



2011

Poems

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Recommended Citation

Genc, Gur; Marangou, Niki; Adil, Alev; Baybars, Taner; and Stephanides, Stephanos, Poems, *Kunapipi*, 33(1), 2011.
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol33/iss1/4>

Poems

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NOT POETRY... WATER

To Cypriot Poets

Since Aphrodite this island has turned into a rubbish dump of love.
 Our feet tangled in the roots of invaders
 bone piles crack as we move
 under our weight.

The earth so over-saturated with death syrup
 the only escape
 is not poetry...
 water!

Due to excessive heat even the stones have melted
 and flowed in streams to the sea
 Foreign tongues like melted copper burnt
 our mouths opened with sexual invasion.

For such a small island so much poetry
 do not write anymore
 plant trees
 or water!

(trans. Aydın Mehmet Ali)

NICOSIA

Nicosia you tricked me to stay on one side
Of your divided backyards sitting under sacred date-palms
With those who speak badly and
Who got me hooked on hash;
Instead of in a house I slept in the Armenian graveyard
And dreamt of Isabel d'ibelin herself;
With a spring mattress dumped from the shut-down brothel and
A second-hand 28-inch bicycle frame, I exchanged my pride
Although the old may still smell jasmine
I smell only the military scent of sweat
And wounds in your streets
In your rotten rivers
Even if I were to try, I could not bring down to land a V-necked heron
Whiter than your spinster girls
Nicosia, You've had my name in your mouth for too long
Spit it out...

(trans. Oya Akin, Stephanos Stephanides and the poet)

THE PULL OF THE MOON

From the moon to the sea flows the River of Silence
 From the sea fish run away to the moon,
 Swimming swiftly against the current
 —Sparkling scales fall on the shores of the island facing the moon—

I have no feet
 Or instead of shoes
 I wear the night on my feet

No matter how late I am
 With dreams I always arrive early at my destination.

From the moon to the forest flows the River of Silence
 From the forest birds run away to the moon
 Swirling up against the current
 —White feathers fall on the mountain slopes facing the moon—

I have no body
 Or instead I am stretched
 Between the past and the pull of the moon

No matter how far I go
 Instantly I return to the beginning of the light.

(trans. Aydın Mehmet Ali)

I WORSHIPPED TOO MANY GODS

i.

I worshipped too many gods, but
 After long winters in the North I know now
 Sun, you are the most real!

Ganged up with the Sea, in this
 Arid paradise, what have you done
 To the lost pieces of porcelain childhoods?
 I'm back, and have little time, so tell me.

ii.

The land, which gives seven, and takes nine
 I'm back — against the proverbs
 Its arthritis accumulating in my joints

I'm asking you about those who hide in oblivion
 And what hides buried inside you
 And others dumped in the bottom of the well

Crossing over the limits of conditions
 Overturning the towers of light onto thorny Mesaoria plains
 And with the feeling of guilt

I'm back, and have little time, so tell me.

(trans. the poet with Stephanos Stephanides)

Niki Marangou

ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ ΣΤΟ ΜΕΝΟΙΚΟ

Με ρούχα απλά
ντύθηκε γρήγορα και ξέφυγε
Κ.Π. Καβάφης «Ο βασιλεύς Δημήτριος»

Μέρες σαν τέλος της πανήγυρης
που οιπραματευτάδες νυσταγμένοι πια
τυλίγουν τους μπερντέδες τους
μαζεύουν τηνπραμάτεια τους
φορτώνουν τα καμιόνια
κι ένας ένας φεύγουν
αδειάζουν οι μεγάλες κάμαρες
οι δρόμοι η Πλατεία
κι η εκκλησία που γνώρισε
πολλούς προσκυνητές απόψε

Σ' ένα τραπέζι ακόμα πίνουν και διηγούνται
πλάι στους αυτοσχέδιους φούρνους
με τον οφτόν το κλέφτικον
πως έστησαν οι Εγγλέζοι ενέδρα στο χωριό
κι ο ένας ξέφυγε κι ο άλλος πιάστηκε

Έτσι αδειάζει ώρες ώρες η ζωή
σε δρόμο θαλασσινό
μ' ένα ίχνος ψυχής
και μια αγνή επιθυμία
τόση που να χωρά μόνο μέρος της πόλης
κοντά στη μεγάλη πύλη
απ' όπου έφευγαν οι Χριστιανοί
που είχαν εργαστήρια μέσα στα τείχη
λίγο πριν από τη δύση του ήλιου

FESTIVAL AT MENOIKO*

In simple clothes
He dressed quietly and left
(‘King Demetrios’, Cavafy)

Days like the end of the festival
when sleepy peddlers
roll up their drapery
gather up their wares
load up their trucks
leave one by one
emptying the large halls
the roads the square
and the church that encountered
many pilgrims tonight

At one table they are still drinking and telling stories
next to improvised ovens
with kleftikon cooking
of how the English set up a trap in the village
and how one escaped while the other was caught

Life at times empties out this way
seaward bound
with a trace of soul
a hint of vanishing desire
only enough to hold part of the city
near the big gate
where Christians
with workshops inside the walls
would depart shortly before sunset

(trans. Stephanos Stephanides)

*This refers to the EOKA struggle against British rule.

(from *Selections from The Divan*, Kochlias, Nicosia, 2001)

ΑΓΙΟΙ ΣΑΡΑΝΤΑ ΚΙΡΚΛΑΡ ΤΕΚΚΕ

Στον Τεκκέ

υπήρχε μια σκιερή αυλή
ένα περιβόλι με αμυγδαλιά
ροδιά και συκιά
για να τρώνε οι πιστοί
κι ένα αρχαίο πηγάδι
με νερό.

Οι δερβίσιδες ήταν σαράντα

38 Τούρκοι και 2 Έλληνες.

