

for an English version despite winning China's most prestigious literary award, the Mao Dun Prize, and having been adapted for the stage, television, and film.

A direct reference to a Tang Dynasty poem by Bo Juyi, the title may be seen as an allusion to the travails of the putative main character, Wang Qiyao, but it is the subtitle, "A Novel of Shanghai," that names the tale's true center—the city itself. On the surface the novel reads as the story of "Miss Third Place" in the Shanghai Beauty Pageant—an apparent window of opportunity for a beautiful young woman living in a traditional Shanghai *longtang* (slum), dreaming of becoming a movie star—but it is the city's modern history that forms the backbone of the tale, creating the subtlety and "sorrow" necessary to spin out a simple story to more than four hundred pages.

Like Qiyao, modern Shanghai has never controlled its fate, bowing in turn to the forces of Western colonization, communist "liberation," and contemporary capitalism. Through forty years of political and social upheaval, Qiyao serves as an unwitting guide as we observe Shanghai groaning under the weight of overwhelming forces. Both the city and Qiyao are beauties determined "to meet all challenges . . . to follow . . . fate through to the bitter end." Unfortunately, the more beautiful the woman, or the city, the less she controls her own existence. As Qiyao ages through relationships with five men, becoming a symbol of the "old Shanghai," the city likewise declines from its colonial splendor of the 1940s to the crumbling *longtang* and polluted rivers of the industrial 1980s. Qiyao's violent death while guarding a gift of gold from her first lover seems to prophesy an end

to any vestige of what once made Shanghai the "Paris of the East."

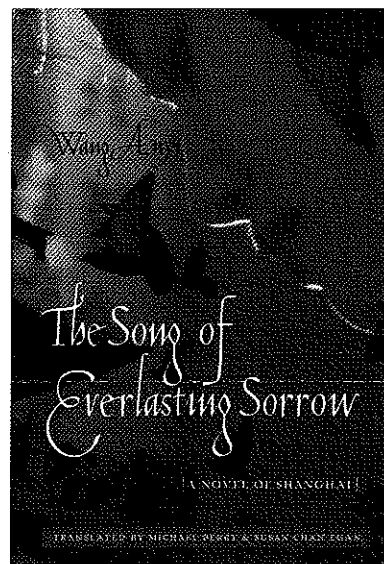
Readers seeking a fast-paced story of romance and intrigue will be disappointed, but Wang's intricate art makes vivid the mundane trivialities of city life and "liberated" young women who seek love where it cannot be found. Tempting as it may be to compare Wang Anyi's descriptions of physical objects and psychological states to those of realist-naturalist writers such as Zola, James, or Wharton, to do so would be to miss much of what makes her writing unique: subtly shifting views of the *longtang*, discursive meditations on the day-to-day details of living not merely to survive but to live well. Those willing to read as reflectively as this novel demands will find it more than worth the time and effort. (*Editorial note:* Wang Anyi was a nominee for the 2009 Newman Prize for Modern Chinese Literature, and *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* was chosen as the representative text of her work. For more on the Newman Prize, see the July 2009 issue of *WLT*.)

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Adonis. **Mihyar of Damascus: His Songs.** Adnan Haydar & Michael Beard, trs. Rochester, New York. BOA. 2008. 120 pages. \$16. ISBN 978-1-934414-08-8

As the translators of this volume point out in their apposite introduction, although Adonis has, in the fifty years since these poems first appeared, come to be associated with numerous innovations and ruptures, "the poems of *Mihyar* constitute the initial definitive disrup-



tion." Indeed, many critics and poets regard *Mihyar* as a turning point for Arabic poetry in general.

That it has taken forty-seven years for this signal work in the history of Arabic—and world—literature to be published is largely a function of the unwillingness of anglophone presses to commit to single-author collections of poetry. As the translators note, "The poems stand alone. . . . Still, it is useful to translate an entire collection to give the reader a chance to see the act of creation, the constant improvisation of different, expanding meanings as Adonis's vision unfolds." Of Adonis's twenty-two poetry collections, ten have appeared in French translation (and another ten anthologies besides), but this is only the second to appear in English. BOA Editions is therefore to be warmly congratulated for publishing this title, and so handsomely too—the cover design by Lisa Mauro is beautiful, the cover art (by Adonis's dear friend, Kamal Boullata) is stunning, and the five handwritten Arabic texts enhance this important work.

