing news. It was about ten o'clock in the evening. My maternal grandfather arrived. He said, "Rise. Get ready and prepare to leave right now. The communists are soon to invade the village." We all prepared. My mother took what she could. She also carried my baby brother Seraphim. My other three brothers including myself could walk. I took my schoolbooks with me. We left the house. We walked through the night past springs and ravines and through thick
forests. My grandmother fell here and there, but we helped her. A few hours later we stopped and camped out. The night was filled with terror. The next morning all of us, in fact the whole village, walked miles away. We stopped and camped again. Bread was in short supply, but we did have water. The name of the place was Marathorema. The next day we walked more. I do not remember whether it was the fourth or the third day that we entered the nearest city. I had never seen a city before. For the first time I saw a truck. The most frightening thing was a bicycle. Think about it. A man riding on two wheels. We entered the city. Soon we were assigned quarters at a very beautiful house. The lady who owned the house, a very religious woman, and even her servant, did not like us. We were intruders. They reported my father to the bishop as an atheist. So then we were in the city of Arta. I went to school there. The town boys could be rude. They called those of us who came from the mountains “hicks” but they never became too violent. I do recall that on the celebration of March 25, the national holiday of Greece, both I and a cousin of mine were gently excluded from participating because of shabby clothing. It was on that year that my aunt Loula invited me, the oldest of the family, to go to Ioannina to live with her family. She did this to lighten the burden of the family. She was a wonderful woman and in her house I lived with her three very beautiful daughters, my cousins, and with her son Herakles. I attended the best elementary school of the city. I got up early to go to school. We’re now in 1948. The civil war was raging. Every morning I heard the rattle of machine guns. I didn’t know what that was all about. I later realized that the Greek military were executing communists. These communists appeared before military courts without the benefit of a lawyer and they were summarily condemned to death. The daughter of the chief physician of the eighth division of Greece was also executed. In the fall of 1948 I joined my family in Markiniada. The schoolteacher was married to a woman who was born in my village. He had two lovely daughters Nausicaa and Stella. The school year was normal. It was in this village that I learned zoology and Greek grammar, but terror soon moved in. The communist forces wanted to occupy the village and the town of Arta. So then once again we left and we crossed seven streams to get to a place of safety. This place was in the middle of nowhere, but the owner offered us bread and great big olives.
The wet night dripped fear and mystery. Yet, the kindness of our host and the warmth of the fire put us all to sleep. The next day we walked away toward the city. I shall never forget the deafening sound of Greek army volleys of explosives. So once more we went back to town for safety. Eventually we returned to the village of Markiniada. My mother took my two youngest brothers and left for the high mountains to join her father. My second and third brother and I were left behind. For two months, we lived in a small church, a chapel that was lost in the wilds of this village, the Church of Prophet Elijah. It was so beautiful to go to sleep surrounded by the icons of the saints and the great angels of the church. For sustenance, we had a great jar of butter. A sweet woman in the village supplied us with bread. Bread and butter. We still played. Unfortunately, there was a day in which I jumped down a wall and I injured myself. My knee kept on swelling. There was no doctor in sight. About a month later I decided on my own to walk to town to find a doctor. So I did walk and I did reach Arta. A doctor looked at my knee and sent me to the 401 military hospital of Ioannina. Doctors were wonderful people. However, they misdiagnosed my problem. They put my knee in a cast. I spent six months in this cast back in Astrochori. I put up with all that nicely, but there was a time when my mother, after a long, long labor gave birth to a set of twin sisters. They were given all assistance available in the village. For lack of medical help, they died two days later. I wish to record their names: Maria and Christina. There was no priest to offer them proper burial so my father buried them near the church of Saint Dimitrios. Souls are immortal, so my sisters appeared later to me in a very healing dream. Eventually, I ended up in the children's wing of the great Voula Hospital. I have the fondest memories from my stay in this hospital. We could continue our education. Famous soccer players and actresses visited us. I read more during this time than at any other time in my life. At some time in 1950 I got out of the hospital. I had to learn how to walk again. I soon made the adjustment and entered high school in 1951. I was a good student. I excelled in Ancient Greek, History, and Theology. I graduated as highest-ranking student of my very large high school. The girls’ school was apart from the boys’ school. Students were suspended for lingering anywhere near the girls’ school. Boys and girls at this age were kept apart. In addition to traditional Greek values, a new wave of religious
fervor by the name of Zoe, had moved in and permeated the lives of urban people.

Arta, the city in which I spent all of my high school years, was then a very conservative town, backward and repressive. The main streets were lined up with shops. The shopkeepers collected money which they stuffed under their mattresses. They took every opportunity to exploit the people of the mountains who came to town to shop. Its fat priests used the churches to make money. Actually, it was the cemeteries that were goldmines for them. They were paid by next-of-kin of the dead to sing the wonderful hymns and prayers which must be sung for the dead. Wealthy citizens put ads in the papers that they would give as a dowry two thousand British sterlings for each one of their daughters, provided the bridegroom was a high-ranking officer or a high-ranking judge. This is amazing because in all cases I am aware of, the daughters were beautiful young women. At that time in the history of Greece the church, the army, and the police were all one. They were keepers of the public order. In fact, they were fascist—all of them. Now, those who were part of this criminal syndicate have to own up to that. Their children may sit comfortably in the best coffee shops of Athens and Thessaloniki. They may be feeling fine as they criticize America. A massive dose of amnesia is needed for them to do that. They forget the immediate past of Greece. They think they are heir to the greatness of Greek music and to the greatness of Nobel Prize winners in poetry. This is a state of selfish euphoria.

By 1950 I left the hospital and took a special examination to enter high school. My father stayed up long nights with me and helped me prepare to pass this examination. All this took place in the town of Arta. The rest of my family was back in the village. They lived in a big barn-like structure that my father built a couple of years after our house was burned down in 1947. When I joined the family after the end of the school year, my grandmother, my mother and father, and their six children lived in it. I have always liked this very large wooden cabin. Some of my brothers do not remember it as fondly. It is true that rats and weasels attacked our food supply every night, but it is also true that this humble structure offered a sense of freedom which is rarely present in a regular house, especially a city house. Our corn was stored above the rafters. We had plenty of it. Everyone remembers to this day how gen-
erously my father gave of it to people in our community. Of course, we had a fireplace which is so very different than having a heating system of any kind. The hearth was warm and maternal and we all gathered around it. Once again, we had flocks of sheep and goats. The cow was tethered at the trunk of a fir tree outside our place. Women had to do very hard work. Savoula, my paternal grandmother looked after the children all the time. By the way, she started smoking and drinking when she was sixty and she lived to be a hundred and two. Anastasia, my maternal grandmother, brought fresh beans and fresh corn to us. My mother made bread, cooked, and watered the fields. At this time, my father was still disabled from the hardships of the war. Our wooden cabin, to me, was more like the Arc of Noah. We lived in it when winter cold became deadly. We took our flocks into it to secure their survival. We had no close neighbors so for us this home seemed to be the only hope left in the world. I point out here that there was no telephone, no easy access to news, and no medical clinic anywhere. It is with great grief that I recall that the lack of medical facilities in this isolated part of Greece cost our family the lives of my two twin baby sisters. They died rather shortly after they were born. Conditions surrounding this isolated life account for the death of my beautiful brother John at the age of five. There is no end to the rehearsal of hardships which beset our lives. By 1955 when my young brother died, our family had lost people to the war. Some of the survivors were maimed or disabled, yet, there was an amazing desire to survive and to put life back together.

Most people feel that they must write in a sequential way. One date follows the next. One month follows the next. One thought follows the next thought coherently. Yet, this is not true to reality because the human mind loves to wander, loves to weave, to go back and forth. Before our house was destroyed in 1947 we lived a different kind of life. We were a great family and all members of this great family were always welcome not simply to visit but to stay and to spend, not only one night or two, but weeks.

The fire was dying down. Around the hearth there were several people: my mother with two of her children, my grandmother with me next to her; and then uncle Yannos, the great storyteller. His stories were endless. Every village and every creature that was part of his story had a name. Then he had his ways. He would talk and tell part of the story
and then he would deliberately stop for quite a while until the rest of us were dying to hear what happened.

"There were forty villages I had to go through. It was not easy. I had to wrestle with all kinds of creatures. Frogbelly was a fierce enemy. Oxbelly was tough to deal with. Just as I managed to get past him I came to a spring and the dragon appeared before me. He had a huge tail and his breast was protected by rattling steel blades. Fire came out of his mouth. He must have eaten a lot of people for the stench of his breath almost wiped me out."

At that point he felt that the kids were falling asleep. So first he stoked the fire and then he unbuttoned his shirt and all kind of fruit came out. Figs, walnuts, grapes, plums and even the rarer Cornel tree fruit spilled out of his bosom. He distributed all this cornucopia to the kids to wake them up and sustain their interest in his endless stories. Sometimes he would stop at a certain point of a story knowing he could resume the following night. So then he would stop and begin telling another story. The kids were very much alive and gaping at the fire. By the way they loved him. Here is what he said one night:

"The regimen of the devils came through our village. I hope you believe my words. They knew that a certain man had stolen a sheep so they took the hide and hanged it up on a tree branch and they started beating on it with sticks made of Cornel wood. Then they proceeded. Their leader was ugly as sin and limping all the time. After they marched for half an hour the leader felt compassion for his followers and found a stump and upon it he lifted and placed his testicles. This was a sign that the march had come to an end and everybody should rest for an evening."

Of course there was much more to this story but that is all I can remember. Uncle Yannos was also a great singer. He sang a great song when I was born. He took his time in everything. He was one with nature. Figs and grapes, the two things he loved more than anything else, took time to grow. He found himself engaged to a girl from the neighboring village. It took him eight and a half years to make up his mind whether he should marry her. By then her family gave up and had her married to another man, however he was undefeatable. He positioned himself at some conspicuous mountain peak and fired many volleys of salutation to greet the event. He then proceeded to ask for the
hand of her sister in marriage and that was the lady I knew as his wife. I know from my father that when a certain oak tree grew old and people suggested that the branches should be cut off, Uncle Yannos said, "Why do that? The branches will fall off on their own." He too had to put up with pain. His very handsome and very strong son Nikos was killed by accident during the Civil War. He was a very sweet man but he could hold grudge. One of his daughters, Spyrivoula did nothing for him, yet he as a Greek father had to marry her off. He called on my father to accompany him on a fact-finding mission about the circumstances of the bridegroom. My father told me that Uncle Yannos and he visited this place. My father took a good look at the little house and the patches of land surrounding it and he said to my uncle, "Uncle Yannos, if Spyrivoula is married into this family, she'll go to hell." And Uncle Yannos said, "I want her to go to hell." I never knew my grandfather Apostolos, priest of our community. I am so sad about that. I have been told repeatedly by many people that this man worked all the time and that he worked in the fields under the moonlight. People told me that he sang more beautifully than any man they had heard. There were bandits then in the land and some of them caught his oldest son Stratos and they asked my grandfather to go meet them and ransom his son. My grandfather did so but the next time they came around the whole community rose and marched against them in the night and scared them off. It is a pity I know so little about my grandfather. Some things I learned from my grandmother, Savoula who died at the age of 102. I have no idea whatever what their relationship was. I do know that my grandfather provided her with servants and workmen. I know that she lost four children. Her life was not very easy. I learned from her that at her wedding she did not know who her future husband was. There were four brothers present and they all looked about the same. Blessed be her memory. My grandmother told me that she knew who her future husband, Apostolos, priest of the village, would be by the color of his sleeves. I loved my grandmother Savoula. She received a modest pension from the Greek government and she gave all of it to my father's family because there were so many of us. She observed all the fasts of the Orthodox Church. She was a very devout woman. Every night she prayed before the icons. As I mention elsewhere, she started smoking and drinking at the age of 60 and she lived to be 102. Every time she brought someone's
name up in a negative way; she crossed herself and said, “May he go to hell and may God forgive me.” I was fortunate to be present when she was dying. She had such a strong heart. The heart would not give up. My wife Anne held her hand until she died. We stayed up with her all night. That is the Greek custom. The next day many people came and some of them were carpenters and made a coffin for her. Others would dig her grave. I talked to all of them and I said, “We want to pay you some money” and they said, “We charge no money. This is our kin.” The streams were running and all of our mountains were covered with snow. A procession formed to the cemetery of the Church of Saint Barbara. At the church, my father gave a speech. He said, “Mother”—there is no other word in this world that brings so much harmony to it. My grandmother Savoula was buried like a queen surrounded by her people and revered by her strongest of sons.

