

Fantasies of the Feminine in Contemporary Greek Women Poets¹

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Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."

Mutism

In her poem "Myth" the American poet Muriel Rukeyser² exposes the unquestionable assumption of patriarchal western society that there exists such a thing as a "genderless" identity represented by men (and male artists) who can best perceive universal truths about the human spirit and are able to embody them. As a result of this deeply ingrained cultural presupposition, a woman writer has had to deal with the realisation that men write out of experience that is not gender specific but that her "feminine" life is likely to be regarded as trivial, private, and irrelevant to the fundamental issues and endeavours of humanity. Throughout the centuries the woman writer, and particularly the poet, has been constrained by a "double bind",³ an enormous tension between the socially defined notion of femininity and the needs of the creative mind to articulate her own sense of self and world. So many women felt compelled to make a radical choice—"the choice to be an artist or a woman, categories culturally constituted as mutually exclusive".⁴ Inhabiting a private, muted zone on the boundaries of patriarchal culture, the woman artist has had to struggle with this double-

bind situation between the conflicting demands of attachment vs autonomy, relation vs separation, self-denial vs self-assertion, self-sacrifice vs self-empowerment—in other words the clash between the desire for creativity, knowledge, active participation in social and cultural life on the one hand, and the total frustration of that intellectual and emotional fulfilment by a society whose norms and conventions restricted the woman to one role only: that of the mother (of son) best exemplified in the archetype of the Virgin Mary.

The cultural construction of female “nature” and femininity has constricted women to the private space of domesticity, to the Angel of the House model, so poignantly expressed by Athina Papadaki in her poem “Ironing”:⁵

The order of things repels me.

A heavy anchor nominates me sea-bottom,
thus I am necessary.

However, I dilate towards desertion, as if I never crossed
the line of Lilies.

This, yes this

planet of ours with its invaluable needs!

What a resistance keeps me from succumbing to an honest housewife⁶

Split self deals primarily with the sense of alienation a poet feels, caught up between her outer female and her inner artistic experience, “between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of self, between what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is”.⁷ Creation and procreation seem incompatible, with the woman being crippled in self-effacement and self-denial, rent between the demands of nurturing and supporting others, and the need of self-assertiveness and self-love—the risky freedom to which the aggressive act of creation lures her outside the safe enclosure of domesticity. As it has been alleged, “it takes an enormous ego to say: My experience of the world, my vision of the world, are worth—I am worth—your attention”.⁸ Women’s victimisation has often taken the form of poems rejecting the physical body itself as that part which most visibly registers the entrapping of femaleness; hence, the alienation from the body, particularly the sexual body, as we read in Andia Frantzi’s “Adventure of a Description”:

Dark and nighted your body
like a tree on the sea’s edge
in summer; two summers gone
short breath of amber
the moonless night
milking you
suffocating you

stirring you
beheading you
with your chest all tattooed
and an old Anestis for a father
last year, the one before, and this one again
the rape has been accomplished.

Dark and nighted your body
like a tree
wood eaten up by worm
lifelong and oppressive variation.⁹

The emotional desolation of women locked in regrettable relations surfaces constantly in poetry where we find references to a buried self and poetic power, both in danger of disappearing under the multiple pressures of gender roles. To claim her vocation as an artist takes a truly heroic voice on the part of a woman in a patriarchal culture that defines the active, creative female as an “anomaly” in the system. For the woman to attain knowledge and self-realisation it is necessary to choose the artist in her and to work through the guilt and anger of having had to cast off the “imposed” self, “the image of Woman in books written by men”, as Adrienne Rich describes it, and to discover “her self-consciousness as a woman”¹⁰ which often lacerates her. Jenny Mastoraki professes in her collection *Tolls*:

I escape through the words
I have not said
I surrender myself
to the hours I most loved.
This silence is endless.
I am scared to wait for
what will not come.
I am scared at the thought
of what I have not written.
This silence
totally mine
dismembers me.¹¹

Submersion in a sphinx-like silence, withdrawal, narcissistic self-absorption, self-love, self-mythologising, which are usually presented as the conditions of creativity, have been considered anathema by society when adopted by women, and thus have made it impossible for the woman poet to choose her artistic self without qualification, ambivalence, or a strong sense of guilt. Struggling against the role of passivity assigned to her by tradition, in claiming the right to be “author” of a life and a text, the woman writer—and the poet in particular—has

been treated as a double “monster”. On the one hand is the monstrosity of giving birth to a book instead of a baby, a brain child, which is the prerogative of men only—women confronted as “thieves” of the poetic logos; Adrienne Rich, speaking about her own life as a poet, affirms that “you were always asking yourself whether you were in some way a monster”.¹² On the other hand is the woman’s internalised experience of monstrosity, the exotic “outsider-in” who needs to murder the Angel of the House, the simultaneous anger and guilt that she feels—anger at the self-sacrifice that has been imposed on her, guilt at the need for self-definition—that make the woman/poet a contradiction in terms. Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke in “I have a Stone” also employs the Oedipal myth to her own ends in order to articulate this monstrosity, what she has elsewhere called “the cost of a woman’s self being split in two”,¹³ the social destiny of being born or rather defined as woman and the desire for self-knowledge and self-assertion; self-empowerment is in deadly conflict with attachment to others, leading to an experience of suffocation:

I lick a stone. ... This stone I call Oedipus. Because just like Oedipus it is irregular with deep grooves for eyes. It also rolls on swollen feet. And when immobile, it hides underneath a destiny, a serpent, my forgotten self.

