MARYAM HOOLEH

“Athena”

(poetry)

Translated from the Persian by Cameron Cross
Athena

See, how down we tumbled
And the spectacle through and through
   Licked our faith
We kept clear of the dogs
Until our heart
Hung from the howls of civilization
All expansive hopes
With the groan of narcissism
Sank
   Into the graveyard of human limbs
And nothing but shoes
   Remained . . .
See, how the Kurds have brought
Vagrancy
   To Athens’ portico
And the whores of Albania
Walk
   On torn and tattered veils
   And the tiled floor of the dead
And drape the mottled arms of beauty-spots
   Over last century’s cabarets
And set the lock
What a strange dance!
As birds
With severed necks
   Fly
   Over the PKK’s wall
And as patriots
With broken teeth
   Spit
And hatred and helplessness
Form a brotherhood
Ah—
   How I adore painting
   Yet at the same time
   I loathe
Every kind of shirt
As for the painters
In democracy’s capital—

    Behead them
Only their fingernails have been capable
Of planting a flag in my heart
Flag
Flag
All this color
Is no longer worth nature’s glory
The rainbow hangs from the gibbet
And no color
Has refuge
In the arms of another
Flaunting the residence permit
Showers from its dawn
    With the kernel of hope
Until the clouds
In an astonishing assembly

    Form
The image of calcified prophets
And dream men
All become believers
Don’t ask that one to take my hand
Don’t ask that one
To gather my feet
    From the surface of the mire
That one obeys their shoe
(And the shoe will forever
Madly

    Traverse
The blisters and blood
With an armload of firewood and beer)
Until breaking
See, how down we tumbled
And my heart poured out
From the hair of youth
As one estranged
My mother guesses you
And you join in
Her weeping over me
O Freedom
No one knew
How they had
To embrace you
Next winter
I’ll worship
The forests of your song
In the fireplace
Next spring
Zarathustra’s children
Will kill him
Like the new-year bonfire
And I know nothing
About you
In one hand heroin
And silver in the other
I’ll go to the Omonoia Square
And lay out my wares
And tomorrow
I’ll invite you
To a game of billiards
And order a debate
For you
Not knowing that last night
In a road of darkness
Tehran
Has killed you
And that in the morning
The BBC
Has licked
Your wounds
With measured ruminations
If I lost
Convince me
To forever wear black
And light two candles
Upon my shoes

Athens, August 23, 1998