

THE LIGHT

THAT BURNS US

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PREFACE

*“Words are my Praetorian Guard.
When I give the sign they leap into the line of fire.
Whoever comes at me feels their spears.”*

Jazra Khaleed

THE 1990S AND THE FIRST YEARS of the new millennium in Greece were a golden era of prosperity and development. Athens, after many failed bids, was finally to host the Olympics in 2004, providing an opportunity for Greece to brand itself to its own people and the rest of the world as a nation with a glorious past, a glorious present, and a glorious future. In feverish preparation for the Games, Athens was transformed into a vast construction site, an urban redevelopment project that was called the nation’s “steam engine of economic growth.” A Metro network was under construction, with spacious marble-halled stations that exhibited Byzantine and Ancient Greek treasures unearthed as the subway tunnels were being burrowed beneath the city; new highway interchanges and ultramodern freeway junctions appeared, along with new fleets of city busses, a new suburban rapid transit system, a brand-new airport that won the



The War is Coming

*For Ghayath al-Madhoun
and his million Arab poets*

I decided to leave Syria the day a stray bullet passed in front of my eyes. That day I realized my homeland was not my homeland, my blood not my blood, and my freedom belonged to a freedom fighter who didn't think to ask my permission before he shot me: a lack of courtesy we encounter often in war time.

~

If they are going to kill me, better to kill me in a foreign language.

K. V. D.

Death Tonight

Tonight death will turn widower
Machine guns still lusting in heat
Soldiers return to their countries
Castrated
Maimed
No longer to shoot
No longer to rape
Death sticks to their fingers like resin
Their deaths
The days stop at a checkpoint
The days are Moslem mothers
They don't have papers, they are deported
Tonight death will turn widower
I saw peace pluck her eyebrows
Just before she stepped on stage
Chewing popcorn
The masses on the square
Applaud the bombing of innocents
Murders of immigrants
The victory of civilization
The triumph of democracy

A first-world strip show
Tonight death will turn widower
Shrieks of dishonored women deafen my ears
Cluster bombs burrow into my stomach
I rule the moon
I assign all ebb and flow
The cops try to imprison gravity
Yet another undeclared war
The children's eyes shine black in the Apache's searchlights
Filled with ashes
Filled with hatred
Remorseless

Oblivion is selling one more genocide on eBay
Tomorrow is already a word without future
Death tonight

P. C.



Hope Always Has a Plan B

"The Greek people have just lived through a seven-year period of great trouble, and I believe that the moment has come for the feeling of anguish and pain to give way to a feeling of hope."

Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece, April 7, 2017

1.

in Greece people from one end to the other are waiting for hope

in the cities people are waiting for hope / in the towns people are waiting for hope / in the villages people are waiting for hope / in the mountains people are waiting for hope / in the plains people are waiting for hope / by the sea people are waiting for hope / in the back of beyond people are waiting for hope / beyond the back of beyond people are waiting for hope / the news announced that no one knows when and from where hope will spring

shopkeepers are waiting for hope / freelancers are waiting for hope / bailiffs are waiting for hope / civil servants are waiting for hope / insurers in the National Insurance Agents & Consultants Ltd. are waiting for hope / cashiers in the Sklavenitis Supermarkets Inc. are waiting for hope / the traffic cop at the junction of Alexandras and Kifissias avenues is waiting for hope / the old men playing backgammon in the cafes are waiting for hope / my grandmother in the village is feeding her porkers and is waiting for hope

only the bosses are not waiting for hope / the bosses know exactly when and from where hope will arise / one could say that as hope draws near the bosses begin to feel less fear

2.

hope comes / hope is asking for your vote / hope is moving forward / hope is changing

hope is calling for elections because it is eager to rule / hope is seeking a fresh popular mandate / hope is seeking a strong command of self-reliance so that it will be strong enough to issue sovereign edicts / hope is calling for a broad social consensus / hope is calling for a strategy approved by the majority of the people / hope is calling for a sociopolitical cooperation and support from the people, this being the only way for hope to produce results / hope can only produce results when it becomes one with the people / what would hope be without the mobilization of every Greek woman and man

3.

hope has a plan / hope does not customarily attend / hope does not state what it would like to happen in the future / hope always states what it can do today / hope does not make assumptions / hope makes commitments / hope does not dole out promises / hope doles out responsibilities / hope tells truths and commits to a plan of hope / hope has a specific realistic and budgeted program / hope is always on the right side of the river / from the right side of the river hope greets those who are on the wrong side of the river because they do not have the money to pay the boatman to ferry them across

hope is always one step behind Frau Merkel / hope is a point of reference throughout Europe / hope is a significant and necessary change of strategy / hope is the European new deal / hope is working on a 300-billion-euro investment plan with the aim of boosting growth in the eurozone / hope has as a starting point the long suffering European south and makes its presence increasingly felt / hope is necessary in order to bring Europe back to a path of economic recovery /



5.