Εκεί ήταν θαμμένοι και οι τεσσαράκοντες
μάρτυρες της Σεβάστειας, αλαμάνοι άγιοι,
που ήρθαν από την Παλαιστίνη.

Στο πανηγύρι στις 9 Μαρτίου
μαζεύονταν χριστιανοί και οθωμανοί
και γιόρταζαν μαζί.

FORTY MARTYRS KIRKLAR TEKKE

At the Tekke
there was a shady courtyard
an orchard with almond,
pomegranate and fig
so the faithful might eat
and an ancient well
with water.

There were forty dervishes
38 Turks and two Greeks.

It was here that the
Forty martyrs of Sebaste
were buried,
Alamanian Saints,
who came from Palestine.

At the fair on the 9th of March
Christians and Ottomans would gather
and celebrate together.

(trans. Xenia Andreou)

ΣΤΗΝ ΑΓΙΑ ΑΙΚΑΤΕΡΙΝΗ

Στις παλιές εκκλησίες της Πάφου
Μέσα από τις φθαρμένες τοιχογραφίες
Πάντα υπάρχει ένας ευαγγελιστής σε μια γωνιά
Μέσα σε πορτοκαλί φωτοστέφανο
Πλαί στους πορνικούς και τους τυφλούς,
Την Άννα και τον Ιωσήφ
Που βάζουν τη Μαρία να κοιμηθεί
Διακρίνεις συνήθως το χέρι που αγκαλιάζει
Το μάγουλο πλάι στο άλλο μάγουλο
Μέσα στα πράσινα και κίτρινα του χρόνου
Τα άλατα της πέτρας
Το αραβούργημα πλαισιωμένο με τσουκνίδες
Στη βάση του τοίχου πλάι στα απλωμένα χαρούπια
Σπίτι της σαύρας
Και ο Αρχάγγελος υπερμεγέθης
Να μας φυλάει όλους

SAINT CATHERINE

On the decayed wall paintings
of the old churches in Paphos
you always find an evangelist in a corner
in an orange halo
next to the whores and the blind
Anna and Joseph
putting Mary to sleep
you can just about make out the embracing hand
the cheek next to the other cheek
in the greens and yellows of time
the calc of the stone
the arabesque surrounded by nettles
at the bottom of the wall next to the carob heap
a house for lizards
and the oversized Archangel
guarding over us all.

(trans. Stephanos Stephanides)

ΟΙ ΤΡΙΑΝΤΑΦΥΛΛΙΕΣ

Παρέα με τον γεωμέτρη και τον κηροπλάστη
φύτεψα φέτος τριανταφυλλιές στον κήπο
αντί να γράφω ποιήματα
την εκατόφυλλη από το σπίτι με το πένθος στον Άγιο Θωμά,
την εξηντάφυλλη που έφερε ο Μίδας από την Φρυγία,
την Μπαγκσιανή που ήρθε από την Κίνα,
μοσχεύματα από τη μοναδική μουσσιέττα που επέζησε
μεσ' την παλιά την πόλη,
αλλά προπαντός την Rosa Gallica που έφεραν οι σταυροφόροι,
που αλλιώς την λέμε και δαμασκηνή,
με το εξαίσιο άρωμα της.

Παρέα με τον γεωμέτρη και τον κηροπλάστη
αλλά και τον τετράνυχο, τον τίγρη, τον φυλλοδέτη,
τη μηλολόνη, τη χρυσόμυγα,
το αλογάκι της Παναγίας που τα τρώει όλα,
θα μοιραστούμε φύλλα, πέταλα, ουρανό,
στον αφάνταστο αυτό κήπο
κι αυτοί κι εγώ περαστικοί.

ROSES

In company with the aphid and the caterpillar
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-petaled rose Midas brought from Phrygia
the Banksian that came from China
cuttings from the last mouchette that survived
in the old town,
but especially Rosa Gallica, brought by the Crusaders
(otherwise know as damascene)
with its exquisite perfume.

In company with the aphid and the caterpillar
but also the spider mite, the tiger moth, the leaf miner,
the rose chafer 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.

(trans. Stephanos Stephanides)

ΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΣΤΟΝ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΗ

Ουκ αν έχομεν ειπείν βεβαίως
 ούτε αλκυόνων περί ούτε αηδόνων
 Λουκιανός

Γιατί ρε Διονύση,
 δεν είναι εύκολο να μιλά κανείς σήμερα
 με βεβαιότητα ούτε για αλκυόνες ούτε για αηδόνια
 όταν κατοικεί σε σπίτι
 που δεν θυσιάστηκε πετεινός στα θεμέλια του
 κι ούτε έχει κοιμηθεί σε στρώμα
 με σταυρούς ραμμένους στις τέσσερεις γωνιές του
 όπου έπεφταν τα νομίσματα
 χρυσά και αργυρά
 κι οι σπόροι από βαμβάκι και σησάμι
 ή έχει χυθεί μαζί με τους άλλους στους δρόμους
 ως βαθιά μέσα στη νύχτα
 στα λαμπρά φωτισμένα σπίτια
 με τους Λάζαρους ντυμένους με κίτρινα λουλούδια
 και γύρω απ τα γεμάτα άνθη στρώματα τους
 στέφανα και δημητριακά
 πουλιά ερπετά πέταλα
 αλεύρι μάραθο κεριά και μέλι
 πιο μαλακά απ' τον ύπνο

Έτσι Διονύση,
 μέσα στο γενικό θαλάσσομα
 της ανακρίβειας των αισθημάτων,
 πίνοντας καφέ, Παρασκευή πρωί
 δεν έχω παρά να σου πω
 πως σε πεθύμησα πολύ.

