

Lily Michaelidou

*a r e n a*

*p o e m s*

*translated by David Connolly*

By the same author

*Poetry:*

*Time's Alchemy, Govostis, 2001*

*Shapes and Roads in Relief..., Govostis, 2003*

*Remembrance of a Dawn (bilingual edition), Govostis, 2004*

*Intimations, Melani, 2008*

*Prose:*

*The City Needs No Introductions, Melani, 2010*

*Love, life and death compete in the same arena  
for the ruby wine  
some call it "holy communion"  
others intoxication...*

*Of the night*

## THE FISH

*To Miltos Sachtouris*

The table in the corner was a narrow one.  
Barely room for his elbows to rest on  
and support his head.  
The hours followed the sun's trajectory  
as at that moment it sank stifled between  
the buildings and the garden's ailing trees.  
The window beside him opened up a prospect.  
Dusk; a passing from day into night.  
Some it soothes and others it shakes.

He was sitting, spreading his thoughts  
over the coffee grounds.  
Around him familiar and unfamiliar faces.  
Him and the day's last customers.  
Later they'll alter the arrangement  
the waiters, the forced smiles  
the tablecloths, the cutlery  
only the best for the evening.

But it was still early; with him there, in the corner.  
With his eyes pinning those present to the walls  
taking those absent down from their frames  
finding an outlet in the wallpaper  
as though making the final inventory.

He noted the revolts, the disappointments  
the separations, his few possessions.  
Dog-eared books, faded photos  
clothes and loves from another age; the sea  
his companion in the mornings, in the evenings  
moments buried in the parentheses of his eyes.

He recorded the encounters, the executions  
painted ectoplasms, breaking the ice  
of his short life; swimming like a fish  
in the icy water of the sea spreading over the wall  
in the extension of his thinning hair...

## UNEXPECTEDLY

### I

Crisis burst in everywhere.  
Her hair wafts in our faces.  
Her heady perfume a smell of brothel.  
She gazes smug and intense.

The downhill streets of crisis.  
Balcony overlooking the valley of crisis.  
The escutcheon at the entry of crisis.

Yet the crisis, I reflect, is an abstract concept  
How could it conquer the air, the mountains  
the sea, the sun?  
How can all that expansive light around us  
possibly belong to the crisis?

I disregard the warnings.  
I wear time in reverse  
pluck its white temples  
slap some red on its lips  
and surrender myself to your judgement.

## II

Chaos is hell's reflection.

Despair has distorted the faces.

I wandered in a park with eucalyptuses.

The sunlight didn't touch the ground; it spread  
over the treetops.

It's March and unexpectedly, winter has returned.

Just as our lives have turned upside down  
and our shadows, too, upside down.

Chaos caresses the eyes, hair, neck  
penetrates the heart and a sudden awareness  
agitates the body.

Chaos spreads dark and inevitable  
like a mountain after a forest fire.

Bronze faces of politicians clang in the darkness.

### III

5.30 in the morning.

The body's classification, as in nature.

Everything has its place; eyes, light  
taste, touch, pain.

And just when you think that it's all working tamely  
the shell breaks with a crack and you dream that you're flying  
that everything around you is moving airily  
mutely, facelessly.

One more crack and hair, gaze  
smile, balance all break.

Outside the atmosphere is hazy.

Again the sand from Africa – as every March –  
and Rachmaninov goes on transporting you at breakneck speed  
to lands you never dreamed of  
ever.

#### IV

I spent all night awake.  
From the darkness the ceiling stared at me perplexed.  
Outside the rain was incessant.  
The phrase that stood out as I read the *Schubertiana*  
stuck in my mind and refused to go.  
The words spread, dominated me, subdued me  
and violated my insomnia.  
No counterweight to grasp, to get my balance.  
How will I rid myself of this chaos?

*...all those who buy and sell people and believe  
that everybody can be bought don't recognize themselves here...*  
cries Thomas Tranströmer.

## V

From my window I watch the crows flying  
forming themselves in lines; not to injure each other.

Day breaks.

I'm reading Bukowski and Pentadactylos is snowcapped.

Unable to keep my distance

I was injured by his lepidopteron verses.

The blood drips on the pages, reddens the writing.

And suddenly, darkness again.

Stray politicians, banker crows

straddle the horizon.



