

SEAN BONNEY

from CANCER: POEMS AFTER KATERINA GOGOU

Lumpenproletariat. And other adventures in vocabulary.

They say I am Katerina. A force from somebodies past. Not yours.

There are people who came here to become managers and became
managers.

And people who became warehouse advisors and people who never
sleep.

They say I was having a wank in the royal parks.

Gunfire is a streetplan, I say. So is Marx. So the type of equations they
call pistol-whips.

I dreamed I was made out of chains I dreamed I was blowing the
place sky-high.

I'm sure that today has a date or something. No-one tells me anything.

•

for a long time now
have been aware of them
visiting my home
special registers of fog and rain
others are fucking on the floor
they sit among them

pale as morning
others are kissing
they recite deserted slogans
the cancellation of incidents
salts and luminous voices
with no body
with a pale sun
and death shall flee them

•

Communisation. No one says it. So much of our vocabulary is missing.
Cordoned off, those words. In exquisite militaristic grammar, a border
That we speak of when we talk about political parties, those things
Where so many of our lives went missing. The spaces between musical
tones,
Call them that, those words where we learn the terms of slaughter
And then we tell you we are still alive. No I'm not sure what we mean
by that.
We talk of political parties. A hole in the earth where we cast our votes.
We know that the cops carry grenades. That means nothing. So do we.

•

I think of my friends as blackbirds
screeching from rooftops
murdered by rising rents

Exarcheia Kreuzberg Hackney
we survive
at random. pissed out of our heads
in songs in squatted bars
there are those you beat to death in prison
with us its done with pills and needles
we never sleep we always dream
we wake in the same bed
with bedbugs
with trackmarks I love my friends
they are wires stretched from city to city
in borrowed dresses and migraines
interpreters commies thieves
they live in silence. they paint in black
they invent their language
yours is only good for spitting
and we live
at random. lines and bombs and wires
tight around your hands. your necks
you fascist shits. your necks
my friends are wires are blackbirds

•

This is for those who never made it
For those in the centre of the earth
Who cracked apart in the holding cell
The enormous noises of the border

“Kreuzberg. Exarcheia. Hackney.”

•

Dear Katerina,

Yes I know, things are bad for us all these days. I've lost count of the number of people who've disappeared over the past few months. There's an uneasy nausea settled into the basic awareness of, well, everything. It's not even the news or the weather. Even the raw evidence of our senses—sounds of machinery outside the window, smell of diesel and gas, the elevated railway, bird-song etc—has become sinister. The sunset is a warning. The ticking of the clock a threat. Everything has combined into a pitched malevolent force that has gathered up all of our slogans, our unfinished business, our favourite songs, our raised trembling fists and transformed them into a great choral shriek of THEY'VE WON, YOU HOPELESS BASTARD, THEY'VE WON. Dark times, everyone says, from the centre of a light so fierce it has scraped who knows what all over our retinas. For the lack of anything better to do I sit here and try to conjure up some kind of meaning from the scars that have been left there. I sit there in the dark and I read your poetry. Or rather, I reconstruct from memory what translations of it exist. I stare at the traces of an alphabet I don't understand, and I think that in the gulf that separates your poetry from mine I might be able to find the beginnings of a counter-light to see by, or a way of pronouncing the language needed to help undermine the fascist tinnitus that all of our sensory networks have become. Do you know what I mean? All I know is that I'm telling you this because I sense something of this desperation—desperation I'm determined not to normalise—in your work as well. Nearest I can get to it is a dream I had when I was very small, before I knew how to read, or maybe even speak, I'm not sure. I was in some kind of a quarry. There was a man in a dark suit standing nearby. In the quarry's wall there was a face—human, but seemingly made from some kind of plastic. As I looked at it, it opened its mouth and began to make a low moan. Somehow I was aware of a kind of rotational movement, as the moan continued, building in gentle intensity until it became a siren's shriek. That's all I remember, and it's haunted me ever since. Through these recent nights, as the light and the heat and the scars have grown too fierce to see by, I've been thinking about this dream, this distress call from the centre of a landscape I don't recognise, this...Oh I don't know. It's a weird game, to ask advice from the dead as they walk toward us, telling us our fortunes from their enclaves in the landscapes our poems try to describe.

New signals. Isolated. Inseparable
all colours are fascist
in the holding cell
the unmarked grave is ALL history

or abattoir.

•

one royal car one screaming mob

•

The fanatical cracks in the windows.
Mark the places we planned the attack.
I'm confused by the colours. My yellow dress. Etc.
The autumn leaves and the bruises on my feet.
I don't know if we'll ever meet again.
But for sure I'll see you on the other side of this.
The parts of our voices that are missing.
In heaven and the rain so filled with pain.
Love. War. Fear. Hate.
The rich die differently deaths to the rest of us.

When a dancer dies everybody says they know her illness. That they saw her on the U Bahn, smaller than she ever was in life. But it was theirs all along, that illness. Its just they never treated it as a theory or as a practice. Instead, they tended it like garden roses, running it through their borders and their nations. They defined themselves by absence of disease, and because of this there are no dancers left except those who are trapped between worlds, hands fluttering in front of their faces, invisible to those who speak of them. They will still be there, on those same station platforms, when all of the cities are deserted and the middle-class body explodes in bedbugs and palatial plague

There are those who never appear in mirrors, but only in police cameras. There are those who are the opposite. I don't know which I am. I'm told I was last seen on the border. I'm told I was wearing a pearl necklace, a red and black sweater. You ask me was I setting fire to cars. You ask me what is my name. I say if you add up life and death and schizophrenia and the judge and the informer and sexual desire and a small piece of paper from a foreign land, well, maybe you can take a guess. I say add all of that up, or multiply, or divide, or whatever, and you smile and you say that I am stupid. In return I say thank you, thank you very much. I am very polite. I tell you about the whiteness of the cells. About the coats of the doctors, the silence of the isolation tank. The entire Tory Cabinet a monument to the power of heroin. I tell you all of that, and then I show you how to become invisible.

