

ARISTEA PAPALEXANDROU
Nychterini Vivliothiki (Night Library)
Kedros Publisher, Athens 2020

In her size

[L'habilleuse speaking]

*But I'm not looking at the women.
It's their clothes I'm looking at!*

Rumors have circulated for years
that something has long been connecting us,
me and Cinderella.

Rumors ordinary ones
that both she and I allegedly wear
a size 8 shoe.

That's the only thing we have in common.

As for the rest
there's nothing certain to put your finger on.
Besides which, what her story is
I learned piecemeal.
Sundry narratives middles ends
not at all compelling
cheap gloss
on the illustrations
as if to ensure
that I'd lose interest
so as to never learn the ending.

And she, a passive smoker --rumors run
with a ten-inch stiletto size 8 slipper
hobbling to run
for the coach before she turns into a pumpkin.

It seems like she won't make it
and her step has not changed.
It's smoke of the same origin
she's been inhaling for centuries.

I am lighting a cigarette
I'm wearing 8's
I'm available
I'm declaring it
I am Cinderella to my very cinders.

And at once a voice asks me to be silent
albeit whatever you have to say has already been said to us
by lots of other women.

Easy with the rare size
yours and Cinderella's.

Who did the psychoanalysis on Freud?

You may take it as an instance of male injustice if I assert that envy and jealousy play an even greater part in the mental life of women than of men. It is not that I think these characteristics are absent in men or that I think they have no other roots in women than envy for the penis; but I am inclined to attribute their greater amount in women to this latter influence.

SIGMUND FREUD

They told me of a doctor in Vienna
Berggasse Strasse 19
who's got what it takes to cure me.
His method works.
A century has passed and then some
And it has proven infallible
 More or Less
to solve the riddle
of my own anhedonia
too

If it's the penis that's to blame
—my father's that I envy
I transfer it onto you
and unruly id
is becoming Ego
Superego
and I'm killing it
it's you that I'm killing.

If it's my mother that's to blame
with the nipple unwilling to succor
I've been smoking since I was sixteen
am healthy and
 More and Less
I forgive you, mom.
After all, I'm not the only one.
Even the doctor of the Berggasse
he too
was, as is well known, pipe-crazy.

As far as I can tell anyway
no one was in time
to analyze him while he was alive.

Me neither, no one's managed to,
over my dead body.

For all that you stick me with
not letting myself
be doctored *in absentia*
doctor dear.

With objecting to stand trial
for irreparable damage
in the whole Eve business
on all matters
of primal envy.

God Rest her Soul

I have nothing I can touch
aside from items of no
further use
From overdue promissory notes
to receipts
 in drachmas, if you please
thousands upon thousands of them paid out
in services to whomever now
the God Rest her Soul is offered up
with cost at max a stain of olive oil
the worst quality cheap kind
whatever has dripped onto the marble of the tomb
 the wild darkness

I have nothing I can touch
aside from the variations
dreaming has left
on your dress
Since the time I bought it for you
its colors have gotten livelier
And it's right away like you too have come to life
in a hurry to get chance
at a few seconds
to issue directives
In a few seconds
you will have died all over again
and not even from the other shore
the one opposite never
will we get along

I have nothing I can touch
and neither is that the dress
I'd given you as a gift
That one you've exchanged; you've changed me out
For what kind of God Rest her Soul
and for what new
and delicate daughter
have you slipped
 through my fingers?

[Three poems from *Nychterini Vivliothiki (Night Library)*, Kedros Publisher, Athens 2020,
Translated by Danielle Freedman, a member of *Citizen TALES Commons*]

It's Overtaking Us,
Fomite Press, Vermont/USA 2020

The Fugitive⁽¹⁾ (Stadiou St.)

muse ingenious...