## **FLIGHT**

At the entry into Holy Week she discovers the exit.

Slight sounds warn of his arrival.

His body seeks her body, to dispel the fears  
to dismiss the weaknesses.

She sits on the ground, a cup of water beside her.

With slow movements, she first washes her hands  
one by one the keys of her neck, the dusk from her face.

She then takes hold of his feet, one after the other  
caresses the veins, the hard skin, the soles.

His breath floats on the water and spreads like a prayer  
all over her body.

Every year the same position.

Every year the same movements, between the hands and the eyes.

His passing eternally captivated her nights  
at times liberating a tempestuous expectation.

## MEMORIES

*To my grandmother, Erato*

I found her sitting at the front door.  
In her lap she was holding a large tin tray  
full of wheat that she was cleaning, sorting grain by grain.  
“I’m making kollyva,” she said, “it’s All Souls’ Day tomorrow”.  
I stare intently to read that which isn’t written  
on any script, which by itself is a whole  
world; her own unique gaze, the misty white  
of the eye in the shadow of her years.  
“The souls,” she went on, gazing up at the sky  
“find no rest; one day each year  
they come down to earth and watch us.”  
A light reflected in her thoughts and her words  
came out like consecrated bread. I noticed the thick veins  
in her aged hands. “They come down to earth, touch  
our breath and sit on the trees’ branches.  
The trees shouldn’t be pruned on that day  
because the souls will fall to the ground, be hurt and crying  
they’ll voice their grievances about the living...”

I brought the image before my eyes  
the rustling of the souls among the branches  
the breaths oscillating in space.  
Calm at the end of the daily toil  
inundates the nights, bringing to the surface  
the testimonies of the old ’uns  
emanating from of their fears.

## FEMALE PORTRAIT

*to Marie Laurencin, 1938*

The fingers barely touch the flowers' slender stems.  
The leaves bow to the touch.  
A fresh arm bends imperceptibly, restraining  
the lightest of silk on the shoulder. The garment conceals nothing  
remains simply still, one with the youthful skin.  
Sandy mounds stir discreetly to the breath's rhythm.  
The chin, a curve in the face's expanse.  
The neck supports the charm of the head; bent as it is  
slightly, towards the scent's refraction.  
The magnolias of the same colour as the cheeks.  
In the gorges of the eyes are concealed secrets  
that the paintbrush endeavours to determine.

Certainly the artist took his share.  
Besides, how could he undress that creature  
open the tide of the lips, bathe  
drown in the colours' intoxication, surrender  
to the exclamation of the ethereal spasm?

The hair tied with ribbon falls, like the sun  
on a back as smooth as the evening.  
She loves the light caressing her.  
The stone in her ear is rocked by the heaving  
of her nacreous breast; excited it whispers to the lobe.

She is beautiful and she senses it as the paintbrush touches  
the absolute moment emitted by her body.  
The colour squirts over her nakedness, paralyzing  
the today and the tomorrow of his hands.

*Little pauses*

## **THE CAUSE**

It was the sand hills.

The house that stood alone.

The sea that slid on a shore exclusively its own  
and the tamarisks that grew unrestricted.

It was the moon that waxed day by day  
till it became red like a ball of ice-cream  
that invited me to taste it

and the wind that blew sand on the faces  
sand light and damp that glistened and stuck to the skin.

And you, who weren't here, yet you filled the room  
with a love unrestricted like the tamarisks.

You weren't here.

Yet you were the cause.

## **GRIM SHADOW**

Because I was thinking of you I skimmed the pages  
gathering pallid meanings.  
I suddenly realized I'd come to the last  
while night had long fallen outside.  
I gazed at the clock and waited.  
Someone was delaying the portent of your arrival.  
It was then that I saw the grim shadow  
trampled by the cars' gleaming wheels.  
Its arms protruded pointing in a characteristic manner  
to the way you took to leave  
and the marks on its body  
appeared empty to the naked eye.

## **PIANO CONCERTO**

The previous evening the pianist had agreed  
with Beethoven and Haydn to astound us.  
He disturbed our absorption with a sigh  
and continued playing some chords  
so light and airy that I felt his fingers  
leaving the keys and searching my body  
for scales of a deeper intensity.