This stone I call Oedipus.¹⁴

Monster

When woman, the traditional Beauty of fairytales, rejects the patriarchal definition of herself as the “other” of man and acknowledges her anger and rage in the internalised images of self-hatred and self-sacrifice that have been imposed on her, when her need to claim and name her identity as a female person gives rise to a psychic tension that drives her unmercifully to find a way to express herself, when imaginative experience calls her to undertake the dangerous journey into the self—then the Beast is born (in her and out of her). If the fact that creativity in women was for centuries looked upon as “unnatural” has eclipsed the female artist as a monstrosity, then it is no surprise that what she brings to life is a “monstrous” creature, particularly in the most satanically seductive, daring and therefore precarious of literary genres for women—lyric poetry. In her 1971 essay, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision”, Adrienne Rich tries to explain the significance of anger for the woman poet. She asserts that “to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way *is* in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination. The word traditional is important here”, she adds; “There must be ways, and we will be finding out more and more about them, in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united. But in those years I always felt the conflict as a failure of love in myself”.¹⁵ Speaking specifically about the nineteenth-century woman poet, Rich stresses the fact that she “felt the medium of poetry as dangerous, in ways that the woman novelist did not feel the

medium of fiction to be”, because, “Poetry is too much rooted in the unconscious; it presses too close against the barriers of repression”;¹⁶ hence, for contemporary women writers, she argues, “there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as we try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just coming into, and with little in the past to support us”.¹⁷ As Anne Sexton also states, “Poetry, after all, milks the unconscious”.¹⁸

With this surfacing of the repressed in the labouring female subject trying to bring forth her own meaning, it is no surprise that “the birth may be abortive or monstrous”¹⁹ and that women’s creativity should often be embodied in deformed creatures – their poetry populated with hideous creatures and beasts. As Liz Lochhead, the Scottish poet, puts it, “A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster”.²⁰ Anghelaki-Rooke’s version of creaturehood, “Magdalen the Great Mammal”, confesses:

I, a mammal of a future
prehistory
poisoned from so much sperm
I ruminate on the futile words
of my act
– always play-acting as if I were to
die soon –
that’s why I fell in love with you.²¹

Pavlina Pampoudi in *Eye of the Fly* warns us of possible reversals in the given order of things, and alerts us to the dangers of a scopophilia where devouring/being devoured are equal options:

The eye of the fly
Beware,
It composes otherwise
*The edible world.*²²

Translating the traditional role of motherhood, the woman poet as a “mid-wife” must transform (maternal) fecundity into (female) creativity, wrestling with the problem of giving vent to an act of imagination that is socially unacceptable and psychologically unbearable. Nowhere is this gendered politics of monstrosity given a more unnerving representation than in the abortive image of woman giving birth not to a (male) child but to her own “poem”: herself. Giving birth to themselves apparently means for women poets that “after centuries of either silence or subversion, they can at last speak openly and forcefully in their poetry about every aspect of their lives”.²³ The image of the procreative/creative cow appears in Mastoraki’s “Birth”:

I sprouted in a greenhouse
 concrete. A cow's voice
 grazes my bowels.
 I limited myself
 to this vegetative condition.
 I did not speak.
 I did not provoke anyone.
 Only I have always thrived
 in places where dictionaries
 have persistently denied my existence.²⁴

Often, a woman's relationship to her own daemon—her active, creative power—dresses up as a hermaphrodite, as for example Pampoudi's androgynous creature that crawls into a precarious life in her poem "Birth":

I come out at night thisty
 I have no eyes almost nowhere

I creep with my twisted roots
 Over the ground.

I keep undissolved
 Only my erotic mouth with its blood
 My unknown sex

And in deep abandonment I reproduce myself
 The first male one from the end of my species—²⁵

Women, we are told, "are becoming midwives at their own births, exploring new ways of regenerating and rejuvenating their female creativity and the muse within themselves".²⁶

Muse

The question is, who or what is the fertilising principle, the vital active aspect of the poetic process, the potent and demonic force against which the poet is constantly pitted—in other words, what kind of muse is the woman artist inspired by? Given that traditionally, from Homer onwards, the gendered poetics of western culture has invariably ascribed the poet as male and the muse as female, the issue of the "sex" of the muse (or internal power) women invoke is of crucial importance, I think. Lochhead in a letter wonders about "the problem of the Female Muse for the female writer, or do we have to discover, or rediscover some 'male principle' within ourselves to be whole, can we have a Male Muse?... or must we squabble with parts of ourselves, live with our Bad Sisters...".²⁷ The

image of a male demonic that overwhelms the female conscious self is a reversed version of the perennial model of the male poet's succumbing to the seduction of the female muse. We wonder: Is it the aggressive, male side of the female self, the Jungian animus, that creates poetry? Is creativity (like libido, as Freud has told us) only and always masculine? Anghelaki-Rooke introduces a ravishing young partner in her poem "Writing":

His hand with the bitten nails was slowly entering into me, until I became the motion of my own burial. Coming to touch with it I concluded each poem. Into this new erotic landscape I bring my little table and my papers. I set the engine going. By the third verse the new inspirer has utterly overpowered me. I take a guess at how he lives and how he knocks me down. I begin to imagine more than I act out.²⁸

Pampoudi, in the poem "The Engagement" of her collection *He I*, makes the following equations:

He the Egg
I the Larva
He the Fly.

He I

Deadly discoloured and I such
Green the most toxic
From my eye-pupil –²⁹

and portrays a creature that corresponds neither to masculine nor to feminine standards but is rather hermaphroditic, "a unique, even monstrous creature, with the characteristics of both man and woman".³⁰ Here androgyny is not seen as a metaphor for wholeness or psychic unity but as a disfigurement—grotesque. The interest about the muse's sex also relates to the more general question that is being debated nowadays concerning the problem of *écriture féminine* or writing as a woman—"Why not just be poets, androgynous creators for which sex is no longer an issue?", Susanne Juhasz asks, reminding us that androgyny can be dangerous because historically it usually means subsuming the feminine into the masculine;³¹ conversely, androgyny has been seen as a metaphor for balance and wholeness, as a psychic unity, either potential or actual, an openness to the forces of opposition within the self.

It is quite common for contemporary Greek women poets to celebrate a female muse: mother, goddess, sister, daughter, lover, self. In articulating the crucial relationship between woman poet and female muse, modern women claim as muses powerful active figures through whom they find voice; women act as inspirers for one another, partners woven in a complex web of creative potential-

ty and reciprocity. The re-mythologised female muse as a source of imaginative energy is a female “other” who is at the same time an aspect of the self, an imaginative force emerging from within, a fantasy of female duality, such as we encounter in Maria Laina’s poem from the collection *Her Own* where, as the speaker says,

She kept her body, serious
in the entrance hall, in the street
among others.
She saw things grow;
maybe another woman looking outside?

