

Phil Cohen

Toasting the 'twentytwelvers'

To Ritsos, the commis chef,
who, knowing the backstreets of Athens
as well as his onions,
took a shortcut through the main course
and won the first Marathon of modern times.

Those who cook the books
know the proof of the pudding
never survives its eating.

To the doves of Seoul
who, scorched, but unconsumed
by the Big Flame, carried
the torch of Hope
back to the Olympic dovecot
where it was devoured
raw, not cooked,
by the assembled vultures
hungry for pigeon pie.

Luck not fate decides
which birds of passage survive.
The outcome is not always what the Gods intend.

To Titos Patrikios,
Chief of the Athens Games,
who, *with bunches of bats hidden
in the empty dome of his heart*
was unable to write the statutory ode
and resigned his commission.
And to all poets
who resist the temptation
to write winning words
for the Olygarchs.

Let us instead learn
to make praise songs
with cunning rhymes,
graceful lines mischievously scanned
against the iambics of official verse.

To Socrates' sweetheart, Asopichus
winner of the boy's footrace
and to all athletes, whose bodies

are parables of passions
that dare others to speak their name.

Of all the sweet and delightful things
belonging to men,
reticence and modesty
are most to be prized.

To Hermes, who needs no toast,
Shape shifter, man of many parts:
Courier of dreams and the dead,
Patron of poets and boxers,
Champion sprinter turned getaway artist,
Trickster, rap master, psychopomp, thief .
Your lyric is no simple panegyric.
Above the door of the gymnasium
we read your caution to the watching fans:

Admiration Makes All Things Beautiful
Yet belies the truth
The race is not to the swiftest
But to the one who most desires its fame.

Phil Cohen