*In the Künstlerhaus Schloss Museum  
Wiepersdorf 2012*

## **FATE**

When I stare at you it's not only your smell.  
Don't wait for what I'm unable to give.  
I'm here.  
But love is begotten somewhere else.  
-Words unite us when we are seeking  
when we fall in love or when we grieve-  
When I touch you it's not only your skin  
it's also what the past brings to today  
surrounding us.

When you kiss me it's fate  
raising its glass to our health.

## UNDULATIONS

*to Yang Lian*

The words knelt on my lips.  
Tiny tadpoles flirt with my desolation.  
Their touch gives a new dimension to the world.  
When I'm asleep red waves break on my sleep  
-the sea is in love-  
With slow undulations they leaf through my new body.  
They appear to be liberating a sky.

## WAITING

Carefully I take out the dress.  
I put the shoes in their place;  
the hurt next to the window  
to watch the darkness forgetting.  
The night provides the spark.  
No, I won't keep anything for me  
I give everything to you.  
Eyes and hands at your service.  
Legs and the lost step.  
The needles from the savings bank  
and whatever has remained after the bleeding.  
I won't keep anything for me.

Only an indefinable desire  
surrendered to the light.

## **SELF-OBSERVATION**

From the window I watch the sun  
moving on the grass.  
The garden is alone.  
The trees glance at each other surreptitiously.  
An open window in the neighbouring block.  
On the fourth floor an old woman leafs through a book  
stops at certain pages  
passes over them, goes back.  
On those pages she encounters her youth  
when she travelled with a sun all her own.

Mourning stagnates in her eyes  
as when one visits  
a dead memory.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

I am transformed into a bird without beak.  
The wind has provided for the wings  
the stars for the eyes  
and the rain for the wetness of the kisses.

I feed on dreams and sky.

## **OLD JOURNALS**

On a bookcase shelf  
I keep the old journals.  
I open them now and again, not to recall  
but to erase, not to repeat.

Because repetition conceals a tyranny  
that kills subtly.

## **NORTHWARDS**

They followed the path northwards.  
The clouds were in passionate embrace.  
It is morning.  
The sun has no prospects of rising.  
Thick forests jostle on the mountains.  
Forests, clouds and a hostile wind.

The northern lands gaze at the southern  
like their body's lower extremities  
that support all the weight of the earth  
its tormented weariness  
with a sun continually under their feet.

In the north the darkness holds the keys  
occasionally smuggling people out  
to confide and fall in love  
in the seas of the south  
beneath the lustful gaze of a sun  
that rises unhindered.

*Stockholm, 2010*

## **SOLITARY TABLE**

The only table where he could sit to eat  
was the one he painted from morning to night  
and it was covered with food and delicacies.  
The colours didn't last longer than the day.  
Whatever he managed to savour, he discharged the next day.  
Yet his brush didn't stop  
rummaging in the waste  
for more vivid colours.

## **LAST LITTLE PAUSES**

### **I**

Counting backwards I imprison time.  
For the offences till today  
I condemn it in absentia.

### **II**

I couldn't walk as airily  
as between insomnias.  
Sleepwalking at the appropriate time of transition  
into the celestial realm;  
the Pleiades rustle like leaves in the wind.

### **III**

I can't have enough of you, the days are limited.  
But at night for limitless hours  
I enter the church where your body celebrates.

*Writing the divide*

## THE THREAD

*to Emin Gizenel*

At night I think of you on the other side of the city.  
Your history is not the same as mine;  
and yet we grew up in the same city.  
We eventually got back together, but not our city.  
We weave our existence with the thread that divides us.  
We build flights of steps to go up together  
we leave signs to find our way back to the start  
like the people of the desert.

The years softened, just as our hearts and our passions.  
We're now like the travellers who on every trip  
search for paths to lead them to their senses.

Today, gazing at the new signs  
"The city of my heart", I keep the details alive;  
the air and its smells, the cries and laughter of the streets  
its scars and its weeping, like to the thorns that grow  
at the point where they divided it in two.  
The dividing line has an inhuman face.

That's why I think of you at night  
the city uniting the separate threads of our history.  
A kite is flying over your neighbourhood's roof.  
I can't see the thread holding it steady  
but I know.

## **TO THOSE ACROSS**

I've not written much about what divides us  
nor about what unites us.

Nineteen seventy-four  
inflates year by year  
becoming a huge hot-air balloon over the city  
blotting out the sun.