Out there
out of her white face
she strengthened without noticing
that she was becoming beautiful.³²

Mary K. DeShazer points out that certain “modern women celebrate the muse as female lover, one whose eroticism energizes the poet, making her work possible and meaningful”.³³ Often the woman poet confronts her own demonic aspect in the guise of that most terrifying creature of all, the Gorgon; it is the muse as frightful shadow, a crucial Medusa-self against whom the poet struggles and yet through whom she ultimately transforms wildness and rage into vital creative energy. So the Medusa,³⁴ the “angry or unangelic underside of the self”,³⁵ with her ugliness, violence, darkness, seduction, physicality (the very opposite of traditional femininity) becomes a symbol of dynamism and freedom rather than annihilation and death, as male mythology would have it. Apparently, the ability for a woman to feel rage and to reconcile her destructive power is the necessary precondition for the emergence of a self that is truly capable of sexuality, creativity and love. Rea Galanaki in her collection *Yet Gracious* depicts this deadly creature in a moment of meditative serenity and composure – self-assured, ready to meet all challenges:

The Medusa combs snakes her hair.
Perseus will come with sword and mirror.
Heavy shadow and smell of fig-tree.
As a comb Judas’ fingers caress her.³⁶

Women, Hélène Cixous argues, have been captured “between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss” – stories reflecting nothing less than the male fear of castration which bears no relation to female sexuality; so she urges women: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing”.³⁷ In declaring themselves Medusas, Furies, Witches, Goddesses, Amazons women poets are exorcising

the “good girl” paradigm, the Angel of the House which repressed their spirit and suppressed their art. Laina, in the section “The Witches” from the collection *Pink Fear* warns us to

*Beware of this dark woman
because she rides in front of you.*

and avows:

Let her die, therefore, let her die
let love untie her flesh from her shoulders
so that I can lie at last
on her white bones.³⁸

Myth

The interaction of the woman poet with her muse often uses the language of sexuality to achieve an epiphany of self-fertilisation, whereby the artist creates out of her own internal powers. If, as Denise Levertov maintains, poetry is a dialogue with the god in ourselves, “a means of summoning the divine”,³⁹ it is very tempting for me to bring side by side two poems divided by almost three thousand years, where the female speaker is conversant with the goddess, Aphrodite in this case. Sappho’s “Ode to Aphrodite” is a poem acutely aware of the magic spell of persuasion and seduction; there is a close erotic intimacy between the human and the divine females who (usurping the male military discourse of power employed in the Homeric epic) become comrades-in-arms. Sappho invokes the goddess—the vision of power and energy incarnate in female form:

Come to me now again and deliver me
from oppressive anxieties; all the fulfilment
my heart longs for, fulfil; and you yourself
be my fellow-fighter.⁴⁰

As Estella Lauter argues, the “phenomenon of the ‘return’ of the goddess in contemporary arts is fascinating. It has suggested to some that there must be an ‘essential’ female or feminine experience which has persisted through the ages even in the face of patriarchal oppression”; in this relation of mortal to immortal woman, Lauter believes that “female creativity is much in evidence” and a way of “repeating an experience of collectivity that underlies the formation of the culture’s symbolic code”.⁴¹ Kiki Dimoula’s poem “Definitions” represents a type of “negative” collectivity, drained of any hope of positive interaction with the female divinity, in a world emptied not only of transcendental presence but of meaningful existence as well:

So it is with you, Goddess Aphrodite.
 I meet you for years now,
 alone, all alone,
 at the corner of Kordigtonos and Kypselis street
 – a crossroads for mortals –
 in a house garden,

...

And now the moment has come for us at last,
 Goddess Aphrodite, to talk
 as equals. I mean to say
 as a statue to another statue.

...

When loneliness listens.
 And loneliness is, Goddess Aphrodite,
 what appears in the background:
 precisely behind us both.⁴²

Dimoula confesses: “I am so exhausted with the given reality to desire the discovery of another one. I think that what makes me more exhausted is the fact that I am a woman. It is very difficult, very tiring, and extremely dangerous for a woman to be nothing but her sex, or the total abnegation of her sex”.⁴³

Yet, despite Dimoula’s frustration, the return of the goddess, satisfying a psychological need rather than a historical necessity, dominates the fantasy life and hence the poetry of many contemporary women artists. Known as “revisio-nist mythmaking”, this alternative reading of mythology and history falls within the current feminist attempt to redefine culture, to speak the past from a woman’s point of view that has been totally absent from symbolic constructions. Adrienne Rich best exemplifies this tendency: “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves”, she emphasises; “And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society”.⁴⁴ So the retelling of traditional stories or myths has come to be not only a central theme in contemporary women’s writing but one of the most significant strategies of female and feminist projects in exposing and subverting traditional misrepresentations of women; it is also an attempt to revive a matriarchal genealogy that has been erased from recorded history (or myth). The search for foremothers, both actual and fictional, is an important stage in the development of many contemporary artists who experience the need to confront and incorporate female power. I would like to mention briefly the numerous women figuring for instance in Zoe Karelli’s poetry: her Godiva, Ophelia, Eurydice, Antigone, Ate, St. Catherine, Virgin Mary, Cassandra, Herodias, Bacche, Soulamitis, Sachrazat, Sappho, Persephone, Hecate, Kyniska of

Sparta, and Velestichi of Macedonia.

In a rather random selection of poems that represent a new “femininity” by reconfiguring folktales, legends, and myths thus making us aware of the possibility of a matricentric or matricultural view of the world, I would like to quote from two women poets, one Greek-American and the other Greek, emphasizing (in the words of Liz Yorke) that the “work of reminiscence is crucial. The retrieval of women’s experience in history through the re-visionary telling of women’s stories enables us to clarify our differences from one another” and “involves the unfixing of stereotyped associations that cluster around the traditional thought-forms, the myths and stories of western patriarchal cultures”.⁴⁵ Olga Broumas begins her poem “Cinderella” by exploding the romanticised version of femininity and reimagining the female character’s needs; a woman “is her mother-goddess”⁴⁶—goddess being a personification of the poet’s own creative self:

Apart from my sisters, estranged
from my mother, I am a woman alone
in a house of men
who secretly
call themselves princes, alone
with me usually, under cover of dark. I am the one allowed in

to the royal chambers, whose small foot conveniently
fills the slipper of glass. The woman writer, the lady
umpire, the madam chairman, anyone’s wife.
I know what I know.⁴⁷

Jenny Mastoraki recasts “Chalima’s Tales” in a manner uncertain as to whether she “masculinises” the feminine or “feminises” the masculine:⁴⁸

