

HELLENIC AUTHORS' SOCIETY 1993

GREEK
Writers
TODAY

AN ANTHOLOGY
Vol. I

ISBN 960-87861-1-8

Edited and with a foreword by David Connolly

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

It is quite remarkable that, for the foreign reader, the term 'Greek Literature' or any reference to 'Greek writers' almost invariably calls to mind Homer, Sappho, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and a whole host of other Classical and Hellenistic Greek writers, as if Greece's literary output had somehow come to an end in the ashes of the ancient library of Alexandria and, unlike the mythical phoenix, was never to arise again. The burden of Greek antiquity is such that we are obliged, today, to talk of 'modern Greek literature' and 'modern Greek writers' in order to avoid confusion, and it goes without saying that very few foreign readers would be able to name even one 'modern' Greek writer. It is also remarkable that neither of the two modern Greek writers who did achieve international recognition in the 20th century were considered in their lifetimes as being representative of modern Greek writing. Constantine Cavafy was born and lived most of his life in Alexandria and made only two short visits to Greece, while Nikos Kazantzakis, who also lived a great deal of his life abroad, received little recognition in Greece until after his international success. And although, today, Cavafy has been appropriated and given pride of place in the canon of 20th-century Greek literature, Kazantzakis is still regarded somewhat suspiciously by contemporary Greek authors because of a folkloric image of modern Greece that his books (at least as these have been exploited by film directors and tourist organisations) have helped to create. And apart from these two rather uncharacteristic cases, even the award of two Nobel prizes to modern Greek poets –to George Seferis (1963) and Odysseus Elytis (1979)– has done little to create any interest abroad in modern Greek writing. It might be thought that the problem has to do with a lack of (good) translations. Yet, in recent years, a sizeable number of works by contemporary Greek writers have been translated and published in countries such as Germany and France, Spain and Italy, where translated literature represents a fairly large percentage of these countries' annual book production. And even in the English-speaking countries where, regrettably though not surprisingly, translated literature is only a very small percentage of annual book production,

the list of works by Greek authors translated into English is quite astounding. The fact remains, however, that these translated works rarely reach the major bookstores, let alone the reader, and generally fail to make any impact in the foreign book market.

The reasons for this lack of impact are many. In the modern era, the promotion of modern Greek literary works abroad has not been helped by the fact that it is written in what is a language of limited currency or by the fact of Greece's position, literally and metaphorically, on the fringes of Europe. Similarly, most foreign readers still associate Greece with its glorious past or with its image as an 'exotic' tourist destination, factors which create certain expectations among the foreign readership. The international success of books by foreign writers on Greek themes or with Greek settings which meet these reader-expectations provides ample evidence of this. A further aspect of this same question of reader-expectation is that foreign readers exhibit a certain wariness when it comes to modern Greek writers. It is not without significance, for example, that Colin Wilson, writing in 1962, remarked that Kazantzakis' name remained almost totally unknown despite five of his major works having been published in translation in England, and even more in America. He attributes this curious situation to the fact that Kazantzakis wrote in Greek, and that modern readers do not expect to come upon an important [modern] Greek writer. He adds, somewhat ironically, that if Kazantzakis had written in Russian and been called Kazantzovsky, his works would no doubt be as universally known and admired as Sholokov's. (Of course, Kazantzakis' international recognition was subsequently secured with the success of the film *Zorba the Greek*).

It must be remembered, nevertheless, that when Wilson wrote this, foreign authors were often translated and presented abroad as representatives of their literary traditions and cultures, with the aim of highlighting not only the individual author but also the whole of his or her literary tradition. This is particularly evident with authors writing in 'languages of lesser currency' or 'minor' languages, with Greek being no exception. Forty years later, in an era of globalisation, international book-markets and publishing conglomerates interested in 'fast-sellers' rather than national literatures, a writer's nationality and literary tradition is of less interest than whether he or she can write good books and whether these books are commercially viable.

The 117 Greek writers whose works appear in this anthology are not presented as representatives of a national literature. Rather, the anthology has as its aim to provide the writers anthologized with a platform on which they may converse with and stand beside their international counterparts. It is also intended to bring the work of

these writers to the attention of foreign publishers and agents and, as such, will be regularly updated and expanded in future volumes. The publication of the anthology was partly dictated by the lack of any platform for the presentation of contemporary Greek writers. There is, for example, no publication in Greece similar to the annual New Writing anthologies published in the UK, which would provide examples of the work of contemporary Greek writers, nor indeed any journals similar to New Books in German, or Books from Holland and Flanders, designed specifically to inform foreign publishers, editors and agents about recently-published literature in Greece. Some information, at least, can be found in Ithaca, a monthly literary magazine published in English translation by the National Book Centre of Greece (Ithaca@ekebi.gr) and in the quarterly magazine Dedalus, published by the Hellenic Authors' Society, an abridged version of which is published annually in English. The interested reader may also consult the Society's website (www.dedalus.gr) where more translations and information on individual authors can be found.

Greece's accession to the European Union some twenty years ago and its role as an equal European partner has done much to change foreign conceptions of Greece and to present a new and contemporary face of Greece. By means of this anthology, we, too, wish to show that, despite the unavoidable comparison with its glorious past, despite the lack of currency of its language, despite its fringe position as a political and economic power, contemporary Greece possesses, nevertheless, a notable literary output and significant writers who are engaged in a cultural dialogue with their international counterparts, and who bring their individual contributions to that dialogue on the basis of their own perceptions, sensitivity, experiences and traditions. We consider that Greek writers deserve a place on the international stage by virtue of being good writers and not simply as representatives of an 'exotic literature'.

And here it should be stressed once again that the present anthology does not claim to be representative of every trend and mode current in Greek writing today. Rather, it is a selection of extracts from works by contemporary Greek authors and, more specifically, of authors who are members of the Hellenic Authors' Society. Of these members, roughly half submitted extracts of their work in English translation. Responsibility for the accuracy and quality of the English texts rests with the translators who undersign them and with the authors who submitted them for inclusion. To avoid any confusion, the authors' names appear in transliteration in keeping with the Society's handbook of members.

David CONNOLLY

MITOS ALEXANDROPOULOS

From:

Scenes from the Life of Maximos the Greek

Maximos knew nothing of Czar Ivan's secret decisions. However, he did know that this was to be his own last battle. He earnestly believed that if he could convince the Czar, everything he accomplished and suffered in life would instantly make sense. If not, then all would have been in vain.

'Czar Ivan,' he said, putting heart and soul into his words, 'listen to what I have to say. Hark back to our own Byzantine emperors who perished, not for anything else, but because they were the first to sort out words from deeds. Afterwards all the others followed suit, and we drowned in sin. God will not ask you what you said, but what you did, even if you are not a Christian, even if you have never kissed an icon – this is not the point. Think of King Cyrus. He was not a Christian; he was impious and a heathen; but the Lord exalted him; He induced him to grandeur, because his deeds were virtuous and Christian, and his judgment was just and merciful... And do look at this, Your Majesty!'

Lightly, sprightly, his eyes sparkling with excitement, the monk ushered the Czar before a table on which spread a sheet of paper with a sketch.

'What is this?' inquired the Czar loftily.

The enthusiastic monk began explaining to him.

'Sooner or later I'll be dead. With my savings I commissioned someone to paint an icon that I may offer to the Holy Trinity. It will be my spiritual will, my blessing and my curse!'

Ivan looked silently at the sketch.

'The colours are missing, Your Majesty, that is why the depiction is not very distinguishable,' murmured humbly the hagiographer Anastasios, bending down as though begging forgiveness.

'I can see that,' said Ivan, and indeed his keen eyesight had no trouble making out the shapes. 'Here are sowed fields, there the Lord with his Apostles, and beyond the castle and the city. What does it describe?'

'It is the Lord walking through the crop,' Maximos explained. 'Jesus is talking to his disciples, and they, scattered in the field, cut the corn and eat it because they are hungry. And over here, a little beyond the gate of the castle stands a group of Pharisees, casting sly looks at the Apostles. Because it is the Sabbath. The Pharisees taunt the Lord, saying: 'Today it's the Sabbath; look what your disciples are doing!' And Jesus says unto them: 'Have you not read anywhere what King David did on the Sabbath, when he entered the temple, in the time of

the high priest Abiathar, with his starving soldiers? He was hungry, and partook of the offertory bread destined for priests, giving also his hungered men to eat. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The Son of Man is also the Lord of the Sabbath'...'

The monk spoke with all the warmth of his soul. He spoke as did David and Christ. And along with his words, it was as though his soul expired – there was nothing more he wanted to say, now and forever, Amen. He fell silent, and fixed his gaze on Ivan's face in expectation.

Alas, he could not read the secret thoughts of the almighty Czar. However, his experienced eye could see that neither his words nor the example of Jesus brought the coveted result. The Czar remained poker-faced, as though having heard or seen nothing.

'Czar Ivan,' he continued in a low, deep voice, 'I beseech you, do not go to Beloozero! Your decision will count for much. And if you pay heed to my advice, you will be doing a great service, great beyond imagination. And great shall be your reward and glory. Think: the people in your kingdom live bitter and painful lives, their thoughts are humble. The farmer is unread, just a small ignorant child. Take hold of him, guide him, feed him well to grow up, school him. What can distant pilgrimages and churches with tall belfries teach him? The tip of the cypress also extends skywards; you look up and your mind reels. To what avail? The stature of a cypress tree may dazzle us, but it provides no bread, or a fig, or a grape and an apple to sweeten our poor palate... Czar Ivan, I kneel and kiss your feet; do not go on this pilgrimage!' And indeed that very moment the Czar was thinking of the gravity of his decision. If he did as the monk advised, it would mean that the latter still had influence; that he had lost nothing of his willpower; that it would take long to get rid of his advisers who now ruled the nation. But if he finds the courage to say no to this oldster, whom all regard as a sage and a saint, it will mean that his will has set, has consolidated, has become a bastion, and the time has come for him to rule as a true Czar and Emperor.

He asked the monk:

'What if I undertake the voyage, old man, as I first planned?'

The monk's dark look glowed harshly.

'Aaaah!' he growled shaken, as though seeing horrendous scenes. 'Woe is you! If you do not listen to me, Czar Ivan, you will cause great harm to Orthodoxy. And analogous shall be the pain you will suffer. And you too shall come to great harm... And soon enough, mark my words!'

An enraged Ivan asked:

'What harm are you talking about?'

'I am telling you,' replied the monk dryly, 'what the priest Achia said to the wife of Jerovoam: going where you are, means losing the Czarevitch.'

Ivan grew deathly pale. The monk's words frightened him; but stronger than fear was his willpower.

'Are you threatening me?' he shouted. 'How dare you, you a mortal, say things that only God can decide?'

'He will go,' the dreadful thought flashed into the monk's mind, and he felt his powers failing him. But he plucked up courage and said:

'Do not be angry, Your Majesty; get hold of yourself. Of all the planets the brightest is the sun, and of all the people the brightest is the Czar. Your purpose is to lighten, not to shade. Should anger penetrate your spirit like a black cloud, it obliterates everything. Show yourself to be a true and magnanimous sovereign; do not subordinate virtue to passion!'

'Monk,' Ivan said, gritting his teeth and narrowing his eyes to the extreme, 'you have passion in your heart. It is not out of love that you are telling me all this, but out of malice for what you have gone through. You want us punished!'

The monk pressed both his hands to his heart, as though afraid of losing it. 'In God's name, no! Czar Ivan, what sentiments and what rancour are you mouthing?

For what reason? Here, in the Russian realm, I suffered martyrdom. I have lived here for forty years. My tears were kneaded into your soil... Even the demigod Prometheus, Czar Ivan, when the gods finally deigned to release him, not for a second did he remove from his wrist the iron bracelet with the hard stone from the rock of his martyrdom. Therein were his tears and sighs. Divine Prometheus came to love Mount Caucasus as his second motherland. This is what people are made of.'

His words, dewdrops, steamed and dissipated in Ivan's inflamed mind – he had heard nothing.

'Monk,' he said shaking, 'you seem to know a lot, and you have the gift of the gab. But the only thing I want to hear from you now is this: take back what you said about the Czarevitch!'

Maximos saw fear trembling in Ivan's eyes for what he prophesied. In the Czar's fear glimmered an only hope.

'God help us,' he said, and crossed himself. He approached Ivan and looked him deep in the eyes.

'Czar Ivan, if you do not listen to me, the child is lost!'

Groaning with rage, Ivan stamped his foot and rushed to the door.

DIMITRIS ALEXIOU

A Letter with Question Marks

I wonder where you might be?
'In Loutraki,' as I was told?
Shall I believe them?

Did you cut your hair short?

Do you live in a single house?
In a house with pines and cypress trees all around?
In an apartment with a balcony and many flowers?

Are you enclosed in by high walls and bars?

In the morning do you wear the jeans I know?
Do you find deserted beaches?
Are you swimming –still– naked?

How much freedom do you have?

Are you still wearing your black dress?
Are you going out at night?
Do you pick quite bistros?

Are you listening to the 'Old songs with sounds of the future'?

Do you have any children?
Are they blond as you wanted them?
Are you caressing their hair?

Do you teach them how to sing?

Does your room face the sea or the mountain?

Are you enchanted by the Gulf of Corinth?
Do the Geranian Mountains cause you ecstasy?

Are you still in the habit of reading poetry?

Is it cool during the night there?

Do you cover yourself with the linen sheet?

Do you leave the window open?

Do you have... any windows?

ANDREAS ANDONIADIS

Film Noir

First he placed his finger.
He twirled it around.
The myriad ice-cubes rang out
in the short glass.
Afterwards
he sucked his wet finger
and with the other hand
he brought the glass
to his mouth.
He twisted his tongue
around the cold liquid
the transparent cubes refreshed his moustache
while the glass
started making mist
from his trapped breath.
Finally
he drank with irresistible desire.
'How I wish you gave me the same treatment'
you said.

From: FAMILIAR SOUNDS

KATERINA ANGHELAKI - ROOKE

Tristiu

[PROLOGUE]

Poems fail when loves fail.
Don't listen to what they tell you;
A poem needs love's warmth
to endure time's coldness.

[1]

A place I have invented
to go when I am deeply sad
sad right down to the unmelting ice inside me,
the crystals of tears
until regrets my little white panther cubs
start biting and their bites how they smart!
Tristiu I call the place I have invented
to go when I am deeply sad
a state continuously intensified
since all the grand landscapes of the end
begin to smell stagnant water
and rotten fruit.

[2]

In Tristiu you arrive without a sigh
only with a slight pressure inside
recalling love standing hesitant
at the threshold of the house.
Here you'll find poets living in 'sacra-cy'
lofty ones, who with the shake of the head
signify: 'no... no... it's a mistake'
or even: 'what a pity, now it's too late',
while a beggar on the corner keeps mumbling:

'The good thing about desire
is that when it disappears
the value of its object disappears as well'.

Here all the failures of youth
Have become silent public squares
The mutilated passions, dark parks
And the last pitiful love exchanges
Underfed dogs wandering in the alleys.
Worse than old age
This place is inhabited by wasted youth

[3]

In Tristiu I am constantly in tears
from the moment you showed me
the value of sorrow...
No, it is not the negative of fertility
but the positive of absence...
You said and your profile disturbed me
as if it were carved in the hardest of rocks,
your eyes made of sulphur
alarmed, alarmed me...
Let's weep, then, and let's call it joy
joy because we are still here, suffering.
At daybreak we will enter another harbour
like entering a new poem
and in the frost I will hold
the last line of an untold love story.
The voice, the height, the line of the neck,
they are all eternal repetitions of the insatiable fear.
Looking at you I discovered
the hinterland of feeling.

[4]

The most beautiful man in Tristiu
found a black butterfly dead, in his streets.
He was naked and slightly sweating
he shone but not as much as it did
with all the light coming out of death.

The winged symbol of superficiality, the butterfly
motionless, dressed the colours of the night
was found lying there as if, immediately after an orgy,
death had got up and left.

Or if it was resting before starting its difficult
journey from blackness to perfection.

[5]

The youngest woman in Tristiu is me
who looks and looks and can't believe
that so much dust has accumulated
on the path of joy.

I tell myself that there must be some mistake
and I never followed the road of Silk,
I never touched the hero of my poem on the chest.
His heart only I imagined standing
like a Bank that we see and think
'How many things are locked in here, how many riches'.

[6]

What you lose stays with you forever
and Tristiu is a place that I have fabricated
there to be one with everything that I have lost
when the unsufferable dusk comes
or the mute sunrise
and it is again as if you were waiting for the school
bell to ring, the lesson to start again
yet another exercise on an unknown theme.
You look down, the school yard's cement
or pebbles, you brush away a few crumbs from your school uniform
and you enter the classroom;
you enter the monotony of tasteless time
the vagueness of existence
which, I know, a bit altered
one finds again toward the end.

[7]

Religion in Tristiu
is a Headless Meaning.
Her statue stands quietly
next to those of her sisters:
Virtue, the most beautiful and Wisdom
with the best proportions.

But Meaning is adored without a head
and when the one I would love if ...
comes to worship her, he wears pink shirt
and is aroused
because everything means something to him,
it's opposite too.
Here love and death became one body
and the grass growing
in between the open legs of the lying statues
makes them resemble living souls
who grieve in the green and shipwreck
in foreign eyes and in love suffer.
In Tristiu love-death is worshipped
as a unique sense, headless because without hope.

[EXODUS]

Leaving Tristiu behind
I realized that I had lost my sense of direction
towards something that would be real small
and real wrist with beautiful pulsating life.
I turned once round myself
and while I was heading for the boat
I found myself in front of a closed shop.
Behind the black -from dust- windowpane
a tragic jacket was standing: no one
would ever seek warmth in it, ever.
The sun had set
and the streets all together
were howling 'impasse'.
I left. In between my palms
as if a frozen bird's
the last breath
I was protecting the last handshake.

[END]

Translated by the author

EUGENIOS ARANITSIS

On Infants Who Depart this Life

Though barely twelve years old, I'd already realised that the key is the first thing that enters the house and that, for the majority, time was something distinct from the body, a wave of anxiety in the void, a sea shoot in the bare-ness of hearing. The world was tilting towards the shores of uncertainty. In order to support myself, to acquaint myself with danger so it wouldn't assail me, I had acquired certain fixed ideas, for nothing is so familiar as the fear of change. To these ideas was added the image of a girl; one the same age as me, the daughter of Greek and English parents who had come to Corfu on account of her father having been transferred to the Consulate. It's now im-possible for me to bring her face up on memory's screen. All I can present is an outline.

The young girl was called Cynthia, a name somewhat arbitrarily chosen, as her father explained to mine, in an attempt to render in English some-thing of the wonderful cadence of the Greek name, Chryssanthi, handed down by a grandmother from Patras (with equally wonderful genes, no doubt!). Such echoes of poetic naming are abundant today, but at that time Chryssanthi sparkled among the countless Marias and Sophias like the Crystal's crown. A name bearing flowers tainted with gold; the Moon favours the harvest.

Inevitably, that name gave birth to a thunderbolt that passed right through me; they say that either you fall in love in the first three minutes or not at all. From there derive all the later senses of déjà-vu, those scintillating yet terrifying pleasures of recollection's specialist. When I say 'I fell in love with her', perhaps I simply mean that, outside school, I saw her very rarely, a faint aquarelle on the pavement opposite, a highlight of melanin, from her hair, at the cinema, five rows in front of where I was sitting. On an excursion to the hill of the Resurrection, lying as she was on the grass in an aura of paradoxical naturalness, she let her blouse run up a couple of inches and her lovely navel gazed at the sky like an eye with no eyelid; the sky had left a little spittle there, a drop of Michelangelo's blue.

Today, I'm aware that men love such women because they love their sorrow, their grave melancholy, the impression of a kind of delicate self-denial. Then, of course, I had no idea. Love is precisely this terrible unawareness. However funny it seems in retrospect, it was because of the fairly-like gaze of that Chryssanthi (or because of the fascination

of her name) that I'd ceased to eat and that I slept sitting up, while my friends grew fewer day by day, just like fair-haired people the further you go south. I dreamt while awake that I was being chased by death in the form of something at last heroically missing, like a saddle galloping without the horse. For the sound of the galloping is the time measured by the heart.

On Good Friday, at around eight, just before the start of the procession with Christ's bier, the pupils of three schools, together with a group of scouts and the band, gathered, as we'd been instructed, outside St. Eleftherios' church, beside the harbour. The girls waited separately from the boys, as was only proper in those times, the two sexes forming the poles of a voltaic pile. The girls carried circular baskets full of those blossoms that the Corfiots call 'lilacs', large mauve clusters with a seductive fragrance – a precise allusion to the female principle of things, when the madness increases, you want to embrace them, so beautiful they are with their formal costumes, so unapproachable and at the same time so vulnerable. For if fragrance corrupts, then absolute fragrance corrupts absolutely.

Chryssanthi (or Cynthia; or Kynthia; who knows!) had her hair tied back in a ponytail and avoided looking at me. Perhaps that's why, in the growing dusk, the crowds were gradually sinking into the invisible hemisphere of things, into the depths of a still silence, and in the fade-out I could see only my tiny star lighting the dusk, twinkling, exchanging a few words with her friends, growing impatient, bored – or feigning all this on my account, for me, the astronomer.

Someone was late in coming –the mayor? the prefect?– and the delay encouraged the slackening of the groupings; the spring fervour in the air whispered to us: 'Dare me!', while the more impatient musicians blew low notes on their wind instruments, till she and I, blushing excessively I think, found ourselves in the lane nearby, face to face. Out of her hope that no one was watching us, she began to excrete something looking like amber, and then we kissed. I don't recall it, but I know. Suddenly, the reality around us had become unbearably dense; you could touch the fragrances with your fingers. Which means that we had arrived at the zero point of human history, where all measurements come to a halt before they begin. We were radiating. At that moment we must have been visible from the Andromeda constellation.

It was then that I realised that, contrary to what the teachers inferred, not only did the present exist, but, in my view, only the present existed. A kiss, though momentary, lasts for eternity, with a sweet vibrato and quivering dialogues that are unheard. C. (it goes without saying) had closed her eyes, while her two large eyelids said to me:

'We're hunters of bee-eaters; regard Our plunder...'. And her nose, charming and investigative, asked: 'Does the bed of Christ's funeral bier have one pillow or two?' I think that it's from the taste of that girl on my lips that I acquired the gift of predicting the future. I'm sorry if my predictions are disagreeable, if my texts are sown with funeral steles.

Then comes amnesia, orphanhood, harshness seen from a distance. Reconciliation with sleep. The inopportune character of the comic element. I'm not recording this recollection in a mood of nostalgia, but out of a wish to say that, today, thirty-five years later, I find it difficult to decide whether this episode was simply the activation of some glands that literature hastens to idealize or if it was, in fact, the closing of the circle that had opened with Mary Magdalen's convulsion. None of you know either. That's what unites us.

Translated by David Connolly

GIORGOS ARISTINOS

Descent

And they raged and they frothed about the corpse, it was the most murderous of battles and the arrows fell as rain from the embrasures and the buckets and cauldrons of boiling water and hot oil which spattered and poured together with insults and curses, base and vulgar, and look how the sun was tumbling down and all about was shaded purple, dark, omen which meant that sometime soon they had to cease, because the moon was on the wane, they said and how could they see only from the light of the torches and from the explosive bursts of gun-fire, but the corpse had to be shielded, the body which was lying there in the dust, in the ploughed and furrowed sod, was sacred, as if it summarized history and all the myths of generations, as if it chaptered the whole of their world and it was all they had which they recognized as a human which held them together and kept them standing, because, he, or better yet, the splendour of that rigid body marbled to the repose of the Unknown Soldier, or stiffened by tetanus, was the vestuary of passion, of memory, or labour and childbirth and of countless deaths and they thought that if it were snatched and desecrated by the adversary, those damned vultures of prey, who came from afar, uninvited, to elbow them out, to push them out into the sea, to uproot them from their paternal soils, they would surely die an instant death, as if darkness were to fall of a sudden and it was this sheer stubbornness of will which made them defend it from the tribulation of dismemberment and this the reason which Ferdinand paced to and from astride his Mavro, gripping hard on the horse's reins and sinking his spurs into its leathery hide, with his dagger sweeping circles over the enemy's head and sharpening the blade of his sword across their skulls, indifferent to the spill of blood which flowed broad as the river and he heard the roar of his own screams which stretched his jaw to breaking, 'the moon will take you down you viziers and seraskiers, you fucking beggars and you Mehmet Pasha Hadzipetleri, I myself will pluck you from under the shining sun and I'll celebrate this day that you cast us to the gutter for no damn reason', and the horses were in frenzy, because the moon was bruised and bloody and they too ached and bled while the dust rose thick and every now and then bodies fell, at times, slow, as if in slow motion, because whilst in mid-gallop they fell with such impact against the defence wires that tumbled over the horses' flanks like spastics, or that's how they

seemed to someone watching from a distance and other times they fell like flops of dung, bit by a bullet which took them by surprise leaving them indignant, for they never had the time to see, to even suspect, the approach of death and they expired like farts, their souls passed from their bodies as wind and then the panic accrued, 'let's get out from here, let's get out from there', a multitude of voices were heard to cry, but how could they hurdle the sacks of bodies piling slowly into mounds and the hooves of the horses slipped but still they persisted because the violent mania to live smoked their and enraged them to such eye-popping, combustion and thus Ferdinand became all the more obdurate and it was then that he found himself before Metzko Arapi, that brutal and elusive gut-ripper and with one artful and tremendous gesture he reaped his head, which rolled and all the bile of hatred was digested by the (infinity) of death and it was a glorious but temporary victory because the opponents retreated with a strange and synchronized drone, only to re-group and coil together, whilst the most fanatic of our men dismounted and nailed the astonished head to a pole and brandished it about and it was the midnight hour and his men mourned his loss in muted sobs and then someone improvised a poetic dirge, 'Oh you were well safe Metzko in the mountains, safe too in Akrata, whatever did you want in coming down to the valley of St. George?' and the atmosphere became all the more suffocating because whilst the landscape began to clear, we dismounted and with voracity we began the loot: crucifixes, icons, tobacco-cases, gold-plated chains, identity bracelets, lighters, talismans and charms, boots, gold teeth which we gouged out with the knife. Devil what a lust for death this was, and many more ornaments and diamond studs which adorned the leather shirts and the ephemeral husk of the soul and all this took place in haste and bedlam, in a malignant bog of murky water, but Ferdinand will never forget how came it be that he was there, that ultimately it wasn't merely his claim to defend the body, but rather a subterranean and inexplicable furore, an unbridled fanaticism which pushed him to the brink, to those twilight zones, there where the innermost part of the soul germinated and thrived, that part which was pulverized by the millstones of logic, but which never perished, on the contrary, it found the turf for its coarseness to bloom, which was why, with every blow, where metal crossed metal and sparked, it ignited within him the vertigo one feels before the abyss, an abyss which must be filled and it filled only when his blood reeked of decay and when evil glimmered before him like a rancid eternity, this was the will which tugged him to the grime and drew him to whatever the putrid breathe, it was then that Dimitri, who followed at his heels, was heard to wail: that the moon came up dark and bleeding, whilst the clouds which galloped wild

through the smoke gave the place a pale and yellow hue of soot and not even the stars, not the Great Bear, nor Venus were visible, which was why the battle would be aimless, shouted Dimitri and they should retreat to closer ranges, 'why shed so much futile blood?' he wondered but Ferdinand driven, as if a recollection of the aimless and the futile had grafted itself to the skin of his soul.

Translated by Melia Tatakis

KOSTAS ARKOUDEAS

From: *Angels and Shamans in the Aegean*

CHAPTER 2

During the journey from the main town of Fyra to Oia the wheel of the bus ran over a sharp rock that had fallen on the road. The bus jolted violently and its load of passengers lurched around like jelly wobbling on a plate. The bus's radio was on at full blast playing Cretan dance numbers. The driver manoeuvred his charge to the side of the road and lit up a cigarette underneath a huge sign warning against the danger of cigarettes causing forest fires. Clinging to the hand straps and piled one on top of the other the tourists were laughing and joking about the incident, oblivious of the terrible accident we might just have had. I could hear them pronounce the name of our destination as 'Oy-ah'—anxious to articulate every little letter—instead of plain Ee-a as the Greeks say. A group of half-sloshed dropouts was laughing in the gangway as they passed around a bottle of raki, whose smell had flooded the whole bus. A Spanish couple was wedged right in front of me, writhing rhythmically on the seat. The man's shirt had become one with his sweat-drenched back; the young woman was suppressing her sighs of pleasure, her eyes closed and her hair falling in disarray over her forehead. On one occasion when the bus swerved someone screamed. The wheels very nearly went over the edge of the road, beyond which there was nothing but deep and expansive space. The bus then took a furious run up the final straight that looked like a strip of land with sea on either side.

It was then that we could see the majestic chasm of the Caldera, a bow that curved like an eyebrow, the cliff-face created by volcanic eruptions – a rift that descends through to the seabed where the old body of Santorini lies shattered. The sight of it gave me once again that sensation of *déjà vu*, that very same feeling that I had had when I first set foot here on the island of Santa Irene. Something was happening, something was being said, could be heard, which I thought I had experienced some time in the past, which I had already seen, and thus knew what would follow. This prolonged sensation made me feel strange and in order to shake it off before it became intolerable I pushed my thoughts to other things, quite irrelevant. For instance, why is it that rappers, when singing about how smart they are, poke

their fingers around in the air? Are they perhaps unsure where the brain is? Does the finger-stab indicate emphasis? Or do they think with some other organ?

The bus reached its destination. The doors opened and out poured the tourists as if from an overflowing wardrobe. The young man who sold the bus tickets climbed up onto the top of the bus to unload the bags from the roof rack. I got my rucksack, hoisted it onto my back and checked my watch. It was half past seven in the evening. I was dying for a coffee, but time was precious and I had to put off such luxuries for now. I needed to find a place to stay before it got dark, so I headed off to find the only person I knew in the village.

This person was Asproyenis, 'Grey Beard', who ran a bar-taverna known as The Ivory Coast. He weighed about twenty stone, but slimmed down in the summer to nineteen ten. 'You'd hardly recognise me in the summer,' he would tell me, 'Just skin and bones.' His ample presence meant that you couldn't miss him, though he was hardly bothered by this. Whatever he did, he did because he wanted, and whatever he didn't want, quite simply, he didn't do. His philosophy was that too many ifs and buts and perhaps –someday– soon destroy a man and merely serve the realm of neverland. Asproyenis' genuineness immediately made him likeable, and this is what led scores of people to follow his trail. He knew absolutely everybody, and was friends with everyone and with no one. He slipped with ease into the role of photographer, mechanic, theatre hand, coffee-shop owner, cook, barman. You say it, he could do it. He had a hand in everything. Whatever stone you happened to pick up, there he was underneath.

His bulky personality seemed to attract all and sundry. The Ivory Coast resembled a home for life's less likely crew. There you could find a whole cast of rejects from the world of entertainment, idle filmmakers, painters of doubtful talent and Sappho-struck poetesses. This crowd, wherever it went, would leave in the air the smell of food, of drink and hash. It seemed the goddess of Debauchery had been given the same marching orders as Asproyenis and accompanied him wherever he went. No kidding. Some people you can imagine going back home after a day at the office; others you can imagine hiding, cowering and whispering behind drawn curtains; and others roaming the streets like strays, spending half their time in institutions. In the case of Asproyenis, however, you could just picture him on board a pirate ship traversing the main in the quest for booty, and plunging into the embrace of whores and wineshops at the next port of call.

I first met Asproyenis one summer in Mahairida, a small bay in northwest Crete. He had made a spot for himself behind some rocks on the beach and sat there smoking his beloved joints while he told me

tales of Africa. He told me of the panther people, who, while in most respects quite normal, would go for a time into the forest and behaved like animals. They are also known as the silent people. When in the forest they take part in mysterious rites, cutting the palm of their hand and letting the blood drip onto the earth. The wounds they rub with mud in order to heal. By this they create a bridge between the past and present way of life, they bring instinct closer to the rational. On my last visit to Oia three years earlier Asproyenis was the first person I looked up. I had arrived shortly before dawn and found him in front of the taverna gazing up at the moon. He put me up at The Ivory Coast, in a room whose walls were full of holes from where I expected various ghouls to appear. Asproyenis stayed in the front to have a row with a cockerel that was crowing across the way. 'One of these days I'll make a coq-au-vin of you, my boy, you just see,' he growled menacingly.

This was the picture I saw in my mind as I went down the village steps. The taverna was crammed with tourists who were hogging down the mysterious dishes he served up: natsos, buritos, chicken mafÈ. I was half expecting to hear the music of Miriam Makeba coming out of the speakers. But things had changed. He had put on New Orleans funeral marches. This was the usual strategy employed by the proprietor to make sure the customers didn't get too comfortable and stay all day long at their table. Most of them didn't seem to care about the music: they were too busy gobbling up their food. But there were some that had noticed and, with their food still in their mouths, looked around suspiciously. Asproyenis was inside, crouched behind the counter sorting through his cassettes.

'The capital of Bhutan. Quick!' I called from the other side of the counter. I heard him bump his head as he tried to stand up. Not bad: I had caught him unawares. Whenever we met we would play this geography quiz; it worked like a little bond between us.

'Re! What the devil are you doing here?' He got to his feet and straightened his glasses. I laughed; I couldn't help myself—he'd grown a moustache. As long as I'd known him, his large fat face with its flabby cheeks had always looked freshly shaved. The change now was extraordinary. In the past, thanks to his mop of long, shaggy hair, the round glasses and his impressive bulk he looked like some kind of aged hippy, or, rather, like a Persian eunuch in a harem. With the bushy moustache he now looked more savage, more the corsair. Yes, he'd acquired a vaguely heroic air, though also colourfully funny. Particularly at those moments when he became serious and looked at himself in the mirror, turning his head slightly to the right, admiring the profile that flattered him.

'Buddy, you can't count,' I said, 'Bhutan's got two capitals: Punakha and Timphu. One for the winter, one for the summer.'

A broad grin spread across my face. He was looking just great. He opened his arms and gave me a strong hug in greeting.

'So what's new, Asproyenis? Still struggling?'

'You're still wasting away? What's happened? Have you given up eating? You look ready to conk out.'

'You're not satisfied with being enormous yourself; you want us all to be. You feel insulted by the presence of anyone slim around you.'

Anyone would have thought we were carrying on yesterday's conversation. He asked me what I was up to and where I'd been; I gave him a brief résumé. When I told him about Gavdos, he let out a sigh. He started inquiring about the various islanders he'd met. He knew all their names, their families and woes. He had gone there almost every summer in recent years, though this year was an exception. When I told him about the buildings sprouting up in Saracen bay and the fact that the locals were hoping to turn the place into Miami Beach he groaned in despair. He struck his fist on the counter in anger knocking over some coffee cups, and started cursing, saying that if he'd had his way no one would dare lift a finger to ruin the tranquillity of the place.

I asked him to help me find a room as I had nowhere to stay. It had been ages since I'd last slept on a comfortable mattress, and I could feel my back was aching for it. Asproyenis told me that I'd have a fat chance of finding such a thing as the island was already chock-a-block with visitors. After the Feast of the Assumption on 15th August very few tourists had left in fact, and even then they'd been replaced immediately by new arrivals. The small room where I'd stayed the first time I came to Santorini had been taken over by his dog Bebis, a black Doberman that stuck its head out of the window and snarled at the world with its vicious teeth. I could think of better roommates.

'There's just one solution: you could put yourself up at Balis' place for a few days until I find something else for you.'

'Who's this Balis?'

'A friend. You'll see. He's a bit of an oddball, but what the hell. If you don't work him up the wrong way, you'll get on fine.'

I decided to try it out. After all, I had nothing to lose. Asproyenis told me how to get there, and I was soon strolling through the narrow lanes of Oia. The beauty of the place was almost painful. A jumble of thoughts and vague memories started to overwhelm me. Yes, it was an island of extremes, was Santorini. Some adored it, others couldn't bear the sight of it, not even in a picture. I had seen people pack up and leave after the first day, while others couldn't part from it—they would stay on the island all through the winter. Some called it devil's island

and likened it to a Titan scorched by Zeus, and suchlike. But the native inhabitants adored it. The worst thing that could possibly happen to you would be to die far from the shores of Santorini. Oia, known in olden times as Epanomeria, was the sea captains' village of the island. Its houses were built on different levels, the roof of each house serving as the courtyard of the house above, and they were famed far and wide for their beauty. It is a village that is literally clinging to the rim of the volcano, to the Caldera. It was like something from a fairytale, a palace and a castle all in one. [...]

Translated by John C. Davis

YIORGOS CHOULIARAS

The Sirens

No creatures in the world
were less musical than the Sirens.
Someone deaf must have passed
those places first, however,
who started this story
about their irresistible song.
Everyone who followed was lost
vainly trying to sustain what gets
lost no matter how much you listen.
So their fame was confirmed
as it happens in such cases.
Who would any longer dare
dispute a supposition of this kind?
Odysseus was ignorant of the Sirens
but he knew people.
In the ears of his companions,
beeswax sealed their mouths.
There was nothing they could say
while he would have proved
that even for the most irresistible
song it is hard to escape
from a strongly bound person
who does not want to listen.

Translated by David Mason and the author

GIORGOS CHRONAS

Parma

Hills and swamps originate from our look
our desires rot in pouring rain and dead letters
At night, drunk before broken wardrobe mirrors,
we make our way with extinguished cigarettes
with records of oldies pictured amid trees
robbed of their fruit and the Genoese sun without the malady of March
Most of our memories expired in the morning
next to sleeping bodies and forgotten smokes
thus the dreams we expected and never came turned into
tunnels through which pass trains, sewers, boys with ball bearings
and ambulances

In the evening, up on the roof among pigeons
congealed in childish talk and myths untold,
at an unsuspected time, I feel dubious of Atzesivano
irreproachably taking the knife from the table
and putting a simple end to his life, like a late-night broadcast
on a New York radio station for listeners
half-doped with Veronal

Since we never met at Parma station
and didn't speak of such things as Martha mowing without hands
in Megalopolis or Kostas leaving with his ship
for Piraeus, let us remain mere spectators
in the Orpheus cinema, Ash Monday afternoon, balcony seats,
at another unsuspected time, when Etruscan and Sanskrit
were not spoken, and wait for Caesar
to cross the Rubicon while shouting: *alea jacta est!*

DAVID CONNOLLY

The Fortunes of 20th Century Greek Poetry in English Translation

As Odysseus Elytis remarked in his address to the Swedish Academy on receiving the 1979 Nobel Prize for Literature, the Greek poet uses a language spoken by only a few million people and yet it is a language that has been spoken for over two and a half thousand years without interruption and with a minimum of changes. There was not one century, he notes, when poetry was not written in Greek, a fact which indicates the great weight of tradition borne by the Greek language and the great weight of responsibility for the modern Greek poet. In like manner, Constantine Trypanis notes in the Introduction to his anthology of Greek poetry from Homer to Elytis:

Poetry written in Greek constitutes the longest uninterrupted tradition in the Western world. From Homer to the present day not a single generation of Greeks has lived without expressing its joys and sorrows in verse, and frequently in verse of outstanding originality and beauty. [...] It is a happy augury that in the last hundred years better poetry has been written in Greek than in all the fourteen preceding centuries; and that in the last fifty years, by the surrender of its political or purely national aspirations, Greek poetry has again achieved universal validity and significance.

(*The Penguin Book of Greek Verse* 1971, p. lxxv)

Few would disagree with Elytis or with Trypanis concerning the traditional role of poetry in Greece or its flourishing in the first half of the 20th century when Greece produced a prodigious number of major poets, regardless of whether or not these poets achieved international recognition. Trypanis, it should be noted, was writing in 1971 when C.P. Cavafy had already attained international fame and his works were available in multiple English translations, when George Seferis had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1963), and when Yannis Ritsos and Odysseus Elytis were at the peak of their poetic maturity and were starting to appear in English translation and to arouse interest abroad. Today, some thirty years after the publication of Trypanis' anthology, the English-speaking reader will most likely be familiar with at least one of these 'Four Evangelists' of Modern Greek Poetry. However, apart from Cavafy, Seferis, Ritsos and Elytis (listed in chronological order of birth but also in the order by which they are generally known in the English-speaking world) few readers will have heard of any other 20th

century Greek poets. The English-speaking reader might well be justified in supposing that these Evangelists left no disciples and that, in contrast to the first half of the 20th century, the second half has produced no notable Greek poets. This, of course, is not the case. Nor is it the case that subsequent Greek poets have not been translated into English. Nikiforos Vrettakos (1912-1991), Takis Sinopoulos (1917-1981), Miltos Sachtouris (1919-), Manolis Anagnostakis (1925-), Kiki Dimoula (1931-), Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke (1939-) and younger poets such as Yannis Kondos (1943-) have all been published in book form, while these and a host of others have been published in anthologies and special Greek issues of literary magazines. A great deal of Greek poetry has been translated but it has failed to make any impact in the English-speaking world and Greek poets are generally conspicuous by their absence from the shelves of English bookstores and from the international stage in general.

How is one to account for this absence? One might start in reverse by positing some tentative reasons for the relative success of the four Greek poets who attained varying degrees of international recognition, but also for their descending order of familiarity in the English-speaking world. Taking their poetic stature as given, one might say that Cavafy was also fortunate in being championed by the likes of Forster, Auden, Durrell and Bowra and in writing a kind of poetry that because of its thematic content and Cavafy's peculiar tone of voice is familiar to the Anglo-Saxon poetic sensibility, especially in the rather prosaic and colloquial English translations in which he has come to be known. Seferis (Greece's first Nobel-Laureate), unquestionably influenced by Eliot and with his modernist use of ancient Greek myth, is also somehow familiar when read in English translation and, like Cavafy, has just enough exoticism and antiquity in his themes to beguile the English reader. Ritsos, who was hounded in Greece for most of his life because of his political persuasions, really came into his own in the English-speaking world during the Seven-Year Military Dictatorship in Greece (1967-74) when to translate him became an act of defiance against the military regime and a cry for democracy. Since then, he has sunk once again into obscurity in the English-speaking world, despite his having being characterised by Louis Aragon (1971) as 'The greatest living poet'. A French poet's susceptibility to Greek hyperbole? Perhaps. Yet nevertheless, a statement that should at least arouse the foreign reader's interest. As for Elytis' poetry, intrinsically linked as it is with the peculiar word forms and sounds of the Greek language, even the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1979 did little to enhance his standing in the English-speaking world, and he remains largely unknown or ignored, despite the fact that all his works

exist in multiple English translations. Of the four poets here, there is no doubt that Elytis has fared the worst in English translation.

Undoubtedly, what is a distinct advantage for Greek poets, namely their ability to draw on various phases in the Greek language –the ancient, biblical, medieval, learned and popular– becomes a distinct disadvantage for the translator of Greek poetry into English, which does not possess the same range of linguistic keys to allow the translator to reproduce the music of the original. For example, no corresponding English idiom exists for the purist (katharevousa) language often used in contemporary Greek literature to produce literary effects ranging from the officious and pompous to the ironic and hilarious. It is virtually impossible for the translator to reproduce this admixture of language in English. Yet it is not only the language but also the legacy of Greece that becomes a distinct disadvantage in promoting contemporary Greek poetry abroad. Many contemporary Greek poets who have failed to make any impact in English translation have undoubtedly suffered from the legacy of Greece's ancient past and of a particular perception of Greece by Westerners. The absence in their works of references to antiquity or of folkloric images of Greece conflicts with what the English-speaking reader has come to expect. In contrast, poets like Seferis and Cavafy filtered their reflections on modern Greece and their personal response to modern man's predicament through the familiar prism of ancient Greece and Greek mythology. Ritsos, too, in his later period, makes liberal use of the themes and characters of ancient Greek myths. Elytis, who consciously avoids any reference to ancient myth, nevertheless uses images from the Aegean world as a recurring motif in his early poetry and these images are reasonably familiar to the foreign reader.

Given that so much contemporary Greek poetry has, in fact, been translated, the lack of international recognition for the poets concerned might be attributed to the quality of the translations. It is always easy to put the blame on poor translations. Yet perhaps one should look to other equally important factors such as the distribution and marketing of Greek poetry in translation, and also to the lack of any effective policy on the part of the Greek State concerning the promotion of Greek literature abroad. Regrettably, the fate of modern Greek poetry in translation is often sealed by slim volumes published by small publishers which never reach the bookshops, let alone the reader.

In the thirty years that have elapsed since Trypanis' appraisal, two whole generations of new poets have appeared whose poetry, even more so than that of preceding generations, is characterised by 'universal validity and significance', and who with their own concerns

and modes of expression continue the unbroken Greek poetic tradition. Writing poetry always was and still is a national preoccupation in Greece, even if in recent years its privileged position in the preferences of the reading public has been lost to the novel, largely due, it must be said, to the marketing policies of the Greek commercial publishers. It remains, nevertheless, deeply and passionately rooted in the Greek psyche and the poets who succeed in achieving recognition represent only some of the peaks appearing above the surface of a deep sea of collective poetic conscience. If contemporary Greek poets are to have a readership beyond the borders of Greece and the Greek diaspora, this will require successful translations of their works and a effective policy for promoting them.

Published in *Poetry Greece* 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 4-6.

VERONIKI DALACOURA

What Verefon Said to Pegasus

A young woman I am no longer, Horse, which is why, when you fly so high, my heels keep their silence while touching your ribs: what do my feet have to say once your body enthralls my thighs? My curled fingers, though, caress your neck with the improbable wrath of haste. Down in the world of mammals I wish for the false friendship of the winds. The soles of my feet once more, seeking your nose, mount your forehead, crying out at your hair: 'Stop!' I am not sure whether the doubtful breathing of your cheeks can be loved. I myself never fly because it has been said that by remaining on earth I owe your own pleasure plus the goose pimples on my breasts.

O Sea! O Sea! Infinite Depths, where are you? Where does the dawn find the drowned over whose short voyage you keep vigil?

O Sea! O Sea! Why do I, who have thus fashioned my own life, have to lose it thus-high in the sky, looking down at the castles?

Note: In the title the author makes a pun on her own first-name and the classical Bellerophon.

The Final Text

The end of summer has come. In these winds which blow is nothing of the sweltering heat of the past days, and the light, the light I was ever waiting for, fills the city with delicate motes of dust. Nothing recalls the streets I once walked upon: everything is so closed, so cyclic I would say, that from here you think that flying is the only escape. What are the memories worth? And how is it-overcoming death and love- that you wind up once again at the end of the road you took? I wanted to write about that unbelievable geometry or to shout:

'O Sculpture of Chlorophyll! O Microphytes of Plaster!'

Nothing of it all came about. I waited in silence, for I demanded neither the grandeur of the heavens nor the conquest of the luminous stars. Despite everything (I repeat), I encountered the light, though I yearned to see it so, only much later, by chance, while observing the movement of heavenly bodies.

From: SLEEP. A COLLECTION OF PROSE POEMS. Translated by John Taylor

ZEFI DARAKI

Golden Apples Moved

Over all four walls the mirror curved its light the girl
wanted to transcend her seventeen
her eighteen years

Golden apples moved
in the eternal light assuming a rosy hue
in all encompassing love
as we say April
as we say May

With a sad luminescent song
you covered yourself in
the branches of the days
so you would not be crushed by the monster of time

When Saturday dawned
the seconds of our bodies
dissolved in our hands

The past of the future
was closing in

From: THE BODY WITHOUT A PASS-KEY, Translated by Tom Nairn

NIKOS DAVVETAS

Dream

I was hungry in my sleep
and all night my dead sisters
fed me salt

later an intolerable thirst gripped me
my throat dried up
'if anyone offers you water
-they whispered-
don' t look them in the face
if you want to wake up'

terrified I went down to the yard
our well was sealed up
on it sat naked an unknown woman
from her nipples ran fresh water
I looked in her face
she has no eyes
just two silver coins.

My thirst went, but I was hungry again
and all night my dead sisters
fed me salt.

The River

At twilight a blind sea follows me
through the labyrinthine city
I hear her stick tapping oh the flagstones
her white dog barking
at the crossroads;
I try to get away from her
my aimless walk
takes on strength and purpose
sometimes I turn up unknown alleys
vainly seeking a safe refuge.

Myself in front and the sea behind
as the years pass I've become accustomed
to her calling me Acheron
to her believing me poor creature
that sometime
I shall go back with her
to the forests of the deep.

Translated by Simon Darragh

Act III

They said she was over eighty
but her body looked brisk, youthful
as they brought her onto the stage
with the frayed rope round her neck
the scratches on her chest and face

under the ivory skin
the vertebrae of her backbone in relief
step by step
they led up to the forest of her hair.

With a wet sponge I cleared away the blood
I washed her chest and armpits
so that beautiful she could travel to the daffodil pastures
but her braid lay in my hand undecided
between black and white

God keep the clay
and return to us her soul
for as long as the gates of heaven
remain unguarded.

Translated by Peter Constantine

The Doll's House in Arles

Deep in the earth
a severed ear floats on the stream like a plane-leaf;
Sometimes we would whisper in that ear
during public ceremonies, in private moments
sweet words, or severe
now in the earth it can't make out
the footsteps of him who dripped
poison into its labyrinth
nor shudder at the grinding of the knife
on the iron biers of Arles
it remembers only the Spring
when birds nest in the roof
and the dolls stir their stitches a little
stretching their sickly limbs
trying their rusty joints on the boards.

In the heat the black Symplegades open
only the cicada passes
on a palm-breadth of light
to sing monotonously
for those who wake with their thoughts on death
but lightly put it off till tomorrow
secretly hoping
all might begin again from nothing
just as every March
a new world turns green
and fondly the worms can remember
corpses preserved by the Winter's frosts
and rain-washed roots
like horns buried
in that wandering headless body
can take hope
in Van Gogh's yellow darkness.

Translated by Simon Darragh

ANGELOS DELIVORRIAS

Great Sculpture in Fifth-Century Athens

ATOSSA: *Meanwhile, my friends, I would like to learn where Athens is located.*

CHORUS: *Far from here, to the west where the last rays of our Lord the Sun set.*

AESCHYLUS, *The Persians*, 230-232

Needless to say, Athenian history –the history of an incalculable contribution to mankind– does not begin in the fifth century B.C., which was to become known as the Golden Age of Greek antiquity. Nor did Athenian sculpture begin then: it started much earlier, following remarkably closely the progress of social and intellectual evolution, that is to say the gradual transformation of the political system through the ages until finally it crystallized as an unrivalled model for the administration of public affairs. Ever since then, this has been the yardstick by which all constitutional systems in the world have been judged.

The end of the Late Archaic period

Overture: Adagio con spirito, sostenuto. In monumental sculpture, as in every other manifestation of the need for self-expression, the artist's struggle to externalise his feelings is vitalized chiefly by an absolutely conscious tendency to free the dynamic of art from the shackles of materiality. This is a fundamentally important attribute of artistic creation which, while guaranteeing durability and the immutability of values, remains indifferent to the challenges of spatial relationships and the attraction exerted by untrodden paths beckoning him towards new forms – or rather the attraction exerted by the flight from the apparently real to the really apparent. In the Archaic period, during the sixth century B.C., materiality as a value and immobility as a virtue quickly reached the limits of their revelatory powers, juxtaposing creativity with visual charm, in other words with that which is cheerful and pleasing, with a view of the beauty of things that is admittedly optimistic and positive but nonetheless purely external. However, the wonders of the world, a world in motion, naturally provoked reactions of a different kind and raised questions of a different order with ever-increasing frequency.

Knowing that man had been posited as the measure of all things, artists soon yielded uninhibitedly to the mystical enchantment of an

exploratory frame of mind that leads almost inevitably from the fascinating charm of form to the consuming excitement of its content, from its visible outer trappings of its hidden inner kernel, from the mythical dimension of its value judgments to its deeper existential meaning. In this way they discovered in movement the fundamental activating force of life, and in the anthropocentric approach to all things they discovered not only the relative contributions of individual responsibility to the conception and rendering of the world but also the potentialities of personal participation in its formulation and interpretation. In this mobile universe, respect for the pictorial elements of form and an obligation to penetrate and understand its inner meaning are kindled by the mechanisms of an unprecedented kinetic vitality, and they quickly move on from observation and admiration, optimistic acceptance and abstract generalization to active searching for its root causes. That quest in turn leads on to a dynamic remoulding of the ingredients of reality through the transference of personal characteristics on to the harmonic frequencies of a process of idealization, which, however, never transgresses the strict boundary separating the natural law from the sin of hubris. And this is a hallmark of the subsequent evolution of ancient Greek art.