Its shadow is etched on the earth, on our backs and on our future  
an indelible stain.

## WINTER ON TROODOS

The mountains reach out and invite me.  
It's snowing on Troodos.  
The island is captive amid mist and rain  
surrounded by memories.  
Aggressive drops fall clumsily on the windows.  
I open the front door and find myself  
under winter's total dominance.  
With difficulty the sunlight splinters the dense clouds  
embracing the forest now aglow, now melancholic  
like bodies after love's celebration; the veneration.

It's snowing on Troodos  
over a roofless, divided island.  
Yet the mist and rain don't recognize dividing lines.  
They possess it e n t i r e l y.

## **PRAYER AT NIGHT**

Half past four  
it's raining incessantly.  
Running towards the walls  
the water falls with a splash in the moat  
and exhausted the city dons the weight of the mud.

Lightning flashes phosphoresce in the darkness  
like fireflies in despair.

And the muezzin's prayers  
from the other side of the walls  
intrude in sleep's balance  
violating the chasteness of the night.

## **DARK GLASSES**

I walked the streets.  
Hordes of people passed me by  
or went in my direction.  
They were all wearing dark glasses.

It was impossible for me to see what spot held their gaze  
the magnitude of the waiting, their surprise  
when they met the abyss's eyes.

## **SQUARE DARKNESS**

An inch into death suffices  
to whisk away many lives.  
Lives that just before seemed not to suspect  
how close their world was to the nether world.  
No longer are they able to be aware.  
The explosions ostracized the circle of their lives.  
Everywhere fires, mutilated bodies  
unrecognizable; God's complete forsaking.

And bewilderment marks the eyes.  
How will memory preserve them?  
As a speck of light or as a living  
momentary resistance?

Now they clear the mind's vestibule  
to hold the dead.  
The surroundings will very soon be shaped  
with their last belongings.  
A dead breath, a bewildered look  
a broken gesture, a cry  
the last snap thought  
the final goodbye, unforeseen, instantaneous.  
Absolute darkness in only an inch of death.

In a square darkness, how much can you see?

*Monday, 11 June 2011*

*In sights*

## I CAME TO PAY RESPECT

*Everything fits into writing. Rivers,  
bridges, mountains. Plains and districts.  
A spacious place the way you speak.  
Michalis Pieris  
Writing's places*

I came to pay respect Master, to light the lamp.  
It took a long time and the nights gave out.  
Twenty years on this rock, beside the sea.  
Winters with the wind bringing the earth's echo to your threshold  
the wave leaping as far as the door, the foundations quivering  
overcome by the brine.

Here now, I'm knocking at your door.  
Who are you to waken me with your cries?  
What wind is grabbing the ropes turning me from eternal sleep?

But I came only to pay respect, I mumbled  
not to unearth time's fury.  
Just to see your window, the steps that raised you up  
and the yard's tall pine –still alive and spreading–.  
A rock wedged in the dry-stone wall  
and the carved plaque on the entrance wall  
testify to your passing here.

Yet I'll say it, even if it sounds odd.  
I saw you today, sitting with that ponderous look.  
I saw the pen trembling in your hand, your lips voicing the writing  
and the message thickening, crowding on the paper  
and your word like lightning, and then, the bad news  
liberated in the fever.

Yet your lamp didn't go out.  
Thousands of eyes still pore over your writings.  
Thousands of hands grope, to grasp the meanings  
to make special yeast, to knead themselves with you  
to eat to drink from your blood  
to find repose in their souls.

*Aigina, June 2010*

## IN TIME'S ARENA

Midnight between the upright columns.  
The squares empty; total silence.  
Living together beneath the sacred rocks, Zeus  
Demeter, Hades, Dionysus, Helios and Selene.  
The Officials watch the naked bodies  
in the wrestling ring; the curving of the bodies; the goal.  
Hera's temple, the Echo Hall, the workshop of Pheidias  
who is still waiting to hew the light  
in men's closed eyes.

The moon follows the beaten path  
certain of its future.  
Subterranean tremors echo, recorded  
are myriad dialogues between moons and suns  
history within history, life within other lives  
outside us and within us.  
The eyes, hands, discourse  
absorb, grasp, take wing  
and whirl in time's arena.