A dog follows every resident of Homs, most call it the hunger dog, a few call it Assad's dog, an old man in Karm al-Zeitoun calls it Badr, the name of his eight-year-old grandson who was slaughtered by the Shabiha on the morning of Friday, March 9, 2012.

*

The hunger dog always follows its owner; when the owner sits down to rest, the dog lies in a nearby shade, when the owner falls asleep, the dog stands guard. If you see the dog walking ahead with its muzzle in the air, it is because its owner is starting to wane, soon unable to walk, and the dog is seeking someone else to follow.

*

The hunger dog is made of its owner's flesh; as the owner wanes the dog waxes, the dog wants all the flesh for itself, which is why it lets its owner wane until one day its owner

falls. And melts away. And the dog has already found a new owner, fresh flesh.

*

Just as fish live in the sea, so the residents of Homs live in hunger. You could say that hunger has become their natural habitat: they sleep in hunger, wake up in hunger, forage for food in hunger, make love in hunger, bury their dead in hunger. The only thing they cannot do in hunger is dream, the only thing they see when they close their eyes is themselves hungry.

*

In Homs hunger is the only power, the only truth, the only God. In Homs hunger is the only language, and like all languages it can destroy you.

*

In Homs everyone talks about their hunger, they talk constantly about their hunger as if there were no other topic, they talk constantly about their hunger and talk to their

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

JAZRA KHALEED (born in Chechnya, 1979) is a poet, translator and filmmaker. He lives in Athens and writes exclusively in Modern Greek. His works are an indictment of fascism, social injustice, police brutality, and racism in contemporary Greece. His debut collection, *Grozny*, was published in 2016, and his poems have been widely translated for publications in Europe, the US, Australia, and Japan, and have appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *World Literature Today*, and other publications.

As a founding editor of the Athenian poetry magazine *Teflon*, and particularly through his own translations published there, he has introduced to a Greek readership the works of Amiri Baraka, Keston Sutherland, Etel Adnan, among many other American, British, Australian, Arab and German-language political and experimental poets.

His short films have been screened at festivals such as Ann Arbor Film Festival (USA), Experiments in Cinema (USA), Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur (Switzerland), Kasseler Dokfest (Germany), Entrevues Belfort (France), L'Alternativa (Spain) among others. The film rendition of his poem about the immigrant situation, "The Aegean or The Anus of Death," won prizes at the Paris Festival for Different and Experimental Cinema, the Zebra Poetry Film Festival, and the Balkans Beyond Borders Short Film Festival.

EDITOR

KAREN VAN DYCK is Professor of Modern Greek Literature in the Classics Department at Columbia University. She writes and teaches on issues of gender, diaspora and translation. Her books include *Kassandra and the Censors* (Cornell, 1998), *The Rehearsal of Misunderstanding* (Wesleyan, 1998), *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present* (Norton, 2009), and *The Scattered Papers of Penelope: New and Selected Poems by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke* (Graywolf, 2009). Her bilingual anthology *Austerity Measures: The New Greek Poetry* (Penguin, 2016), introduced Khaleed to a wider readership. She discusses the anthology as well as this new poem by Jazra Khaleed in her essay "What's Found in Translation" (*PN Review* 234).

TRANSLATORS

PETER CONSTANTINE is the translator of Jazra Khaleed's *Requiem for Homs*, published by Ameilichos in 2019, and "Gone is Syria, Gone," a 2016 short film by Khaleed that was shown at international film festivals such as Experiments in Cinema (USA), Internationale Kurzfilm-tage Winterthur (Switzerland) and L'Alternativa (Spain). Constantine's recent translations include works by Voltaire, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Gogol and Tolstoy. His translation of the complete works of Isaac Babel, published by W. W. Norton in 2001, received the Koret Jewish Literature Award and a National Jewish Book Award citation. He co-edited *A Century of Greek Poetry: 1900-2000* and the anthology *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present*, which W.W. Norton published in 2010. He is a Guggenheim Fellow and was awarded the PEN Translation Prize for *Six Early Stories* by Thomas Mann, and the National Translation Award for *The Undiscovered Chekhov*. He is the director of the Program in Literary Translation at the University of Connecticut and the publisher of World Poetry Books.

SARAH MCCANN earned her MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and her work has appeared in journals such as *The Bennington Review* and *Hanging Loose*. Her poetry appeared in *Visiting Frost* (Iowa, 2005) and *The Helen Burns Poetry Anthology: New Voices from the Academy of American Poets* (Chicago, 2010). Her translations from Modern Greek have been recognized by the Fulbright Foundation and published in such journals as *Words Without Borders* and *World Literature Today*. *Rose Fear*,

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