I now want to recall my other grandmother, beloved Anastasia. Ever since I could walk I got up in the morning and I walked down the streams and the slopes to visit my grandmother Anastasia. Her home was a stani. A stani consisted of a house and thatched pens. In these pens the goats and the sheep were kept together. The little goats that suckled their mothers were also kept together. It was a wonderful feeling to walk into this space. It was warm and the animals lay down and they were so sweet. When I visited my grandmother she gave me a broom of heather and I used it to clean the goat and the sheep pens. My grandmother Anastasia was an unusual woman. When I visited her she said, “My golden, my silver boy! Sit by the fireplace.” I once brought a book and showed it to her and she said, “My grandson, may you sit on a hill of books when you grow up.” She was very sweet but she could also be tough. I do remember how she used unusual words for her age about some of the neighbors. She said, “Fuck them. They’re faggots!” Later on she became even more poetic. Her sons were married. She was not unusually unhappy with her daughters-in-law but her grandchildren know that there was a day that she called on a neighbor and said, “Constantine, watch out. Watch out man, for if my daughters-in-law piss on the thorn bushes, the bushes will wither.” My grandmother said to me that when she was eighteen years old someone in the village tried to kidnap her. It was frightening. She crossed the river and the men who wanted to kidnap her followed her, but then my grandfather's
brother, Dimitrios, a great man, caught up with them and chased them away.

Anastasia lived through tragedy. She lost four members of her family in the same night when the Grip of 1917 hit the village. Her husband, my grandfather Christos, a tall handsome man, dominated my childhood. He protected his daughters and his grandchildren. After his house was burned in 1947 he lived to see his son Themistocles lose his two legs and his left eye. My grandfather took my uncle everywhere on mule-back and then one day no longer able to take the sight of his son so reduced, he dropped dead.

I remember him as the sweetest of men. He took care of all of us. There is a rumor that he had affairs with some of the ladies in the village. However, to us that means nothing. That's very human anyway. When his grandchildren discuss any of that, it surfaces as humor.
WOMEN AND WAR:
SELECTIONS FROM REGINA PAGOULATOU

Regina Pagoulatou was born in Cephalonia in 1920. She came to the United States in 1963. She started writing poetry before she came to the U.S. Prominent among her books are Pyrrichios (New York, 1979), Transplants (New York, 1982), “Motherhood” (New York, 1985), and The Angels (New York, 1988). In addition to her books of poetry, she wrote Exile. This book is a remarkable and candid testimonial to the time Regina Pagoulatou was a political exile.

(EXCERPTS FROM EXILE: A CHRONICLE 1948–1950)

THE TRAP

Athens. Friday, April 23, 1948. For Christians, the feast day of Saint George, champion of the faith; for nationalists, the day of arrests.

I worked in a travel agency. I brought passports from the Ministry of the Interior for clients who were emigrating and shared with them the tears and pain of exile.

I had just returned and was sitting down at my typewriter when a stranger, leaning on the counter, turned in my direction, whispered “psst” and silently motioned for me to approach.

I got up and went over to him.

“Since ten-thirty two men have been loitering outside, waiting for you. What is your first name? Ah, it is you. Come with me. Follow me and don’t say a word.”

“I don’t know you. Who are you? Where am I to follow you?”

“I’m a policeman. The Chief of the Security Police would like ten minutes of your time. Follow me.”

I didn’t have time to protest. I asked permission from my boss, who was stunned to hear my destination, picked up my briefcase and followed the gentleman, who had shown me his police identification to reassure me.
It was an impasse. We walked out of the office; he stayed a few steps ahead of me, and saw to it that I followed him. He looked circumspectly over his shoulder to insure that I was keeping up, while behind me followed the “tail”—with great bravado and feigned indifference.

They took me through back-streets, zigzagging through narrow alleys to the headquarters of the Security Police, located on the corner of Patission Street.

We climbed the steps and they directed me to an office. My brain was numb and my legs wobbly. The officer on duty was fierce-looking behind his stripes, hasty and abrupt.

“Welcome! Here we are! So what opinion do you have about the rebel forces? About the forced levy of children? About the ‘Government of the Mountains’ and the rest?”

“None! Because I have never been politically active.”

“Impossible! You must tell us your opinion.”

“About your bringing me here?”

“About what I asked you. Are you trying to be witty? And you need to sign this affidavit of disavowal.”

“Affidavit of disavowal? Of what? say I am something I am not? Or to get involved for no reason in something doesn’t concern me?”

“To disavow communism and to give us the names of those who recruited you.”

“Do you have any proof of that?”

“Yes! We have our sources!”

“Excuse me, but I repeat, I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about.”

“I’ll show you whether you have any idea,” he said angrily, and gave the order to “detain her,” while he drew red lines on a piece of paper in front of him with my name on it, and wrote in bold letters the words “political exile.”

The policeman escorted me down stairs. We went to another office, where they entered my personal information into the register of female detainees. Then we stopped before a door. He took out keys, opened the door and pushed me inside. I was in the women’s detention center of the Security Police.

...
"Sentenced to Exile"

Monday of Holy Week dawned. The beginning of the Passion of the Lord, and the beginning of a week of new sufferings for us.

That afternoon, outside of visiting hours, my older brother came. The guard called me to a corner in the hallway outside the detention room.

"Hello, brother."

"Welcome to the rebel woman!"

"Why do you call me that, brother? What is my rebellion?"

The guard beside me was listening, not missing a word. It was like being in a company of three. Except that he didn't talk, he only listened.

"One must pretend to be crazy in here, continued my brother. It's the only way to assert oneself."

"How is our baby, our Maria?" I asked curtly, changing the subject.

"My child is dying, and as if that wasn't enough, I have to run around on your account. One brother joined the guerrillas in the mountains, the other is in exile on Ikaria and you, where are you headed? Sister, why don't you sign that damned affidavit so you can come home? Is it such a big thing? Who's going to look after our mother and our brother? I have a wife and child! I've sacrificed enough; I can't do any more. You've planted a bomb and blown away our family. Come on, let's go home and put politics aside!"

"What politics, my poor brother? Who got mixed up in politics?"

"Lady, listen to me. I'm washing my hands of you. You want to go on a vacation? May you travel well with a brisk tailwind. Whatever I could do for our mother, I've done. That's it. That's the end."

"I never asked you to do anything for me, brother. Act as you wish."

"You want the last word, eh?" He swore between his teeth, turned his back on me and left.

I suddenly felt small, just a tiny little mere span of a human being. I opened the door to go back into my cell. As I was about to enter, the guard pompously said to me:

"Tomorrow the 'non-signers' will weep."

But I didn't weep too much the next day. Because on that day, which was Tuesday of Holy Week, that same guard handed each of us who was to be exiled the order telling us that the following day we were to leave for Chios.
During visiting hours on Tuesday my younger brother came.

"I brought you a Lenten dish. What you asked Mama for, what was it? Some panties? You know the guard held them up and shook them, he said in a low voice, when he checked to see if there was anything to confiscate. And I bring you our Mother's grief and our ardent prayer that you come back as soon as possible."

"All right, brother, except that the order has come that tomorrow we leave for Chios. We were handed the order. All I ask is that you come down to the port of Piraeus, so I can see you, and bring me a cot, one or two blankets, underwear and maybe a dress. Keep Mama's courage up and take care of her. And you be careful how you handle yourself. You've become a man now and your responsibilities are than your years or your size. Take care, my little boy, will you?"

His eyes watered.

"To Chios!" he cried and left at a run, like a wounded deer.

Transfer

I had lost my sense of time and space. It must have been about nine-thirty on Thursday morning of Holy Week. But I cannot recall the port of Chios, even as a faded photograph. When the S/S Heliopolis moored, the guard detachment of gendarmes was in place, ready for action.

"Each one of you pick up her things—quickly. Disembarkment will be by name," said the gendarme in charge.

The situation was both comical and pitiable. Tassia M. disembarked dressed in a mountain-climbing outfit, and from that moment we never referred to her by her name, but as "the mountain climber."

Major Zervas, a short, puffed-up little man, who was the camp commandant, received us like booty. A row of three trucks was waiting to transport us to the barracks. All along the shore, standing away from the zone of disembarkation, Chioke hawkers were advertising their mastic, in little clay pots or in bulk, and their warm sesame-covered rolls. Those among us who had hought to have money in hand quickly and surreptitiously purchased the Chioke sweets and tins of sweet preserves for the asking price. This buying and selling happened so quickly that the gendarmes could barely keep up with it.
We were loaded onto the trucks like cattle. Without delay, the trucks took the road leading away from the port toward what was called “The Barracks.” If I were to be asked their exact location, I would not be able to say.

We came to a stop before a high wall with a wide entrance whose iron gate creaked as it opened, like the gate of Hell. From the guardhouse on the right appeared a shrunken, lean figure, aide-de-camp Marketakis. Beside him, with a pile of papers in his hands, was sergeant Yeorgios Papathanassopoulos.

“Climb down and bring your things with you. Sergeant, call the roll,” said the aide-de-camp, in a regional drawl.

The sergeant blushed to his ears and started to call out names followed by the formula, “Barracks One, Room such and such, Barracks Two, Room such and such, Barracks Three, Room such and such.”

I was in Barracks Two, Room Two.

We followed the sergeant by barracks group, and as we moved across the courtyard, a strapping, gray-haired woman, her hair pulled back in a bun called out:

“Mess call for the ‘Marias.’”

From the windows of the building women greeted us silently, waving their hands and nodding to us.

A gendarme who was standing at the large iron door to the building took several huge keys from his belt and unlocked the door. Then he took out a small key and opened the padlock, pulling a thick chain toward one side of the door. He opened the door half-way and a line of ‘Marias’ emerged, each woman carrying two large buckets, and moved toward the kitchens. Then the guard called the room-chiefs to take us into their rooms.

Barracks Two, Room Two, on the second floor, was my new abode: a rectangular room separated by a concrete half-wall from Room One, and connected to it by an opening; two windows on each side, which I later concluded looked north and south. A high-ceilinged, whitewashed space about ten meters long and five meters wide.

The room-warden, Vangelio from Hania, assigned us our places and said to those of us who had just arrived that if we wished to write a few words to our families she would collect them in time for the departure
of the S/S Heliopolis and hand them over to the gendarmerie for censoring. I had no paper. I asked for and received some paper and was told that my letter must be no longer than one and one-half sides of that small sheet. Normally, I would be able to write ten lines on a letter form, which was more easily censored. But they had none to lend me. And so, on that sheet of paper I wrote my first letter to my mother: a letter full of acute misery!

... 

Oh, My Sweet Springtime

"The 'Marias' come get the tea," an Armenian voice shouted at eight o'clock in the morning. It was the voice of Arshaluys the cook, a handsome Armenian woman.

Today was Good Friday—no floor washing or cleaning. We folded our blankets and waited for the tea to arrive. About ten o'clock the thief's door opened and the women spilled out into the courtyard, where five or six women brought the epitaphios and placed it in the center. All the women gathered round it. One woman brought the censer, full of burning incense, from the kitchens. The aroma of incense perfumed the heavens.

I didn't have the strength to go down into the courtyard for the epitaphios service. I opened a window and watched the entire ceremony with tear-filled eyes.

A priest wearing his stole emerged from the office area, followed by camp commandant Papathanassopoulos, Marketakis, and three gendarmes, all in dress uniform, their Christian piety at its peak.

Heavy, black, Good Friday clouds had concealed the sun. The acacia trees drooped sadly, pitiably cropped, in the gray morning light, with only the flowers at the top untouched.

The service of the Lamentations began, and the melody of the encomiums for Christ appeared to be coming from the lips of wounded angels.

With Dimokratia the Athenian, who understood all the details and artistry of the service in charge this time, Ploussia, Elektra, Fofo and other women with good voices transformed the humble sanctity of the place.
“Oh, my sweet springtime, my most sweet child, where has your beauty gone . . . ”

The melody of this verse was heart-rending, and the choir reserved for it all of its collective artistry, coloration of voice, and intensity. So much so, that each of us wept in our hearts for a spring that each of us had lost.

When the service was over, the women lined up to revere the epitaphios, which was now stripped of its flowers with the same care taken in its decoration, and each little flower was placed either beside the icon above a pillow, or hung, by itself, on a nail in the wall, as a remembrance and a keepsake.

The rest of the day passed with stumbling around, circumspection and tears. The afternoon sortie did not take place, since we had got more than our share of fresh air that morning.

After Easter Sunday, which brought each of us the extra benefit a red egg and a sweetcake as well as a . . . “portion” of roast lamb with potatoes, life returned to its previous pattern, without excitement or particular emotion.

We needed to take seriously the fact that we were imprisoned soldiers, in a prison without bars, under the eye of God, in a spring-time field blooming with red poppies that reminded one of Turks with their red fezzes, and the massacre of Chios. In a forbidden spring.

. . .

One Year

April 1949! The May flowers are budding and the poppies with their little red heads, have painted the countryside around us the color of blood. This is how the Turks, wearing their fezzes, must have looked during the battle when the great massacre of Chios took place and Greek blood soaked the earth.