Slowly I move the heavy column.  
I sit in the hollow.  
With earth I fill mouth, hair.  
I wrap myself in laurel leaves  
that in years to come they may find me in this position.

Unknown female they'll note, no identity.

*Ancient Olympia, August 2013*

## EYRIE

*to David Madevosian*

The eyrie where he never nestled  
stands proud and silent, high  
on one of Hrazdan's slopes.

We are met in the entrance by his breath  
deep and rasping.  
He wanted to have time to show us round  
his indomitable dreams.

Before our eyes he bares himself, bursts inside us  
scores our breasts.  
Parajanov is unpredictable  
he fashions images, creates stories, films with symbols  
paintings out of cheap materials.  
We get tangled in his nets  
become part of his works  
the birds in his hat  
tiny specks of dust on his horizon.

On the round table, nuts  
Armenian brandy and mulberry raki.  
A small glass *holy communion* to our health  
and another to the memory of Sergei Parajanov.  
So ended vespers  
on the twenty-sixth day of October  
in two thousand and twelve.

*Yerevan, October 2012*

## **PAINTING**

I chose to stand before it.  
I look it straight in the eye.  
It sits all alone against the wall with its only reward  
the puzzled expression of strangers.  
The red spilled out abundantly smearing the landscape.  
The windows were hazy; hazy too the horizon.  
Yet I could see through the open  
shutters clothes hung on the lines  
like dancers, dry leaves fallen on the earth  
and a narrow street with no name that led, who knows where.  
The wind was silent.  
A dim story in every human figure.  
Yet the thought of the artist Mher Chatinian was plain.  
What I see is what his brush allowed freely  
to unite with my senses and my pen.

My obedient words simply give an interpretation  
to his arms' disobedient extensions.

*Museum of Modern Art  
Vanadzor, October 2012*

## IMAGES

I thought I saw the eyes blinking.  
He was sitting in the place suggested by the sculptor  
beside the water-lilies, in the eastern corner of the lake  
so the first rays of sun would caress his eyes.

Summer is here.  
Clouds jostle around the sun  
and the earth remains moist beneath the wild grass.  
Returning yesterday afternoon from Wörlitz Park  
atop a tall pole I saw a stork  
standing in its enormous nest.  
Erect it swayed beneath the sky  
but didn't lose its balance.  
Up there it had complete control over life and death.

The wild stork and marble eyes  
slipped inside me like a rush of surprise.  
Since then they have followed me with the same passion  
just like you...

*English Grounds of Wörlitz  
Germany, June 2012*

## SPRIGS, LEAVES, PETALS

*to Nora and Agis*

On the old ore mine's slopes, the roots of the age-long  
pines reach down to the dark galleries;  
silent and uninhabited.

The wind was blowing, stirring the fragrances; it whistled  
crossing the afternoon, taking with it  
endemic and indigenous sprigs from the bushes.

I sit beside the lake's glimmer  
the willow's branches bow to the water.  
All around the mountains of Troodos.  
A hawk crosses the horizon like a note.  
The insects, lizards, caterpillars, the annoying mosquito  
and the butterflies open the days with delicate pecking; lightning.  
The garden breathes and the mountain is a deluge of green waves.

I lack nothing, I reflect.  
Nature's dimensions are indefinable  
just as indefinable is life's course.  
I note the day, the time, the forest's transparency.  
I note the stones upon the stones  
the sun that followed me like a shadow  
the spider, that weaved and joined  
sprigs, leaves, petals.  
I lack nothing.

I move the stones, dig the soil  
plant myself between the herbs, to acquire fragrance.

*Botanical Garden at the Amiantos Mine  
2 August, 2013*

*of the day*

## IN BARCELONA'S HANDS

*to Annie*

\*

The day I landed in Barcelona  
the sky presaged fine weather and the breeze  
carried the bells' chiming far from the city.  
When later I entered the cathedral I discovered  
that technology had entered long before me  
and had taken the place of the candles.  
The electric candle lights up with a switch  
and lasts as long as the contribution and the faith.

\*

Beginning of June in Plaza Cataluña.  
The benches were all taken.  
I had a walk round.  
I strolled among the pigeons  
they were alarmed and flew off.  
I sat beside the fountain.  
The clouds were hiding the sun.  
Beginning of summer yet the breeze was cool  
on the leaves and faces; tired pavements  
noisy crowds.