I know this stranger
By the light spread by
her black dress

I should put it the other way
round it's she who knows me I
feel like she's been following me
since the time when gasping I
wandered about the city And I
heard as if from afar her silence in
my ear: "Speechless rival slip into
Stadiou swiftly"

I the speechless rival
And it rises before me

Lovely this youthful silence
It knows me and I know it
I and her fleshless in my
black dress
As if she wants to tell me something
Consuming me to feed me
Sweetly permeating my being

I feed her and she feeds me

(1) The poet mentioned to the translator the Greek title was in some sense inspired by *The Fugitive* (*Albertine disparue...*) section of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and though the poem is not directly related to it there is a sense of ambiguity, the sense of being lost, of being forgotten, a "fugitive" becoming estranged from even him or herself.

Eyewitness ⁽²⁾

Locked in his white shirt there
are some twilight moments
when he flashes before my eyes
is lost, you'd think erased before
he nods at me that he'd left
 he's leaving

The little I know about him is inconsistent
He's not from here and is not in any sense
important But he does have a way of
being convincing Trustworthy stranger;
they chose him to breach the promise of
another True man of borrowed
 guilt
Perhaps he would like to
have spoken himself about
 that night
About the others' alibi All he
saw as he was passing by
 coming
infiltrating their steps

This mute human commanding me to articulate
 voice

(2) In this poem there is an obvious conversation between Papalexandrou and George Seferis one that is carried on in "Wind, Its Blowing" and "Ab Indivisio". More specifically, in "Eyewitness" the poem "Narrative" by Seferis is the center of the conversation while in "Ab Indivisio" it's "K. Andromeda" from the collection "Mythistorima".

Wind Its Blowing

This man
is climbing a glass stairway
in mist He's holding a
black revolver shooting into
the air forcing the clouds to
snow

You ordinarily can't see
him with the naked eye
Eyes suffering from
myopia concoct him An
apparition you'd say in the
winds' void

And then... There he is in the
flesh sitting in committees The
Day's Agenda and you're there as
well example of redemption
He invites you to climb the stairs
you're trembling... wind blowing on
you But you persist

And just as you're set to
step you're back at the first
rung 10/10 vision the abyss
but a stride away the truth
before you

Springtime Projection

I

Dream's sky
was overcast
Then an overcast day
broke as well

Men women a throng
companionship of strangers
This gentleman this
white throated woman
This man, her
—With the black revolver
Figures sightless
nodding at speaking to me
I'm dragging all of them off to work
to a secret meeting
with the one authorized
by the brokerage to the general
assembly to the tax office
I'm selling my life selling it off
salons tables packed in tight
resplendent libations

of my sleep my waking
me myself body and soul
all my belongings
I'm selling, selling myself off
my belongings
past
the man with the white throat
with the black revolver
Figures
perpetually moving
well hidden
secrets
everyone was saved
And the assassin of the murderer
the most beautiful alibi
far away in Guadeloupe
Everyone was saved
except me
who was dreaming of them

II

The dream up to here
from here on prophecy

Sleep without dream
Autumn without rain
Cigarette out in the open
Her naked, dead of winter
No one not getting warm
No one not getting cold
You're rained on from all sides
You're seared on all sides
Remaining untouched as
You were before

Therefore
I am not alone,
you were right
And in any case
when you least expect it
your world is illuminated
by some kind of sun

Brand New

Water best of all
Pindar

A barefoot woman crossed over
the dry lake
She came tumbling down
trying to find a bottom
to steady herself on
But no bottom to be seen anywhere
only its immense prospect

And everything considered a pretext
for going back
—that it's unliftably light
with such a downhill slope
that she can't feel her feet
and became exhausted
and that it appears
there is no bottom
And each of her pretexts
soon made her out a liar
She strode and raised
fish from the desert
She strode and raised
my absent self as well

And that false pretext
made her a liar again
Into depth advancing
and advancing

so she'll never arrive —
Vast dry cavity
of absence and chaos
site of a destination
not destined to be achieved

And they are not roused with a body
without a body those deep dead
and haunted shells
like the barefoot woman
 who is relentlessly overtaking me
and you'd say she resembled me

And I am not being dehydrated by an old dream
Starting tomorrow I will be composing
a brand new nightmare

[Five poems from *It's Overtaking Us*,
translated by Philip Ramp, Fomite Press, Vermont/USA 2020.]