Αναφορά στην τελετή που γινόταν στη Λάρνακα το Σάββατο του Λαζάρου με ομοιότητες
 με τις Αιγυπτιακές τελετές για τον Άδωνι

(from *Divan*, Rodakio, Athens, 2005)

LETTER TO DIONYSISIS

Nothing we have said is
certain concerning either
halcyons or nightingales
(Lucian)

You see, Dionysis
nowadays it is not easy for us to speak
of halcyons nor of nightingales
as we have not lived in houses on whose foundations
cocks were sacrificed
nor have we slept on mattresses
with crosses at their four corners sewn
where coins fell
of silver and of gold
and seeds of cotton and of sesame

nor have we poured into the streets
deep into the night
and into houses brightly lit
with Lazaruses in yellow flowers adorned
their blossom-filled beds beset with
garlands and grains
birds lizards petals
flour fennel candles and honey
softer than sleep

That's why, Dionysis,
in the 'general turmoil
of uncertainty of feelings'
drinking coffee on a Friday morning,
I just have to tell you
that I've missed you very much

(trans. Stephanos Stephanides)

The feast of Saint Lazarus was celebrated in Larnaca until the beginning of this century and had similarities with the feast of Adonis in ancient Egypt.

(from *Selections from The Divan*, Kochlias, Nicosia, 2001)

ΔΕΝ ΤΗΣ ΠΗΡΑ ΛΟΥΛΟΥΔΙΑ

Για την επέτειο του θανάτου της μητέρας μου

Δεν της πήρα λουλούδια
αλλά σηκώθηκα νωρίς
να βρω ψάρι καλό στην αγορά
βρήκα και μήλα καθιστά για τάρτα
έτσι όπως τα έφτιαχνε αυτή,
μες τις καλές της μέρες.
Στρούντελ και σνίτσελ απ' τη Βιέννη
και σβίγγους όπως η θεία Ματίνα.

Δεν της πήρα λουλούδια
αλλά έσβησα στην ώρα του τον φούρνο
για να προλάβω την συνάντηση στο μαγαζί
πήρα τον Γιώργο από το σχολείο
κάναμε μαζί μπάνιο το σκυλί
κι ύστερα ήθελε να του διαβάσω εφτά βιβλία

Δεν της πήρα λουλούδια,
κατάφερα όμως να δουλέψω δυο ώρες στον υπολογιστή.
Πήγα να δω και την κυρία Δήμητρα,
με κατάλαβε από τη φωνή μου
Είχα καιρό να πάω να την δω, της πήρα γλύκισμα νηστίσιμο
και κάθισα κοντά της και μου έλεγε.

Δεν της πήρα λουλούδια
κλάδεψα όμως τη λουίζα και έβαλα λίπασμα
στα δέντρα. Μετακίνησα τις γαρδένιες έτσι που να πιάνουν ήλιο το πρωί
και φύλαξα τα ρούχα τα χειμερινά.
με προσοχή να μην τα φάει ο σκόρος

Με προσοχή αντιγράφω τις κινήσεις της
πως έπλαθε ζυμάρι, έβαζε λάδι στα κιχιά,
ανέβαινε, κατέβαινε, και όλους τους εφρόντιζε.

Δεν της πήρα λουλούδια
μα προσπαθώ ισάξια
τούτο το σπίτι να φροντίζω,
τούτο το σπίτι και τους ένοικους του
όπως με έμαθε αυτή σωστά και μετρημένα.

Με προσοχή αντιγράφω στις κινήσεις της
με προσοχή να μην τις φάει ο σκόρος.

I DID NOT TAKE HER FLOWERS

On the anniversary of my mother's death

I did not take her flowers
but I got up early
to find fresh fish in the market
I also found sour apples for a pie
like she used to bake
on her good days.
Strudel and schnitzel from Vienna
and dumplings like aunt Matina's.

I did not take her flowers
but switched off the oven in time
to make the meeting at the shop
picked up George from school
together we gave the dog a bath
and then he wanted me to read him seven tales.

I did not take her flowers,
but I managed to work for two hours on the computer.
Then I went to see Mrs Demetra,
she recognised me by my voice
I had not seen her for some time, I took her some fasting cake
and sat by her and we talked.

I did not take her flowers
but I pruned the verbena and gave some fertilizer
to the trees. I moved the gardenias so they could catch the morning sun
and put the winter clothes away
carefully, so they would not be eaten by the moths.

I copy her movements carefully
how she kneaded the dough, brushed oil on the pastry,
went up, down, and took care of us all.

I did not take her flowers
but I try like her
to take care of this house and its occupants
like she taught me, with love and care.

I copy her movements carefully
carefully, so they will not be eaten by the moths.

(trans. Xenia Andreou)

ΑΝΑΜΕΣΑ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΖΩΝΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΣΑΡΙΠΟΛΟΥ

Μνήμη Ολυμπίας και Μάριου Ιακωβίδη

Ανάμεσα Αγίας Ζώνης και Σαριπόλου
ξεπροβάλλει ώρες ώρες η ζωή
τυλιγμένη στο μυστήριο
όπως σε άμφια
λευκά ή μαύρα
ή πορφυρά με ανταύγιες χρυσές
κλωστές και χάντρες κεντημένες
από χέρια λαϊκά
που και να αποστρέφουν ξέρουν
το πρόσωπο
και να προσφέρουν τα δώρα τους
γλυκά και χωρίς αντάλλαγμα
ούτε ψεγάδι
καθώς το παράθυρο ανοίγει και φανερώνει
το τακτοποιημένο εσωτερικό
το παλαιό ανδρόγυνο
με την αληθινή αγάπη στο τραπέζι
η πομπή περνά και χάνεται στην Αγίου Ανδρέου
σκαλώνει στη μνήμη ενός ψηλού καθρέφτη
μιας κόκκινης λάμπας τραπεζαρίας
εφόδια για τα δικά μου πια ταξίδια.