I have no idea whether a foreigner arriving in Athens in the fifth century B.C. would have been able to realize what had gone before; whether the images of the works of art he encountered on his peregrinations would automatically have made him think of the epic struggle for self-expression, which had followed the same path in other, unexplored fields of artistic and intellectual creativity; whether he would have been able to discern the common factors that had led to the revelation of history (for example, through the realization that the responsibility for man's fate lies with man himself just as much as with God) or the birth of the theatre (where this realization is made the object of a shatteringly critical self-examination) or to the search for true knowledge through philosophy (where thought is elevated from the fundamental questions suggested by the horizons of the natural environment to the mysterious realm of human behaviour). Times had changed, of course, and democratic government had become firmly entrenched after the famous victories of Marathon (490), Salamis (480) and Plataiai (479). Following the repulse of the Persian invaders, some of the destroyed monuments of the Archaic period were used as building material for the city wall that was to protect Athens from similar harrowing experiences in the future, while others were buried devoutly under the soil of the Acropolis, where the foundations of fifth-century art were laid, as a lasting reminder of the universal significance of the conflict between the Athenians and the

despotism of the East. Remembrance of the past was kept alive not by the fetishistic conservation of ruins but by a culture that strengthened character through the precepts of self-knowledge, thanks to the power of suggestion and the fact that the lessons of history were taught more tellingly through the example of mythology. From then on –and this was a characteristic of the whole gamut of Greek art throughout its dialectical continuity– exploratory trends in art were never inhibited by regret over opportunities lost in the past: on the contrary, they were encouraged by the promise held out by the present for future success in striving for an unchanging ideal.

The Severe Style

March: Allegro marciale con anima. A lively sense of history, especially as regards the correlation of history with the preservation of memory, can be discerned in every branch of the arts, in the shape of large-scale projects commissioned by the state as soon as life in Athens had started returning to normal. The famous bronze monument to the Tyrannicides (Harmodios and Aristogeiton) represents the city's first honorific commemoration of its historic past, shortly before the production of Aeschylus's *The Persians* at the Theatre of Dionysos in 472 B.C. This sculptural group by Kritios and Nesiotes was put up in the Agora in 477/6 to replace the Archaic version of the same theme, which had been carried off by the Persians and would never have been restored to its original home without the help of Alexander the Great nearly two centuries later. The fame of this work and good likenesses of it have been preserved by numerous Roman copies in marble, which testify to the stylistic magnificence of the original and the Romans' skill in reproducing old masterpieces to meet the ever-increasing needs of the imperial period. The vivid depiction of the tyrannicides' indomitable boldness and self-assurance and the almost naturalistic ripple of their muscles, breathing life and movement into their bodies, are still worlds away from the more advanced anatomical knowledge of Archaic sculpture. The relationship of the two figures in the original work and the question of which was the front side have been the subject of interminable debate, but the message for today's viewer is one of valour, conveyed by the glorious deployment of the axial lines, which pierce –or rather which seem to be break through– the obstacles to communication and the optical barriers of conventional pictorial space.

The trend towards greater realism in sculpture as a mark of respect to the natural environment is equally apparent in other works of the early fifth century B.C., the period of what art historians call the Severe

Style (490-460 B.C.). Many sculptures of that time are remarkable for their bold freedom of movement, the ruggedness of their facial features and a certain despondency of expression. All those characteristics are typical of a great Boeotian sculptor working in Athens, Myron of Eleutherai, whose best-known work (made famous by Roman copies) is the bronze group of Athena and Marsyas set up on the Acropolis circa 450 B.C. Here the compositional relationship between the two figures possesses a unity derived from a state of mind that can now be called Classical, for it has outgrown the explosive extroversion of the Severe Style and keeps the autonomy of the figures within the bounds of a closed, unified world teeming with nuances of meaning. Myron is also credited with a number of other works that are either lost or dubiously attributed to him, including a statue of Erechtheus and one of Perseus holding Medusa's head, both on the Acropolis, and two more groups depicting Theseus in combat with the Minotaur and the bull of Marathon. Throughout the fifth century the exploits of Theseus, the Athenian hero par excellence, continued to provide inspiration not only for artists but also for official Athenian propaganda, as symbolizing the union of the Attic demes and the birth of democracy in Athens. The cycle of his youthful exploits, the coupling of his name with that of Herakles in the story of the Amazonomachy at Themiskyra and his two great personal triumphs in the Centauromachy and the Athens Amazonomachy, all of which served to remind the Athenians of their superiority in struggles against uncivilized enemies, were retold again and again in the great public works projects of the Athenian state.

The female figures of the Severe Style are characterized by a heavier structure, greater emphasis on the weight of the garments and noticeably more restraint of movement. These basic specifications were retained until about the middle of the fifth century and are still apparent in the 'Cherchel Demeter', a statue type that appears to have no stylistic antecedents, where the gravity of the godhead is accentuated by the heaviness of the simple peplos with its few relieving folds. In the 'Mocenigo Demeter', another unclassifiable type, the graceful drapery of the chiton has already begun to express the dictates of a different kind of harmony. The chiton, pleasingly combined with the tonal variations of the folds of the peplos round the body, epitomizes the aesthetic taste that was to prevail during the thirty years of the High Classical period in such works as the 'Albani Kore'.

The sculptural potentialities of the peplos and of the chiton and himation are exploited together in one of the most impressive and original works of the next thirty years: the large relief of Demeter, Kore

(Persephone) and Triptolemos from Eleusis, probably intended for ritual purposes and obviously carved by a very fine sculptor, whose high reputation is evidenced by the number of Roman copies of his work. Other sanctuaries in Attica, too, with their splendid new temples erected on the ruins left by the Persian invaders, were adorned with an astonishing number of magnificent sculptures; and the same is even more true of the temples, sanctuaries and public places in Athens, especially the Agora, where work had already started on the sculptural ornamentation of the Temple of Hephaistos and Athena, the best-preserved Classical building in Greece. It is absolutely out of the question that the production of major sculptures in such extravagantly large numbers could have been the work of Athenian artists alone, and in any case the demand created by the acceleration of building programmes is known to have attracted a lot of experienced sculptors from other Greek cities, each working in his own aesthetic tradition. The assimilation of these different artistic approaches, with Attic workshops exerting a dominant influence and with the genius of Pheidias putting its imprint on everything, was what gave Athenian sculpture of the time of Perikles (461-429 B.C.) its special character.

The High Classical period

Song of Praise: Allegro maestoso, vivace. Few of the attributed sculptures of the thirty-year High Classical period are mentioned in the written sources, and even fewer have survived the ravages of time. However, the existence of Roman copies that capture their essential qualities gives us a good idea of what many of them looked like and has enabled scholars to decipher the spiritual message conveyed by their mode of expression, using the Parthenon sculptures as a yardstick. For at no other time was the greatness of inspiration so faithfully served by inspired carving of the marble as it was in the sculptural ornamentation of the temple erected on the Acropolis as a tribute to the city's patron goddess and her system of government: of that there should be no doubt. Never before or since have historical facts been epitomized with such shattering eloquence in stories from mythology; never before or since has there been such an exciting correlation between the level of self-knowledge and the level of expressive skill, between religious feeling and social need, between individual liberty and personal commitment, between the experience of the past and the expectations of the present, between political propaganda and the ideology of a state.

In the various parts of the Parthenon's ornamentation art historians have discerned the hands of a whole host of different artists, 'poets

working with chisel and stone', each making his own contribution to the realization of Perikles's vision and the overall design co-ordinated by Pheidias. Plutarch expressly informs us that 'everything was managed and superintended by Pheidias', and his reliability is not in question here. That explains the fact that it is not just a matter of superb technical skill: the inner unity of the overall design is apparent in every part of the decorative scheme –even in fragments of marble fragments– and in the majestic inspiration of the guiding hand that lifts every craftsman to the peak of his potential in a chorus that is polyphonic in structure and symphonic in its organization, a chorus in whose composition the human dimension is fused with the divine.

In the unification of the architectural design, the ornaments and the figural sculptures an important part was played by the metopes, carved in bold relief, which ran round the outside of the building on all four sides, subduing the upward thrust of the colonnades and reinforcing their stability. The metopes at the east end, over the entrance to the temple, were badly mutilated in the Early Christian period, but traces remained of the outlines of the figures and an analysis of the subject was published by Camillo Praschniker: almost certainly, these metopes depicted Athena and other gods and goddesses in scenes from the Gigantomachy. Also badly damaged are the metopes at the west end, which depicted the Athenian Amazonomachy with Theseus playing a prominent part in the defence of his homeland. Responsibility for the almost complete destruction of the north metopes with the exception of the 32nd, which remained intact in situ, has to be shared between the religious fury of the early Christians and the bombardment of the Parthenon by Morosini's Venetian army in 1687. Yet even here archaeologists have managed to identify the subjects of some of the panels depicting the dramatic events of the siege of Troy, giving prominence to the feats of the Athenians and especially the participation of Theseus's two sons, who were shown rescuing their grandmother Aithra from captivity. The metopes of the south side showing the Centauromachy, unlike those on the other three sides, are in very good condition, especially since the marvellous restoration of the central section from a large number of fragments identified and pieced together by Alexandros Mantis. Apropos of the brutish assault on the bride and guests at Peirithoos's wedding, Theseus is once again held up as an example of the values cherished through the ages by the Athenian political leadership. Much has been written about the symbolic implications of these mythological stories and their connection with Athenian ideology of the Classical period: the main point here, of course, is that the conflict between the power of reason and mindless violence is to be understood as

analogous to the conflict between law and order and lawless abuse, between the Greeks and the barbarians, between the Athenians and all their enemies.

An Athenian citizen would no doubt have been filled with a similar sense of pride in his country and its political system on looking at the more conspicuous sculptural groups in the pediments of the Parthenon, the birth of Athena at the east and the contest between Athena and Poseidon for the patronage of Attica at the west. Running through these highly significant compositions is a more profound train of thought and a dialectical analogy in which the patron goddess, seen as the personification of her blessed city, is the linchpin connecting a whole series of contrasting pairs of oblique allusions: in the east pediment, the peak of Mt. Olympos with the entire Hellenic pantheon welcoming the newborn goddess; in the west pediment, the flat summit of the Acropolis with the mythical founders of Athens passing judgment on the gifts offered by the competing deities. In the former, and event of the utmost theological significance projects its apocalyptic grandeur on to celestial, or rather cosmic, co-ordinates, with the rising of Helios (the sun) at one end and the setting of Selene (the moon) at the other. In the latter, the terrestrial component of the divine nature is taken as a function of human need, with the cosmic dimension of the subject limited to the confines of Athenian territory. Here the personifications of the River Kephisos, the River Ilissos and the Kallirrhoe Spring mark the outermost limits of a marvellous work of narrative sculpture which, while vindicating the Athenians' choice of the gifts offered by Athena, shows a decent generosity of spirit by giving equal honour to Poseidon – and quite properly so, in view of the Athenians' growing interest in the sea.

The Parthenon sculptures, or those of them that have escaped the fate of most Greek antiquities, breathe the rarefied air of an expressive range too vast to be compared with present-day values, conveying a feeling of immense freedom that knows and respects its limits; a freedom that extends its embrace in equal measure to inspiration and to execution, that goes far beyond the parameters of time and space, a freedom for which no match is to be found in the earlier or later history of sculpture. That is why they have so far withstood all attempts by art historians to explain the meaning of their forms and the significance of their subject matter. The great Greek archaeologist Christos Karouzos put his finger on the truth when he declared, in a similar context, that the dialectical miracle of the High Classical period can only be expressed in feeble oxymorons: during those thirty years in particular, he said, 'Tranquillity is a form of terrible spiritual and mental conflict, universality a form of superabundant individuality, ideality an

expression of the most familiar reality'. His pithy and perceptive words come closer to the gist of the matter than anything that has been said on the subject before or since.

The only other point I should like to make about the Parthenon sculptures in particular concerns their musical tonality, that is to say their underlying rhythmic structure and their melodic values. To me it seems really remarkable that their essential quality is still expressed in musical metaphors, in spite of the gaps left by mutilation at the hands of the early Christians, destruction or damage caused by the bombardment of 1687 and systematic looting in 1800-1803, with the result that what remain of the Parthenon's sculptures are scattered in countless museums and private collections in Greece and abroad. So I would speak of a crescendo that starts at the east end –the heavenly, divine end– and grows in volume at the west. For the west end –the earthly, human end– was the first subject of the sculptural counterpoint to be seen by the pilgrim as he emerged from the Propylaia to be confronted by one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

SOTIRIS DIMITRIOU

From:

The Vein in the Neck

She had kept some of his shirts and a jacket or two. At night, she would put her arms around one of them and would surrender to a delirium of tenderness. Should she forget everything, she could never forget the sweetness in her mouth. She had never said this to anyone and had never heard anyone say it. When he touched her, and held her, her mouth would fill with a sweetness that rose from deep inside her. When the sweetness flowed, it was unbearable and she would swallow it again and again to send it back where it came from. She would choke, she would lose the world around her. His clothes offered her only faded traces of that sweetness. In moments like this she intensely, totally, felt his absence. In her anguish, the only words she could utter, the only words that could remotely express her feelings for him were: 'Oh, God!' 'Oh, God! God! God!' She was silent and shielded herself when in the company of people. It was only when she heard of some other man who had cancer - and she often heard such news, being a widow - she was still hopeful, he might live, she couldn't help saying. 'Let's wait and see, we don't know yet...' [...]

KIKI DIMOULA

No-Star Brandy

The words of tears get completely lost.
When disorder speaks order should be silent
-loss has great experience.
Now we ought to stand by
the pointless.
That slowly memory might again find its speech
give fine advice for a long life
to whatever's dead.

Let's stand by this small
photograph
that's still in the bloom of its future:
young a little pointlessly locked in embrace
facing an anonymously
cheery seashore.
Nafplio Evia Skopelos?*

You'll say
and where wasn't there sea then.

* Nafplio is an historic town in the Argolid. It became the first capital of Greece in 1929. Evia (Euboea) is the second largest island after Crete. Skopelos is an island in the Northern Sporades.

As If You'd Chosen

It's Friday today I 'm going to the market
to take a walk in the decapitated gardens
to see the oregano's fragrance
a slave in bundles.
I go in the afternoon when demands' prices have fallen
you find the green easy
on beans marrows mallows and lilies.
It's there I hear how boldly the trees express themselves
in the fruit's sharp tongue
heaps of orators the oranges and apples
and a slight recovery starts to grow rosy

in the sallow cheeks
of a muteness within.

I rarely buy. For there it's choose for yourself.
Is that an advantage or problem? You choose and then
how do you bear the unbearable burden
of your choice.
Whereas that by chance is so feather-bed soft. At first.
For afterwards you stagger beneath the consequences.
These too being unbearable. In fact it's as if you'd chosen.

If anything I'll buy a little soil. Not for flowers.
For getting accustomed.
There it's not choose for yourself. There the eyes are closed.

Re-Ruination II

And
I'm even afraid of my hands'
touch on these stones
lest it accentuate the decay, accelerate
the ruins' ruination.

ATHOS DIMOULAS

When was it you brought me here
to show me round the oracles?
So I might inquire of the sibyl Memory.
The other one beside, the high priestess Lethe,
has crowds of people is up to the neck in work
swallows unchewed the fummy leaves*
of everything forgettable.

It's been raining since yesterday.
Whatever I see from the restaurant window
wants to disappear. It's a job to keep the columns
of Athena Pronaia** opposite from falling
-I must be careful when I copy out this view
not to get carried away by the consonance
and write Pronea. They'll say I'm showing
a mirror round the ruins.

It's raining. Large groups of noises
take refuge in the restaurant.
Locals, history's lovers, couples
in love - students of their own futures
touring pensioners,
renovators of ennui families
societies chairmen bouquets of speakers.

Foreign languages flow in cups of our own
the rain fences with the cutlery
portions of conversations are devoured, bottles
of wine stretch their necks to recount
anecdotes jokes laughter break out.
Waiters the impressions bound enraptured
from table to table
vociferous desserts are ordered by camaraderie.

While I'm respectful; I eat in a low voice
in the company of my one Apollonian cover.

* Reference to the fact that the priestess at Delphi, the Pythia, chewed laurel leaves and inhaled the fumes rising from a fissure in the ground to induce a state of prophetic trance.

** Pronaia: literally 'in front of the temple', as this temple to the goddess Athena is situated below the great temple to Apollo. Dimoula makes a pun on the sound of the word, which could also -erroneously- be written pronea, meaning 'formerly young'.

Translated by David Connolly

PHILIP D. DRACOD Aidis

From:

The Message

'... On the occasion of the taking of the Winter Palace and the victorious progress of the long years of struggle endured by the Russian people You personally and Your Collaborators I congratulate warmly and side wholeheartedly with you, convinced of the progress of the revolution and the prosperity of Your country.

EMILIANO ZAPATA, GENERAL OF THE LIBERATION ARMY OF THE SOUTH ANENECUILCO, PROVINCE OF MORELOS, MEXICO, 28th OCTOBER 1917.'

'We are not at Anenecuilco,' his secretary Manuel Palafox grumbled.

'But that was where my election took place,' the general reminded him.

He signed the letter, folded it, put it in the envelope, and wetting the edges with his saliva he closed it. He had to be informed about events in Russia; the anarcho-syndicalists and the vagrant missionaries of the rebellion and the imminent overthrow of mundane affairs had written and proclaimed so much that he had only retained in his memory the barest minimum, which is not far from the truth. He had no special faith in the trumpeting of the press.

'We have added no number to the register,' remarked the secretary.

'Call me some volunteers,' Emiliano Zapata ordered.

A soldier opened the door of the general's office.

'So you are the first?' asked Emiliano Zapata.

'I have the honour to report that I am the first volunteer, sir.'

'Who is the second?'

'I have the honour to report that there is no second volunteer, sir.'

Thus came about the selection of the volunteer who was to take from Emiliano Zapata's hands the paper of unknown contents –the message– in the closed white envelope and set out within the next few hours (at any rate that very day) from southern Mexico, on horseback, to get as fast as possible to the centre of Moscow and hand it over to the great Lenin. There was no need for him to stay for an answer, and he had the right to return at his leisure on condition that he remembered everything that might be transmitted to him, orally and briefly, by the Leader of the Bolsheviks. What matters is what we ourselves do, not what others see fit to let us know. Manuel Palafox would take upon himself to provide the volunteer with supplies of sandwiches and the necessary passport for his transit through friendly regions of the country and through each foreign country. A map was not needed.

From the province of Morelos in Mexico to Moscow is not very far, what it takes to smoke a cigar at most.

'Let him take along several boxes of cigars,' said the general.

'I do not smoke, sir,' said the volunteer.

The Leader of the Bolsheviks would appreciate the message from the general of the Liberation Army of the South: Mexico had stolen a march on Russia, the revolution had begun already in 1911, it would soon be in its seventh year on end, and it would last as many years as necessary, seventy, seven hundred, seven thousand at that, time does not matter, even if traitors try to corrupt it.

The soldier had been told straight from the general's mouth that the envelope must not be lost whatever happened, and that the bearer ought to be careful not to lose his life, for no one would follow on his heels like a relay runner to pick up the message and carry it immediately to the addressee. This certainly did not mean diffidence and giving way or compromise. A bearer leads a natural life like anybody else. And the soldier understood that we hold our lives in order to carry a message from here to there, and with some luck, all the way to Moscow. He did not even know where to find Moscow, nor how to reach its gate. But he thought that all the roads lead to Rome if you ask your way. It would not do to lose one's way and go to St Petersburg. The revolution may have started there, but like all revolutions it hurries to meet its forefathers and have their blessing. Thus it obtains long duration, perhaps even lays claim to eternal life. St Peterburg was the foretaste, Moscow the eternal city.

Neither the general nor the soldier had any idea that, when the revolution had got under way in Mexico, in the very year of 1911, in Egypt, a staff member of the Irrigation Office had composed a poem with the title of Ithaca. In 1912 the poet, Constantine P. Cavafy by name, was about to sign a work contract with the Office. In 1917 he would be given the title of assistant director of the Department of Business Correspondence. He would go on polishing his poems with the perseverance of a revolutionary and a conqueror of power, with the fanaticism of Baruch Spinoza polishing diamonds while walking tirelessly the summits of the philosophical mountain range.

Among these mountain ranges we meet Ithaca, a horizon of unexpected poetry of stunning purity. But the revolution undoubtedly did not interest the poet, nor did the seizure of power stir him. Otherwise his poem would begin something like this:

When you set out on your journey to Moscow...

The continuation could be deleted down to the last line which would, almost biblically, give off the following ring:

You will already have understood the meaning of a Moscow

And perhaps the poem would have been no more than the following couplet:

When you set out on your journey to Moscow,
you will already have understood the meaning of a Moscow.

An almost Delphic oracle which we can interpret today as if we had before us the mountain ranges literally blocking up the horizon.

Anyway, on the 6th of October 1911 a clerk in the insurance company against industrial injuries in the kingdom of Bohemia, Prague, Franz Kafka, wrote the following lines in his diary: 'The look of the stage is very simple while it awaits the actors, silent like us. Seeing that it ought to suffice to cover all events with its three walls, its chair and its table, we do not expect anything from it. On the contrary we wait expectantly for the actors and we are therefore attracted by the songs which make the prelude to the performance.'

The great Lenin did not expect any written message –congratulations or anything else– from the general. Besides it is doubtful if he had any idea, even the vaguest, of his existence, or if he had followed, however superficially, developments in Mexico (adequate testimony to the contrary is missing). Certainly not out of conscious downgrading of the value of the insurrection, but that issue at the other end of the world was a mandatory heritage from unimpeachable wills. A despotic president of the democratic republic had lost power, another individual, a mediocrity with limited mental faculties (Francisco Madero) had followed him, only to be assassinated shortly after and leave his position to a general who was defeated right away by regular and irregular troops from every point of the horizon and who had disappeared to be replaced by the next one (the 'rebel' Venustiano Carranza!), disrespectful of the constitution which had been passed by vote. All this can be worded in a single phrase in a country where you will receive the following answer if you ask when there is the least rainfall, in winter or in summer: 'It depends, sir, there are no fixed rules.'

We are not in England where Karl Marx had foreseen seditious movements, nor in Germany where the great Lenin saw the dictatorship of the proletariat flow into the Rhine – from the Dnieper, the Volga or the Yenisei. In Mexico, especially in the province of

Morelos, the peasants stubbornly reclaimed their land, the areas which the big landowners had trampled under foot and appropriated: the same old song! All things considered it was a question of an uprising like the one of the landless peasantry of the Thessalian plain in Greece under the leadership of Marinos Antipas: local turmoil, disputes and conflicting interests, a time-honoured tradition since the days of Rome and feudalism and right up to our day, which does not expect any radical overthrow of the regime but cries out for the refutation of some sort of lawlessness and proclaim the return to the former state of things, to the idyllic days of time immemorial when the land belonged to those who cultivated it. This truth will not drive anybody to cry: I want all the power. It will always remain an issue of negotiation until it is gradually frayed, corrupted and forgotten. It will linger on in history.

The Bolshevik revolution will give the land to the Russian people at once and will not worry any further about that issue. For it is not about the return to history but the making of history. Let us consider the difference: history has been, for thousands of years, a long succession of stages, life-belts left by those that went before for those that followed, even if many maintained that with repetition and imitation the tragic succession of events changed into a comedy in bad taste. In this flow there was always the surprise of unexpected acts which fed new imitators. Karl Marx understood that hoax and pronounced the following words which we are called upon to fathom: we make history. What does that mean, comrades? It means that history has certain laws, which when brought to light by means of the sciences of economy, anthropology, statistics, sociology, i.e. the sciences of man, prove that there is an objective succession of events. Anyone who discovers and develops this succession, even if he forms a tiny minority, will be in a position to produce history like a machine producing goods by following a certain process which is calculated and unswerving. Thus the events will have a genesis and presence which will brook no objections, which will be necessary. One step further is sufficient to argue that whosoever becomes implicated in such necessity will be nothing but a cogwheel in the process, another product in the great endless and controlled process of the world. Is there anything or anyone that can restrain such faith? Undoubtedly someone who knows the historical necessity and consequently the only one who has a right to claim: All the power to the Soviets. Who will dare ask him for a share? After so many years let us not yet be so hasty as to maintain that the invocation to the Soviets was a hoax. Each process undergoes changes, and anyone who defines it inserts and extracts cogs, because it is a question of means not of ends.

There's the future for you! There's the new lily-white page in the book of mankind: a new journey.

As for Emiliano Zapata only the foregoing pages have been left, where one can write between the lines and in the few empty spaces, blacking out what was written by the predecessors, borrowing their words, patching together the present so that it will match the unbroken thread of the past. How far back is it possible to make knots? Right back to Julio Lopez? To the monk José Mariano Ruyloba? Julio Lopez was an Indian from the region of Chalco in Mexico. As leader of the members of his race he had sworn that he would fight against the rich and had proclaimed rebellion to secure the return of the stolen lands to the rightful owners. He was shot in 1868 on the grounds that he was 'a rebel, a bandit and a fanatical socialist.' José Mariano Ruyloba, the monk who was endowed with the gift of eloquence was, for his part, preparing to sing the praises on the occasion of the reception of Simon Bolívar, the liberator in 1825 at La Paz in what is now Bolivia. Fate, however, willed it that Ruyloba departed this life before Bolívar heard his speech, and many were those who deplored that such an opportunity to celebrate a rhetorical feast came to nothing. No one ever learnt that the monk's speech had been written in classical Greek on the pattern of Demosthenes and Isocrates, but also the harangues of Thucydides. [...]

MARIA EFSTATHIADI

From:

Gloves With Hands

We walked on and on. He did not cross the bridge. Once again, near the water, old deserted houses, their doors rotted out, demented people with shifty eyes walking aimlessly about as if in a vacuum, people panic-stricken by their collapse. Uprooted tribes, strange languages, different kinds of communities, unfamiliar places of worship. A city eternally suspended between ever-changing worlds and boundaries, unable to accept its own reality. Late, in the evening, he reached his house. Spots. Blue spots. The hours lay in waiting, between the rooftops, eager to steal a bit of turquoise. He unlocked the door, undecided, as though he didn't really want to go in. Around the piano, music sheets strewn all over the floor, bits of paper with notes scribbled on them – the space overflowing with his desire to translate the entire range of the human voice into music. Voices must be heard as voices: sounds rather than words. They must speak to the listener not about what they say but about what they are: noises, tonalities, colour. What they have to say is not important. All these years, no one but himself had ever crossed the threshold of his hideout - not even his landlady, even though she had often offered to care for him. He had become a collector of unusual objects, always trying to discover in the oddest ones the answer to a wisdom that was enigmatic, the key to the mystical harmony of the universe. He always searched for it in all that was bizarre. He hoped, this way, to uncover God's unknown, mysterious handwriting (watch out: the mystery is not about the hero and the story; it is always about the teller of the story) He lay down on the cot, just as he was, dressed in his white suit, and his black and white shoes, loosening only his necktie. Covering himself with an olive-green tunic, he lit a cigarette and rested his eyes a while. As his fingers relaxed, the cigarette kept falling from his hand, once, twice. He would wake up alarmed, take a drag, then he would fall back into a stupor. The last time this happened, he took no notice. The cigarette tumbled away, but its journey was interrupted by a bunch of papers. The still burning cinder lit up, hesitantly at first, the edge of the last newspaper in the pile. Little by little, in the dusk, the objects all around began to glow. Something akin to mist shone on the walls, then the mist turned into drops. Water fell from the ceiling. Something yellowish and slippery oozed out of small holes here and there. He tried to stop the

holes with his fingers, his hands ran from one to the next. But he was at the mercy of something which was nothing. On one wall, dark green leaked out of the paint, immense spots that spread out, changing shapes all along. There was also something else in the room (what was it? it slipped from the cot and disappeared into the crack of the door; something light in hue, thin, with long long legs) Suddenly the door was kicked open...

In the evenings, before going down to his basement, he got into the habit of keeping her company. From the darkened depths of the hall, he would bring over the small guard's chair he'd sit next to her, and he would talk to her endlessly. Sometimes he sang to her pieces of his work. Then, he would turn off the light, and returning the chair to its place, he would let her sleep. Often, in the morning, he covered the glass case with a thin dark cloth to protect her from the indiscreet gazes of the few curious visitors. One day, after quite a long time, he tries to remove the glass case with by unscrewing the four screws that attached it to its metal base. When he realised he could do it, terror overtook him, and he retreated in distress. Walking backwards he ran to the long narrow window and glued his face onto the clouded glass – it, too, screwed tightly in place. His gaze wandered out into the night horizon, searching for the lit-up curve of the bridge. He stayed there for a long time. Suddenly he turned and stared at her. He made his way back to the case, lifted the heavy glass in his arms and placed it on the floor. Leaning forward, he placed his lips on her forehead. His hand caressed her cheek tenderly. Ever so hesitantly, he brushed her two vocal chords with the tips of his fingers. Afterwards, he replaced the glass, bade her goodnight and retreated to his basement. From that time on, each day, he repeated the same movements, then went down and stayed up all night writing music. He was done with the piece quickly. Didn't even need to do much editing. He copied it onto a grey notebook he had bought during one of his few outings. Now, in the evening, with the glass case open, he read it to her aloud, gesturing and laughing like a child. When he was done, he went through the same motions of placing his fingertips on her gaping neck but this time he didn't stop. His hand descended slowly, caressing her breasts, then slid past her smooth belly to her legs, her toes; afterwards, he brought it up again and for a long time he sat touching her mount. At one point, abruptly, he embraced her body with both arms, and buried his head between her half-opened thighs. He remained thus for a long time. Suddenly coming to his senses, he tripped down the stairs and found himself on the street. Fireworks blinded him. Forgetting to shut the door behind him, holding on tightly to his notebook, he sleepwalked toward the bridge, forging his way through the crowd that spun around

him – a crowd whose visage was multiple, yet unique. It was carnival time.

Translated by Haroula Dontopoulos

From:

Almost... A Melodrama

It seems that during all the days before she left, A. had been in despair, now that we had found out about everything we could understand why she, always so eager to travel, was now trying to find a tactful way of postponing the trip, without any success though, these trips come with the job, you don't get to decide when, that's the bad thing, she went away mirthlessly, that's what Vasso told us, A. felt tortured by that childhood memory, she couldn't get it out of her head, Vasso told us about it in a few words, A. had been very young, barely four if a day, and her brother was six years old, Ayi was his given name, a very rare name, the house they were living in was large, not like one of those colonial mansions we see in films of course, A. had told her, but it was spacious with lots of rooms, a rich house, her father had inherited it from a well-off, childless uncle, he was the one who had invited her father to that country, when he had grown very old, to give him a job, he was in the salted fish trade, and her father carried that same line of business until the day they left the country, he moved there with his Russian wife, he had met her here and they had fallen in love, she was a teacher of French, she never worked again after they moved there, Vasso never gave us any details as to how A.'s mother had got here, perhaps she didn't know herself, one day we'd ask A. to tell us all about it, it must have been quite a romantic story.

A. and her brother would often play with that little black boy, Vasso told us, he was their age, a grandchild of their nounou, that's what they called the woman who was in charge of the house, so to speak, something like a housekeeper, she also co-ordinated the other two or three servants, nounou used to bake amazing cakes, she had belonged to the house for a long time, long before A.'s parents moved there, so they had kept her, A.'s mother said that she didn't know how she would manage without her, the children simply adored her, her son worked too for A.'s father's firm, he was one of the most trusted employees, the little black boy would spend every day with them, most times he slept there with his nana and in the morning they'd all go out

and play, A. didn't go to school yet, she and the black boy were together all day long, that sometimes made things difficult, when other white children came over to play with A., their parents weren't too keen on having their children rub shoulders with that black kid, that's how they get uppity, they would say, one day they'll revolt and drive us out of our homes, some of them have already started secretly organising themselves in neighbouring countries, things there were rather bad for the white folk, so we had better keep all the blackies at a distance, even their children, so that they don't forget their proper place, even though nounou was ever so faithful to A.'s parents, you never know what kind of snakes you are nurturing at your bosom, they didn't want their children to have much to do with the black kids, not that it mattered so much if they had some contact every now and then, after all we are all human, still better keep them at a distance, A.'s parents however were somewhat different, although it wasn't so obvious, they were careful in how they related with the other white people because they did live in that community, nounou was perfectly aware of this too, so when other children came over, she usually found some pretext to call her grandson away, because a lot of the children were like their parents, they taunted him and abused him, A. never said anything, she was afraid she would lose them, one of their favourite games was to draw the black boy to the far side of the garden behind the tool shed, pull his trousers down and wring his willy, how you wring a chicken's neck to kill it, that's how, and he would scream with pain, but they shut his mouth and threatened him that if he said anything to anyone they would kill him, so he never said a word about it, he always followed them, even though he was afraid, he didn't dare not go, besides it didn't happen all the time, only when there were no grown-ups around, A. would not participate, but she would sit there and watch nonetheless, she didn't do anything to stop the other children, and when they left, she would take the black boy in her arms and they would cry together, but she never said anything to her parents either, then the kids came up with a different torture, they would prick his willy with pins and laugh, just like they pinned insects, the black boy died of an infection, nobody realised until it was too late, he was all swollen, full of pus, they could do nothing to save him, he never said anything, nobody could understand how it had happened, not even their own practical medicines managed to help him, nor the doctor A.'s mother brought, the black boy died without A. ever saying what she knew, she stopped playing with the other children, she only wanted to be with her brother, apparently her parents thought her melancholy was due to her young friend's death, how could they ever imagine it was because of remorse, this went on for about a year, until she

started school, and then, quite miraculously, it was all forgotten, as if nothing had ever happened, and suddenly, A. had told Vasso, just when I was lying in bed under the sheets, in utter despair, confused about what was true and what was false, it all came back to me, so vividly, every single image, as if it happened only yesterday, and since that moment, whenever I lay down to sleep it comes back to me, it is as if it springs out of the wall across, faces, the garden shed, the children, nounou's arms, my brother and I, the black boy, sometimes joyful, sometimes terrified, sometimes with an imperceptibly mocking smile, the cakes on the table, my mother dressed in her Sunday best, ready to go out with my father, forgotten details, a door handle, a shiny black Mary-Jane shoe, a wheel and a piece of the car fender we owned at the time, a snake on the veranda, my excitement at waiting for the phone to ring and it never ringing, is it all the same or are they different faces, I had never seen A. like that before, Vasso told us.

A. returned from Malta, it was difficult during the first few days at the office, us knowing and she not knowing that we knew, she tried to bury herself in work, didn't talk much, she looked kind of low, Vasso still hadn't told her that she had spoken to us, she was trying to find a way to say it, it wasn't easy to tell someone that you have narrated her life, in so much detail at that, after all it wasn't just any ordinary story, we watched her, we liked her better now, you do get to like someone more when you know they are in a rut, you feel for them, we felt she was like a daughter so to speak, particularly after we found out about that incident with the black boy, the things people you meet have been through and you never have an inkling, we want to believe that everyone we see is normal, but one's childhood is a whole other story, it is so true what they say, that it affects your entire life.

Translated by Leo Kalovyrnas

GIANNIS EFSTATHIADIS

From:

Black & White

Dear old Alexandra
so many weeks
months
years
have gone by since
yet I can't get out of my mind
that phsss
of the gas stove

funny
there are so many things
to remember you by
your words of wisdom
your precepts
your advice
yet a gas stove
and a phsss
bring you closer
to me

NENI EFTHIMIADI

From:

The Adventurers

At the Cleaner's I was meticulous with the stains. I checked them over insistently, then gave orders for the use of the right chemical so that they would disappear and the fabric would not lose in quality and colour.

I observed Roulis as if he was a huge stain and tried to discover his components. I detected nothing special and, had he not threatened us with death, I would maybe become his friend for the evening in some beer cellar, because he had traits I liked, clarity in speech, politeness in silence, stability in movement. And he looked sympathetic. Controlled glance, normal weight, and a face with contained wrinkles. I guessed, from the neutral conversations we held in the living room, that neither his education nor his reason was contemptible.

Unfortunately Roulis was the stain, but the cloth was missing – I did not know his environment, the place he lived and moved in, the profession he exercised, his family, if any naturally, his wanderings, or his profound preferences. So, I could not take measures against him, because making disappear a stain depended on the composition of the fabric and its colour. [...]

As soon as the policeman left I had an idea. And while Aris stood at the glass doors swaying strangely, as if he suffering from sudden fits of dizziness, I remembered that the night of the disaster, the moment Dino pounced upon him and he bent to the right, something slipped from his pocket and he caught it in the air. I managed to see what it was. A mobile phone, what Thomas challenged me to get. I did not pay then any attention; Dino's blood mixed with broken glass came first, survival as well, because the Stain had appeared on top of the stairs.

Now, in the benign living room of pretexts I had to dare, because I would not speak German but Greek and I definitely lacked elemental protection using a landline phone. I approached Aris and said straightforwardly:

'I saw you have a mobile.'

'My mistake', he answered. 'It ruined my life.'

I didn't grasp his meaning, but he was not the stain to be analysed. Another came first.

'Can I borrow it for a few hours?' I asked him. 'I will pay the double of what I'll spend.'

He took it out of his pocket, he slipped it into mine and said:
'Keep it until the end of our great vacation. But put the marks where you know!'

Thus I became self-dependent, but could not make sudden moves, because as I was watching the Stain, the Stain watched me too. I found the opportunity when the cook brought the fruit in for lunch. I served myself a glass of beer, went to the office next door and sat in an armchair in a way that my back remained visible, but not my hand movements. At length I leafed through the telephone directory making notes.

I behaved like a capitalist drug addict, I called up the private eye with the most spectacular add, although I agree with Inge, size never means quality, it remains size and as such imposes. After the operator and the private secretary, I got to the person himself. I told him I wanted information about the life of a man, because things were easier if I knew the origin of a stain, I reacted differently when the client indicated that he'd spilled desert of his coat the night before and differently when ignorant, without a CV and dates. Was it easy?

'A piece of cake' he answered.

Promptness was a must. I needed the information in a day, maximum two – time is our life.

He bragged that his office was the fastest in Europe and asked:

'Give me a name and address or car plates. And the data of your credit card.'

I started with the easy ones. I had my credit card in my pocket; I spelled it out, waited for him to make sure there was credit in my account. He came back to the phone excited and I found the courage to confess:

'I don't know the address. And he didn't come by car, he brought a boat I cannot describe.'

A heavy silence on the other side of the line was broken with delay:

'It's OK, the first and last name will do.'

The mobile phone almost fell off my hands. I may have heard his first and last name then, at the old robbery, but I did not remember, and what did we call him now? 'Boss' or 'Snake' or 'Worm'.

'His first name maybe Roulis and his age about fifty five' I said softly.

He laughed:

'And you want me to look for the whereabouts of a certain fifty five year old Roulis in the whole state?'

That's what I wanted, the situation was complex, otherwise I would not ask for info.

'Does he threaten to kill you?' he asked seriously.

I didn't say yes or no and the truth is I did not know what Roulis wanted of us.

'Do you have any picture?' he insisted.

I was desperate. I didn't have the Polaroid with me, the one that perpetuated Inge's sweet moments, but even if I had it, would the enemy let me use it?

'Can you describe him?' he continued irrepressible, and I deserted.

I said he was one meter seventy five or eighty five, maybe ninety three, could not calculate accurately, most of the time he was sitting, but his weight was normal, although I could not rule out traces of fat around the waist, because he covered it permanently with a newspaper. But his speech was lucid, his manners polite and I could be befriend him for a night at a beer cellar.

'What is the colour of his eyes?' he said suddenly.

In his tone I felt he was not asking about Roulis anymore, but rather questioning my state of mind.

'Brown' I said confidently, but in seconds changed to black, then blue, until I ended at a shade of doubtful gold, the one that changes with the hues of light and darkens at night.

'Is this some kind of practical joke?' he asked stiffly. 'Is it possible that this man does not exist?'

I reassured him he existed, he was in the living room, but I could not observe him like Rot's stains, with him I lost my powers.

He didn't say any more. He waited for me to hang up.

I apologized humbly, promised to get back to him with more data and pushed the off button. Just before I caught a sarcastic laugh that will haunt me to the end of my days, the way Thomas is tortured with the expression of a lady client who bought a sour cake.

I remained awkward, mobile phone in hand, and the stain theory that I had to refute.

Translated by Klety Sotiriadou

LILY EXARCHOPOULOU

From:

Nicknames

I

It was unexpected, especially coming from Her. To degrade him, to put him down so much. Because no matter how one looks at it, it was plain degradation. To speak in front of his wife and to reveal things from his past. And in the final analysis, what past? He had rejected the past, hadn't he? The past and all its consequences. It was a conscious decision. As soon as he would hear a remark like 'when we were students' he would sweat, shiver internally, break out in pimples. People brag about their past because they have nothing to say about their present, he contended.

He had met Jenny in a colleague's office. He was glad to meet her, really glad. A unique inspiration had entered his life. Without resistance, subterfuge or misery. Jenny was who she was. As she is today. A woman with a past which she kept to herself. A solid woman. Yes, this was the word he was trying to find when he first met her and would source himself from his old habit of giving nick-names to people: Stelios the Okey-dokey, Mary the Kink, Mitsos the Easy-peasy, Loukia the Militant. He would give nicknames unconsciously, they would leap out from a niche inside him and he could not prevent them, restrain them; the nicknames and the name giving. There was a catch though; the rest of the gang had not managed to give him a nickname. Dinos the Whiner had attempted: 'Wordmaker', and Dinos the Murky: 'Intellectual'. But of course they did not fit him. Now he saw it: the fact that they had not been established was indicative; they were too profound and did not really suit the character – his character.

Jenny did not have a nickname. When he met her, this era had long passed. The nickname era that is. He had reconciled himself with his weaknesses and wanted a clear break from his past. A clear break from himself, better say. But still he was keen on finding out things. What Jenny did in the evenings, for example. Where she loafed about and if she loafed about. Whether she went to the theatre, the cinema, or to bouzouki joints. If she daydreamed by the rocks on the beach or whether she preferred Sunday walks through the Monastiraki open market. Whether she read newspapers and if she knew how to cook. Whether she was inclined to pink or light blue. If she was a nature-lover or she got hot in the bars of the Exarchia Square. Their encounter was

that open. Without pre-described points of view; limitless. An encounter with the unknown. It is rare to be in such luck.

He remembers her in the office, leaning over a sketch. Nothing provocative about her. Jeans and a blouse of neutral colour. She has a pencil in her hand, a mechanical pencil, and is correcting something. He is getting ready for the foreseeable. As soon as she finishes her work, she will put the pencil behind her ear or place it on the desk. She will fold the sketch methodically and put it in the drawer or in the corner where he sees that some other rolls are stacked. She will go to drink a glass of water or will return to her desk. Diligent and neat, that's the impression she gives him. Dull, beige, nerveless. She turns and smiles at him. Silly cow. She asks him whom he is looking for. Formal. Does he want some coffee. Polite. She says matter-of-factly that his friend might be late. Interfering. Would he like something else? Bothersome. He sips his coffee. I'm wicked with people, say the bubbles. Nevertheless, he observes. She did not fold the sketch. She has left it just as it was on the desk. She has the pencil in her hand, it has become an extension of herself. With the pencil in hand she looks for something in the files; then she uses it to press the numbers on the telephone dial. He does not hear where she is calling. Somewhere. Nor with whom she is speaking. With someone. Professional or personal call? he tries to guess. Indiscreet.

Second meeting. A habitual scene. The restaurant, Italian. After the starters he catches himself watching her. He congratulates himself on resisting his urge to ask his friend Yorgos about her past. He has outgrown this old habit of his. She is seated across from him in a pink little outfit. So, the colour is pink. She looks at him impudently. He reciprocates with a promising glance. There is nothing given in this encounter. 'Do you like pink?' Audacity. On his part. 'I' not partial to it... You say that because I'm wearing pink?' His glance encourages her. 'This suit is my sister's and as soon as she became bored with it she passed it on to me. You see she gets easily bored... Do you like it?' He smiles. Should he tell her that he sees her as a pink cloud? He decides not to risk it. He is not romantic, he might give her the wrong impression. 'You don't look like a romantic to me', she says and explains that she is surprised he likes pink.

In bed with her. After a long late night walk. Late it is, very late. She has not distanced herself from him, she is there, whole, herself. I like this, he convinces himself. Without linguistic disclaimers; everything internalised. The stillness unbearable and pregnant with passion; it frightens him. He turns on the light, seeks a cigarette. The enamelled ashtray has a small artistic signature, 'Jenny', on the side. Well, well. She has not said anything to him about her hobbies, her creative

streak. Self-promotion was not her style. He flicks the ashes carefully next to the unpainted rim, he is afraid of ruining her handcrafted self. He asks her. . 'Just a hobby', she says casually, 'amateur work.' 'But you are really good', he objects. 'It might prove handy if I end up on the dole', she jests. So many things about her I do not really know, he recalls. In her bathroom a prevalent lull. Peaceful, he finds it, that was the exact word that crossed his mind. A flowery cologne and then a different one, more full-bodied, more male-like, though not exactly masculine. Somehow he feels gratified.

Translated by Nicole Stellios and the author

Suppliant

In the end
it is a terrible fate
not to be
able to escape
the ghosts
of those disdainful stables
They call you to order
and you arrive
as the unique
preternatural
suppliant
seeking to undo
the kingdom of heaven
No one
offers himself to you
And then
there are those horses
constantly neighing
in your ears

Translated by Stavros Deligiorgis

EVGENIA FAKINOU

The Tree

I love women. Women and wild flowers. I love the colours of wild flowers. White, yellow and purple. These are the colours of the land. In ancient times people painted their statues those colours, and in later times they painted their doors and window frames the same. People don't paint their doors and windows frames any more. Those are the colours of crocuses and anemones, lilies, irises and asphodel. White, yellow, and purple.

Women are suffering greatly again. It is women who write History. They carry the world's great events on their shoulders.

In the old days, the maidens from the distant North would come, and we would talk together. Then came the priestesses, clad in white, with copper gongs, and garlands in their hair. In their white robes they would lie down and wait and listen for the whispering of my leaves.

They would ask me of things both great and small. And I would tell them. Because I know. The birds from Libya used to tell me; and the snakes from Acherousia; and the Sun, the great lover; and the invisible flowers; and the far-off stars and constellations. [...]

Will my Archontoula remember the road? And the house? Will she remember to turn off the crossroad and take the right path?

He was bringing down animal skins. Stretched lambs' skins and young goats' skins. He was sitting on the cart, on the wooden driving seat, and I was standing at the fork in the road, wearing my black clothes and holding my pomegranate. I'd done what the woman with the metal sandals told me to do. I'd gone south, and I was asking everyone I met: 'Have you seen a little girl with a blue skirt and a little cross on her shoulder?'

I went through villages and hamlets and shepherds' pastures, and everyone I asked said to me no, so in the end all I said was:

'A girl...blue skirt...little cross on her shoulder...'And they all said 'No'.

And I was going further south all the time. By now I had reached the outskirts of Larisa. I saw a pomegranate sticking out through someone's fence. So I did what the woman with the metal sandals had told me. I stole the pomegranate.

I'd never seen a pomegranate. It was huge. Come what may I would have taken it. Just as I was breaking it off, a girl came out of a gate in the fence. She looked me up and down. I must have looked like a gypsy. My clothes were hanging off me, and I had no shoes. The soles

of my feet had become hard with walking barefoot. I used to dye them with henna, to make them red, because Andronikos liked that. And my hair was hanging down, unwashed and uncombed...

'Would you like a drink of wine, Auntie, to help you on your way?'

'Auntie', she called me. So that's what you've come to, Dimitra...! Once you were a goddess, and now you're 'auntie'... If Andronikos could have heard that! Twenty-three years old, and people were treating me like an old woman!

She took me into her cabin. She gave me some raki to drink, and some bean stew. 'Are you from round here?' she asked.

I shook my head, and immediately asked:

'A girl with a blue skirt and a little cross on her shoulder. Have you seen her?'

She didn't answer.

'Are you a refugee?' she asked. And before I could answer, she said: 'there are a lot of women who come looking for their lost sons and daughters here. Some looking for their husbands, too...' At that, we fell silent. What more could I say to her, or she to me? Then she got up and went to a chest and pulled out some black clothes.

'Take these', she said. 'They were grandmother's before she died. They're quite clean –and she died in old age. Wear them. Don't walk around like that...I'm afraid I have no shoes to give you, though'.

I made the sign of cross over her, and left. I had my pomegranate, and I had the black clothes. They were a complete outfit –a petticoat, a skirt, a blouse, a large head-scarf, and a knitted shawl. I went down to a deserted spot by the river, among the reeds. I took off my torn, dirty clothes and went and stood in the river. I washed and washed and I felt like a proper person again. I rinsed my hair again and again until I'd washed out all the dirt. I stood up to get dressed. And there, where the river hadn't been muddied, I saw the woman that Andronikos used to call his 'goddess'. The only difference was that I was thinner now, from being so tired and from walking so much. Andronikos's drawings on my body looked strange, considering the state of the rest of me. And it was then I saw it, rolling down slowly on top of the water – Andronikos's beautiful head. That was the first time it appeared to me. I rushed to take hold of it. It never even occurred to me to wonder how Andronikos's head had got there, all the way from Vourla to a river in Larisa. I ran and tried to catch it, but it kept moving away. And I must have been making a noise as I splashed about the water, shouting: 'Stop, Andronikos, stop and let me hold you...' And the women who were doing their washing further down must have heard my shouting, and they came to look. And when they saw me they

froze. And I froze too. I was naked, with Andronikos's drawings on my body, from my breasts down...What must they have thought?

One of the women started screaming: 'run, run...Don't you see, she's a witch...She'll steal our voices...'

And before I could make a move to say, 'no, I'm not a witch,' they had all run off in terror.

I dressed as quickly as I could and hid my own clothes under a rock. The only thing I kept was my white petticoat. Or, rather, it was white once, with lace and embroidery. But it was now full of holes and grey with dirt, and patched, with the little pockets where I kept my seeds. All kinds of seeds. Sorrel, spinach, lentils, basil, marjoram, beetroot, cauliflower, buck-beans, limes, peas, yellow marigolds, and all different colours of carnations. I'd had mania for seeds. Some I picked and some I found. I stitched them into little pouches, which I sewed into my petticoat. I thought, 'when I find my Persephone, I shall make a little garden the like of which has never seen in all the world. But first I must find her'.

When I was dressed, I wrapped my headscarf round tightly to hide my blond hair. My hair was golden-yellow again now that I had washed it. Better for me to look like an old 'auntie' than a twenty-three year old. I had seen and heard many things. [...]

From: THE SEVENTH GARMENT Translated by Ed Emery

ANTONIS FOSTIERIS

Where you Are

I hear it's always freezing.
And you, on leaving,
Didn't even take a blanket.

Mind you pull the earth
Up round yourself.

Translated by Yannis Goumas

Domestic Forest

In your cool living room a forest rustles.
These pieces of furniture that you hear breathing
Still keep in their foliage
The flying creatures of instinct. And if they creak
Each time a new visitor walks in
It must be because they feel somewhere a hidden axe
Being sharpened. This time
It is just a polite smile.
At night they panic
And their thick nail made from a tree root
Is thrust
Into a rock of cement. Their branches
Ruin the ceiling; here look at the cracks
In the wood as it groans. Leave them alone;
Neither truth nor deceit will smooth down
The knots on the bark of the old age; leave them.
And if the ticking of the worm acts like
The beat of their heart
They keep dreaming of the heroic flame
That will separate at last the spirit
From the body –
Gleam from coal.

Translated by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke

ANTIA FRANTZI

The Unsaid Sound

to Lizy

There are days when I wish I am a tree
drinking my raisin as a balm
my leaves scattering around and shedding no tears
but instead seeking the lost centre.

Listen from down below rises the lost incantation
from the land of our fathers and of the wanderers;
the seeds of the body of hidden people burst open
but there again remains unbridged the gap of the unsaid sound.

Translated by Katerina Angelaki-Rooke

The Poem of Love and Dashed Hope

[1]

This poem rolled
Like a stone rolls
From my heart to over there
Then it came back, paused
In my heart.

Now I must choose
Stone or heart?

[2]

All the half-rubbed out
Shapes I see on the glass
Caught in the time of the old frame
The face with the swollen eyes
And you correcting the image
Sometimes with colour
Sometimes with a light movement
Of wind behind the curtain.

The glass that separates us
Unbreakable as death
The hand that passes
Through the glass
Of a shattered love.

I open the window
the black bird beating
Its wings
Waiting to go.

The glass that always separates us
Like the sea that spreads
caresses the broken glass
Bleeds-
It is of love.

[3]

My face moved toward you
The light of the sun pulled back
The arrow of love
Then it grew dark
And became deep purple
Night that hit the crops hard
Froze the water and the heart
Writhed in my mouth
And said:

I am not unless there is
You in the ark
Of day and night

I am not unless there is:
Me in the ark
Of sea and viscera.

I am not unless there is
Light in the darkness
of dashed hope.

[4]

This poem that rolled
Like a stone

It couldn't have been written
It paused in my heart
It is waiting for my to choose.
Poem or heart.