If Victor Hugo were alive and were to ask this little blond and blue-eyed Greek boy, Natalia’s Kostakis: “What does he need to be happy?” the little boy, surely, would not ask for bullets and gunpowder to destroy . . . Turkey! With tears in his frightened eyes and in his thin little voice, he would answer: “I want to go home. With my mother, my father, my brother, and my toys!”
But, Kostakis, “there is no ship, no road . . . .”

They had announced to us in good time the content of the order of “the prolongation of exile by one year.” And suddenly, another official government order controlled our fate.

“You will spend the next year of your sentence (what sentence?) in Trikkeri—near Volos. The transfer of the camp will take place in the very near future. Those of, you who wish to avoid such a painful hardship know what you have to do, and you know exactly where my office is. Decide, therefore, and act. Little Mr. Zervas ended his big speech.

Nervousness and shock hung over the camp from one end to the other. Smiling faces became clouded and carefree spirits gave way to thoughtfulness and questioning.

“Where the hell is this Trikkeri? Why are they treating us like pawns, with decisions that were not issued by any court of law? Did we commit a crime? Let us have due process! Where is the merciful Red Cross—to blush! To do away with the injustice? Where is the honorable United Nations? To punish our crime according to law? Where is higher justice to halt this migration with her just hands and blind eyes?” Kalliopi Proukaki asked angrily, when we shouted the news to her about our being transferred to Trikkeri. “Isn’t it unheard of, unethical and unjust for the dignity of the human being to be torn to shreds without any legal process?” She asked herself and lay down, exhausted, on her cot, her eyes dull and aged.

But we had to begin our preparations and we tried hard during a night full of enchantments to divine what Trikkeri would be like. Each one of us imagined it for herself, as she wished it and as it would be best for her. Antonia, the seamstress from Volos, brought us closer to its reality:

“I don’t know what else, but we’ll enjoy space, the sea, the sky, and the olives! We’ll breathe freely in the air. We’ll have our private tents, which I am certain they will have left just as the men put them up. My husband not only was exiled there, but as an iconographer he wrote some icons for the monastery I went to see him there, before I was exiled, so I have an idea about Trikkeri. We’ll be all right there. For sure!”

The day of our transfer was approaching. I went looking for Beets, to ask him:
“Mr. Papathanassopoulos, may I ask a favor?”
“Well, my eagle-clawed one! What do you want?”
“I would like to go to Trikkeri, if possible, with the second group of women instead of the first.”

“Why? Is there a special reason? Don’t you want to enjoy the island before it becomes crowded? We’re going to transport you in three groups. You can easily go with the second, or the third. But why?”

“Because my friends are going with the second group. That’s why!”

‘Green pastures,’ take my advice, go with the first group.
“You’ll be able to choose where you live. And you can select a place for your friends.”

On the trip from Athens to Chios it bothered me that I had nothing else to hold but that briefcase. Now I was burdened by all the things I had to haul with me. In addition to my notes, to the satires, and the songs I wrote then. Those souvenirs I entrusted for safety to Tanta’s little suitcase. We made them secure between the lining and the leather of the suitcase, then glued the lining in place so that nothing was visible, even if there were to be an inspection of our things. I transported this valuable treasure of mine in the same way from Trikkeri to Makronissos and from there back home. I was now burdened with my “household” goods: my old cot with its thousands of patches, blankets, coat, my aunt’s old suitcase, which had arrived as my first package, with the blankets.

How thankless human beings are, my God! Never content. As the saying goes: “Neither in the cold, nor in the heat!”

From the barracks they transported us to Hora, to the port. From there we were crowded onto the ship, then it was night, and I remember nothing.

I lay down in one spot, closed my eyes, and didn’t move at all. The next morning the ship dropped anchor in the tiny bay of Trikkeri. On the bushes covering its cliffs, varicolored clothes were drying in the spring sun. The government had already transported new shiploads of women, most of them from northern Greece.

On that piece of Greek soil, during the spring and summer of 1949, five thousand women from every corner of Greece were gathered. There were little children, too, numerous children. Their little faces marked by deprivation and the dry, cold north wind.
At Trikkeri

Mount Pelion stretches its foot into the blue expanse of the Pagasitic Gulf. At toe of its boot sprouts a blossom resembling the pompom on an evzone's shoe. That is Trikkeri!

We saw it at first like a gray ribbon, which changed to green as the boat approached. Cliffs covered with wildflowers and flowering bushes. Short, bushy trees loaded with blossoms. Flowering lemon and orange trees that perfumed the surrounding area.

Women waved scarves and clothing, welcoming us with happy shouts as the boat's horn announced our arrival.

The boat dropped anchor, lowered the gangplank, and each one of us carefully stepped out onto the stone pier, possessions in hand, and with the fear of God, lest a false step send us into the water.

Sergeant Papathanassopoulos was in charge of the disembarkation. What a joy to have the same, familiar, administrative staff!

"We'll wait for everyone to disembark, then we'll be off to the other end of the island, where the camp is located," said the sergeant, slurping his coffee as he sat in front of the "Good Heart," the solitary little coffee shop on the pier.

We put our baggage down and sat on it to wait. We could hardly believe that we were near the sea. We could hardly believe that our sky was not delimited by the barricade of the camp.

"A loukoumi and a glass of water please," I said to the waiter, who was barefoot, wearing a straw hat full of holes and wiping an old, rusted iron table next to me with a dirty towel.

"Right away! Loukoumi and water!" He gave the order, which took some time to execute, since he both took the order and served.

"Well, it seems that's why the flies are stinging us—by the time we lift one foot, the other one is numb from idleness," said Mahi, who herself ordered a cup of coffee.

Some time later, Papathanassopoulos shouted: "Ready, ladies? Pick up your things and follow me. What you can't carry, leave behind and you can come back for it. We have about a half-hour's walk."

We couldn't believe that we were walking among greenery. Chios did not give us this sweet smell, this green caress, because we didn't see it, nor did it see us. So we could not praise it in the words of the poet:
“My hands fill with flowering jasmine  
My eyes become intoxicated with your mastic trees!”

This Trikkeri is a wild tiny piece of land, unprotected from the raging winds and waves. It was unknown to us, even by name, until this moment. It was inhabited by men exiled before us. They tamed it somewhat, dug wells and planted olive trees, which, as they grew, raised their trunks among the bulrushes, the arbute, the besoms, the caper bushes. Under their bushy embrace, next to the older olive trees, they now sheltered the small tents, the private ones, as we called them. They’re like those that Americans set up quickly when they need shelter at night, crawling into them on their stomachs for protection from the cold. The Greek spirit on the one hand, and permanence and need on the other, had altered their design. The exiled men had built walls all around and used the tents as a cover. Thus, instead of subterranean habitations, they became ground-level and upper-story homes, with makeshift doors and windows, built with clay, or rock, or wood.

“Here’s where you’ll bivouac. Up there, by the monastery, is other camp and headquarters,” said Papathanassopoulos, showing us the other place. “That’s where the women who came ahead of you are. Communication is forbidden. Upward from this arch, there is no passage, except by permit. There! That’s your kitchen, and that wooden building down there is the canteen. That’s where you’ll muster for mail-call. And this little bay is where the boat from Volos will stop every other day with bread and supplies. You can take whichever tent you want, and at noon, twelve o’clock, mess will be at the canteen.

“Where are the toilets, sergeant?” asked Rena R.

“Toilets? All this space isn’t enough for you? And the sea? Who’s heard of toilets in the countryside? You’ll take that path (he turned to point it out to us), to go to the spring for water. Curfew is at nine o’clock, as usual. No lights, no conversation. Understood?”

What a stir! As soon as Papathanassopoulos finished his instructions, we ran like crazy, each of us carrying a distinctive bundle, and tried to occupy the best tent.

I found one, called it “best,” left my old suitcase inside and returned to fetch my other possessions from the port. When I returned, I set up my cot, made it up and placed my suitcase on top of a cardboard box.
next to the bed. Now I had a table. At last! I had something to myself for once! Two meters of earth and a canvas roof. I went outside and looked around, exploring the landscape, to familiarize myself with it. Close by I saw a piece of wood and decided to go and fetch it. It would make a good seat. And here was a rusted and dented tin can. What a lovely vase. I picked some wildflowers, brought them inside and decorated my palace!

"Niki, what will we do about water? Where shall we store it?" I asked my nearest neighbor.

You know, I remember how at that coffee shop, down at the port, where we disembarked, they had a row of water-jars. Surely they were for sale! Shall we go?"

"But how? Will they let us?" I asked.

"I still have a handful of things that I'm going to fetch."

"Yes, but I don't have anything."

"Idiot! You'll pick up something of mine, as an excuse," said Niki. "I mean, I don't have any money."

"Big deal! I'll lend you some. How much can a water-jar cost? I need to get one, too. Where will I put the water, did you think of that?"

So we went back to the little port and returned with our water-jars. We laid down Niki's things near the path that led to the spring, and headed that way for water.

Beside the ruins of a very old house a pump stood, proudly. Niki grabbed the handle and started to pump. I held the water-jar directly under the mouth of the pump.

"Pay attention, Niki! When a clay jar is wet on the outside, the water becomes cold, like crystal. Please, pump slowly."

Ah, the first drops appeared. We filled the jars, drank, and wet our perspiring faces.

"We're going to have a hard time here, too, with the water, said Niki. See what a dry landscape it is? How will all these women manage? Unless they allow us, occasionally, to take water from the spring at the kitchen."

I didn't allow her to finish. A lemon tree attracted my attention. I felt my mouth water and ran beneath its branches. Niki was right behind me. We each picked a green lemon, carefully wiped off some brown mangy spots with our skirts and bit into it. The lemon was more bitter
than sour. We picked up the jars and the things we had left on the tin can and went back to our tents. I poured water into the tin can with the flowers, and covered the mouth of the jar with the cup Ourania had given me on Chios. As I sat on the piece of wood, drinking in the air with deep breaths, I could hardly believe that I needn't share it with someone else. I pinched my hand, to assure myself that I was alive, awake, that everything around me was mine: the space, the air, and my tent!

**Changing of the Guard**

The changing of the weather was strongly felt on this windswept plot of Greek soil.

The first signs of winter struck the doors of our tents harshly.

And together with this threat of the weather, came the changing of the camp guards.

It was early December 1949. Trikkeri had become a toy of the winds and the snow. A voice like a sword cut through the storm.

"All the women muster, immediately, at the upper camp! Notify the women who live in the outlying tents. No one is to stay down here. Do you hear? The order is for you to appear immediately," a gendarme shouted with all his strength.

An endless line of women, like a line of ants, ascended the road to the monastery.

From the half-ruined outer wall hung an iron gate, which was open, but guarded by a gendarme.

In the middle of the large courtyard, an expanse of gray, worn flagstones, was the church with its ancient icons, built in the local architecture style, and all around were two stories of cells and guest rooms. Domed apses, above and below, lent a Byzantine color to all this ancient ensemble, which somehow kept the wind out; we began to feel warm. We stood next to one another, without saying a word. The snow beneath our feet became warm mud. We rubbed our hands to keep them warm.

Our glances fearful and curious, took in the space and finally came to rest up high, beneath an apse. We recognized Commandant Zervas. Beside him was a very tall bishop, the Metropolitan of Magnesia, accom-
panied by the military commander of the Larissa region, the Police Chief of Athens, Rakitzis, and a large number of army officers.

“General, I officially hand over to you the five thousand woman force of Camp Trikkeri. And I hope that the results of your command will benefit the nation!” Commandant Zervas spoke loudly and formally to the general, a wizened, dark-skinned older man, with a patronizing air and a chestful of medals.

It was the general’s turn to speak. He began to bark from where he stood, foaming at the mouth and waving his arms. Two big yellowed teeth were visible in his hollow mouth—like the remains of a skull.

“Thank you, major! I am certain that the army will be performing a great National Duty, with the takeover of this camp. Whatever you were unable to achieve by virtue of being the gendarmerie, the army will bring to pass!”

Then he turned toward the crowd of women and continued, while our blood ran cold in our veins.

“Sluts, you will sign the affidavit, whether you want to or not! You will formally and publicly renounce communism. I will throw you over the cliffs alive, like horses, to be torn to shreds by vultures and crows. No one of you will dare avoid it. Understand this well. Today is the beginning of a new period aimed at wiping you out. Today, the official war against you begins. Whoever does not surrender will suffer the consequences. Military courts and executions will speak in your stead. With systematic cleansing of you, we will eradicate the beast of communism. His Grace the Metropolitan of Magnesia is with us as God’s representative in order to bless this, our godly, patriotic undertaking!”

“You quite correctly expressed your views, General, the Metropolitan interrupted testily. It is my Christian duty before God and men to help the Nation—as far as I can, as a foot soldier of Christianity and as a human being, by your side.”