It is no longer easy for me
nor desirable
to write verses.
All around lurk those who were killed
with hooks and twisted knives
and the place foams potassium.
They were right who said that in the end
Chalima vomited oil
the fairytales.
So, in difficult times,
I get a basket of mushrooms
and pass for Sleeping Beauty.
At first it looks a little as if
you plunge headlong

from the wall.
 But then you get used to it
 and you even come to like it.⁴⁹

“Myth remains alive”, Levertov maintains, “only when it retains its capacity to provoke, at a deep level, the ‘shock of recognition’ and a sense of personal relevance. For it to affect the reader, it must in some degree have ‘happened’ to the poet”.⁵⁰

If I were to search for a common reference point, the need for a new myth that, despite geographical, cultural, racial, generic specificities underlies the multiple female voices of our times, in the realms of poetry as well as theory—ranging from American radical feminists, to French psychoanalysts and infiltrating the whole scene of women’s writing today—it would be the ultimate and radical redefinition of “motherhood”.⁵¹ This is the crucial shift of focus from woman-as-mother-to-son (best portrayed in the religious image of Mary and the baby Jesus) to woman-as-daughter-to-mother—essentially silenced in western culture with very few exceptions, the most celebrated of which is the Demeter-Persephone story, the reclamation of Kore by Mother at the heart of the Eleusinian mysteries, paradigmatic of (the woman’s) acquisition of creative power. In the words of Adrienne Rich again, the “cathexis between mother and daughter—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story”.⁵² The origin of the theoretical debate but also the imaginative re-discovery of the mother (pre-Oedipal or phallic, but also as a socialising factor) takes us of course back to Freud and his successor Jacques Lacan with their emphasis on the mother as the primal object of love in infantile sexuality; from there (usually by way of critique and polemics) we witness the notion’s dissemination into the work of many women theorists and artists. From the neo-Freudian notion about the female psyche developed by Nancy Chodorow⁵³ and Carol Gilligan,⁵⁴ based on the assumption that women are emotionally more important to women than men and stressing the artist’s relationship with the maternal or pre-Oedipal realm, to Melanie Klein’s (and object relations exponents) that all formation of symbols is a projection of the infant’s sense of the mother’s body—which makes of artistic creation a reproduction of the desire for the mother as a beautiful land to be explored.⁵⁵ Broumas in her poem “Little Red Riding Hood” confesses to such an insatiable longing:

I grow old, old
 without you, Mother, landscape
 of my heart. No child, no daughter, between my bones
 has moved, and passed
 out screaming, dressed in her mantle of blood⁵⁶

Julia Kristeva, following Lacan, sees language as symbolic function constituting itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drives and semiotic processes;

unlike Lacan, though, she allows for the possibility of the return of the repressed archaic, maternal “chora” in poetry – poetic language being the resurgence of that rhythm, that primal pulsation, thus becoming “the equivalent of incest”.⁵⁷ With her emphasis on *écriture féminine*, Hélène Cixous maintains that because of the proximity to the body woman’s writing is close to voice and rhythm, thus never completely cut off from the (imaginary) mother.⁵⁸ Desire for the mother, even identification with the maternal body, also forms the core of Luce Irigaray’s thought, supporting that women have been systematically denied the “use” of the mother in order to fantasise their origin as female subjects. For Irigaray, this repressed, unspeakable homosexual mother-daughter erotics – the murder of the mother – forms the cornerstone of patriarchal culture; for her, woman’s fantasy life centres around the mother who operates as part of her psychic reality, and needs to be encountered and represented in a new symbolic order that would be prepared to accept this extraordinary narrative of female desire emerging from the relation to, and remembrance of, the maternal body.⁵⁹

And the (women) poets? How do they translate – in praxis – how do they accommodate the body of the mother (rhythm) in the topos of the father’s name (language)? The voice of a daughter emotionally isolated from her mother, the longing for a lost paradise, for what Rich calls “the forbidden ‘primary intensity’ between women”,⁶⁰ we hear in Athina Papadaki’s “Persephone”:

From my husband’s night shift, I thicken into darkness.
 As for the past
 at my mother’s, I had, I can’t deny it
 white trousseau, the only white
 I have known.
 They have desecrated spring, with my name.⁶¹

Mouth

The question is: What is happening today? Now? At this very moment? What can the multiplicity of voices heard in Greece on the edge of the century convey about “women” and “poetry” in our times? What should be done to destroy the double bind, to reconcile the functions of poet and woman? And why “was it poetry and not some other form which came to occupy such a central role within feminism, and what are the implications of that seemingly privileged position?”.⁶² The problem, as I see it, is mainly one of fantasy and representation, of introducing women-made myths and metaphors for women, rejecting stereotypes (all those poems about women written by men), revisioning archetypes, envisioning prototypes – in other words, attempting to construct a new symbolic, a culture that is not (only) patriarchal, but one which would validate woman’s right not simply to equality but to “difference”: a different sexuality, a different economy, a different aesthetic – woman’s language. Athina Papadaki in “The Nameless One” speaks about the woman with no name, no personhood, no integrated being, no

story, no language—dissolving as she does in the moment-to-moment trivialities of her life (with the sad conviction that “There is no mother tongue, there is no deviation or escape from the trap of the masculine language system”⁶³):

Every Saturday, a habit,
I clean up,
woman thrashed like all the rest
reflecting a kneeling flow
on the polished bathroom tiles.

That’s how I want you to remember me, nameless.⁶⁴

What is the new story that contemporary poets and theorists are trying to tell us? That we need an-other language and that this language is (possibly) poetry? As Jan Montefiore claims, it is “partly through the contemplation and practice of women’s poetry that the notion has emerged of a specifically female language which would articulate women’s bodily experience, including physical love, childbirth and the memories of infantile sensuality”.⁶⁵ According to Rich, at the heart of any re-vision of language is poetry, for “Poetry is among other things a criticism of language”; or, insisting on the links between poetic language, power, and consciousness, she asserts: “Poetry is above all a concentration of the *power* of language, which is the power of our ultimate relation to everything in the universe”.⁶⁶ Similarly, in Audre Lorde’s version, poetry is “not a luxury”, poetry “is an absolute necessity in our living”.⁶⁷ In renaming the world (that is in bringing a female Imaginary into the male Symbolic), women poets serve as muses and mouthpieces not only for each other, but (provided they are listened to) for a male audience as well. No longer compelled to transcend their female self, to assume the mask of “universalism” in order to speak authoritatively to others, women at last attempt to construct a poetry that is their own and in which they can be themselves, revealing that there is perhaps a basic differentiation between masculine and feminine modes of perception, which render an imaginative transformation of reality still possible. Though miles apart (geographically, historically, ideologically) Adrienne Rich and Martin Heidegger would seem to agree on one point: Rich, with her “What it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, I think, is perhaps the major subject of poetry from here on. It’s the ultimate political question, and it is going to affect all the other questions”;⁶⁸ according to Heidegger (as reported by Irigaray), “each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through”.⁶⁹

