

ATHINA PAPADAKI. Poems translated by David Connolly

Athiná Papadáki (1945-) was born in Athens. She studied Politics at University and works as a journalist. She has published seven books of poetry: *Archangel of Concrete* (1974); *Ewe-lamb of the Vapours* (1980); *Earth Once Again* (1986); *So Pale Almost White* (1989); *Shop-window Lioness* (1992); *Sleepless Woman of the Skies* (1995) and *In the Balcony's Realm* (1998). She has also published six books for children. Selections of her work have been translated into English, French, Spanish and Polish.

From: *Sleepless Woman of the Skies* (1995)

ASH AND ASH AGAIN

The world is falling, falling
with everything winged and fragrant,
a drop of oil on my passion.
I owe my infamy to fire.
Like to all that's fateful
it mobilises hosts of dreams
till it scorches utopia like grass.
Sometimes this too is revived
a gazelle by sweat's horizon,
to once again stir the dry air
amidst the lentisk.
I believe in all that burns in vain.
Transient and speechless
I see mammals blazing
in the festivity of milk.
I'm precious,
I guarantee nothing but ash.

POEM CLINGING TO THE SKIN

Everything hangs by a thread even trees,
when invisible they move
giving their place to the breeze's female nature,
that an age of chlorophyll may be born once again.
The butterflies raise the level of spring
from flower to flower
eternity moves,
yet strikes with the reality of ice.
The water rises slightly
removing rings from fingers,
while girls give account to their mirrors
before becoming brides.
With their dark sensations beneath the stars,

dreams.

We act as runners towards the world's unborn verdure.

EVDOKIA

April is such an enigma in the mind.
All in order yet scattered,
impassioned and towards evening speechless noughts.
All things acquire value in silence.
It's here that the devoted belong,
housewives for instance when, stooping, they gather
crumbs left on tables
then throw them to the birds,
perhaps the daily round might sprout wings.
But the dazzle is tireless,
every moment everything happens as if on a firing range.
If I were to relax.
Heavens, my daily chasteness
calls even bread routine.

From: *In the Balcony's Realm* (1998)

SUPPLICATION

I lit a candle to the dawn of the world
and I saw the water's root
with the flower immaterial
still in the scales of chlorophyll and scents.
I try to articulate the nothing the all
Lord, don't expect so much of my youth
for if I get any younger I'll die.

RARE SPECIES

In stealing roses I kidnap shadows.
Lord, remember me
when with plundered blooms I set out
– for where?

THE MOTHER WITHIN

So clear where the dreams I committed
the world took me and raised me up.
Call it sworn or pledged,
as if the fate were familiar and straight,

I arrived at the mother within
I get honey out of stone.
If there's anything still immortal within me, it's utopia.

THE WORDLESS OTHER WOMAN

House carved in purple stone,
brought by a sea of troubles
which woman lives through me
which woman's prayer was heard
while in the chambers I circulate
as light and water.

Four walls
and me within blossoming slowly learning
that the invisible sheds leaves.
Plaster fallen from her dreams on my sheets
incorporeal she sends word
of many lives in one.
I wear her dresses
sunless and glittering in the drawers.
One for midnight, another for daybreak
and all for the next woman after me.

Standing on the balcony
I'm surrounded by hills,
the slopes of marjoram and thyme almost touching me.
Patriarchal the olive grove all the way down
and the sea lighter than fate.

GARDEN WITH NO GARDEN

Metamorphoses sacred in the sunlight,
from so verdant to dry
where you were expecting flowering.

You open the window,
all things of earth in black
as if the flowers had turned ascetic.

Yet here the rose
with leafy sins will rise
from the invisible damp.
Garden with no garden.

THE MEAL'S TRAPPINGS

So what is hunger?
Hounds with royal patches
coming with leaps
from the chasms of dust
suddenly stain the fixed prey
with fear's tremor.

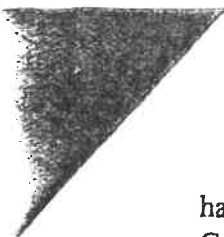
The blood disappears in spices and steam,
in the shiny dining room
with porcelain manners,
the knife twelve inches no more from the fork.
Invisible taste served on visible lace,
with flowers, wine and fowl.
Matter seized from matter
as far as the skeleton's ends
the voracious can't wait and makes our life mortal.

ON ANTHROPOPHAGY

I humbly invite you all to silk's disarray..
Buffets of pleasure in the garden
with cool fabrics and cold plates,
with no nightingales but the music ribbons
winnowing your dreams.
In merriment's circles an invisible quartermaster,
in the fish
the cereals
the sinless wine.
Calf and lamb cured with spices
beneath the changeable blue.

All laid out, perfect and untouched
and only the serving moving,
Pallas the Attic Assumption,
with dishes determined to be consumed,
but the new prey concealed,
ever straining to escape but unable to walk on water.
A full moon and what can you blame it for?

I invite you all to a place that's mild
but disobedient towards dawn,
when victims bedecked get even with the grass
and as babies once more
bellowing at the divine fodder,
the grass remains perplexed and fresh
as if matter with or without a hide



had never been buried within it.
God will provide, but will he receive?

I'll welcome you with a coral hem.
And at the moment of greeting you'll devour me,
first the wrists.
A bourgeois woman I won't rise up.