The Metropolitan’s words raised the courage and pride of the General, who stood proudly beside him, wearing his heavy coat with the shiny buttons and medals. He raised his right hand, which held a shiny horsewhip and snapped it in the air, making a strange sound. We could almost feel it on our cheeks, cutting and icy. It was snowing hopelessly and that brightness of the snow made the darkness all around even colder.
“Muster in teams of six!” shouted the General, and it seemed as if his tooth was shaking from the sound and would fall out. “Like horses over cliffs!” he repeated, and his horsewhip made noisy lines on the dark horizon. We gathered into groups of six as we could; the next order was also from the General:

“Faster, sluts, faster, around the church.” We began to walk by sixes. The next order was again from the General:

“Faster, whores, faster, around the church.”

We started to run in sixes, around the church. The bishop watched our spectacular circles, which were like the circles made by exhausted horses at a trot, around the windlass of a well.

The General was now beside us, near the church, which was encircled by our steamy breath, our muddy feet and our terrified, dull eyes, which were bulging in their sockets.

“Run, run!” he shouted like an emotional spectator at the race-track.

And we ran! We ran vigorously and courageously at first. But the longer we ran, the more our powers abandoned us, while the General was quick to restore our powers with his whip, lashing out at us rabidly.

This scene resembled Siberian labor camps: people running in circles in the yards of the Tsar’s prisons!

The first victims fell, face-down in the mud. The rest of us jumped over them as we ran, while the General ran here and there striking the fallen women with the whip.

“Aunt Angeliki, courage, courage, let’s make it to the end.” And the little old lady with the long skirt and the head-scarf fell down, in the mud.

The next time around, I passed by her and stretched out my hand as I ran to grab her. She was not moving. I jumped over her and started to run again. The General, like a shot, ran and grabbed her by the foot and dragged her out of the way, hitting her with the whip.

He was cracking the whip in the air, threatening our already exhausted powers, which grew less with every circle. And when most of us, our resistance gone, found ourselves in the mud, then his rage subsided. He stroked his whip triumphantly, as if he owed his victory to it. Stumbling like a drunken man, he warned:

“That was the beginning! It was nothing. The future rests in God’s hands. Dismissed, and every slut in her place.”
He glanced at the Metropolitan, who during the whole time had remained in his seat, reveling in the scene like a latter-day Nero; he nodded to the General with a smile of satisfaction, rewarding him for his bravery!

In a sorry state, exhausted, with our snot running from frozen nostrils, we walked downhill to the lower camp, silent and totally exhausted, without a word. Mess that day was a pleasant memory: salted cod, desalted in the salty sea, with potatoes and onions.

I lived in the same tent as Tanta since the time the weather had turned harsh, for company, for warmth, and for security. This way we shared both our fear and our bread.

It was getting dark! The wind began to uproot olive trees and tents. The snow came in through every opening.

"My fear is somewhat assuaged now that we're staying together. My heavens, what strength there is in human companionship! Would you believe it, Maria?" asked Tanta, like a hunted animal.

"How can I not believe it, Tanta, since I feel the same way? Only I'm starting to be very fearful of what tomorrow will bring . . ."

"Bah! What will tomorrow bring? Don't be afraid! Those gymnastics the General put us through today were probably to intimidate us. Would you believe that poor enlisted men are greater animals than those bumpkin gendarmes?"

"I'll tell you, Tanta. After what I saw today, I'm starting to lose my faith in humanity. Why, what difference does the color of the uniform make? Whether it's the green of the gendarmes or the khaki of the enlisted men? What matters here is the quality of the human being, which is being put to the test under circumstances where instincts rise to the surface and betray everything. Doesn't today's acquaintance with the army and its General fill you with worry?"

"I wasn't able to continue my comments, nor was Tanta able to reply to me because from the cross-tied canvas door flaps of the tent the beam of a flashlight pierced our darkness like a lightning bolt, and the head of a soldier appeared above the hand that held the flashlight.

We froze! We caught our breath and turned pale from fear, as if a thunderbolt had struck us.

"Tomorrow, I'll show you what a 'bumpkin' is and what an enlisted man is! I'll teach you the army's philosophy. And we'll give you an example of the . . . quality of the human being.
Humans behave like humans with humans, and like animals with animals—"with commies!"

He spoke opening and closing the mouth of that head which was resting on the hand that held the flashlight. The rest of his body was invisible, and his head seemed to be disembodied, hanging like a sculpture on the door of our tent.

We lay unmoving and silent on our cots, and the only thing I recall vividly, even now, were the two white rubber shoes of the soldier which were visible on the ground—conspiratorial arms for the great military undertaking of the following day.

"Shut up, he said, and we'll see about that tomorrow! Theories are tested by actions . . . ."

He switched off the light and left us in the dark, without our knowing whether or not he was waiting outside.

As if on cue, we both rose and felt our way, stumbling, to the door of the tent. We found our tin cans—vessels for nocturnal needs, and as we sat on them, our fear continued to visualize two white rubber shoes in that same place.

ATTEMPTED RAPE

Fifteen of us from the group of women who lived in that horrible place, were brought directly, after a stop at the toilets, to a damp, dark cell, opposite the office at one corner of the monastery.

"I can put up with anything, said Aliki. The one thing I can't stand are these rats. Even if I see them from a distance, I faint. I don't know why; and it's not as if I want to react like that!"

"All right, Aliki! We'll do what we can to keep you from seeing them, from their touching you," we all assured her.

It was not yet quite dark. A shaft of light came in from the cobweb-covered small window of the cell. And here was a huge rat, as big as a cat, walking as if it was his house, on a roof-beam, balancing his heavy body now on one side of the beam, now on the other. Soura took off her coat and threw it over Aliki, covering her up.

"You'll suffocate me, ladies! What came over you? I'll die of asphyxiation . . . ."
"Enemy in sight, Aliki! Didn't you say you don't want to see a rat? That's what we're doing, protecting you."

Thus, every time we covered her up, she knew we were doing it for her own good.

After the episode of the rat we were sitting on our knees, freezing and silent.

It was dark outside when a new guard opened the door of the cell, but the room remained dark.

The barrel of his rifle struck the door as he held it half open, and suddenly the beam of a flashlight fell on us, searching to the corners of the cell. Then the light shone in our eyes. We were blinded, and our eyes filled with tears.

"You, you, and you," he said to me, shining the light in my eyes, follow me!"

Three of us followed him. He locked the door of the cell with a heavy padlock, turned off the flashlight and went ahead while we, speechless and terrified, followed him without protest.

The hobnails of his boots echoed on the tile. We could not see and did not know where he was leading us. Suddenly, he turned on the flashlight and a beam of light moved around and came to rest behind him. In this wandering beam of light we looked at each other and each, silently, read the agony in the other's eyes. Then he turned the beam light in front of him and opened three doors in a row.

"You, here!" he said to me and shoved me into the thick darkness. "And you, here! And you, there!" Then he closed the three doors and left us there!

We heard his footsteps grow fainter and then disappear. We didn't dare to speak. The cells must have been separated with thick beams between them, because when I tapped my fingers on the wall I got no response from next cell. Was it Stella in there? Or Popi? I could not guess. I didn't know!

I only wondered in the deathly silence whether this holy space was built for the sole and specific purpose of medieval tortures. What more did the Christians suffer at the hands of the Romans than we were now suffering at the hands of the Greek army? No answer!
In the space between the door and the floor a ray of light appeared, a strip, and footsteps were audible. It was as if three bolting, panting stallions were galloping down on us, unbridled.

The door opened suddenly! The beam of the flashlight revealed the presence of my body, like a sculpture in the dark, and a soldier fell on me with force, switching off the beam. In his face I recognized the night guard of the haunted house. The door slammed behind him. The stench of wine filled the darkness. I was against the wall, unmoving.

“Orders! Orders that you not get away,” he shouted and his hands gripped my body like pincers. My body became heavy, like wood, and I became one with the wall.

“Don’t, don’t! For God’s sake! Don’t do it,” I shouted and put my hands in front of my chest to keep him off, while his hot breath, heavy with wine and panting, warmed my nostrils and the smell made my insides churn. “Don’t, don’t soldier, brother! Don’t do this to your sister!” I was shouting and crying. And with one hand against his chest, I raised my other hand and gave him a vigorous slap on his face.

His legs became tangled with mine. He tried to bend my legs and to throw me down.

“Don’t! I cried with all my strength. I am your sister, soldier, don’t you see me? Your sister!” And my head was pierced by the force of my own voice. “Your sister! Do you hear me?”

I felt his hands loosen their grip, and a sob rose up in his chest. He collapsed on the cement floor.

“How could I be such a wretch? How could I do that? They got me drunk, and ordered me to come here. Forgive me, woman. Forgive the beast that was ordered to go astray. Forgive me, sister.” He was sobbing, full of contrition, face down on the floor.

I felt like a living dead woman, frozen in my place.

He got up with great effort and left.

In the morning we were brought back to the cell we had occupied the previous evening.

We remained there for several days.
January 28, 1950

"Today the camp is dismantled! Every piece of furniture and equipment is to be transported by you to the western port of Trikkeri. Immediately afterward you are to take possession of your cots and of all your belongings and to muster there until further orders," bellowed the commandant.

"Do you suppose they'll be sending us back home, now that we've dismantled everything? Or will they send us somewhere else," asked the little old ladies, puzzled.

"We don't think it likely it's the first. It looks like they're getting us ready for someplace else. Perhaps for Makronissos! Who knows?" answered some of our group, with uncertainty.

Today's dismantling was the coup de grace after yesterday's frostbite. The snow continued to fall, uninterrupted.

"Ah! What a strange weight these cauldrons from the kitchen have in comparison with yesterday's square, iron rooms! These are like Christmas toys," we noted, with relief.

We began to move all the contents of the camp to the port with sudden, painful hops caused by the sharp pain in our feet.

Huge cauldrons, whose handles we threaded on iron or thick wooden bars. We balanced them on our shoulders, like Japanese water-carriers.

Tents large and small and everything that belonged to the upper and lower camps: countless things, including big, heavy poles and numerous small stakes.

We came and went, back and forth, without stopping. The downhill path from the camp to the little port was favorable to our heavy load. The uphill climb was torture, even though we made it empty-handed. Our thighs were bloody from the scraping, the cold and the ceaseless movement, with the result that our walking was outrageously ridiculous. We looked like true wrecks.

When we completed the transfer of the contents of the camp, we recovered our cots from the cell that was used as a warehouse, and began to haul our personal baggage, marked with our names.

This was a strange looking boat that stood out from the other, familiar ones. Its huge mass blocked the usual pretty view of the harbor, which was mostly hidden, now that the transport ship had opened its
wide, deep, gangplanks. With its thick, huge wooden lower lip stretched out and leaning on the shoulder of the land, it joined the land directly with its deep, dark, gaping belly, resembling a giant Minotaur. That gaping belly was suddenly illuminated by some faint, hanging lamps. Without wanting to, we could now see clearly how deep, how huge this cave was. It totally obliterated our small size. We had no point of reference for this Hades before us.

“One team of you will board the transport ship to take charge of the baggage and stow it with mathematical precision along the sides of the ship. The space in the center will remain totally empty. We weigh anchor at eight o’clock, so organize yourselves,” ordered the commandant.

The portable ovens, cauldrons, tents, and all the military articles had been loaded earlier.

We began now to go in and out of that incredible hold, piling our baggage along its walls, in dangerous piles. All the different bags mixed together tamed this terrifying depth with their shape and lightened its darkness.

All of our heavy baggage was piled in the transport ship. We held only a small package with the 24-hour ration that was distributed to us: half a loaf of bread, half a smoked herring, and an onion!

The ship let out a shuddering sound, tossed about, then lightly raised the edge of its gangplank from the shore, moved forward and then stopped! In this position, it held its wooden edge stretched out one meter from the shore.

...
weariness of the past few days was now only a general numbing exhaustion and a voracious hunger.

Everything appeared to be going well. Nothing was disturbing us for the moment. Only when we began to digest what we had eaten with such gluttony did we begin to feel an unrelenting thirst; and we drank water and ate oranges to quench it.

It was not only that we were drinking. All the weight we had lifted caused our kidney functions to increase. The cold made it harder for us to control ourselves; and we began to feel the frequent need to urinate. We strained to control our bladders, but could not. It was past midnight.

"Will somebody come with me to the toilet?" I asked. Only Tanta got up.

"I'll last till morning, said Aunt Angeliki. If I try to stand, I'll throw up."

As soon as we climbed down from the mountain of baggage and stepped onto the deck, I felt something churning up inside me and I kept swallowing it with disgust. An acrid taste of smoked herring and onion moved from my stomach to my mouth and from my mouth to my stomach.

We made our way with difficulty among the groups of women, partly because of the lack of space and partly because of the movement of the ship. At times we found ourselves standing on one leg, like storks, because there was no place for the other leg. We kept losing our balance and tripping, falling on the women who were sitting on the deck.