Although there is a historical early-eleventh-century iconoclastic

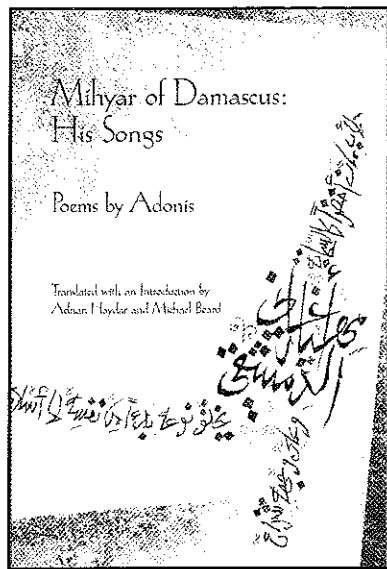
poet by the name of Mihyar, this collection's Mihyar is a persona adopted by Adonis (itself a pen-name and persona, that of a Near Eastern harvest god). Adonis's Mihyar embodies the revolutionary, the anarchic, the mystical, and the esoteric. One critic has gone so far as to call Mihyar a post-religious figure and has argued that in this collection Mihyar/Adonis is a prophet of the profane. Prophecy is certainly conspicuous. Indeed, language and the prophecy it begets are Adonis's "manifesto." Consider "I'm a language for a god who's yet to come, / the sorcerer of dust." Or, as Beard and Haydar put it, "To talk about Mihyar is to discuss what poetry can do"; or, as Adonis himself puts it, "He is the physics of things."

The 141 poems of *Mihyar*, though alchemical, like Adonis's later poetry, are unlike his later work in that they are deeply lyrical. Adonis would go on to produce some of the most significant poetry ever written in Arabic in the twenty collections after *Mihyar*, but *Mihyar* remains defining and a must-read.

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Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke. **The Scattered Papers of Penelope: New and Selected Poems.** Karen Van Dyck, ed. & intro. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2009. 123 pages. \$15. ISBN 978-1-55597-519-7

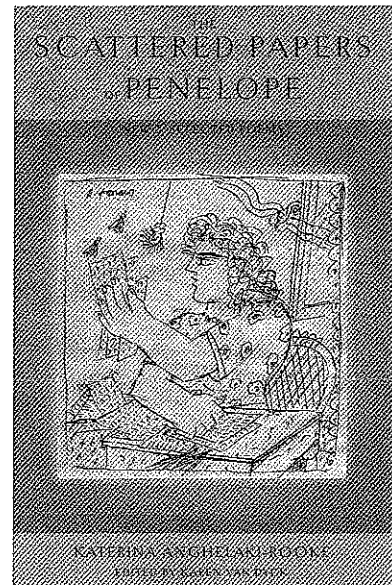
Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke is one of Greece's most important contemporary poets. She has received the Greek National Prize for Poetry and the Athens Academy Prize and is the author of sixteen poetry collections, of which five have been translated into English. This most recent anthology of her poetry, edited by Karen



Van Dyck (one of Anghelaki-Rooke's main translators), gathers together a strong selection of poems from the different periods of her writing, also including translations by Edmund and Mary Keeley, Kimon Friar, Rae Dalven, and others.

Anghelaki-Rooke's verse has the clarity of contemporary vision layered with more than two millennia of Greek language and poetry. She takes everyday experience and turns it into an allegory of modern life. Her poems anchor the abstract metaphysics of myth in the ordinary rituals of everyday existence.

During the dark years of the military dictatorship in Greece (1967-74), Anghelaki-Rooke was an outspoken activist and champion for the freedom to write. In her fight against censorship, in spite of the danger to herself, her voice reached out to Europe and the United States. Through her activism and that of her circle of women poets, censorship came to an end before the dictatorship fell. She opened the door to many different ways of feminist poetic expression, which was a con-



siderable accomplishment in Greece's still male-dominated culture. As Karen Van Dyck has written in her introduction, Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry is not directed specifically at women or at Greek readers: "Her poetry can be seen to fit into the tradition of the best of American feminist poetry, alongside Adrienne Rich and Anne Sexton, where writing the body and rewriting myth are central concerns. Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry, though, is less militant. Her Penelope and Helens cook dinner for their husbands and suitors with one hand and write poetry with the other."

Anghelaki-Rooke is also considered one of the foremost translators of English and Russian literature into Greek. She has translated, among others, Dylan Thomas, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott into Greek, but in my view her single most impressive feat of translation is her monumental translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

The range and power of Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke's language, as she recasts and reweaves the Greek