Translated by Philip Ramp

RHEA GALANAKI

From:

The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha

On the day the fighting began, I caught sight in the distance of the house where I was born. We set fire to the village, and I was seized with a great anguish, through I bore no responsibility for the fire, at the thought that the house might be turned to ashes. But it remained unscathed, because a May shower, intervening in my favour, checked the flames that had attacked the adjacent houses. I was filled with awe at this demonstration of benevolence from the elements. As I sat astride my horse, wrapped in a piece of oilcloth reaching down to my horse's hooves, welcoming the rain, which sounded as if nature were softly weeping, I told myself that this was the way it had to be: not because I had returned home, although even an iniquitous homecoming such as mine may still have been honoured with nature's weeping, but because the moment I saw the house, I remembered suddenly that I had a home.

Ioannis had told me in Egypt that according to one report, my mother had returned to the village after the massacre and met her end in the house; but its image had never tormented my spirit in the way that the memory of the plateau as a whole had done. While the rain lasted, the sight of the house pierced me unexpectedly with the sharpness of iron nails. I heard the nails being implanted in me one by one as the raindrops hit the oilcloth that covered my body. It occurred to me that during all these years I had perhaps dismissed the memory of the house in order to protect myself from the harrowing interdiction against crossing its threshold again, or from fear that it might have fallen into ruin; the land itself, in contrast, was not subject to such dangers. The vigilance and speedy action which the imminent battle demanded of me would not leave much time to look into the matter further. All I had time for, as I listened blissfully to the rain of long ago, was to reflect that for many years I had, unawares, substituted in my memory the outer for the inner world; which meant that I had no real knowledge of all that my soul enclosed. The memory of the cave, for a number of reasons, had never become identified with the memory of the house; it had rather become a part of nature, or of my subsequent tribulations. Now I waited for the rain to stop so that I could take a second look at the house, fearing that I might have been the victim of an optical illusion.

I could have visited it in the days that followed; I longed to do so. But I kept finding excuses: the demands of the campaign, the human lives that depended on my decisions. I took part in the fighting as if drugged, and tried to keep my mind clear as best I could, with a great effort of will. Much as I longed to visit the house, I needed to prepare myself first. I still found it incredible that the house had survived, that it stood there waiting for me to return – but then, was it really waiting for me? Incredible, indeed that I should have acquiesced to the bloodshed of this war simply in order to remember the house's existence, to receive this very quintessence of memory. I felt that it held the promise of an ominous yet voluptuous catharsis; that I was somehow betrothed to it. I kept turning round to gaze at it, reintegrating in into its natural landscape, persistently probing its stone walls for some hint of their intentions. They seemed to allow me a glimpse of the interior. The house received light either from the wide open front-door or from a flickering oil-lamp carried from room to room, as I began to recall in a swift rush of memory. Was it really waiting for me then, I asked again.

I decided to visit the house on the first evening after the fighting ended. I was pressed for time, because we had completed our operations on the plateau, and for my part, I could not bear to stay on and watch the looting. I found the key under the stone where we always used to hide it. I was pleased to note my spontaneous use of the pronoun in the first-person plural; it meant that the house was indeed waiting for me. I wondered whether the gentle metallic sound of the key in the lock could still imply that life –whatever kind of life–retained its continuity. The sound of the key in the lock reverberated like a gunshot, filling me with terror. I considered the possibilities : the Ottomans' weapons were probably loaded, since they had been licensed to loot the village for three days running; the Christians, on the other hand, had taken their weapons with them up on the mountains, but a straggler or two may well have been lingering in the evacuated village. I had to make haste.

The door creaked open. I stepped inside, closing it behind me. Then I leaned back against its thick boards, trying to feel the grain of the wood, the knots, the nails that delineated the door's skeleton. Sudden tears forced me to shut my eyes. Blindly I began to suck in the familiar air. Some moments went by before I could open my eyes again, having had my fill of milk. I discovered that the door I leaned against had grown taller, while I had shrunk to the size of a child. I wiped my lips with a child's hand. I pulled myself away from the door and attempted to walk; I felt frail, perishable. With the same childish hand I held on to the wall as I wandered round the house. I came to the fireplace, and I

removed a brick from the wall; but my sling was no longer there. I told myself it did not matter; when I grew up I would go shooting birds with a gun. I placed the rusty blade from the cave and Antonis's last letter in the hole in the wall, where I used to keep my sling, returning them where they rightfully belonged; if, that is, an object can be said to belong to a particular place. I put back the brick, sealing up the hiding-place; burial, I added to myself, that might be one form of such a belonging. Besides, I did not wish to have inquisitive onlookers jump to conclusions, should these objects be found on my corpse.

I had no way of knowing whether anybody had lived in this house after my mother, since I had accepted the version according to which she had lived and died here alone. I was unable to find any evidence of a stranger's presence, for the house was completely bare. I remembered every single object that had been in it with an extraordinary clarity: the simple appurtenances of a rural household, the few things needed to bring comfort to toil-worn bodies. But despite my memories, the house remained bare, indicating that it had not been lived in for many years. As if the horizontal and vertical lines, the curving arch, were trying to convey, in a scarcely perceptible manner, that all feeling was absent from this place; a message diffused in things like the dust, the spiders' webs in the corners of the rooms. The same childish hand would be needed to part those gossamer veils.

I stepped forward and stood exactly under the arch at the house's centre. I dug a small hole in the floor of beaten earth. But I lacked all that was required; nor could I offer any other blood but my own. I slashed the frail wrist with my yataghan and let a few drops of blood trickle into the hole. Then I sat back waiting, uttering the words. I waited a long time, as if the shades were resisting my entreaties. I feared they would not heed me, because I lacked what was needed, or for other reasons which could spell my undoing in this house. Finally, late in the day, a subtle change occurred, like the fortuitous flutter of an eyelid, and the horizontal and vertical lines, the curve of the central arch, began to quiver, losing their precision, spilling on to the floor, their vacant interstices quickening into vibrant space. Familiar human voices reached me, the sound of domestic animals, the sound of the weather, of singing, toiling, mourning, feasting. Then along came the smells: bodies, trees, cloth, winter fire in the hearth, harvested fields, ripe apples – that last smell invaded the house, dyeing it crimson. In the red apple-light I saw her hand, no longer in arrested motion on the spindle, twitching its fingers at last; and my father's hand, which had been frozen in the act of gripping the reins, flexing at last at the wrist. The hands were the forerunners; the full-size figures soon followed. She was the first to approach me, to welcome her long-lost son, the

fey one, tormented by a love without issue. How had he found the courage to reach down to her, undaunted by any religious restraint, she wondered? He was so handsome, though, coupling manhood in its prime with a child's innocence, as tenderly as the outline of the mountain merged into the heavenly vault before fading with it into the night. Let him draw a little closer to her, let him behold in her eyes the weariness of work in the fields, soothed by a dish of hot food and easeful sleep; so that he might also behold the weariness of his Egyptian life, soothed by the forgotten touch of her hand stroking his hair. But let him not draw close enough to witness her ordeals, let her remain forever as he had known her. He knew of course, her beloved one knew that they would soon be together and rejoice, bodiless and sinless. Therefore he need not fear the gardens and sweet flowing waters that might visit him in his dreams.

I ran to her. She disappeared instantly. I sank exhausted to the ground. After a moment I heard a voice chanting a hymn. I looked up and saw my father coming towards me, dressed in gold-embroidered vestments, chanting "The birth, Jesus Christ our Lord", for he always remembered I had been christened Emmanuel. He had registered me, in his own hand, as Emmanuel Kambanis Papadakis, son of Franghios. He no longer knew how to address me, by my Christian or my Muslim name; which was the reason he chose to chant that hymn, continuing to call me inwardly by my Christian name. Some things can never change, he said, and that is why I accept you, though I had great trouble arriving at that decision. Some things never change, even in the kingdom of the shades, only it sometimes happens that the shades, too, are maddened by the south wind and appear in a different, unfamiliar guise. I want you to know that I would rather be slaughtered again than dishonoured. However, the kind of life that has been your lot is another matter. You prospered, and that is a fine thing; only you lost the connection, the continuity; you broke off, and I was broken off with you. What may redeem you is that you never wished, or were never able, to obliterate us. I am a man who has felt the thorns and barbs of progressing along a single course, so I can recognize the difficulties of a dual course. I mean to say, I can comprehend your striving for atonement. I will pray for you. No, I do not know in what manner you will meet your death. I can only tell you that it is fated to be hard. You must be brave; you must not fear. We will meet again soon. [...]

Translated by Kay Cicellis

GIORGOS GAVALAS

The Woman Who Picked Up Kisses

Everyday she exorcised Evil
on her right always the enigmatic mirror
put on her violet suit slowly
throwing on it the lace shawl
and walked along
the street all scattered
with broken glass

From the slabs of pavements she picked up
carefully
discarded kisses
of erotic effusions
hiding them in the bosom

Evening
before the lovers' ball started
she was exquisitely tired and returned
to the old house

On the table she spread
the collected kisses
undressed
and the with longing
brought them to the lips
the cheeks all over the body

So adorned with lust
in front of the dark mirror
she got dressed in courage
for one more night
lost.

Introspection

With so much suspicion falling on him
he was unable to carry
his feeble body

He went down on his knees
put his days
 in a row
counted up to a thousand.

Then he lost control
of the senses
to the point of
 discovering guilt
even where culminated
 the sacrifice.

The Chairs

The chairs always know how to wait
at an end of the room
or round the table

The chairs are quiet
Waiting for visitors
they don't get restless
discriminate none from among them

They wait in silence
relating ancient stories
they have heard
at times of rejoicings
or sorrow
The visitors with pale faces
and names that are common
such as
 Yannis
 Charalambos
 Thanasis

come in
 greet
 and sit down
Sometimes they feel in the air
the presence of the dead

and they are anxious
fidgeting on them rhythmically
At this time
the bread lessens
in the corner of the table

Then they start talking simply
– Rain was late in coming this year
– The birds pluck out
mosquitoes in the air
Words that are trite
common
 human though.

The chairs note down
all they hear
and bury it.

CHRISTAKIS GEORGIU

From:

Archipelagos

(TWENTY YEARS IN LABOUR)

The small church that carried the centuries like dust hanging from the chandeliers had become the nationalists' headquarters. The iron gate that opened to the courtyard was guarded by five impassive men who examined passes before allowing anyone to enter.

The English conqueror, who carried the rust of time in the form of a cruelty strewn with civility, said: 'there are colonies, which, because of their nature, will remain for ever colonies.' And the new Press Law demanded the depositing of a sum of five hundred pounds as a guarantee against violation of the law. Seditious was the word that began to appear in government communiqués for the first time after the Second World War. And then it was everywhere. Not to express your thought. The Saxon experience over many years showed that thought without a language is a harmless intellectual exercise. 'Five-finger exercise', the Colonial Secretary had said jokingly.

And the informers, a special unit attached to the Information Service, plain-clothes police sergeants, began to assemble. Two were well known, Salingaros and Poullaos. They attracted attention so that the less known could do their job better. They leaned their bicycles on the trees or the low wall opposite and vanished into the small crowd that had gathered in the square.

Salingaros' hair, thinned by time, formed tiny paths on his head while his false smile had something of a wrinkle on it, like his entire body. The other one was entirely different. Erect like a horse, muscular but always a kind of shadow in his eyes. Maybe it was that shadow the Information Service had trapped.

'To the insolent provocation of the foreign conqueror that we are for ever like brutes to carry our colonial yoke, and like brutes not allowed to look at the sun of our freedom, we shall answer with all the strength of our Greek soul.'

In the atmosphere there is electricity in a latent form. And a latent conflict. Those from Kyrenia had lost the leadership battle. 'Makarios II is dead. Long live Makarios III.' However Makarios III is not from Kyrenia. A plot is being hatched.

A struggle. Those from Kyrenia filled the void with a stream of words. The Parthenons and the blue-white flags become verbal sweets. They

talked about heroes and the necessity of material compensation. Money to compensate them we had. Heroes we didn't. The son of the so-called white politician from Limassol –in recent years his white hair and his unearthly appearance did justice both to his name and his real character– talks about lurking dangers, quixotic adventures in mid twentieth century. However now there are no windmills but iron birds and tanks. Shouting drowns his words. A plot was being hatched. And outside Salingaros and Poullaos, with the information unit, tried to put their fingers on something.

They dragged themselves through the fields. The Larnaka lights twinkled. Somewhere there are the palm trees, and beyond, the sea. The palm trees with imperceptible movements underline the up and down movements of feet and bodies. The glances move up and down too. Instantly they are stopped in the middle. Beyond, to the east a metal structure is sleepless in the night and through its intestines it vomits electricity, which is stored in huge metal wires and transported to all the spots of the horizon. A horizontal movement, incessant. A vertical movement could stop it. To cut it as if by knife. And the electricity would be swallowed by darkness and absolute darkness would reign for three hours, and Nicosia would in vain try to stand on its feet. It would stumble in every step on the absolute darkness and would be immobilized. And the English would be running, swearing, in all directions.

They dragged along cautiously breathing the starry night with the passion of an unlawful love. They carried a reel of thick rope. They would throw it over the thick wire carrier. The short circuit would stop the flow of electricity. It should take two or three hours before they discovered the damage. In the darkness they would be at their mercy.

'Are you afraid?'

'Something is hovering inside of me. You think it's fear?'

'Maybe. With me it's the very opposite. When I'm afraid I feel nothing.'

'It's better like that. I find this hovering a bit annoying.'

'There in the middle, are those the lights of the palm trees?'

'I think so.'

They arrived at the spot that had been pointed out to them. They dropped the reel of the rope at the foot of a tree and advanced a few steps to examine the wire at the point where they would throw the rope for the short circuit. The first one glanced at his watch: two forty-five.

'We've still got ten minutes.'

The other one glanced at his watch, but said nothing. They went back to the tree and began to unroll the rope. Under the swift surface of their movements nothing could be seen. Two fifty. The instructions

were clear: at two fifty Cyprus would sink into darkness, especially Nicosia. Two fifty-two. The rope had been unrolled.

'Don't leave the tree until there is deep darkness. Then you vanish. We'll meet at the Virgin Mary of the Vines. On the little mound. To the west of the village. From then on everything will be easy. Ready?

'Ready.'

The rope is dragging through the green grass of April. The previous evening he had fastened a lead counterweight on one side. And suddenly there was darkness.

And there was light: from his childhood this phrase had stuck in his mind. The scene changed: and there was darkness. He vanished in the night. He has two hours in front of him. He has until five o'clock to be at the Virgin Mary of the Vines. At times he felt the morning dew stroking his legs. His trousers got caught on the thorns. He didn't care. This time, the palm trees suffered from a heavy immobility, seemingly nailed on the night itself. His mind, however, stumbled on his feet. He breathed heavily – the fucking smoking. From time to time he cast a glance in the direction of Larnaka. Darkness swallowed it. Headlights of a delayed car or maybe one on an early morning errand lanced the darkness –beams of steam– then at a bend were swallowed by the hills. He moved on. He knew where he was heading. At four-thirty he arrived at the little church. [...]

NIKOS GRIGORIADIS

No Beauty

This poem, born of you, I write,
I wash it, I comb it, to make it sweet-smelling.
I then caress its closely-woven flesh.

And yet, no beauty can replace
Another beauty. No poem
Can give off your perfume

Young Girl

The young girl with her archaic smile
Has never forgotten her reverie
Though
Forty odd years have passed since.

Noiseless in the dark she comes at night
Offers her succulent breasts
To me to suck the ancestral of oblivion,
Which suddenly sets like plaster on my lips
And freezes me

The Hand

His firm and once muscular, hand
In the shades of colour of an old icon or
Restless blood,
Now atrophied, pale and cold
Shuffles, with weak movements
The dried ears of corn of verses.

The Poet

Nothing ready does he have to offer;
He just builds a cabin, decorates it,
Arranges the lighting correctly,
Chooses the appropriate melody
And withdraws.
Happiness
Rests entirely
With the lovers.

Translated by Kostas E. Evangelides

THODOROS GRIGORIADIS

From:

The Waters of the Peninsula

The sun shone upon them again as they left the forest behind them. The horses looked very tired. The travellers' throats were completely dry.

Strangely enough after an hour's walking they did come across a leaning brick building, with an old inn next to it. The road that used to traverse this place was completely disused. The cross-roads down the road no longer forked; there was but one road left. The construction of new roadways towards all kinds of destinations had rendered the old paths useless.

They dismantled and crept into the derelict inn, which must have at one time housed a bakery and shops. An old man came out to greet them. There was no one else left but him. The travellers saw a tiled courtyard, flanked on three sides by the wings of the building. The rooms were empty and filthy, with a wooden loggia above. They hadn't been used in a long time.

They quenched their thirst at a well situated at one end of the courtyard. The old man explained that the well was bottomless but no one would believe him. He told them that a few years ago a grandchild of his had fallen in, and they never managed to get her out again. Only Nikiforos listened attentively.

Stephen began to wander around, scanning the area for any traces. Could Blunt have also put up at this place? On the marble tympanum above the doorway the foundation plaque could be read: This building was built in 1830. That meant that Green couldn't have put up at this inn, unless there had been an older one in its place. Pointing at the date, he asked the old man why the building had been left to crumble so.

The elderly man talked without waiting for the translation assistance of Nikiforos, who had to stand between the two and speak simultaneously to both of them.

'The whole area has been deserted,' said the old man. 'All the locals have moved towards the coast. The Bulgarians are pressing in upon us and we are gathering back into Turkey.' He stressed that it was the Greeks who did most of the fleeing.

The old man feared no one. How much longer did he have to live anyway? 'I speak both languages, and I may kneel before one altar as easily as before another. As if I know why the Church split up in the

first place. I can live with whomsoever. I just don't like getting harassed.'

Stephen didn't know whether to look upon such an attitude as adaptability or as chameleonic fickleness.

The tiny chapel adjacent to the inn was dedicated to Saint Paraskevi. The bath beside it was relatively new, built under the trees.

Stephen crept into the tiny chapel and noticed that the sacred spring was shaped like a tunnel. Perhaps the bath's water and the sacred spring's water both flowed from the same source. Be that as it may, Blunt's book made no such mention.

In the small domed bath, Yunus was already splashing happily. The pool was small, a natural cistern carved into the rock, and the water came up to his chin. Darkness had descended. The old man let them have a battered lamp and asked them what to prepare for dinner.

Stephen called Nikiforos to him as they sat at the wooden kitchen table. He was fond of the clever Greek, who liked to keep himself to himself. Stephen told him that so far everything was coming along smoothly, although this was just the beginning. Still, the road they were on was the right one.

Nikiforos asked the old man for some tobacco and he rolled a cigarette. It was the first time he smoked during their trek.

'Why don't you have a bath too?' Stephen asked him.

'Let the mudlark get rid of all his grime first!' Nikiforos said in Greek and then translated.

Stephen discerned a certain spite and selfishness in the interpreter's words.

The old man first served them a sour drink – watered yoghurt it was. Stephen asked him if the inn still ran properly. The old man shook his head. The train had lain all these roads to waste, even though it was hours away. Nevertheless, he still kept it as a home. He had nowhere else to go. From time to time woodsmen came from the Rodopi forests for a few hours, or some passer-by dropped in for a cup of coffee. That was all. Gone were the wayfarers. People didn't walk as they used to in the olden times.

'Oh, Turkish soldiers come now and then for a drink of raki. They're guarding this bridge, about an hour's walk to the west. They've been left to guard it even though it's of no use to anyone. It is a frontier, they say. Whose frontier? They don't know any more than you do... Do you know which country you're in at the moment?'

Stephen got distraught. In his imagination, a map large as a wall rose before his eyes. Unfortunately, it was a geophysical one and of little help in his effort to define the exact frontier lines.

The old man asked him in Bulgarian:

‘What are you doing in our parts?’

Nikiforos kindly asked him to use Greek. He spoke Bulgarian rather well, but the old man used a local dialect.

Stephen pondered on how to reply. He could see that Nikiforos was also not very forthcoming about their journey. For a moment he considered giving some rational reply but he was unable. He could say something along the lines of ‘We are searching for the places where the first Christians who were baptised in Fillipi passed through and spread the word of Paul the Apostle... We yearn for that long-forgotten Church...’ But how could he possibly translate... ‘comprehensiveness’? Or should he perhaps tell the man that he was on a voyage into poetic Byzantium – a spiritual journey towards the springs of a civilisation that spread its lights to Europe... What could he say when even his fellow-travellers failed to understand him!

The old man’s eyes drooped with sleepiness. He seemed not to care about springs and holy baths. He could only narrate the same story over and over again. How his grandchild had drowned and how no matter how long a rope they lowered into the well they couldn’t find her, yet they found a holy icon which had been cast there in an effort to save it from the Turks a good two hundred years ago... On the icon, the child’s face had imprinted itself. So her mother took the icon to a monastery in Rodopi and then she was able to die in peace.

They interrupted him to ask a few questions of a more practical nature. It turned out that the old man was useless even as a guide, just like everyone you met on these Balkan routes.

Stephen made his way to the baths. Nikiforos followed him. They both undressed down to their long buggy underwear.

On the slat beside the pool, Yunus lay relaxing, naked as always. He barely glanced at them. His face was lit with unexpected bliss, an expectancy, a certainty for something that would soon reach fulfilment.

Stephen lowered himself into the pool first and felt the hot water pressing in all around him. He had a hard time breathing.

‘It seems sulphurous,’ he told Nikiforos who had dipped his head into the hot water.

For a moment Stephen lost him completely. He became angry.

‘This is not funny,’ he told him. ‘You could drown!’

Nikiforos’ head emerged from the water.

‘Will we find baths wherever there is a sacred spring?’ he asked Stephen.

‘Not necessarily. We could though. Who knows what state they’ll be in when we find them... We’ve got quite a few surprises in store still.’

Nikiforos gurgled in the water, washing his mouth and teeth.

Yunus sat up. Stephen asked him if he was going to turn in. Yunus looked at him in bafflement. He looked terribly dizzy. Stephen's face suddenly lit up upon noticing Yunus' manly arousal.

'Yunus, have you ever been with a woman?'

Nikiforos translated.

'No. At the Seminary marriage was forbidden till the age of thirty.'

'Well you don't have to wait any longer. You can make love.'

'Love is everywhere. Love is great. It is the union with god,' said he voluptuously.

Nikiforos felt discomfort at having to render these words into English. He worried that he might confuse certain concepts and acts.

Feeling uncomfortable by the fact that Yunus unabashedly sported the full length of his nature, Stephen turned his head to Nikiforos. Thank heavens the entranced man from the East went away leaving them on their own. Undoubtedly, Edward Carpenter would have approved of such company, thought Stephen, and solaced himself with the thought of the 'prophet' who favoured communal living. There he went again, thinking the same thoughts that he was trying ever so diligently to erase from his mind.

'And what about you, Nikiforos, I imagine you...'

'I have a certain girl on my mind back in Anghialos. She waits for my return.'

'Don't you sleep with other women in the meantime?'

'In Constantinople I used to go the 'girls'. Quite often, as a matter of fact. But I never felt anything special.'

Stephen's tone of voice became more personal. It was now his turn to speak.

'I've split up with my girlfriend. She got angry with me because I went on the road again. She couldn't accept my readings or my views. I asked her to let me have a year in order to accomplish this mission. She refused. She understood nothing at all. She may be clever but she lacks depth. Straight from the outset she disliked the fact that I've got so many interests, that I enjoy reading poetry. All that money she possesses ends up being an obstacle to her development as a human being. Art, in her eyes, is a tedious pastime. She abhors anything artistic, poetry for instance. I wonder if women really need the arts. In some way they have assimilated them in their femininity. Of late, my ex-girlfriend has retreated to her mother's house in the country. I haven't missed her so far...'

He dipped his head underwater for an instant. Then he tried to exclaim: 'We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins'. He broke

into laughter all by himself. 'I wish I had been excommunicated from all Churches. Only that way would I recapture the true meaning of belief.'

He dipped into the water once more.

'But then the Church is one, don't you agree?'

Nikiforos didn't reply.

Stephen shouted 'I'm happy' and almost slipped all the way into the pool. He noticed the gloomy look on Nikiforos' face.

'What's wrong?' he asked him.

Nothing was wrong. But then he thought better.

'I'm homesick. I miss the girl I was telling you about. I miss the vineyards and the salt-pits. The sea I always used to look out to, no matter if it were only the Black Sea. Have you any idea why these countries here in the middle of the peninsula are so struck by pain and misery? It's because they're landlocked. There's no sea breeze. That's why they're restless to find a way out to the sea. Summer is so very beautiful by the water. I used to swim all the time.'

'You talk as if there's no chance of you ever seeing any of that again,' said Stephen.

'You're right. I have an ill foreboding. And this isn't just my intuition talking.'

'Are you perturbed by Yunus' presence?'

'No. Well, I'm not sure. He scares me. More than anything, what scares me is that we don't even know who he is. You've seen how he carries on. As if he comes from nowhere.'

'Not even he knows where he's from.'

'That's exactly what has me worried,' said Nikiforos stepping out of the water. It turned out he was just as aroused. It must be the hot water...

'Sometimes I sit and wonder if he's really human, actually walking beside us. But... what's the matter, Stephen? Why are you looking at me that way?'

Ayiasma, in Greek, refers to water flowing or springing near an old chapel, and which is supposed to be sacred. It may also refer to hot mineral springs. [...]

Translated by Leo Kalovyrnas

NATASHA HADJIDAKI

Dark Red

Tonight I am Theda Bara
lying on lion's skin
in a Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer set.
It is Autumn and my sewing machine
has rusted, but I'll come to find you
as soon as my heart beats reach
their natural height.
I am Dorothy Lamour
as I float on a sea made of pearls and seagrass
behind the groves of Ecstasy.
I am Jane in the arms of Tarzan
and at the end of the comic strip
the child of the jungle will thrust
his knife in my back.
I am Anna-Maria Pierangeli and
I'm sitting with my legs open
on James Dean's silver shining Porche
just before he turned for the final
California Dreaming.
I am Daisy Buchanan
in this dirty hotel lobby
just before Jay Gatsby starts talking.
I am Natalie Wood drowned in the
red dress of Splendor in the Grass.
I am Janet Leigh naked in my bathtub
and I'm waiting for Anthony Perkins
on this rainy American night of Psycho.
I am Charles Manson's wooden chick
and I invite you tonight for a blood bath.

Translated by Kimon Friar

KYRIAKOS HARALAMBIDIS

Ardana II

I didn't know any Turkish.

- Do you speak English? I asked her.
- I understand it.
- Is this my house?
- This is your house.

And I started crying in my sleep – tears of leave-taking. My sobs lifted me like a leaf in a storm, and I woke up, Pylades.

My bed was drenched – did my dream have a leaky roof? You and I have seen it, felt it, lived it: our army-wiped out! Not a ship, not a strip of land in view, not a single house, my friend. Yet the street door was the same, the alleyway the same, the carob tree, the well, the clay oven, the tractor, the garden wall-they were just the same, but the house meant nothing to me. I didn't recognize it. Standing right in my own courtyard, and all I felt was... ill-at-ease. You'd have wept to see me there, I bet.

In my own courtyard, and it wasn't my home now, it wasn't my village. I was a stranger, my soul had no peace.

- What words are these? Outside your own house and you couldn't recognize it?
- It wasn't mine anymore, Pylades, the house I was born in wasn't mine. I even asked her: Mam, I said, is this the house where I was born? And she told me, that Turkish woman told me: 'This is the house'.
- It's all so strange. How did she know that this was here I came into the world? How could she be so sure?

Translated by Martin McKinsey

CHRISTOS HARTOMATSIDIS

The Nymphs' Spring

Aven today this spring still exists. It's near the central square of Maronia. Than evening, Spring of 1940, Grandfather got out of the tavern a bit dizzy. He moved forward and saw next to the spring three young women bathing. Their hair was long and luxuriant. Then, they put on transparent garments and under them, their pearly white bodies were shining. The lasses approached Grandfather –who was still young then, of course– and started dancing around him.

'It must be from the booze!' Grandfather thought and he tried to avoid them, but the nymphs –because the girls were nymphs– wouldn't let him. 'Stay with us Aristeides!' they gurgled 'Don't leave!' and by holding each other's arms, they prevented him from passing.

They danced around him that way and Grandfather moved along the stream. It is said that these creatures love water. But when he approached St. George's chapel they moaned sadly and disappeared. That same night Grandfather fell in bed with ague. He was shaking. He had a high fever and was gibbering all the time. In the morning he coughed up blood.

In the Autumn when he felt better, the War began. Then came the Occupation, the Resistance, the Civil war. Grandfather never returned to his village. I remember him right before he died in emigration. He lived in a derelict house in the slums of Fillipoupolis next to the tobacco factories. Outside the air was heady from the tobacco leaves, which were drying slowly in the warehouses. In his little room –the exhalation of pestilence– a sour and warm moisture. On the wall, though, he had needlework – Spanish women dancing with tambourines and long luxuriant hair...

'Do you see them?' Grandfather asked. 'They told me not to leave. But I did!'

THANASSIS HATZOPOULOS

Bee-Hive Tombs

(THE ANCESTORS)

They lie in beds that sleep can't reach
Still like prayers or
Like incense in a crisis of calm
Stripped of gaze, stripped of fear
Acrid in body and unarmed in soul

Dead that waited for someone to be found
To cover them and blind dream of a little earth
In rooms stripped of light and empty of ways
On their fingernails the echo writhes
On a marble slab they lay to sleep
Their mother's unburied dead

An Antigone robust from her load
Stands by their hides and their shells
Stalking the light from the unburied

Men in the entrance guard the half-light
Her senseless waiting that never became
Nor was ever meant to become lamentation

Hunter of Souls

(THE PROPHECY OF THE FORGOTTEN)

Not yet daybreak the hunter
With bird calls in his hands and lips
Invites birds' voices
To enter the leaves of his lurking
To be buried in the dew
To be blinded in the torch's glare

Voices, trills of souls whose souls
With likenesses of dirges, of lullabies
Try to deceive that dryads

May come to emerge in the morning mist
There where the first light condemns the darkness
To death on three counts
That there they may leave the shadows for the water

And after bowing to him
Before the rifle barrel
Be killed a second time

Translated by David Connolly

LIA HATZOPOULOU-KARAVIA

We Recognise the Angels No More

We recognise the angels no more.
They walk about amongst us without wings or haloes
usually in boots
instead of a white robe they wear casual clothes, even rags
whatever could possibly hide the nails
the marks of nails on their bodies.
They ride on noisy bikes, have earphones
drums, electric guitars, whatever could cover
the bitter memory, the jeering, the pounding of the hammers.
We recognise them no longer; moreover, we feel indignant
not one angel as promised by the myths
the grandmothers the high clergy and the simple priests
the poets and the painters –
bearing some emblem of the past
a faint smile golden hair light blue eyes
not one single angel corresponding to, say, one billion persons
while we had expected one for each of us
our guardian at the edge of precipices and a handkerchief for our tears.
We need the angels.
No one has told us the other side of the story
they stretch imploring hands to us
and others are unable to, they have no hands
they growl and snarl threateningly
wrathful angels of death
blind among throngs of blind people
the angels of our times
in the midst of desperate men, they themselves the most desperate.

STRATIS HAVIARAS

Loose for a Little While

for Seamus

Terms ten the tenth time, ten times ten, ten times a hundred, and at the close of the great millennium, loose for a little while, as foreseen and told in writing, except you never knew it would be your lot to uncap the pit and unchain the beast. So long, then, so long and no longer, the beast having in the meantime fattened and the pit narrowed, the smell of rotting flesh and waste so vile all you need is a match and the air will ignite and the pit erupt just in time for the Memorial Church bell tower to strike midnight –if it ever does strike the hours past Five P.M.– the beast’s eyes burning at the sight of you, at the sight of light, and you are having second thoughts about your task, come to think of it, if you think not of it on your own, this hour comes not from the cooling core of the planet but from another source altogether, say a plagiarized mood-emotion-insight-experience, for when piecing together the unprecedented carnage and firestorm of the Year 2,000 retrospectively, the clock on the Mem Church spire did strike twelve, but whether it was midnight or noon it was never recorded. They now say the end of the world is only the end of the world as you know it. I say, Over my dead body.

Karyatis

for Tatiana

A young Caryatid from the Treasury of the Siphnians signals me to approach, to listen, to attend her. She has a clean, smooth face, and her cheeks look healthy, her eyes bright in the rain and the morning sun, her hair twined with staffs of wheat. When I am close enough to hear the voice between her lips (marble rusted by eons of silence), she whispers, ‘Please, carry this capital, this burden of mine for a moment. Beauty gives good weight, it won’t crush you...’ I know the myth. Beauty does give weight, but the capital doesn’t. The capital has crushed or diminished a myriad. ‘But not you,’ she explains, ‘not if you don’t cave in, not if you, the darer of astral sandstorms, are not lesser than Herakles who relieved the perpetual carrier of the firmament, Atlas, that he may take a moment or so to scratch behind his ear.’ And she says, ‘It should take me no longer than that to bend down and

shoo that living charm that adorns the strap of my sandal, that four-footed creep archaeologist, that marble-foot-fetishist lizard, the age-old salamander that may also have been sculpted in marble – how can anyone tell.’ And she adds, with an archaic smile, ‘It’s once in a lifetime that you have this chance to risk getting crushed into gravel; not to perish diseased, not to succumb to external erosion, to internal terror, and not to live to regret it, but to carry that crushing weight for a moment forever, your concept of the firmament small enough not to diminish you, large enough not to choke in your hold.’ So I plant my feet on firm ground, and the girl hands me the whole world. And she bends to shoo the lizard from the strap of her sandal, and her freshly washed peplos unfolds, showing the youthful elegance and strength of her thigh. Except the lizard turns out to have been made of the same marble as the sandal, and when the girl touches its tail her fingertips remain attached to it, fingers of marble. I have carried the firmament for a moment forever, and if my hands were free I would gently stroke her cheeks as though I were one of her sons or she my daughter.

Whatever Happened to the Great Cicada Promise

Seventeen years to be born, five weeks to die; Magis Cicada Septendecim, the periodic cicada, said to live only five or six weeks after emerging from where it spent seventeen years preparing for its brief life. Under cover of darkness, young nymphs dust their fine wings and climb the nearest tree, determined to excel in the arts and sciences, and get married and have children before it’s too late. Sure enough, the males are already waiting, having spent their first full summer day noisily composing paeans, prothalamia and great multigenerational sagas. Or turning out beautiful hardwood sculptures that would live a thousand years. But it’s only days before the females are laying hundreds of eggs and dying, while the males are still out there, wailing away. They too, of course, die soon afterward, wondering what ever happened to the great cicada magic and the great cicada promise. I myself am sitting by the window, typing down my ra-ta-ta-ta thoughts on the subject, still blaming others for my ineptness, compromises, and relentless failures. If the artefact is flawed I’d say the tools must be crooked - mallet speaks no English, chisel no Greek... The day ends, cold rain falls steadily until dawn, drenching trees and vegetable gardens. I spend the early hours of the day tending the plants, wiping the green tomatoes on the vine with paper towels before the midday heat can boil the raindrops still clinging

to them. Horses of ignorance draw the chariot of the sun through the clouds toward the day's first clearing. The workday is long and the night full of paid informers and killers. The sun of justice and the moon of love shine on overhead in all innocence, until proven guilty.

Green Leaf Bug Writes Only At Night

for Elektra

The August moon rose over the island, and a breath of cold air crept across the water. A fisherman, bringing his boat in, is singing a long-forgotten love song - the love-part perfectly unrequited. Up in a pine tree, a green leaf bug is trying to finish typing his novel before the first frost. But it's still summer... But Bug writes only at night... But summer night is short... But day goes on as if there's no tomorrow... He is typing all this. He reaches for his fountain pen and even does some handwriting: If my hand is an extension of my mind and my emotions, and the pen with which I write an extension of my hand, extension of what, if I may ask, is the difficulty with which I write? Green leaf bug writes on even though night dampness slows him down. I wish an angel were here to give Bug a hug. But like Rainer Rilke I'm afraid she might crush me in her stronger embrace.

From: MILLENNIAL AFTERLIVES

ARGYRIS HIONIS

Stories of a Time Past That Never Came

A JAPANESE MINIATURE PAINTER writes a poem on a grain of rice, while another Japanese miniature painter paints the scene on the tiniest barnacle surface, where it is naturally impossible to distinguish the poem from the rice. But if you pay attention to how perfectly the writer's ecstasy and agony is retraced on the barnacle, you will be certain that someone is writing a poem on a grain of rice.

HAPPINESS IS A BIRD, said a Japanese wise man once, and the greater the happiness the farther it flies. Grief is a tree and the greater the grief the deeper its roots. Man is the soil. Inside him grief grows the deepest roots, while he sees happiness fly the farthest away.

WHEN THE UNDERTAKER DIES, he is buried by other undertakers. But I like to imagine him driven to his last residence by all the dead he buried in his lifetime, as an instance of appreciation for his services, or even that he alone, with his slow official step, carries his own self to the tomb, to lie down and pull the soil over him as a blanket.

THE FLY TRAPPED in honey discovers suddenly and irreversibly that even the sweetest death is very bitter.

From: MOTIONLESS RUNNER

Athletics

HE APPLIES HIMSELF IN ABSOLUTE IMMOBILITY, to the erasure of every pulse of body and soul, even the barely perceptible. A difficult sport, perhaps the most difficult of all, to swallow ceaselessly, without remorse, all internal and external movement. It is like asking a lake to remain unwrinkled, despite the thrown stones.

A HUNTER OF CHIMERAS, he has arrested numerous such monsters, only to free them at once, not because he is an animal lover, but

because he is certain that, were he show these chimeras to any fellow humans, not one would believe them to be genuine.

TO FISH THE MOON you need interminable patience and persistence but mainly endurance in the face of sure failure. Moon-fishermen, armed with hooks or fishing nets (or even buckets, when fishing in wells), usually sit on the banks of a serene lake and wait to see the moon in the water. Fishing begins then and ends with the light of day, when the moon retires into the dark depths. The fishing nets naturally come up empty, the hooks are left untouched, but the dedicated moon-fishermen do not relent and quit the game only when the moon empties out and goes into hiding in order to regain fullness.

They say that if you bait the hook with a star, you're sure to end up with a moon in your frying pan. But how can you catch a star, since everyone knows stars are not reflected on the surfaces of lakes.

THE WRESTLER who decides to wrestle with time covers his body with oil so as to slip from time's powerful grip. But everybody knows time has no hands and therefore no one ever slips away.

WHOEVER RACES with Charon and beats his speed reaches the end first.

LONG-DISTANCE swimmer inside a well.

Immobile on the Riverbank

HE WAS ALWAYS SEDUCED by stories of people to whom nothing ever happened, people who lived without the event of their birth ever becoming noticed, people who never died because no one ever felt their absence. Difficult stories, the most difficult of all, told only with the mouth closed.

WITH THE USE OF ALCOHOL, he tries to tame the wild days, since alcohol obviously has the capacity to repress the extreme, almost maniacal, and certainly useless insistence of the everyday to become eternal.

WITH APATHY, he sees his dreams drowning. Hands in his pockets, he observes them sinking out of sight. He has no rope to throw them, something to grab hold, no life-jacket, no saving raft. He stands there

immobile, almost content, watching them drown. Deep down, there is a relief, a consolation, finally to be without dreams, since dreams are known to have the ceaseless tendency to get shipwrecked and you must ceaselessly engage in rescue operations.

From: ESOTIC LANDSCAPES

Translated by Stathis Gourgouris

DIMITRIS HOULIARAKIS

The Conduct of the Mouth

Mouth look not into the darkness
That growls and opens up before you
Mouth go not mad on the peaks
Score not your tongue with razor blade
Mouth spit not your teeth
Close not open not
Mouth your dead blood
Keep to your palate.

The Black Box

Who will find the black box of our lives
among the hapless smoldering wreckage
who will gently lift it out and then
who will delve into it solemnly
to analyse the causes of our tragedy.

Yet even if this is done what the benefit
since what was meant to be became
since pale we search the shattered
flagstones of our youth
and now we know no one
now we ask for nothing.

Yes better that the black box
of our lives be never found
better that it rot away somewhere in the fields
while the silent grass grows up around
till it's quite covered
and all that remains is a
hump in the ground.

Children's Candles

Light up the children's candles once again
with your little ribbons tied around
light them up and shine on the dusty
waste and bow close over the body
cheerful candles that once we held
light them up and warm us just a little
be you the escorts to the cold earth
to the shadow and the stone.

If only we could suddenly awake
and there in the darkness
candles burn and drip
their wax on rosy hands
and we children all devotion
in the church with eyes of wonder
look ahead and wait and stand.

In a Portrait of El Faiyum

Beloved face with long departed gaze you look on me
your black hair in the sand quite
faded your lips are cold
your rosy cheeks now funerary white.

Lovely face who may you be
what your descent what woes brought you down
what bodies tasted the joy of your touch.
Cherished face I have naught for you
but tender words; you're like me
you alone in this cold museum mausoleum
I too alone in the wilderness of the world.

Translated by John C. Davies

PANOS IOANNIDES

Chinese Fondue

The formal dining-room shared a common wall with the drawing room or double reception room. This wall, on the right as you entered, was covered from end to end by a collage, about six metres long and one metre high. It was a composition of photographs: animals and birds, fish and reptiles, shellfish, lichen, fruit and plants. They were all cut out, mounted on a gold background, life size, without connection or association. The photographs, taken by a master of the art, were so perfect you might think that the inhabitants of the giant collage would escape at any moment from their silent, stationary world and the konaki* would suddenly become a garden of paradise or would be flattened by their by their unbridled flight.

On the opposite wall was a second collage, narrower about sixty centimetres high, with the same gold background. This was a different collage: of forks and spoons, ladles, serving spoons, skewers and tongues, knives and saws and butchers' knives, of every age and kind from primitive ones of bone and stone to modern ones of silver, steel, gold. All authentic, gathered from the ends of the earth, stuck on the original wall painting.

'Life in a jaw,' Kay linked the two compositions with their transparent allegory.

The oblong table or 'tavla'** as he heard Paul call it, was laid with crystal and silver and fine china. Around it Kay counted eighteen chairs, robust and made to bear the weight of men 'of large displacement.'

Three smaller tables had also been laid behind and at the sides of the big one. Round each of them were drawn up chairs like those round the 'tavla'. 'Please sit down! Wherever and with whoever you like,' said Jenny. 'There is no protocol tonight.'

The announcement caused the guests –all of whom were at home with the strict formality of the house– numbness and inertia. For a few moments they were at a loss, undecided as to how to act. Some, the most intimate, hastened to sit in the places which etiquette normally assigned to them. Others, the less daring, waited to see where friends and acquaintances would sit.

Kay, who naturally belonged to the second group, was about to sit at one of the smaller tables next to Barry Mikailovits when he felt with

impatience the arm, long as an anaconda, wrap round his waste. He recognized it before he saw it from the touch and the weight.

‘Though we have no protocol tonight I have reserved a special place for you’, the host told him. And went on, ‘tonight you are Number One! You noticed, I imagine, the invitation...’

With this, one of Kay’s queries was answered. The numbering of the invitation was not chance. How could it be? So far, so good! But the explanation raised a new question. Why was he, of all of them, the guest of honour? He, the most lowly of them all? What had Carolos thought up? What was he planning? The arm led him to the big table, opposite Jenny, between the Minister of Coordination, and his fiancée.

He sat down. He drew his chair up as much as possible. The Minister smiled coldly at him, leniently. The ‘fiancée’ was the mature spinster he had danced with a little earlier. He heard them call her Joanna and immediately there flashed through his mind the explanation of the joke that Litbranski had made. She was the ‘certain Miss Joanna Mylona’ and the ‘brainless’ gorilla she had fallen in love with –that’s how he had described him– was none other than oily, hairy, tall from the waste up but short-legged Minister of Coordination, Mr. Maleas!

Behind the semi-circle formed by the heavy silver knives and forks and the glasses, in full array, was the menu, standing up and half open. He hesitated to take it, to study it as most of his table companions and Miss Joanna on his left did as soon as they had sat down. He tried to make out from his place what the long list in elaborate French included but it was impossible. The acute angle between the opened pages and the optical angle of the menu did not permit it.

He lifted his glass and moistened his lips with water. He noticed the crest of the house engraved on the crystal. He looked round. It was repeated on all the cutlery, on the embroidered table cloth, on the silver napkin rings.

As soon as he put down the crystal glass a waitress appeared at his side (until then he had not seen her next to him) and refilled it to the original level. Then she vanished again! The same waitress appeared several times later when he had swallowed the first drop of white wine, when he rolled the red wine round his palate and so on. She came and went noiselessly and was positioned so skilfully that she remained completely out of sight for as long as the plates and glasses held the first serving that each guest received. As soon as the level of the glass fell or the plate half-emptied, the houri became flesh again and restored the order of things precisely. Unless the abstemious turned her away, as he himself did on two occasions. ‘For goodness sake, I shall burst!’

Kay noticed that the same or more or less the same thing was happening to all the guests, regardless of the number on their invitation, with the same professionalism, grace and order. He noticed, too that the guests were not silent and discreet like the houris who materialised and vanished next to them, bringing nectar and ambrosia. They shouted, told jokes, chewed noisily, gestured, laughed loudly and in a room which, just as all the other rooms in the house, did not allow sounds to enter or even slip through its boundaries, but kept them all jealously, preserved them, magnified them, counterbalanced with those here the others outside... Kay, at times, had the impression that he had buried his head in a bowl, a bell which echoed above, around within him...

He noticed further, as the dinner progressed from starter to the first, second and third course and so on with the precision and rhythm of a Swiss Patek Philippe watch, that though the fifty-five or so guests had heroically attacked the appetisers and snacks that had been served in the reception room they appeared very ready now to do justice in full to the new harvest of 'gastronomical magic' as the Minister described it to his friendly fiancée.

The menu which Kay did not open but exhausted included a starter of prawns, mussels and crabs mixed with pickles, capers, finely chopped gherkins and set in aspic. The first course was 'Iberian eels', in size and quantity like spaghetti, with optional dressing. Then came lamb – neatly shaped cutlets cooked in bread-crumbs and a mixture of garlic, rosemary, crushed coriander, parsley and other herbs. To accompany it were served beans, potatoes no bigger than marbles and small pastries filled with spinach or grated carrot and cheese. Then followed the surprise, the 'clou' of the evening, the third main dish, optional: 'Chinese Fondue'. And to cap the meal, desert, coffee, cheese and cigars.

As for the drinks, three wines were offered which clearly bore the same name, Carolos: 'Carolos Blanc', 'Carolos Rose', 'Carolos Rouge'. As Miss Joanna explained to him when he asked her after she had unexpectedly and in a friendly way lifted her glass and toasted him, they were all three a special order for the cellar of Carolos. A well-known winery in Limassol had prepared them for him from rare varieties of grapes. Special order, too, from a winery in Paphos, were the brandy and liqueur. Mrs. Carolos had given her name to these: 'Jenny of the five stars' to the brandy and 'Commanderie de Jenny' to the liqueur with a taste between passion fruit and papaya.

Although Kay had gone into the dining room determined to eat only a little –he was a small eater and at night ate only fruit or salad– tonight he could not resist the temptation. Each time the waitress came round

he thought like the ladies outside, 'shall I or shan't I?' 'I'll try just a mouthful.' But in the end he was carried away by the smells, the flavours and the appearance and emptied his plate. What he sedulously avoided was finishing the second helping, which the 'invisible' waiters placed before him, willy nilly, as soon as he finished the first. This was not because he lacked the appetite –far from it– but for tactical reasons. He had noticed that when you finished your second helping before the others at the table you were confronted with a third one. This happened to the Minister two or three times, without of course him seeming to be displeased. Because the lamb and herbs was really a dream!

But let him not cast aspersions on the Minister. It happened to him too –through ignorance rather than from a desire to please Jenny and Paul– with that incredible fondu!

Events developed rapidly and he was trapped. Before he managed, tipsy as he was, to alert his defence mechanisms, he had already perpetrated the crime and he had been the first to commit cannibalism...

At some moment, between the second course and the sweet, Paul announced to the lovers of Chinese food that he had a surprise tonight!

'Who is brave enough to try it first?'

Everyone with 'oui', 'jawohl' or simply 'yes' and 'Ó·È' with raised hands, with the chinking of crystal and laughter, readily proposed himself. The sole exception was Kay. He was always conservative in food as in love. Perhaps because he had not yet found an 'Olivetti' cookery book and bed.

'I first tasted this dish in Shanghai,' explained Paul. 'Since then I order it whenever I travel to the Far East. It's difficult to make the decision to try it, especially for us Westerners who have no imagination at all when it comes to cooking. However, once you take the plunge you love it for the rest of your life. That's what happened to Jenny and me! We haven't served it at our parties before because we didn't find the ingredients in Cyprus, first and foremost the fish Betty Boop. The scientific and Chinese names escape me so we, or rather Jenny, Christened it like that. Well, after a lot of effort I managed it. An acquaintance of mine who was returning from Sydney via Taiwan brought me several dozen a few days ago.'

* large house or mansion

** large table in traditional style

From: THE UNEARABLE PATRIOTISM OF P.F.K.

ALEXANDROS ISSARIS

After Sunset

Death is quietly whistling in my sadness
It spreads on my limbs like a bruise
A worm that climbs to
My heart.
The distant landscape sinks into the mist
Peacocks are in hiding
Freezing weather.

I withstood it for years
In seas of fickle colours
Like the desert's echo
Like smouldering hope.
My mother walked on tiptoe
Right behind it
Saying prayers and incantations.

Loves of mild months
Earth in my empty mattress
Fleshy roots amid
The spirit's stones.
Angels' hallelujah arias
Beneath transparent domes
A phallus as from a pool of blood.

Clouds went in and out of the room
Memories reclined
And I on my back counted the wounds:
94 82 82 77 76 75 73 68
Nothing ashore.
I waited for the waves to withdraw
That I may incline and see
The plain of dreams
White shells, conches
Kouroi, turtles, fossils of kisses
Medusae and music boxes.

I think that I only by
Moulding light of mud
Reversing the sunset
And pawning my body
To the sky
Will I memorize what little is left.

And when our bare feet
Will step into the black sea
They'll ask us: did you love?
With heads hanging
Cheeks burning
Bitterly
We'll whisper
Oh yes, again and again!

I always remember
Remember last year
Ten twelve years ago
A tell figure in the rain
Remember the hill and the train
The back glowing in the light
The chestnut hair in the park
The festive night
The sweet-scented dark armpit
The brittle words in my ears
The lilies in the frost
The first snowfall
The hundredth kiss
I always remember
Remember nothing.
You rise as if out of sleep
With a broad-leafed embrace
And you shape undecipherable.
Rose saliva with pencils of remembrance
Sperms spasms against a copper background
You writhe with light. Dusk.

Brook, brook, brook
Water will flow
Time will come
We'll reach the sea
And with our brothers

The butterflies, the gazelles and the Centaurs
The lizards, the eagles, the violets
We'll become drops without memory.

But just before
We'll stand naked behind a wall
And when they ask us
Did you love?
With heads hanging
Bitterly
We'll say: yes
Again and
Again!

VICTOR IVANOVICI

Standpoints in Balkan Literary Comparativism (FRAGMENTS)

[...]

The need arises to reconsider the epistemological orientation of literary comparativism in the Balkans. The subject readily lends itself to meticulous consideration. For obvious reasons, however, I will now briefly elaborate on just a few points (three, to be accurate), which are of course subject to further discussion.

1. The invasion of South-East Europe by the Enlightenment towards the end of the 18th century resulted in the immediate dismantling of the single historical and political pattern to which all the nations in the region had more or less contributed intellectually. I am referring to the Byzantine Commonwealth –after Dimitri Obolensky– or rather, to put it more accurately, to its late phase, which in a well-known book Nicolae Iorga, a Romanian historiographer of international acclaim, dubbed *Byzance après Byzance*.

Furthermore, Romanticism –which generates no conflict with the Enlightenment in our region, because ‘tamed’ (V. Nemoianu, *The Taming of Romanticism*, 1984) when it arrives– further contributes to this course of development in two ways:

* On the one hand it helps construct the individual ‘national identities’ of individual ‘cultures’, by endorsing any local differentiae specificae at the expense of the Byzantine – post-Byzantine genus proximus. This is effected within the ‘master narrative’ [le Grand Récit] of each individual national history, the compilation of which constitutes a major task and aspiration of Romanticism. Extensive chapters on the common past are thus practically ‘deleted’ and ‘re-written’ as episodes in each individual ‘narrative’.

[See, for instance, the diametrically opposed appraisal of ‘Phanariot rule’ and of the Greek Revolution from the Greek and the Romanian historiography viewpoint respectively].

* Romanticism engages in directly linking the newly formed cultural patterns with a more ecumenical centre, which will henceforth be located in the West. National literatures now claim their due within the so-called Weltliteratur (Goethe), which is identical with the Western Canon. The ensuing epistemological processes are inversely proportionate to those referred to earlier: unlike what happened with

the dated Canon, where specific points of difference as well as the detachment of each 'national culture' were underlined, within each 'national culture' features contiguous to the West are sought or even invented.