"Do you know where the toilets are?" asked Tanta.

"I think they're probably over there," I said, pointing to a door deep to our left, on the right side of the gangplank.

"See, it 'must be there where the women are lined up . . . I'm bursting, Tanta, and I think I'm going to soil myself! The toilets must be there, look! Other women are going that way. But how are they getting through these 'Clashing Rocks?'" I couldn't move ahead or speak.

A gurgling mass reached my mouth and there was no way I could reverse it. I suddenly found myself bending over a day pot held by a fellow exile, who was also vomiting into it.

Onions and herring mixed with orange. A sour smell and the taste of bile lingered in my mouth after the first expulsion. I sensed that my bowels were experiencing the same urge. I was vomiting; the owner of
the pot was vomiting. My whole body was shaking with spasms, my eyes watered, from my nostrils poured forth the same vomit as from my mouth.

I had no idea where Tanta was or where she was throwing up. When I finally recovered somewhat, I saw her bending over a pot, vomiting communally above five or six other heads that were also bent over and vomiting. Her vomit, like a rocket, was raining half on the other women, half into the pot.

What a disgusting sight this was! Those women were lucky who had their own bowl, or glass, or cup, into which they could discreetly vomit.

I was covered with cold sweat. I crossed my legs and sucked in my stomach to maintain my dignity. One or two steps and I would cross my legs again. By the time we approached the toilets I thought I had died ten times over. When we finally arrived at the toilets, what a disappointment! We had to climb up a ladder to reach our destination.

THE FIRST DAY

On the way to death, we walked silent, in groups of six. Loaded down with as much of our baggage as we could carry, we walked along the shore more than a kilometer’s distance.

We could barely move our feet. The filth caked on me since yesterday and the unimaginably biting cold grated on my thighs and I thought I was bleeding. I had the impression that the sun itself was mocking me!

“Maria, Eleni, Kassandra, Mooter! My little Kostaaki! Yiorgaki, Nataliaaa.” Otherwordly voices, distant, trembling, uttered our names, while the echo carried them from the distance on our left to our ears. We could not turn our heads in the direction from which the voices were coming, or nod, or speak.

“Ah, my brother is here!”

Rows of soldiers were escorting us, moving along with us left and right.

Finally, we came to the large barbed-wire gate, which opened into an area enclosed by barbed-wire and full of large tents planted everywhere. Two armed guards were stationed at the gate. We moved forward until we reached the row of tents up high, toward the rear.
The officer in charge assigned thirty of us to each tent. He was impeccably dressed, clean, fierce, harshly barking orders:

“Each of you take a place here. Put your baggage there. You will not set up cots; that is forbidden! And muster, so that we can go to retrieve the rest of your things. You may take one water jar from the water-truck, which is there (he meant our point of disembarkation). Your rations will be distributed when we return. You see, down there, he pointed with his finger. There, where the smokestack is. That’s where the kitchen is for your battalion. At mess call, you will walk single file. Look here! You see down on the other side, close to the shore? Those are the toilets. So, waste no time! Ready, march, in groups of six!”

We went down and returned the same way, carrying our baggage, helping one another. Each of us brought a container of water a jar, a can, whatever we had.

The day was ending. Toward dusk, we finished all this exhausting coming and going. With systematic precaution, and very quickly, because we didn’t know what else would intrude in this new place, we soaped a piece of doth and washed ourselves like cats, so that we could change our underwear. How cold the water was!

We found our aluminum plates and fell into single file for mess. Four large cauldrons with one army cook at each one, serious and silent, serving bean soup with a large ladle. Next to them another soldier handed out the bread, while we, exhausted, tried not to warm our hands with the heat of the food, but to protect them from the strong wind that spattered us with the broth. Ah! Starting tomorrow we have to find some deeper plates to collect our rations in.

The walk from the tent to the kitchen was a long one and by the time we got back the bean soup was cold.

As it grew darker, the cold grew more bitter and the clear, velvety-dark Attic sky sparkled with stars.

We ate as best we could and lay down on the ground fully dressed, on our blankets, with the cots as headrests. We had not spoken for hours and now only whispered in our fear. We were like hunted animals, not knowing what lay in store for us. We lay there, eyes fixed on the roof of the tent.

The ceaseless sound of the guards’ footsteps outside—and they were many—made us even more agitated. The cold darkness with its calm
was shattered now and then with terrifying, heart-rending cries:

"Mother! Stop, brother!"

"Fag! Bastard! Confess! Confess or I'll make you spit blood . . . "

"I am spitting blood, brother! Can't you see I'm spitting blood? Take a breath before you start hitting again . . . "

We thought we were hallucinating. Were we hearing things? Were we outside reality? Was it our shaken imaginations, nested in our suffering, exhausted bodies?

"Mommy! Can our daddy be crying like that?" whispered Natalia's Kostakis. He and his brother, were buried like little birds in their mother's arms.

"Sleep, my darling. See how Yiorgakis is sleeping? I don't hear anything! Is someone talking?"

"Listen, listen, Mama. They must be beating our daddy, hear?"

And the child broke into tears, cut short by the guard's flashlight shining into the tent.

"Who the hell is whimpering in the middle of the night? What are you doing that's rousing him? Do you need whips to know it's nighttime?" he said angrily.

"He's a little child, my good man! A tired and sick child, how can I make him understand?"

"Shut up, lady! Are you now playing the heroine with a small child?" He switched off his flashlight and went out, walking up and down the row of tents, matching his steps with those of his colleagues, who could be heard on the other side of the tent, which, along with all the others, was situated with great precision in this sleepless, disturbing night—the first one.

... 

The Visit

That same day, after . . . mess, we heard the bugle-call! Unaccustomed to this type of military order, we did not understand what was meant, and did not move from our spot. Until, after the bugle call, its meaning came to our ears through the loudspeakers:

"All women muster at the kitchens! In one-half hour, you will be allowed visitors. The commandant has arranged a visit with your relatives! Do you hear?"
Oh, heavens! So the moment had come to see my brother, after almost two years! Who would have imagined that he would be in the same place as I, a kilometer away, a soldier and an exile! My heart leaped.

After the announcement, we gritted our teeth in pain and headed downhill toward the kitchens.

To the right of the barbed-wire, the soldiers, all in a row, searched uneasily with their eyes to find their relatives, sisters, mothers, and fiancées. We, too, searched for our people.

There was shock and confusion among us.

When the order was given to open the gate, the rush of humanity was greater than had ever occurred at any port, any train station, any airport—either in wartime, or in peacetime.

Women ran, soldiers ran, searching for one another. They called out names, cried, laughed! Sang, danced. Jumped for joy, waved! And in this celebration of human emotion, we forgot what we had been through and what lay ahead.

What kindness and humanity on part of the command of the Makronissos Camp to bring us together with our relatives!

I saw a soldier running nearby, toward me. He hugged me, cried, and spoke. I was puzzled, continuing to search for my brother.

"Sister, how thin you've become! How many times I ran by you and did not recognize you! Only your eyes are recognizable! How could I imagine this scarecrow with braids was you!"

"Oh, my brother! I couldn't recognize you, I muttered between sobs. How could I recognize you? Your head is shaved, these odd clothes—khaki—seem foreign to you. Tell me how you are. Are you well? Let me introduce Tanta to you. We both wrote to you when you were on Ikaria. What news do you have from home? How are you? Tell me, tell me"

My brother slipped one arm around my waist and the other around Tanta's and we started to walk, up and down, from the kitchens to the tents. Tanta and I waited to hear his news, his advice, to bring us out of the confusion we were in.

He was so frightened and silent and we were unable to understand why. We didn't know what to ask first and what second. He was turning his head uneasily right and left, as if afraid of someone, as if someone was watching him.
He lowered his voice, looked around him again, frightened, and with his head down, as if indifferent, kicking at the pebbles on ground, whispered:

"The affidavit is a personal matter. A question of your individual powers of resistance."

I found myself before the table. The soldier sitting opposite me held out a form. He dipped a in the inkwell, handed it to me and ordered:

"Here!"

The words on the form danced before my eyes; I was unable to read what they said.

The officer held my hand.

"Here. Sign your name here!"

It as if I was hypnotized. Obeying his orders blindly, I signed with trembling hand, under some words, which are the only words I still remember:

"Makronissos, January 30, 1950."

I would have experienced the same feeling if I had just signed my death sentence. Tanta finished with the same process. The officers showed deep satisfaction and Homer came to us, smiling, and placed our watches on our wrists.

Tanta and I left the tent like robots and climbed up to our tent. A profound feeling of shame kept us from raising our eyes, which did not have the courage to meet—even in a conspiratorial glance—in the starlit darkness.

Have you ever betrayed anyone? Even with the most innocent of intentions? Have you ever betrayed yourself? If so, only then can you understand how we felt that night.

For it was not only that our conscience, unsettled by the hardships and tormented by guilt, would not allow us to sleep. It was also that the loud and mournful cries of our fellow exiles, who were being beaten all night long, pursued us like the Furies.
Excerpts from *The Angels*

2
Guardian angel,
Uninvited one,
whose presence
they insist on connecting
with what is good,
revive, if you can,
the oxygen of this room.
In the dead of winter
I share it
with the room’s plants
and their blossoms.
Do something
that I may not die
in the suffocation of loneliness.

December 29, 1984

4
I did not know how Angels hurt and
conscripted to live in Paradise.
A deserter
from the Archangel’s camp,
you come and ask me
to open the door.
I will break the law
because I have tasted slavery,
I know
what an Angel with broken wings is!
Come in
and dry your clothes
by the flame of my lamp.
Come in!
The salve of wisdom placed on your wounds
will heal them.
I ask nothing in return.
Kindred pain
is light pain.
I was at another camp
and I, knocked on someone's door,
but no one opened.
I know
how despair feels
before a door that is shut.

Come in!
Come through the wide-open entrance
of my debt—the debt law defines.
Let the unruly wind
whip the windows.
Let the wild storm
lash them without mercy.

Come in. Don't get wet.
Together we'll read a letter
sent to me by the sun.

Wednesday, January 2, 1985

9
Arrayed your loud,
varicolored ethereal clothes,
and your angelic and benign visages
—with your wings
ready for flight—
you survey,
through the arched
stained-glass windows of churches,
the stream of humanity
that floods the streets.

You do not suspect at all
that the parading homeless
begrudge you your comforts.

They envy your position of privilege
warmed from inside
by hymns and incense—

Shining from without,
the sun's light
showers gilt iridescence
upon your faces.
Your winged sandals glow
as though you were ready to rise to the heavens,
leaving earthly matters
beneath your feet.
Our northern window
has no stained-glass angels—
Our breath has frozen
on its glass,
while strange shapes of crystal
and paintings appear on it,
such as none,
besides us,
can read—
arresting in their light—
the dark from within and without.

January 20–21, 1985

13
I fell asleep, care-burdened,
And I dreamt
That I paid you a visit.
In my satchel I fetched
Countless "Glory be's" to the sun,
a loaf of bread,
and my canteen
heavy with the dew of Justice—
drop by drop the speech
of Martin Luther King,

At your camp's entrance
the Archangel Michael
more beautiful than ever
asked to check my belongings.

I do not recall
such a distrusting check
either at a prison camp
or in any of earth's prisons.

Despite all this,
I managed to sneak in
some secret unwritten messages
stamped
on my heart's folds—
not without a sense of guilt.

If I were caught,
you would condemn me
without considering
my honorable record.

I did not even deign
to offer you instruction.
But when I took out
the children's notebooks to show them,
and thousands of blood-stained doves
flew out of them,
all around,
then I saw that you lowered your heads
and raised a tearful keening.

Your cries awoke me
from the agony of the dream—
I turned the television on,
and fired rockets
vanishing into space
at once.

February 17, 1985

16
What is reconciliation then?
Reach out with an unblemished hand
to feel the touch of mine.
Do not let its roughness frighten you.
The exchange of give and take
hallowed it,
as, toughened by the hoe,
it labored to awaken
earth’s sensitivities.

Colors made it beautiful,
as from within the form of action,
it tried
to sketch your face.

As I dug a grave
to bury the seed,
I brought out into the light the parasites,
so the earth from the heat within
might elevate you
to an ear of corn.

So that a dew of love, crystalline and ripe,
might bring the grain to full growth
over the swamps of hatred.

March 15, 1985
MY MOUTH
My mouth, a cradle for the Psalms of David,
tasted bitterness
and ordered my naive tongue
to cringe, hushed for fear of delusion and profanity.
My heart was always free
to rouse my lips for the matins,
while my tongue,
like a faithful dog,
curled before the hut of prudence
and licked the hand of humiliation.
My mouth would only raise the banner
and shout the war cry
every time some shadows dressed in black
vanished from our yardlike
animals that smell the earthquake,
it had a presentiment of feasts to come.
My tongue, with its sixty years of service this
old Eurykleia of forthrightness and obedience
unflagging
in its faith in the cries of protest,
is offered
for experiments with the serum of truth,
to be transplanted to some weakling
whose tongue was paralyzed by cowardice.

