



international writers meeting

LOVE FOR OUR COUNTRY IN CYPRIOT POETRY

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Dear Friends,

Foreigners fall in love with Cyprus and we often wonder why. However we consider this quite natural and we ourselves are madly in love with our country although sometimes we carefully veil this weakness.

I will never forget a scene which occurred in London. We happened to be there on the tragic day of July 20, 1974. It was the first day of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and the well informed British television was already showing the Attila map with the present partition line. It was in a central London road right in the middle of the Cypriot community. A woman was sitting down. Wailing and sobbing she repeated:

"Oh my little island smallest of all the countries of the world. Oh what have you done to my little island...?" This woman as I learned later was away from Cyprus for thirty years and had no close relations in the island. Nevertheless ^{she} felt pain and distress for her little island as if she dispaired for the fate of her unprotected child.

Similar feelings about their little country possess the Cypriot poets and creators. This is perhaps the explanation for their unlimited love. What kind of love can be compared to the love of a mother towards her child and especially towards her little and unprotected child?

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If someone wanted to pick out a common characteristic of poetic creation of all the Cypriot poets, men and women, contemporary and older of whatever ideological creeds or artistic style, irrespective of age, origin or subject I think it could be the following: The love for the little country. Most of the times this love is expressed through the lyric description of her beauties.

Stasinos the first and most ancient poet of Cyprus gives the most surprising description of the colours which dominate the Cypriot landscape: yellow, blue, violet, rose and white. He describes Aphrodite's dress painted in spring flowers, crocus, hyacinths, violets, roses and anemones by her escorts the "Harites" and the "Ores". Efklós the diviner gave the following classic maxim:

"A poet will be born in Cyprus of the sea..."

Our demotic poetry straddles the centuries with pages of unprecedented beauty about nature and the vigour of the people of Cyprus and reaches us through the voice of our dialectic poet Pavlos Liasides who praises and mourns our enslaved country.

If you turn any page of a Cypriot poetic collection you will feel flooded by that wave of tenderness which culminates in the "Cypriot Symphony" of Theodosios Pierides or the stirring Verses of Tefkros Anthias. Other poets less expressive of their feelings, more reserved and epigrammatic like Costas Montis become elegiac prophets when they sing their loved one, Cyprus: Love of Cyprus was expressed in various ways according to the idiosyncrasy of each poet in the wake of the tragedy of 1974. Sometimes this love was expressed with powerful verses like handgrenades. Sometimes positioned behind symbolic street barricades hurling verses through filtered philosophic bitterness. Sometimes it challenges proudly and provocatively. We could add a series of names of good poets who preserve their personal style and have as a common subject the great drama of our country. However space and time do not allow us. We could also present good anthologies from poetic descriptions of the

beauties and hardships of our little country. Our poetry stands high notwithstanding the many problems of our poets. Let me at this juncture make a brief reference to our women's poetic contribution..

A woman's hand more sensitive to the touch of the poetic lyre, gives it a special kind of colour which starts from the tender hand a mother offers to her wounded child or the girl to her Fiancé who is a soldier and this colour goes as far as the curses of the wife of the missing husband on those who caused her suffering. These are poems often robust and impressive which do not lose their lyrical freshness. The beauty of the landscape increases the intensity of the tragedy and the blazing light intensifies the drama.

On the other side of the barbed wire we hear the echo of the poetic expression of the love of the Turkish Cypriots particularly the young ones, for a common country. The verse of the young Turkish-Cypriot poet Meshie Yiasin have become a song and a symbol.

"They say that man must
Love his country,
this is what my father
often tells me.
But my own country has been divided into two,
Which of the two parts should I love?"

Dear Friends,

The purpose of this short speech is not to evaluate anything. I would like to stress once more that besides one's poetic creation, besides any ideological or other differences among poets there exists something that joins us together: concern over our country's future. It is a concern deriving from the historical fate of this trouble some small island whose position has turned it into a bone of contention. The

recent events divided our island into two and escalated our agony because the problem we have to face now is one of survival of a very ancient civilisation which is threatened to disappear.

It is exactly this concern and feeling that are reflected in our poetry filling it with nostalgic images. Pentadactylos mountain range, Salamis, St. Helarion, Egomi, the deserted town of Famagusta, Kantara Castle, still open wounds, become beloved persons who wave their hands from a distance. The tight time limits, the need to hang on to something sure and stable are pushing us towards our roots. Ancient gods, legendary figures, become a contemporary entity. Our rich folkloric tradition suddenly appears before our startled eyes. Dispsied items, a wooden kneading-through, a stone mill, a basket, a water pot become tender ties with the earth and our childhood. We look for them thirstily among the load of super automatic machines that are around us. It is not a matter of loving antiquity or naturalism. It is a deep and pressing need which gives our poetry a social functions .

But it is not only the external features of our identity that attract the poet. His lense penetrates deeply into the soul of the people, searches for its inner elements and rejects the forged ones and the unnecessary ones. This is something difficult to do in our times of supersonic aircrafts and sattelite radio stations. Our language is another problematic matter, with idioms that are being lost, modified or absorbed. These are the problems that concern us as individuals or as a whole.

Meetings such as this one organised by the Cyprus P.E.N. help a lot in learning about other creators and exchanging views. We, as Cypriots, appreciate such meetings as they help us in a particular way. We are pleased, dear delegates, to have ypu with us for a few days, and we hope we pass on to you part of our incurable love for Cyprus.