Nothing is more rewarding for women, ultimately, than the stripping away of surfaces to claim the deep reality within; and poems are a piercing through to and embracing of truths so long buried and rejected. But what is “truth” to contemporary women—poets, theorists, teachers, students, or just “women” (because many of us recognise in these poems features of our own experience, familiar

signs of the process toward self-discovery—or self-loss). Rich warns us that “The unconscious wants truth. It ceases to speak to those who want something else more than truth. ... The unconscious wants truth as the body does”;⁷⁰ Alicia Ostriker asserts that, “To tell all the truth and tell it straight has become the program of most women poets”;⁷¹ Muriel Rukeyser proclaims that “if one woman told the truth about her life the world would split open”.⁷² Less optimistically, though, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke alerts us to the fact that recently she notices “a strange turn: truth is being articulated—female truth—but the impression created by the poetry is that it is no more than a lie. It is a new camouflage”, she says, “much more sophisticated, a near rejection of truth, a derision, like a recipe that was given to us and failed to work. Failed in what?”, she asks: “To give answers to our life whose complexity has outrun the problem of male-female relationships and comes up against other unsurpassable obstacles. ... Truth is being stated”, she claims, “it is a ‘pink fear’ (Maria Laina) that cannot impose a new behaviour on anyone. Truth is being spoken in female poetry today, but it appears as yet another mask, the metaphoricity of existence that cannot be healed”.⁷³ Here, I believe, is the “rose” of feminist identity politics invaded by the “sickness” of the postmodernist “worm”—the premature “death” of a (female) subject-in-process towards self-creation.

Remembering all the same Tillie Olsen’s dictum that “Every woman who writes is a survivor”,⁷⁴ I would like to conclude with partly quoting from two poems that exemplify in turn what I would call a “feminine” and a “feminist” poetics. Kiki Dimoula dedicates her poem “Mark of Recognition” to the “Statue of a woman with hands tied” that decorates some park; when looked at from a distance, it gives the “misleading” impression “to be slowly sitting up to remember/a lovely dream/gathering all [her] strength to live it out”; from “close up”, though, “the dream clears away” for both the woman spectator and the female object of her gaze. Eternally captured, it seems, in this “cosmogony of marble”, an a-priori loser in any socio-political struggle “for freedom and equality” but also a metaphysical prisoner of the marble’s “Argus” of a density, the woman is condemned to infinite captivity, with her hands “tied behind” in a total impotence that turns her into a cultural cripple:

They all call you a statue right away.
Right away I call you a woman
Not because the sculptor
surrendered you to the marble
as a woman
and your thighs promise generations
of beautiful statues
—a clean harvest of immobility—
But because your hands are tied.
Everywhere I turn
I see your hands are always

tied.
That's why I call you a woman.

I call you a woman
because you always end up
a captive⁷⁵

In Zoe Karelli's poem "Man, Feminine Gender" ("the first purely feminist poem in modern Greece"⁷⁶) the speaking subject, addressing the (male) god of Christianity, admits to a knowledge that has devastated her, but also a knowledge that shatters to the ground the hierarchical binary oppositions of patriarchy—masculinity/femininity, activity/passivity, aggression/softness, pride/humility, sun/moon; she is thrown into a position of existential and sexual isolation, a "nothingness" from which a new identity (and language) flowing from an imaginary source specific to women, can perhaps begin to emerge:

What can I do since I know so well
so many things, and know better than to think
that Thou plucked me from his side.
And I say that I am "man," completed
and alone. I could not have been formed without him
but now I *am* and am capable,
and we are a separated pair, he
and I, and I have my own light.
I was never the moon,
but I said I would not depend on the sun,
and I have such pride
that my trying to reach his
and to surpass myself, learn
completely that I want to resist him,
that I want to accept
nothing from him, that I do not want to wait.

I neither weep nor chant a song,
but my own violent separation, which I am preparing,
is becoming more painful
that I may know the world through myself,
that I may speak my own word,
I, who until this moment existed
to marvel and to esteem and to love.
I no longer belong to him,
and I must be alone,
I, "man" in the feminine gender.⁷⁷

Notes

1. Revised version of the paper "Beauty and the Beast: Re-membering the Woman/Poet" published in the volume *Women / Poetry in Britain and Greece*, ed. Ekaterini Douka-Kabitoglou, Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1998.
2. Fleur Adcock, ed. *The Faber Book of 20th Century Women's Poetry*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987, 135.
3. The notion of the "double bind" is emphasized, among other contemporary critics, by Susanne Juhasz in *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women. A New Tradition*, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976, Paula Bennet, *My Life a Loaded Gun: Female Creativity and Feminist Poetics*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, and Suzanne W. Jones, *Writing the Woman Artist: Essays on Poetics, Politics, and Portraiture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
4. Suzanne W. Jones, *Writing the Woman Artist*, 24.
5. Unless otherwise stated all translations of poetry from Greek into English are mine.
6. Ἡ τάξη τῶν πραγμάτων μ' ἀπωθεῖ.
Βαριά μιά ἄγκυρα μ' ὀνομάζει βυθό, ἄρα εἴμ' ἀναγκαία.

Ὡστόσο
διαστέλλομαι πρὸς τὴ λιποταξία, λές καί δέν πέρασα
ποτέ ἀπ' τίς γραμμές τῶν Κρίνων.
Ἐτοῦτος, νά, ἐτοῦτος
ὁ πλανήτης μας μέ τίς πολύτιμες ἀνάγκες!
Τί ἀντοχή γιά νά μὴν ὑποκύψω σ' ἔντιμη νοικοκυρά.
"Σιδέρωμα", Ἀμνάδα τῶν ἀτμῶν, Θεσσαλονίκη: Ἐγνατία, 1980.
7. Deborah Pope, *A Separate Vision*, 86.
8. *Naked and Fiery Forms*, 2.
9. Σκοτεινό καί νυχτωμένο τό κορμί σου
ἴδιο δέντρο στήν ἄκρη τῆς θάλασσας
καλοκαίρι· καί πᾶνε δυό χρόνια
κεχρμιπαρένια ἀνάσα κοφτή
ἢ νύχτα δίχως φεγγάρι
νά σ' ἀρμέγει
νά σ' ἀσφυκτιᾷ
νά σ' ἀνακατεύει
νά σ' ἀποκεφαλίζει
μέ τό στήθος σου γεμάτο τατουάζ
κι ἓνα μπάρμπα Ἀνέστη γιά πατέρα
πέρσι πρόπερσι καί φέτος
ἢ ἄρπαγή συνετελέσθη.

