at the *taverna*
our English waitress
can’t pronounce the Greek

**Pressing On**

Past the white houses and olive-treed streets,
up the hill and through the paved city,
on public transportation, the Greek women ride

with me. We greet each other with *kalimera* and a smile
and watch the parceled city population densen, the traffic
squeeze us in, the smog thicken. Policemen help
direct at busy intersections. I want a piece of this
city. I want the breath of the gardens near Zappeion park,
a souvenir in Plaka. I want that glance from a *kamaki*
on Syntagma Square as the bus stops and I get off.
The coffee really is better here, strong and fortifying.
After I shop at the English bookstore, I’ll take

my walk to the edge of the Acropolis, to the base
of the steps where crowds of tourists gather. I’ll hear
the guide begin the tour. I’ll stare once again at the pillars

visible as they strike the Athens air. Then I’ll put on my chiton
and step over marble, monolithic stone. I’ll
press the philosophers’ words deep into the grooves, where

I’ll hear less echo. And the voices of the women will surface,
a lament beneath the rock. I’ll raise them up.
I’ll let the men tremble, let the earth

burst into tears. Every statue will wince.
Every temple will burn. And each goddess will return,
the clouds releasing incense.

*UFLR 2011*
Mother of the House

The fishing boats have gone out to sea. 
The red-eyed sunset swallows them.

When I wake, the fishermen will be back, 
hoisting their buckets onto the dock,

their muscled arms shimmering 
like waves—the village women in 

black will lay out their drachmas, check the scale, 
check the morning sun as they return 

to prepare the midday meal. I 
will be rising. I will boil water 

in the briki for coffee, 
join the silence of the kitchen with 

only the intermittent steps of your mother, 
who continues to finish morning chores. 

I try to slow the day. But she knows 
the hours cannot be tamed—she 

will clean the squid, stuff it 
with sweet rice. She will map 

out the inky spots of the day. 
No one will cross her. No one 

will question her, lest they disturb 
the day’s feast, the ordering 

of the house, the sanctity 
of family life, while I
linger in the kitchen, with coffee
and boxed cereal,

then walk the coastal
road to the center of the village,

waves collapsing on the beach,
the sea spray misting on the breeze,

the tourists, still groggy with sleep,
toting their gear to chairs in the platía,

where I greet the wide-eyed Greek
merchants who package my bottled water,

some new rolls of 35 mm film
so that I can pool these moments
together, have them developed,
so that I can see exactly

and will not forget
the light in the fisherman’s eye,

his long-muscled pride, and the warmth
within your mother as she works

the day, as it rises in her veins,
as she nourishes us in the neat house,

as she invites everyone in, as she feeds
all of the hungry.


A Sigh on Mykonos

The ferry pulls in—a slip
of white houses and blue harbor
as I step onto land and it yields to me,

men and women ready
with rooms and greetings,
the glow of the town’s façade

pulling me off and onto a high road
out of town, straddling
the port. The earth shows. Donkeys bray

as they pass me. Chickens cluck and a rooster
screams far too late in the day.
The house the woman who greets me owns

opens to a view of the entire town—
sea and all—and I’m amazed no one has
rented this room on the hilltop far enough

from the sounds below
that the moon dissects the sky
with its own silence swinging on cloud

while the crickets join in chorus,
quiet to crescendo. Every creak
magnifies in the three-room house so
that I hear the door to the only
bathroom open and close, the latch
to the entrance of the house lift

and drop, footsteps
to the doors down the hall. When I open the shutters,
the water at the port moves past me

and the moonlight shimmies all the way
to Delos. Somewhere in the rough
current the gods must have lost track of time,

and a new worship began, body and erotas
swept up. But I, above the town fringed
with islanders, breathe in the air

they must breathe when the sea
is loud and the wind is
unstopped and the ferries are far

less frequent with their fat
smokestacks—a hint of thyme,
pungent mint, rich earth and

stone hot-to-cool, like an exhale,
like a prolonged sigh.

UFLR 2011
**Thick Rope**

δεν μ’ αγαπάς
den μ’ αγαπάς
den μ’ αγαπάς
den μ’ αγαπάς

repeats
like the thought of a lost
wish

θέλω να ξέρω γιατί δεν μ’ αγαπάς
θέλω
θέλω

the sea
swirls words
στη

θάλασσα
μαύρη
den βλέπω

what to make
of the boats
that disappear

οι άνδρες
sto χωριό
με τα ψάρια τους

how the women
gather,
their arms

flapping
like fins
their mouths

gasping
ta ψάρια τους
pour water over them
how can I swim
στη θάλασσα τους
without thinking

of their arms
muscled
as thick rope?

the dock
swarms
ti σκέφτεσαι;

δώστε μου
δέκα κιλά
eκείνα εκεί

I toss my rope
around them
reel them in

ξέρεις
πόσο καλά τα ψάρια
θα είναι;

do you know
όταν περπατάς
πίσω;

do you feel
the pull
the tide

muscling
back
the rope?

θέλω να ξέρω γιατί
dεν
μ' αγαπάς

The Half of It

As I push open the sliding door to the kitchen balcony, light pours over me and into the house, the clothes on the line outside already stiff from hard water.

The water in the briki begins to boil. I sip my Greek coffee slowly and then pour my American cereal, adding long-life milk.

A mix of food, a mix of language. Even my blood seems altered. In the supermarket, which every year looks more American,

I fill my cart with bottled water, manouri, mizithra, Swiss cheese, and milk from Italy. The dark chocolate wafers I choose come from France, but the homemade chocolate croissant I eat daily is made by the baker off the highway in Ano Voula.

At the supermarket register, I pay in drachmas and double-count my change in silence, in English, before I step through the electronic doors.

Once in my car, imported from America from Japan, I could be on almost any city street as the air rushes by at normal speed.

But under the carport, the shade wide and never-ending, the coolness stays, while upstairs, the apartment sits in half-shade, half-sun.

Even with all the windows open, it is too hot; with the shutters closed, too dark. Always I struggle for balance, as though I were a balance, tipping from side to side.
C’est vrai, I’m thinking—
the French tourist saying no one
knows French here