BETWEEN AYIA ZONI AND SARIPOLOS STREET

For Marios and Olympia Iacovides

Between Ayia Zoni and Saripolou
life peers out from time to time
wrapped in mystery
as in vestments
white or black
or purple with golden hues
threads and beads embroidered
by common hands
who know both how to turn away
their faces
and to offer their gifts
sweetly and flawlessly
wanting nothing in return
as the window opens and reveals
a tidy interior
the old couple
with true love at the table
the procession passing by and into Ayios Andreas Street
holding to the memory of a tall mirror
a red dining room lamp
provisions for my own future journeys

(trans. Stephanos Stephanides)

ΕΠΙΣΤΡΕΦΟΝΤΑΣ

Επιστρέφοντας
βήμα βήμα
στο καλύτεριμι
του παλιού χειρογράφου
περιμένω το σύνηθες θαύμα*
που είναι κρυμμένο με επιμέλεια
στην 25^η σελίδα.
Οι φαγωμένες πλάκες λάμπουν στη βροχή,
οι βάρκες ανεβοκατεβαίνουν τον Βόσπορο
και ο έρωτας μου φαίνεται
υπόθεση πια μακρινή.
Συνεχίζω λοιπόν την ανάγνωση.

Κάθε Παρασκευή ο αυτοκράτορας πήγαινε στις Βλαχέρνες για να παρακολουθήσει το σύνηθες θαύμα, όπου άνοιγε το κουτί, όπου φυλαγόταν το κάλυμα της κεφαλής της Παναγίας και αυτό υπερίπτατο

RETURNING

Returning
step by step
along the cobbled path
of the old manuscript
I await the usual miracle*
hidden with diligence
on page 25.
The weathered flagstones sparkle in the rain,
the boats sail up and down the Bosphorus
and love now seems to me
a distant matter.
So I resume my reading.

(trans. Xenia Andreou)

According to tradition every Friday in Vlachernes in Constantinople the Archbishop opened the box containing the veil of the Virgin and the veil floated on the air. The Byzantine emperor used to visit the church every Friday to witness the 'usual miracle'.

ΟΔΙΚΟΣ ΧΑΡΤΗΣ

Βλέποντας τον οδικό χάρτη
Λευκωσίας και προαστίων
η οδός Fuat Paşa τελειώνει στην Δίωνος και Ιασίου
η Defne Yüksel στην Λάμπρου Πορφύρα
η Yenice Şafak στην Λεοντίου Μαχαιρά
κοντά στον Προμαχώνα Ρόκα
στους παλιούς χάρτες το ποτάμι διέσχισε την πόλη
αλλά ο Σαβορνιάνο άλλαξε την κοίτη
για να γεμίσει με νερό την τάφρο.
Εκεί τις Κυριακές οι οικιακές βοηθοί
από την Σρι Λάνκα απλώνουν τα μαντήλια τους
και τρώνε μαζί.
Οι φοίνικες τους θυμίζουν τον τόπο τους.

STREET MAP OF NICOSIA

Looking at the street map
of Nicosia and its suburbs
Fuat Paşa Street ends on Dionysou and Herakleitou
Defne Yüksel on Hermes street
Yenice Şafak on Leontiou Mahaira
in the vicinity of Rocca Bastion
on old maps the river cut through the town
but Savorniano, the Venetian, changed the flow
to fill the moat with water.
There on Sundays the domestic servants
from Sri Lanka spread out their shawls
and eat together.
The palm trees remind them of home.

(trans. Xenia Andreou and Stephanos Stephanides)

ΟΙ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΣΤΟ ΒΟΥΚΟΥΡΕΣΤΙ

Για τον Andrey Gritsman

Στο Βουκουρέστι υπάρχει
μια πανίσχυρη και μυστική οργάνωση γυναικών
με μαντίλες και χοντρές κάλτσες,
που συνήθως κρατούν μια πλαστική σακούλα.
Σκουπίζουν τις εκκλησίες,
πουλούν κεριά,
ταίζουν τα αδέσποτα σκυλιά,
ανοίγουν το μπουκάλι του κρασιού του παροδίτα
και κουβεντιάζουν καθημερινά με τον Μπρανκοβεάνου
και την κόρη του Σάφτα.
Ξεσκονίζουν το ένδυμα της
πριν πιάσουν το θρήνο για τους τέσσερεις τους γιούς
και βάζουν το μαργαριτάρι που έπεσε από το περιδέραιο
στη θέση του.
Συγκεντρώνονται στο εργόχειρο τους,
παρ' όλο που ούτε τα μάτια, ούτε ο φωτισμός τις βοηθούν
και φροντίζουν να ανατέλλει ο ήλιος στη σωστή ώρα
κάθε μέρα.

WOMEN IN BUCHAREST

For Andrey Gritsman

At Bucharest there is
a formidable and secret organisation of women
with kerchiefs and thick socks,
who often carry a plastic bag.
They sweep churches,
sell candles,
feed the stray dogs,
open the wine bottle of the itinerant
and chat daily with
Brankoveanu
and his daughter Safta.
They dust her frock
before breaking into a wail for the four
sons
and put the pearl that fell from
the necklace
back in its place.
They concentrate on their embroidery,
even though both their eyes and the lighting
fail them
and they make sure the sun rises at the right
time
every day.

(trans. Xenia Andreou)

Alev Adil

NICOSIA GIRL

It's performance time Nicosia girl,
the traces and erasures of your footprints,
the vestige of your gestures,
your ghost on the balcony,
are dancing for me.

Memory, a secret agent of war,
sets the scene:
a bridge, a labyrinth, a graveyard.
Dance your inherited amnesia,
a heritage in an undeciphered script,
your political dread, your amour projection,
your sentimental terrorism,
double-shadow, violent architect,
my assassin.

NOIR LOGIC

There was no gun sister
but when we were exchanging
words and kisses
my gimlet eyes
my shop bought soul
turned their romance
into stones
and when he had swallowed
a bellyful
he sank, he drowned.
As I did too
having lost track
of who was who,
the mirrors,
the smoke,
the damned dreaminess
of the aquarium,
the shiny screen.
Tell me again,
who were we?
Why did we do
what we had to do?