Σκοτεινό καί νυχτωμένο τό κορμί σου
ἴδιο δέντρο·
κορμός διάτρητος ἀπό σαράκι
παραλλαγή ἰσόβια καί καταναγκαστική.
"Ἡ περιπέτεια μιᾶς περιγραφῆς", *Σύγχρονη ἀνθολογία γυναικείας ποίησης, 1900-1980*, ἐπιμ. Ευάγγελος Γ. Ρόζος, Ἀθήνα: Δρυμός, 1980, 442.
10. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, New York: Norton, 1979, 39.

11. Δραπετεύω μέσ' απ' τίς λέξεις
πού δέν είπα.
Έγκαταλείπομαι
σίς ὄρες πού πιό πολύ αγάπησα.
Αὐτή ἡ σιγή δέν ἔχει τέλος.
Τρομάζω νά περιμένω
αὐτό πού δέ θά 'ρθει.
Τρομάζω στή σκέψη
αὐτῶν πού δέν ἔγραψα.
Αὐτή ἡ σιγή
ἀπόλυτα δική μου
μέ κατακερματίζει.
Διόδια, β' ἔκδοσι, Ἀθήνα: Κέδρος, 1972, 1982, 15.
12. In a 1977 interview with Blanch Boyd in the gay publication *Christopher Street*, quoted by Paula Bennett in *My Life a Loaded Gun*, 215.
13. "Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry", *Hellenic Diaspora*: 141.
14. Γλείφω μιά πέτρα. ... Τήν πέτρα αὐτή τή λέω Οιδίποδα. Γιατί ὅπως ὁ Οιδίποδας εἶναι κι αὐτή ἀκανόνιστη μέ βαθιές ἀλλακιές γιά μάτια. Κατρακυλάει καί κείνη μέ πρησιμέ-
να πόδια. Κι ὅταν ἀκίνητη, κρύβει ἀπό κάτω της μιά μοίρα, ἕνα ἔρπετό, τόν λησμονη-
μένο μου ἑαυτό.
Τήν πέτρα αὐτή τή λέω Οιδίποδα.
"Ἐχω μιά πέτρα", *Ἐνάντιος Ἐρωτας*, β' ἔκδοσι, Ἀθήνα: Κέδρος, 1982, 1986, 11.
15. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 43-44.
16. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 174-75.
17. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 35.
18. Quoted by Susanne Juhasz in *Naked and Fiery Forms*, 119.
19. Dorothy Porter McMillan, "Liz Lochhead and the Ungentle Art of Clyping", in *Liz Lochhead's Voices*, ed. Robert Crawford and Anne Varty, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993, 27.
20. *Liz Lochhead's Voices*, 168.
21. *Contemporary Greek Women Poets*, ed. Eleni Fourtouni, New Haven, Conn.: Thelphini Press, 1978, 43.
22. Τό μάτι τῆς μύγας,
Φυλάξου,
Συνθέτει ἀλλιῶς
Τόν ἐδώδιμο κόσμο—
Τό μάτι τῆς μύγας, Ἀθήνα: Κέδρος, 1983, 31.
23. Paula Bennett, *My Life A Loaded Gun*, 261.
24. Βλάστησα σ' ἕνα θερμοκήπιο
μπετόν ἀρμέ. Μιά φωνή ἀγελάδας
μοῦ βοσκάει τά σωθικά.
Περιορίστηκα
σ' αὐτή τή φυτική κατάσταση.
Δέ μίλησα.
Δέν προκάλεσα κανέναν.
Μονάχα πού πάντα εὐδοκίμησα
στά μέρη ὅπου τά λεξιικά
ἀρνήθηκαν ἐπίμονα τήν ὕπαρξή μου.

- “Η γέννηση”, Διόδια, 34.
25. Βγαίνω τή νύχτα διψώντας
Δέν έχω μάτια σχεδόν πουθενά
- Σέρνομαι μέ τίς στρεβλωμένες ρίζες μου
Πάνω απ’ τό χώμα.
- Κρατάω άλωτο
Μόνο τό έρωτικό μου στόμα μέ τό αίμα του
Τό άγνωστό μου φύλο
- Καί σέ βαθιά έγκατάλειψη αναπαράγομαι
‘Ο πρώτος απ’ τό τέλος τοῦ είδους μου—
“Η γέννηση”, Αὐτός Έγώ, β’ έκδοση, Ἀθήνα: Ἡ Μικρή Έγνατία, 1977, 1980, 18.
26. *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1986, 110.
27. Anne Varty, “Scripts and Performances”, in *Liz Lochhead’s Voices*, 150.
28. Τό χέρι του μέ τά μασημένα νύχια έμπαινε άργά μέσα μου, όσο νά γίνω έγώ ή κίνηση
τῆς ἴδιας τῆς ταφῆς μου. Μ’ αὐτήν έρχόμουν σέ έπαφή καί τελείωνα τό κάθε ποίημα.
Στό νέο έρωτικό τοπίο φέρνω τό τραπεζάκι μου καί τά χαρτιά μου. Στρώνομαι στό
γράψιμο. Βάζω μπρός τό μηχανάκι. Στόν τρίτο στίχο ό νέος έμπνευστής μ’ έχει τέλεια
κατακτήσει. Μαντεύω πῶς ζεῖ καί πῶς μ’ έξουθενώνει. Ἀρχίζω νά φαντάζομαι περισ-
σότερα απ’ όσα πράττω.
- “Τό γράψιμο”, Έναντίος Έρωτας, 20.
29. Αὐτός τό Αὐγό
Έγώ ή Νύμφη
Αὐτός ή Μύγα.
- Αὐτός Έγώ
- Θανάσιμα αποχρωματισμένος καί απομυζῶ
Πράσινο τό πιό τοξικό
Ἀπό τήν ἴριδά μου—
“Ο άρραβώννας”, Αὐτός Έγώ, 14.
30. Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, “Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry”, 144.
31. *Naked and Fiery Forms*, 206.
32. Κρατοῦσε σοβαρή τό σώμα της
στό χόλ, στό δρόμο
ανάμεσα σέ άλλους.
Έβλεπε πράγματα νά μεγαλώνουν
μήπως μία άλλη πού κοιτάζει έξω;
- Έχει έξω
έξω απ’ τό άσπρο της πρόσωπο
δυναμωσε χωρίς νά προσέξει
Ἵτι γινόταν άμορφη.
Δικό της, Ἀθήνα: Κείμενα, 1985, 64.
33. *Inspiring Women*, 41.
34. For an extensive discussion of the Medusa-figure in poetry by women, see the “Con-
clusion: The Muse as Medusa” in Paula Bennett’s *My Life a Loaded Gun*, 241-67.
35. Paula Bennett, *My Life a Loaded Gun*, 245.
36. Ἡ Μέδουσα χτενίζει φίδια τά μαλλιά.

