



My mother listens to me unperturbed, and when I finish, she says:

“These are the words of a diseased mind. Don’t you ever breathe a single word about all this to anyone, you poor thing, because you’ll end up in the loony bin.”

In this acclaimed novel, hugely successful when first published in Greek, Auguste Corteau (Petros Hatzopoulos) imagines his mother Katerina’s inner life, with wit and earthy humour observing the saga of their extended family’s ups and downs in the city of Thessaloniki over a hundred years.

From the poverty of the 1920s after the Asia Minor Catastrophe through to affluence and aspirations of grandeur – a gigantic Ford is imported from America for trips to the beach – sicknesses are hidden, and siblings torture siblings. Hilarious characters come and go –

such as Lazaros, who dyes his hair auburn and dresses in floor-length shiny leather coats with more jewellery than Liberace; and Vangelis, who dresses in polyester suits with huge lapels unbuttoned to the navel to show off the enormous golden cross that lies on the thick fur of his chest, and dyes his pompadour with shoe polish.

The family use money to make up for love, and mental illness haunts them as if in Biblical vengeance. Katerina drags her husband and son into the chaos of her unhappiness as she lurches between love and hate, booze and pills, threatening the lives of herself and others. While making her son keep his homosexuality a secret, she smothers him with a destructive love until he finds her on her deathbed as he turns twenty-four. Katerina’s story begins with her own end – a kind of confession: the sometimes moving, sometimes shocking tale of a struggle with bipolar disorder.

Auguste Corteau is the pen name of Petros Hatzopoulos. Born in Thessaloniki in 1979, he currently lives in Athens. He is the author of fourteen novels as well as plays, novellas and short story collections and is a recipient of the Greek National Book Award for Children’s Literature. He has also translated many works of literature into Greek, from Nabokov’s *Lolita* to Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*. An LGBT activist, in 2016 he signed a Cohabitation Pact with his partner, the first same-sex couple to do so after the law was passed in the Greek Parliament.

Claire Papamichael was born in Athens, Greece in 1963. She studied Sociology and has been working as a literary translator for more than 35 years. Two of the books she translated, *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens and *The Comedians* by Graham Greene, were shortlisted for the National Translation Award and the English-to-Greek Translation Award respectively. She lives in Athens and loves Branston Pickle and clotted cream.