I followed the flow of people.  
There are exits where their thoughts escape.  
Downward-sloping thoughts, without full-stops.

\*

In Plaza Real the palms stretch beautifully  
above our heads.  
The square with its arched rotundas, the large fountain  
the carved lampposts with their helmets.  
I sat on the ledge of the central fount.  
Suddenly I was enwrapped in a multinational murmur  
that removed history and ushered in  
the smell of paella.

\*

In Plaza Espania I took the line  
that goes to La Barcelonetta.  
I sat beside you even if you weren't here.  
I brought you close with the carriages' gentle jolting  
as they unwound on the tracks.  
Our faces put on glassy eyes;  
to see life's smooth countenance.  
I got off at La Barcelonetta.  
You didn't.  
You stayed gazing at the platform.

At that moment I felt  
what the underground repeats every day;  
at the mercy of a route that follows me  
with a glassy gaze.

\*

In Santa Maria del Mar the flames are not electric.  
I lit a candle for you, for me  
for what keeps us alive.  
There's a smell of lilies, incense and wax.  
A smell of momentary faith and hypocrisy.  
The church organ stands proud and distant  
high up between the arched columns.  
Silent chandeliers.  
A minimum of light; as of hope.  
And the crucified Christ  
a step above our heads  
in the nebula of the dome,  
stares at us plainly, perplexed.

\*

In the Picasso Museum  
the rooms were divided into periods  
and photography was prohibited.  
Yet the artist photographed us  
staring at us suspiciously.  
The brushstrokes towards the end of his life were eccentric  
and the expression on the faces of the women he loved  
divided.

Are they smiling or crying?

\*

I descended the stairs, several basement floors.  
He was sitting beside the huge posters, as every day;  
body hunched, dog beside him.  
Hands crossed on the floor, eyes fixed on a cloud of emptiness.  
The dust was devouring his tattered clothes.  
I tossed a coin into the cup and at the sound his eyelids flickered.  
I watched him fly like a dove and nestle  
high up in his nest  
far from people.

\*

With collar turned up he crossed the boulevard  
with the tall plane trees; birds.  
His hair blew as did the long scarf.  
The leaves' shadows played on his face.  
Authentic choreography.  
Step to the ticking of seconds; haunted step;  
a smile; conquest.  
I followed him with my gaze.  
He moved away like a cloud changing shapes  
in the haze of the horizon.

All the buildings were with open windows.

\*

Their encounter makes the air creak.  
At first she takes his hands.  
She brings them up to her eyes.  
She observes the veins, the scars.  
Her hair is tied back.  
Without hesitation she leans on his shoulder.  
Her breath writes on his face  
a word in red.  
Lips savour the skin; a promise.

Suddenly she sits up and grabs the pen.  
She inscribes the words, the hours, closes the leaves  
of time in the pages.  
The reconciliation ceremony is over.  
They silently go back into the mist.

\*

I see them through the window.  
He is hugging and kissing her.  
Their hands speak their own language.  
Her cheek rests on his shoulder  
and her hair rustles conquering the air.

They are not young, unrestrained or impulsive.  
They simply let themselves be carried away by the images  
place, desire and time  
journeying to what memory brought back to them.

My view suddenly vanished  
the rain misted the windowpane.

\*

The freedom of solitude.  
You look, note, think, listen  
record, delete without distraction or restriction.  
At first I couldn't freely follow the thought;  
it escaped me in Barcelona's hands  
diving like an illusion into the sea.  
I subsequently compromised  
because freedom is a compromise  
a lifebelt to be saved or drowned.

\*

Parentless children sprout in the chaotic streets.  
Day and night they roam repeating  
what they've been taught.  
They try to catch our attention  
and behave like adults.  
They externalize fake emotions  
begging for recognition.

\*

In the arena; without bulls, bullfights and olé, oléee.  
The fury of the age.  
In the arena a huge shopping mall.  
Shops and restaurants  
filled the basement and all the floors.  
The arena is in use again.

Except that people have replaced the bulls  
and multinationals the bullfighters.

\*

I am transformed into a bull that refuses to fight.  
The lances are already piercing my body  
the blood flows writing the epilogue;  
red cape; nightmare.  
I am transformed into a bull  
that fights with itself.

\*

On the train from Colonia Güell.

They are sitting next to us, dressed up for an outing.