[Thus, again in the context of the two cultures of the region I am most familiar with, several Greek theoreticians and historians overrate the contribution of Byzantine men of letters in exile to the launching of Western Humanism, even as they speak of the Cretan Renaissance; their Romanian counterparts, on the other hand, detect Gothic style elements in the popular architecture of Northern Transylvania and refer to a multi-faceted and manifold 'Romanian' Baroque at the beginning of the 18th century. Along more or less the same lines the Ukrainians claim their own version of the Baroque: an offshoot of the Polish Barok Sarmacki – even though this is not readily acknowledged in the Ukraine]

2. If the above is true, and if –as I tend to believe– this double Romantic venture was crowned with success, we are logically led to the conclusion that, at least as regards South-Eastern Europe and at least as regards the modern period, the comparativism of influences has lost all its objective underpinnings. For about two centuries now there has been no direct contact or interaction between Greek, Romanian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Serbian... authors, intellectuals or artists, not even a common reception of external cultural stimuli, only distinct instances of reduction to Western reference systems. 'Balkan comparativism' ought to be redefined methodologically as a comparativism of parallelisms viewed under two headings:

* The first involves the comparison of domestic cultural products with their presumed 'prototypes' (literary and art movements, intellectual and ideological trends and so on) in the area of the Western Canon. What is at issue here is determining which specific 'refraction angle' the reception of these 'prototypes' involves; but also appraising whether, how and to what extent the opening of each 'angle' is (or is not) affected by factors like 'national tradition', mentalities and so on.

* The second phase will involve a comparison of individual 'refraction' instances, in search of analogies and differences. Such elements (if they exist) constitute what we call the 'Balkan dimension' of the local realization of any aesthetic or ideological current or movement in the West. Yet this dimension is neither 'specific' to nor

‘inherent’ in the objects compared; observable only as a deviation from the Canon, it essentially constitutes an extension of it.

3. My final standpoint might appear the most daring of all three. If nowadays:

- * the cultural patterns that have formed in the region are directly linked with West- European culture and dissociated from one another,

- * whatever ‘originality’ they possess can only be conceived of as a Western Canon ‘refraction’,

- * while their common dimension is construed as a deviation from it, hence as an extension of this very Canon, then Balkan comparativism, given the European reference system, is also in need of some criterion for a careful assessment of the ‘contribution’ of each culture in the region to the above processes. This leading role belongs to the specific cultural pattern which –its historical-cultural presuppositions being similar or analogous at the outset– appears relatively more advanced than other ‘national cultures’ of the Balkans in terms of Europeanization.

For reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, I believe that such a measure of comparison can indeed be supplied by Romania, a country which can boast both a broader and a more constructive contribution to the intellectual movement of the West, having achieved a fuller and more solid assimilation of the Western Canon. In short, the comparative approach to any literature in the region can only benefit from being paralleled with Romanian letters.

[...]

Before closing, however, I wish to be allowed a digression and a personal thesis statement.

In my paper, I noted the loss of our former cultural identity, which was derived from a single cultural model, as well as the gradual but also direct linking to the Western Canon. When it occurred, this change of ‘paradigm’ must have been painful; still, we are neither the first nor the last to have suffered something of the kind.

In my main professional capacity as a Hispanist I had the opportunity to observe from pretty close up how similar processes –in Spanish-speaking America– have long been the cause of hermeneutic deliria involving strong regret over the supposed ‘dependence’ of the supposed ‘colonial’ intellectual production upon the cultural market of the supposed ‘metropolis’ (that is Western Europe and USA). To realize just how ridiculous these ‘supposedes’ are one need only consider the

fact that nowadays this 'dependence' has at last secured the participation of Latin America in world cultural events on equal terms, as well as that its 'colonial' products are nothing less than Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa or Carlos Fuentes... In the Spanish-speaking world, 'bloomers' of this kind, produced in monotonous abundance by the 'School of Resentment' –as so aptly pointed out by the Western Canon theoretician [Bloom 1994/95, 30]–, feed off the remains of a Third World leftism, toned up by injections of made in USA academic 'political correctness'. In any case, these arguments must also greatly appeal to the ears of our 'right-wingish' nostalgics, who are constantly flinging all sorts of arrows at the decay brought upon the time-honoured 'Hellenic-Christian tradition' by Modern Greeks 'euro-starvelings'.

As far as I am concerned, I find it absolutely positive that, both culturally and otherwise, we have cut ourselves off from a satiated, archaic model and joined the modern 'paradigm'. Far from being levelling, this evolution opens up the horizon of Weltliteratur, which can only be conceived of in the Western Canon framework. There was of course a price to pay, too, which was, until recently, the lack of contact with the immediate cultural context. The situation largely holds to date and constitutes an objective reality, which is why I have taken it to be the starting point for the views expressed above.

However, things have been somewhat 'loose' lately, which, as hoped by the advocates of postmodern evaluation relativism, may be seen as foreshadowing the eclipse of –whatever– 'canonicalness'. I do not in the least believe this is something to wish for, if it entails the 'Balkanization' of the Western Canon. If, however, it is to bring about the abolition of the one-sidedly hierarchic centre-periphery relation, with the simultaneous re-establishment of the Canon cohesion upon the principle of polyphony, that is on the basis of multiple and multiply connected and related centres, then the emerging change will prove particularly fertile.

In our epistemological sphere, for instance, there emerges in this case the possibility of supplementing comparativist parallelism with a comparativism of mutual encounters [...].

ROULA KAKLAMANA

Yannis and the Other

However much he tried, he couldn't get near. The wall was impenetrable, misfortune great. It was the tears of a brave being streaming down his cheeks, but the eyes would not clear. Everything was blurred. Just like that. Unable to fathom the reason why, he fluctuated between corruption and incorruptibility in his effort to find a way into his soul.

Because everything was to be found there. Both Yannis and the Other, and what intruded into love and banished it.

Because this loss was not only immense and unfair, but also, and more importantly, unwarrantable. To find the thread implies to find the reason. To hear with your own ears and see with your own eyes.

Yeah! The enemy was insidious. Invisible the veil, immense his power, and time on his side.

Yannis was neither a beast nor a saint. Just an ordinary Yannis, of those you see in the street, who, even though stooping, taciturn, with a vacant stare, the usual cigarette in his mouth, you felt like approaching, greeting, finding an excuse for entering into a conversation.

But Yannis didn't have a ready tongue. He wasn't easy to talk to. When he wasn't eating or drinking or smoking or speaking (rarely, when it came to the latter), he played with a twitch on his lips, a game varying from anger to indifference.

And that was the problem. 'All other things make sure of explaining themselves or laying claim to the mystery,' says the Other.

'Lay claim to the mystery,' repeats Yannis between his teeth.

'From anger to indifference. That's what I want to know,' persists the loquacious Other.

And Yannis bends over slowly, slowly, even more than his usual stooping position, to the point that he has difficulty in seeing the lower half of his interlocutor's face. He looks round with due urgency. He finds a stone, or something that looks like a stone. He fumbles it in his right hand. Then, lifting his arm diagonally, with an analogous movement of the body, he hurls it. Bingo! The stone lands beyond his field of vision.

'And woe to him who gets in the way?' asked the anxious Other.

Yannis chuckles to himself.

The Other grows cunning. He sits in a low chair, brings his hands forward, wriggles them, places his palms on his cheeks, and props his elbows on his knees. He is trying to think.

Yannis chuckles again.

Perhaps they had already come to an understanding.

For it was exactly then that it happened: what will connect us with Yannis' mysterious anger and his even more mysterious indifference, and with the stone he threw not unintentionally, without rhyme or reason, in answer to the Other's questions.

Be that as it may, not even he realized what had exactly happened.

Not only unexpectedly, but also inexplicably, he found himself recovering from a lethargy; coming round after being anaesthetized; as if surfacing from a great depth – sea, well, subterranean life– and asking: 'Where is the Other?' His voice reverberated a thousandfold. His mouth shut.

'The Other! He's asking for the Other!' A discussion was heard from afar, which also resounded with echoes.

'Just a mishap,' he was told. And as the echoes gradually diminished and he began to see and realize that he was in something that looked like a hospital – that all around came and went stretchers with injured people, nurses, doctors and other medical officers distinguished by their uniforms, some white and others blue, he asked what had happened and where the Other was.

'The Other? What Other? Everybody is an Other. Each one and an Other. There's no Other of your own. All the Others are Others. One goes, another comes. Sometimes no one comes or more come.'

'My Other was there.'

'Was! Past tense. Then. Once. But who wasn't?'

'So sudden?'

'Not sudden. For ages now!'

'Who hit me?'

'Everyone did.'

'Is there no culprit?'

'The culprits are many.'

'What about the Other?'

'The Others are many.'

'So sudden?'

'Not sudden. For ages now.'

Until Yannis stopped using his wits and resorted to his senses, trying to contrive a means of protecting himself.

'And the Other?' he asked himself, forgetting for a moment the new situation. 'What Other? The Others are many!'

And someone who was attending to his wounds burst out: 'The year 2000. A round number...' Then, abruptly, he swallowed his tongue. But Yannis, too, recovered quickly and resumed his calculations. Taking things into consideration, weak as he felt, bedridden (well, something like a bed), wrapped in bandages (maybe his entire body and his head, with openings only around the mouth, the ears, the nose and the eyes), he tried to piece together those words necessary for his being. He, himself, but also the Other, whom he considered an essential existential link, and whom he couldn't see, hear or feel. And this is what worried him, as he kept confusing him with 'What Other? The Others are many.' He sought the Other, although he suspected that same had met his fate, something which plunged him –not surprisingly– into the depths of grief, while also causing him anxiety about his person and his position in the world. An anxiety not entirely justifiable, at least vis-à-vis the important issue of the Other, by all accounts no longer in existence. 'I must have a good look round. I can't content myself with what they tell me. I should rely on my senses. I can hear now. There remains for me to see, smell and touch. Even feel,' he said to himself once alone. There was no mirror. Whatever he saw was a repetition of what these people had spoken earlier. Indistinguishable distant sounds, a faint light as if through slits forming the shadow of a network on the opposite wall, and on the ceiling nothing of interest. His faith in his own instincts began to shake.

Until he remembered those three things that occurred before the incident which brought him to this new and unexpected situation of Himself and the Other. He had thrown a stone far, far away, without knowing the outcome of his action. The Other, who was always standing by, said: 'Woe to him who gets in the way.' He sat opposite him in a similar position, and they looked at each other. They agreed on a number of things without exchanging a single word. [...]

Translated by Yannis Goumas

DIMITRIS KALOKYRIS

A Cat Called Age

They say that King Cyrus was raised by a one-eyed female dog. Zymbragos by the dark Charybdis. Telephus, the illegitimate son of Hercules, was brought up by a doe. Paris, of the Trojan War, was raised by a bear. No need to mention of course the wolf-nursed founders of Rome, but we will recall the fine Aesop fable about the cat which, in some unknown way, had fallen in love with a young man and pleaded with Aphrodite to transform it into a woman. The cat's plea was heard and the young man was quick to respond to the wiles of the feline-born beauty. Now wanting to test whether the young woman had also been spiritually transformed, goddess Aphrodite sent a mouse her way. And she, upon catching a whiff of the rodent, left the young man high and dry in bed and ran to capture her dinner. Raging with indignation, the goddess of love turned her back into a cat.

But Alcozarãan was raised by the absence of a cat.

We must also make mention here of Lewis Carroll's bodiless Cheshire cat, of Bulgakov's diabolical (and keen cigar-smoking) cat, of the introverted Prince of Chavarese, who was cat-ified in 1925, and of Eliot's divers silly cats. It is rumoured that the tame old Chan, a cat belonging to a European doctor living in the outer districts of Saigon until 1899 (the year aspirin was invented), was a debauched opium smoker.

Brecht's Herr Keuner did not like cats because he did not consider them a friend to man. However, when some stray whined outside his door, he would get up and let it into the warmth of his home. 'Their plan is a simple one,' he said. 'When they yowl, there will always be someone to open the door for them. And when people stop letting them in, they'll stop yowling. But even yowling shows some progress.' Being in favour of vocalness, we proceed progressively and unabashedly to the modern city. The city of people and the city of cats are found one within the other, commented Italo Calvino, but they are not the same city.

And yet Alcozaran was born in the city of Toledo and what's more, on April 28th, 1896, the day that the statue of the Charioteer in Delphi was dug up. His father was a merchant of white linens and his mother a natural blonde. He had two sisters, who were, in turn, on the plump side but crushingly respectable. He studied law, owned white cats (Bellfinia, Ystaspa, Cojones and Miamor) and he was fluent in German.

He showed leadership, mild ambition, an inclination for recognition and all other features that co-habit in people with high levels of uric acid in their blood. He remained among the conservative while he had an arranged marriage with the sister of a noteworthy clergyman, who had even unexpectedly served as a naval officer. He acquired a wary daughter and the life-tenancy of a ground-floor shop near Madrid's central train station. He loathed cold coffee and any form of rebellion. During Franco's regime he found himself working in the diplomatic service in countries of Central America where he metaphorically won laurels and literally won nominations of honour. In the summer of 1962, I think it was, he had a disagreement with the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and in the throes of rage sent a decorative bronze inkpot flying at him, causing scratches upon the said Minister. The incident was hushed up but it contributed to his being demoted to commonplace position in the corps until he was finally forced to voluntarily resign from civil service.

For a time he wandered around with his spouse on unofficial visits to cosmopolitan capitals of the world, spending modest amounts of money on the gambling tables and entangling himself in French conversations about the high intelligence quotient of the cat; perhaps this was his way of discreetly rekindling old acquaintances.

What is the relation of philosophy to humanism? None. To the Freedom of the Press? Minimal.

On the balcony of some hotel in Zurich he coincidentally read an article about a rhapsodist from Knossos named Thaletus and about the philosopher Theano, also from Crete, the legendary wife of Pythagoras, who, as you may remember, formulated three main theories: first, never breed swallows under the eaves of your roof (a most unwholesome habit of dire consequence) and second, do not describe the image of God in the circle of a ring. The reason is obvious.

So, in late March of 1968, we find our traveller in the loft of the monastery in Arcadia. Was he occupied with the dark truth about the holocaust? Was he concerned about the tremors of the desert? I do not know. Zachariah the cat gazed into the night air rising from behind the walls.

The benevolent Alcozaran decided that this was the land for him. He rode the bus around the neighbouring mountain villages and finally found an inhabitable room near the corner coffee-shop in Myrolithos.

In the years of Ottoman Rule, the area had been plagued by a dragon of feline form, which gulped down fire of any sort. It was not a slight of hand; it was merely the nature of its nutrition. But the world was getting cold. No one could cook. There was a famine. As the story

goes, Saint Myron went to visit this dragon one afternoon in the threshing floors of the fields. They argued and in the heat of the moment he threw a pebble at it. What followed was a miraculous rainstorm of stones of unknown origin which buried the Saint. The dragon repented, took on the Saint's form and ended up as an archimandrite. On the hill that was formed by the storm of stones the present town flourished.

Time passed, as it always does, with uncertainty. It's true that the villagers considered Alcozaran an outsider. In spite of all their fabled hospitality, they viewed him warily and provided him only with the bare necessities. This unusual stance originated from an unconfirmed rumour that this man was connected to the importation of a Spanish breed of sheep called merino, which had not become acclimatised to the White Mountains, a fact which had grave financial consequences on the area; in addition he was also suspect because the marrow of the sheep in question was certifiably thought to eliminate the desires of the flesh.

It was only the warrant officer that deeply valued him because he instinctively considered all Spaniards to have identical political ideals, that went along with reborn phoenixes, the emblem of the Greek dictatorship. I wonder if he knew my motto that democrats cannot love cats without being punished. I doubt it. I think he felt his vulnerable authority being attacked at the times which, according to custom, the sericulturists of the province spread false rumours. Let us remind you that this method is believed world-wide to speed up the hatching of the silkworm.

Alcozaran, however, reconciled himself diplomatically with the kittens Xasou and Charkia and lived for four months watching the light play on the clouds. He wrote two commanding letters to his wife: the first one to say he was still alive and the second to request the monographs of Alexander Garden and Michel Bégon (the guardians of the ethereal gardenia and the colour-begetting begonia respectively) because he had recently developed a sudden interest in horticulture.

One night he rose from his bed to make a visit to the outhouse and upon his return saw himself pale and immobile lying in his bed. He immediately collapsed.

The village doctor, Athanasakis, administered first aid and then threw up his hands in despair. Relatives were informed via the embassy and they found him well-steamed, sowing wheat germ to be consumed at his funeral.

For three days the Spaniards wandered around the village gesticulating wildly. At least they consumed vast quantities of omelettes and boiled chicken at the local tavern.

The priest was finally informed that Alcozaran had fixed his gaze on the ceiling and was watching the angel, so two dark-skinned peasants lifted him by the armpits and made him walk around the bed (because he hadn't yet filled his life's quota of steps, so let him take them and be done with it).

They took him down to the Catholic cemetery in Heraklion in a truck. Funeral announcements were printed in two languages, where all his titles were mentioned, but unfortunately with inexcusable typographical errors. Close by the relatives stood the warrant officer in full regalia, some unknowns and a cat called Age.

On the spot where the cat later died no moss ever gathered.

Translated by Thalia Bisticas

TASSOS KALOUTSAS

The Poppy Field

He paused, deliberately, and his father half-opened his eyes, without seeing him, and slowly moved his head in a gesture that meant 'Go on'.

'I set off on our usual route, same time, just before sunset. Before then, I looked out your stick – which my father-in-law, as it turned out, had been looking after like the apple of his eyes. 'He'll be back sometime', he said, 'and then he'll be asking me for it', in fact he'd even carved the handle – and I found it in the woodshed. He saw me and smiled I know, he must have been thinking, where he's off to now – where he used to go wandering with his father. City folk, he says, look at the country in a different way. That was when his nibs was on his way back from the coffee shop and was planning a quick return. I stepped out and left the village behind, keeping to the main road. I went on quickly till I reached the knoll, without feeling tired at all, and had a strong feeling that you were with me. May, you see... I tell you, at mid-day my head was ringing with all the jackdaws squabbling on the big ruined balcony, but now I really enjoyed the birds singing. Every now and then I caught a whiff of mint, chamomile, wild grasses and spearmint, enough to make you dizzy. Then, when I got up aheight, I saw in the distance, on the upper side, something that made a particular impression on me, a little field that was all red. I took a bearing on it with my eye and said. 'Let me just go there – that's surely brimful of poppies'.

The mountain was looking on the horizon, no snow on it now, but I could feel a cool breeze coming from that direction. There was only light traffic on the main road, one or two cars every three minutes. Swathes of green on the right and left. I stopped to stare at a wheat field, which on three sides went round another one with tobacco seedlings. From a copse nearby I could hear a bird singing – and what warbling! Without letting up once, man. I thought my heart would burst. I wonder what it could have been: goldfinch, nightingale, bee-eater maybe? Then another bird high up on the wires started a tune, then another one, in some foliage opposite, a proper concert. And, as I was starting off again, banging the stick down on the asphalt, I saw a sapling swaying in front of me, all green, with a thistle next to it, stretching its stalk up to touch it, in what you might call an attempt at harmony. I tell you, I felt funny. It went through my mind that I was like

one of them insects that get chased though the air, and even if they'd told me at that moment that I was nothing at all, I'd have accepted it.

A villager came by on his tractor, and we waved to each other in greeting. Didn't even know him. Just a friendly soul in the wilderness, I thought – a consolation. That's why I love the village: they greet you, you greet them, never mind whether you know them or not. I saw beside me a field with a dark brown colour – freshly watered. They'd have been sowing something. Back in the distance, the ears were growing longer in the wheat-field, but the tobacco, where there was any, was short, just a dwarf compared to it. If you want I'll tell you all I noticed in detail. The barley was fleshing out, forming grains, the wheat, as I was saying, was in its prime, gaining in stature, the beet, in rows with a leaf as broad as that, the tobacco and maize have just been shown and are only a span high, same as the sunflowers, although they've got a wide leaf as well. I walked on, taking deep breaths, and couldn't get my fill of gazing around. Now and then, my eye would catch some lizards scurrying among the weeds. On occasion, mostly at noon sort of time, I've seen snakes cross the main road, as well.

I said snakes... The day before yesterday, listen to what happened to my father-in-law, in the afternoon... ha, ha! He went to put his jacket on, which he'd left in the shed above the sheepfold. He throws it round his shoulders, like, goes to put his hand in the sleeve and feels something cold. You hear? He was horrified. So he shakes his jacket and out it falls, a snake that big! I said 'But weren't you afraid?' 'What was there to be afraid of?' says he. 'The poor thing had found the sleeve nice and warm and wriggled in! When I saw it leaving I said farewell. Pity. It was a house snake. From the time it came to us, we'd been free of mice'. D'you want to hear something else he told me? 'If you ever kill a snake' he says, 'and it's in the morning', cut it in two and it'll waggle its tail until the moon comes out. Then it'll finish...'. So there you are, at some stage, I got there, and I saw I hadn't been wrong. It really was a little field, chocker-block with poppies. It was a sea of poppies with thousands of other smaller flowers among them, blue, white and yellow, even tufts of chamomile. It was an orgy of vegetation –untouched by human hand– and nature itself was showing its face. Red dominated, like a cistern full of blood. I sat for a long time gazing at it. Meantime, I'd got quite near to the bend, the big crossroads was only a little further on. That's what I reckoned, at least. Suddenly, I said to myself, 'since you've come as far as this, why don't you go and have a look, like. Just go on a bit further to see how far away the coppice at the cross-roads is, what the plain looks like from there. It's a chance to gawp at some of the sights from that side as

well. Call it curiosity –although what curiosity, since we know all the places– call it what you like, but I wanted to go on a little further.

Now, if you remember from the other times, when we went by car, the bend is nearly blind at that point. As I got closer, I heard a noise, which got louder and louder so I moved right over to the edge straight away, but there was a ditch there with high bushes covered with thorns and I got stuck on them. The car came round like a rocket, bouncing around, because the driver just managed to turn the wheel over to the left. You'd have said it was like a gust of wind had blown it there. Just at the last minute, a look of total panic came over his face, but, mind, I wasn't far behind him there, pal.

In a right state, I decided to turn back. I thought simply: What do you suppose I could have found of greater interest on my way than that marvellous little field with the poppies? Nothing, of course, except maybe all sorts of dangers... I clamped the stick to my side, like a sword and stepped up the pace again. The sun was now low on the horizon, exactly opposite the little field. Two cars slowed down and wanted to give me a lift, thinking I'd broken down, but I waved them on not to stop. How could they imagine the way I was feeling... I kept taking deep breaths and before I knew what was happening, you might say, I'd reached that incline outside the village...'

He faltered. He'd always had the idea –even though they'd avoided talking about it– that the first symptoms of his father's illness had made themselves felt there on that incline, about four years ago. He remembered the scene well, because it had made such an impression on him and he'd thought it a bad sign. His father had stopped, panting –most unusual for him– and clutched his waist with both hands, as if a shooting pain were going right through him and crippling him. A few months later, having gone into a steep decline in the meantime, he became confined to bed.

Suddenly, he bent over him.

'But what's the matter... Are you crying?'

He bit his tongue. His father had his eyelids tight shut, but a tear seemed to be teetering at the edges. His face was serious, serene – proud it seemed to him– and an ineffable sweetness played over his features.

He didn't answer. His son stroked his forehead a little, then stood up and gazed at him in bewilderment for a moment, arms akimbo. 'I'll be back later to give you a shave', he murmured faintly, straightening the bed-clothes, then looked at him in silence for a little and felt something welling up inside him, choking him, since his father seemed not to be hearing him any more now, and looked as if he wanted to escape into sleep.

From: THE CLUB AND OTHER STORIES, Translated by W.J. Lillie

DIONYSSIS KARATZAS

Solitude Birthday

Bitter sorrows
and seawaters.

The Day of Water

Born on the Day of Water
I was christened by Love
on Abyss banks.
As a grown-up I encountered the night
and transformed in
discourse and writing
I fought
to conquer your heart.
But you
you simply gave all your blood
to an oblivion tree.

Should I know
I could become soil
which you recall in every raindrop
deeply in your roots.

In the Waterslang

You speak seaslangwise?
In a kiss
of waterdrops
I will lavish upon your body
and
when I reach your
deep, delicate darkness
on a dead island

I will anchor
where to meet all angels.

On your Departure

When you go
not frighten the birds.
Instead,
vigorously withdraw heaven aside
so I can count Night like Home
and cork the sea so firmly
that water cannot stop
and rain cannot fall.
Ignorant as I am
I may slip
and get drowned in solitude.

Translated by Nicholaos Chryshochoos

VASSILIS KARAVITIS

A Few Fundamental Questions and Perhaps Only One

How they say goodbye to love
How they fall in love with loneliness
How they tame fear
How they take in pain
How they disuse hope
How they exile faith
How they trust thought
How they get used to doubt
How they slip to apathy
How they end up to silence
How they transform life
How they deceive death

How they keep on asking
How they find out an answer

How

Abstraction

He hopes to reach sometime
Another degree of happiness:
To recall the world
as do the dead

And also miss it.

Measure of Self-Knowledge

After some thirty years
Of fruitless revolution

You understand at last
How simple
How easy it was
For the world to exist

Some twenty centuries
Without you.

Discoland

There was here once silence.
The finest thing in the world.

Retrograde Motion

I ripen
As a futile fruit
and as a debtor to soil
(which feeds me slyly).

[Written in English by the author]

IOANNA KARISTIANI

From:

Suit in the Earth

The freezer with the AIDS virus, mother.'

Kyriakos Rousias, after a silence of three or four hours and absorption in notes, little lights, lenses, half-turned round, pulled his mother's black kerchief a little to the side, and showed her at the end of the corridor, behind the empty desks, BL3, the prohibited zone, which was where the large black refrigerator, like a two-doored wardrobe, marked in yellow DANGER – AIDS – HIV, with billions of viruses in frozen ampules, double-locked and at a temperature of minus 80 degrees, also stood. She checked her fingers on her knitting, so as not to lose any stitches and followed him with her eyes, without comment, until they returned, two minutes later, he to his computer and she to her purple wool.

Rousias had first seen his mother's hands, the nails battered with old, slain blood, at the age of seven, when he put on glasses, five degrees of myopia in the left eye, three and a half in the right. Up to then, he had seen half of what other people did.

Many of the things which they had considered normal ever since they were babies - a lammergeier carrying off a wild cat and the ensuing mayhem in the middle of the sky - Kyriakos became aware of at the age of seven, and the child was staggered, because everything came all at once, suddenly the world around proved longer and higher, at least four times as big, it wasn't a vineyard, a garden and the familiar Valyris, Pateros, Sgouros, and Klados families.

In his adult life, he wrote off many persons and things, he left as a bridge to the things of the past and the old place his mother's hands and one or two personal possessions. In major difficulties, in certain long, sometimes all-night, telephone calls with Hatziantoniou, just Hatziantoniou, because of the host of Georges in their small, closed circle, or with Germans and Chinese who were associates in his work, even with unknown postgraduate students, sick people or relatives of sick people from Crete and the whole of Greece who, whether or not he was the right person, turned to him, he wouldn't allow the person at the other end to say good-bye, as if he couldn't bear to ring off, he would constantly draw lines on his forehead with the cross he wore and

dig up old stories, make up questions, draw out confessions, prolong the dialogue, prolong the monologue, to drag out the phone call.

On the day of his birthday –Friday, 17 July 1998– Kyriakos Rousias lost the little cross given to him at his christening. And after he had disturbed and lifted the cushions, he investigated the recesses of the settee, combed through the long-haired rug, turned his shaving kit upside down in the bathroom, shook out his briefcase, searched his dirty shirts which were left about everywhere, rummaged through the leavings of yesterday night's small party for his forty-something birthday, come on now, come on, he begged a thousand times, but the little cross didn't come. At twenty past one in the morning, he set out for the laboratory, to look there. He left behind the tall trees of Gaithersburg and took the 270, which he once had called 'Technology Corridor' and passed, with some self-satisfaction Comsat with its satellites, Human Genome Science and its genetics, Perkin-Elmer with its computers. There are some highways which are all order and boredom, as if their left-hand lane had tired of looking at the right, and the right at the left – the 270 was such a case. It was still night, traffic light. Where can I find an amulet of the True Cross to send you? – the cassette was a present from Hatziantoniou, he'd been for Chicago all along, which he'd been listening to since 1974 and had distributed, and with him Rousias had learnt it by heart, together with his friends, overseas Greeks, the diaspora, and Americans. So Kalatzis was singing, a normal sort of voice, never in great high spirits and party mood, and it sounded as though it was coming from across the way, like a neighbour in his white vest at the window, and perhaps that's why they liked it that bit better, it didn't distract them from their work.

An amulet for her to keep, even if she doesn't love me, the cassette went on, Rousias entered into the song, Kalatzis was singing about an amulet, he meant his little cross.

The voice would keep him company on the forty-six kilometres to Frederick, as if he had his wife next to him –if he'd had one– and they had been talking quietly and a bit boringly, about familiar things.

And with his mother, when he had a bad conscience about the long silences, though he wasn't the only one to blame, he would put on the cassette at home, in the car, in the laboratory when he took her with him for company, Kalatzis, mother, he would tell her.

When he was twenty-eight, he'd brought her to America for three winters, for four or five months each time. They'd listened to the songs hundreds of times; they too were a part of their silence.

His head was still heavy.

Someone from Kolymbari, who had his reasons, had sent him as a present a demijohn of old Kissamos wine and they'd downed half of it

together with the Polish chicken which the Epirot's Lilka had cooked for them, don't you come because we're not going to speak English, there's no way we're going to translate for you, they'd warned her, as usual.

Kyriakos Rousias the Cretan turned forty-three in the company of the two Georges from work, the Voliot molecular biologist, the Epirot physicist, and Lilka's chicken, exactly as he had turned forty-two the year before, forty-one the year before that, forty in exactly the same way, thirty-nine, and so on.

In the sparse conversation they said various unconnected things, raised their glasses to the toast –death to women– and in low voices, as if they were conspiring, broke into their songs and again it was the best moment, as if the three of them were going arm in arm on a major nocturnal binge.

At Gaithersburg, outside, night was everywhere and the moon nowhere. They didn't know how it had got lost, it had been submerged in their boozing, we'll find it and we'll leave like gentlemen, the two guests promised.

They got drunk twice a year, in April on St George's day, either with Hatziantoniou in Chicago or with the Voliot at Rockville or with the Epirot in Baltimore, an hour away –he had lived there since he worked at Johns Hopkins– and they got drunk again in July on Rousias's birthday.

These two piss-ups were absolutely necessary so they could forget the competition, the hypertension and the workload face to face with death.

The toasts continued, to football, to their villages, there was the mandatory one to Asia Minor, a concession to the absent Hatziantoniou, to Dior, as they called their friend the thoracic surgeon, because he always had one or two needles pinned under his lapel, for sewing.

Then the Epirot, whom they called the still married one, as if to say get on with it, get a divorce, got up from the rug, which even in summer was always at the foot of the settee, took off his shoes and socks, gathered up Lilka's tupperware and announced that he had a good offer of a job from a university in Australia.

'One less George,' was the way he put it.

Once again, Kyriakos Rousias caught Frederick napping.

There wasn't a soul about in the little town, a light at a very few windows, some chatting-up, marital talk, illness and insomnia, one July with ninety-eight degrees Fahrenheit and humidity which stuck to your skin like celluloid.

Four or five streets all in all, little two-floor wooden houses, painted a faint blue, a faint pink and cream, something like primary school paper cut-outs next to the vast former chemical warfare military base, fifty kilometres north of Washington, which for some years now had hosted three thousand researchers of the NIH, the National Institute of Health. There were some two hundred Greeks, one of them being Rousias. 'The night bird again,' said the guard, and, without looking at Rousias's ID, raised the bar.

The silver Achiura rolled unhurriedly over the flat area, over that level affair which a row of distant lights over there, seven hundred metres away, made to look like a waterfront in the earth. Its lighthouse was the sole tall building, the four-storey dark-red anthrax building, haunted, mother, he turned to say in her ear whenever he brought her to America and dragged her with him to work so that she wouldn't be on her own at home, particularly at weekends, when the laboratories emptied of their scientists, secretaries and cleaners. Then, without the Japanese and Spanish smiling at her condescendingly and supposedly taking notice of her, Mrs Polyxeni was at home ensconced in her chair and at the same time absent, present wherever her thoughts sent her, two or three places all in all – to the events of her life, which had not used more than these.

Mrs Polyxeni had no problem with the language, she was quiet in Crete and even quieter in America, nor did she want any dialogue with her son, so as not to interrupt him.

The two of them got by between the small and the large centrifugal separators and super-separators, which were like washing-machines, and the high-precision balances and the PCR.

The old woman didn't ask any questions, as if she knew about such things, and Rousias, bent over buttons, luciferase, fireflies, mother, he would sometimes say to her, winking, and she would go on knitting, with the ball of wool unwinding at the feet of her son, the desks, the machinery and around her black slippers.

He parked outside his own laboratory, the parking lot was empty. He stuffed the cassette in his pocket, unlocked the iron gate, and pressed the switches to turn on the light bulbs.

It was ten to two in the morning. There was no need to shout is there anybody here, night work was a kink of the Greeks and the two Georges, hard drinkers, would already be snoring away in their beds.

He jammed his eye to the microscope, a first movement out of habit, he then began to search at random, to lift up piles of prospectuses, diskettes, to stick his finger into the box of paper-clips, to turn pencil-holders upside down.

The wastepaper baskets –empty; the carpet– swept; the corridor – washed; the glass partitions– without fingerprints; the toilet–sparkling clean. Their Puerto Rican had a mania for cleanliness, not a pin escaped her.

She loved Rousias, because when he talked to her, he looked her in the eye, the others simply looked in her direction. She called him a sweetie, poured away his cold coffee and gave him some hot, and it was only his absent-mindedness, which didn't make her bark. She went through the wastepaper basket and picked out his glasses case, keys thrown away and twenty-dollar bills, dusted them down and left them on the desk.

The night of the seventeenth of July – nothing. And to phone her he would have to wait until a decent time.

'Hey, Rita, you're like my godmother,' he would say to her, and certainly they scored a draw on breasts, my little cross, fuck it, he would complain to her, it can't have got lost somewhere with the chain as well, but fat Rita with the swollen knees would be fast asleep and so Rousias, with his hands in his pockets, wandered round the fifteen offices of his associates, everywhere there was the menu card of the Chinese restaurant, some SOS deadlines, the Pan-American congress at Keystone, March 2000, photographs of their Swedish girl who had gone back home, to Karolinska, clumsily torn pieces of paper with fax numbers on them, the behind of a top model with sand clinging to it, the German with family in the Samaria Gorge, and Mr Babis, father of the Epirot, photographed standing smartly to attention next to Jackie Onassis's grave.

TAKIS KARVELIS

From:
Metaphassi

[17]

It's time we got accustomed to holocausts.
If a house catches fire
or someone in a moment of despair
decides to immolate himself
or some racketeer walks toward us
disguised as a respectable homeowner or a pimp
we have one hand held out for a handshake
the other one on the trigger
and that's how we while away our lives.

Translated by Eleni & Bertrand Mathieu

NIKOS KASDAGLIS

From:

Shaved Heads

It wasn't the first time I promised marriage. I did it once before I got drafted. There was a man from the village – we'd been fighting since our school days and he'd always get beat, except when he was with his friends.

We grew up and stopped the kid stuff, but he could never abide me. One day, coming back from the fountain, my sister tripped and fell. Fotis happened to be there at the time and he made a dirty comment-what would she do now that her little jug was cracked-and stuff like that. She cried all the way to my uncle's house. But that wasn't enough for him. He had to make the sluts he had seen in town none was as well built as my sister. He forgot, though, that he had sisters, too.

I heard about it as I was irrigating the truck farm. I dropped the winch and ran. There was a group around him when I got to the coffeehouse. They saw me from far away and shut up. Fotis stood up and grabbed a bottle before I could get to him.

'Did I hear right, Fotis? Did you bother my sister at the fountain?'

'That's right'.

I almost choked. In my village, I was considered the best fighter, but right then I couldn't be satisfied just to beat him up or knife him. I couldn't get even with that sort of thing. His friends were on the lookout to see when we'd tangle so they could part us, but I turned my back on them, instead. They eased up and started to laugh.

The next day Fotis was out with two of them, knives stuck in their belts. They were afraid. I'd come on him unawares, as though I couldn't knife him at midday in the square if I wanted to. But I was biding my time.

I went after his younger sister. She couldn't get to the fields without running into me. After a lot of manoeuvring, I managed to get her to sneak out of the house at night and meet me. I promised her everything till even I didn't know whether I wanted to trick her or if I meant everything I said. Before day broke I took her back to her house and told her to tell her father that I'd be back that evening to ask for her hand.

She was afraid to tell him what we did.

'Don't worry about it,' I said. 'We're going to get married anyhow, right?'

When the sun rose again, it shone doubly; sucking air into my lungs, I never felt such joy or saw how beautiful the colours of the earth I dug were, or breathed in its smell, I sweated and dragged up water, washed up with both hands, lay under the shade. My mind wouldn't leave the girl.

But in the afternoon my mood weakened as the sun fell and I began easing up on my work, wishing the sun would never set. Night fell and I was still digging away, saying to myself that it'd never do for me to leave the row half-done. Then I stopped everything 'cause I didn't care about the row, I just didn't want to go into the cafe and do the dirty work. But it couldn't be helped 'cause the villagers, for days now, laughed whenever they saw me in the square. I ordered mastiba at the café –I was treating– and a group gathered around me. But my tongue was tied and I talked about a calf of my coumbaro and the late tomatoes that hadn't budded yet.

I was wondering whether it wasn't better to go and ask for her hand after all, and maybe I'd have done it if the evil hour hadn't come. Fotis showed up, looking for me.

'Yiannilo, I've come looking for you to let bygones be bygones since you're going to join our family.'

As though I needed – I laughed.

'Get lost', I said. 'Cuckold'.

He didn't understand right away and was stunned.

'What's the matter, Yiannilo? Why're you talking like that?'

'Cuckold,' I said again, this time venomously.

Then he understood and changed colour. He lunged to grab me and we exchanged punches before being separated.

Afterwards, he locked his sister up in the house and beat her all night; the neighbours didn't sleep at all listening to the racket. We had another fight, this time with knives, and if I hadn't been drafted, one of us would have killed the other for sure. When I was in Basic, I got a letter from my uncle saying that the girl couldn't take the abuse any more; she left and never went back to the village.

RINA KATSELLI

From:

Blue Whale

[11]

My wife says that the bad thing about me is that even though I'm a refugee I've found a way of furnishing myself free of cost with many blank sheets of paper, which I fill up without control. But in this world, if anyone has any duties, it is to a clean sheet of paper, which he alone must fill up responsibly. No one is too unimportant or too great not to do such a thing. So I, the least of men, whom injustice has forced to get rid of his Christian name, feel that I have that duty. Sometimes I wonder whether this here is my page or I must start somewhere else, and I lie awake at night tormenting myself. As long as I am unable to find an answer the least I can do is to continue writing to seek the answer with the wish that you, friend, fill your page whatever it may be.

[12]

As I have introduced the subject of sheets of paper and writing I shall say a word about my cousin who takes writing extremely seriously and struggles to find the money to have her books printed. She came yesterday and we discussed literature, philosophy, history and the like. When one is in her company one has no choice save to talk about those subjects. When I mentioned to her that I am writing something, which I shall send to 19 acquaintances, she was brash enough, to suggest that I add several pages of her own. She said she wanted my acquaintances to read some explanations about her last book, which had been misinterpreted. I refused because I did not want to get mixed up with the bran for fear that the chickens might peck me. I am poultry farmer, I raise and sell hens and I do not want to allow myself to become their food. Fundamentally she got what she deserved. When they take everything you own, your squeals are like those of pigs, which disturb the public peace, cause trouble, but are futile. I have never heard of a pig being saved because it squealed while about to be slaughtered and I know that because my grandfather was a butcher. You may ask, 'Mister D.G.C. what are you doing; don't you squeal like a pig?' No! I'm writing this especially for you friend, so that you are careful and you do not let them take you to the slaughterhouse like

they took me. I'm shouting now to prevent your screams. I am aware, not only of my own worthlessness here on earth but also of the worthlessness of our planet in the vast universe. If, however, I send a warning just to you alone I will feel that I have done my duty as a human being because as far as I am aware, up to now no pig has squealed in order to save the other pigs from death....

Although I turned down my cousin's request to put her writings here, I regretted it at the last moment. Deep down I am good-hearted although my wife remains unmoved by that. 'That 'deep down' always remains 'deep down'. I never see it come to the surface so that I can see one good day from you,' she tells me.

How did I come to change my mind? When she got up to leave I was tempted to ask her why she tried to present in art form her experiences and to publish things that normally should stay locked away in her drawer. She replied that she no longer had a drawer since she was also a displaced person and that a great man said 'if there is something good about art today it is that it can serve man to help him understand himself and the reality in which he moves'. I wanted to learn his name. 'He's a famous director who makes quality films. His name is not important,' she replied.

I was ready to argue with her but she seemed very bitter. I guessed that she had problems and troubles because like me she was a refugee. My heart softened and goodness welled up within me. What a pity my wife was not there to be proud of me. I asked her to give me what she had written and I promised to add something here. Today, through the post, I received her literary work, the little book which contains her experiences during the Turkish invasion and the subsequent loss of her home. The reasons for their presence take up eight closely-written sheets of paper which begin:

'This book is a small cry of pain from the heart. A small cry of pain, which was brought about by the blows which the powers of injustice and evil wrought on me, on you and on the who/e of Cyprus - a small cry which I should very much like to stifle. This little book disturbs me unbelievably and I should be extremely happy if it disappeared from my life, from your life, from the life of Cyprus and from the face of the earth. I shall retract it. But how? Can they take back the blows which gave rise to it?'

Afterwards, in a typically feminine manner she gossips a great deal about niceties and continues:

'This book does not set out to cover historically everything that happened in Cyprus in the second half of 1974 – a person who could do so would certainly be admired. A cry of pain so personal and isolated cannot include everything from alpha to omega. This essay is given to those who have the ability to understand human suffering so that they may get some idea of what happened in the ruined place, what happens when people are made homeless and destroyed either here or in another corner of the earth.'

Again she says many things before she adds:

'This little outburst of anguish which has become a book is disturbing. Please tell it to keep quiet by removing the reasons for it, if you can. Each one of us can do so, if he sits down and tries to work things out, if he thinks rationally and unemotionally yet humanely and struggles for the salvation of all of us. With the above precepts each one can do something for the salvation of our country, and for the salvation of the who/e world. If you cannot do so, follow the example of a friend of mine who cannot bear to see in the newspapers and magazines photographs of children with bloated hungry stomachs and the slaughtered bodies of fighters so she quickly turns to the pages where she finds pleasant short stories or literally immerses herself in the humour column.'

This book, which is a cry of pain, disturbs its readers but nothing is achieved by provoking those who were forced to utter that cry. They did not want such things to happen and they would be the first to wish that they did not have to write accounts of such things. And do not ask what others would have done in our place and how they would have either shouted or kept quiet. Who is so sure of himself that he knows what he would do in a given situation and if he would be able to shout. It is not easy to have a voice at such moments and more than that to have the courage to express one's feelings. It is enough that this voice is sincere and if it appears somewhat oppressive you have every right to stop up your ears and shut it out. It is nothing more than a small insignificant cry among the screams, which you did not bother to hear. As for me, I very much regret that I sinned by surviving and writing my experiences, so I ask for forgiveness.

I found my cousin's book very mild, and many of my refugee acquaintances agreed. I noticed that if you live through a terrifying experience and afterwards you see it transformed into an art form it does not satisfy you. Whatever is expressed as art is lessened in impact whether by words which are of limited endurance and

significance or by colours which everybody strains to describe as perfect in regard to their harmony. Perhaps the cinema with its devices can capture some of the terrible realities and I would agree with the words of the great director... But the cinema is almost always a commercial venture. For that reason, even here I'm afraid of describing how they took from me all the respectability I had inherited directly from Homeric times. I do not know whether in a few years time I'll dare to write something. The events of 1974 are great wounds inside me, which, if I scratch them, will bleed making me burst with revulsion at the emotional portrayal of the horrifying reality I lived through.

Such revulsion I felt when I looked at some so-called famous paintings, which attempted to show the horror of the burned bodies of our brave young fighters whom I chanced to see and whom I took to the hospital during the weekend of the invasion. In remembrance of those young men who were roasted alive by napalm bombs, the artists paint pictures of those same young men, their faces bathed in serenity with a few superficial bullet holes here and there. That serenity and those few bullet holes heighten the physical beauty of the young men and at the same time makes me despise the triviality of art because those pictures had nothing in common with the heaps of human pulp which I had seen in the trenches. I ask myself if those who survived the destruction of the town of Guernica and who happened to see the painting of the same name by Picasso, felt the same. I'm not trying to blame the painter or my cousin for the little book she had printed. The thing, which drives me mad is how art reduces reality to mediocrity thus cheapening it. Perhaps man, instead of expanding his horizons, limits them. Thus works of art with a message have ceased to speak to people because the latter do not bother to listen and to hear. They learn English, French and Esperanto and they speak those languages. Others consider art as floating in a void and they are certain that today art has lost its link with man and that it no longer functions in society, and now is above it and they insist on 'art for art's sake'. Thus man stays outside the language of art, he hardens, he casts aside humanity and his natural self and he has become a synthesis, which has no relation with the infant, which comes forth from the bleeding womb of his mother. For that reason it is high time we produced an artistic form, which speaks directly to us - an anti-art of necessity, which will represent the current tragedy - the tragedy of a grain of sand in infinity. We should try to portray the disappearance of the blue whale and the destruction of a Hellenic core and its culture in Northern Cyprus in a way that no way diminishes its significance. It should satisfactorily portray the destruction of Byzantine murals, the broken crucifixes from our churches, and our cemeteries. These and many

other things happen and art has the duty to find a way to speak without minimising the significance of such events so that everyone can understand, not only an elect few, even if such works of art seem cheap and even if they are fit only to be sold at fairs.

NIKOS A. KAVADIAS

From:

Flight in the White

Nausicaa, what is happening to me is strange. I'm flying, Nausicaa. I am telling you the truth; it's not a writer's fantasy. Don't laugh at me, I have the feeling of a strange event, and it is indeed strange the flight in this tunnel of bright white light –if it is light, for it doesn't blind me– with the strange but beautiful music –if it is music– that comes from everywhere and nowhere. I am flying with unimaginable speed, knowing neither the way nor the reason, nor the destination of this flight. And, the other strange thing is that I don't care, I don't feel fear or enthusiasm. It is like being a machine; I have no emotions, although I retain their knowledge, and simply I register what I see, hear, and read – not books, Nausicaa, but thoughts and feelings that are appearing in front of my sight at high speed like passing on the screen of a computer. I can't find any other way to describe it for you, but you can understand how important it is for a writer to be shown in such a simple way the inmost worlds of people, their secret lives – the really hidden ones. This was my inaccessible dream, right from the start: to penetrate the mind of people and witness first hand events that are authentic – not substitutes; in other words, Nausicaa, to write THE BOOK. This moment, however, when I have the possibility of doing it, I don't care for it at all. I only know. I know that I know what was happened in the past, what will happen, and what exactly all these people feel and think; these people, whom I see as being simultaneously children, adolescents, young persons, middle-aged and elderly, in a perpetual present. Should I call it dream? In dreams, however, one doesn't see so many details, neither colours, nor oneself; yet, I see myself lying down on our bed, in our bedroom in the small house of Rafina – near the bed I see the night-table with my watch, my pills, my eyeglasses and the glass of water on it, a little far from it I see the armchair with your unfinished needlework laid on it's back, my woollen jacket hanging on the clothe-horse that we had bought from Monastiraki – and at the same time I see myself in Corfu, being a seventeen years old boy, and having the sudden idea to estimate the age of the old houses from the layers of the colours that I discern in the wounds of their walls: the grey-green of mould, the carmine, the white, and the ochre. Nevertheless, in the same scenery there are also present the members of our family, each with it's own motions and characteristics, and other places and landscapes of our island, and

other people, friends, known and unknown persons, to whom I stare all the time feeling nothing but the knowledge. The faces are coming more and more closer, growing in size as being looked from behind a magnifying lens; at the banks of their wrinkles there are discernible layers similar to the ones that the wounds of the walls of the old houses have, and the pores of their skin seem similar to craters, whence hidden loves, sorrows and hopes spring up like fumes.

NATASSA KESMETI

From:

Virgo of Solitude & the Myth of the Carrier

Valsamina came out again. 'I am worried that you are feeling cold', she said to Florence; and placed a shawl over her woollen jacket.

'Shall I help you to your bed?'

'Not yet, I am not sleepy. Bless you for caring though. After all, the north wind is not blowing tonight but tomorrow gales might start again and we won't be able to stay out. You must be sleepy and I am keeping you awake.'

'No', said Valsamina. 'I am reading about Virginia's life, remember me telling you about the Englishwoman...'

'Virginia... like my granddaughter, Virgo. Virginia her full name, in other words Virgin, which means what?'

And Florence turned inside her, like she was looking very deep in her for something distant... in an endless sandy beach dominated by repeatable tides and ebbs... where from... how can one draw out a lost diamond brooch or maybe a stone, an enigmatic, heavy, fatal stone to put in her pocket and proceed...

'Maybe not taken over, "untaken". Possibly...that: "untaken"', Florence said again. 'Would it be worth it? Remaining "untaken" till the end. Is it worth it? What do you think Mina?'

'I can't answer you. I am afraid I am not the right person, not because I feel "untaken" (Valsamina was unmarried but apart from all her uncoordinated movements –something that can be observed in women that have stayed single and alone for a long time: a series of sudden shakes a sort of jerky moves, like they are not leaning on anything, like they are in the middle of a vast space– by no means she seemed unloved, a spinster as they used to say in the past) but how can I say it: unasked. Like I was there in the window exposed for a long time, illuminated or wrapped in some light of my own and yet no one saw me and nobody asked me to live with him. I say so, because I suppose that this is what marriage means, what it is all about.'

'Yes', said Florence... 'so do I'.

'Do you', said Valsamina with surprise. 'Why should you suppose? Isn't your experience enough to assure you?'

'No' said Florence somewhat impatiently. 'I am afraid it is not enough. The only thing I have realised is that what is needed is something...a third that wishes to live between the two or that they, themselves, have to find in order to stand as a bridge between them, so that each can walk towards the other, without crushing him...'

‘A third?’ asked Valsamina even more surprised turning towards Florence as if she was trying to make out better her features lit by the moon, in the same way one does with someone totally unknown, an intruder entering suddenly his place.

But the old woman wholly under the moon, enigmatic like Virginia’s lost diamond brooch in the vast sand opposite the only Lighthouse, was shining in the way that very old women sometimes shine with a light pouring from their wrinkles, from the deep trails formed by their eyes when they turned inside, since they did not have anything else to long for, and calmly added:

‘No, no I don’t mean what most people retrieve to so often, a cheap substitute like so many other cases. Even though in my life there have been some that in one way or another brought me to the verge of intoxication...but never Intoxication itself. I mean, so much, that I did not see anything apart from the Image behind their Shadow and did not want anything but to follow it even get lost for it’s sake. Only to touch it. And I am not merely talking about the body and embraces like some modern person would easily think. This is a rather limited intoxication if not an easy one. Neither am I talking about the death in love, another fixation of garrulous times and people that relay mostly on distance and observation. I am talking about the Intoxication that is neither a robbery nor boredom or despair and which no word will ever be enough for it, although light-drops sprinkle in every word that hosts it for a while. For the intoxication that always slides away, escaping like the rarest perfume from the slightest cracks and remains the Beggar of so many boring civilizations... But lets leave all these. As I asked you before, the question is whether staying untaken is worth it in the end, no matter inside or outside marriage conditions, which is irrelevant. To put it more simply, I think that this is the reason your English friend, the author, committed suicide: because she stayed wrapped in her sensitivity as if in an impregnable castle. How did you say she wrote... “The vision must reinvent itself all the time.”* How can an impregnable man, an untaken one, manage such a big task particularly in his 50’s, 60’s even later, if he still lives...How can he manage to reinvent it in an older age, let’s say like mine...’

‘Come now, you are tired, we’ll continue tomorrow. The moon is filling. In a few days there will be a fool moon’, Valsamina tried to persuade the old woman and stretching her hand she held smoothly her arm.

But Florence, instead of standing up, grabbed her hand in an unusually warm manner and made Valsamina sit down too.

‘You know, Mina’, she said, nobody can transfer you not even to the other shore. However we all look for our carrier.’

They sunk in silence holding tightly each other...

‘What do you think,
three moons summer is,
the fourth will find
ravines full of winter...’

murmured Valsamina at some point and then added:
‘I think I understand...You are talking about the Intoxication of the
Myth. Well, tomorrow if I may, I’ll tell you a very short story, I once
heard, that might fit the case...’

* Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Translated by Lydia Pavlopoulou

YIANNIS KIOURTSAKIS

Two-Bottoms

[Sunday, December 21st 1986]

Climbing up the Ekali hill this morning, I was thinking of the books I have written and of the book I want to write -the book, I guess, I have always wanted to write- and to which I have not yet given life. Because what we do is almost always different from what we want to do -a lesson I have learnt well through the years: as a child I had decided to write novels, poems, a diary, but to this day, at the age of forty-five, I have only completed a few essays which, however much marked by my personal experience, are a long way off from the plans I had made when I was young. I was also thinking of my fruitless struggles and crushed efforts; the thousands of scribbled pages torn or buried away in some drawer; the difficulty I have in expressing myself; the sometimes incredibly long time it takes me to form a short sentence. I was thinking of the years that have gone by, of my life, passing away without leaving a clear mark on the papers on which I insist in spending it.

The morning was clear, brilliant and I walked under the same pine trees, and along the same paths I used to take as a child with my parents on winter Sundays when the weather was good: the same strong smells from the lentisks, from the pine needles, from the damp earth; the same brilliant December light, a glorious, and at the same time, gentle light, inexpressibly familiar. Opposite, Mount Parnitha seemed very close and looked as brand-new as then - as on the first dawn of the world...

Of a sudden, I felt that the impenetrable web between the past and the present had been torn: this light had melted the fabric of time at a stroke, boring holes through every horizon, placing my old life in front of my eyes; I felt that all past events were happening at that very instant and that my parents -who have been dead for years- were there again, beside me, inside me: invisible, yet unbelievably present in these smells, this light, this pristine sky that my body drank in with all the intensity of memory. I could feel their blood in my veins, and, indissoluble, the blood of Harry - my brother who died when he was twenty-six. Yes, I could actually feel that other pulse beating with my own pulse and my dead brother being resurrected in my blood, in the same way that I could feel the light of the sky entering, flooding the darkness of my body. It was as if I could see from the inside my own self - that unknown person that I call 'me'.

'Because I am Harry,' the sentence flashed in my mind, as if to materialize a multitude of thoughts that have been clinging to me for years – and bearing a direct relation to my unborn book. We were two persons that belonged to the same time, the same place, the same family – we were brothers: two consubstantial beings, the only difference between us, was that Harry was eight years older, an abyssal difference to us as children. Moreover, as we grew up we were able to distinguish our similarities more clearly: we had both been terribly spoilt – especially by an elderly and very «motherly» father who invested in his children all the love he was capable of and what years were left of his life; we found it very hard to leave the cocoon of his protection, and when we finally broke away, we were badly bruised in our contact with the exterior world. Now, after all these years, I have the feeling that if our destinies were different, it was only on the surface, on the level we call chance and which so often decides, without rhyme or reason, on our life, our death and on so many other matters.

In truth, would Harry, that lively boy thirsting for life, have given an end to his days that January evening in Brussels, if all he had lived and thought during the few days, the few hours before, had taken a slightly different course? if he hadn't felt in just that manner his love life had reached a deadlock, if he had known in all certainty that the very next day he would have found a job, if one of us had been there with him at that moment? And if he had been saved that particular evening, would he have tried again later? Who knows. And what can I say about my own difficulty –I should say weakness– to find my place in this world, in this life? What can I say about the feelings of depression and inability to express myself that annihilate me now and again – this image of death that periodically casts its shadow on my life? 'Yannakis is following in my own footsteps,' Harry wrote to my father during his first year of studies in Belgium, begging him to bring me up more strictly... Of course, on the surface, the facts proved him wrong: Harry has been under the earth for over twenty-six years -more than his whole life!-, whereas I am still here breathing in the mountain air and contemplating the light of the sun. And yet, does all this have a meaning?

In the meantime, as I continued my ascent of the hill, I began to feel that if all these thoughts and memories had suddenly invaded my mind this morning, if they had all rallied around the sentence I have mentioned, if this sentence had taken shape in my brain, it wasn't by chance. Their immediate manifestation wasn't due only to this light that seemed to cancel time and space, but also to a feeling I had

experienced the previous evening, in one of those waking dreams that so often get confused with the dreams of sleep. I wonder now why I didn't remember earlier: last night, a little before falling asleep, the character of Two-Bottoms swirled in my brain: the character with a double body in the popular theatre of the old Pontic Carnival of the Dodecameron, who always carries the dead body of his brother on his back. I acknowledged once again the decisive importance of this character in my line of thought when I wrote Carnival and Karaghiozis (together, of course, with the basic intuition of the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, who was the first to talk about a 'two-bodied body' in the carnival, thereby giving me the idea to write the book). I went over the different points of view and the developments resulting from this study -from its very essence-, shaped and nurtured around this same core. It was then -as I was on the point of falling asleep- that I thought of Harry. I suddenly realized that if I hadn't been carrying inside me the death of my brother, if I hadn't been in my own way a kind of 'Two-Bottoms', I would never have expressed myself in this manner about the carnival, I would never have written this book, to which all the others -those I have written and those I want to write- are, I am sure, but a preparation, or a prolongation, a variation, a different version. I pondered on how true it is that in all our life we only write one book. This was, I think, my last thought before drifting to sleep.

From: LIKE A NOVEL

MANOS KONTOLEON

From:

Dominic

Dominic stood on the roof; it took a few seconds for his eyes to become accustomed to the reddish light that lit up the sky like the glow of a huge forest fire. Suddenly the sky was clear of clouds but the red colour remained.

The wind had grown much stronger. It blew, whistled, roared, and hit Dominic like a burning blast – could it have been from a hot desert somewhere?

The roof wasn't a big one. It had a wooden floor and there, right in the middle, it had a horizontal slab. A black, stone slab with a prickly surface and rough sides.

With great effort Dominic managed to overcome the resistance of the wind and approach the slab. The black colour attracted his gaze. He kept looking, as though pushing his whole body into a dark room. Light! Where, at long last, could he find the light of an answer? And then, on the surface of the black slab, some letters began to take shape. They were all gold and all mixed up. The M was beside the R, the F beside the O, further away was the A, then the E, somewhere else the L. Dominic looked. So many letters. How could he choose the ones that would form an answer? And then the wind died down. A light sea breeze came up – what beach had it come from? Then Dominic knelt down beside the slab, took the other daisy petal out of his pocket and let it fall on the stone surface. The breeze started moving it around, sending it from one letter to the other and Dominic made a mental note of the order in which the letters were now arranged:

ASKTHECHILDRENINTHERIGHTWAY

So that was it! Dominic got up and the gold letters vanished. Only the white daisy petal remained – now motionless – on the black slab. And Dominic ran toward the stairway, and began running down hurriedly.

'Ask the children in the right way!' he murmured, as he ran down the steps two at a time.

Of course, the children know; as long as you ask them in the right way, they will reveal their wisdom to you.

You have to talk to children in stories.

Dominic was sitting on the wooden floor of the veranda on the first floor when he started telling his story. Little children tentatively began poking their heads around the balcony doors and listening to him as he related his story:

‘That morning –it must have been spring– the sun came out, as always, from behind the highest...’ Two girls and a boy approached him, sat down beside him, looked at him and listened.

‘Meanwhile, the father had gone to the middle of the field in front of the house...’ Now there were twenty children sitting around Dominic: nine with white faces, two with brown, six with black, three with yellow. They looked at him; they listened.

‘In the palm of his hand, he held the last piece. It had a strange shape. It looked like a star ... Here, this is it!’ Dominic took the clay star out of his pocket and showed it to the children, There were fifty children sitting around him – thirty-three girls, sixteen boys. They were looking at him; they were listening. And Dominic told them the story of his life. Around him on the floor of the veranda, more and more children gathered. The veranda was full. And all the children were listening. They looked at him, they kept silent; they understood.

And the white daisy petal showed the letters in order. First the A then the S then the K... ‘Ask the children the right way’ I read. Dominic stood up, and the children looked at him. ‘Have I asked you in the right way now?’ asked Dominic. How light he felt! And how good it was to share your life with others!

The children nodded their heads, gesturing ‘yes’. And then all together in one voice, they answered him.

‘The Nameless Forest is there...’ and they all raised their arms to indicate the west. ‘That’s where the Lady with the Beaded Hair Who Speaks in Rhymes lives. When you find her, she’ll show you the doors made of trees from the Nameless Forest.’

‘How far is it from here?’ asked Dominic.

The children paused.

‘We have heard some people say it’s two hours from here; others say two days. And still others two years. We don’t know.’

Dominic smiled. He got the point.

‘Each person,’ he said, ‘knows his own way.’

The children looked at him with admiration. A little black boy touched his arm. ‘You should know,’ he said, ‘that when you get to where you’re going, you will no longer be the person you were when you started. You’ll be someone else.’

‘You won’t be anyone else. You’ll be the same, but different, too!’ added a dark-skinned girl.

‘In what way?’ Dominic wanted to know.

And the children, all together, told him:

'Then we'll be calling you "Dominic the Great". That's what we'd think of you!'

Dominic's eyes filled with tears. Emotion, sorrow or happiness?

He waved his hand over the children's heads.

Then he went down the stairs, walked on the red earth and looked westward...

The red colour of the sky kept changing, going from deep cherry red to dark purple, then black. Dominic walked. In his fist was the clay star lighting his way.

YIANNIS KONTOS

Rally

Today I'm driving my armchair
recklessly at high speed.
I've already broken
the smog barrier three times.
Many doubles of me have been
maimed and killed. I'm left alone.
Alone I drive this danger.
I flash past and they stare at me
in wonder. I've never understood
why I speed motionless, distracted,
gazing at the calm elsewhere.
Someone's altered the road signs
and they forever signal one-way.
I've often seen the town
in reverse or landed in deep water.
At other times the potholes are covered
with cotton wool, the visibility perfect.
As you can see,
everything is driving me mathematically
to the next bend where waiting are:
cliff, sea and take-off.

From: GRATUITOUS DARKNESS

Humidity in the City

Summer, like in a play
by Tennessee Williams.
We're sitting on the veranda
in vests – half-naked
the women are drinking
lemonade. We wipe
the sweat with paper napkins.
The languor has taken us
with it and involves
the moon too in our case.
Everything is rotten and

silver. Cats beg
for food. As for us, we learn
our roles. The stage-director
shouts: 'Don't drink too much
liquid, we're on in a moment.'
Someone throws rubbish
in time's interim.
Rushing to get on stage
we imprint in the mirror –that's
hanging before us– an uncertain
shape, a line, rust,
fear at what's to come.

The Actress Julie Christie, Now Old

to Kostas Kazakos

She gazes at the blue corridor.
The curtains would billow
if suddenly the windows
were to open. But what prevails
is calm and room temperature
carefully maintained. Outside, as usual,
the clouds rub against the old buildings
producing light rain, that enters
the cracks in walls and souls.
On that English evening, she waited for me.
Alone as she was, she sang a few
verses from old ballads. In the wardrobe,
her velvet dresses sighed,
and the wood creaked. She took the brandy.
Smelled it, drank. The hearth glowed.
She strained her ear, she'd heard many sounds
of late, mainly of love, and laughter.
Adopting a serious mien, she crossed the iron
bridge, with its numerous lichens and damp vegetation,
and came towards me: I tried
to unscrew my thought from her body
and to sleep quietly without the lights
of the cinema.

From: ABSURD ATHLETE, Translated by David Connolly

TAKIS KOUFOPOULOS

The Actor

The actor had barely spoken the last word when backstage a mechanic pressed the button and the heavy velvet curtain dropped. Now, to be accurate, the last word was not so much a word as something like oh or ah or ha or ha-ha-ha. Still, it hardly matters. That's the way the playwright wanted it, that's how it was in the text, and the director had agreed; the long monologue which was really less a monologue than a series of grimaces and imperceptible movements on the part of the leading character, with a few words in between, words such as 'here', 'there', 'afterward' 'I'm thirsty' 'you rats' – anyway, this last monologue was to end with oh or ah or Ha or ha-ha-ha, and the curtain was to drop immediately. In fact, the director had insisted that the curtain start to fall even before the oh or ah or ha or ha-ha-ha had been uttered, so as to catch it in midair, and both should fall together. True, this had caused an argument. The playwright claimed the curtain would muffle the sound of his words, which ought to ring out clear and strong. The director said the thick, heavy curtain would have an even greater impact than the sound. The playwright insisted but, since director and playwright were one and the same person, in the end the actor was instructed to utter that oh or ah or ha or ha-ha-ha somewhat louder.

So the actor said it loud enough –it rang through the centuries– and the heavy curtain dropped. What followed is hard to describe; literally, a pandemonium, unique in the annals of such theatres throughout the ages. No Roman arena, no liberation of Paris or successful explosion over Hiroshima, no return of victorious butchers from the various fronts could hold a candle to it. The entire building –that splendid building– was shaken to its foundations as though by a real earthquake. They say the crystal chandeliers were smashed and the walls and ceiling cracked. That may be an exaggeration, but it is a fact that not one of the spectators remained indifferent or unmoved. They were all on their feet, some climbing on the pillars, some standing on the seats, others on the shoulders of the ushers and policemen –who were trembling– as they cheered, whistled, booed, clapped. Even the officials in the first rows –ministers, generals, and so on– took part. They didn't stand up, of course, since everybody knows that the thin little legs

dangling from the seats cannot support them any longer. Nor did they clap, for their broad, puffed, heroic chests, covered with names of electoral districts and glorious battlefields, wouldn't allow their hands, hanging from equally thin little arms, to meet. Nevertheless, they shouted at the top of their lungs, 'Bravo, bravo, to the gallows, to the gallows!' and waved their short arms and legs.

Even the critics, who had always been unanimously opposed to modern art and had come only to denounce it again the next day from firsthand knowledge, and to put in a formal application for its suppression by the Consul, even they – maybe from fear of the mob's staring, black, round eye, maybe because they thought it wouldn't hurt them after all to keep an open mind about these wild theories (if only those bums who accept them and fall into ecstasy would go and wash a bit, in the same river of blood where they themselves had washed, and then come back for discussion, but on the basis of the eternal principles of art, ethics, and logic and not merely because he had said so), or maybe because they had been truly moved by that oh or ah or ha or ha-ha ha, which was so well timed and so well spoken – anyway, they too put down the crowned busts they were carrying, stuck the actor's head on their lances, raised the lances and waved them. The ladies and young girls, seeing the head on the lances, wagged their fingers at it shouting, 'yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo!'

Those, however, who had taken the lead in the whole auditorium, were the spectators in the balcony. It was they, really, who had caused the incident; long before the curtain, before the last act and last cry, some of them had risen to their feet and begun to analyse and interpret the play. Their neighbours pulled them by their jackets, the audience in the orchestra turned and hissed 'Shhhh, shame!' but there was no stopping them. The director, who was watching through a hole in the wall, feared they were going to ruin the show. He therefore gave instructions to the ushers, who rushed up to them and told them something confidentially (it's rumoured those people had been hired to applaud, and the director threatened to withhold their post-paid wages, but this is obviously slander) – anyway the ushers told them something that calmed them down right away. Now these people could not be controlled. They danced, gesticulated, howled, and then exhorted the rest of those in the balcony, and they all marched to the railing, and, one by one, jumped down to the beasts.

Meanwhile, the actor stood motionless behind the curtain, in the last pose of the play, listening, dazed. He had never dreamed of such success. Of course he had worked hard for the part, even since childhood. He had sacrificed his whole life, and not only his own. Study, memorizing, acting, exercises in diction, in impassivity, in pain control,

and above all a program with everything timed neatly -food, sleep, maxims, all in the proper moment and place. Naturally there had been no room for weaknesses such as wine, tobacco, or even women – and not because he was sexless as his enemies asserted. But was all that enough? Hadn't so many good actors –maybe better ones– almost failed before him, in that very same play? We say almost, because some of them did begin by showing a good box office and a number of beheadings, but in the end it all remained within the circle of the intelligentsia, it didn't move the masses to hysteria, to genocide, to folk song, to processions and massacres.

To be sure, those others had not uttered that oh or ah which is so human, and more particularly that ha-ha-ha which is so divine. The more naive among them preferred to finish by spitting contemptuously, while the cleverer ones chose silence. And yet not even that was enough, for ultimately it is up to the public to decide and the public is imponderable and unpredictable. You never know how to catch an audience; by the hand, by the collar or by the neck. Or when to capture it; when it is fasting or belching, when it is about to murder or has already murdered, when it is walking into the gas chambers or coming out. You know nothing about it. Everything is decided on the spur of the moment. And now the moment looked good.

The actor motioned, people ran to assist him out of his last posture in the play, he was given something to cover his nakedness, and he advanced proudly toward the curtain. In the auditorium they were now chanting his name in three-four time, accompanied by the noise of the seats and swords. His tiredness was gone, and so were his objections to the text and the scenery. He no longer worried whether it was to be Isaac or Iphigenia, Paul or Saul, 'Take aim' or 'Fire'; gone too was that fright he had felt in the middle of the performance when he saw the public yawn, unbutton their waistcoats, and scratch armpits and cuts - it was then he had turned to the director, trembling, and the director ordered the auditorium to be sprayed with deodorizer and the heat turned off. All that was now forgotten. From behind the curtain came shrieks of applause, firecrackers, wailing. The people wanted him, they were ready to fall at his feet. History opened the way for him to sign his name.

The actor reached the middle of the stage, put on his best smile –a smile of both indulgence and affection– raised the curtain, and stepped forward. But instead of finding himself in the presence of the worshiping public, he encountered a second curtain. It was lucky there was a double curtain, because as the first one dropped it upset the part in his hair. He smoothed it down, smiled again, and raised the

second curtain. Only there was a third curtain, then a fourth, a fifth, a sixth... The actor stopped out of breath. Velvet enclosed him on all sides. He tried to figure out whether he had walked in the wrong direction, but no, there he was in the middle, where the two parts of the curtain meet, the right and the left. He mopped his brow and thought a while, and then suddenly his face lit up. He remembered that the director had ordered the curtain to be composed of successive layers, so that the horrible things that happened on stage between acts would not be heard in the auditorium. The opposite, of course, did not happen, for everything that took place in the auditorium was audible on stage, but that did not matter. In fact it helped, for it let the director watch the public's reactions and determine how the play was going. Not that he would change the text (even if he wanted to it would have been impossible since the actor -who was a different person- had learned that text and would stick to it), but, depending on the mood of the public, he could alter the sequence of the scenes and so avoid trouble, like the time he presented the Supper scene to an audience that had just finished eating and was therefore totally unmoved.

The actor remembered all that, took heart, and prepared to go on. But suddenly he noticed that the noise from the auditorium decreased, then died down altogether, and in complete silence somebody marched onto the stage and took up a position in the middle, declaring he was a relative of the actor and would now give a funeral oration for him. The actor, who had no relatives, became very angry and began to raise the curtains quickly. But the audience was also annoyed, for, instead of delivering a funeral oration for the actor, the man on the stage was delivering a funeral oration for the audience. Somebody got up and shouted, 'What are you talking about?' and two or three others joined him and shouted the same thing, but instead of replying the speaker turned toward them, made the sign of the cross, and the poor fellows instantly melted into thin air. Then the rest became very angry too, stormed the stage, seized the speaker, and set up a summary court of justice to try him for unwarranted exercise of power, and that was the end of him.

It appeared, however, that the man had friends in the audience because, whereas after the incident everybody was ready to resume the applause and lynching, some people -the man's friends, of course- began to say first in whispers, in talk, and finally in bellows that the man was no relative but the actor himself, whom we were waiting for and who had left the stage through a side door, that he used his real face, which we hadn't seen before, and that he had spoken in parables. Naturally, those who set up the court protested, saying this was a lie

since the actor had died, and anyone who claimed such things was a heretic. Then the others cried, 'Traitors', the first group said, 'You are instruments of Satan', the second said 'You are instruments of the oligarchy', and since they all had naked swords they rushed at each other. It is hard to record the number of heads that fell and the number of watches and purses stolen. The fighting was mostly face-to-face -the way the seats were arranged- but often it came to close combat where everyone fired freely, with a number of individual deeds of valour and heroism. The battle had many stages. For a moment one side advanced and the other fell back, then the other advanced and the first retreated, so that it was hard to know whom to bet on. From time to time someone climbed on a seat and shouted, 'Brothers!', then both sides quickly stopped, fasted, confessed, turned toward the curtain, lit candles and fire crackers to it, waved swords and amputated arms at it, and then turned back to each other and resumed the butchery.

Meanwhile on the stage the actor was still struggling with the curtain. He went on lifting, one with one hand and one with the other, tensely and hurriedly, for time was running out and the audience -his audience- was slowly forgetting him. True, there remained a few old women and retired officers, but the public, the great public of today and tomorrow, had stopped calling for him after having given him such an ovation. It was busy with other things, with other wars, not his own, and it didn't even mention him in connection with them. It did of course come toward the stage, to light candles and fire-crackers, but this could as well have been meant for the relative. So he had to come out, to appear, to say I am your chosen actor whose name you called out in three-four time. They told you I was dead but I am not dead - because if I were it would be awful for you. I just got entangled in those damned curtains, and other phonies came and took my place and pretended they were me, but here I am now before you, all of me, bring me my speeches so I can see if they are right, bring me my portraits for me to approve, bring your children too so they can contemplate me in my glory and worship me even as you have done. Those were the actor's thoughts as he threw himself wildly against the curtains, opening, raising, pulling, tearing, but there was no end to the curtains.

For a moment in the auditorium the one side... no, the other... or rather -let me have a look- ah, yes, the one side captures the stage. Then the others, seeing their holy sanctuaries in the hands of the enemy, become very angry, they close ranks, sing their national anthems, increase the portions of mess food, hurl themselves forward, and reach the stage, but then the ones who were watching started

shouting 'Dirty bastards!', 'All right' the others said, and retreated, only to gather fresh momentum and rush forward again, this time not only capturing the stage but routing their opponents. It looked as though the battle was won. Bets were counted, the proper sums for taxes, stamps, and rent deducted, and calculations made as to the amounts due for straight bets, double bets, split bets, and so on. Actually it was not all that simple. For the one side, seeing its position was desperate and no help forthcoming from either Saint George of the infantry or the Taxiarchs [patron saints] of the air force, rushed off to get some tough mercenaries and put them in the first lines. As soon as they saw the mercenaries, the other side said, 'Oh, yeah?' 'Why not!' said the first side. Then the other side rushed and got hold of some of the same mercenaries and the struggle took on new vigour. Fresh incidents, fresh heroes, fresh martyrs, fresh packs of cards and chips, and soon fresh desertions -by those called to the phone or those who lived far away and had to catch the last bus- and again fresh reinforcements and so on and so forth.

In the end, after all of them were slaughtered many times over -it was getting late and we had to go to the office tomorrow -they put on their scarves and overcoats and gradually, chatting in small groups, began to move toward the exit.

After a while the auditorium was empty and quiet. Only a slight rustle could be heard now and then among the curtains.

Translated by Rodis Roufos

VASSILIS KOUGEAS

The Ghost of the Rose

The ghost of the rose,
a bed sheet enveloping the body
of a dancing middle-aged.
In a dark green room
of one mirrored wall and a blackboard
on it written the name Bruno and a date.
In the middle stands my daughter embraced
by her second self. Her other hand lying
on the dog's head with eyes like saucers and long fur –
they are friends but fear lies within.
Why is the book close?
Why are the roots of the dress growing
in the wooden floor?
What is the man with the empty tray doing
outside the door?

Daughter of mine
I am too far now.
If you can hear me
don't lean so
over the cliff.

What Is Left?

Here is a question, remarkably insisting
unlike any other.
While Michelangelo emerged on a scaffold
was tapping the marble with a chisel,
ravels of stone scattering the red dog
lying underneath. Occasionally blinking
his eyes but staying put
loyal to the miracle unfolding
for just a bit of Florentine gold.
Perhaps because the voice of Lucrezia Agujari

was coming from the radio nearby,
because the morning dew was descending
from Monte alle Croci in the room,
playing with Arno and filtering
in the workshop like a drug.
So, what is left?

Apart from the masterpiece of St. Mathew in the Academy
dazzled we stand in admiration,
faces, things, shadows –without proof– took part
in the act ,
unknown to us they travel now in a world
hardly defined by the word past.
?Might they have hidden in the ochre
flowing from the creases
might it be a further benevolence,
granted much after
unaccounted for?

From: OF THE FORMERLY INHABITED

MENIS KOUMANTAREAS

From:
Koula

Two evenings later, Koula left her office at a run. All through the afternoon, she kept consulting her watch and glancing at her pocket mirror to check her make-up, her hair. What if he got there first and had to wait! Being late was bad manners, she pleaded with herself, it was strictly against her code of behaviour, her habits.

The Monastiraki station was packed; it was the rush hour, closing time for offices, folk art and souvenir shops, furniture shops, smart boutiques on Ermou Street nearby; a motley crowd converged on the station. She grew desperate; they could easily miss each other in the rush. She sat down on a bench near the left-hand exit, so as to be facing the first carriage when the train came in. She let her gaze wander beyond the precincts of the station. She noted some of the old buildings still surviving in Athens; old walls corroded by humidity, wrought-iron balconies with griffins and swans, broken ornamental roof-tiles. From a distance they looked pretty, but she couldn't help feeling glad that her own two-storey house, built soon after the war, stood in green, peaceful isolation in Kifissia. She found the big apartment blocks of Athens constricting, stifling, but on the other hand old houses like these had a dreariness about them that depressed her even more. She believed she had done wisely to choose a house in an area that was both convenient and quiet. Yet she had to admit that whenever Athens happened to be in turmoil –celebrations, demonstrations, tear gas, barricades– an undefinable feeling of uneasiness nagged at her, sitting safely in Kifissia with her family, away from it all. But then the comings and goings at the tax office, the harassed people who came to complain, protest, appeal, and more often than not left in despair, only to come back again in a few days – were they not tangible manifestation of the city's daily turmoil and struggle? Was her involvement in that not enough to free her of guilt? She smiled to herself and glanced once again at the little mirror in her handbag.

At that very moment she saw him leap out of the train, in his red sweater and bell-bottom trousers. He beckoned to her to board the train so that they wouldn't have to wait for the next one. The cypress-green figure flashed across the platform; she fled to him, and barely squeezed through the closing door. This was the first time they both

had to stand, chests, hips, shoulders pressing softly against each other, cushioned on all sides by the surrounding crowd. Koula's eyes were unusually bright and youthful. How beautiful you are today! he blurted out, and added quickly: where do we get off? what would you like us to do? Koula remained silent. I've got an idea, said Dimitri, what about getting off at St. Nicholas? We could go to the square... All right, said Koula, but then she remembered that was where his friend, the young architect, had got off the other day. The square, she asked, what will we do at the square? I know a little taverna there; it's in a basement, there's wine and a juke-box, the sort of place working people go to, said Dimitri, do you mind? Rather than sit in a boring café or tea-room – personally, yes, he definitely preferred the local taverna. As you wish, she said, not wanting to spoil his pleasure. To be sure, she had never been to a working-class taverna in a basement before.

Walls blackened by smoke; here and there wall-paintings of revellers in water-colour; tables covered with greasy oil-cloth, glinting in the neon light; a blaring juke-box in the back. The customers were a mixed crowd; plebeian types, soldiers, students, one or two drunkards, real ones, not like the ones on the walls. One of them, a middle-aged man, was stumbling around in a parody of a hassapiko dance; now and then he stooped unsteadily to slap the tiled floor; he let out loud hissing sound as he stamped his foot and threw back his head. His dancing partner, a skinny, sickly young sailor, did his best to cut a dashing figure, swerving and jerking in an unconvincingly rakish manner. Cut it out, the customers shouted, give somebody else a chance! Dimitri watched Koula anxiously. She reassured him with a glance. Everything's fine, nothing to worry about. She slung her bag on the back of her chair and drew her legs together, patting her skirt into place over her knees. She looked faintly surprised, but interested, definitely interested. Two waiters, one lame and the other toothless, spread a sheet of greaseproof paper over their table and offered to bring them some taramosalata and smoked fish. An elderly man with an unnaturally black moustache sat at the next table; his companion was a young boy with fuzzy hair arranged in stiff ringlets round his head. His face was totally expressionless as he swayed to the beat of the music from the jukebox, slapping his hands rhythmically. Now and then the elderly man sidled up to him and whispered something; the boy shrugged him away, leave me alone, he seemed to be saying, give me a break, for Christ' sake.

Koula drank in little cautious sips. After the second glass of wine, she began to warm up; she leaned over to Dimitri, I like it here, she said, it makes me feel carefree. The young man took out his cigarettes and offered her one. She accepted it hesitantly and placed the filter tip

carefully between her lips. Go on, smoke it, he urged her, can't you see, everybody's smoking here, we don't want to look like convent-girls, do we? Well, I am one, practically, said Koula shyly; when my mother died my father sent me off to a girls' boarding-school, I spent four whole years there!

The juke-box churned out popular songs like 'Your eyes are shining,' 'We parted one evening,' 'Life has two doors.' In the brief intervals between songs, the customers exchanged jokes and bantering comments; they all seemed to know each other. Somebody called out to the elderly man with the black moustache: that lover-boy of yours is worth a lot of money! Not for the likes of you, the man retorted; holding the boy's chin he forced him to turn his face away from the customers' lewd gazes. From where she sat Koula could smell the stench of alcohol and nicotine on the man's breath. What did he mean by 'lover boy?' asked Koula. Dimitri burst out laughing in reply. A cold shiver ran up her spine, then quickly turned into a fiery streak that made her blood tingle. Oh dear, she sighed, what sort of place have you brought me to, I shouldn't have listened to you, Dimitri! She kept laughing nervously; it was almost a giggle. Dimitri laughed along with her and raised his glass in answer to the friendly toasts and sallies that were lavished on them from the neighbouring tables.

Do you have to answer everyone, Koula asked. That's the way they do things here, he said. It's the custom. He caught hold of her hand and clasped it hard. Koula felt the warm young hand in hers, pressing her, carrying her away - where? She could not tell. How long have you been coming to this place, she asked. Since last year, he said, I need to unwind now and then. I suppose you bring your girlfriend here, said Koula. No, he laughed, she's much too snooty, she wouldn't appreciate a place like this. Like what? she wanted to ask, but the wine had already gone to her head. So you come here alone? It depends, said Dimitri, it's not always easy to find the right sort of person, and he looked at her straight in the eyes. Koula lowered her gaze. I bet you like going after girls, she said in a gentle, scolding tone. He pretended he hadn't heard. Why don't you let your hair loose, he said, you always look as if you'd just stepped out of the hair-dresser's. He stretched out his hand and ruffled her hair. Instinctively Koula made as if to pat it back into place. There, you see, you won't let yourself go, you're always buttoned up. And that long coat you wear sometimes, it's time you threw it away; give it to some old lady, it's all wrong for you, you're young. Young... she repeated, laughing nervously again. His eyes sparkled, his lips were very red, as if they'd just been kissed.

The place resounded with the noise of clashing plates, blaring music, gusts of loud laughter. It's too noisy here, she complained, we can't

talk. Be patient, he said, there'll be a time for us to be alone together soon. He went on filling her glass. There was something in his manner that repulsed her and attracted her irresistibly at the same time. All around her the walls receded, the taverna seemed to expand, her past life fell open, unfolded...

The place resounded with the noise of clashing plates, blaring music, gusts of loud laughter. It's too noisy here, she complained, we can't talk. Be patient, he said, there'll be a time for us to be alone together soon. He went on filling her glass. There was something in his manner that repulsed her and attracted her irresistibly at the same time. All around her the walls receded, the taverna seemed to expand, her past life fell open, unfolded...

She saw herself as a young girl walking home one spring evening after classes at the accountants' school. She soon became aware that a boy was following her. He kept pestering her, and in the end he pushed her against a wall covered with a billboard. She could still feel the kiss he planted on her lips. Then she remembered a certain Sunday with her husband in a waterfront restaurant at Porto-Rafti, not long after their wedding. They were served by a dark young waiter with wanton, long-lashed eyes. As he leaned over to serve her, he brushed against her arm discreetly but meaningfully. When her husband went off to make a telephone call, the waiter quickly stooped and whispered something to her. She felt rather than heard his voice – a hot breath against her ear. All night long the searing sensation stole over her entire body. She woke up next morning with a horribly bitter taste in her mouth. Oh dear, she said to Dimitri, why did I ever listen to you! But he only laughed carelessly and raised his glass: 'Here's to us! Cheers! Bottoms up!' [...]

Translated by Kay Cicellis

DEMOSTHENES KOURTOVIK

From:

It is Accomplished

These are the two most famous kisses, both in the history of photography and of the 20th century. The first was spontaneous; it was shot by the photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt on Times Square in New York, on August 14, 1945, the day Japan surrendered and the war ended. The second kiss was given in 1950 on another square, Place de l' Hotel de Ville in Paris. But its own authenticity is disputed; it is probable that the photographer Robert Doisneau helped a little bit, one way or the other, in the public expression of the two lovers' passion. We shall see later what this could mean.

It is of course no coincidence that the post-war period was inaugurated by two kisses that became legendary and have since decorated, as posters, the walls of millions of people; after a war that had proved how easily human flesh could be reduced to an amorphous mass of meat, free expression of the body became a maxim in the three decades that followed. In a sense, it is not accidental either that both kissings take place on a square; more than ever before, love in the new era needs space to express itself, it wants to spread its energy far beyond the private universe of the couple, to become the force that will change the world.

A world that needs urgently to be changed, as the second picture shows (and if only for this reason we should suspect this photograph of being doctored). Let us pay attention to the two frowning persons, the man and the woman who frame the young couple. They are two of those figures we meet everyday on the street almost without noticing them. But how graceless, stiff, dry, cobwebbed they look next to the kissing couple! They are both staring in the same direction, but away from the kiss: the joy of love is absent from their horizon. In contrast to the bright faces of the two young lovers, their faces are grey (how not suspect again that the photographer manipulated the picture playing with the light?). The world these two passers-by represent is the aged world of yesterday, deformed by the subjection to conventions. It must be overthrown. Love will overthrow it.

In both photographs the most vivid, the most vibrating, the most ecstatic part of the couple is the woman. She is the one who lends tension to both scenes. Let us observe how the body of each girl is curving like a bow, yielding to the male power, if one wants to see

these pictures through the glasses of traditional conceptions, but prepared to correspond to its own passion, ready to emanate its catalytic energy through a tremendous explosion, if we follow the language of the pictures themselves. This is not accidental either. The woman was to be the more dynamic sex in the new era. It was mainly her who was to question the worn-out values of yesterday, who was to prove more adaptable to a world where the old roles were in discrepancy with reality and the new roles demanded flexibility, tolerance, sensitivity, freedom from obsessions. The dawning period was the era of the woman. Maleness had finished together with the Second World War – its last, strongest and fatal convulsion.

The couple in the probably non-authentic photograph of Place de l'Hotel de Ville is an authentic couple. The couple in the authentic photograph of Times Square is a non-authentic couple; they are a marine and a nurse who met as strangers in the crowd and kissed each other in their enthusiasm over the end of the war. They never met again. The nurse was identified long ago. She is still alive, being today an old lady of seventy-five. From time to time different men presented themselves to her pretending to be the marine in the picture. But she always detected them as swindlers by asking them what that man told her the moment he kissed her. All gave the wrong answer. Until, one of the days in which I write this and the 50th anniversary of the famous photograph is celebrated, the marine too was at last identified. Also he is alive, he is a retired policeman. He gave the right answer.

One is tempted to ask which of the two pictures is the most moving. Perhaps most sentimental natures will prefer the authentic couple of the probably non-authentic scene. Undoubtedly this picture, faked or not, is a wonderful hymn to love, youth and beauty. But its perfection has maybe something cool and remote. Besides, the thought that the photograph may have been doctored stirs up some vague, unpleasant feelings in us. If the couple was really in love, why should they have needed the photographer's urge to kiss each other? And if they were ashamed to kiss each other publicly, because this was still unusual at that time, what made them obey the photographer? Do we have here the anticipation of a situation only too familiar to us now, the invasion of our private life by the camera, which does not only record it but forms it?

Personally I prefer the other photograph, the one with the accidental couple. Even if it were not authentic, it would seem to me more characteristic of our time: today it is mainly the accidental, unexpected encounters that reactivate our zest for life and our passion. But since the photograph happens to be authentic, I see in it also another, even more comforting message: it is in the accidental, fleeting encounters

offered by the new era that we rediscover our spontaneity, the genuineness and meaningfulness of our gestures which in our everyday, established relationships are usually lost among purposeless or too purposeful words.

Besides, the right answer to the question what the marine said to the nurse, the answer that no scoundrel could think of was: nothing.

Translated by the author

STATHIS KOUTSOUNIS

The Lottery Ticket

good evening, it said, I chose you
put me on

I was walking along a main avenue
damp sweltering heat still wringing out
the closing hours of the afternoon

suddenly a Suit
rushes right at me

but it's hot, I said, and furthermore
I'm not used to wearing suits
and here in the street how can I have a fitting
with all these people milling round

don't worry
people are minding their own business
they won't notice that
you don't even need to take your clothes off
I fit everyone and I'm not choosy
and you'll get used to the heat and anyway
they'll all put me on sometime

but I'm not ready, I replied
and before I could defend myself
it had already wrapped itself around me
and was terribly tight

my limbs grew numb
and my vision steadily diminished
while it slowly moved me along
and I no longer saw people
bustling along the avenue
but a crowd frozen
in the final click
of my camera

From: VARIATIONS OF BLACK, Translated by Philip Ramp

MARIA KYRTZAKI

The Song of Solveg

*Do you look at me
with bashful eyes? Can you deny me
when I plead?*

HENRIK IBSEN, *Peer Gynt*

Let me come with you,
the poet implores.
And she leaves without him
And that is why she leaves
To leave without him.

I'm going, she says, far away.
To a white land.
To a land of sand.
To a white house.
With a warm fire burning at night.
Sparks for listening to and the gusting
breath of the desert Livas wind. I will go
To an endless extent of night
Of snow or sand. Alone
In the white of the land
which I will name Alaska
but will also call Morocco. There
between sky and white
I will stare only at the white.
And when I see one black spot,
Far away.
Out where the game of the country of the eye is defined
and the white country of earth is divided
from the blue country of sky
and later once more from the deep blue of night.
When there I shall see a black spot far off on the horizon
heard as a dissonance – like burr in the throat that echoes
in the honey of voice. To say
The one man coming may be him.
To prepare to receive him.
To not be startled by his breath.

Even if he is holding a knife
it will seem like a purple flower
on the white visage of the world.

Let me come with you, you said to me.
And above the moon persisted
indifferent full
whoever wants to come with you
To go through owes it to the white
to first become a black spot on the horizon

Showing he
is the only sign of life
that takes no notice of death.

In the land I named Alaska
but which I also called Morocco
a polished wind reddens my skin
My soul grows fierce
Animal that dissolves in the sun glow of night.

Translated by Philip Ramp

MARIA LAMPADARIDOU-POTHOU

From:

The Angel of Ashes

The three of them are on the deserted path and the moon moves among the drooping trees and the dark waters. Phoebus holds the lamp high to light their steps. Konstantinos leads the way, Kerberos, his tongue hanging, is behind him, and Phoebus is last. Like the other time. He feels a strange arousal. On this windy night, Konstantinos is leading him to the secrets of his charm, this endless night of hallucinations dissolves like a musical awakening in his soul.

What is Konstantinos seeking tonight? Where is he going?

He does not ask. It is enough to be with him. To see his firm body and to breathe the fragrance of his youth – the fragrance of his seven-sealed secrets.

Tilted, deserted crosses on the overgrown graves.

They have arrived.

Konstantinos runs directly to the Stone Tree, the one that Nikola said was blooming. Its tall thick trunk is bent over the earth. It droops over the grass-covered tombs and still moans, as if writhing in pain.

He stands before it for a few moments, panting with anguish. Then he puts out his hands and embraces it – he who had not touched a living being for centuries, he whose body dissolved, turned to ashes each time he passed by there.

But now he embraces it, the tree that turned to stone for his sake – according to Dominikos, it turned to stone on the day of his death, from his mother's lamenting. He opens his arms again and again, opens them wide. He trembles with the desire to hold it to his bosom.

He does. A thousand-year-old gnarled trunk that exudes sweet breaths, warm sweet breaths, and an odour of Good Friday.

Phoebus brings the lamp closer, to watch. He is puzzled that Konstantinos shows such tenderness for this haunted tree, forgotten here, in God's desert. And in the flickering light of the flame he sees the bird. It looks out with huge eyes, like holes of the abyss, and makes low mournful sounds. Konstantinos raises his head and looks at it. This mournful sound is familiar, but he will never learn that the bird's name is Teiresias and that it is the same mourning bird – the one that opened time to enter the night of the engagement ceremony.

Phoebus turns on the flashlight, to see better. What is Konstantinos going to do? He is trying to do something. He sees him position his back under the trunk of the tree, but is it possible? He is supporting it

on his back as if he is going to lift it. A huge tree, half-stone, half-green, like coral that a hundred men could not move. And he, by himself, the untouchable and gentle Konstantinos, with the unreceptive and tender hands, raises it up on his back...he is raising it up.

With bated breath, Phoebus watches him spread his legs, standing solidly on the ground, and open his arms, slowly, almost ritually, like metaphysical wings. And with one final motion that was more perceived than real, he raises up the tree.

The tree moans. A moan that seemed to come out of the bowels of the earth, out of the bowels of Hades. Then it shook its new foliage and stood on its own feet.

Proudly.

An enormous, giant tree.

In the moonlight, they both noticed that it was a lovely white cypress.

The one that was descended from the cypress trees of Hades – according to Nikola.

The one that came from the Asphodel Meadow of the souls.

A calm spread over the place and it was washed in moonlight. Nearby, the Nekyomanteion loomed, silent and forbidding. But perhaps it was not. Perhaps another life form, that of the living myth, participated in some incomprehensible way in what was happening.

Phoebus unconsciously raised his hand and touched the small birthmark on his temple. His hand felt blood. Konstantinos saw it out of the corner of his eye and bowed his head. He was ashamed. He was using Phoebus. He was using his devotion, the purity of his love.

‘One day you will understand. Wherever I am, one day I will repay your love.’

It was the second time he repeated the same phrase. Phoebus did not speak. At that moment he was living his own ecstasy, his own passion. A passion that was simultaneously love and music and the incomprehensible. It was desire and yearning for the impossible. It was transcendence and hubris and mystery.

He wanted to return home quickly, to write the music that was flooding his body. The music that was born of the mind’s pain toward the incomprehensible.

Konstantinos saw it.

‘You go ahead with Sgouros... I’ll come along shortly.’

He stood watching him until he was no longer visible on the path. In his black clothing with the gold around his forehead. A sorrowful angel. As tall as the shadow of the cypress.

As the shadow of the White Cypress under the moon.

CHRISTOFOROS LIONTAKIS

Apprenticing Satellite

The cold mist
on the rose bushes of the filling station
interpreted time differently.
A wrong manoeuvre and his fingers got soaked as
they and the motorbike ran into the foliage
shattering the hands of his Rolex
that only measured repetition.
A faint moon in the guise of an hourglass
and the first sounds of waking in the morning.

The light brings a touch of nympholepsy to his face.
Stressing the bounty of sorrow
it re-forms the ancient beauty.
Apparitions of sleep, the helplessness of beauty and
that certain unexpectedness of the nightingale invigorate him.
And he takes off, revving, despite the loss.
An apprentice satellite of Orpheus.

Translated by Stratis Haviaras

19, Rue de Mèlèzes, Bruxelles

For Angela

Palm-Sunday Eve and with a blossoming whiteness
the garden bids good morning to the equinox.
A little boy moved the globe
blushed at his mischief
and the eastern corner reddened.
How strange the light at the heart of Europe
it brightens the dogs' fur
and dims the luminous signs.
How strange the light! As if they've borrowed it from Delos

offering euros as security.
How strange the light! It shows
Rimbaud and Verlaine wrapped in snow.
How strange too those birds
tracing shapes from the deep in the sky.
Nice weather, says a voice
as if not having spoken for several days.
And a tree of unknown name
persists in blossoming amid the white.
The crack beneath the eye has reddened
the broom's yellow ready to burst.
And may time treat you well.

Translated by David Connolly

THEMIS LIVERIADIS

The Refusal

You've just borne a moribund baby
And you won't admit it
Its book is open at the first page
Weight and eye colour
Now the haemoglobin count is rising
As the relatives gather in the waiting-room
The doctor suggests a transfusion
You insist on wearing this raincoat
You refuse to take it off
You refuse to acknowledge the birth

It's impossible, you are saying
I never became yours

From: THE DEATH OF THE ANIMAL

Erotico

More inflexible than a statue
You are the guarantee of my loneliness
You seem to respect only madness
Like someone who considers reason a beggar
You put into the palm of my hand
The coin of guilt
You have aborted the foetus passion
Escaping on yellow steps
You gave me these scissors
For the pages that were to come
Useless the pencil now
You are reshaping to some Unknown
And mirrors open to receive you
The relatives cover them with a white sheet
My teeth are knocking
Like the blind man's steps

The sky shudders with
The chill of lightning

Father is still working at that stable
There is the old man too
With holes instead of eyes
I feel him observing me in the moment
I kneel to kiss the dust

You insist on
Defending your sanctuary
For years now, standing in front of a Dream,
You never let me sit.

From: THE BURIAL OF THE EGO

The Dawn

I had heard about it, but I didn't pay any attention until I saw them with my own eyes. Some while before the dawn, when it is still dark, they appear from that corner of the upper town, coming along the street. They fill almost all its width. When you first see them flowing down the road, you can't believe your eyes. So many living beings in the heart of a dead town. Like a white river.

As it was the first time, I felt surrounded. They were so warm, spreading their dirty smell. Then I saw the black dog. On the other side... He had already distinguished me from those sheep and goats. Rearing on his hind legs, he showed all his teeth suspiciously, smelling my fear...

Soon enough I realised that it was better for me to stay with them. I was hoping, if possible, that this flow would never stop. Their stink had become mine. And their fur so warmed me at that day break, I had surrendered to their protection.

I always knew that sometime it would happen. Now this wild black dog is waiting for me... He is powerful, with strong legs and pointed teeth. I know that I will not fight.

Everything that comes after will be humiliation.

From: NOTES FOR IFIGENIA

GIORGIS MANOUSSAKIS

Reflection

The tree near the shore
the hill behind the tree
the man with the fishing rod.

Everything is repeated in the same way
on the motionless surface of the water.
Which is the real picture
which is the reflection?

Mind prefers what is up
heart what is upside down.
Mind what is firm,
heart what is elusive.

Both images are true.
Like faces on the playing cards,
half upright, half down.

Colours

In the vase three flowers:
Red, yellow, white.

A bee came inside from the open
window and visited them one by one.
It tried to persuade them about something
but they were persisting in their opinion:
Red, yellow, white.

A Tree in the Fog

It is only a tree
something like a naked skeleton
of its summer multiple self.

But when the fog comes down from the mountain,
passing through its branches
the tree becomes enigmatic
it is wrapped in a mystery, it plays
between existence and non- existence.

Spectral, elusive shadow
moves up the upper room of the myth.

The Prayer of the Blind

Rain waves beat the window glass.
Behind the glass a blind man is sitting.
He is listening to the sound of rain and feeling
the water flowing on his face.

He is shutting his eyelids, he is praying
'Lord of the waters, wash out
my blindness too, make me
when I open my eyes
to see the rain's colour .'

Moment

She was sitting in the garden reading.
Her neck was stooped; her eyelids were declined
her hand was left on the right page.
A butterfly came and sat
on her shoulder. Time stayed stilled
and everything was sending out a calm of eternity.

Suddenly her head went up
her hand turned the page
The butterfly flew. The moment shattered.
and I
who had believed so much to its eternity!

NIKI MARAGOU

Roses

In company with the aphid and the grasshopper
I have planted roses in the garden this year
instead of writing poems
the centifolia from the house in mourning at Ayios Thomas
the sixty-petalled rose Midas brought from Phrygia
the Banksian that came from China
cuttings from the last mouchette surviving
in the old city,
but especially Rosa Gallica, brought by the Crusaders
(otherwise known as damascene)
with its exquisite perfume.
In company with the aphid and the grasshopper
but also the spider mite, the tiger moth, the leaf miner,
the mole and the hover-fly
the praying mantis that devours them all,
we shall be sharing leaves, petals, sky,
in this incredible garden,
both they and I transitory.

ARIS MARANGOPOULOS

From:

Love, Gardens, Ingratitude

[FOREWORD]

We all live two lives: the transitory life of baseness and Ingratitude, and the other, the life of wild, unattainable Love. Between them lies a vast Garden, ancient, nameless, invisible to many. It is here that the two lives come together, hate each other, part and then of necessity meet once more.

Love, Gardens, Ingratitude is a stealthy game laying political claim to this Garden. It concerns only those readers who question daily their precise everyday existence and hope to escape, albeit briefly, into the wild life of communal Love –the sole way out on this virtual planet.

Love, Gardens, Ingratitude is a tough game about the liberated women in large cities who live like male beasts although (they act as if) they don't know it. It is also a tender game about the humanitarian visions of some (very few) men.

Love, Gardens, Ingratitude is the time-tested comedy of rebellion and love, which stubbornly resists these thankless times when such vital necessities are offered for sale in the luxurious shop windows of the global village. But maybe it is simply a comedy of naïve misunderstandings, like the similar-sounding slogan: Bread, Education, Freedom.*

Athens, which is the entire world, lay clearly before his eyes. A vast monster has covered the earth, the heavens, the water, everything. Wood: there is nothing made of wood. A land of desolation, a landscape without music. He cannot hear a sound, or rather- his ears are about to explode. He cannot hear a sound, or rather- his ears are about to explode. He can hear no human sound... a click... or rather – his ears are about to explode... because he cannot hear any familiar sound... He hears a click, he hears a clack, he hears a boom, he hears a gdoop... he hears a gdombo, he hears a grombo, he hears a gramboo, he hears a grimboo, he hears a gremboo, he hears a kraab, he hears a kroob, a greb, a krab, a kroob, a krob, a kreb, a krab, a kroop... kroop, kroop, kroop, his ears are about to explode from this sound-which-isn't a... which isn't... which probably isn't of this world, a cling, a clang, a click. There is no music. He hears a – or rather he hears a – he hears a – or rather he hears a... noisy, crashing, pitiless sound. Pitilessound.

Athens, which is the entire world, seems to be breaking through the earth's crust. Beneath his feet it is cracking through the crust. The earth makes a crick... crick, just like a rocking chair. Whatever he does, wherever he looks: the airplanes' cruel beaks; people's floating cigarette smoke; the cavernous wounds and the elegantly finished (by third world hands) suitcases; the porters and the hoarse loud-speaker; everything is flowing, dust, crawling, shoes, on the shiny plastic floor of this sweaty plastic hospital airport, everything, their things, he, she, them, but he can still hear a goop, he can hear a grap, he is flowing with them and he can hear a kroop, kroop, kroop, this is all he can hear, he can hear just this tormenting sound. Criiick.

His temples were throbbing wildly. His eardrums were pulsing orgiastically. Noise and hubbub. The prehistoric Monsters who rule the planet seem to have spilled out en masse into the streets of Athens - and especially into this provincial street, inundated with glass factories, which led from the airport to the city. Legions of mercenaries, wearing their official disguise as ministers and managing directors, were organizing festive parties on the pavements and in the side streets and avenues, buzzing like a million bees, in honour of the (extended to infinity) rat-a-tat-tat of the standard machine guns and the comforting froop-froop of the shells of all kinds which are being aimed by remote control at every single region of the planet. An unbelievable new order was spreading swiftly to the outermost fringes of this utopian city, Athens, with an inconceivable racket: great automobiles were hurtling through the air with a demonic din, their shiny bonnets open repulsively wide (gaping sharks' jaws); fountains of motor oil and petrol were spurting forth forcefully, spilling out everywhere, catching fire easily, making dark brown stains in the blackish sky; thousands of recyclable soft drink cans were raining down from the aircraft flying overhead, aluminium feuilles-volant landing with an unheard of noise on the well-asphalted earth, beside tons of shattered cars, disintegrating video players and other Japanese domestic equipment of outdated technology. The Monsters were buzzing restlessly, like millions of worker bees, the city was burning, burning, scorched in a pandemonium of criits-criits (and buzzz-buzzz), while, from time to time, a heavy one swooped down and crushed everything, drops of blood, gap, gap, and once more: gap. Clouds. Forgotten sunless marshes. Trapped lizards. Phlegm, gastric fluid, the moaning of invisible supercelestial infants... the typically Greek taxi driver stank of unwashed flesh, everywhere smelt of an ancient Balkan war.

Where the hell does this noise come from, this accursed click. Can't other people hear it? Groop, grap, grap. Then again after a moment:

gap. What sort of place is this? Why? His ears are about to explode. «Put some music on,» he screams at the driver, «Put some music on, damn you!» The driver presses the hell button and the sound is murderous, screeching, infernal, it is a krab, it is a krab, krab, krab! Mountains of recyclable rubbish, smashed videos-cars-soft drink cans are overflowing on to the kerbs, he can barely make out the dome of the sky and... what country was here once? Whereabouts in hell has he landed?