I HEAR
I hear
my inner voice
clashing inside my eardrums
against screaming sunflowers
and rattling reptiles.
The crying of babes
muffled by the sound of marching songs,
by the whining whir of bombers
and the stamping of the dreaded boot.
The wailing of the world
dashes, deafening, against my eardrum.
Trumpets of redemption
blare, to silence the vibrating din
in the labyrinthine cave
of my ears,
where humble words,
like unexplored stalactites,
have lost their meaning;
thus is the miners'cry for help
lost in the mine tunnels,
and children's voices, hounded down,
flutter about like frightened birds.
Let the little conch of my ear's hollow
gather the cherub's hymnal to Peace
by running through
the book of the winds.
But only close it
with the Magnificat of Love:
An offer for a transplant
from an age of turmoil.

MY EYES
I leave my eyes
sated with color,
beauty and light;
with the brilliance of the mountains
and the terror of the Cloud of Death.
Wearied from sprinkling at the Taking down from the Cross,
blinded by the mire
of the Healing Springs of the War,
they make me wobble
like a newborn cub,
and once they dimly lit up
when the promise of Peace was heard.
Then I put on glasses to see
everything in its true face:
Where I used to hang out masks walked by
and tossed pennies of charity
into my little beggar’s tray:
on reaching the corner, they revealed themselves,
then vanished, spitting and cursing.
If you look carefully
on the screen of their worn-out irises,
you will read, as in a continuous showing,
without annoying subtitles:
“The Truth,” in your language!
Perhaps it is precisely this
that will hinder the transplant.

PARALLEL LIVES
You speak
about your purchases and investments
in ships that plow the oceans
and planes that cleave the skies;
about villas with splendid views to the sea,
and others in God’s own neighborhood: the Alps;
then about your precious collections
of rare foreign coins
and exotic stamps;
and then of your good buys in Christofle and Jensen
silver,
and Baccarat and Bohemian crystal.
In answer to your challenge
I rigged my schooner-carefree and,
with cross in hand,
I set course for perilous journeys
to sunder the waves,
clutching with tight fist
my tattered clothes
to keep the wind away.
I set course, with my heart swelling
with longing to be appraised by collectors
as the cheapest coin
of the poorest country.
As the humblest stamp
of the lowliest nation
that Civilization will carry to the brink
of destruction,
stamped with some message
of great joy.

GRAVESTONE
My mug was acceptable;
bearing only two eyes,
which were, as they said, beautiful,
tenderly kissed by sleeplessness and pain,
kept wide open beyond even the fated
moment of my redemption.
So don’t count
this slab that covers me
a heavy one,
and don’t let it grieve you terribly
that it jealously holds me down.
I have shut out the upper world
-no scowling grudges here!-
but those eyes are still wide open
in the darkness of death!

THE WELL
I stand erect
at the bottom of a well,
and under my feet I feel
the water’s flow like a pulsating vein.
The stream is buried deep within,
and I drift with it,
but its walls of stone block my way to extinction.
If I dare sit,
I will be gulped down by its racing current.
Toss me a sunray to grasp
and climb to the narrow mouth
that at such a depth
erects a dark fence between me and the light.
I have a complaint
against the lord of the well, the plane tree.
It bent over
and gave my mother a twig
to hound me with.
And I jumped into the well
to escape escape's tortures.
GREEK JEWISH SONGS OF YANNINA

No one knows when the first Jews came to Yannina. Oral tradition down to the Second World War had it that their arrival was to be placed in the following the destruction of the Second Temple (70 A.D.). Since Yannina itself was founded much later (ninth century?), this oral tradition proves nothing more than that the Jewish community of Yannina felt its foundation to be of the greatest antiquity. Two imperial edicts of Andronikos Palaiologos the Second, dated in the year 1319, grant the Jews of Yannina right to dwell in the city, with the same rights and privileges as all inhabitants. Yannina fell to the Turks in 1431, and the members of the Jewish community, along with all other Greeks, became Ottoman subjects. After the religious persecutions against the Jews in Spain in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella at the end of the fifteenth century, the numbers of the Jewish community of Yannina swelled with fresh arrivals from Spain who sought refuge from persecution under the more tolerant Ottoman rule. So Hellenized were the Jews of Yannina by this time that they completely absorbed and Hellenized the Spanish Jews. At the time of the Second World War, the only testimony to their arrival was a handful of Spanish surnames. This is exactly the opposite of what happened in Thessaloniki, Constantinople, and Smyrna where the Spanish immigrants imposed their culture and language upon the local Jews whose cultural and linguistic links with the Greeks were tenuous. From the year 1611, the Jews of Yannina lived inside the castle with the Turks while the Christians lived outside it. This must have somewhat strained relations between Jew and Christian, but there is little or no evidence of serious hostility between the two elements. Indeed, the community prospered both culturally and economically until Greece fell to the Germans in April of 1941.

At the outbreak of World War II the Jewish community of Yannina numbered about two thousand people. Some of them fought as officers and soldiers in the war against the Italians and the Germans. Of these some also joined the partisans in the resistance which followed the conquest of Greece. Much like most Greek Jews, the Yanniote Jews reacted with disbelief to tales of horror which must have certainly reached them in 1944. They felt that they would share a common fate with other
Grecks, and were disinclined to relinquish the comforts of their homes for the rigors of the Greek mountains where the partisans took the resistance or, worse yet, for the perils with which furtive emigration from the country was fraught. What could have been gained by a more daring approach is illustrated by the extraordinary story of the Jews of Volos, where only 130 of the 822 Jewish inhabitants perished, because Metropolitan Joachim warned Rabbi Moshe Pesah in time for him to arrange for the escape of his flock to the partisan controlled mountains of Thessaly. However, it should be stressed that the Yanniote Jews were so Hellenized that they could hardly have been expected to single themselves out for a fate different from that of their non-Jewish compatriots. This explains why they were so easily rounded up and deported to Germany for extermination in 1944. Most of the two hundred survivors have migrated to Israel and the United States. The meager remains of their once flourishing culture are to be found in the picturesque People’s Museum of the city of Yannina.

In the many centuries of its existence the Jewish community of Yannina created a peculiar and productive syncretism of Greek and Jewish attitudes and beliefs. The ritual seems to have remained eminently orthodox, but life in general took on not simply a Greek but a distinctly local Yanniote character. Unlike other Greek Jewish communities where Ladino was spoken, the community Yannina adopted local customs to such an extent that its Jewishness was confined almost exclusively to the religious side of life. One may say that of Yannina together with the Jews of nearby Arta and Preveza made up a distinct Epirotan group within Greek Jewry.

The Jews of Yannina used Greek not only at home and in the marketplace but also in the synagogue for liturgical purposes. In addition to traditional Hebrew hymns they sang religious songs composed by their own rabbis. Some of the best known Hebrew hymns were also translated and sung in Greek so that the congregation would understand them. Sermons and exegetical commentaries to the Bible were also given in Greek. Quite remarkably, the translators and composers of religious songs did not make an effort to employ either the elevated and ancient language of the Orthodox church or, at any rate, some form of Greek constrained by scholastic norms. Instead, they turned to the spoken idiom and to the folk song. Thus, their compositions reached the faith-
ful in a very direct and sensible manner. Given the short-sighted fierceness with which defenders of puristic Greek have insisted that the language of the people should be denied its rightful place in church and school, the Yanniote rabbis must be retrospectively looked upon as daring reformers. Of course, tradition did not constrain them in the manner it constrained Greek clergymen, but, all the same, the significance of this enlightened step they took must not be overlooked.

No other area of Greece can match the wealth of Epirus in folk songs. It is significant that in several of the major collections of Greek folk songs nearly half of the songs come from Epirus. In Passow's famous collection which contains 646 songs more than 250 are from Epirus. The collection of Aravantinos (Athens, 1880) contains 497 songs and 1142 distichs, all from Epirus. The astonishing fecundity of the Epirus muse may be attributed partly to the inspiring wild beauty of the land, and partly to the richness of its folklore, a richness which was guarded by the relative isolation of Epirus down to very recent times. To these factors, one must add a very turbulent history, full of tragic vicissitudes and legendary figures whose exploits kindled the imagination of the people. Tyrannic pashas, brigands, klephts, rebellious priests, lovelorn shepherds, forest nymphs, witches, dragons, mountains and trees with voice and feeling, all mingle in imaginative and betimes eerie patterns to present us with a world in which the line dividing fact from fancy is very thin. Above all, the chief characteristic of the Epirus folk song is a heroic outlook on life, and a sense of the tragic in life, which rarely becomes fatalistic, or impervious to humorous levity.

However, it would be a distortion of the truth to maintain that the folk muse turned always to the heroic for inspiration. Life had its lighter side, and love its whims. There were precious gems of folk wisdom to pass on to succeeding generations. And what of the need to amuse and to tell a story simply to while time away? For such occasions the distichs, the famous λιανοτρόγυλα or στιχοπλόκια were invented. So rich was Yannina in the composition of distichs, and so skilled its composers of such songs, that the term Γιαννιτικά (sc. στιχοπλόκια) "distichs of Yannina," became almost generic for such songs, whether they came from Yannina or not. It is against this background that we must try to understand the sixteen songs of the present collection.

Although a few Greek folk songs give some evidence of religious
piety, by and large, the composers of folk songs shied away from truly religious themes. In fact, the Greek song is a remarkable repository of pagan belief and pre-Christian sentiment. There is also a rich tradition of folk poetry which pokes fun at ecclesiastic institutions and even at the sacraments. With some mild exceptions, the sixteen songs of our collection retain a predominantly serious and intense tenor throughout. One may say that, however Greek the Jews of Yannina had become, when it came to religion they retained a purely Hebraic outlook.

III. BEAUTIFUL SONG IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE

1. Beauty is from God, and has boundless grace,
   It is not on sale for pennies, for anyone to go and get.
2. The handsome man, all love him,
   Thus even the prophets of God, desire the handsome man.
3. Beauty has been loved, from the time of Adam,
   He took the woman, Eve who has great fame.
4. So very beautiful was she, at her beauty,
   The sun, the moon, the evening star paled before her.
5. The snake envied her, envy entered its heart,
   They cut off his feet, he crawls on his belly.
6. Angels from the heavens, they love beauty,
   From the heights have they descended, down to mortal marriage.
7. In chains of iron, have they been hung,
   Far off in dark hills, have they been set.
8. Whoever comes into carnal desire, good things never come to him,
   He is deprived of his understanding, and he is left empty.
9. When one marries well, him God makes a covenant,
   He gets a woman lovely, as a jewel.
10. Come see the wonders, in the three fathers,
    Three women they had, lovely ladies.
11. Abraham had Sarah, first of the mothers
    Because she was very beautiful, kings desired her.
12. Because they extended their hand to his own portion. One was smitten with blows at the first fall of evening.  
13. And to another came an angel and spoke to him in his sleep; He gave the woman back and his animals.  
14. Isaac had Rebecca, famed for her beauty, She was fearful of God, like her mother-in-law.  
15. Jacob had Rachel, lovely as the moon, Seven years he worked, just to win her.  
16. And afterwards they cheated him and gave him another, A great condition did he work off for Laban.  
17. Now you see how beauty is loved; Let a woman be beautiful, and let her be honored.

IV. Beautiful Hymn in the Greek Language

1. Now the gardens have flowered and all are in bloom, And my heart is tightly locked.  
2. I took a key and tried to unlock my heart, And cast my cares into the sea.  
3. And a great condition did I lay upon a fair hawk-quill pen, To write fine words in this booklet.  
4. And may my words be fair, and may they be honored And from the ways of God may they not be twisted.

34. Man from the beginning has sinned, Even as Adam who was created first in the beginning.  
35. God made him in His own likeness, And handed all things into his hands.  
36. For him He made his woman, He made them a couple, They had a heavenly blessing and the grace of God.  
37. Within Paradise was their abode, They strolled among the trees, this was their task.  
38. And they went about naked, without covering themselves, There was no other person to tell them to be ashamed.  
39. And all the trees of the Garden, He told him to command, To take from all and eat, from whichever he might wish.
40. But from the tree of knowledge, "Do not take and eat,
The day thou eatest, thou shalt return to dust."
41. But the evil snake, with great cunning,
Has produced death in all this world.
42. He approached the woman to question her
He says to her, "He has forbidden all the fruits to you,"
43. Then that well-known woman on the spot replied,
Of the words of God she denied nothing.
44. She tells him, "The trees of the Garden he made our own,
But only from this tree are we to stay away,
45. If we take it in our hand and perhaps eat it,
On the spot we shall die, we violate His word."
46. The snake made reply, with wickedness he advises her,
He says to her, "If you eat of this fruit you will never die.
47. Take and eat of this fruit, it is sweet as honey,
Open your eyes, that you be as the angels."
48. And the woman beheld the fruit, it entered into her heart,
Because it was very desireable in her eyes.
49. She took from the tree and ate with all her will,
Because the words of the snake had entered her heart.
50. So she gave it to her husband and the two of them ate,
They brought us death, their sin.
51. Then they opened their eyes, and were moved to shame,
And they sewed up fig leaves, as if to cover themselves.
52. God goes looking for them for he wants to meet them,
They heard him, they hid because they had not understanding.
53. Then called out God, "Adam where art thou hidden?
Hast thou eaten of the fruit and art ashamed?"
54. "O Lord, in truth I have eaten against my will,
This woman gave it to me, whom Thou placed near me."
55. Then He spoke to the woman, to see what she would say,
And she leaned upon the snake, without entreaty.
XV.