OKTAY RIFAT

Speaking of death
and things to wear,
the poet was always
immaculate in appearance,
freshly pressed;
not exactly afraid
at the end.

YOU CAN'T GET LOST IN THE WALLED CITY

Daedalus' fugitive disinformation,
a nomadic Ottoman passion,
a palimpsest of amnesias,
a river, a shopping street,
a boundary, a barricade, a border.
This walled city is a labyrinth of war
under the rule of a secret dream.
On waking in the morning
of the pale blue apocalypse,
in the spring time of the little brides,
the blood poppies,
long after the streets lost all their names,
it's still impossible to get lost
in the old city.

TRANSIENT THEME

In the cosmic dark room
the image develops,
a wash, an oily film, a transient theme.
I am a woman in the crowd
a grainy dark fragment turning away
against the flow
of indistinguishable faces.
I am a woman passing through,
a cancelled passport,
a lip print on a cup,
a dip in a pillow.
Packing away my chipped deities,
I am a lost civilisation.
A solipsist's mythology grows shabby in my rucksack,
a beloved broken toy.
I'm taking my gods with me,
knowing there's always
Nothing to bequeath to eternity.

COMPLICIT CARTOGRAPHIES

I lost the thread
of a dream
a mapmaker offered me.
It rained and the ink ran
on the pages of an A-Z for the city
where I always
found myself
lost.
And if I asked among the forest of strangers
drifting in a breeze
of my sleeping
for the names
of streets
for directions
I'd wake...
Evicted unceremoniously
from that city
I'd wake losing
first the punctuation:
the weave of tense,
the warp of sense,
until all that remained:
the traffic roaring like the sea
the harbour lights of my childhood
on a summer's night,
a small forgotten war and the smell of jasmine,
other cities rising and falling
other fish frying
dogs barking
couples arguing.
Where is that hotel room?
Is it the scene of a murder
or the source of love?
Why am I waiting at the airport?
On waking I am lonely
for a grammar
to contain these questions
to sew the story together,
for a complicit cartographer,
for dreaming in company.

Taner Baybars

LETTER TO HOMELAND

Dear Father, you ask in your letter
 why for so long I have written no word.
 To you I shall not confess any more than I can afford.
 I am not insensitive to what you write:
 a friend was murdered, a friend's house burnt.
 These I understand, I know
 and as I said I can feel your grief.
 Several times everyday I pause while walking
 and talk to them loudly.

Homesick?
 I am not because I've never had a home
 but you are not responsible for that.
 Yet I still remember the sea and the mountain
 together, at night infinitely apart,
 and the space between them my cradle.
 I must have no digressions in a letter
 so I stop living in that alien past.
 In the present, I mean right just now,
 the summer rain is beating on the sash
 and the conceited sun is falling on the mirror.
 Very, very strange.
 Nevertheless I have to burn a fire in June
 it's so cold
 although there's nothing wrong with the equinox.

Unhappy?
 I said I would confess no more than I can afford.
 I shall not say I am happy nor unhappy.
 but what you guess is true:
 I do sit on my own for hours
 and breed thoughts as you breed friends.
 Yes, I do sit on my own,
 I laze,
 I cut my nails and wait till they grow again
 and in the meantime I do nothing.

I've just looked out:
Rain shines like broken pieces of glass;
my mind is strung; before me the horizon
lies black and strangled.
I wonder where the sun is coming through.
But I don't feel I can provide solutions
so the sun will shine and I shall remain
ignorant.

Unhappy?
I said I am not.
I know that there's a grain of happiness
in everything I touch.
That is if I touch.
I know that trees would answer my touches
a bird's wing would unrein my tongue,
my ears would receive the vibrations
of this city.
I do not reproach them with irresponse,
it is my fault.

Unhappy?
Father you are persistent.
I said I am not unhappy
though I know I would unearth unhappiness
in everything
if I touch.

SNOW FORECAST

When the sky is making all this effort
to coax the rain to snow, turn bovine voices
soft, and quietly impose its presence—

how can I think glumly about my pose
in a small bed, left arm's absent mistress?
Words I have meant to say but have not said
could not form a single, pure flake.

(from *Narcissus in a Dry Pool*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1978)

WAR CEMETRY OMAHA BEACH

The grey fall towards the sea
trims the green grass
cycloped with pill-boxes
mossed inside, sanded without.

You, in your young shoes
trot among the Davidis and Crosses
pause before a beetle
and raise your foot.

I shout: Do not kill it
and the ghosts around me laugh.

LET'S HOLD HANDS

I always find myself holding the hands
of girls who've lost boys, of women
who can't win their husbands back.

In their deflected monologue I become
the lover, the husband, a soothing ear
or the hologram of someone already dead.

I trail in a rumour of hands, not one
really mine to hold. I hold the pan
and what I cook in it is mine, it can't
sadden my ears with tales of a happy past.
I grasp the handle and briefly thank God.