He hides his head between his knees as gdoops and squeakings and crackings and screeching noises slip through his temples, penetrate into his noise-racked body, to his kidneys, his stomach, his ears, his joints, his heart, his lungs, his chest, his fingers, his fingernails, the soles of his feet, his ankles, his back, his loins, everywhere pain, pain, pain, noise, din, din, a scream, a shrill scream pierces his heart, what would save him now would be to get hold of a piece of wood, he longs for a piece of wood to hang on to. A little bit of wood. He had a piece put away in his suitcase, in the boot, he now needed that bit of wood at all costs, he made the taxi stop, he got out carefully just as if he were in an area under bombardment, as if he wanted to dodge the shells, or more as if it wasn't possible to dodge them and at least he wanted to be able to see, to have some visibility, not to be wiped out without reason in the taxi.

He got out somewhere in Syngrou Avenue. He opened his suitcase in the middle of the street like a madman, a tramp, like a heedless tourist amidst the respectable toing and froing of the Athenian building site. He had come from nowhere to nowhere. There was nothing recognisable in it, nothing familiar in this place where he had landed. He found the piece of wood quickly. He took hold of it, gripped it hard in his palm, a longish wand, a slim wand of maple wood from the forest of his French walks, worn smooth by the passage of time. Just an insignificant little piece of wood. He squeezed it again and again, with all his strength, trying to wring out all its energy, its pores into his pores. He knelt down and closed his eyes in order not to see. Not to see... he bent double, became one with the piece of wood and the pitiless sounds all around him began to subside like frightened rabbits.

[...]

To the Greek in his servitude, servile thoughts are an ancient habit which no longer shocks the native-born. In his mind now rose thoughts of Sanidopoulos, recently repatriated. Dispirited, he kicked a pebble into the lake. This disturbed the nocturnal rhythms of the Garden. Sleeping geese ruffled their feathers slightly, frogs dived into the depths, peacocks fidgeted, sparrows fluttered in the foliage, bushes rustled, and Ben, who just a year ago had ceased to rely on the petty

journalist within him for food and drink, wondered like a terrified petty journalist: 'Am I or am I not a suffering Indian, a black child, a Muslim woman; am I or am I not a tortured resistance fighter in the Civil War, a betrayed Spanish anarchist, am I or am I not...' Was he, or was he not, untamed Laodameia, repentant Achilles, tramp-like Odysseus, bankrupt Rigas Velestinlis, ruined Makrygiannis, humiliated Theophilos, betrayed Belogiannis, martyred Ploumpidis, passionate Lambrakis, Paul Lafargue and Laura Marx rolled into one, beaten up student of sixty-eight and seventy-three, even despised poet – or was he simply a useless, bootless life?

Benjamin Sanidopoulos, journalist by profession to earn his living and poet to earn his death, really wondered whether, for lack of any drastic historical events (and given that the prospects of overthrowing Injustice were minimal), he could finally bid a silent farewell to the world in the summer monotony of the National Garden.

* Launched for the first time during the 17th November 1973 uprising against the dictatorship.

Translated by Caroline Harboui

PRODROMOS MARKOGLOU

Grappling Iron

They thrust the grappling iron into his heart
and dragged him away.

He drew along with him
A landscape thickly planted with memories,
ruins of women weeping
and imploring.

With his tongue clenched between his teeth.

The others contested for the body
to hell with the soul,
the body is their property
they ripped out his heart
and his eyes.

He denied nothing,
not a single assertion,
because their every deed or probably gesture
justified his love,
enlarged his store of visions
stripped naked the incomparable grandeur of trivialities.

From: WAVES AND SCREAMS

Our Souls in the Hands of Speculators

Our souls
are hides nailed on planks.

We grew up the way a tree steadily spreads its rings.
While arsonists threaten it,
we travelled without moving

and our roots fell
into clear veins, into rotted waters,
the thunderbolt chose us for its shelter many times;

we did not deny our souls
because pain is not the greatest of dangers,
because love is not the ultimate limit.

Our souls,
hides on planks,
with nails and grappling irons,
every day
in the hands of speculators.

Translated by Kimon Friar

PAVLOS MATESSIS

From:

The Daughter

The first Quisling collaborations to pay the price were Madame Rita and Siloam.

Madame Rita was a whore by profession. Rita was a pseudonym. Vassiliki was her real name. Madame Rita was the most respectable whore in Rampartville. A real star she was, I copied a lot of her tricks later on my acting career. She had her own brothel, but she did call-out work too. For the Germans mostly, at the 'Crystal Fountain' restaurant where I took her the holy bread from father Dinos that time during the Occupation. The rumour was they had relations that father Dinos, he was a real skirt-chaser, plus his wife was super religious. Homely too.

When Rita went by on the street all the honest women crossed themselves. Holy Virgin protect us from such a fall, ma said one time, right in front of Mrs. Kanello. That was back in the signor Alfio days. No smart remarks from Mrs. Kanello, though; she never looked down on ma on account of she was seeing two Italians.

Madame Rita was a public official. Swished around like a church bishop, she did. Everybody greeted her on the street, even the judges and as she walked along she was glancing right and left and making a mental note when someone didn't say hello. A man ignored her at his risks and perils and if he did, Madame Rita tore into him right there in public, in the middle of the market with curses to make your hair stand on end, reminded him how many times he visited her girls, at half price. Only accepted high-ranking civil servants, she did. And military men, from captain up.

Me. back before the war, I got goose bumps when I saw her, how grand she was. Only two people gave me goose bumps as a kid, Madame Rita and the queen, when I saw her for the first time. Unfortunately, we never met again. She came to Rampartville on the royal tour, still only the wife of the heir to the throne she was, so the little people would fall in love with her. There was such a huge crowd at the welcoming ceremony, we lost track of ma. The crowd kept pushing us back until we ended up in the very last row, daddy hoisted me onto his shoulders. Look at the queen, he was shouting, look at the Queen. There was a big crowd, we were all the way to the back, and daddy never even saw her in the end, being short as he was, but he was weeping with devotion. Madame Rita was there too, even though she wasn't with the

dignitaries. Greeted the Perfect even; smart man, he returns the greeting, How are you, Madame Rita and how is business?

After Liberation they demolished half her brothel to make an example of her and took away her permit for a whole year. But she opened right up again when the Allies arrived thanks to our member of parliament Doc Manolaras; he was still a doctor back then. In fact later on she added three extra rooms onto the main brothel with money from the Marshall Plan people said, from the budget for war reparations, claimed it was destroyed in the bombing, all of that during the Tsaldaris administration.

That was how Madame Rita was punished for collaborating with Enemy. Siloam was the other one.

Siloam was a tailor. He only went with men and didn't even hide it. Stelios was his real name, I didn't know what it meant, 'going with men', or why they gave him a woman's name (Picked it out myself, dearie, he tells Mrs. Adrianna latterly; everybody who comes up to me, I want them to know what I fancy, not going around afterwards saying I lied to them. Like a sign in a shop window so people know what they're getting and who they're getting it from. You've got to tell the truth).

Siloam was nowhere near as grand as Madame Rita. But he was good-natured and a bit of a sad sack, nobody was scared of him, or should I say her? Everybody who went by he greeted with deep bows, like he was begging their pardon and they were obliging him by saying hello Orphaned from age thirty, he was and he kept his hair combed into a pompadour.

A first-class tailor though, took pride in his work and if wanted to swear on something, he said 'by my scissors'. Just how good a tailor, Doc Manolaras told my father, back before the war. And a useful man to have around; he was the one who made men out of most of the boys of Rampartville, on top of him was where our young men learned their lessons. Seeing as how the girls were all honest and they never went with a man before marriage, first they got married and then took a lover.

Anyway, nobody bothered him. Seems he knew plenty of secrets; many of the worthiest married men of Rampartville served their apprenticeship with Siloam. God forfend I should ever say a word! He used to say. Ass may not have bones but it sure can break bones.

Collaborated with the Occupants too. Come the Liberation they arrested him but in jail he cooperated with the partisans so they let him go. After, the X-men arrested him but in jail, he cooperated with the X-men so they didn't ship him away.

When you come right down to it we never did figure out what Siloam's real political beliefs were, if he was a leftist or maybe a royalist. They

were influenced by his emotions of the moment. He was in love with a partisan? Well, you got a lecture about Marx and little embroidered hammer and sickles. He was head over heels with an X-man? You'd find him wearing a little crown pinned to his lapel. But he was no double-dealer, he stood up for his beliefs every time. Once during the Occupation he even gave me an egg. And when our whole family left town after the public humiliation, he stopped by to pay mother his respects.

Siloam stayed on the Rampartville. But after the partisans, the X-men and even the Brits (they took the bread out of my mouth, he always said) let him down, so people say, he finally put his foot down, cut his hair and went and got married. Today he's faithful to his wife and his scissors turned out fine children. So, I heard. Of course, it did happen that he fouled his wedding wreath from time to time. They say he used to tell his wife: listen here woman, society is society, family is family and ass is ass.

Siloam and Madame Rita may have been the first of the traitors to be punished, but the other Quisling women weren't far behind.

We were liberated a good three weeks by then, cleared away all the dead bodies from the city streets. The burned stench just wouldn't go away, but we were used to it by then. The only thing we couldn't stand was this particular stink, right in our neighbourhood it was. Wouldn't be coming from your house, by any chance, said this woman cattily as she went by; from a couple of streets over she was, dead now.

One morning we were playing with Mrs. Kanello's seven kids in front of our houses and I lean against the wall of the church and I feel a kind of dampness on my back. I turn around, there's a thread of green slime oozing down the wall, from the top of the bell tower all the way down to the ground. And that's how we discovered that the little partisan's dead body was still there, all those weeks. Some people climb up to the top, covering their noses with hankies. He's decomposed they yell down. Mrs. Kanello hands a sheet of raisin cloth up to them and they haul him down. The body was dripping, nothing was left but this sodden shapeless thing like crushed grapes in the raisin cloth, how can you bury this, this... thing, somebody said. Day after day we scrubbed the street, sprinkled quicklime, nothing doing. The stink was still there when we left Rampartville; probably still there in fact.

They took him to the graveyard; me, I didn't participate because at that very moment the truck came to take mother away. Mother didn't put up any resistance. I can't even remember where our little Fanis disappeared to, but I wanted to follow along, only the vehicle was moving too fast and I couldn't keep up with it.

Maybe an hour later it was, I spotted her on the main street, you know, where the nice folks take their evening promenade, she was standing there in the back of the open truck. The sun was hot. The truck was an open truck and the Quisling women were standing there, thirsty, hanging onto each other so they wouldn't fall over. But they didn't have to worry; the truck was moving real slow now, at a slow walking pace so everybody in town could enjoy the public humiliation. All the women's hair was gone, cut off with sheep shears. Mother's hair too, it was cut off. There she was, standing at the back of the truck, not even trying to hide, she wasn't. Was she looking at something? Don't know. The truck was just crawling along, the driver had his instructions, but there were people everywhere, in front of the vehicle, behind, on all sides and so the driver was creeping forward, had to be careful not to run down any of the citizens, laughing merrily as he went. The whole crowd was enjoying itself in fact, everybody was laughing and all the windows were full of spectators and the proper gentlemen stepped out of the coffeehouses to stare at the passing truck. Most of the people in the crowd were carrying goat horns or full animal guts cut open, all free from the municipal slaughterhouse, some others were ringing sheep or goat bells, where did they find all that stuff? Some were carrying flags and waving them patriotically over their heads. And the goat horns they were waving them in the air too, dancing around, and sticking them against the truck. What I mean is, they were trying to hit the sheared women but they were missing mostly and only spattering them with bits of green filth, plus a few of the honourable people standing around, but nobody seemed to mind what with the general Liberation high spirits and they just kept on dancing around and around.

Me. I got my hands all smeared with the stuff, I was hanging onto the truck like a bunch of grapes, but when the second slug of guts hit me I fell off and now I had to run, run to catch up, ma was all the way to the side of the truck now, like she wanted to climb off and guts were smeared all over her, up climbs another guy, hangs a pair of horns tied together with animal innards around her neck and a sheep's bell and everyone is clapping and cheering and there I was, following along behind in slow match step.

That went on from ten in the morning till maybe six in the evening, up and down every street we went, downtown and uptown, but I wasn't going to leave. And lots of people were hammering on empty tin cans with rocks. And church bells were ringing. Not at Saint Kyriaki's though; father Dinos refused, locked the church doors tight.

Come afternoon we passed by the 'Venice' pastry shop, the place where the better families of Rampartville used to go for French pastries

before the war. During the Occupation, of course, all they served was diluted grape marmalade on tiny little plates. Fortunately for me, I fell off right in front of the 'Venice', seeing as Doc Manolaras's wife was sitting with some friends of hers right there at one of tables and she shouted. Don't trample the kid! Waiter! And when I came to the waiter poured a pitcher of water over my head. Mrs. Manolaras had a name with a big reputation. So she says: Go home little girl, what are you doing here? Go on home, you shouldn't be seeing this, you'll only remember it all your life, go on home and don't worry, it's just one day and it will be over soon, this evening they'll let them go.

I felt better already. Then I remembered something Mr. Kanello told my mother. So maybe you were a whore for a while but it was for Christian and moral reasons. Mother never did admit she was a whore on account of she had two Italians. But she was an illiterate woman and she respected Mrs. Kanello's opinion and since Mrs. Kanello said, she was a whore that got mother really upset, but she accepted it. So when the truck stopped outside our house to pick her up for the public humiliation, ma climbed right up almost eagerly, never crossed her mind they were wronging her punishing her the way they did.

Me, I grab the pitcher out of the waiter's hands and run off to catch up again and scramble up the side of the truck and pour water over my ma, standing there all day in the hot sun with her hair cut off, can't let anything happen to her I was saying to myself. And the sun was getting hotter even though it was almost afternoon, the sun was getting hotter and I don't remember anything more.

Translated by Fred A. Reed

LIA MEGALOU-SEFERIADI

From:

The Joy Is in the Journey

Steps, steps, steps and more steps! Up and down, up and down! In a way it's fun...and how could I resist washing laundry today, with such a lovely wind blowing and the air so fresh that the clothes will dry in a moment? As soon as you hang them out they begin to flutter. Whenever I see white shirts and sheets lose their weight and start waving, dazzlingly white against the blue sky, I get carried away and in my imagination begin travelling on my beloved Aegean Sea to the Cyclades, to Tinos my homeland, where it was my fate to land on August 1922. It was a time when, once again, the Greeks had to pay for their sins because of their puffed-up dreams. My friend Niki, who is a retired teacher of Greek, tells me that there are many ancient Greek sayings in praise of moderation, a virtue which, it would seem, we lacked even in ancient times. As I was saying, after the disaster of 1922 many refugees came to the islands. The majority went to Syros, fewer to Tinos and Mykonos. Among them was a certain Eleni. She was a newborn babe when Smyrna went up in flames. The Greek boats that came to the rescue could not take all the people, and so the parents of the child, wanting to save her life, entrusted her to a sailor from Tinos. 'Take her to your island', they told him, 'and if we survive we'll come for her. But this is the end for us, at least let the child live...'. The sailor took the baby -almost the entire crew was from Tinos- and, on reaching the island, put her in his wife's care. They already had children, two boys, but decided to keep the little girl that God had put into their care. As far as they knew the girl had not been baptized, the parents in their agitation had not mentioned any name, and so they named her Eleni. 'Elenitsa' I was called. I had no idea of all this. I thought I was their real child and that only my schoolmate Foteini was a little refugee. She had been saved in the confusion of the disaster by the captain of the same boat. He had no children and made her his daughter. Foteini was very pretty and they doted on her. They even sent her to secondary school. Later on she married a sea captain, had children, a house, property. Her two children received a good education; her daughter became a notary, her son a ship builder. Smart as anything, that Foteini of ours. She never learnt the truth about her birth, though. To this day she doesn't know. We were told her secret by my father in the course of a conversation about parents' interest in

their children. I was saying, I remember, that if a child is your own, you feel for it and suffer and so on, but that with a child that isn't really yours it is different. My father then said: 'It's not quite like that, Elenitsa. I know that Captain Elias took little Foteini in 1922 from the refugees and ...' 'What! Foteini is not really their daughter? She's a refugee?! And they treat her like a princess?!' 'Yes, Elenitsa. It's as I am telling you: it's not just birth that counts, but rearing the child, living together, sharing its joys and sorrows. The actual birth is not enough: the heartache comes later ...'. Amazed, I listened to my father, never realizing that what he was saying concerned me directly. He would then tell us about that day when the port of Smyrna was so covered in human bodies that you couldn't even see the sea: it was absolutely terrible. You can imagine how it felt when a few years later I learnt the secret about my birth. By then I was a grown-up girl; it was during the years of the German Occupation, when we had to exchange all our best things for a little flour, a little oil. My mother kept her jewels in a little casket, which was emptying fast. One day, my big brother went over, opened it and took out a gold medal shaped like a teardrop. The medal hung from a gold chain together with a gold cross with a rose instead of a Christ. 'With this we'll be able to get a whole sack of flour', he told my mother. 'No!' she exclaimed, 'Not that! Not that!' 'But that's all there's left!', he insisted. However my mother took the medal, cross and chain from him and put them back where they belonged. I wanted to see them, but she wouldn't let me. Still, I was too curious, and went and opened the casket while she was sleeping. Holding the gold objects in my hand, I saw the date of my baptism, my name and underneath the words 'little refugee girl' engraved on the back. At first I couldn't understand, but then I got very upset. These ornaments had been around the baby's neck, with nothing written on them. The inscription was added later on, for my baptism. Maybe the 'little refugee girl' was written by mistake, maybe they thought that some day my real parents would turn up, maybe again they had intended telling me the truth early on but somehow didn't, who knows... It was a serious blow to me when, willy nilly, I made them tell me the whole story. I tried to imagine my parents, but could never see their faces: all I could see were hands handing over a baby. And blood, and fire, and ashes. These pictures haunted me for a long time. Just as a girl would feel after foolishly abandoning her illegitimate child on the steps of a church and then wanting it back: she will never find it, however much she looks for it and her life becomes a torment. That's just how I felt. Until I finally realized that the chapter of my birth had ended and all I had to do was close it once and for all. My parents were those who brought me up, loved me and who, in turn, I loved, dearly

and truly. And indeed since then, this is the first time that I re-open this chapter. Though maybe not. It opened of its own accord once, when I was watching old 'news' on television and suddenly Smyrna appeared on the screen, all in flames: 'Oh, my God!' I yelled. 'Oh, my God, my parents are being burnt alive!' And I burst into tears like a small child, though I was already a granny, with grey hair and all. That's why, though travelling to Turkey has become very easy now, I refuse to go, I don't want to set foot in Smyrna. The years may go by, bringing about many changes, but some things never change. One never knows when the small child inside one is going to cry.

DIMITRIS MIGAS

From:

It Rarely Snows on the Islands

Every September, a few days after the opening of the new school period, I have the feeling, almost the certainty, that most of the children are familiar to me, that they had been students of mine again earlier in the past. They have the same characteristics the same (as the last time) stable age and slightly altered names. In all my transfers and school changes I deal with similar situations. Up to a point coincidences entertained me but as time went by these incidents began to occur worryingly often.

Many times I get carried away and I qualify their progress taking under consideration criteria and data from years before, sometimes I am even lenient with them – according of course to the place and the period we had first met in the past.

By time I got used to it; I accepted, an irrational according to the facts situation as if it was something almost normal. But when one morning I faced in the classroom of the last grade of high school a girl, who I very well knew that had died years ago, I was shocked. She looked very much like a schoolmate of mine, whom I had loved since the first classes and I unexpectedly lost afterwards.

As years go by similar experiences multiply, they seal my life and they define my attitude. The other day she revealed herself to me again. From the desk face to mine a teacher who had just arrived was smiling and waving to me. It was she again! Her face was glowing and she looked older than the day we had met in the classroom of the last grade and even older than the last time I remember her at the island, walking slowly along a snowy landscape and coming smiling towards me.

I saw her again the next day at a literary meeting on Alexandros Papadiamantis. There were many people there. She was standing leaning her body against a pillar of the amphitheatre, still, attached to the lecturer. She was more mature than the previous day at school, almost close to the age she would have had – if she had been alive of course. Despite my interest in what was said, my look was set upon her all the time; her presence monopolized my attention. Time was passing by and she wouldn't move. The lecturer finished his speech, the audience applauded and she was there, standing still. I was worried.

She realized that she had died –I thought– and may be she understood that this is not our island. I stood up from my seat; but in vein.

She moved on. She went towards the platform and she opened her books and notes. She started speaking. She isolated from the work of Papadiamantis the incident of the meeting of Diamantis Agallos with the shadow of Mirsouda at the river of Kehria – December and it was snowing. Her subject was the extended story The Rose Shores. She spoke of expanding and surpassing reality...

I didn't go near her when her speech was over nor did I follow her when she got out of the hall. And where would she go? Her house at the island was on the hill above the port and this city was plain, almost Mediterranean.

But I could not sleep all night. I fell asleep at dawn; and then I could not wake up.

The next morning I was late for school. I found the classroom door shut; I thought it was strange. I try to listen and with surprise I distinguish her voice amongst all the other voices. In my own classroom! I stand unable to decide. It seemed that she was kind and foreseeing enough to keep the children busy so that they would not notice my absence. I knock discreetly on the door, they would not open; harder... I insist; nothing. I push the door slightly and it gives in; I get inside, I make two steps and...

Among my present students and our old schoolmates, is sitting Mavretta –a mature woman now at the right age– she is reading. Nobody is disturbed by my presence. After the first shock I realize that she is reading my verses, unpublished ones. I walk quietly along the classroom, next to the wall, without disturbing them, I get to my desk and I seat down, next to Aethonas and Stratis –friends from my childhood, schoolmates– who were listening attached to her and became aware of my presence only the last moment. Aethonas makes space for me and then he bends down so as not to be seen and points with his eyes persistently out of the window.

It is snowing outside; for the first time in one of my poems.

CHRISTOFOROS MILIONIS

Fryni

Our Fryni did not have the pallor of the ancient flute player. A pallor which, in man's strange imagination, was the reason for giving the name of the toad, the most repulsive animal, to the most divine creature, 'the most beautiful courtesan of all time', who had inspired an Apelles to paint the Anadyomene Aphrodite, and a Praxiteles to make the Cnidos statue of her. [...] Our Fryni had a dark complexion, browned in the sun, and eyes that cast dark, lustrous glances. And as her body... Now that I think about it all, here in my apartment in Ippokratous Street, I must have been the luckiest person in the world of 'the closed rural community', as those who have studied the subject call it, when they talk about the time, which, they say, is lost forever. With comments like that make me feel that I am the last witness or, to put it another way, the person who has been given this privilege.

Anyhow, our life was indeed so rural, that it was full of the smell of horse manure and rutting animals, and was so confined, that if you dared to cross the village boundaries, you would most probably have found yourself in front of the hollow eyes of German machine guns that crouched in their lairs, guarding the roadways.

[...]

Outside the village, there was a deep ravine beneath a huge precipice, where birds of prey nested, and all around there was dense vegetation: large maple trees, plane trees, covered with wild vine and clematis, so that Fryni and I would get lost in the damp, sunless footpaths. Then the gardens began - little stone hedges among cherry and walnut trees, going down to the stream below, with its maidenhair and large willows leaning over the water that flowed nimbly away, after it had first been churned up into a white cloud by the huge waterfall. We all used to water our gardens together, and then go down to the stream.

[...]

One day, in the middle of summer, when the place was seething with cicadas, Fryni suddenly groaned, and threw away her basket. 'Aah, I'm suffocating', she said, and tossed back her head. And then she said: 'I'm going into the waterfall'. Her eyes shone. I was speechless, standing with my mouth open. She went behind some heather bushes, and threw her frock on the branches. She was left only with a white petticoat. And then, stooping over, she climbed the rocks that were slippery with moist vegetation. The white cloud of water enveloped

her, and she began to shriek, her cries, her cries drowning in the roar of the waterfall. Only when I called out, 'Fryni, you will slip', did I hear her say, 'You come too'. But I pretended I hadn't heard her.

From: KALAMAS AND ACHERON, Translated by Marjorie Chambers

AMY MIMS

Iliassa

The Clownness of Space

Shivering in the middle of nowhere
appearing from another saffron planet
The Clownness of Space
ageless angel of no period and all periods
saltimbanquo in Rembrandt berets and jeans
spirit lily-necked and fragile-limbed
splayed above the bays of Sappho's Eressos
Clownness of Space
childless smile of rising moons
shooting star meteorized against grey
stratospheres
a-drift between the North Pole and the
Orient
torn among the Western Megalopolises
outcaste existing anywhere
Clownness of Space

Clownness-of-Space:

cease your fear
woman mangled and dangling
in Space
schizophrenic meteor
split into a billion
meaningless pieces
cease your fear
You have been pregnant.
You have given birth.
You have a child of flesh.
Now be content with pregnancy
of poems alone
Go back to your own home -poetry-
alone.
Re-discover your own voice alone

Dare to stand
alone.

Seek the peace of the sea
chase the roar of the sea
sleep awake in the sea
wake asleep in the sea
I seek the sea
I'm seeking me

Come follow me
I'll lead you
to a moon-free
sea
The Sea of Liokrousi
Thalassa
Come
Follow
Me...

From: THE BOOK OF AMY

KOSTOULA MITROPOULOU

From:

The Old Curiosity Shop

The young girl came again on a Sunday. He had opened up the shop very early in the morning and for no special reason, he was singing and looking out onto the street. She came in wrapped in a bright red knit that made her body appear naked.

'What do you sell on Sunday?' and she looked at him provocatively and with that naiveté of girls her age. 'Aren't you going to kiss me, Daddy? I've come a long way.'

He pushed the door noisily and held his arms open. 'Careful, you'll ruin my make-up, don't be such a savage, you devoured one of my earrings together with my ear, take it easy, I said, this is a very expensive dress, do you like it? No, I'm not wearing any underwear, it drives you wild, old man, right? No, I'm not taking it off, I'm cold, I'd like a very hot cup of tea, do you still have such a thing in here? It feels like I've been gone for more than a month, what do you think? What are you looking at me like that for? It's me, I came to see you, I missed you, and now quick the tea. I'll lock up and then I'll tell you a story.'

She spoke to him and constantly changed place, from his arms to the middle of the shop, among the furniture and the antiques with the dust of years, 'I like it in here, as if I'm on a trip, only my suit-case is missing.' And her laughter brought tears to his eyes, as he prepared her tea and the words 'she's back' lodged in his mind, which could mean love. Nonsense, can a young girl love her father sexually? And yet she had come back to him, which meant she had chosen. In heaven's name, how could he endure such happiness?

'The tea's ready' and he saw her behind the old console, wrapped in the cover of the sofa, naked and the bright red dress laid out on a lame chair. He knelt and kissed her toes, the dimples in her knees, her belly, her rosy breasts, her shoulders, her eyes, her mouth. 'Now you've come I'll begin living.' And he gently rested his face on her belly. 'Stay with me' and his warm tears aroused her.

'What are these antics, Daddy? You're crying? I'm here, I'm not going away, I'll be good to you, what lovely tea! Is that from Africa too? Know something? I'm beginning to get used to you and I don't much like it. I was always free, understand? Hey, psst, what are you doing there? You're driving me mad. Don't stop.'

He had thrust his head between her open legs and was sucking the warm fluid, he could feel her quivering like a bird, he was sucking, swallowing all her juices, burning fluids and the scent of flowers of the field, 'You're magnificent,' and her eyes, half-closed, drove him wild. He fell on top of her naked, desolate, despairing, he thrust himself deep into her womb and that languished 'ah' of hers stunned him and he would begin all over again, 'I love you.' Her face became exaggeratedly drawn from the same contraction many times and then she tumbled onto the middle of the sofa and became a rosy little ball and snuggled up to him, 'I love you,' and he kissed her everywhere, bewitched.

She gave him a cigarette one of hers. 'You were magnificent and that's why I shan't scold you for the word you used' and she closed her eyes, 'I'm cold.' He held her wrapped in his arms and with the old embroidered cover and again he kissed her everywhere and she grew impatient, 'Enough, I'm tired, and don't ever say such disgusting things again. What does 'I love you' mean? Old words that don't mean a thing, just listen to him 'I love you,' in other words 'stagnation'. Cover me up, I'm cold. What time is it?'

He would become terrified each time, scared that she would disappear suddenly and he would never see her again. 'It's still early, I want to hear the story you had to tell me.'

He sat on the floor and rested his head on her legs. 'I'll call you desolation, abyss, Acheron. I'll call you southern star and flood-tide and ebb-tide. Tell me how you'd like me to call you so you come, so you hear me and come, a devastated life is all I have to give you, but I will love you faithfully, all right, fine I won't say that word again, I'll be faithful as faithful as a dog to you and you'll kick me and I'll be glad. Do you want me to pretend I'm a dog to show you?'

He fell on all fours and barked plaintively and rubbed against her and she burst into laughter, 'I'll call you Blackie, I had a dog that died, now you'll be my Blackie, come on, Blackie, run so I can see you, but on all fours, no fooling around.'

He would soon be out of breath. 'You've grown old, pal. Come here now, I've got a bone for you to lick, beg, there's a good boy! Here, catch!'

She wrapped her bare leg around his neck and he grunted, like a dog 'Thank you' and then like a man 'Thank you' and with all his senses heightened so that he could keep this happiness for afterwards when she was gone. Her voice reminded him of music. He sprang up startled. 'Now I'll tell you my story. I went on a trip without a boat or train, without a car or plane, nothing like that. I had a buddy, we grew up together, we were both nineteen, 'Shall we take off?' he said to me. I didn't understand. 'Why not?' and I went with him. What are you

looking at me like that for? We didn't make love you dirty jealous old man. He gave me 'hash' to smoke and we 'got it on' together for eight days and nights. I don't know what we did, what went on in that room but one day I got bored and when he was in the bathroom I took off. And you know something? I had fooled him and I wasn't taking the dose he gave me, I'd let him get 'high' first, and then I'd take a little, out of curiosity. A shame though, eh? My buddy kicked the bucket! I found out about it afterwards. They found him in the bathroom dead as a doornail. Good thing I'd gone, because otherwise I'd have blown it, eh? Did I scare you? Big deal! I saw some strange happenings on this trip and I think I got as far as Africa, imagine!

Translated by Elly Petrides

CLAIRE MITSOTAKIS

From:
Medallions

MEDALLION V. A.

You're at Versailles. The Sun-King passes before you. He looks dishevelled, his clothes all creased. This is the only moment in the day when he's alone. He walks this way and that, practising how he will shortly appear in the Court. He's holding his wig in his hand, looking at it critically from behind, studying it. He knows now exactly how many inches he may incline his head. He examines his hand, then the reflection of his hand in the mirror. The mirror corrects the eye. With his eyes shut he visualizes the room and takes his position in it. He sees you staring from behind the curtain. He steps forward and takes hold of you. You have nowhere to run, they'll arrest you, and yet he can't call for help because they'll see you, and before they kill you you'll scream that you saw him pretending to be the Sun-King. They'll take his throne. As for you, they may torture you or kill you. Or give you your life. But from him they will take the kingdom, the Crown, his very self. At any moment there will be a knock at the door, the flunkeys will enter, the courtiers will be waiting. He will emerge, they will place the ermine about his shoulders and the crown upon his head. Violently he tugs you forward, in mad haste flings off the clothes you are wearing, changes them for his own. He hurriedly but dexterously fixes the wig on you, does up your buttons, polishes your shoes and arranges your ruff. He combs out your eyebrows. They knock at the door. The voice of the chamberlain heralds his entry. The great double doors give way and open. They have opened wide. A hand pushes you. You walk forward, to put on the crown.

MEDALLION L.H.

A light rain was falling outside, trickling down the marble, over the stones, wetting awnings and peoples' togas and the coarse hair of the Negroes, sprinkling the many-coloured crowd pressed together in the forum, hurrying down the flagstones of the streets and gurgling rubbish-laden into front-yards.

The philosopher, reclining comfortably on his daybed, was enjoying a massage at the hands of a Moorish slave-woman, as she tried to relieve the ache in his elderly legs.

One of the earliest ideas I ever had as a child, still at the age when children are pleased to play with their extremities, particularly with their toes, was that I recognized myself in my toes and fingers far more than in my face. I wondered then if for all the rest of my life I might still be able to contemplate my fingers -of one of my hands, for example- and feel the same certitude that I was I. Later on, when I grew up and was approaching maturity and wanted my limbs to be handsome and to give pleasure, then for the first time I felt a fear - fear that one day my body would cease to be the same, so that it would be then as if I were inhabiting an alien body. And indeed, my gentle Septima, it is now years since I saw that fear become flesh, to become a thickening that broadens the fingers, a curling of the nails, in-turnings, outgrowths, difficulty in moving. Then I said to myself, there, the creature that inhabits my body is fear.

Septima finished her work and covered the philosopher with a thick cotton cloth, and he, saying nothing more, gave her a gold coin that he extracted from beneath his pillow. He closed his eyes. Tomorrow the emperor would probably send him the command to kill himself. And how much more dubious now seemed to him the co-habitation of his self and his body.

MEDALLION M.L.

He drew near to the window-opening and gazed out for a long time, absorbed. The days were lengthening, the sky soaking the earth with rain, at any moment it would be Spring. He knew that the plain stretched before him, and beyond, lost to sight, the mountains. But that day he could see nothing, there was no visibility, just clouds moving on, low and slowly, nothing else. A desire seized him to go out into the countryside, but how could he get away from the city in such weather! How get on to a horse at his age! He drew the long dark caftan around him and shouted to them to light him a fire. Not that he was cold, his fur jacket kept him warm. But the geometrician, unable to get out into the world of nature, unable somewhere to watch a little water making its own way, a little earth taking some random shape, a few leaves fallen and rotting, some tiny creature dragging its whole being along the ground, some insect flying too fast for the eye to catch, here a few trees, a little grass, some stones, a shadow, some light moving, a ripe fruit dropping from a tree - unable to watch any of

this, he felt a longing for wild action, the greed, the madness of that first speck of fire that starts from a red glow, from a spark, and grows into a flame, a flare that spreads and consumes, roars out right and left, ahead, behind, stops not a second but spreads and spreads, whistling and mounting in sudden leaps, to blaze and burn up everything.

He sat there before his fire, his face red from the heat and the wooden compasses still in his hand.

Translated by Christopher Scott

PAVLINA PAMBOUDI

The Poor Man's Half Hen

There once was a man who was very poor, so poor, that he had no name; so poor, that he couldn't buy himself bread but had to rent it. He lived in a tiny cottage, a cottage so small that it lacked a fourth wall, so small that he was living in it only in profile. His bed was compressed, so compressed that he couldn't settle himself except only upright, and space was so cramped, that he used his bed also as a cupboard and a cooking pot and fridge and a TV set.

At the back of the little cottage he had a tiny garden; a garden so small, that it lacked the gar and it could fit only one leafy tree without leaves and a chicken coop without the co, in which was living a half hen, Ernestina, Tina, that is. Tina was so cramped that she was laying mashed eggs.

The sun couldn't reach the place directly and sent its rays at an angle, but even so there was no room for the shadows to fall and so the shadows were always left suspended. So, this poor man had neither sense of space, nor sense of time, and that was the only good thing in his miserable life.

One day –so to speak– Tina, the half hen, half decided to escape from that depressing op and try her luck in the wide world.

Of course, it was almost impossible to run to freedom with only one right leg and one right wing – but she couldn't become conscious of this problem through her right hemisphere, as this was the job of her missing left hemisphere.

Furthermore, she faced another insurmountable obstacle: she could only form half thoughts.

So she made a half jump and a half flutter out of the op, and then, instead of continuing her effort to escape, she forgot, paused and nibbled at a half worm that was at her foot. When she had half-swallowed, still absent minded, she daydreamed for a while. She half remembered a young cock who... and a bowl of corn which... and mother's feathers when...

Then she made another half jump along with a half flutter and grew forgetful again; she lit a cigarette although she had quit.

A few weeks later she ended up in a spacious grill room which specialized in whole and half barbecue chicken.

Moral: There's no point in flying the coop if you can't complete a thought.

The Basement

Once under the ground level of a large, imposing house lay a dark basement which believed it was the home's subconscious.

This obsession attracted to it cockroaches, rodents, thick layers of dust and garbage. It also caused the lights to fuse and was to source of a persistent claustrophobic smell of fish tightly wrapped in a shock.

Bottomless trunks with secrets, shapeless bundles of inhibitions, heavy boxes of oblivion, dry rotted old furniture, wounded by childish traumatic experience old toys and old objects with lost identities oppressed it. In its most secret corners the spiders spun thick laces of phobias. The cockroaches darted suddenly and shot through the darkness with jerky movements in successive still frames like schizophrenic ideas. The mice ran up and down, invisible, like manic – depressive thoughts with tails.

This gloomy disposition however didn't show itself at all on the surface and the main house appeared tranquil, safe, tidy and devoted to its family.

Time passed smoothly, until one dark morning a dark busy person entered the dark room. He was the new owner. He fumbled a while with the insecurity locks, he changed a light bulb, and – wonder! Everything was flooded with light.

'OK, boys, come down!' shouted the man who wasn't dark any more, only a bit brown skinned.

Three four middle aged men came down and went about languidly collecting the rubbish, cleaning and spraying with powerful insecticides. In only a few hours the basement didn't recognize itself. There was only a hollow echo left and a particularly clever cockroach which had hidden during fumigation inside the mask of the one with a moustache, got slightly poisoned from his breath and was zonked out.

The new owner turned off the light and left. The basement kept still, frozen. It felt a horrible emptiness. If it weren't a basement it would have jumped out the window.

'There's no point in becoming agitated!' said the particularly clever cockroach vaguely as it struggled to sober up. 'It's an illusion.'

By coincidence, at that very moment, there was a 5,3 magnitude earthquake, its centre 150 meters away.

The next morning the whole house was found inside the basement and, although the basement didn't feel the emptiness any longer, it felt utterly confused. The sock from the enforced coexistence of conscious and subconscious shattered the basement completely and the particularly clever cockroach got squashed.

Moral: Everything is an illusion and sometimes more than just one.

From: MYTHS FOR VERY BIG CHILDREN

GIORGOS PANAGIOTOU

[We Belong to the Age of Our Dreams...]

We belong
To the age of our dreams
Locked
In their frenzied sounds
Abattoir of sleep

Guilty fever
Rivering woman
Summer trigger
Lightning incisions
Seeking absolution
Meeting fear
Surpassing mercy
Discoloured flags
Crescent girls
The boredom of
Fugitive
Board fees of virtue
Fissured night
I set my words asail
When
The artist's tool
Is freedom

Translated by Yiannis Goumas

ALEXIS PANSELINOS

From:
Zaide

CHAPTER 28,
In which Geroulanos has a shave and the nobles a consultation

The town of Corfu, with its old fortress perched high on the rocks and its natural harbour lying at their feet, proudly displays its domes and tallest buildings to the ships sailing in to moor under its walls. The sea laps on the shore; behind the barrier of dark cypresses the olive trees shine silver in the morning light. The bare masts of the ships lying at anchor resemble a forest in winter. Merchant vessels are moored in the centre of the harbour, from where a trail of heavily laden carts can be seen making their way uphill towards the public highway. Among the shining barrels of the cannons, high up on the ramparts of the fortress, guards pace to and fro, weapons at their shoulders. From time to time the seagulls spot a fish and swoop down to seize it; at the end of the mole children are fishing with rods, their cries shrill with enthusiasm each time they land a catch that sparkles in the light. To the sides of the port, left and right, lie the Russian and Turkish ships: two men of war and eight schooners. Outside the harbour, at a radius of a couple of miles or so, three more Turkish ships are patrolling under half their canvas. Every vessel entering or leaving the port is identified and checked beneath the mouths of their uncovered cannons.

The fishing boat from the mainland opposite was examined just within range of the artillery in the fortress, after which a signal was immediately sent that this craft was in order. From the deck of their schooner the Turks had contented themselves by simply casting a glance at the fish lying heaped in the creels.

Geroulanos leant against the ropes as the fishing boat slipped through the tranquil water, gazing at the shoal of fish playing under the keel. From the land a tall man with his breeches rolled up to the knees was cupping his hands in front of his mouth and shouting to them to moor beside a long and narrow two-masted vessel which was unloading bundles of hare skins, barrels of dye and enormous bales of cotton and linen from Arta into the waiting carts.

The fishermen washed down the deck with buckets of sea water; whatever remained of their catch after the quartermasters of the allied forces had taken their pick would be sold within an hour, for the town was once again suffering from a shortage of food. Geroulanos took off

his shoes in order to be ready and turned to the boat's owner, who bade him 'God speed, Sior Nikon.'

As the bows touched the sandy bottom, Geroulanos jumped into the warm, shallow water and hurried ashore. Someone threw after him his small kit bag, carefully tied up at the top. He caught it and set off uphill. It had been a week since he last shaved and he stank of fish. He never for a moment ceased feeling his master's sealed letter pressing close against the flesh of his stomach. All the same, in spite of his sense of urgency, it didn't occur to him to present himself in his current dishevelled state.

As he reached the main road at the top of the hill he caught sight of the fortress and the two allied flags furling in the breeze at its battlements. He spat on the ground. The master supported the French – and so did the servant. He hadn't forgotten all the slogans he'd heard, right at the very beginning when everyone's enthusiasm was wild, no matter that other less pleasant memories had in the meantime been superimposed. Ideas are lasting, as Count Andreas used to say. Even if circumstances forced the French to behave like tyrants, the ideas didn't change. Thus Geroulanos eyed the imperial eagles of Russia and the crescent moon of Turkey and gritted his teeth.

In the distance he could make out the bell tower of the cathedral and the imposing dome of the church of St Spyridon. Outside the Venetian bailey a group of Turkish guards were laughing, their muskets laid on the ground, their heads swathed in green and white turbans resembling fresh cabbages, their short caftans open at the breast. He spat once more and quickened his pace. His money was scanty, he must make careful use of it. Who could tell how long he might have to remain on the island while the ransom was being got together? Taking care to avoid any encounters with the foreign soldiers of which the port was full, he slipped into a barber's shop and asked for a shave.

'A shave is all very well, friend,' commented the old barber, 'but what you could do with is a bath to get rid of the stink!'

Geroulanos nodded in agreement and sat down on the bench. Siora Margoni who looked after him whenever his master's business brought him into town would heat up water in the copper for him to wash before presenting himself to Capodistria. Yet would he find her? The widow had a little house at Sarocco which she'd repaired as best she could – for the French had razed the suburb lying just outside the entrance to the town, fearing that its taller houses could be used as strongholds by the besiegers.

Beneath the Venetian mirror whose corners were beginning to become spotted was arrayed a whole series of little bottles and jars containing all manner of cosmetics and unguents: poudre de Chypre for older

clients who still wore wigs, Italian pomade, musk, aloe, myrrh, mint, frankincense, narcissus, cinnamon, spikenard – all of them mixed with essential oils, especially essence of rose. A row of Venetian razors with bone handles each bore a scrap of paper stuck on it with the name of the client for whose use it was exclusively reserved.

For Geroulanos the barber got out of his drawer a black-handled razor with a long blade honed only on the front. He rapidly ran his finger through his customer's beard to assess its stiffness, then wrung out a towel in the hand basin on a three-legged stand at his side and draped it round Geroulanos' neck. He threw a handful of grated soap flakes into a shallow basin, poured in warm water from a jug and mixed it swiftly with the shaving brush. The soap bubbles filled the air with their scent.

ATHINA PAPADAKI

Country House

I will live with basil plants and pulses,
clasping my hands
I will pray for the cycle of my life to close gently.
The ceiling lower than the trees,
the front step two centimetres above
the silver driftwood of the shore.
Towards sunset at the turn of the skies
you lose your power
but gain radishes
and running water.
I step out on the balcony to take some air.
Between the door and the horizon god intervenes.

A Table Rule

I'll taste the entire universe
in deep red vegetables.
Beneath the high points of the stars
entwined in my dark gloves
and voiceless,
the tomato in the custom of the blade.

Sleeping in the Open

[1]

The cicadas expand the infinite
every night, one inch at a time,
I grow more humble when I sleep outdoors.
Most gentle senses,
what would beauty be without the invisible
or sound without silence?

Between the thorns and the coolness
sleep vanishes, I lose it.

On a simple balcony
I found a place of prayer
holier than an olive grove.

[2]

I sleep on a balcony of stars,
decent linen covers touch my body
which at dawn is thrown to the howling dogs.
The fate of the party changes easily.

Translated by Thom Nairn and D. Zervanou

Ash and Ash Again

The world is falling, falling
with everything winged and fragrant,
a drop of oil on my passion.
I owe my infamy to fire.
Like to all that's fateful
it mobilises hosts of dreams
till it scorches utopia like grass.
Sometimes this too is revived
a gazelle by sweat's horizon,
to once again stir the dry air
amidst the lentisk.
I believe in all that burns in vain.
Transient and speechless
I see mammals blazing
in the festivity of milk.
I'm precious,
I guarantee nothing but ash.

Translated by David Connolly

MARIA PAPADIMITRIOU

Revenge

When you die, I shall buy a black designer dress
and wear it. When you die, I shall buy a black dress
and wear it with a deep red rose at my breast.
And since there is nothing sadder than
moulting fur, I'll buy a black panther coat
minus its green eyes yet with its claws
hanging from my shoulders like a second pair of hands:
these I'll use to embrace your body, in order not to feel
the deadness of your flesh.
I shall dye my grey hair copper-red
and my lips a smouldering crimson: erotic, lips to kiss with.
A gently breeze will lift my copper hair
back from my forehead, revealing on it the faintest hint of a mark.
There is a great relief when childbirth sets you free
and another, as great, when you're set free by a death.
Thus I shall stand at your grave with a fullness in my body
akin to that I felt the day I bore my child.
There stands a weeping willow, it too stirred by the breeze
so that its leaves seem to swim through water.
This man is not my own blood.
I shall play with colours just as, when a child, I played with the coloured
marbles. I shall keep silent for hours on end just as, when a child,
I sang within myself, not to disturb my parents
while they slept, and I shall caress my body.
There is measureless poison in deprivation,
there are many geraniums that withstand the winter cold.

STRATIS PASCHALIS

Forlorn

Tonight I suddenly found myself before an obelisk
it was no dream, it was rain
far off the world was fading in misty stretches,
and I could clearly read
the gloomy writing. It said: 'I spent a whole life
gazing at forests
from the train window,
without knowing whether I'll ever arrive
without knowing from where I set out
without knowing what it is I'm crossing,
my coach was called Chimaera
and I was its only passenger'

The Carnation

A smell of spices
your petals, velvet
of bitter almond, a stem
crisp at the cutting.

I walk in union with your boldness
thick with colour and scent

of another race the rose
more magical and celestial
concealing the angelic
thorn of arrogance

whereas you dispense
sensuousness and forgiveness
without any care
for surreptitious danger

which is why you don't easily age
don't easily lose your leaves

From: GAZING AT FORESTS, Translated by David Connolly

SOTIRIS PASTAKAS

Academy Street

to Michalis Ganas

As he walked down Academy Street, he didn't feel
the yellow acacia floret that came
and settled in his hair. He didn't realize
that people stepped aside for him to pass,
his way clear-green, too,
the next pedestrian light. He was unaware
of a host of erotic glances,
of smiles never returned, of faces
warmly beckoning with optimism,
confidence, and kindness. Only when
he entered the lift did he blush with shame,
as he saw in the mirror the yellow floret
caught on his tie; and he smiled,
he, Tuesday's honoured guest,

invested with the order of everydayness.

Birds

The sky cracks in places
Like plaster sometimes in whole pieces
Which lose their lustre as they fall
Become opaque, soft, and warm
They grow fur and down and feathers
And on their brown colour now
They mirror dirt

This is the sky from up close
This is how it comes closer
Everyone now can reach it
(Even those blessed children
With the sling-shots)
Because it exhausts you high up
Eternal and unfractured
Without love's caresses to wear you down
Something you cannot stand and break
In places, crack and strip in whole pieces
Which lose their lustre as they fall
They grow fur and down and feathers
(Because nobody kills you without a motive)
And they fall
They fall
Upon this earth where constantly the sky
Comes to die.

Translated by Stathis Gourgouris

GINA POLITI

“The Gibbet-maker”

Tit. News, news from heaven! Marcus, the post is come.

Sirrah, what tidings? have you any letters?

Shall I have justice? What says Jupiter?

Clo. O, the gibbet-maker! He says that he hath taken them down again
for the man must not be hang'd till the next week

(IV.iii.76-81)¹

To my knowledge, the laconic yet highly tragical narrative intimated in the clown's answer to Titus has received little if no attention by critics of Titus Andronicus. Yet, the 'plot' seems to bear a striking resemblance to a contemporary event which Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience may have 'read' in the clown's cryptic words. Thus, the comical 'misunderstanding' occurs within, but perhaps not without the play where the clown's true interlocutor is situated.

The tragical event to which I refer may become more eloquent if reproduced in the words of the man who 'must not be hang'd till the next week':

So that I with my fower other brethren, were the 23 of the third month [March 1592/3] condemned, and adjudged to suffer death as felons... Upon the 24, entry in the morning, was preparation made for our execution: we [were] brought out of the Limbo, our yrons smitten of{f}, and we ready to the bound to the cart; when her Majesties's most gracious pardon came for our repri{e}ve... Upon the last day of the third month [Saturday 31 March], my brother Greenwood and I were very early and secretly conveyed to the place of execution. Where being tyed by the necks to the tree, we were permitted to speak a few words... And having both of us almost finished our last words; behold one was even at the instant come with a retri{e}ve for our lives from her Majesty. Which was not onely thankfully received of us, but with exceeding rejoysing and applause of all the people, both at the place of execution, and in the wayes, streets. and houses, as we returned.²

Seven days later, on 6 April 1593, Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were huddled out of prison, conducted to Tyburn, and there hanged. If this striking analogy between fact and fiction at all holds, then the hypothesis may be entertained that Titus Andronicus was not composed earlier than 6 April 1593. Whitgift's violent reaction in the

course of Barrow's Examination: 'Away with him! Clap him up close, close!'³ is not dissimilar to Saturninus's: 'Go, take him away and hang him presently' (IV. iv. 45). Thus, the Clown's cryptic narrative and cruel fate, besides providing us with a possible clue as to the much-debated date of the play, may also shed a modest ray of light on another unresolved 'mystery': the famous Peecham drawing of Titus Andronicus. Lord Burghley, in whose papers the drawing was found, was a remote kinsman of Robert Browne and it was through his influence that Browne was released from prison in 1581. There is also some evidence to show that he endeavoured to save the lives of Barrow and Greenwood but 'was frustrated by Whitift and other Bishops'.⁴

Perhaps, it is not without significance that Lady Ann Russell, to whom the 'Browniste' Henry Barrow addressed his letter, was the third wife of Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick and Lord of the Manor at Stratford 'for the first twenty-six years of Shakespeare's life',⁵ as M.M. Reese notes.

Shakespeare religious beliefs; his attitude towards the Puritans and his political ideology may have to be re-examined if Titus Andronicus is read as a 'speechless complainer' from whose 'dumb action' 'an alphabet' may be wrested to make known its 'meaning' (III.iii. 39-45).

From: NOTES AND QUERIES (Vol. 236 of the continuous series. [New Series, Vol. 38]. No. 1, March 1991)

1. All quotations are from Titus Andronicus, ed. J.C. Maxwell, The Arden Shakespeare (London, 1968).
2. The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow; 1591-1593, ed. L.H. Carlson (London, 1970), pp. 248-50. 'Letter to an Honourable Lady and Countess of his Kin{d}red yet Living. April 4-5, 1953'.
3. Quoted in The Dictionary of National Biography, eds L. Stephen and S. Lee (London, 1890), Vol. III, p. 297, Barrow Henry.
4. EB, 11th edition, Vol. IV, Browne Robert and Vol. III, Barrowe Henry.
5. Shakespeare His World and His Work (London, 1980), p. 3.

LEFTERIS POULIOS

Oh God

I am naked without the garment of your compassion
you superior human being
victualler of these verses
murderer and butterfly
you are
it is
also the music of earthly sorrow
two gods welling up from the well-springs of their non-existence.
You gardener, you binder-of-the-stars, you udder of the storm,
human bloodshed. This is your gift:
pollen collected from all things.
Make me into a child
please make me a carefree creature
make me even the grease-rag of your sun
give me favourable words. Demon with your golden hair,
man and horn of godlike whores
unbearable lie forcing my lips to tremble
in the pudenda of your goodness –
well then, speak up
pouring orgasms of human sensitivity into the womb
of poetry.
Piece of sculpture helping my effigy to travel in your plastic
universe, I lift my arm in supplication,
violent and bestial I howl
I call you on the telephone, I open my heart to you
I'm on fire, leaping beyond the flesh,
holding flowers and the lava while living
in the experience of grief
to pay for the fact of my bond
with this world and most probably the next.
And I have a lame arm, my hands cannot grasp truths.
I toss and turn inside my skin like an embryo in some senile womb;
knots and marbles, when hard pressed, collide
and explode in the magic darkness
legs full of membranes yelling through the eyes
inside the centre
electrons and energies and relativities.

