

Review of *Goat, Goddess, Moon*  
Catherine Strisik  
Holy Cow! Press, Duluth, Minnesota, 2025

As in a fine Greek love song, Catherine Strisik's *Goat, Goddess, Moon*, juxtaposes grief and loss with discovery, joy, and rebirth—a reawakening of sorts and an unearthing of the past, a reconnection with ancestors and reconvergence of old paths that once led in different directions.

A river runs through it, the river Lethe, one of the five rivers of the underworld, that of forgetfulness and oblivion, born of Eris—Strife. Yet there are also streams of memory that emerge, joining past and present. Grief is tempered by a luxuriant softening, healing, reclaiming of body and soul, a communing with sea and salt and the light of the three-quarter moon.

The reawakening is not least of all one of the senses. This collection is redolent with aromas and filled with flavors—roses, almonds, orange rind, wild oregano, basil, and fennel, aromatic olives and their oil. And goat stew consumed in the throes of grief. There are sounds of laughter, the tolling of church bells, the bark of a dog, the exploration of simple Beethoven on an old piano. The sounds of Greek, round and fulsome in the mouth—from those of the north to the singular and ageless cadences of Crete—utterances heard and spoken, sometimes in solitude. Song encompassing heartache and, at the same time, transcending it. Sounds are juxtaposed with the sensation of an antiquated pen scratching on paper and the chiseling and carving of letters in stone, the sensations of cobblestones underfoot, and the body responding to touch and texture.

This poetic journey moves through the writer's ancestors' Northern Greece and eventually lands in Crete. Time stretches out. A month. Yet somehow that month has an affinity with everything stretching back to antiquity.

This collection reflects a deepening sense of identity, a hint of belonging. The poet relates an affirmation from a Cretan vendor: "You are one of us." Passages describe a reappropriation of the body and sensuality, and Eros, though unnamed, takes the stage. A one-eyed cat makes an appearance, scrounging for food as other felines vocalize, just as a waiter causes them to scramble and disperse, followed by mournful musings on the pitiful creature's demise (that of the cat, not the waiter).

The final section is an exploration of the author's name and its Greek iterations. The author ponders, "[. . .] sometimes the unexpected occurs in Greek" (p. 56). And indeed it does. In this continuation of reflections on identity, a stylistic shift suddenly occurs, with long prosaic lines, unpunctuated, in a stream of consciousness that densely compresses so many elements of the Cretan sojourn and all the resonance and story

concealed in—and evoked by—the utterance of that sonorous name in Greek.

Learning the Greek alphabet is practically a circus act for a little girl, alphabetic acrobatics to a promise of pennies, the letters full and round on the tongue, in the mouth, on the palate, like a fragrant elixir. Curious oddities and incongruities pop up, such as the Greek uncle fingering American greenbacks. And a muttering of hexes or at least sputters of disapproval in a confusing crossing of paths with a wizened, scornful gypsy in a Northern Greek bus terminal—in an almost frenetic ramble that reflects the chaos of the encounter. A used condom paints a portrait of urban grit with an evocation of deities of antiquity—either the divinity of love and beauty or the stream of oblivion re remnants of a curbside erotic collision or stolen seduction.

Occasionally, a Greek letter surreptitiously intermingles with the odd English rendering of Greekness, adding a curious and playful typographical twist that might easily go unnoticed. While the Greek cited occasionally strays slightly and distorts ever so slightly a word or phoneme, it is a valuable reflection of a Greek-American's perceptions and recollections of details of the language—a part of the journey and how it is stored in memory.

The final poem begins, “My namesake wears my heart.” It is an apt start to an ending, as all of *Goat, Goddess, Moon* is a profound outpouring of the heart.

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