Stephanos Stephanides

BROKEN HEART

on a twilight pilgrimage
 I cross Venetian ramparts
 I journey inward
 seeking a language of lament
 a muffled murmuring of old heart
 graffiti on old walls
our dreams are in the tombs
tombs are in our dreams
 eyes blind and eager
 jealousies hiding light of white courtyards
 ghosts of moustachioed men striding wicker chairs
 muddled destinies at the bottom of coffee cups
 shadows of grandmothers in the memory of lemon-trees
 arthritic hands still joining my quilt piece by piece

 shielding my body
 stone uterus of weeping icons
 Byzantine saints whose names I don't recall
 only a memory a fragrance of ancient smoking leaves
 and wailing prayers of unseen hodjas to the north

 warm countenance of youth in cold helmets
 is the lifeline of this ailing heart
 fluttering banners
 that banish me from severed arteries
 and I move outward through the city gates
 while I dream of east and north
 of apparitions of community
 a communion
 with sea citrus milk of sheep
 and olive
 in a dawning waning earth
 fragile trophy of my quest

1993 (slightly revised 2000)

('Broken Heart' has been previously published in *Blue Moon and Other Poems*, Kochlias 2005)

LARNACA ORANGES

from the sea of Larnaca many years ago
 you set off on a dream for me and you
 and took me by the hand onto a ship
 for my first crossing of a sea;
 and now to this same sea you have returned for your
 last dream
 once my father you return and become my child
 so that now I must dream your dream for you
 while I dispatch you in a casket
 as you leave behind for the last time
 the city of Lazarus and of Zeno
 and cross the sea to your funeral pyre.
 Before preparing for departure
 you bid me find you Larnaca oranges.
 Why are they late this season? you asked
 eager to sweeten your blood
 and become the school child you once were
 jostling through the date-palm promenade;
 no mourning no black no bearded priests you oft declared;
 keep the windows open and let all the light come in you said;
 and now you have relinquished your memory to me
 giving me your final gift;
 your body abject becomes once more a rhythm in your
 mother's womb
 while I pursue the taste of your dislocated oranges.

2000

ARCHAEOLOGY OF A TOOTH

In memory of Giorghos Taramides, my dentist

New tooth clinging to a strong jaw
Shattered in a child's joy
A leap from a witch's hat
One sunny day in darkest Manchester
A juncture of memories with jagged edges
Filed smooth and comfortably concealed
Crowned and protected
Armed to bite back the words that cursed it

Years later Giorghos taps it with his instruments
Contemplating its archaeology and its fate
Strong roots nurtured with spring water
In halcyon days of Trikomo he says
May I not be the one who lives to pull them out
I think about words to write
But the ache recedes into silent putrefaction
Sealing its quiet mourning undetected until memory takes revenge
In a cyst demanding discharge of its pain
Giorghos now a spectre of a kind smile
Sends his emissaries who announce the extraction
Let out the stench and pull out its root
The suffering must end
I think of my grandmother's toothless smile
My father's sunken cheeks
As he lies horizontally during his wake
Where is memory anyway?
But in the shadow of a shadow
And where is memory's beginning?
Is it in fragmentation and deracination?
In the labours of birth the throes of death?
In Elizabeth's gift, an effigy of
A huge tooth in wax — to be consecrated on an altar
Or hung upon a tree as I rehearse words
That will bridge the gap my tongue slips through
As it feels for words that steal the air

I am in need of a monument
A porcelain smile to hide memory's holes

To trap the air in words that bite and hiss
To pacify the pain in a memento for an empty space

June 2003

SENTIENCE

For Aşık Mene

So what shall we do for the dead, to whose conch-bordered
Tumuli our lifelong attraction is drawn
As to a magnetic empire
(Derek Walcott *Midsummer* XVI)

I know this day of May will be the day
The dead will awaken only once
Next spring will be too late
Next month the fragrance of spring
Will fade away into the summer drought
Even the dead do not wait forever
We have prayed one too many times
And if this is to be the day it is to be the day
We feel it in the shudder of the skin
In the redness of the poppy
Everywhere the dead send their messengers
But many turn their heads away in dread
We cannot show our passport
To cross the gate they say
Yet I have to take the road to find you
With my eyes open
Today I know you will not come
In my silent meditation nor in my sleep
But in the exact spot in the sea
Where we feel the sensual bosom of our dead mother
In the aroma of the bush our grandmother used to burn
To bake the bread in her clay oven
Today you will send a stranger to tell me my story
He will first give me fresh lemonade to quench my thirst
And with a key open the door of the room
Where I was born and where you dreamed your dreams
As you stood on this green balcony
With the sea-breeze in your hair
Looking over rooftops, bell-towers, and minarets
At the road with the acacias and eucalyptus trees
And I will hear you speak in the movement of the wind
Your voice traced by an absent hand

Aşık will kiss me on the cheeks
To tell me he too saw the dead
And with a touch of the hand
I will know I have found the brother
In milk and blood
I had relentlessly forgotten.

June 2003

ARS POETICA: SACRED OR DAEMONIC

à tel prix appaiser

Ma chaleur Cyprienne,
(Élégie XIX. Pierre de Ronsard [1524–85])

Do not be deluded
I have a split tongue
Moving between reluctant whispers
And inaudible pulse articulating peace
You know you will never find
In the lull of your dead muses
And the platonic lambda
How to reach pure sound?

No matter if the signs are Greek or Turkish
I lose my way
Even when there is only one way to go
The police sniff and tell me
My hallucination is out of order
And their dogs label me ‘under control’
I slip away looking for relief
In everlasting summer or everlasting death
And when I find you
I strip you naked
In reckless desire for your disease
(or was that only in my dream?)
I do not know if it’s your malady I want
Or if I am diseased by your desire
I negotiate the pullulating mirage
And my body sizzles in my Cyprian heat
And rolls in flames into the blue of the sea
Embers evaporate in the clarity of the moon
And the tempest of the stars
Weaves halos fudging stories
Of roaming phantoms in an overlay of cities
With statues of your damaged fantasy
Who lost their heads and genitals
In impetuous recklessness
Or in the world’s tormented ideology
And I pound your words
Chasing poetry of merely mind or merely sexuality

Two pure white butterflies
Paying off this lack in broken stone
So don't believe me
For different daemons speak within me
All looking for their missing parts

REQUIEM FOR TRIKOMO

For daemons and creatures roaming Mesaoria especially between Trikomo and Salamis:
those named and those unnamed but who I know are watching

Do I come to sing your requiem?
At the checkpoint
I do not see the five flags flutter
History has never been
Only creatures hovering
With the instinct of seven humming birds
Drawing me near
Light as an apparition

