

## TRANSCRIPTIONS

*Andrea Assaf*

### I. Initiation

Serpentine grace  
snakes through phoenix wings  
and drops a beat.

She punctuates  
each syncope  
with embodied  
knowledge –

this memory  
this history  
*mine, not mine*  
in her hips.

An agelessness,  
a piercing – like bullets  
through the chest,  
through a hole-riddled edifice  
in Beirut, or an abandoned  
olive grove in Keserwan  
that still bears my name.

Tell me, did the chest drop  
before or after  
the advent of war?

A history unrecoverable,  
a people lost in time

and devastation,  
re-imagined  
with each articulation  
of her torso –

my people  
in her body  
re-mixed

my bullet-ridden memory  
full of holes

my blood coursing  
through each rotation  
of her wrist – through  
the drop, the bump, the slide,

the goddess in her neck.

Forgotten like Venus,  
damned as Baal,

she dances my reclamation,  
dances the resurrection  
of temples –  
and the fires  
they burned in.

She floats on the ghosts  
as one chosen  
to pray for them  
through her form.

They carry her,  
and give their blessing  
that she might raise them  
from the spirit world,  
back to the blue-green sea  
back to the mist of the mountains  
back to through the bleeding earth.

I see them  
ripple through her –  
through the beat,  
the scratch, suspension  
and pulse, the swirl  
of unseen feet.

She dances  
something I lost  
before I was born.

She dances for me  
she dances me  
she dances

and the loss cries out  
to embrace her,  
to become her,  
to feel that spirit  
ripple through me,  
to find that knowledge  
in my cells – or hers –

to possess or be possessed  
by what she has found.

She dances,  
and some long-forgotten ember  
reignites.

## II. Elongation (a binding)

The serpent was a goddess once,  
a sacred energy –

demonized for her power  
persecuted for her desire  
burned for her freedom.

She had many names:  
Ashtarte  
in the land of purple,  
Lady of Byblos,  
Ishtar, goddess of love and war,  
Manasa, Aphrodite, Tannou,  
Isis, Kali, Imana  
Venus...

And many knew her,  
like carnal knowledge,  
breath and pleasure,  
balancing on the precipice  
of pain.

She was like that –  
planetary  
circular  
serpentine

Her skin felt wet  
even when it wasn't –  
the silken illusion of scales;  
the tenderness of her sides  
could make one forget  
her venom.

As she glided through existence,  
through the fluids of the universal body,  
she sang – a vibration  
an abstract thought  
pre-verbal  
all-knowing  
for millennia...

Until the One-god, with all his armies,  
chased her out of orbit,  
out of earth,  
out of breath itself.

She slid into the body  
to escape the violence,  
to live in the flesh,  
to coil around the human  
spine, and renew life...

Even now,  
she inhabits you –  
slithers through you,  
glissading down the slope  
of your neck,  
caressing your shoulders –

She wears you like a golden fleece  
and glistens on your skin.

She undulates inside you  
with the elegance of silk,  
the fierceness of flame –

this sensuality – an ascension  
lifting you to ecstasies,  
that you might know yourself  
to be divine –

Stellar  
Brilliant

She shines in you –  
a goddess incarnate.

### III. Termination: Breaking Away

She says:

*Play for me, lamenting women  
that the dead might rise  
to inhale the incense –*

I have taken a fallen star  
into my breast,  
and there, she will shine for you –

for the travelers,  
for the sailors,  
for the weary in the valley  
trying to get home.

Come home to me,  
warm yourself in my fire,  
in the starlight of my bosom,  
in the wingspan of my phoenix arms.

Embrace me,  
and I shall protect you.  
I can taste your strength.  
I will eat your vulnerability –

hold it on my tongue,  
swallow it whole  
and digest it for you –  
like a rabbit in the mouth  
of a snake.

For I have been to the underworld,  
passed through its burning gates,  
and returned.

I have banished unfaithful husbands,  
loved undying women,  
survived five times at least  
and only grown stronger,  
wiser, more beautiful.

Like a pulsar, a supernova,  
I shine, and invite you  
to dance!

For I am the glory and the power –  
from before humans began to count time

before the formation of the earth,  
before all that you know,  
or have ever dreamed...

There was a light –

a fallen star –

in my breast  
in my breath

I am immortal,  
and never fall from grace.

My temples have been buried,  
destroyed a thousand times,  
yet they burn still  
in human consciousness.

You see, I cannot be forgotten.  
I move through you.  
I am the snake in your spine,

the energy of ascension,  
the fiercest love you could ever imagine.

I am the fire in your breast,  
the life in your womb,  
the knowing...

Embrace me,  
And I shall dance for you!