

Katerina Gogou

THEY WILL COME

Seven Poems



APOPHASIS

They Will Come

Seven Poems

Katerina Gogou

Translated from the Greek

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Cover image: Ancient Greek tragic masks.

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1.

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

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

2.

My own friends are blackbirds
who play see-saw on roofs of crumbling houses
Exarchia, Patisia, Metaxurgio, Metz.*
They do whatever comes along.
Peddlers of cookbooks and encyclopedias
they build roads and connect deserts
barkers for Zinonos Str. dives
professional rebels cornered in the old days and forced to drop their pants
now they swallow pills and alcohol to sleep
but they have dreams so they don't sleep.
My own women-friends are taut wires
on roof terraces of old houses
Exarchia, Victoria, Koukaki, Ghizi.
You've pinned on them a million steel clothes' pins
your guilt, party-meeting decisions, borrowed dresses cigarette burn-
marks, strange headaches
threatening silences, vaginitis
they fall in love with gays
trichomonas, late-periods

the telephone the telephone the telephone broken glasses
and no one for an ambulance.

They do whatever comes along.

My friends are always on the move
because you haven't given them an inch.

All my friends paint with black
because you've debased the red for them
they write in a symbolic tongue
because your own's only for ass-licking.

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

My friends.

3.

The 4 points of the horizon

Above. Below. Right. Left.

Above, the sky and the things we aimed for.

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

Below, the earth and things aiming at us

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

Right, tourist islands banks and rock

– offering us electroshock in the arms of
Raquel Welch.

Left, the ghost of Russia driving a Mig-25
is chasing us with a big rubber stamp
– and we collect tiny bits of our perseverance
for the party verdicts at the Moscow Trials.

.....
The neighborhood dime-store to catch a breath
but even here I've got to pay
for the shopkeeper's tolerance
an ex-cop selling the "People's Struggle"*
I don't know what to buy so as not to be
an accomplice. Understand?
The 4 points of the horizon
Dressed as banks pilots Marxists nurses
are chasing us. I have to make a call.
What's the number?
Where can I stop and take a single breath?
They've set us up everywhere.
The cops trapped by the gun
women by their sex 229
Justice by the laws
organizations by their dissidents
doctors by electroshock.
Yes. Let's go to the Ilion movie theater tonight. There the
heroes have red cheeks
and always win in the end.

Hired labor – capital
imperialism the supreme stage of capitalism
the betrayed revolution
ah, comrade, how much we miss you...
Time's gotten full of worms
nuclear tests, people's fronts, whorehouses
(and Portugal fallen too) the super-productions of the Catholics and the Mafia
become multinationals, they don't let us love comrade.
Stooges come up our stairs
soccer-field dogs, anytime
they want to they can pull our pants down and fuck us peaceful co-existence
and socialism in one country
ah, comrade, if you only knew the heavy load
we're carrying...
No one could endure the Moscow trials
you were left all alone
and the people were tired, that's where they hit.
You know it, why tell you?
And then they finked. You know it, why tell you?
In China, January '77, they butcher workers
and that arrives here like a poem by Mao
(they put the blame on individuals again) ah,
comrade why weren't you more careful?

Here it's the same. People hide in their shells.
There are 2 K.K.'s and thousands the hermaphrodite
"revolutionaries."
If you're a little bit loose you pass over to the other side.
But don't worry. We'll make it.
It's just that every so often I get tired too,
and I don't have a job, I feel like crying
like right now
and that's when I miss you more than ever
when I "scold" you for not being more careful
and when I'm not ashamed to cry
and write poems
comrade, you who never betrayed
we're experiencing barbarity itself.

4.

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

An endless parade of barbiturates
maintain a sick balance
between you and me.
And up. And down.
And out back and on the side
the system – the rotten system's to blame
even my cat knows that
the system that squeezes
the money they spit
two by two they “turn on” and disappear comrades got old waiting
the kids – what big eyes the kids have – riot squads, drugstores, taxis,
the monopolies the imperialism between us
I can't make love to you
or anybody else. I'm 3 years now on the list
of the unemployed.
Let's not kid ourselves.
If we don't sign the paper they want
we won't be able to make a single decision. Night is falling.
The central committee
kowtows to the Maoists.
Night is falling.
The television commentator's

winking at me.
Night is falling even more.
I'm still hanging in there.
I'm not signing.
Long live the 204th Internationale.

5.

Rotten./ Rotten themes/ moldy volumes
devious libraries
bootlicking words slave words / frame-up jobs fraudulent words
our life here is a bull
a thousand little fascist knives stuck in him
he vomits black our own blood
and you go on painting still-lives
and past-prime book editions making money for
the tourist office.
Political parties—punctuation marks
ecology—ancient forerunners show us the way only on the reverse
the good ones are thrown in deep holes
the public works and illustrious signatures

pave with asphalt over them
a big round crate is the earth like a ballot-box so we can throw our
ballots in
whatever color the salamander takes
it's always rightwing.
Some drab acacias have undertaken Spring roots aren't so that we
may go back
roots are for generating branches
and if they don't
they're dead sticks firewood
roadblocks Forward Forward ever more!
That's what is needed
from submission to an uprising
from either all or nobody
from either everything or nothing
and us / they let us in through the service door we eat their left-
overs standing
wearing on our neck as an old-fashion scarf
the dead cat of civilization
but now I'm no longer alone
I've made I have connections
I'm not afraid of anyone
I pretend I'm living this life while I'm preparing
the other one

in daytime high noon I'll grab bucket and brushes we're
going to tear the flagstones
I'll make a great downpour of leaflets
incitement slogans
bullet-words on paper
letters out of skin and blood
our poetry's psychosomatic—
no one of you is ever going to separate us
even my very life
and anyone who dares let him come this way
hand grenade
with safety pin off.

6.

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

—how in hell's he going to ride the motorbike—
They didn't want me speaking like that.
Afterwards I left earlier I had a headache
again I'd been leaning on the wall. They didn't know
I knew.
That I was never going to sign.
Not for any party.
That I had only thrown a jacket—January '79—
over the freezing cold carried by those who signed...

7.

THEY WILL COME

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

They will unhitch by themselves with their pulled-
out fingernails the hook that hung them
on the ceiling of your earth. They'll have a uniform
bruised color and lobotomies instead of ears. Out of
sewers and prison cells they will advance slowly.

They will enter with the slow step with which terror
proceeds

and glory bound together brothers in blood
a bloody thread
will be bringing the news.

*Translator's notes:

1. Dimitris Mitropanos – working-class Greek singer who became a big star and married the daughter of the Secretary of State (1948-2012).

1. Dexameni – fashionable district in Athens, somewhat like Nob Hill in San Francisco.

2. Exarchia, etc. - lower-middle class districts of Athens.

4. Dianysis Savvopoulos – a very influential writer and singer of rebellious soul-songs, b.1944 61. CPI – Communist Party of Italy.

7. They Will Come. Leros – Island of the Aegean, place of detention for many political prisoners in the Junta years.



Katerina Gogou (1940-1993) was a Greek poet, actress, and activist. Her life was plagued by her childhood experiences under the brutal Nazi occupation of Greece. Identifying with the marginalized, the damned, and the condemned of Athens, Gogou took on the mantle of poetic voice of the working class anarchist neighborhood of Exarcheia. Yet, even among hardcore radicals, Gogou's ferocious, scathing, and uncompromising poetry frightened many and left her alienated. Gogou committed suicide at the age of 53: "I was a tree and I broke."

What is important is to remain human.

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