Forgive me if once you felt eternal
There were three towns here where three roads meet
And church between cinema and coffee shop
Hailing departures and arrivals
On old camel caravans to Karpas slow as buses
Above the Han Chrysanthi the old teacher
Reads my journey in the coffee cup

In my smallness I catch sight
Of fractured Aphrodites and redolent Madonnas,
And on screens wavering with night breeze
I filch glances of the sacred in ruinous passion
Melina's husky melody in black and white
Sophia wet and surging from the blue
Rescuing my totem the dolphin
And the boy ready to ride away
I stretched in all directions
Rolled off into the plains
Up to the mountain and the skies
Then the seas
Stole me away
Without warning nor farewells
Only stories
To carry with me
Eleni retelling
How she lured Stephanos of Alexandria
With her swing song
Bore him ten children

Milled the wheat on the day he died
Dissolved time in her longing
In his silence I travelled with the name
Laid my body out in the immensity of the earth
Exposing it to oracles
Looking for a special divination
Voices saying don't forget
Let memory decompose
Spread like a virus
In the intent look of strangers
Filling crevices moistening protrusions
Rehearsing to absorb and expel the world
Experience its infinite flesh without words
Degenerate in the scattering
Seek ablution with the multitudes
In rivers lit with smell of camphor
Undress the deity
Smelling her secretions
And smothering her with multihued hibiscus
Probe the meaning of her residue
In the moaning of your excess
Today Kathy shoots photos for the post-mortem
To seize the lost house in my voice
Does it still breathe?
The last rite slipped through a hole and
I stand defrocked
Inert in my forgetting
Feeling the fingers breeze
Touching me with diesel and jasmine
And heat of stones
Sending me running
To the random sensuality of seas
Tanju and Jenan
In twin priesthood of intoxicated purity
Pass round the shell
And gesture its extravagant geometry and dream
Life exploding from the stones
While a friend looks on from faraway
Eyes green of lemon yellowing with the wheat
And Mesaoria wild flowers
Sprouting like hair from the belly to the neck

Desire of my body mourning
Stretching in all directions

December 2004

(‘Requiem for Trikomo’ has been previously published in *Blue Moon and Other Poems*,
Kochlias 2005)

AUGUSTAN DAYS

The First Goodbye for Katerina
(After Derek Walcott)

Days as august and as large as the sea
And nights as wide as the rooftops

Here I lie

No use for the shirt on my back
Nor the walls of my house
Spread before a relentless sky
That will brood and puff up
A tease or a promise of rain
The lion raised to the stars
A daze with a spray of fierce light
As Perseus climbs high, or hangs low
In tears, for the days we will lose
For the days — sun burnt red with moon

And the month passes by
The cat slips away
And the marigolds fade
Leaving only a touch
Like tender dust
And a daughter ready to fly

And with Derek I sing
Days I have held
Days I have lost
Days that outgrow like daughters
My harbouring arms

August 2008

EXPECTING NIGHTINGALES

At the smallest hour
I awake and wait
In expectation
The nightingale will sing.
The roar of the sea
Absorbing whistles
Of the passing trains
Hoodwinks me into slumber,
So I do not even sense
The rooster's crowing.
The pink light eludes me
Stealing silently through slats
To soften Kathy's sleep
And I hear a warm smell of fresh focaccia
In Rafaela's buzzing at the door

Villa Rincon, Bogliasco, Liguria, March 2009

KARPASSIA

For equus asinus, careta careta, and the other
rare species who accompanied me on the journey
or who I met along the way

Do you remember
when the sun moved into Virgo
and we were pulled against gravity

To a thin place
careful not to tread the rhizomes
of the calamint by the rock

Where the Holy Friend found his sacred spot
and where there is too much sky
as sea swallows the sun

And in the purple hue
turtle midwives come from far away
to bring the science of nature

To the nature of departure protected
as the whorl of shell in liquid turquoise
embraces a flesh of fragile green

And when night fell with a torrent of rain
and the lightning struck
the defī drum

while the candle flame
danced the leilalim
And in response

our bodies swayed
as the island's hull was turning
till day cleaned the fields fresh

For the wild and wide-eyed donkeys
bashful as they sing to us their kin
Olmaz Olmaz να με πεθαίνεις πολεμά

And with gravity we turn to ask
is this the homeward way
toward a fertile Mesaoria lying fallow

The air, so thick you cut it with a knife
and houses waste like time itself
or space ships that have lost the ground

not sure if in this place
their time is long or short
this plain was once

the old sea
between two islands
was once

my dwelling
till the horizon lifted
to let us through

so I still wonder
how to write thick poetry?
how to chant for a thin place?

Taner Baybars

MIU SEQUENCE I–VIII

I. Threshed Straw on Milk

My sole lantern in the twilight of dreams, the sallow sensuousness of her skin, she sleeps at the corner of her pillow, but her pout remains on mine, jasmine. Underneath her eyelids, galaxies shift, while she's riding on wild quasars, spreading earthly straw to kindle a new nebula beyond the Milky Way, a sacrifice

in soulless void, or a void of unseeables, the Theo and the Logo drift apart. Now she's in her hive, her dreams smell of honey as I share them, the Queen. I enter her comb, the scent of hive dross, I confront the vision of love in her womb. Make the universe dark, her bright stars, the fluid energy, the soft magenta blood.

But we must both wake up, lest this become our permanent voyage, eternal spiral, descending and ascending on different rungs. I whisper into her flesh: Your eyes have seen all, now come back to me, come back to your wilting chrysanthemum.

II. Dewclaws on Grass

The time-tripper returns to an archaeology of memoirs, to her past that was her future before she left, and I stayed in her womb, terrified to make my presence known, her endless orgasm as she milked her way. Back to Earth, deflowered camomile in her hair, mint-hue eyes. Celandine.