- Θά ῥθει μέ ξίφος καί καθρέφτη ὁ Περσέας.
 Ἴσκιος βαρὺς καί μυρωδιά συκιᾶς.
 Χτένι τὰ δάχτυλα τοῦ Ἰούδα τή χαϊδεύουν.
Πλήν εὐχαρις. Τά ὀρουκτά, β' έκδοση, Ἀθήνα: Ἐκδόσεις Ἄγγρα, 1975, 1994, 26.
37. "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* 1/4 (1976): 875-93 (885).
38. Φυλάξου ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴ σκοτεινὴ γυναίκα
 γιατί μπροστά σου καλπάζει.
 ...
 Ἄς πεθάνει λοιπόν, ἄς πεθάνει
 ἄς τῆς λύσει ἀπ' τοὺς ὠμούς τῆ σάρκα ὁ ἔρωτας
 νά ξαπλώσω ἐπιτέλους
 πάνω στ' ἄσπρα τῆς κόκαλα.
Ρόδιος φόβος, Ἀθήνα: Στιγμή, 1992, 1994, 37.
39. *The Poet in the World*, New York: New Directions Books, 1960, 1973, 47.
40. Ἐλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον
 ἐκ μερίμναν, ὄσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι
 θυμὸς ἡμέρρει, τέλεσον σὺ δ' αὐτὰ
 σύμμαχος ἔσσο.
 Fr. 1, *Greek Lyric*, vol. I: Sappho - Alcaeus, ed. David A. Campbell, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press and London: Heinemann, 1982, 54.
41. *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 208.
42. Ἔτσι κι ἐσύ, Θεά Ἀφροδίτη,
 Σέ συναντῶ χρόνια τώρα,
 μόνη, κατάμονη,
 γωνία Κοδριγκτῶνος καὶ Κυψέλης
 —μιά διασταύρωση θνητῶν—
 σ' ἑνὸς σπιτιοῦ τὸν κῆπο,
 ...
 Καί τώρα πιά ἦρθ' ἡ στιγμή,
 Θεά Ἀφροδίτη, νά μιλήσουμε
 σὰν ἴσος πρὸς ἴσον. Θέλω νὰ πῶ
 σὰν ἀγαλμα πρὸς ἀγαλμα.
 ...
 Εἰς ἐπήκοον τῆς μοναξιᾶς.
 Μοναξιά δέ εἶναι, Θεά Ἀφροδίτη,
 αὐτὴ ποὺ φαίνεται στό βάθος:
 πίσω ἀκριβῶς κι ἀπὸ τίς δυὸ μας.
 "Ὅρισμοί", *Ἐπί τὰ ἴχνη*, Ἀθήνα: Στιγμή, 1989, 1994, 22-24.
43. Εἶμαι πάρα πολὺ κουρασμένη ἀπὸ μια βέβαιη πραγματικότητα, γιὰ νὰ θέλω ν' ἀνακαλύψω κι ἄλλη. Νομίζω πὼς εἶμαι πιο κουρασμένη ἐπειδὴ εἶμαι γυναίκα. Εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολο, πολὺ κοπιαστικό καὶ τρομερὰ επικίνδυνο, μια γυναίκα νὰ μὴ εἶναι παρὰ μόνο το φύλο τῆς, ἢ ἡ πλήρης ἀπάρνηση τοῦ φύλου τῆς. Quoted by Μιχάλης Γ. Μερακλῆς, *Σύγχρονη Ἑλληνικὴ Λογοτεχνία, 1945-1980. Μέρος Πρῶτο: Ποίηση*. Ἀθήνα: Ἐκδόσεις Πατάκη, 1987, 122.
44. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 35.
45. *Impertinent Voices: Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Women's Poetry*, London

- and New York: Routledge, 1991, 5-6.
46. Alicia Ostriker, *Writing Like a Woman*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1983, 14.
47. *Beginning with O*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977, 57.
48. I refer to Karen Van Dyck's discovery of analogies in the work of Mastoraki and Irigaray, in "Reading between Worlds: Contemporary Greek Women's Writing and Censorship", *PMLA* 109/1 (1994): 45-60.
49. Δέ μου εἶναι πιά εύκολο
 μήτε θελητό
 νά γράφω στιχάκια.
 Γύρω παραμονεύουν οἱ σκοτωμένοι
 μέ γάντζους καί στριφτά μαχαίρια
 κι ὁ τόπος ἀφρίζει ποτάσα.
 Μοῦ τό ἴλεγαν ὅτι στό τέλος
 ἡ Χαλιμά τά ξέρασε πετρέλαιο
 τά παραμύθια.
 Ἔτσι, στούς δύσκολους καιρούς,
 παίρνω ἓνα καλάθι μανιτάρια
 καί παρασταίνω
 τήν πεντάμορφη τοῦ δάσους.
 Στήν ἀρχή μοιάζει λίγο
 σά νά βουτᾶς μέ τό κεφάλι
 ἀπ' τόν τοίχο.
 Πιό ἔπειτα τό συνηθίζεις
 καί σ' ἀρέσει.
 "Τά παραμύθια τῆς Χαλιμάς", *Τό σοῖ, β' ἔκδοση*, Ἀθήνα: Κέδρος, 1978, 1990, 43.
50. *The Poet in the World*, 84.
51. For a critique of fundamental feminist assumptions and a challenge to the "maternalisation" of women writers, see Betsy Erkkila, *The Wicked Sister: Women Poets, Literary History and Discord*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
52. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York: Norton, 1976, 225.
53. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
54. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982, 1993.
55. For an interesting recent discussion of these issues see Teresa Brennan, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992; see also Teresa de Lauretis, *Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
56. *Beginning with O*, 67.
57. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 136.
58. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
59. For a full treatment of the subject see, among other texts by Irigaray, "Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother" in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill,