1. Begin, my tongue, to avow the miracles,
   To waken those asleep and get them drunk with wine.
2. Eat, drink, get drunk; forget not God.
   Avow His freedom and be very merry.
3. Forget not the orphans, send choice portions,
   Invite rich and poor, all of you praise God.
4. Before he struck, he made a remedy,
   His myrtle became king, to be found for his freedom.
5. Esther, the honored one, reared on musk,
   Does not say whence she was begotten, as she was instructed.
6. When the decree went forth of Haman, the enemy,
   She sent Hathach to do her a favor.
7. He goes to question Mordecai, and to dress him in (fine) garments.
   He did not accept them, and this for Israel's salvation.
8. Esther, the honored one, fasted for three days,
   Was dressed in royal garments, and leaned on her slaves.
9. She goes to call upon the king, to beseech him,
   To fall at his feet, to seduce him with wine.
10. She also brought the enemy, to have him at the right moment,
    She postpones nothing, that he may not go and hide.
11. The king, at his drinking, asked upon his honor
    Of Esther, for she was his, and his soul loved her,
    And Haman also bends his ear.
12. Esther, with prudence, with great charm,
    Answered him straightway, she had sorrow in her heart.
13. "May you live, my king, tomorrow I make my request
    At a reception in my chamber, what I have in my heart."
MARIA LAMPADARIDOU-POTHOU

Maria Lampadaridou-Pothou is the author of over 40 books of poetry, fiction, essays, plays, and critical essays. Her work was honored in Greece by the Team of Twelve in 1966, and two of her novels received prizes from the Academy of Athens in 1987 and 1995, respectively. A native of Lemnos, she is a graduate of the Panteion University of Greece and of the Sorbonne. Her collection of poems *Mystiko Perasma* was nominated by the Greek Ministry of Culture for the European Prize in 1991.

The following selections illustrate a range of women's voices in Lampadaridou-Pothou's work. Selecting her heroines from ancient Greek myth and history as well as contemporary times, the author explores the psychology, aspirations, and struggles of women, in a lyrical style that raises the feminine experience to a universal, metaphysical plane. Often rending and painful, that experience also affirms the strength and passion of her female characters as they confront their fate—knowingly or not.

In *Hypsipyle: I Vasilissa tou Aimatos*, the author seeks to understand the myth of the Lemnian women, whose disrespect toward Aphrodite was punished by an offensive body odor, causing their husbands to abandon them. Hypsipyle, the queen of Lemnos, sympathizes with the women’s plight, but although she opposes their plan to murder all the males of the island, is unable to stop them. One of the women voices the frenzied desire for blood (selection #1).

Selection #2 is from *O Ieros Potamos*, a variation on the myth of Persephone in a modern setting. Marian is the wife of the protagonist, who has returned from Athens to his ancestral home; he has become obsessed with restoration of an old chapel at the local monastery and with a local girl named Persephone. Marian has just arrived from Athens and has learned of Isabella, a seer, who utters Pythia-like oracles, and goes to consult her.

A Spartan mother receives the shield of her son, slain at Thermopylae, with a pride that shields her pain in selection #3 (from *To Ksylino Teixos*).

The heroine Adriani, fascinated by the supernatural phenomena at a site marked for development, fights to preserve it from the developer's
bulldozers. She goes to search for the Stone Woman, who has given her a sign in a dream directing her to dig at the spot where she is buried in selection #4 (from I Ekti Sfragida).

The next two selections are from Natalia kai Christina, two stories of contemporary professional women confronting the infidelity of their husbands. Natalia feels that her marriage to Evgenios is "dead," and decides to divorce him, certain that Evgenios will be devastated when she tells him, but he is not, as he has fallen in love with another woman, who eventually rejects him. Natalia's goal becomes to punish him and she leaves the marriage (#5). Christina reacts to the infidelity of her husband not with a desire for revenge, but by moving beyond the subservient woman she had become in her marriage (#6).

The metaphysical dimension is more prominent when the author speaks in her own voice, especially in her poetry. In Spiti mou tis Mikrasias (#7), she reflects on her father's Ionian homeland and the events of 1915–1922. The house is the symbol of the lost/unredeemed homeland. Gramma sto Gio mou ki'ena Astra (#8) gives advice to her son. Two poems from Kai Thea pros to Amileto (#9) are about the poet's lost child. Selection #10 is an excerpt from the Fourth Ode in the collection Epi Pterygon Anemon, and #11 is the Ninth Passage from the award-winning collection Mystiko Perasma, (the entire collection appears in The Charioteer 39/40 (2000–2002) pp. 56ff).

#1

We the honest women of Lemnos cannot abide that our husbands ignore us, who gave them sons and daughters, gave them our shapely bodies, accepted them
when they sighed between our ample thighs
We bent over them with affection, mothers and sisters and lovers all
And now they have brought those skinny Thracian women and are knocking them up
In a while our island will be filled with foreign bastard children—enemies of our own children
Our pride cannot abide that
We who honored their seed and received them into our house-
holds to work the earth
And to sleep in our beds
Here is how those thoughtless men reward us
They did not think at all of our power
Did not think that such an affront
We cannot abide—we the proud, the powerful
We who ignored the punishment of Aphrodite and said no!
No, we will not bow our heads
She wrought this malodorous punishment on us,
Yes, our bodies stink; our armpits are full of sores
She punished us for our pride
But she cannot destroy us
She cannot . . . she cannot destroy us
Because the power we have
The power we inherited from our proud mothers and grandmothers
Is our right
We hold sway over this island, do not forget that
And they produced children with concubines
They will pay for it
We will murder their male children
They will see the punishment and feel terror
Then we will kill their fathers
Let no male witness remain on the island
And when they are suffocating with tears and terror
And imploring us on their knees
Then we will murder them too
We will drown them in their own blood
So that our souls can find peace
Can emerge from the wild anger that is drowning them . . .

#2

It was still early when Marian arrived. She saw Isabella returning from her morning outing, loaded down with herbs. She was a slim older woman, with erect posture and with dark hair visible beneath her headscarf. Her eyes were imposing; they shone. Clear eyes focused beyond
you. She was wearing a thick woven dress, whitish in color that hung down in folds; a dark worn cape of raw wool that she had knitted herself was around her shoulders.

Each person left whatever they wanted. She never turned to look. The locals would take her a bit of milk or bread. Strangers would leave a bit of money, when she was not looking. Others were afraid to go to her because she uttered crazy things.

Isabella did not care about all that. Seeing the future was a mission for her. Since childhood she realized that she had the gift of looking into time, opening it in two, like a living shell . . . and seeing both past and future. She saw it on each individual; past and future hung on each person like loose threads, forming symbols and images to which she gave meaning. As for the money left for her, she never used it for herself. She would immediately give to any hungry or unfortunate person who crossed her path. She herself lived from her art work. She painted flowers, doves, flowing water, portraits—whatever was asked of her. Her portraits were particularly successful, since she could see past and future time on her subject and rendered all its hidden dimensions.

Some canvases she concealed—turned around so that they could not be seen. She told no one what they represented. Those canvases were her great secret.

She led Marian to the upper story; her words were few. She sat on an armchair that resembled a worn throne, facing the river, and had her stand before the window. Then she lit incense and began to chew some leaves or fresh herbs, from those she had gathered that morning. From the scent, Marian recognized them as willow or laurel leaves. Her voice was hoarse and moist, as if soaked in moisture—the sound of a voice that studies silence.

"To expect solitude it is bad the passing of time in the signs of happiness and the stone of the ring is always red."

She takes deep breaths and rises from the armchair to show that she has finished; that is all she had to say. But Marian felt more confused than ever.

Where does the sentence end? To expect solitude, or to expect solitude is bad? And what does the red stone of the ring mean?

She replied that Marian would find her own meaning, "You can interpret it as you will, she said, or you can disbelieve the oracle."
She stood erect and tearless, a black chiton over her shoulders. She took the honored shield of her son, which carried his blood and the blood of his father before that, the blood of battle, his last breath. Her hand was on the incised L, which was almost invisible from the clots of blood. She did not endure. She embraced the shield and sharp pain flowed forth from her breast.

A cry.

Then she quickly wiped her eyes and stood erect. Every part of her body groaned, she will fall down, I thought, she will collapse. But no. She stifled the cry—the agonizing pain.

“My sons died honorably, they did their duty; my sons honored the laws of Sparta,” was all she said.

She made me bathe and eat. She was affectionate. She knew that I was the Helot aide to Aristodemos, that I was “the foreigner,” as they referred to me derisively in Lakedaimon, the stranger, but that did not seem to bother her. She looked at my hands, my wounded body, took note of every move I made, as if it had meaning.

“You carried it from Thermopylae,” she went on, as if to thank me.

Her body swayed for a few seconds, then a movement of the head that I knew well, a movement of pride, which was characteristic of a Spartan woman.

“Tell me how he died, how he fought . . . tell me about his last moments . . . what he said, what he looked at . . . did you see my Alpheos, too? Tell me everything Alkamenes, I want to know, so that I can think about them from your words, so that I can call their spirits . . . tell me about the grass that grows in that land, about the sound of the sea . . . ”

She could hardly contain her sobs. Her eyes were red, and yet she stood erect before me, unbending, waiting for me to speak.

I look around for the sign, shuddering as I advance. Here, I tell myself, it was here, beside the Sanctuary, at the corner formed . . . and I find the same stones as in my dream, the stones placed there by unknown hands, touched by them three thousand years ago, hands now
annulled. My fingers are shuddering—here, here...—shuddering and shaking, and I begin to dig with unbelievable force, removing the soil and advancing to the depths, I, the fragile, delicate one whose tender hands have not known manual labor. Then I begin to talk to her, you are buried here, here, you gave me a sign, you came into my sleep and gave me a sign. Who are you? From what depths of the soul do you emerge? And what do you want? What do you want from me?... What do you want?

The perspiration is rolling down my face and my hands are covered with blood, but I continue to dig, crazed, frenzied, I will find you, I must find you, and I collapse onto the pile of excavated earth, crawl, slide toward the pit I have opened and stretch out my hand to touch its bottom, because there is something hard there. The shovel had struck stone, and I grope. The soil is moist, dark, and soft at that point, exudes an odor of essence of metal and of roots, of a vein of water, and of silence. A bit more, my hand touches something smooth, a smooth circular shape about the size of a head with thin furrows on the edge, and a shudder runs through my blood. I have found you, am touching you, it is you, you...

I rise up to breathe, my fingernails are broken, my fingers covered with blood, but I take no note of them, I only weep. I am weeping, the sobs arise from the depths of my being, from my centuries, revoking my ephemerality.

I clear the soil around it, throw off shoes and coat and climb into the pit I had excavated, to dig with my hands now, with my fingers, so as not to wound the woman with my shovel.

Chryseis, perhaps, or Markiane? Or, simply, Woman?

The warm earth envelops me with moist breaths, moist odors, and I want to shout. I feel the cry rising from deep inside me, rising from the darkness of my existence, a cry that contains all other cries, from the first night of the world, that contains pain and ecstasy and the terror of the unexplainable, and I know that I am the witness of the unexplainable, which I have carried in my womb from the first night of the world, to give birth to it again and again...

The cry. It was my own cry.
... I wonder if it doesn't bother me that nothing happened in his life
... he didn't develop, you see, he remained an insignificant minor officer in a bank . . .

She herself had achieved a high position in the company where she worked; she had struggled, worked hard—"I didn't waste my time on pointless walks and on velvety hours of music . . . success is not won without giving, you know that . . . time must be productive," she shouted angrily.

—but for him the hours spent with his music are more valuable than the pursuit of success, don't forget that Evgenios likes poetry . . . at one time he wrote . . .