She bears me out, her space child, her lover centuries old, the bearded babe, dying of old age. My eyes are open, shot with her blood, I give her back her pout. She gives me her teat, the γαλatic sustenance, life's flow to the finite universe, to cure me of wrinkles, brittle bones and occluded eyes; the vibrating trough.

I ask Miu, my lover, my mother, my nurse, to tell me what she saw outside me, whether her path crossed with His, on the day of His Ascension. No, she'd gone to a time long Before, where Life was only a Thought, alone, face to face with God.

III. Pentecost in Centaurus

Miu has discovered her quantum corridor, the fold in fold, forever unfolding,
star crumbs falling off stale spheres, baby galaxies smiling to celestial cameras...
Miu has skipped away leaving me on a marooned rock to incant the Chung Fu,
the truth in the second trigram, the nebulous Centre of St Augustine and Niels Bohr.

Shabuo harvest of hay at the Southern Cross, Christ preaches on Alpha Centauries;
the harvest route is sabotaged by Saul, Miu finds him hiding in a cluster, Omega...
I am the Beginning and the End. The Holy Spirit descends on the Centre. Quasar.
There are no flowers in space, no birds, Miu's tears cannot flow without graviton.

We embrace on the red rock, zeal hot, but quiet and reasonless. Oh, such peaaaaace!
She puts me into her pouch to give me back my years gained or perhaps lost in space,
but does it really matter where we end up, at what age? We are Alpha and
Omega. *Zut!*

IV. Intimations of Summer

Young girls in polka dress or tight jeans, push their children to pavement cafés, prim husbands with a neat moustache. Miu unbuttons the spots of a ladybird as it creeps down the bough of a magnolia. Early June, white petals, waxy sheen. Singing nettles in its shadow, furry little teeth searching a better shade of green.

All gone, the night in gale, the swoosh of wind in tired almond blooms. The News continues relentless, unsettling seasons, death has no season or politics a summer. Miu calls from the kitchen, her voice like a feast, to wolf on, with long chopsticks. While we crunch, almond milk on her throbbing thighs, the cock nightingale's screech.

Miu says, the universe hides in the seed of the hellebore, in the oyster's glair, Let's stay here, no need to go, see pretend happiness in cafés. Elves lie on dank grass teasing joy with nettle teeth, small garden infinite sky above, and choice air.

V. Hound Fire

Canicula, the hound. A wag-tail on the Canal du Midi picks at lunch crumbs on a house boat *La Tramontane*, still and sultry, the sky white with the heat. I lie on a concrete bench, cool, near the sluice gate, gushing water lulls the heart, the weir lock hisses, a dejected man sobs, I hear them both, my eyes closed.

Night dreams in noon-sleep, vagabondish, my time ship to Miu's golden sheep, she's fleecing stars and planets that float at the edges of the $\gamma\alpha$ -xy searching for the secret of life or after life lived and begun again from the end of the infinite. I wake up as the weir lock shuts and the canal surges on the other side. She's there.

I tell her my dream, how I follow her wherever she goes. My dream is my death and I can invent a world where I can will myself to be reborn, a corner in the multiverse. . . But I want to know *where* I come from, *beyond* the mother's womb, *before* Miu.

VI. Treasure Chest

I fold my shirts for the chest, I remember each one, worn for whom and where; the day, and the night I took it off. So many shirts all washed in the Milky Way, yet the cotton fabric retains what is timeless, beyond space. Even the scent is intact. I spread them out on the bed, will those nights come alive? Quantic magic? Is Miu.

She will unweave nothing, she'll take me nowhere in her chronocraft to visit old loves; suffer the joy again, or shed tears over sunken beds. Loitering in time is not her craft. Her marsupial pouch is not enough to contain me and my endless past, to swift through super dimensions. I wear all the shirts, and they vanish as I put them on, except the last.

Miu takes me on with her gift shirt, she'll take me to Celestarock where my future ends, while she continues to Wu-Li dance across the hidden universe to another infinity. But she'll come back to pick me up, my shirt in tatters. No stampede of Time on it.

VII. The Sound of Speeding Light

I search for the squirrel that hides all the hollow stars in the universe
hoping to feast on them when sucked into a black hole. Poor soft tail!
Then there are the Crabs in Twins, walking on feline Fire of ocean rocks,
waiting for the unruly tide to float them back to their void in the sky.

Miu steals the sound of the speeding light, inverse Prometheus. Stolen
oranges from the Black Hole, tossing between the juggle of now and never,
scattering their pips at Plato's feet. No longer in Pascal's infinite silence,
I throw yarrow sticks against fate, watch them fall endlessly on the *I Ching*,
and hear the shrieking novae. Miu rounds them up, whistling, to their pen.
Dwarf white dots, centuries in dying, crystal end. She cascades to our sleep-bag,
beach end, on wet sand, to see them from below, the innocent chrononaut...

VIII. The Eclipse

The Ego is the eclipse of Self, and Self is in the eclipse of Love,
 there are no memorial candles to show the way to where they all belong.
 Which side of the universe, if not beyond, under — or *a* universe
 We dream up to console our loneliness, play-school cut-outs, in colour.

She's off again, Miu, she now floats without her craft, sieving stardust,
 to let the small particles fall on our Selves, or Egos, centric to some nebula,
 and every shake of her sieve shatters yet another hope, yet another belief,
 stars or their dust are not our destiny, they feed on our endless Love.

Come, now, star-filled Miu, fill our tent with your hegemony of celestas,
 the key to the sea, Poseidon's vast den. Your astral midwifery is clapped
 by luminous nuggets of spheres still encrypted before the cast of Time.

(Originally published in *Tilki ve Çobanaldatan, Toplu Şiirler 1951–2001*, Çeviren: Gürgeç Korkmazel, YKY, İstanbul, 2007. Permission to publish original English version given by the University of Reading [Special Collections] and Susila Baybars. Thanks to Guy Baxter [archivist at the University of Reading] for his assistance.)