- New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, 7-21.
60. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 202.
61. “Περσεφόνη”, *Ἀμνάδα τῶν ἀτμῶν*.
62. Jan Clausen, *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism*, New York: Long Haul Press, 1982, 8.
63. Δεν υπάρχει γλώσσα μητέρα, δεν υπάρχει παρέκκλιση ή διαφυγή από την παγίδα του αρσενικού γλωσσικού συστήματος (*Υπάρχει, λοιπόν, γυναικεία ποίηση*; Αθήνα: Εταιρεία Σπουδών, 1990, 47).
64. Κάθε Σάββατο συνήθεια,
καθαρίζω, γυναίκα ραβδισμένη δπως όλες
άντανακλώντας μία γονατιστή ροή
στά γυαλισμένα του λουτρού πλακάκια.
- Καί θέλω έτσι, νά μέ θυμάσαι άνώνυμη.
“Ἡ άνώνυμη”, *Ἀμνάδα τῶν ἀτμῶν*, 15.
65. *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*, London: Pandora, 1987, 1994, 138.
66. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 248.
67. Karla Hammond, “Interview with Audre Lorde”, quoted by Mary K. DeShazer, *Inspiring Women*, 172.
68. Quoted by Deborah Pope in *A Separate Vision*, 117.
69. Quoted in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, London: The Athlone Press, 1993, 5.
70. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, 187-88.
71. *Writing Like a Woman*, 2.
72. Quoted by Deborah Pope in *A Separate Vision*, 4-5.
73. Τελευταία βλέπω μια παράξενη στροφή: Η αλήθεια λέγεται – η γυναικεία αλήθεια – αλλά η αίσθηση που δημιουργεί η ποίηση είναι ότι πρόκειται για ψέμα. Ένα καινούριο καινούφλαζ πολύ πιο περίτεχνο, μια σχεδόν περιφρόνηση της αλήθειας, γελοιοποίηση, ακόμα σαν μια συνταγή που μας δώσανε και απέτυχε. Απέτυχε τί; Να δώσει λύσεις στη ζωή μας που η πολυπλοκότητά της πια – της ζωής – έχει ξεπεράσει το πρόβλημα άντρας-γυναίκα και έχει άλλα αξεπέραστα εμπόδια μπροστά του. ...Η αλήθεια λέγεται, είναι ένας “Ροζ φόβος” (Μαρία Λαϊνά) που σε κανένα δεν επιβάλει μια καινούρια συμπεριφορά. Η αλήθεια λέγεται στη γυναικεία ποίηση σήμερα, αλλά εμφανίζεται σαν ακόμη ένα προσωπείο, ο μεταφορικός λόγος της ύπαρξης που δεν έχει γιατριά. (“Τρόπος του γράφειν γυναικεία”, Colloque, Institut Francais d' Athènes, Λαγονήσι 15 Ιουνίου 1996).
74. Quoted by Adrienne Rich in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, 123.
75. *Contemporary Greek Women Poets*, 48-49.
- “Όλοι σέ λένε κατευθείαν άγαλμα,
έγώ σέ λέω γυναίκα άμέσως.
“Όχι γιατί γυναίκα σέ παράδωσε
στό μάρμαρο ό γλύπτης
κι ύπόσχονται οί γοφοί σου
εύγονία άγαλμάτων,
καλή σοδειά άκινήσιας.
γιά τά δεμένα χέρια σου, πού έχεις
δσους πολλούς αιώνες σέ γνωρίζω,

σέ λέω γυναίκα.

Σέ λέω γυναίκα
γιατ' εἶσ' αἰχμάλωτη.

"Σημεῖο ἀναγνωρίσεως", *Τό λίγο τοῦ κόσμου*, Ἀθήνα: Στιγμή, 1994, 41-42.

76. Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, "Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry", 143.

77. Translated by Kimon Friar. Quoted by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke in "Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry", 151-52.

Τί θά γίνει πού τόσο καλά,
τόσα πολλά ξέρω καί γνωρίζω καλλίτερα,
πώς ἀπ' τό πλευρό του δέν μ' ἔβγαλες.
Καί λέω πώς εἶμαι ἀκέραιος ἄνθρωπος
καί μόνος. Δίχως του δέν ἐγινόμουν
καί τώρα εἶμαι καί μπορῶ
κι' εἴμαστε ζευγος χωρισμένο, ἐκεῖνος
κι' ἐγώ ἔχω τό δικό μου φῶς,
ἐγώ ποτέ, σελήνη, εἶπα πώς δέν θα βαστῶ ἀπ' τόν ἥλιο
κι' ἔχω τόσην ὑπερηφάνια
πού πάω τή δική του νά φτάσω
καί να ξεπεραστῶ, ἐγώ,
πού τώρα μαθαίνομαι καί πλήρως
μαθαίνω, πώς θέλω σ' ἐκεῖνον ν' ἀνισταθῶ
καί δέν θέλω ἀπό κείνον τίποτα
νά δεχτῶ καί δέ θέλω νά περιμένω.

Δέν κλαίω, οὔτε τραγοῦδι ψάλλω.
Μά γίνεται πιό ὀδυνηρό τό δικό μου
ξέσκισμα πού τοιμάζω,
γιά νά γνωρίσω τόν κόσμο δι' ἐμοῦ,
γιά νά πῶ τό λόγο δικό μου,
ἐγώ πού ὡς τώρα ὑπῆρξα
γιά νά θαυμάζω, νά σέβομαι καί νά ἀγαπῶ,

ἐγώ πιά δέν τοῦ ἀνήκω
καί πρέπει μονάχη νά εἶμαι,
ἐγώ, ἡ ἄνθρωπος.

"Ἡ ἄνθρωπος", *Τά ποιήματα*, τόμος δεύτερος, Ἀθήνα: Οἱ Ἐκδόσεις τῶν Φίλων, 1973, 123-24.

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