You are a bone thrown to a dog
I am a fool in the Milky Way by the name of 'pitiful little light'
I'm akin to a barnacle, to seaweed, a beggar, a fish, to urine.
The flag of victory is hoisted upon acquaintance with my woe.
You rock – you fire or thunder or Cow or Zeus or Brahma
or Allah, make this poem howl
like a cyclone clothed in the vast awe of my corruption.
I am at your mercy, a flame galloping from one generation
to the next, though feeling boredom.
Oh deliverance, my mind cannot contain you.
Oh daisy - decomposition
so then, is the earth the coin whereby
you intend to settle your debt?
Phoebus Apollo, you mendicant, come and fill
this life of mine
with your own face. Let my soul spout like a fountain
outside the grave of existence playing the heartaches
of eros
exhaust-fumes coming from your own machine.
Stop killing me little by little on the day of the deposition
from the cross
amidst the infinite laughter of the nuclear bombs
in quick succession keep striking the ciborium-canopy of cosmogony
with the stones of my eyes. Out of my entrails shape
the burning phoenix on some enormous matchbox.
Inconceivable caress in the middle of the limpid gazes
of exquisite female constellations.
Drown me forever
you cataclysm of human limbs.
Rend the city with the phallus of war, crush
the human beings, the crawling trains, the flying objects
flapping their wings to tear the nylon day
into myriads of rags ripped out of mysterious evolution.
Gulp the lines of the horizon
Bury Time in its grave
Make me into a stone with a pip.

Each day ends like gravel turning into air
gleaming as it rests upon the great regal
hearse
Lady Earth.

From: POETRY 2, Translated by Amy Mims

MANOLIS PRATIKAKIS

Clay Jug

I come from the bitter but beautiful race
of potters. I, their breath,
a clay jug; like a voice breaking, like a
voice trying to gather up the smithereens from the earth.
I remember the clay, the whirling round on the spindle
of the potter's wheel like a dancing girl and the craftsman's
soft palm on my soft and unripe flesh. I remember
my flesh being spaciouly opened up to conceive water.
I'm almost pregnant with water, I hide it from the light
and guard it in times of drought. I sit in a shady corner
like an animal. A silent animal perennially
guarding over your brightness. I jump onto her shoulder
like a monkey and we run to the source together.
Her hand firmly in my handle lest I fall, hurt myself
and spill out my soul like moisture, and only our
scattered bones remain then on the path.
Sometimes my laughter can be heard, glug glug
as it pours through my neck. Sometimes my tears
shine in her eyes.
Her thirst is my thirst. It is my law.
It is my presence.
I come from the clay. And I hang as a huge piece of
fruit from waterfall blossoms.

From: THE MAGIC OF NOT CLAIMING

B

Entering your lonely evenings your lonely nights as I once entered the
forests and the night birds frolicking and the sudden dolphins fluttering
in the depths of the trees, I finger unknown sites, unbaptised bodies of
small embryos of voices. I can see you orientated towards a shaft of
light reading the large book of the sea as he who was I passes over the
pebbles, he a stranger before my wings were shorn off and half of me
was lost in the depths of the Libyan sea, opposite the cane-brake of
youth where another wind used to blow, in the small coffee shops with

waves of sorrow in the open windows and the moons, I see you walking alone on the beach and reflected in dreams, losing you in the rocks and finding you again rising from the sea of all visions.

I see you multiplying in everything, a geography of beauty leaving me and approaching me to the brightest herbs.

From: LIBIDO, Translated by Parina Stiakaki

STELIOS RAMFOS

From:

Silence: Withdrawal from Speaking

Silence, as withdrawal from speaking, is as closely linked with stillness as withdrawal from activity. The word –the logos– provokes a feeling of freedom and power; it is itself a power exercising spiritual influence, an expression of our vital personal realm endowed with a critical social aspect. It was inevitable that such a dimension should occupy the attention of the desert fathers. Moreover, it had from ancient times attracted the notice of learned men, who studied it as a vital characteristic of the human person and cultivated it carefully. The same was true for the secular Church, which produced so many eloquent orators, but not for the hermits. Their interest was not centred on the study and cultivation of the word; it was centred on withdrawal, on a profound, purifying silence. [...]

The meaning of silence in the ascetic life

Silence as withdrawal from speaking does not entail a withdrawal also from the word, the logos. The ascetic pursuit of silence is more a pursuit of purity than an abolition of the word. It is significant that in about the fourth century silent reading first makes its appearance, thus emphasizing the entry of the human person into an era in which the interior life becomes predominant. For inwardness accompanies the discovery of the word, but the idea of God's dwelling in the heart in Christ is needed before it will flourish. Hence an economy with words did not lead automatically to a development of inwardness. One purpose of the ancient Spartan frugality with words, for example, was that the citizen should not be distinguished from the group as an individual, that there should be no rupture in the cohesion of the group. Of course, four centuries before Christ the Stoic philosophers had distinguished the immanent logos from the uttered logos and showed that the word –the signifier– and that which it manifests –the signified– differ. The uttered logos is of material dimensions; its meaning is incorporeal. That is why even our thought is expressed by means of sentences and not simply by words: it is the sense that communicates, the logos in its grammatical structure and syntax, never the isolated words, which explains the exclusively human creation of composite meanings, while animals receive only impressions, even when, like the parrot or the crow, they articulate

words. In spite of all this, inwardness has limits which weaken it. So long as truth remains in the end external, the logos manifests it exclusively, and silence is ignorant of it or conceals it. Silence will receive the logos by right when truth comes to dwell within us. The silent person cannot then be a person who denies spiritual life; but he can be a person who loves the interior logos. By what criteria can the interior logos be described as authentic? By the same purity of heart which protects the authenticity of prayer and stillness. If the word embodies the love of wisdom, silence expresses the wisdom of love. This is why Poemen teaches that silence is deprived of benefit when it coexists in the human soul with the condemnation of others. Only with the presupposition of sudden misfortune we do not fall silent; we are struck dumb. Something that astonishes us leaves us speechless. In these situations existence for a moment loses all meaning and our voice is lost with it. The word comes to fill a void, a gap. Silence, on the other hand, presupposes a certain fullness. Silence without fullness becomes oppressive, a disorientation with regard to the meaning of the world and of the other person. Idle chatter not only shows indifference towards the word and its recipient; it shows above all an anxiety about a void of our own. By contrast, silence comes from interior serenity and fullness. Fear may prevent us from speaking, but as with misfortune or surprise this does not mean in any way that we are silent. Silence is something more than the natural absence of sound. It is a mark of consciousness and therefore as aposiopesis can become a form of concealment. We have seen that there exists a threatening silence and there also exists a silence of thanksgiving. In the latter case it does not refer to inwardness in general. Inwardness in general gives precedence to the Ego over everything else, and in this sense finds a refuge in the rational faculty or is recognized in ecstasy. As something rational, inwardness is expressed in the feeling of discipline and responsibility. As something mystical or ecstatic, it is manifested in the emotional passion of an Ego which cannot bear its limits. By contrast, the inwardness of thanksgiving is the content of my relationship with the other person and the world, a relationship outside the division between subject and object which provokes and foments the modern divisions of the soul. In this perspective one could think of silence as a withdrawal which allows persons and things to remain in their authentic being, a mode of life unrelated to any kind of tactical manoeuvring. When silence becomes a self-seeking tactical game, it loses all spiritual significance. It hides rather than reveals and deceives rather than cleanses. Silence must always remain a form of withdrawal, because withdrawal is fundamentally thanksgiving.

SOTIRIS SARAKIS

The Performance

Now the chorus stopped.
With an assured voice the coryphaeus
explained to the dazed crowd
that the performance
should start all over again from the beginning
and that all the murders
had to be committed again one
by one
in the hope that –this time– they would be successful
in the hope that –this time– they
would lead
to the much desired catharsis.
How many times will I have to pay
this never ending bill?
cried one Clytaemnestra
from the third row of seats.
A futile effort;
besides, she knew all the rules
when she agreed
to take part in a tragedy.

Then all the spotlights were turned off
the blood began to warm up
so it would be steaming hot at the right moment
the owls rehearsed their calls
from the ruins across the stage

And a benumbed moon,
stretched its uncertain rays
from the highest peak in the horizon.
The spectators –silent– descended
each carrying to his private place
that ineffectual pain.

From: THE FLEECE

SAKIS SEREFAS

With Heart in the Mouth

July, I come home alone
tired out from an outing
only to find, find what?
a ghastly looking Virginia Woolf seated at the glass table
wrapped in a wringing-wet black scarf
staring at me as if in a daze
I stopped dead 'shut the door' she begged
'is this a house without a fireplace too?
I nearly caught my death waiting all day' she gasped
and burst into tears
I was stunned 'don't just stand there, sonnie
light a fire to dry myself I froze in that river
drowning
wasn't the redemptive death I hoped for
'twas hell with those water snakes all over me
I took stones out of my pockets and hacked them
they cheeped inaudible on the morning riverbed
reddened the scummy sky
got entangled in my hair
'twas hell, my dear' and more tears like a little girl
I managed to recover 'do I see you or are you imagining me,
madam?'
I asked intrigued lighting a cigarette
'you twerp!' she sneered 'and I thought
despair had taught you something - you're worthless'
and went up in smoke.

From: A FURIOUS RUSH, Translated by Yannis Goumas

ARIS SFAKIANAKIS

From:

If You Didn't Know... You Should Have Asked!

Three o' clock in the morning. I toss and turn in bed like an eel. Thoughts gnaw at my brain. It's impossible to shut an eye. Beside me, Moira grunts in her sleep. She grates her teeth. Snorts. She's not happy either, but that doesn't seem to stop her from getting some sleep.

What keeps me with this woman, I wonder. Do I love her, as I claim, or am I simply bound to her by some sense of morality?

I get up carefully so that the bed doesn't creak, and make my way to the living-room. Dim light from the street lamps filters through. The night cold invades the room through the fireplace. Rain patters on the windows.

I make myself comfortable on the sofa and light a cigarette. I listen to the ticking of the clock. A wedding present.

It's been a few months now that I've had trouble sleeping. To be exact, I do sleep but it's with difficulty and fitfully. Of late, however, things have become really bad. Dawn usually finds me with my eyes wide-open staring at the ceiling. This is not good, no good at all, I confide to the incandescent tip of the cigarette; it hisses derisively. This insomnia problem –I start to expound to the sofa across from me– is a sign of a guilty soul.

'Only you don't believe in the existence of soul,' a voice descends from high above. 'Hmm, well, yes, but then why the devil can't I sleep?'

'That can be seen to,' the same voice is heard, this time from right next to me. I feel my hairs standing on end. I try to utter something but my voice is gone. All of a sudden, the room has acquired a certain reddish glow. A fire has been lit in the fireplace. Feeling overwhelmed by a soothing warmth I turn my head.

He comes and sits near me, yet he chooses to place himself on the far side of the sofa, as if he is worried lest I were infected by some contagious disease. He is peering at the fire right in front; a crooked nose and bony cheekbones. He looks like a tired middle-aged man. As for his chin, it is decorated with a grey goatee which is more in keeping with a Chinese Mandarin than with the telltale pitchfork of Hades. Over his white shirt and red velvet trousers he's wearing a black anorak which is now dripping on Moira's settee. This somehow annoys me, for my wife is rather obsessed with her sofas.

'It's been raining,' he excuses himself as soon as he picks up on my discomfort.

‘That’s quite all right,’ I hasten to reassure him.

A few moments of uneasiness ensue. I just hope this is but a dream. As for him, he is toying quietly with a ring in his hand; it is bejewelled with a red stone. ‘Is that a ruby?’ I ask, wishing to be sociable. He looks at me mournfully. I look deeply into his eyes, trying to make out the eternal flames of hell. I do actually see something, but it must be the glow of the fireplace.

‘This ring,’ he explains, and a breath of sulphur overpowers me, ‘is for you.’ Oh oh! we’re already into nefarious dealings, I tell myself.

‘Don’t be so silly,’ he snorts as he satanically reads my thoughts. ‘It is only an honest contract that is exceedingly beneficial to the both of us. This stone,’ he continues, ‘is a garnet. You are aware, I assume, of the properties inherent in this stone.’

I sit up nervously. I offer him a cigarette in order to buy time. He points to the warning printed on the packet by the Ministry of Health with a pointed fingernail. ‘Insomnia is just as hazardous to one’s health,’ I retort angrily. ‘Instead of being sound asleep in my bed here I am rubbing shoulders with nocturnal creatures and roguish rulers of the netherworld. Wouldn’t it be far better if I were actually dreaming of you rather than have you here in flesh and blood staining my sofa?’

Totally unfazed he clicks his fingers, and out of the blue two tumblers and a bottle of whisky appear before us.

‘Have a drink, my friend,’ he invites me generously, ‘there’s no need to get all wound up. You know that we think highly of you.’ Indeed they must, since it is due to my personal therapeutic intervention that a dancer, a bartender, two students and a poet have all deferred their journey to the underworld for some future date.

‘Your problem, my dear old friend,’ my fellow psychoanalyst from Hades explains to me, ‘is that you have lost your sexual desire. This in turn gives rise to vexation, anxiety and, consequently, insomnia. This ring will restore your lost vigour.’

‘Before you go any further, dear sir,’ I interrupt, ‘you ought to know that this problem does not stem from any lack of vigour - besides I’m not that old - but rather from my decision to remain faithful to my wife.’ I didn’t find it useful to mention the presence of a mistress just then. ‘I have taken a vow to lead a monogamous life and...’

‘To whom have you vowed, if I may ask?’ he breaks in rudely.

‘What, to myself of course!’

‘With your permission, let me observe that such vows are not to be taken seriously. Therefore, I assure you that as far as your vows are concerned you are at liberty to revel in the fair sex once more.’

‘Are you exhorting me to commit adultery?’ I jump up in shock.

‘Sir, it is not I that blessed this wedding,’ he protests, quite rightly too.

I have a sip of whisky. Straight out of the infernal distilleries. Oriental houris to please my palate. Available only in select wine shops.

The Prince of Darkness looks at me askance. He lights a long, thin cheroot, which I find rather affected. 'Please refrain from jumping to any conclusions,' he says. And then, changing tactics ever so suddenly,

'How is sex with your wife, then?'

'Well, she's expecting,' I justify myself, 'and that has put quite a few limitations on our sexual life.'

'Does that make you sad?'

'There was a time when we were at it non-stop,' I admit.

'That is exactly why you need this ring,' he exclaims triumphantly and slips it onto my finger. It is just my size.

'If, nevertheless, your insomnia persists,' my apothecary from Erebus prescribes, 'we'll shall have to resort to more drastic measures. Do not worry, however. One way or another you shall get your sleep back.'

I must admit that it sounds rather comforting.

'I am indebted, sir,' I bow, 'and I'm willing to pay the price.'

'Have no fear, I shan't ask for your soul,' the hellish merchant from the river Acheron soothes me. 'What a childish idea. Be that as it may, there is one small favour...' He pauses. The rain has stopped. I realise that I've been holding my breath.

'Naturally, you know Sara...' he says. [...]

Translated by Leo Kalovyrnas

ALOI SIDERI

Extroverted

Travelling all summer through
drifting sometimes with the breeze, sometimes with the waves
I sought a phrase
a spurt that squirted for a moment only out of a current under ground
and presently altered its form
like a cricket that gives a shout in its sleep
and is lost again in the dense foliage of the night
its voice melted into other tunes
barbarian reposts of the bushes
the roar of a wave before the coming of its successor
or a sudden gust of sea wind

I was misguided by the moon
-it was almost full-
the hills and the rest of the vain geography of the island
as though all that were perceptible were consolations of fear
distractions from poetry

Travelling all summer through
-thyme, crito and other fragrances-
thus extroverted I was redeemed
the only thing I could stand being the exquisite sensation
left in the morning by a dream forsaken
carefully avoiding remembering the phrase
lest its magnetic attraction should lure me
to abysmal depths

The Performance

It was like a theatre stage
the colours of the scenery were unnoticeable or I forgot them
the faces - unknown to me-
lost in evident embarrassment
little by little their features changed as though they shed their guise

as though they were no longer acting
until I sensed they were in agony

There was something in store behind the scenes
something invisible to us
which with increasing intensity affected their stance, their movements
whilst at the same time they did not for a moment cease
to recite their parts with precision
postponing perhaps in this manner
certain unspeakable tortures
which they knew they would presently suffer

AGGELIKI SIDIRA

Mother of an Organ Donor

Your eyes, resuscitated in a stranger's face,
without memory,
look around surprised
and indifferently passed over me
as if they never loved me.
Your heart
with uneven heartbeats
tries to reconcile itself
to the other's life.

How heartless of you my child
to make me love
all these prospective deads.
How many more times will you die,
little by little,
and in how many more graves
will I look for your body?

From: ATTEMPTED LANDSCAPE

The Eye Glasses

I get messages from your armchair
 challenging me to settle in its warmth,
to mingle with your spirit.
I'm wearing your sweater
and I let myself drown
in your smell that has permeated it.
I open your cigarette case
and the scent from your cigarettes
engulfs me.
Yet your eyeglasses
Will always be left over
Tragically alone
Signalling your definite absence.

From: THE EIGHTH NOTE, Translated by Nausika Georgopoulou

DINO SIOTIS

Juan and Jorge or Actually Not

Juan Rulfo, father of all rumors about Pedro Paramo and his whereabouts in the desert of Comala, one day came face to face with Jorge Louis Borges, father of all rumors regarding Latin typography and Greek topography. They met in a non-topos, a utopian place with no name. Actually not. They didn't meet but for the purpose of this very very short story we will assume they did. In fact they did meet and Spanish poet Luis Cernuda in his prose poem entitled 'La cocha vacia' mentions this encounter. In the foggy morning light the two writers, walking side by side along the small roads of Carmellita, a tiny Mexican village, talked about architecture, teutonic alliances, the alchemy of dreams, Homer, Pindar and Epicurean symposia. They spent most of the day in a self-imposed exile way discussing things only in present tense. There were no PCs yet and they couldn't talk about the software of metaphors so they exchanged ideas about the hard disc of memory heading toward ancient dust. Actually not. There were no references on dust, but for the purpose of this story etc. I should mention here that this story took place in 1952 the year Luis Cernuda made his home in Mexico and the publishing house Porrúa y Obregón put out his book 'Variaciones sobre Tema Mexicano'. Juan and Jorge had a liquid lunch in a nearby eatery but they were reluctant perhaps to come to a conclusion regarding the cathedral's architecture and the emperor's new clothes. In the afternoon they visited the local library, neither public nor private. In the silence of the books the two Latin American writers witnessed the arrest of a book thief who specialized in ancient manuscripts. The police officers suspected the writers of collaborating with the thief, told them they had the right to remain silent. Juan Rulfo, speaking for both of them, said they had no choice because they were in a library. Actually not. They lied and told the police officers they had no idea who the manuscript thief was but for the purpose etc. Later in the day they both saw someone, a passerby, who had the image of a Titlacaoan, a magi, in one of his transformations. They greeted him and invited him for a glass of local wine. He said he would rather go to the museum to check out how much his statue resembles his real image. The stairs and the narrow

corridors of the museum caused nausea to Titlacaon and that allowed the two writers to observe a magi faint in the tainted light of the museum. At sunset Juan and Jorges fell off the map of Carmelita and Luis Cernuda lost sight of them. Actually not. Luis Cernuda never saw Juan Rulfo and Jorge Luis Borges together, but etc.

Boston, Feb. 14, 1998

Final Four

Yes, I was thinking of reading out loud, a poem about a man driving on a California highway or was I thinking of writing a poem about a sunset by an abandoned windowsill. Did I say window? Did I mention that the man's car driving on the California highway broke down? And did I say, Your Highness, that the sunset was considerably a non-stop glare of stretched storks heading toward the end of the mountain line, the ultimate surprise coming from the grey clouds? 'This isn't a question mark', said the California man to his wife riding in the passenger's seat just before she left him. 'This is a Chinese opera, and if you plan to walk out of our life before you light a cigarette, pass the daily escapes. It's natural'. And as I stand still by the windowsill watching the sunset one eye, the California man with the other, I wonder, Your Excellency, is this poem going to make it to the Final Four?

Boston, January 14, 1998

Ad nauseam

The day starts and I'm shifted to a dead-man's-land. The view from here is quite complex considering the fog, which could cause a series of serious accidents. I shake my head every time there is a history re-enactment, especially when round babies run out of St. Jerome Hospital in a Cadillac Seville seeking a better breastfeeding opportunity. At around ten a.m. new loads of tourists arrive by charter flights kicking off the creamy festival of Cindy Crawford-look-alikes. The organizers seem to be very pleased that everything is under control. Their system works: the tourists applaud whenever a bimbo from out of town licks her fingers in an attempt to decide how much of her beauty she is allowed to show off. Some fingers go up, some fingers go down. Some fingers move vertically, some fingers move

horizontal. It is not a puzzle. Around noontime I realize how hard it is to locate the literary connection between longitude and latitude. For lunch I have a bowl of vowels mixed with Ps, Qs and Rs. After all the tourists are gone I wonder why bother with a vacant landscape, if you can borrow an industrial model disguised for country use. Try to understand, Your Cyberhighness, that I am in recovery from what is not precisely known and that my place at the pool table suffers from insomnia. Instead of a nap I try to imagine the society next door living in a world with children created by a baster. Not necessarily a turkey baster. It will be a society where the laboratories of amnesia will stay open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. People will go in & out in a hurry exchanging amnesias the same way other people from another era were exchanging memories. Who could deny, Your Cyberhighness, that I am quite a different man ever since you laid your eyes on me? It was an afternoon in 1975. Of course I don't look like the Marlboro man but—listen to this—my male ego becomes a mail ego every time I sense the presence of a postman at any Starbucks corner. As I cross the road I see people buying Cindy Crawford magnets to hang on their fridges or to stick on their dashboards. It is like a sitcom. I pass them and realize that my past has outlived my present, which has outlined my future in the midst of a cosmic whirl. As I look at the footnotes of this piece I see that they need a biopsy. A biopsy to find out the effects of rubbing colliander on the cancelled prayers and testimonies of Latin-American nuns and Tibetan monks. Some nights the most depressing thing about the news is the news itself. At dinnertime I give up because I find too many Qs in my alphabet soup. But I'm running out of time, Your Cyberhighness, and I have to go now. I consider this a perfect day. By the way, did I tell you that an asteroid will hit us tonight? Details at eleven.

Boston, March 17, 1998

THOMAS SKASSIS

From:

In the Athens Underground

During excavation of the tunnels and galleries for the Athens underground railway, it was observed that the health of three workers may have been adversely affected by protracted activity below the earth's surface. Perhaps because the incidents occurred at different times, or because the symptoms resembled none of the mental or physical indications scientifically associated with work in these particular circumstances, the matter was never given any significant 'play' in the media. (The first thing to come to my mind was the political angle: in politics, the scope of a project and the risk involved determine its importance, which in turn determines the only cost that matters to a government. Of course, I may be exaggerating.) Be that as it may, these days an event must be shown on television or written about in the press in order for it to exist unless –and on the off chance– it finds itself embedded in the pages of a report from the subway consortium's young industrial psychologist to the state monitoring agency.

Thanks to the disinterested friendship of a person who enjoys access to evidence that most of the interested parties would prefer to conceal forever –forty years at minimum–; a person who respects my fascination with phenomena that cannot be readily explained in terms of normal behaviour, and who trusts (wrongly, in the event) my ability to keep a confidence, a photocopy of this lymphatic 'existence' has come into my hands.

The author of the report, as would any scientist of integrity, attempts to describe the symptoms. But his writing style, though lacking the concision of a medical or even of a psychology text, reveals a certain literary proclivity. With all the impatience born of the unavowed though justifiable anticipation of future recognition, he hurriedly ascribes to them a novel term –'Buried Past Syndrome'– a transparent attempt to lay down a possible interpretative framework (or to eliminate others). I have copied out several extracts of the report, in the hope that it will be of interest to those of our fellow citizens who continue to concern themselves with all that lies below the hypertrophied surface of things: '...All three suddenly presented crises of intense concentrative and attentive disability which lasted anywhere from one quarter hour (case

of A. S.) to two hours (case of G. H.), the principal symptom of which is the blank gaze of the individual who has just been awakened from an afternoon nap and has temporarily lost all sense of time and place. In the case of foreman K. P., where acute symptoms persisted for two days, I suggested that he be granted a five-day sick leave. Patient then returned to work fully recovered. No loss of memory or other anxiety-related symptoms were noted, and the results of the exhaustive physical examination that ensued proved normal in all respects

[...]

‘These crises were accompanied by variants of the same vision. Though reluctant to provide more than the sketchiest of details, the patients did not refuse to describe what they claimed to have seen. Particularly striking was the fact that throughout their account, they displayed the calm assurance of men convinced that they had seen nothing out of the ordinary, and at the same time, of exceptional significance and unquestionable veracity.

[...]

‘All three reported the existence, in the deepest reaches of the gallery, some ten meters below ground, of a passageway leading into a labyrinth of streets corresponding exactly with those on the earth’s surface. The description given by all three concurred: these underground streets bore names which could be easily linked to the country’s recent past, such as The British Factor, National Stance, American Influence, Civil Strife, The Highest Price, etc., carved (chiselled was the word used by one of the three) on the remains of walls behind which they could not recall having seen the ruins of houses or other buildings. A pale yellowish light of unknown origin and indefinable source suffused everything, causing the street names to gleam with a dull phosphorescence, as if the channels of the carved letters were ‘lit by glow-worms’ (in the words of K.P.). Everywhere total silence reigned, and the tepid atmosphere breathed no odour of earth, dampness or mould.

‘None of the three observed any sign of life—whether animal or vegetable—but all were struck by a feeling of boundlessness. ‘It was like a dream: deep, calming, not of this world,’ said A. S., while G. H. described it as ‘beyond place.’ When asked, they were unable to indicate neither how long they had spent there, nor how their emotional state had altered during their wanderings. From their description, however, this writer is left with the impression that a single minute was equivalent to a century, and that in a state of timelessness, normal emotional functions become blunted.

[...]

'It must be remembered that among the hundreds of workers employed at the site, no one else noticed the existence of the passageway, nor complained of any related disturbance. The three themselves, when asked, made several half-hearted attempts to indicate exactly where they had passed into the subterranean city. But their attitude was one of indifference, as though they had been obliged to do so for the sake of appearances, fully convinced that any attempt to convey their experience was pointless. In fact, K. P., whose education consists of primary school, was heard to mutter over and over again during the attempt to locate the passageway, 'now they tell us.'

'These events could be consigned to the category of collective auto-suggestion or hallucination if: a) they had not occurred at widely varying times, b) they had not occurred at different work-sites, and c) if the three had not, ever since, maintained a slight but constant smile.'

There can be no doubt that the author of the report has encountered some difficulty in maintaining the required professional distance from the accounts of the three victims (are they really?). Perhaps he has been misled by the prospect of discovery; perhaps by his youth... But he certainly oversteps the bounds of scientifically acceptable conjecture by concluding his text with a remark that raises questions about his own mental balance. 'What worries me,' he writes, 'is what may be happening even deeper down.'

ANTONIS SKIATHAS

The Shrine (ICONOSTASIS)

The road made a coil to the right, a snake with its tail vanishing in the plain.

A lot of lights, road signs, and a gas station were hiding the view we had once from above. We stepped back, walked down in small companies from the Albanian inland.

Unarmed, our cloaks full of lice. Hungry for three days, almost barefoot, water was bringing us near fainting. We took off our boots, the flesh between the fingers was detaching along with the socks.

The almond trees once again bloomed.

Hector took the way to the village, all our glory was a loaf of bread.

He took a few steps and then the explosion was heard. He remained there, we buried him offhand.

A long later time we brought a price of marble to guard him and a candle to give him light.

The road coiled on and on, a snake with its tail vanishing in the plain.

The gas station was on his head. Aside the marble gravestone the dustbin, with tows of flax, motor oils and gasoline.

The marble with the laurel vanished in the garbage.

The almond trees were cut down, the fountain dried up.

What did Hector want there alone without water, without candle, without blossoms of almond tree in Spring.

The Testament

We have nothing
We have sold even the water,
Nomads in the mud of the island of Milos.

The children have abandoned us.
The fire pierces us
and the sorrow
for the broken rocks of the Black Sea.

Only the Crucified hears
the moaning of the sea.

The wind scatters at the shores
heirlooms of the ancestors.

Papers that the sun toasted
Detached
the intestines of the Universe.

The city is threatened
the light is thrown down into tunnels
of brave hoplites.

The city is threatened
The kinsmen
of favourite poets consolidated
the black lists.

The city is threatened
the openings in the ground
remind our power.

The Tree

At the first days of autumn it was approached by thunders and all the House was illuminated.

In other times, at the beginning of Spring feathers of goldfinches, orioles and sparrows were soiling its blossoms.

The sea village was overflowing by voices as we were passing a rope around the board and we were going to and fro with the legs stretched for gaining impetus and this was creaking from joy, throwing down its flowers like snow.

At the mornings of August, while its temples were filling from hymns by locusts and crickets, the sun at its higher branch shined like a mirror from the island of Skyros.

At the Civil War, came a company and passed a rope around the fork. The legs stretched, the wind was waving the breathless corpse to and fro for seventeen hours.

Silence,
Great silence, winter was entering.
The chain saw started up, chewing its trunk and this, with a prolonged
creaking, fell down with all its fruits.

Thus stopped the cry of the Father who wandered in the foliage like a
phantom, searching his child.

MIMIS SOULIOTIS

The Wooden One

Like an afterthought in the greater folly of thought
or like an irony of storytelling,
the horse rolled into the impregnable citadel of Troy
like a bitter pit in a sweet apricot,
like a fog in heavy air,
something else altogether.
Incredible that they went undetected –
their construction was far from flawless
and the commando's cover far from perfect.
It was taking air from all sides
and if you pricked your ears you could hear the short breaths,
the weight of the bodies on the concave floor,
the shuffling around on planks
even though they had lined the belly to muffle the sounds.
The finish reeked of unwashed bodies.
A Trojan man or any woman there,
armed with brains and a sense of smell
and the sixth sense of the times
would have gotten a whiff of the Achaeans
having drawn at breath's reach.
The Trojans, whom I got to know in grade school
(they were seated on the left side of the classroom), were not fooled.
They just couldn't stand prolonging the show,
it was time to end this charade
so that the next Epic could begin.

Translated by Stratis Haviaras and Manolis Savidis

ANTONIS SOUROUNIS

With Spiro Hoursoutoglou in the Salonica Bar

Let me start at the beginning, then you tell me whether I did right or wrong. It was a couple of years before you got here, this huge flock of us northern Greeks arrived. They counted us down there, they herded us on, they herded us off, they decided we fit the bill and shipped us god knows where in the dead of the night. The next day we find out we're thirty miles outside of Dusseldorf. I'm telling you, it was Dachau all over again... I nearly lost it. The bus would come at night and pick us up for the factory, then take us back in late afternoon, more dead than alive. I mean it: Dachau.

But I'd had my fill in Salonica so I said to myself, Spiro, you rat, play dumb for a spell till we're out of the woods. Because believe me when I found out her old man, Shorty's old man, had gone bust, I felt like the fucking roof had caved in. You know what it means to track down the donkey, to catch it and tie it up, then a week before the wedding, you find out it's hightailed it and left you holding Shorty?

I'd quit my job. I mean, with Pops owning two stores down on Egnatia, it wouldn't do to have his future son-in-law asking the ladies, 'Would you like the feta hard or soft?' So I quit and played the lover-boy, until Shorty starts dropping little hints and letting the air out of my balloon. At that point I tell her to drop dead, and tell myself to drop dead, and seeing as I'd picked up different habits, I figure I either stick around and go on like nothing's happened, or I make myself scarce for a year or two till the whole thing blows over.

Fotis had already been here a few months and he'd sent me this colour picture of him with some German broad in a slip parked on his lap. I'd been here for about two weeks or so, slowly working myself to death, when Fotis sends word to be ready on Saturday night, he'll be by to pick me up. All that time the only women I'd seen were from the window of the bus coming back in the afternoon, so what the hell, I tell myself, at least let's get laid.

Fotis turns up in these tight pants, a check coat, and a hat with a feather in it. I nearly laughed in his face but then I think, easy, boy, it's probably the latest style. We go into town, have a beer, have another beer, and another, not a female in sight.

'Let's go to this other place,' Fotis says.

We go to this other place, and it's the same story.

'So Fotis old buddy,' I tell him, 'that chick in her slip, where's she at?'

'I dunno. This Greek pimp brought her by... Twenty marks a pop, thirty if you want your picture taken. She laid the whole dormitory in an hour, the pimp snapped the pictures.'

'And, 'er, exactly how often do those two make it by this way?'

'Beats me,' he says. 'They don't have a schedule. Whenever some girl starts to go, they ship her out of the city and take her on tour...'

I'm giving you all this background so you can see the kind of shape I was in when Shorty turned up. Monday through Saturday nothing but work, then jerking off on Sundays. There was a stack of girly magazines going around the dorm, some even had dried cum on them, just the sight of them turned me off. Not the pictures, the filth.

It was something else that got to me though, I didn't even know where it came from. On Sundays, I'd have these thoughts - I had loads of time for that. Spiro baby, I'd tell myself, this just won't do. The factory's going to eat you alive, bones and all... That kind of shit. And what about Spiro Jr.? I'd say (and there I'd unzip my pants to have a look at him), Poor devil, I'd say, the ladies used to treat you right, and now look at you, there's hardly anything left. That's more or less how it went, and as I sat there talking to it and stroking it, I'd get off. Can you believe it, sometimes I even had tears streaming down my face! A twenty-eight year old cock, right, and stuck there in fucking mothballs... Back then, I felt real love for it, like it was my son or something. You know, if life doesn't shove a finger up your ass, you die thinking the hole's only there to shit with. I loved my arms, too, my hands and my feet. I talked to them as if they were poor slob who worked and suffered alongside me. Sometimes I started to wonder whether I'd gone nuts. And I'd say to myself, if this is what it means to be nuts, Spiro baby, you're better off this way. Did you ever stop to think how many turd-machines there are out there who forget they've got hands at all except when they're sitting on the bidet? And I'll bet you anything that writers are the same way: they look at their hands and all they see is the pen in their fingers.

I must have been going on four months without a whiff of pussy... It was afternoon, I was sitting with a few of the guys playing blackjack, and this Greek fellow comes in. 'Anyone here by the name of Spiro Hoursoutoglou?' he asks.

'What do you want with him,' I ask, but nothing doing.

'He in here or not?'

'Nope,' I say. 'He's in Germany doing time as a factory worker.'

'Well,' he says, 'if he turns up tell him some chick was here looking for him'

'Sure thing, buddy,' I call after him. 'If it's Liz Taylor, show her in. Otherwise forget it. Spiro and Spiro Jr. are taking the day off.'

You know, there was bullshit like that going around, there's a Miss soandso outside asking for you, right, or on the phone. No way, I wasn't going to let these hillbillies pull that one on me.

Two minutes don't go by when I hear 'Spiro...' I'm telling you, I almost passed out. I didn't recognize the voice but the tone – it was the same one I used when I was talking to myself. What the fuck, I ask myself, has my back learned how to talk, or my foot – or maybe Spiro Jr.'s grown up, the little bastard, and got himself a voice? That much tenderness from another human being! And in that sleazy sweatshop no less, with porno mags strewn all over our empty beds.

Let me tell you, with that 'Spiro' every cock in the house is standing in attention, that's how much reverence instantly came over us all. I go up to her, right, take her by the arm and lead her away from the others.

'What in Jesus name are you doing here?'

It was like I'd turned the faucet on. I mean, she was crying so hard I thought we were all going to drown in there. I put my fingers around her throat.

'Answer me,' I say. 'What'd you come here for?'

'I... I love you,' she says.

'Great, so you love somebody it gives you the right to pack up your bags and come after them? Did you ever consider asking the other person whether they loved you?'

She was crying like there was no tomorrow. Didn't say a thing, just cried and cried. I sat there going over everything in my mind. Okay, so I didn't love her. Still, it's no small thing for somebody to drop everything and come to the ends of the earth looking for you. That was part of it. The other thing was, as it turned out, the only way for you to get by in Germany was with a contract. I had one, but what about my prick? Why shouldn't it have a contract of its own? Half an hour goes by like that, neither of us saying a word.

'You're too fucking much,' I finally say, laughing.

She starts laughing too, timidly at first, then the two of us together, loud. Have you ever had it happen to you, Andonis, where a woman goes straight from crying to laughing? I don't know, it had to be about the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. I go to smooth her hair and next thing I know she's all over me. We go off, into a corner and there, pardner, I learn what it means to be human again. I don't just mean the screwing, I mean afterwards, I held her in my arms and I cried. I cried for hours without saying a word. She didn't ask what it was about, but it was like she knew. She caressed my arms, my back, my legs – and they were the very things I was crying for. At one point she started to put her hand on my crotch, then realized that would change things,

and she took it away. That was that. We got married, with Fotis as best man. We gave this sonofabitch -fat Aleko, remember him?- three hundred marks to find her work in Cologne. Every weekend we'd get together and count the money we'd saved, and the hairs on our butts. This setup lasted six months or so, until I managed to break my contract and come join her here. We got a room in Nippes: kitchen, bedroom, living room all in one – you know the deal.

But hell, we had good times back then, didn't we? Whooping it up from house to house on Saturday nights. And boy, did that girl ever know how to tsifte-teli! What the hell happened to us? Every now and then I see one of the old crowd in the street, and we don't even say hello. Any idea why it all changed? If only we'd had a scientist around to solve that one for us, eh? But then he'd had to have been through the same shit we'd been through, and that's asking a lot. Eighteen years in the factory... Shorty was a real trooper, I have to say. In all that time, not a word of complaint. Doing what she did, no less: washing the crap off old men – old Krauts, no less. Just hearing what she put up is enough to make you love her. They didn't have anything better to do all day than tinker with their pathetic little things. They'd look at it this way, they'd look at it that way, they'd hold it up to the light, then call her over to have a look herself, that kind of shit. So anyway. My kid grew up on his own, locked in like a house cat. Nothing in my life turned the way I wanted. I wanted to be tall and I turned out short. I wanted to get some schooling and I never had a chance. I dreamed of a woman up to there, and I married Shorty. The only thing I didn't want was to be a factory worker – and Christ, that's just how I ended up.

I'll tell you something I've never had the guts to tell anybody before. I walked past thousands of women in all those years, right? And I looked at every one of them, square in the eyes. Not a single real woman ever looked back. Not even just out of curiosity.

You've done all right for yourself on that score, but if that's it, if that's all someone has going for him, good riddance, buddy. Because as far as I'm concerned, you are your work. I mean, some people take home in a day what for us is a month's wages, and you ask yourself, what's going on here? Why should twelve months of mine equal one of his? I'm telling you, just thinking about it makes me want to take to the streets with a gun. [...]

Translated by Martin McKinsey

DIMITRIS I. SOURVINOS

The Only Begotten

All alone
all night long
in the upstairs
demolished room
with the fond of solitude
chandeliers of stars
I
superior
to Fear and to Sleep
bareheaded and roofless
uncombed
fasting
on the yellow board
stooping
I plunge into my papers
like a soldier
hit on the chest
-formerly
charmer confessor
comforter
interpreter
specializing in dreams-
finally now
simply
the complaint of the dead
I hear
and their naked foot soles
in the Night's
palest courtyard
I
the unprotected by birds
the willing
and prepared for Worry
the only begotten of the Moon
the prey to Love
all alone

look I hear
write and weep

From: COMPLETORY, Translated by M. B. Raizis

ALEXIS STAMATIS

From:

The Seventh Elephant

When he'd read the letter, he folded it and put it in the file on his desk together with all the others. Three matches were lying beside the ink-pot. He picked up two of them and joined their ends, so making a shape like a pyramid. He got up from his chair and stared at it. He didn't like it. He thought it oppressive, as if it were hemming him in. He took the third match and placed it parallel to the notional floor in the middle of the pyramid. The result, a capital 'A', was more to his satisfaction. Then he took it apart and set about another arrangement. He placed the one match above the other in parallel. He looked at them again. He didn't like the co-ordination, the parallelism. He took the third match and used it to join the left end of the bottom match with the right end of the upper one. The shape was complete. A 'Z', completely geometrical, took shape before him. Two shapes with three matches. The same components, a different result. His attention turned to the third match, the diagonal one, it seemed somehow different from the others. He took it, struck it, let it burn and then he understood. It was this third match that prevented any boxing, that joined the nonconvergent, that led the way to the conflagrative end, leaving behind two lines that would never meet.

Aura

1.

Midday on deck, the sun directly overhead, and sea, everywhere sea, sea and gulls, all azure and white. In his head he could feel those tiny tails as Mitya, one of the three Russian brothers, referred to them. They were trembling, that's exactly how it was; there are these tiny tails that tremble and then remember, this is what's bothering him. This very attribute, that makes them vibrate, tremble and then remember, unnerves him. How he wished that those tails didn't exist, that he could see and think at the same time, that the image and its processing might be one single procedure. What a waste of time for the image to enter the tail, to stir it and then for this to call up memory, to inform and compare, to process and decide! Of course the worst thing about all this business is that he eventually remembers.

And it was this that he was trying consciously, but also out of an instinct for self-preservation, to play down. As much as he could.

He stretches his legs. A twinge of pain in the knee. Ever sensitive in the joints, an indeterminable pain, vague. The sun scorching. He feels sleepy. He's tired, exhausted. There's a kind of exhaustion that's the worst of all: trying not to think of anything. Like now. He wants to empty himself. Of thoughts, of images. Impossible. A bee is circling round him. He wafts it away. It comes back. Goes away again. Somewhere to the south she'll be thinking of him with a wet towel over her face. Her legs sunk deep in the sand. Even deeper. He'd recognised the telephone call straightaway. She put down the phone in less than five seconds, but the breath of the long-distance call had given her away. The silent reminder. The worst nightmare. He stretches out his legs still more. A slight pain in the coccyx. Useless in any case. Remnant of a tail. The animal disappears from upon us. Only a few vestiges remain. Some nooks to remind us of it.

He looks at his watch. 4:44 p.m., 4.9.95. Fours again. Like nails in the briny afternoon. A light, refreshing breeze is blowing. I'm travelling, he thinks.

2.

'Allez-vous à Paros?' from the chair next to him.

An engaging, well-built young man, with broad shoulders and hawkish profile, from Paris, a medical student. He was obviously in a mood for conversation – or rather for a monologue. In a characteristically nasal voice, he tells him that it's the second time he's going to the island. On hearing the name Paris, he again sees before him rue Daguerre with its marketplace, the cooked meats and the seafood, with the thousands of colours and with the sense of festivity streaming from every stall. At the same time, he also sees Les Halles and the houses he frequented and the environment of the enfants gâtés of the French capital with whom he had shared – by chance? by choice? – a crucial period in his life. And of course the salon with the exhibition of antique furniture, as he would later admit with sarcasm. Next, a film came into his mind: *La Haine**. Particularly the final scene. With the shots a sound track on the face of Said, the Arab, the Foreigner. Then, with the associations coming thick and fast, he journeyed in his mind to the Emirates, to the warm sea, to his meeting with Otaiba, to the meal in kaftans, to the souk, to the hotel, to the bottles bought illegally at five times the normal price...

Jacques Delamarche went on for an hour. He talked about his studies, his separation, about Paris Saint Germain, about Mitterrand's

illegitimate daughter. Then he got fed up. He was like a child clumsily playing with a toy for some time before tiring of it: a toy that in any case was only following as a matter of form –as his mind was on other things– he went to the toilet leaving Jacques on his own smoking his last cigarette. Once there he took out the small bottle and took four large swigs. He gazed at himself in the mirror and smiled at his swollen eyes.

* 'La Haine': French film 1995, directed by Mathieu Kassovitz.

3.

The sun bright, a mitrailleuse mercilessly shooting out its rays. Below, a hissing rose from the amorphous, glowering face of the sea. In the distance, a faint grey, the island appears like an illusion. On a wooden form beside the boats a middle-aged couple are talking. He listens.

'Do you remember last year how lovely it was?'

'Yes, but not like in 1980. An orgasm of building, that's what it is.'

'And the people are so different...'

'That's people for you. They change.'

'People change along with the houses.'

'This island's got something, a magnetism. It forms a triangle with Delos and Santorini. Isosceles.'

'You're right about that. It's certainly got something.'

'A magnetism.'

He feels a certain lethargy. A lethargy caused by the sun, that makes him think of other suns. A condensed light hurls wet pointed darts. He shudders. He puts on his ear-phones: Jonathan Richman. 'That Summer Feeling'. Two more swigs. The air is shining like a gold ring at midday. A hydrogen molecule from the alcohol vanishes into his guts. The spirit is transformed into acetone. Everything alters, everything changes. And he, sad for some time now, doesn't know. He doesn't know that what he feels right now, what for so many years has been inexplicably causing him pain, that same thing is here now. It's here and travelling. With him.

Translated by David Connolly

KOSTAS STERYOPOULOS

Cave Koutouki

As soon as we crossed the threshold,
the music of millennia was heard,
when we continued on amid stalactites and stalagmites
enlarged throughout the centuries;
drops dangling for years on end and never
dropping,
and pale marmoreal stalks that have sprouted rootlessly.

Crystalline schist. Dolomite limestone.

Men in their Sunday best
who had never before made such an excursion,
and the guide grown hoarse with explanations.
Women in trousers and men with stepped-up shoes,
souls that come in stupor and in stupor leave
and go to wake up in another body.

No one knew where we were going,
as night fell and day dawned
amid the dampness of pale marble.
Statues and crosses in writhing configurations,
an endless cemetery of odd shapes
that altered their appearance
as soon as we stopped to stare at them.

But at a certain moment daylight appeared high up in the distance,
and we all believed some sort of an explanation had been given,
that we had found the beginning.

Yet even so we went like sheep to slaughter
under the stones and the millennia and even deeper still,
as we emerged finally out of the earth's bowels,
believing we were escaping her.

Until we found ourselves outside once more
in the luminous autumn of Attica.

From: HALF OUR COURSE, Translated by Kimon Friar

NIKOS THEMELIS

From:

The Reversal

In difficult times the house must have a master.' This sentence stuck in her, and after kyr-Ignatios' visit, she kept repeating it; and when she didn't mention it for a few days, I reminded her of it. We both knew who the bridegroom was to be: there could be no better one. The question was whether Anna would finally say 'Yes'; every time we broached the topic, she would fly into a passion. Anna dreaded, and at the same time adored, only one person in the family. The mistress placed all our hopes in him. For days on end she patiently waited for one of those moments when Master Antonis recovered his senses, and, grabbing the first chance, she went to work on him, dripping with honey. She was well-prepared and talked to him slowly, asking him what was to become of the family, the family the late Master so cherished, telling him what his friend Ignatios had said, how hard times lay ahead, full of danger, how everyone's happiness, but above all Anna's, as well as all our belongings, depended on her marrying, not just anybody, but Nikolis; she ended saying that he was not to let Anna leave his room till she gave her consent. He was to frighten her if necessary, to tell her she would cause him his death if she refused. My mistress said all this to him, and much more, I can't remember. Anna was writing letters that morning. Her mother called her into Master Antonis' bedroom, and then left closing the door behind her. She stuck her ear against the door panel to hear what they would say and I knelt and put my eye to the keyhole, blessing myself in apprehension.

Master Antonis propped himself up on the pillows with his good elbow and, gathering all his strength, all he had left in this world, without adding or leaving out a single word, faithfully repeated what my mistress had told him to say. Now and then he got mixed up, and would lose his words, breaking into a stammer from trying too hard,

putting his good hand to straighten out his lips, massaging his throat to get the words out. Even his little finger on his paralysed hand began to shake from the effort. Now and again he would fall back exhausted, and just as we thought he'd given up and wouldn't be able to continue talking, he would pull himself together and take up his speech where he had left it, doggedly weaving his tale like a spider her web. As soon as Anna understood the first sentence, she pretended not to have heard any of it before, as if she was hearing this for the first time, from him. So he took up the story once again from the beginning, repeating it between moans, like a porter carrying a heavy weight. And then again, and again, and yet again, as if Anna was constantly saying 'no' with her mouth and her eyes. There we stood in front of the door, hearing Anna sobbing and begging her father to pity her, not to force her. But as long as she didn't say 'Yes', he kept on lashing out at her, tearing her to pieces, harming his health threefold for every blow he dealt her. When he groaned: 'It's your fault if I am lying here paralysed and it will be your fault if I die here and now', Anna bit her hand hard, as if to cut through her veins, and her sobbing turned to a blood curdling howl, alarming all the neighbourhood. My mistress held on to me as I stood there beside her, digging her nails into my shoulder in her anguish, and I held her tight, pressing her hand further into my flesh, regardless of the acute pain I was feeling. When finally, with her jaws trembling between her sobs, Anna gave him an answer, he went on like a demon, full of strength now, as if during all those long years of silence he had been gathering it in the innermost recesses of his heart, specifically for this moment: 'I don't want any promises. I want you to swear. An oath. An oath on your knees.' A sound left her lips, as if she wanted to shape it into words, wanting to say something, but her pain twisted her lips into an awful grin. This was too much for my poor mistress who burst into the room, with me following behind; we found Anna had sunk to the side of the bed, clutching his good hand, the one with the ring, and raining tears on it, sobbing in despair, trying to say something but unable to produce a single sound, her jaws trembling hysterically, beating her breast again and again, her tears pouring over his fingers, her mouth frothing from too much pain and too much crying. Master Antonis remained stock-still; only the little finger on his bad hand shook uncontrollably. My mistress ran to him, and bending over him began wiping his sweat off his brow with her handkerchief, soothing him with words. When Anna, never letting go off his hand, finally collapsed on to the floor, he looked up into my mistress' eyes as she bent over him, looking at her as he had never looked at her before in all his life. For the first time seeking her approval. 'Eleni, my love, did I say everything you wanted me to say?' he whispered. This was the first

time my mistress' real name was heard in the house. 'Antonena' he had always called her, 'Antonena' we called her too. She took his head –red and sweaty– in her arms, stroke it, as if forgiving him for all the pain of a lifetime: 'Not Eleni, Antonis my love, only 'Antonena', only 'Antonena', she murmured as tears ran down her cheeks, as they always did when he spoke roughly to her. It was only after Anna howled for a second time that we realized he had given up the ghost in my mistress' arms. It was as if he was giving up the spirit in exchange for having taken Anna's soul with an oath.

A Private Anniversary of a Great Public Holiday

Evangelia the beautiful placed the bunch of lilies on the bedside table, whereupon the bedroom glowed in the fragrant light that these special flowers began to emit. The way their white sheath-like petal is furled always reminded her of one of the ice-cream cones of her erotic summers; the yellow pollen-covered phallus in the centre stands up like a candle on a birthday cake. Every year, on this day, Evangelia's lost lover sends her this bouquet of flowers to mark the anniversary of their separation. For when she was twenty-one, on the day of the national anniversary, her angel had tenderly slipped out of her life. His light, however, remained. Though so much time had passed since then, she bent in emotion over these flowers of memory. Her lips brushed against the white trumpets and their cool freshness shivered down within her. She breathed in their discreet scent and minute kisses of pollen clung to her skin. She still could not quite believe that through all these years the invisible bond of their separation had endured so steadily. A perfume of reverence and nostalgia came over her as she took from the wardrobe the wreaths from their wedding –which had never taken place– and laid them on the bedside table. Floating in the tenderness that flooded her body, she fell back silently on to the bed. Her lover's absence was now stronger than ever – almost a mere breath away. A breath like a gentle breeze from the past, shiveringly susurrating over her body. Slowly, slowly she abandoned herself to the sweet intoxication of sleep, immobilised in her dreams. Beside her, the bedside table with the lilies and the wedding wreaths shone like a monument to fallen lovers.

It was then the period when the erotic flame burned unquenched in Evangelia's body, heralding a holocaust. Until one day the revolution of pleasure broke out. Her love was invincible throughout every battle. The wounds and traces left by their bodies' wild grappling became the

sacred symbols of their struggle. Raising –like a banner– the gossamer underclothes that enwrapped her body, and with her breasts to the fore, she enflamed her erotic opponent and succeeded into drawing him into a struggle that did not end until the final fall. Her rosy flesh gave colour to the dawning of a new life. Yet the conquerors were doomed never to be crowned in wedding wreaths. Her beloved opponent was lost before he could enter the temple of love for the ritual reconciliation.

Now Evangelia was walking in the flooding moonlight of day. As she passed before the empty church she heard the far-off sound of a liturgy. The words and the chanting had never been assimilated by time and their surroundings, with the result that they had remained suspended in the air like some dream-like recording. She instantly recognised his beloved voice making the jubilant speech to mark the anniversary of their separation. A Bank Holiday of love. Everywhere bodies and souls in utter harmony among the crowd that had gathered from all directions, while innumerable sheets unfurled proudly on the buildings. Evangelia, wearing the blue and white flag of her wedding dress, went out into the Avenue of Parades, which was strewn with laurel leaves.