•

But oh my friends we have lost our lives
In the mouths of our enemies
The cracks in their windows
The quietest compromise. I don't know
what it means
 that its not that we don't want to live
but the fuck of its always being stopped.
It is sadder than it seems.
The dead know how to use hunger.

Katerina Gogou wrote a poem in memory of her friend Pasolini and sometimes I wonder if the meaning of his death and of his name has changed since then. So much has. I could draw a sort of obscene angle connecting his broken index finger to the fascist cops of Genoa 2001, as when in Gogou's poem the blows of his murderers become identical with different forms of art, with the Vatican and with the hired thugs who split his name apart one night in the 1970s. I don't even know if that name is still known. Someone razored his fingerprints away, in the

way refugees do to themselves, and they kept them in an office in City Hall. As for the secretive thugs, about all of which is known for certain is that they smashed his body to pieces, their faces have been transformed to a ricochet of sparks that spell out all that will ever be known about the unstable meanings of the death of Pasolini. His face was separated from his body. Sometimes we dream of a new landscape, of a city that is mostly uninhabitable desert, but its rich inhabitants never seem to notice this fact. We sketch it on the ground, and call it Ostia, Tottenham, Hamburg. Love is invisible. So is terror. And so is Gogou's poem, in memory of Pasolini, and herself. Both of them on their hands and knees, in the pitched illegality of blackness, the ragged perfection of their banners.

•

ffs all of us bastards of capital. yeh we deserve everything we get.
ghosts or jacknives or angels. whatever we call it. makes no difference.
landlines and blowjobs and public urinals. night sweats and centuries.
centuries. that's a laugh. say it. say guillotine. say razor say fuck it.
our passports have all expired. we wait on the runway. we are saying
nothing.
say leprosy say burn down the avenues say bloodflash. say paris commune.
say jesus too, whatever. don't believe a word. say the parable of the finks.
run crying to the bosses with those fucking holes in your hands.

•

“this end of the world shit is making me sick”

loneliness does not meet for lunch in Selfridges
or stroll abstract and satisfied thru the V & A
it doesn't care about Beethoven
or the Beatles, for that matter
never gets nostalgic about memories of its mother
its ribbons its straw hats its oh-so-middle-class morphine
loneliness is not white
is up for sale. loneliness will clean your toilet with its fucking tongue.
oh god I'm swearing again
turns up on the front pages as refugee porn and is three years old
queues up politely for a boot in the face for black eggs and poisoned ham
crawls up from the desert its mouth filled with salt and grain
dies of junk-heat in Texan jails
loneliness is the Lucasville Amnesty
runs out of Karstadt with weapons etc
humiliation pain humiliation pain
is Syria is Tempelhof
is Yarls Wood is Midazolam
is the whiplash of the calendar is the quiet conversation of the commodity
crawls out from the ocean its mouth filled with sand and glass
knows your passwords
destroys private property. knows all your music is prison.
knows all of your language is prison. all of your seconds are prison.
knows western weapons
knows european oceans and blood-clots and fucking shit
is dancing barefoot
is screaming is smashing your windows with boots and chains
its ruined hands loneliness a sharpened axe
wants nothing
no demands
revenge

•

Because I know the law
I am permitted vision

They struck me blind

•

That I was the hanging tree
The stray kid hanging there

That they shot you in the mouth
This language frightens me

To speak with precision
Bullets ran through all things

Long time ago

•

At midnight I change my fingerprints
The cops wont find me

Their bullets
I find a way to look like them

“Strange things happening in the land”

•

Poetry, what's it for
Comes from “doing”
Means “Do It”
I would like an answer
From the immobilised

•

Terror. I want to hear it
From those who can't breathe

Not the rest of you dead things

•

I could draw a diagram of our life. It could be a jack-knife.

Nice metaphor you say. No its simply a weapon.

No-one could get used to living here.

Omania Square. They call it the Assembly of the Dead.

The Calendar is Broken. The Ruling Class are not Human.

But the food they steal from our mouths is real.

So too the wings of anarchy so too Marx. Screw our purloined heart.

I know how inconvenient this pain must be. Get used to it.

NOTE

Poet, anarchist, and actress Katerina Gogou (1940–1993) was born in Athens during the Nazi occupation of Greece and came of age in the tumultuous political situation that followed the end of World War II—the resistance, the Greek Civil War, and the subsequent far-right military junta that ruled the country from 1967–74. She first worked in the mainstream Greek movie industry, where the few roles for women were highly stereotypical female comedic “types”; Gogou’s increasingly critical view of democratic progressiveness and communism both led her to develop close and enduring ties to anarchist groups based in the Exarcheia neighborhood of Athens. In the late 1970s and early 80s, Gogou returned to cinema, starring in neorealist films directed by her husband, Pavlos Tassios. In the tradition of radical poet-singers, Gogou is known for her poetry of scathing political critique, anguished choruses of the dispossessed, and, in later books, personal revelation. Her first collection of poetry was published in 1978; it is her only work translated into English, as *Three Clicks Left* (trans. Jack Hirschman, Night Horn Books, 1983). Gogou published six books of poetry in her life. She died of an overdose at age fifty-three. – ED.