The one in white, lacy like a butterfly  
the other red and black like a ladybird.

Rings, earrings, necklaces that lead round the neck  
eyes made up lips, cheeks rouged accentuating  
the longing to be kissed.

The dentures endeavour to subdue  
the chewing-gum revolving in their mouths.

They talk incessantly and giggle like little girls.

One thing is sure; their years added together  
are over a century and a half.

On the train to Barcelona.

They wore all the accessories for an official outing.

Fingerprints, identity, age  
swollen veins ready to burst, nails painted  
thinning hair held to their heads with combs.

The jolting renders their movements more fragile;  
just like the memories they carry in their handbags.

The train stops.

They get up, adjust their feathers  
ready to get off and fly.

*June, 2013*

### **F i r s t P u b l i c a t i o n s :**

*Unexpectedly.* Included in the poetry collection «Crisis» (Smokestack Books, UK, February 2014).

*Memories.* Included, untitled, in the collection «The City Needs No Introductions» (Melani, 2010).

*Prayer at Night.* Included in the video by Mary Plant «*The Walls of Nicosia*» (June, 2011).

*I came to pay respect master.* Published in the literary magazine *In Focus* (December, 2010) and included in the collection «The City Needs no Introductions» (Melani, 2010).

*Eyrie and Painting.* Poems from the text «Eight days – eight moments in Armenia» published in the literary magazine *In Focus* (March, 2013)

*In Barcelona's Hands.* Several poems were published in the literary magazine *In Focus* (Autumn, 2013).

## Notes:

Page 6 – *Unexpectedly*. A time of harsh economic crisis that affected many lives.

Page 8 – *5.30 in the morning*. “Again the sand from Africa”. Almost every year, sand from North Africa comes and covers Cyprus; it lasts for weeks, sometimes months.

Page 9 – *I spent a sleepless night*. «Schubertiana», poem by the Swedish Nobel laureate, Thomas Tranströmer.

Page 10 – *From my window I watch the crows...* It rarely snows in Nicosia. In January 2012, the Pentadactylos Range and Nicosia were covered in snow that lasted a day.

Page 11 – *House boat*. “cross-stitches, cutwork shapes (koftá), satin stitches (anevatée), rivers (potamoi)”, designs on hand-embroidered cloths.

Page 13 – *Memories*. “Kollyva”, boiled wheat, mixed with sugared almonds, currants, shelled walnuts, pomegranate seeds and sesame, and distributed at memorial services. “Old ’uns”, an expression used by older folk to refer to the ancestors.

Page 14 – *Female portrait*. Painting by Marie Laurencin (1938), exhibited in the Daniel Malingue Gallery at 26, Avenue Matignon in Paris.

Page 29 – *The thread*. “The city of my heart”. The first advertising slogan in Nicosia’s bid for the title of 2017 European Cultural Capital. Later, the slogan was changed to “get in the zone”. In the end, the title went to Paphos.

Page 34 – *Square darkness*. On 11 July 2011, the explosion took place on the naval base at Mari in which fourteen people were killed, among whom were two twin brothers aged eighteen.

Page 36 – *I came to pay respect master*. At the house in Aigina in which Nikos Kazantzakis lived for twenty-five years.

Page 38 – *Eyrie*. The house/museum of the director Sergei Parajanov, which is built high up, like an eyrie, on one side of the River Hrazdan in Yerevan. It is full of wonderful hand-crafted works, most of which were made while he was in prison out of materials he found around him.

Page 39 – *Painting*. Painting in the Museum of Modern Art, a left-over from the Soviet period, in Vanadzor, the third largest city in Armenia, which is located approximately 128 kms. north of the capital Yerevan.

Page 40 – *Images*. The English Grounds of Wörlitz are one of the first and biggest English parks in Germany. They were created at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They contain a lake with water-lilies and sculptures.

Page 41 – *Sprigs, leaves, petals*. The Amiantos Mine was in operation from 1904 till 1988. It is located in the heart of the Troodos mountain range at an elevation of 1500 metres. Following its closure, the State undertook its restoration in 1995. The Forestry Department is trying to replant the area destroyed and bring back to life the landscape that once characterized the north-eastern slope of the community of Amiantos. A start was made with the creation of the “A. G. Leventis” Troodos Botanical Garden, so named because of the funding provided by the Leventis Foundation.

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