The air shuddered with clapping and cheering, as if lost heroes had returned once more. Although the moon could not be seen in the sky, its blinding light shone on everything, giving magic and brilliance to the day of the nation's rebirth. A perfect coexistence of the free-flowing crowd and the geometric formations parading past. Slowly, as if floating down the avenue, came tanks in a festive camouflage of multi-coloured flowers, with wreaths around their guns. The orderly ranks of bodies wore flowering helmets and precise uniforms on which all the colours and shapes of nature were imprinted. Young girls and young men marched by, the unbearable vigour of their bodies masked by the heirloom costumes of History. Heavy lorries, their sound Byzantine and their speed velvet, towed huge, phallic trailers –detumescent now– recalling the airship Zeppelin of days gone by.

On the official rostrum, upright and shining, stood the global heroes of the cinema, of the sports field, of mass music, famous veterans, international television stars, magnates of the intellect, those who everywhere came first, those awarded all manner of prizes. As they stood there bathed in the moonlight of the day, they radiated a golden glow. Beside them the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Muses and the Choir of Angels were intoning an old hymn dating from the time of the erotic revolution.

In the dewy grove of dreams two battalions of brave lovers of my fragrant white flesh –cruel sadists– are picking lilies.

The crowd was shouting incomprehensible words belonging to some language of the future and waving jersey flags of rich design and soft colours. Every one of them bore symbolic medals on his breast. In the midst of the people's excitement, strange officials suddenly began to gather, their uniforms decorated with discreet stars, three or five or seven, like old brandies. Silence and awe spread all around. 'The allies!' someone shouted in illicit Greek. Instantly the inflated full moon appeared in the sky – the fruit of the orgiastic erotic time. Evangelia gazed, enchanted, at the huge moon-airship which was coming nearer and nearer until in it she recognised her beloved. He was beckoning to her in agony and urging her to get into the balloon quickly. The officials' stars were twinkling. She saw herself standing beside her beloved, although she had remained on the ground and was exactly twenty-one years old. As she watched in amazement the balloon of the full moon gaining height, an official gave the order in a global language. 'In honour of the anniversary-y-y-y... Fire!' Evangelia the beautiful shuddered from head to foot as she counted in terror the twenty-one cannon shots.

From: WHAT I WILL BE WHEN I GROW UP, Translated by Caroline Harbouri

SOTIRIS TRIVIZAS

Mal di Luna

The moon shone all night
like a red hot tooth.

With the darkness, the wind
and the black cloud between the legs.

Each Man Dreams...

Each man dreams with his death.
I've retained a little of your breath
and the mute furrow of your lips
but you have no face, no body
every evening you grow less like a word
that cracked the wind without return.

Here each man lives his own death
every day hiding his hands
every night with music
and darkness.

But I met you in the light, years ago
I have known your voice and your smile
gleaming amidst words in smoke.

Then you entered the vein.

VASSILIS TSIAMBOUSSIS

A Pat on the Cheek

She had always said, 'When I die, if my Angel comes and takes me for a last look at all the places I've ever lived in or been to, it won't take him more than a couple of minutes.' In other words, that's how sheltered and paltry her life had been.

But that night, when her Angel carried her off from the hospital, he left her suspended above her poor little house, like a balloon, for three whole hours, looking in through the window at her only-begotten son, whose eyes were deep wells of sadness, not just tonight but from way back. He was painting their single room for the wake, lest he and his mother become objects of ridicule in town. Painting and crying . . .

Who knows what came over her all of a sudden that, without permission, she came down and dabbed off his sweat with a clean towel, put an old jacket over his shoulders to keep him from catching cold, looked the room over, said, 'Nice job,' and gave his salty cheek a pat. Then she returned to the Other, who was waiting for her on the glass cloud, unruffled, unsmiling, showing no trace of anger or other emotion, maybe only slightly impatient to be off, as he spread his wings and, like a stork with its young one in its arms, began to ascend.

Salami

No sooner did they have him covered up than it started snowing. Those who knew him better went into the reception hall to convey their condolences. I wound up at the cafe across the street and ordered coffee. I kept my coat on, kept my hands in my pockets.

I had no particular reason for being at the funeral. Most of what I knew about him I'd overheard at the house, before they carried him out.

They had invited him to join the cooperative. 'What chance do neighbourhood grocers like us have, with all the big chains selling things at half the price?' He wouldn't listen. 'I didn't slave my life away just to have you pashas telling me what to do with my property.'

He was relatively young, and had little in the way of assets. He did all he could to hold on to his customers – carried their groceries home for them, delivered milk, even started giving credit.

When his daughter entered the University, things got really tight. He had no choice but to have his wife come down and tend shop while he went and worked mornings at his brother's bakery. Luckily the bakery was on the other side of town, he never saw anyone he knew.

The night before, he was having coffee with his wife. He got up to wash his hands, and fell forward into the sink. No cry, no spasms, no bulging eyes. His soul flew away like a small bird.

I still remember his greasy apron and how coarse his hands were. When I was little, whenever we had guests they'd send me down to his store to buy salami. We didn't normally shop there, but our regular grocer didn't have a cooler. He'd slice it with an enormous knife, and always ate the end piece.

'What do you sell it for?' I once asked him in my innocence. 'Why not eat the whole thing yourself?' He roared with laughter. 'You like salami?' he asked me. 'Love it!' I answered. 'Good. Here's what we'll do. When you grow up and make some money of your own, come on back and we'll open up a salami business together. We won't sell it to anybody, just keep it all for ourselves.'

I paid for my coffee and went out. A thick snow was falling. I went through the heavy iron gate. The oil candles trembled in the dusk. I walked to the fresh grave. I took it out of my pocket and reverently set it on top. I was a small Hungarian salami, the best money could buy. In Memoriam for I that is leaving and will never return.

Translated by Martin McKinsey

YIANNIS TZANETAKIS

Loop

I saw you in my dream
emerging from the poem
verses like waters closing in your wake,
I spat a bit of galaxy like a child
enjoying bonfires and expected guests.
 'Mommy', said I, 'this was my favourite toy.'
 I picked a tear out of the closet
among the ones I kept for such occasions
and snuggled it all night like a loop

From: WITH WILDERNESS LIGHTS, Translated by Ion Zotos

THANASSIS TZOULIS

The Dog's Dream

Dry rivers were rotting under the mist
suddenly insane voices reached our caverns:
Don't go near the dog the moment it remembers
it wants us to change its dream
as it listens to the frozen waters beyond the dry rivers
and we have no other picture
to hang where it sees
Before the waters the poet went
to play his blood in the lake with the hunters of the dead

his books shall remain blank he said

– Raise the children for it to believe from deep odour
when it dreams their veins
to sweeten under the vine arbours
– large turtles took them
who know of unbearable swamps
that lie below the blood of the poet

Only at night do they raise
and ask about Miaoulis's boats

– Fasten the chain where the house was
and a domestic bird to thump the wing
to hide the void coming from the bones
– Casts its other end to meet our hands
to join the other half
or it won't find its blood

– Cut the voice's water
all dream in the dark
without poets
and with fiery cuppings on his abdomens
gather the fear like harmed blood
– Drowns in old sounds and howls
from blood to blood

- Kill it then under the mist
in the same void as the poets blood
and the unbearable swamps of the children
with the turtles on their backs
bathing in their milk to see

– I killed it
– And still it howls?
– It howls

– You killed it the moment it remembered.

From: ISTHMOS, Translated by Mavroconstanti L. Thegna

NANOS VALAORITIS

Borisofki's Lair

The well of Borisofski – the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The fish in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The land of the fish of the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The shoulder of the land of the fish in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The road on the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The animal carved on the handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The mouth of the animal carved on the handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The huge mouth of the animal carved on the handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The tongue in the huge mouth of the animal carved on the handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The man on the tongue in the huge mouth of the animal carved on the handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of the well of Borisofski. The knout held by the man on the tongue of the huge mouth of the animal carved on the handle of the knout held by the man who walks on the road of the huge shoulder of the fishes' land in the great empty mouth of Borisofski's well.

YANNIS VARVERIS

Piano of the Deep

These notes
I'm sending you
with the upthrust
are no longer of any
but any musical interest.
Ever since the wreckage
which sent us both
to the bottom
like a weight aghast
the floodlit liner's piano and I
have become something of a sunken ornament
a dull-sounding furnishing of the deep
an exotic flower
or an enormous shell
shelter of seahorses
fairway of fishes open-mouthed
before this black-and-white memory
of bow tie, keyboard and collar.

And if on one of your boatings
you detect on the calm surface
three, five, ten bubbles
like do, sol, mi
don't imagine music
it's only rust which on remembering
presses upwards.

So don't you worry.
My piano and I
feel very comfy here
producing from time to time random notes
but always within the safety of total loss
and at long last
far from
the prospect of drowning.

VASSILIS VASSILIKOS

Portraits of Cabbies

With my own title, 'Portraits of Cabbies', I have selected from Thrassakis's Diary those passages in which he attempts to analyze the Greek mentality by comparing individuals of the same profession (in the case, taxi drivers) from several different regions of the country. This effort reflects his deep desire to cease being merely a Macedonian writer, like so-called Macedonian halva, and to become more pan-Hellenic in his approach. 'Since all Greeks read my work', he writes in a letter, 'I should be writing about all Greeks'.

[1]

The first in the series of cabbies is a Vlach from Thessaly who married a woman from Corfu and settled down there, since, our writer observes, a wife often comes with a house (from her dowry) – and as everyone knows, everything begins with the acquisition of a permanent place of residence. It's Sunday and the banks are closed, so, after haggling over the price of the ride in Italian lira (in Glafkos's day, western countries, dispensing with the old border disputes, have replaced them with international monetary crises that bring about reciprocal deprecations of currency), Glafkos and Glafka finally get into the taxi to begin their pilgrimage-drive. It is morning of their return; they've just gotten off the ferry from Brindisi, and the sun hasn't yet risen above the square with its combed trees and freshly-washed stones. Though it is early morning, their driver orders a cognac from the coffee shop on the square, which startles and worries the couple, since he'll be driving in the mountains on curves where the trees have rooted in the asphalt. But they say nothing. For them the moment has a special charm: everyone is still asleep, the shop is almost empty, just a few old regulars and a waiter watering the potted plants with a hose. Glafkos and Glafka look at one another, unsure whether or not they are still living in a dream. Ordering a coffee, in Greek, Glafkos feels a shudder pass through his lips, as in his school days whenever he got

the best grade in his class on a foreign language exam. The driver is drinking his second cognac. In the village where they stop later, he'll drink yet another ouzo, so as not to displace the people who own the shop. But he seems to be a stable driver. Mild honks, gentle curves. Apparently the alcohol doesn't have much of an effect on him. This heavy-headed man, a Thessalian of the plain through and through, is unable to get drunk off the island's beauty. Born in the blind, stupid plain, he has to drink first before heading up into the mountains. In order to come out of his shell, to tolerate himself in his skin, he needs to be pushed from the inside. Thrassakis, on the other hand, is all smell (the earth after yesterday's rain) and sight (the kerchiefed old women, the goats, the sheep, the jagged hill), uplifted by these external stimulation's. At some point in the journey the driver starts complaining about the price of gas. 'Last year it was seven drachmas a litre', he says, 'now it's seventeen. Whatever money I make I throw right back into taxi, just to keep it running. And the taxi stand closes in the winter', he continues. 'Here on the island we take what we get working three months a year, during the summer. But this year, what with the business in Cyprus, and the other, there was hardly any traffic at all. Not a soul set foot on Corfu'.

This description of the dead summer should be compared to the sixth portrait, in which the cab driver likens the square in Navplio to a graveyard. But the most important element in the narration, as the informed reader will understand, is the reference to the 'other', which is how the cabby refers to the 'cholera' epidemic, the seven years of shame. It has neither name nor gender - it is entirely neuter. At this mention of the junta, Glafkos and Glafka glance doubtfully at one another. (Later, with the experience he has gained, Glafkos will tell us that he would never have opened up to the cabby. But at that point, not knowing, he took a chance). 'The junta', he says, 'is the reason we stayed away for so many years'. The cab driver accepts this pronouncement calmly, his face devoid of expression, lighting a cigarette and offering them the pack. 'No thanks, I don't smoke'. Throughout the remainder of the portrait, as the day proceeds, the cabby's form grows darker. When they stop for lunch he orders spaghetti and drinks two beers, one after the other. Thrassakis, in his bathing suit, pushes his chair back to escape the sound of the cabby chewing, and is hit hard on the back by a young kid carrying a crate of fruit to the kitchen. The nudge of the homeland, he says to himself. In returning, I take up valuable space. I block the passage of others. Then, at the journey's end, he hears the braying of a donkey, turned him, and accepts it as a welcome into the small, bitter love of his homeland.

[2]

Leaving Igoumenitsa, they chose not the best cab but the youngest driver, a kid who honked at everyone on the road to Ioannina. Of course there weren't many cars, but he still seemed like lord of the place and the people. He was a carefree, light-hearted guy, though already washed in the slight melancholy that belongs not just to Epiros but to all of continental Greece. He had no tapes in his car, just the radio. They took a girl along with them to Ioannina who looked like anything but the cousin he said she was; she slept in the front seat, waking on the wild mountain to say she had been dreaming of lightning. But it wasn't a dream, it really was lightening – a bolt hit the wires that hung in the air before them, throwing out sparks like fireworks that never go out. After Zalogo and Laka Souli they descended, while the storm stayed up on the mountain, like a scarf around a wild man's throat. They stopped at a spring. 'It has the best water in this region,' the cab driver told them. 'People come all the way from Igoumenitsa and carry it back in buckets'. There was a café next to the spring. An old woman was mopping the patio with chlorine. The cabby, always cheerful, always in high spirits, pointed out the camouflaged army tents set up in the surrounding mountains. He himself had gotten away without being enlisted because the army didn't have enough uniforms to clothe the new recruits. Glafka bought feta from the old woman. 'It's from the Dodoni factory in Ioannina', the old woman told her. There were hens in the yard, pecking at innards and corn.

[3]

They got to know the third cabby better, if only because the drive was longer – from Ioannina to Athens. They saw him unloading clothes from a washing machine and chose him because his cab was sparkingly new. He was also their only life-long driver up to now. A veteran truck driver, he had 'put a cab on the market', as he put it, at a time when in hindsight it would have been wiser to stick to trucks, since the gas prices skyrocketed immediately afterwards. To Glafka's question as to why all the taxi drivers in the city's main square were over fifty, he answered that none of them were lifers at the job. Most of them had gone as young men to work in Germany, and had come back with a bit of money in their pockets, and instead of opening a store or a café preferred to sink their capital in a cab. Now the profession was bottlenecked. They were even given specific numbers. (One exasperating thing in the 'Portraits' is the customer's right to choose

his taxi, as he had once chosen horses at the track. But unemployment, you see... So if the square resembles a graveyard, as the cabby from Navplio says, Thrassakis is a ghost who has returned to a place suffering from apparent death). But hadn't the junta opened up the profession, to send in its spies? No. At least not out here in the country. Of course you had to grease palms here, too, to get a permit. At first the cabby's political stance is hard to gauge. Neither with one side nor with the other. Sure, for the political exiles to return to their villages from the eastern-block countries, 'all it takes is for people to need them in the fields'. 'But haven't they been forgiven by now, thirty years after the civil war?' 'How should I know what's going on? Blood is blood. If I were a little kid when so-and-so killed my father, how would I look at him now if he were to come back to the village?' Glafka is sitting in front, the curves make her dizzy. 'And our once-strong warrior?' 'If he'd been in the 1969 elections, he would've won by a landslide. But as they say, whoever dips his finger in the honey wants to eat the whole dessert'. The tape of Epirot songs keeps playing, again and again. He has other tapes, stored in a case, but his passengers always like this one best. Like the previous cabby, he too honks at the traffic cops he knows on the road. He seems to know everyone in Arta, Amfilohia, and Antirrio. But in the capital, he loses it. The roads, the noise, the bright lights and the honking make his head spins. All he wants is to unload them, quite literally, an hour early so he can head back up to his beautiful city on the lake, with its Ioanninian silver and the legendary Mrs. Frosini.

[4]

The cabs in the capital look awful. Thrassakis compares them to the ones the Americans abandoned in Cuba when they were kicked out. The companies that made them have since gone under, so they have no spare parts, and sink with time into the gutters of the roads. Headed for Tripoli, they end up in one such cab. The care and kindness of its driver, a young blond kid from Navpakto, aren't enough to make up for the brakes, which sound like the creaky pedal on some ancient piano. After Argos, in the steep mountains, though the moon's light erases the shadows from their cheeks, the air-brushing of this nighttime snapshot can't erase their fears that the taxi might tumble over a cliff as they veer around some curve. And the driver's enormous hands, his words of comfort –'Don't worry, we'll get where we need to go, the worst is behind us'– seem like a camel driver's consolations in the middle of a desert.

[5]

Once again, the square in Tripoli with its gray taxis. The better the car, the less attention they pay to its driver. The more the engine and shocks and tires protest, the louder, the more emphatic the conversation grows about how horribly the world is going, while what's really going horribly is that particular taxi. And so the driver from Tripoli to Sparta passes unobserved, like a tiny figure in a enormous fresco, while the Spartan's humanism becomes almost emblematic as he embraces our strangers and takes them wherever they want to go. He too has nice tapes. He's blond, an agreeable guy. In Githeo he turns them over to a man from Mani who will take them the rest of the way. This Maniat seems like the best driver of all, because the road, from Githeo to Gerolimena, is all highway. In his Diary, Thrassakis often returns to this trip. It stands out in the 'Portraits' for the manner in which the driver himself becomes part of the landscape, as he holds steadily to the wheel, guiding his passengers through legendary Mani.

[6]

The Cabby from Navplio, whom I've already mentioned twice, is distinguished by the following characteristic: he refuses to drop his fares, though all the empty taxis lined up in the square make his insistence seem unreasonable. Work might be scarce, he says, but he isn't going to drop his fares when a new road that passes behind the ancient site of Epidavros – a road, as Glafka comments, which resembles the dictatorship that built it in the manner in which it avoids real life, bypassing villages, looking only on pine trees and rocks – looking, in short, on an inhuman landscape, whitewashed and idyllic, as the dictators wanted Greece to be, without Greeks, populated only by ancient ruins and ladders of light dancing the sirtaki to chords from an electric bouzouki. Yes, something like that. The cab driver, guessing that they belong to the 'other side', puts in a tape of Theodorakis. The driver is from Peristeri, outside of Athens, and before heading into the city center, they stop to see his sister and his brother-in-law, who has a truck and carries tomatoes to the farmers' markets from Kopaida. When they pay him in dollars, expecting him to be glad, he pulls a scornful face and says, 'What if I can't change them?' (Note: Due to 'Dillinger', anti-American sentiment in Greece had reached its peak).

[7]

A Cretan, transplanted into Old Greece, is a lost glory when the north wind is blowing. Such a man is the driver who takes him from Athens to Lamia, after calling to tell his wife not expect him home that afternoon. 'As soon as they heard I was going up to Lamia, my little girls told me, 'Dad, bring us back some kourabiedes''. A family man, there's no need to tell him not to speed. In Bogiati, where he stops to get gas, he points to the army base across the way and said, 'This is where all the torment took place'. 'Torment', he says, not 'torture'. Exiting Highway I, passing through the second toll, he drops Glafkos off at People's Square in Lamia, where Glafkos rests in the shade of the ancient plane trees, once again, after so many years.

[8]

The last Cabby is the one who takes him from Lamia to the brother, by way of Katerini. A cheerful guy, down-to-earth, with a heavy accent – in short, an old-time cabby. His father is also a cabby and he himself has been on the job for fifteen years. A cab, he declares as he closes the window between the front and back seats to create atmosphere, needs three things. 'Tires, upkeep, and heart'. He stresses the last. 'Without heart even the best cab won't run'. He and his father used to have two cabs. Then they sold one, and now only this one is left. He tells stories about last month's mobilization. They took his cab too, of course. 'One of the officers says, 'I'll be driving this'. 'Over my dead body you will', I tell him. For a pro to drive it, sure. They even pulled down the telephone poles in Thessaly, so airplanes could land in the plain'. He breaks into laughter. When the cabby went to report for duty, they found him in no kind of condition. So they gave him a truck to drive, filled to the brim with ammunition. 'But the truck'll break down, it can't carry this kind of load. 'How was he to know – and here he bursts again into laughter – that the boxes were empty...

Glafkos notices fires in the field. They are preparing the ground for the second planting.

*

As a general observation on the 'Physiognomies', we might note that all the cabbies turn up the volume on the radio as soon as the news comes on. The cabbies who work out in the country are in contact with the people, the tractors and horses, while the city cabbies might honk at another cabby or two at the most. And from North to South, West

to East, their concerns are the same: the skyrocketing price of gas, and the fear of another mobilization.

Thrassaki's dealings with taxis constitute an important element in his intellectual makeup. He is the kind of intellectual whose contact with the common element comes solely in the form of conversation with whatever cabby might be driving him from his house to some theater or demonstration – where, in his capacity as an intellectual, he will address the masses, finding himself once more behind footlights that distance and isolate him from the people. And, respecting the unwritten obligations of the ride, a cab driver usually feels obliged to answer whatever questions his customer might ask.

Such was the situation upon Glafko's return to Greece, flushed with the agent's money. He took cabs not only within Athens but between cities, paying the double fare for long distances, which, compared to the single fares he was used to paying abroad, still seemed like next to nothing. In Germany the meter starred at two-and-a-half marks, while in Greece it was eight and a half drachmas, a third as much. Besides, unemployment was so bad during the summer of his return that the drivers, most of them family men, dropped their prices for long distances. Would it have been cheaper to rent a car and driver? (Glafkos himself, we should note, either didn't know how to drive or was scared to). Perhaps. If he preferred the taxi, it was because: 1. He could replace it with another at any point along the way; and 2. A cab driver comes into contact with every level of society, from wage earners on their way to the bouzouki joints to whores, thieves, spies. And since Thrassakis's only contact with the lower class came through his dealings with cabbies, he preferred them over some hired driver whose only customers would be people like Thrassakis himself.

The collecting of life from the back seat of a cab; communication with the driver through a window big enough to frame only his eyes; the paid relationship that furnishes him with information; the fleetingness of contact – all this is completely consistent with what Thrassakis notes in 'Lazarus's Return': 'My frame of mind is like that of the Italian actor who lends his voice to Marlon Brando's face for the dubbing of American movies into Italian'. This confession, though awkwardly phrased, constitutes one of my hero's rare moments of sincerity. Indeed, in every country that dubs foreign films into its own language (and Italy is the country par excellence of this practice), an actor is chosen from among tens of potentials, with the help of machines that test for compatibility with the voice being dubbed. How must this man

feel, speaking from under the mask of another man's face? For this voice-actor, the alienation inherent to the representational arts must take on dreadful dimensions. And Thrassakis, eavesdropping on life, peeping through the closed windows of the everyday, identifies with this man who lends his voice to another, just as he accepts the voice of a life foreign to him, filtered through the impressions of another, of the man in the driver's seat.

Oh, what weather. what weather!
All rain, all longing.

I'll find a voice with which to shout and speak
of the fading of my bitterness.
As I waited through the years
for the sun to shine,
I never noticed the well
they were digging beside me.
And when I finally yelled, 'Drawn,
radiant dawn, end of martyrdom',
I stepped forward, blind,
and slipped and fell.

Lying here in the suspicious whiteness
of lime,
I now look back and wonder,
How could I not have noticed?
The neighbor's kids are grown,
the neighbor inched
into places that once were mine,
and heartlessly they shut me out.
Oh, what weather, what weather!
All rain, all longing.

THANASSIS VENETIS

Disappearance

For years I tear the poems I write for father.
The time of the Occupation, my mother never believed he was dead.
'Kostas will return', she said, as dolphins leapt off her eyes.

She was right, just as rivers guess springtime,
just as the wind discovers its tongue.
He returned—and he left again.

This was revealed as we kept wake over a relative
by butcher Socrates Romphaeas breaking his promise of trust.

In detail he related how father, twenty two
years after his disappearance, appeared like a migratory
Angel before him, got the necessary information for each of us
separately, cracked up for our unjustly slain Eleni, saw us all
like a thief, without our getting a clue and left again.
for Paradise or his Hell sinking into the snow within himself.

Far beyond the limits of my destiny, in the untrodden shades,
searching under the words to find the secret thread.

I tear continually the poems I write for father.
I pick up their pieces, and burn them. From within the flames he rises
in full life.

His eyes a house the earthquake found battered
his lips made of chaff, wreckage of fire.

Something clenches my heart and my voice vanishes
in the time's ravine.

ANASTASSIS VISTONITIS

Biography

Three in the morning.
A tetrapod lurks in the clock,
the message you sent never arrived,
it was a very old recording
a record played, scratched,
into its sounds came other sounds,
disrupted melodies,
ruined instruments,
figures, movements slow like dreams.

A wind blows dragging rags,
lurching in the void are
phantoms, phantasms, memories.
I'm not sure if I've ever seen
those I recall tonight.
The non-existent feeds on lies,
the past is colour and illusion.
Memory is but
refusal's dress,
a way of becoming familiar
with what dies
in an alien sentiment,
that senseless cradle.

Friends come and the unity's broken,
what comes is what I recognised,
my way of recording the seasons,
of prescribing the taste of fortune.
And night, removing all limits,
the only path for escaping from the circle,
from the tyranny of the day.
Now that the waters are blooming,
now that the mud's a black nursery
where the stars' shadow grows,
where the moon's boats glide,
thought races quicker than the eye
colonising the lands of the mind.

Fluid summer, dotted infinity,
water without water's taste,
daybreak, a red dawn
and the sun the eye of a drunk;
in the dawn's pupil the light
refined and victorious told me all.
The same light that burns the capital cities,
the resplendent mausolea.

And then the ills of civilisation:
methods, aims, programmes; and the papers
that are a hoax...

Amid sparks I grew up, became a man.
With a spark I exorcise fear.
Splinters of light traverse the night
fragrances of light open the space.
Fragrances, names, meteors, signals
that are contracted – here. That are subtracted.

Colours of stars,
cloudless skies,
glowing irons and eyes of the asphalt,
seas that glide
beneath my childhood years,
ships from the metropolises, lurching...

Three in the morning,
a tetrapod lurks in the clock,
lights come on and I gaze
at the grass on night's edge,
far from the land of birth –
Yet all the stars shine everywhere,
just as tonight,
three in the morning,
disrupted melodies, ruined instruments,
the message you sent never arrived
and bathing in the waters
incorruptible and pure like tears, the stars.

From: SOIL OF SKY, Translated by David Connolly

CHARIS VLAVIANOS

Autumnal Refrain

E.X.

When the last leaves have fallen
we'll return at last to our familiar, intimate place,
that precious sanctuary
that the exhausted body left unfulfilled
for the needs of an inevitable knowledge.

It's difficult, virtually impossible,
even to choose the adjective
that would lend some meaning
to this empty coolness,
this causeless sorrow,
that spreads gradually, steadily,
eroding your life's most secret recesses.
A simple, natural gesture
might perhaps be the first step,
the start of a new attempt.
If not now, if not today,
tomorrow without fail.

Lack of imagination?
This too no doubt will have to be invented;
and the scenery set up
as the instructions on the paper stipulate.
The stone house has to stay.
The arch in the front room
(your priceless, precious past) especially this.
And the old lintel with the mermaid.
And the fig tree in the garden, and the oleanders,
and the dry stone wall, everything has to remain.
Everything.
That the damage, the breach, the absence may be seen.
That the endeavour, the failure, the work may be appraised.
The autumnal wind
that gave body to these words,
fiercely erasing their metaphysical gleam,
knows all too well the secret they conceal.

As do you
who stoop to pick up a dry leaf from the doorstep.
The leaf of reality.
The exquisite poem of the genuine.

From: THE ANGEL OF HISTORY, Translated by David Connolly

KATERINA ZAROKOSTA

The Ephemeras

I didn't know the ephemeras existed until I met Dialechti.*

Summer was at its height. I'd found myself a Frenchman. He was in his thirties, a bit of a writer, a bit of a film director, he was pretty vague about it. Not that it mattered much. He was good fun, great in bed – that was enough.

We started out for the Peloponnese on a rented scooter. A tape recorder blasting in my ear, the Beatles, the Bee Gees – my generation. We lit up the evenings with beach fires, sped through time with our youth, sped the distances heading south.

We stopped at a petrol station – 'fill it up, please' – and then I saw her eyes, big and solemn behind her glasses. A tiny white cloud of mayflies followed her about. Not white, they were translucent and minute against the clear sky. 'They are the ephemeras', she said gravely. 'They come out in the morning, feed on flowers and die in the evening. That's why we call them ephemeras. They cluster around me and bother me in my work, but I can't chase them off since they don't have long to live. They cry when they're dying'.

We paid. She went to get the change, still surrounded by the white cloud that followed her everywhere. That night I dreamt about her. A radiance enveloped her like a halo, her big eyes staring out from behind her glasses. She spoke to me in a language I couldn't comprehend, although I knew somehow that what she was saying had significance.

After that, summer took on the colours of autumn for me. Outside it was shining but my heart was filled with ephemeras and neither the Frenchman nor the Bee Gees or the bonfires on the beach could change that. On the third day I said: 'let's go back to that filling station'. I wanted to see her again. She had a message for me. When she had brought me the change, I told her. 'I have to ask', she answered calmly as if she was expecting my proposition.

'Farewell to the Frenchman', I said to myself. 'My life has been a series of false moves. What's the difference if I make another one?'

I spent the rest of the summer with her. We worked at the petrol station mornings and evenings. At the peak of the heat we sat in the shade and she taught me the secrets. I learned why snakes go hunting at midday, I learned to sense the plant inside the seed, to see a star in a grain of sand, but more than anything I learned to master the ephemeras.

Gypsies had camped outside the village. It was the tomato season and they had come down from the north for day work. Skirts that seemed to flutter with life of their own; heads in scarves; open-necked dresses and eyes that reflected lost places. The men were dressed just like the locals. Even here it was the women who kept up the traditions, not realizing how this weighed them down.

In the evening the young men got into their trucks and came into the village. They whistled at us as we passed them on our way to the café Germania for an ice cream.

She liked to walk around outside the camp. 'Look,' my friend used to say pointing out their colourful weavings, their embroideries and their bright carpets neatly stretched out on the dirt. 'They carry their home in their heart and even if they are setting up camp just for a day, they do it as if it were forever'.

At night as they danced round their fires, we hid in the bushes and watched. The ephemeras kept us company. She knew how to command them in a secret language. 'Usually they don't come out at night', she said. 'Only for me and a few others, because we are their soul'.

'There was a gipsy child', she said, 'naked as the branches of the winter trees. A car hit him on the road. It doesn't hurt being dead, you know. It's like before being born. His mother held him in her arms. Her other children hung on her skirt. All around the ephemeras glittered in the moonlight and she knew that although one fruit had died the tree had many more to give. Still she cried. That's the way it has been done since the very beginning. If you can feel that, you become immortal'.

I used to say: 'when a person dies a world dies with him'. She never replied. Her silence was as precious as her words. I had learned to understand it.

Memory has altered, maybe even distorted our conversations. It never occurred to me to ask her how she knew. I was peacefully enjoying the last of the summer. Each day enlarged my life's treasures. I was experiencing something unique: a state of sympathy for people, for the sunburned trees, the smooth hills, the sea, the moon and the night. I was near the quick of life, sucking its sap which felt cool like the dew on the grass and hides in small, humble things: the wind among the weeds, the ochre of an August afternoon. It also resides in great things – in work that stays after you're gone, in the high light of joy. My body was responding to the heartbeat of the world. I was alive – what a gift! But next to me she was silently folding up her wings.

Summer came to an end. I left. I was carried away by everyday restlessness, petty anxieties. The city at night. The moon coming down to the bars, reflected in a glass of gin, shining in the caresses of passing love affairs, soothing the agony of those who attempt the

impossible. Every now and then I would dream of her. The ephemeras lit up a gipsy skirt in front of the fire. The fields were folding in themselves for the night. During the day I forgot her. In those days I was struggling to raise my voice above the million others. But the memory of that other life stayed in me like a distant reverberation of a plain, simple nature – sowing and harvesting, beginning and ending, light and darkness. I had made my choice, but part of me lingered in another place, the secret, sealed world where fate is decided.

I went back at Christmas. All had changed. The colours. It rained. The field where the gypsies had made their camp was filled with garbage and plastic bottles. In my heart, the darkness. She had been dead less than a month. Death had been lurking inside her since summer, the doctor had said. Her parents did not welcome me. They had never thought much of our friendship. Fairly well off by their own standards – they owned the only petrol station in the area. This death struck at the order of things, it destroyed their middle-class certainty that all sorts of people have the same needs. They had lost a child they had never been able to understand. Death had taken away words that were never spoken, kisses that were never given. Without her husband knowing, the mother came to me, stifling her tears, and said that her daughter hadn't suffered much and that she had asked for me before dying. Her message was not to forget our secrets. And the ephemeras.

The rain washed her fingerprints off the pumps, washed away her footsteps between the office and the pump, the sound of her voice as she counted the change. The ephemeras had disappeared. Perhaps it wasn't their season. I kept remembering her words, her stature, her peaceful attitude. Something was torn up inside me, something beyond human nature. I fell into a ditch. It felt good to dip my hands in the mud, fill my hair with it, smear it on my face, my clothes. The earth was her body. I couldn't cry, not with my eyes, but my hands, my breast, my belly were crying. My whole body mourned her.

Her name was Dialehti. She wasn't quite twelve. She taught me the secrets. I feel I have betrayed her.

From: LE CADEAU

*Dialehti is a Greek name, meaning 'chosen'.

ZYRANNA ZATELI

From:

Death Came Last,

Under the Odd Name of Ramanthes Erebus

And they saw it. The wind was carrying it here and there – they saw it again tossing about like a rag in the storm and the saddest thing about these rags is that they can suffer hell on earth. The children caught on; from the little they knew, they had caught on. Besides, they had already felt the first chill; it only remained for them to open their eyes. ‘Christ!’ said the one; and instead of crossing himself, he repeated nervously, almost without feeling, the words his older brother would say whenever he had a hang-up or reached a deadlock with his wife: ‘Christ, think Yourself lucky that You were crucified and not married!’ The other one stood stock-still, dumbstruck. ‘You call this a marriage?’ he asked himself without breathing a word.

And it was, in fact, equally racking, if not worse than being crucified. An unhappy moment, unhappy or perhaps unforeseen, had united two stray dogs for the purpose of propagating; but they were caught in the oddest and most lamentable manner and left to the five winds. And there they went, from Anna to Caiaphas, the female carrying on her back the male, the latter no longer up to par, of course: two poor dogs knotted together –one or two, you couldn’t actually say– resigned to their drama and puling; their drama unsparingly parodied and prolonged, since nature won’t allow them –them and wolves– to become disentangled and go their ways before reaching a climax.

And here they were now, driven to despair that would have excited the envy of the most distressed individual, searching for the treasure of a modicum of affection, in dire need of mercy –mercy or whatever: a coup de grace, for that matter– here they were, close to the children again. The children’s despair, too, the envy of the dogs.

‘What shall we do? Look at them!’ mumbled the smaller-built one (though older by seven months), as one of the dogs, that which functioned as a pivot for the other, licked excitedly his wet sleeve, as if all the rain in heaven wasn’t enough to quench its thirst; at the same time, the other dog, the rider, had come almost full circle at the point of conjunction - its hind legs in the air and the female moaning with pain - growling its entreaties to the second child who, scared stiff, had abandoned his mate and stood off. There he squatted and hunched his back, but not without turning to look at the goings-on from under his

arm... But the muzzle of the second dog, the biggest, reached as far as him, its eyes and nostrils telling him what its mouth couldn't utter.

'What shall we do?' asked again the boy who kept on losing and recovering his speech. 'We'll melt in the rain; the earth has swallowed Zaphos up; what are we to do with these bloody dogs?'

'How do I know? I'm not God Almighty!' said the other irritated; and drawing himself up to his full height, he spat on the ground.

'Well, up till now it was do this and do that', the other one reminded him, averting his eyes – his dark look riveted on the canine mating.

'That was before Christ', muttered the older-looking one, who also couldn't take off his eyes and whose look wasn't any brighter.

Lightning danced everywhere, hissing in the air like fiendish snakes that had abandoned the earth only to return; the rain refused to let up; the day –if it was still daylight– resembled not even a night for werewolves, not even the whole thing, this confused situation; only some weird, nightmarish and incomparably awe-inspiring places nowhere to be seen, except perhaps in sleep, in some incredible dreams, thinking from a mind's depth that hell and paradise must be something like this. However, all this, everything, lost impetus for the two young and hitherto Peeping Toms, even though they were somewhat unlucky on that particular afternoon: Zaphos coming off with flying colours and afterwards disappearing and leaving them on their own. For a moment or two, the one standing almost upright and the other still sitting, observed the two dogs twisting and wailing all the time, labouring to find a more comfortable position in their bodily melee; and once they found it - without surmounting their difficulties, of course - they both turned their heads towards him who showed greater indulgence. But before laying a tongue on him, they waited for a sign, some encouragement, or maybe a par.

'Well. well, well!' burst out the order. 'Get up and give them a kick! They've taken you for a cripple!'

'I... cccan't... I feel sorry for them', he replied coyly. 'I feel sorry for them', he repeated, this time clearly and outright and buried his face in his hands.

'Then I'll do it', said the other. 'I too feel sorry for the fuckers, but, well... it's disgusting. Enough is enough', he went on undecided, though one wouldn't put it past him. He looked for this whirligig and it was nowhere to be found his hands empty – where on earth could the whirligig have gone? 'Enough is enough', he repeated.

The animals sensed the threat and barked wilfully; but they moved restlessly on the spot, almost defiantly - two dogs on six legs! - as though demanding from the heartless boy to do what he had to do and not prolong their hopes.

And taking off his right shoe with due tact, rain-sodden and heavy as it was, he flung it at them with a deep cry: 'Go away!' And the dogs once again took to flight – this time from Caiaphas to Anna, to the latter again.

She was called Anna, the woman beyond, Zaphos' apparent 'cousin', who had dreamed of wild roses the previous night.

Thrown against the wall, all shook-up after the last flash of lightning and the shriek that vibrated in the air following the long roll of thunder... and now lying almost unconscious on the ground after the unexpected easing off which somehow pepped her up and at the same time horrified her, to the point of collapsing – now that everything was fading out if what was happening around her was something totally different to a faint, elusive memory... all of a sudden she felt again that howl near her –in her ears, her nostrils, this close now– and a moist, tremulous breath on her chin, her cheeks and her temples, something which obliged her to open her eyes again with a pained curiosity and naturally she didn't want to accept the fact, she couldn't, that a whimpering dog with two heads was standing there, sniffing at her! 'Why has everything turned out bad today?' she thought, 'so very bad...' And she passed out.

It was an afternoon in late July, towards the end of the fifties, when all this happened; at sunset on a day surprisingly chilly for this time of the year, biting, as though caressing and with a strange light for this late hour, soft, roseate –'What, is the day just dawning?' you might have asked– until all of a sudden things began to change, auguring disasters. All those whose houses stood at the foot of the mountain - people living on their own or with families - and were lucky enough to hear the wind rising and the boom of the sea descending from the mountainside sweeping everything before it, spoke about something they had never heard before in all their born days. But they would have said the same about the lightning and something similar about the downpour. As for the rest, they'd be at a loss for words...

Translated by Yannis Goumas

ALKI ZEI

Green Paint

They were all of them different now: his mother and his father too; even he himself. Only Antigone remained the same. She still put her hair up in sixty-eight curling rags every night, as she always had; she still scribbled poetry in a notebook with a red cover. And she still carried on endless conversations with Rita. Although Petros knew well enough that Antigone was every bit as hungry as he was, she and Rita never discussed food and eating. They just chattered about Uncle Angelos and that poet, Kosta Agorinos.

Every Saturday night Rita came and slept at their house. Ever since the Occupation a curfew had been in effect. No one was allowed to go about in the streets at night; and so, even though their houses were not far apart, the girls couldn't stay late at each other's houses. Even though Mama worried about Petros, she permitted him to go about as much as he liked, even after dusk. She insisted, however, on Antigone's getting home very early. If she were the least bit late, Mama would leave off working and wait at the window until she caught sight of her. In fact, ever since the day when Antigone encountered one of the Hunter's fellow officers at the entrance to the building, and he said to her in Greek, 'Good evening. Where did you get those beautiful brown eyes?' Mama always went downstairs and waited for her at the door whenever she was a little late coming home.

Saturday nights his sister could very easily have stayed at Rita's house, but Mama wouldn't hear of it. They had not yet begun to molest Jews in Athens. Still, you never knew what might happen. Supposing they burst into Rita's house without warning, and took Antigone for a Jew too! And so, on weekends, Rita came and shared Antigone's bed. Petros could hear until late in the night. He couldn't help listening. They talked so loudly, giggling and exchanging a thousand silly secrets. But their chatter at least kept him from seeing visions of the starving people who had fainted in the streets.

The girls talked about the flower that Antigone had left behind one day at school. She had left it on a table which, during the day, served as a school desk; at night it was a desk for the staff of the magazine Pegasus. Antigone had discovered that it was, in fact, the very one that Kostas Agorinos used.

The next day, on the very spot where she had left the flower, she had found a white shell. On it was written in letters so precise that they seemed to have been printed, THANK YOU.

'You're in love!' Rita assured her. 'I was watching you when you picked up that shell. Your hands were shaking.'

'No other girl ever received a shell instead of a letter!' Antigone said it so joyfully you'd think she'd eaten a whole cheese pie for supper.

That evening Iannis came to find Petros, as he had told Mama he would.

'Can you come with us?' His voice had a conspiratorial ring to it. 'We are going out to paint the walls.'

'To paint the walls?' Petros echoed in surprise. This was something completely unexpected.

'Yes. That is, for the time being I'll do the painting and you'll keep a lookout. If you see anyone coming, you'll start singing a song.'

'What song?'

'We'll decide on that before we go.'

Petros was still having a hard time understanding what Iannis was talking about.

'What are you going to paint the walls for?' he asked.

'We'll write slogans,' Iannis said. 'Like 'WE ARE HUNGRY! GIVE US FOOD'. You'll see, Petros,' he went on. 'We won't perish of hunger. This is the first step. Everything else will come later.'

It was as though he were listening to the lunatic in pyjamas. Was it possible that Iannis also knew Michalis?

'Some write with red paint,' Iannis continued, 'and some with blue, and some with green. We'll write with green paint.'

Petros nodded eagerly. Green was the colour he liked best.

They arranged to meet at six, near the school. They would go on together to a house that Iannis knew. There they'd pick up the paint and a brush, and then they'd start off. Iannis asked Petros's mother if she would let him stay out until curfew. He explained that they would be going to the house of a friend of his to work on a shadow theatre. Mama liked Iannis, so she agreed.

'You'll be doing me a favour. I'd feel better knowing he was with you instead of roaming the streets.'

When Mama left the room Iannis added, 'And we'll be doing a shadow play, in a matter of speaking, so it's not exactly a lie.'

Nevertheless, Petros scowled. He had been waiting for Iannis to ask them to blow up a train, or to set fire to the Commadatura, and all Iannis could talk about was painting walls.

'What about that train you promised me?'

Iannis burst into laughter. The ball in his throat bounced up and down uncontrollably. Then he suddenly turned serious. 'This is only the beginning. At the house we're going to, I'll introduce you by another name. They call me Kimon. What would you like to be known as?'

Petros started to say 'Diakos' but it seemed rather ridiculous to be called after one of the greatest heroes of the revolution and then just go out and paint walls. Then he wanted to say 'Alexios', but Iannis broke in.

'Pompom. That's what I'll christen you.'

'Pompom!'

'Yes,' Iannis cried. 'Once, when you asked for me at school, and I had already gone, Andreas told me about it the next day. He's in my class, a terrifically funny guy. He said, "Pompom was looking for you yesterday". You had on a white knitted cap with a pompom on it.'

Petros was far from sharing Iannis' enthusiasm for the new name. It was as though Iannis knew that he had an argument with Mama over wearing that old white stocking cap: it had been his when he had been a little kid. But it had been freezing weather and he had an earache. Pompom! What would he say to his sons? 'They called me Pompom: it was a name that somebody pulled out of a hat.' He was about to insist to Iannis that they call him Alexios at least, but just at that moment Antigone burst into the room, and Iannis no longer seemed to have anything to say to him. He just blushed up to the ears and said to Antigone in a squeaky voice that you wouldn't have thought belonged to him, 'How's school?'

'All right, thanks,' Antigone replied haughtily.

'And how's Rita?'

'Oh, she's fine. She says hello.'

'Are you trying to act funny?' Iannis demanded hesitantly, not knowing whether to laugh or to be annoyed.

'I'm not trying to act in the least bit funny,' Antigone replied with even greater hauteur. 'And, after all, who are you to talk? When you are out in the street with other people, you make out that you haven't even seen us.'

Iannis stared at her, thoroughly perplexed.

Then Antigone went on to say, in a single breath, how they had seen him the day before when school let out, and he was walking with someone who was tall, olive-complexioned, with speckled green eyes, and who was wearing a thick blue sweater knitted three over and purl one. They had practically bumped into them, but Iannis pretended not to have seen them, and so then the girls decided to follow them. And they did. They saw them stop at a door at 36 Zaimis Street, a green door that was so dark it was practically black. They saw Iannis knock

and a girl came out onto the balcony. She had curly blond hair and pale eyes. She made a sign to them and then she went downstairs and opened the door for them.

Iannis stared at Antigone in astonishment.

‘But how did you manage to tail us?’

‘What do you mean, how?’ Antigone burst into mocking laughter. ‘We just walked behind you, but you were so absorbed in what you had to say to each other that you weren’t even aware of our presence!’

‘A fine pair we must have made,’ Iannis said. He frowned for a moment. Then he added, ‘Would you like me to introduce you to him?’

‘Of course!’ Antigone said, excitedly. She had already forgotten her irritation. ‘Rita will simply be thrilled! She says the tall man is the spitting image of Tyrone Power.’

That nearly started another argument because Iannis said that Tyrone Power was a stupid actor without a trace of talent. He had long eyelashes and absolutely nothing else! Whereas his friend – well, when he introduced them to him they’d see for themselves!

From: PETROS’S WAR

When I was small and they sent me to the island to Liza’s side of the family, I used to say that there couldn’t be any greater happiness in life. I was a quiet girl, insignificant. I didn’t bother anyone, and I liked to walk around alone in the narrow streets of the island and tell myself stories. Sometimes I stayed with Liza’s aunts and sometimes with her cousins. I put all my things in a little basket and each afternoon I chose which house I’d like to sleep in that night.

‘Aunt Alcestis!’

‘Aunt Amphitriti!’

‘Aunt Yiasemouli!’

‘Can I stay tonight?’

‘Come on up, Daphnoula.’

All the aunts were plump and smelled nice. They spoiled me and I liked to sit on their laps and bury my face in their perfumed necks. Liza didn’t like hugging and I was starved for affection. In my basket I had a zinc biscuit-tin where I kept thirty-one pure white pebbles. I collected them on the beach the first day I arrived on the island. My father wouldn’t let me stay one day longer. Each evening I would throw one pebble into the sea, and as they got fewer, the sadness I felt about leaving overshadowed my joy, even if I had days still ahead of me.

In Rome I count my days by my visits to Gaeta Street. Twenty days still. Twenty more days with Jean-Paul. Twenty more days to be

Daphne. I try to bury Eleni away somewhere. Gaeta Street, Liza's letters, and the Greek newspapers that they send me every so often make her appear, angry and threatening, in front of me.

'How could you...' How could I? Marie-Therese sent a telegram to Achilles about the visa and he answered: 'The requisite efforts are being made.' 'Don't let them be late, Achilles, these 'requisite efforts'; don't let them be late!'

Rome is a magical city. No, I wasn't renouncing anyone. Just taking a breath. The latest Greek newspapers write that they caught Windblown and Kostis. Only the Lion of Denfert escaped. Maybe Liza had hidden him. Kostis had promised me a new dress and a real dance. Achilles had promised that Athens would be ours in a year. Jean-Paul didn't promise anything – just a breath.

I close the newspapers and banish Eleni, Achilles' fiancée, to a distant land. Now I'm Daphne, Jean-Paul's girlfriend. 'La sua ragazza,' says the waiter at the bar where Jean-Paul and I meet, every day, late in the afternoon, to drink cappuccino. I like to arrive a few minutes late. He's already seated on a high stool with his back to the door. The waiter sees me come in and announces to him triumphantly: 'La sua ragazza' – your girlfriend! Jean-Paul turns his head without getting off the stool. 'I ordered your cappuccino,' he says and kisses me softly on the lips.

[...]

When we get back to Jean-Paul's room it's already getting dark. I pull the cover off the divan, undress, and bury myself in the cool sheets. Jean-Paul lies down beside me. We leave the window open, even if it's still a little chilly. Our bodies get warm from each other. The pigeons fly off the terrace and go to perch on the low roof opposite. The bells ring for vespers.

At one such hour I spoke to Jean-Paul about Eleni, Achilles' fiancée. When I'd finished I was in agony. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything? I didn't dare turn around and look at him. He stayed still for a moment and then hugged me tight. Maybe he was anxious for me to leave? No, he couldn't believe that I, who look like a carefree girl, could have been through so much in my life. He was especially impressed by Matina's story. How could such terrible things happen in such a beautiful country! He doesn't ask anything about Achilles. As if it doesn't concern him.

'Will you miss me?'

I don't see any sign of anxiety in his look. He lets go of me a little and answers calmly with conviction:

'How will you go there? They won't let you.'

He didn't say: 'I won't let you.' That much I'm sure of – he didn't say it.

'I'd like you to stay beside me all night.'

Jean-Paul doesn't know I haven't spent a whole night even with Achilles.

[...]

I wake up with the touch of silk on my fingers. Achilles is asleep with his face turned to the wall. I get up and go behind the screen where Daphne's crib is. The light comes from a little night-lamp with a weak blue globe. When she's asleep she looks very much like Liza, the same fine features. I bend over and kiss her. 'We'll go to Greece, Daphnoula, you must see Liza, it's not right for you not to meet Liza. It's impossible for me to go back to bed. I go into the kitchen and sit near the table with my head resting on my folded arms. I haven't woken up properly. Tomorrow, that is, today, I'll call Andreas to come over and we'll telephone Liza. It's a month since they've installed our telephone and Andreas doesn't leave me in peace: Let's call Liza, and let's call Liza. I'm the one who puts it off. I feel as if, when I hear her voice, I'll lose my balance. A letter from Liza, sent two months ago to Marie-Therese, gave me two big pieces of news: my sister-in-law has given birth to twin boys, and there's a telephone in our house. I remember how they used to call me to the phone from the cafe opposite. 'I'm writing you the number in case there's a possibility.' And now that that 'possibility' has come, I hesitate.

During our first days in Moscow, Andrea's nostalgia seemed to abate, and mine seemed suddenly to stop. I was overwhelmed by the thousand and one new and exciting things that I was seeing for the first time. But I hadn't noticed that my nostalgia had shrunk back, somewhere inside me, into a corner, awaiting the time when it would spring up again, fierce and tormenting. Andreas, too, rushed to the museums and forgot about the 'Angelopoulou' tram-stop and the sweets from the 'Teleion' pastry shop. And why shouldn't he put it all out of his head, since he had begun to paint again! Very tentatively at first, he made sketches in pencil on an awful old pad, the grocer's pad, I used to call it. One day, though, when he was sitting with Lev Illich in his studio, the old painter said to him, absent-mindedly: 'I can't pick up anything at all with my hand any more. Why don't you take the lot: paints, brushes, palette...'

From then on Andreas picked up the brushes and did not put them down again. No, his new works don't look at all like those of De Chirico. Lev Illich says they have strength and optimism and a lot of tenderness. Next year, for certain, he'll have an exhibition, Lev Illich promises him, and what's more he'll arrange permanent residence for him in Moscow.

On the kitchen table is a pile of books I was reading yesterday. If I hadn't had Michail Grigorevich to open up my mind, to give me the exceptions to the rule, the roots, the variations of language, I would have been in real trouble with my correspondence studies. But studying with him is a delight. I had to cross rivers and steppes to bring such a rare teacher into my life. Nadia takes me to the theatre and the ballet. Achilles rarely comes along. The theatre doesn't interest him, he only visits the collectives and the factories, because 'in the near future, when we go back to Greece and take control of the country, we'll draw on the great experience of the Soviets.' It doesn't occur to him that we might return without 'taking control,' and that, at the very best, a door might half-open and we might quietly and furtively slip in, a few at a time.

From: ACHILLES' FIANCÉE