She smiled. The subject of poetry always made her smile, without knowing why exactly . . . poor Evgenios couldn't even be a poet, so inconsequential, so miserable was he, she thought with that sweet need for compassion, and once again she confirmed for herself that the marriage bond had died within her—finally and irrevocably. She was now building her house—building it with her own money earned from her overtime hours—and all she dreamed of was to live, free, in her house, with new friends, with exciting acquaintances; she was thirty-six years old and she had aged well, she still had the time to love and to be loved by someone worthy of her, someone with a stellar position who would talk at supper about his business trips . . . All that charmed Natalia, fascinated her, she needed once more to gamble with her feminine powers and to win . . . She dreamed of passion, nothing is worthwhile in life if not done with passion she thought, and felt her body trembling from ambiguous, misty fantasies and from erotic delirium—whispers in the dark amid moonbeams and half-empty glasses. She would not listen to her friend Anna, her only childhood friend, who tried to bring her back to reality.

—Are you crazy? What's come over you that you want to divorce him? He's a wonderful man . . . He never denied you anything . . . What's come over you suddenly, can you tell me?

No she couldn't; and she didn't want to. What she felt was organic, beyond her powers, in crazy fantasies that disturbed the mind's balance. It might be fatigue that was affecting her nerve centers, a fatigue heavy like an illness of the soul, maybe it was that same harsh regime of work
that she had imposed on herself for years against which she was now rebelling, a rebellion that she did not dare undertake in her youth. But she didn't want psychoanalysis now; she despised self-examination; I am free now, she said complacently, and I can order my actions and my life . . . I was bruised achieving this marvelous freedom of mine and, well, I'm determined to enjoy it.

. . .

Natalia opened the door. She was polite and a little pale.
They looked at one another silently . . . She spoke first.
—You came. With your suitcase. Just as I thought.
Evgenios nodded.
—She was hard on you today?
Evgenios nodded.
—She was hard on me, too.

Evgenios was confused for a few moments. He was expecting shouting and fainting . . . now he felt more relaxed. At least she was confronting the situation with class he thought . . . And he dared the great admission: “She told me to leave, he said, we've broken up.”

But Natalia did not show great surprise. “Everything in its time,” she said simply, and Evgenios asked “What did you say to her?”
I reminded her how much you love me. It wasn’t a lie.

A sarcastic half-smile hung on Evgenios’ lips: “She told me you were magnificent.”

Natalia relaxed. She smiled broadly “Oh, my sweet unforgettable Sibyl! So she told you! She is incomparable. That’s why I will give her a gift: I’m going to leave her, she said triumphantly and showed him the key to her new house, “See this? It was built with the sweat of my brow and I am determined to enjoy it. So, I’m going to set up house there. And you will be here—alone.”

Evgenios was growing more and more confused. And Natalia noticed it. She was harsh even though she was placing her own life at risk. That old idea about the stage had got under her skin finally, an ancient role, that she was discovering with sacred passion. “You will never see her again, she repeated. Oh, no. Such things are measured out in life. I, alone. You, alone. With your music—I bought you some records—with your walks—I bought you some walking shoes . . .”

She waited a few moments for Evgenios to say something but he
looked at her dumbfounded and confused. And she finally expressed what had hurt her deeply, what had uprooted her. This whole story was humiliating for me. The wounded pride of a woman is a very sacred thing."

Later, she looked Evgenios straight in his confused eyes: "We are both responsible for ruining our lives and neither one of us has the right to be happy. The balance we were talking about would be disrupted . . . Do you see?"

Anna tried in vain to hold her back, "Are you being reasonable?"

Natalia was not listening any more. She was through. Besides, she knew that reason had no place in her decision. The irrational is sweeter, more seductive, because it comes straight out of the wounded layers of our very self.

And I was certain now that he was in love.

I felt my blood run cold; I was dissolving, a bit more and I would fall, I was no longer part of his life—so simply, so easily—I who adored him, who dedicated my life, as if it were holy, my time, my mind, to make him happy. He had leaned on me, had let himself go, a deep existential dependence that calmed his insecurities and his fears; I had become his mother, his wife, his sister, and above all I was the eternal beloved, "when I hear music or when I am mixing colors, you are there . . . everything I feel passes through you, I exist through you, I gaze on beauty and I wear your eyes, if you leave me, I'll die . . . “ He was sick with jealousy, out of a hopeless need for exclusivity, a tyrannical and tender dependence that was the deep mystery of our happiness.

My body was limp outside the door of his office, and my thoughts, like black crabs, skittered over me and made me shudder, in a moment they would overwhelm me, those disgusting shelled creatures would finish me off, would gnaw on me as a useless thing, would start with my shadow and move into my barren womb. Revenge would say "you killed your children, confess, one of them before you married . . . " A many-footed panic crept over my body and I cried out.

I heard my own voice and was terrified. It came out of the darkest depths, out of the primal womb of screams, out of the beaten breasts of
Medea, when she saw her husband with his paramour, or out of the collective uproar of the wronged, betrayed woman who must drown her shame in silence and solitude, in pride, must bear her own cross, raise it to the point where she can raise it no more, plant it on her wronged body, become one with the cross, with her muted martyrdom.

A hardness arose slowly in my body, a wildness, I will destroy you, I thought, I will create for you another kind of dependence, to replace this one that has worn out, I will plant mines in your sleep, Medea killed her children, I will kill you, your soul, a lightning bolt is burning inside me, watch out. Even if it is my fault that I gave you everything and kept only my shadow for myself, even if I was at fault for allowing myself to be absorbed into your shadow, sacrificing my diploma, motherhood, friends, personal life—ah, what a mistake! I am now beginning to realize when the first crack started, the one that became a giant rupture—well, even if I am at fault for adoring you like a beautiful impotent god, for believing in your oaths, kneeling as you passed, so that you could go ahead, watch out, I say, a lightning bolt is burning within me...

It was the first time I sought an identity for my person, pain makes egoists of us; for the first time I realized that I was anonymous beside him, for years now I had lived without a personality, only a body, the body was our mystery, paradise began and ended there. I am pretending. There was also the soul. It was the agony of happiness. The agony of balance, our life was a fragile material, crystalline moments, ready to slip from our hands to break us into little pieces. And they did.

... When I go to bed at night and count myself among the humble and wronged of the earth, I feel a profound calm as if I have found the road to God.

Sometime I wonder whether I should be grateful to you. You were the cause of my being honored with great pain. There is within that pain a shining white innocence, like childhood solitude, which I found later in that tiny bright spot that flickers beyond despair, and much later, in death, which I await calmly, having walked its white corridors in my sleep and, most importantly, having been inhabited by its nightmares.

That painful night I learned humility.

I had emerged from the arrogance of happiness, did not demand it any longer, had accepted defeat—and that had a boundless allure, a dif-
ferent tenderness that you saw. And you were shocked; perhaps you were even jealous. You were losing me on all planes; and that hurt you. You still wanted to possess me with all the strength of your egoism, believed that my disintegration belonged to you. But I was already somewhere else.

Now, only now, can I look a tortured face in the eye, look for the allure it hides—never before—that allure of the defeated, that you will never come to know.

Or perhaps it disturbed me, that face of defeat, I mean, so harsh, so pitiful, I might never have reached the greatness it hides. That’s why I said I ought to be grateful to you.

Without you, I would never have learned that . . .

. . .

I was enough of a realist, or so I thought, that I didn’t want to create metaphysical cracks in my life, nor to assign too great a significance to dreams. I was channeling my maternal feelings toward Alexandros, I told myself, and when I lost him, those feelings had no outlet, and there arose within me a kind of longing for a child. Until one night, I saw the following strange dream: it was as if I was in a place with many people and I was holding my two children by the hand—even in my dream I was struck by the difference in their ages, four years. I remember their tiny hands in mine, a tender touch, like a bird’s breast, that brought tears to my eyes. So you are here, I am holding you, the thought quickly crossed my mind and I felt a great longing to embrace them, as if the maternal pain had awakened in my innermost being, and I was shaken but something happened, we were jostled, a sound arose from the unknown multitude, and the tiny hands slipped out of my grasp and vanished. I turned to look but they did not exist. I don’t remember living through a greater panic in my entire life. I began to cry out and to push, to push through the crowd, to search desperately. Nothing. The children had disappeared. And a cold fear coursed through my blood, I knew, in the dream I knew, that the children had vanished, even if I could not explain it logically. I turned to leave, and then a strange thing happened: the landscape changed, the crowds were no longer pushing against me, they were bent, silent, and in their midst were children, many children, also silent, haggard, looking at me with big, sad eyes.

The next day I read in the newspaper that volunteers were being
sought for a mission to a war zone. The purpose of the mission: to rescue orphaned and wounded children.

I don't even know why I connected that notice with the dream of the previous night. Some things operate independently within us.

Immediately, I telephoned and volunteered.

#7

Where were you, House of Asia Minor, during those insufferable hours when your children were dying in filthy dark warehouses without even a flower for their departure?

Where were you, House, when dreams became a pile of rubble in the merciless sun?

You were a Mother with severed arms and with a voice of stone.

Surely you were the haunted mother, eyes filled with the winds of pain.

Still you stand unmoving on your silvery sands. And your eyes are rivers of tears.

You await the coming generation, the coming age.

You wait for the white dove to rise from your earth—the white soul of your prophecy.

Haunted mother, with the voice of Pythia, “unfading rose,” you prophesy your age. You lay bare the messages of dark times.

One day we will learn of the power hidden in your rock, charged with your past.

One day we will learn, Ionia, of the power hidden in your Logos that hovers magnetically over your earth.

FEAR THE WRATH OF THE DEAD

AND THE STATUES OF THE CLIFFS!

Said the poet.

#8

... As I told you in my previous letter, there will be many to teach you how to win happiness or the truth of your convictions in the easiest way possible. But that truth cannot be taught; remember that well. The allure of words is illusory. If you follow that course your convic-
tions will be compromising and false . . .

. . . Western philosophers will charm you with their fanatic negativity. Read them, in order to overcome them. And then, immerse yourself gently in the visions of Greek thought. Feel proud that you speak the same language as Empedocles and Heraclitus. No one can conquer the transcendent world empirically. But the Greek principle of philosophy is the key for exploring the secrets of the Universe—the secret of the worldly wandering of man. Because the path of man’s life does not end in this troubled world of ours. It is a perpetual event that continues its upward progress toward Perfection. Take the Hope of the Eternal from Heraclitus and move forward . . .

. . . And remember always your aristocratic ancestry. That will help you to struggle correctly. Because you are descended from those giants of Ionia, who sought the vision of the Absolute. You are descended from those who, in the same language you speak, told us “And I, too, am now one, a fugitive from the gods and a wanderer . . .” when “wanderer” had the meaning “one who is exiled and straying in the world.”

. . . Remember that what will pain you more is perhaps not what you lose, but that which you did not attempt to find . . .

. . . If at some time you are left with arms empty, do not be sad. Spread out your arms in the night and a star will fall into your hands. Then you will feel that you are not alone. Then you will comprehend that everything in this world is only a reminder of the other, real, world. And you will be infinitely happy, because you will find the deeper, the most secret, purpose of your existence . . .

#9

A)
O mother, your absence
Rose up like a storm
Like a garment that mourns the body
And the waters are silvery
As if a dead man leans on them
As if a soul hovers
That has been denied its spring.
Tell it
Lest it be fooled into taking oblivion as a pillow

Better that it lean on a stone
On the echo of the desert
Better on the jointless fissures of my sleep

Tell it to remember
that sleep is alive.

B)
And when you find it
And when you come upon it
A tiny speechless child
Tell it, the room has sprouted like a memory
And journeys uncovered at night
In dreams of other times.

Fragments of raw memory
That flow from the chasms of sleep
With an uncontrolled strip of paradise
Blowing in the night
Like a piece of linen.

#10
Nothing, I asked for nothing
Only to touch the chrysanthemums once again
At the hour when they are kissed by the first rain
To touch the brilliance that burns the horizon
At the end of a solitary day
And to lean gently like the wind
That bends the roses
With a drop of blood in my glance

A drop of common martyrdom
And white like the hour of sacrifice
To disappear with arm upraised
Above the oaths
Above the desolate bodies
Above the night of shadows

With arm upraised
To take leave of the vain din and the tears
The struggle without dreams
The hope that trembles—blue.

Nothing, I asked for nothing
Only a breath
Dampened in brilliant night
—night when the souls slip into the passage-ways
To take it as a token
And a rose that sprouted
Alone
On the stone of oracles.

NINTH PASSAGE
The Three Irises

I was born with three irises, she said,
Three irises in each eye
One atop the other
Stretches of sky entered
The air thickened with azure
And the angels sat to the right
Transforming the vision into a shrine.

Now I look at the world and know
That behind Paradise there is
My childhood full of stars
Forgotten on my body
And a vein of whispering water that flows
The other landscape
With the tearful eyes of the Virgin
And the three silver deserts
One upon the other

I look now at the sky and know that
It is the site of my lost iris I know that
There I wander dreaming
To find the first paradise—before
The sacrifice
To find my first Passage—when
My mother gave a rose of blood
Lest I lose my way.
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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