

Dear Colleagues (Friends?)

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the* The subject at issue here is for us - one of the smallest but also most ancient peoples in Europe - more than merely interesting. Cyprus has suffered much in recent years. The worst of all its trials has of course been the invasion by a large foreign Country resulting in the division of the island in two and the raising of artificial barriers between its two communities, the Greek and the Turkish communities. But this is only the surface. Deeper down, these events were a deep stab on the body of a very ancient civilization, now in real danger of complete extinction.

Our people is struggling to solve its problem while simultaneously trying to keep itself alive, with its roots - or what is left of them - as its main support. About half of the population, namely 200.000 people, are refugees trying to find new roots for seven years now. Meanwhile, our poets have their visions; all our creative people are trying to march forward amidst the confusion and desperation in order to keep up with life as it runs ahead of them. The traces of the recent war are being eradicated under the footprints of thousands of tourists and the memories are drowned by the noise of the fighter planes from the British Military Bases. The television keeps bombarding us with American, British, Arab and Jewish programmes or whatever else might reach its antennae. Besides, a host of other languages can be heard in our shops, our hotels and streets, leaving their debris in our everyday language.

It is with painful nostalgia that we watch as the last vestiges of our national costumes are retreating before the onslaught of fashion and it hurts to see the impersonal, international so-called "comforts", cement, plastics, stainless steel re-placing the stone, wood and marble on which we have grown up. At the same time, it is also painful to see the ancient treasures of our heritage being auctioned by the invaders in the big capitals. All this is happening while we, small and defenceless still feel over us the threat of war hovering around the area.

It is not my intention to claim that Cyprus is the only target of this senseless confusion. However, being a small, problem-ridden place, it is natural for it to feel the consequences more acutely, running the risk of finding itself at the mercy of the various huge

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dangers surrounding it.

Here we can discern the role that can be played by critical thought in its broadest sense. It will help the creative artist as well as the receiving public to discover the essence among the multitude of extraneous elements, free the way towards the genuine roots by getting rid of the weeds and thorns. It can be the link joining the old to the new, the national to the universal, the eternal classic to the ephemeral modern.

The lack of critical thought in a small place plagued by political, social, ethnic problems assumes colossal proportions and creates a gap between the creator and his own people as well as between the creator and the outside world. I do not know whether the unjustified saying: "A critic is only an unsuccessful poet" is international; in our case, however, if only a few of our poets were critics, this would benefit themselves and poetry and our country. This is so not because of any lack of worthy poetical talent. On the contrary, I could unhesitatingly mention the names of more than ten excellent poets and another thirty names of good ones. Our modern poetry could easily compare with the poetry of any other country. Our poetry has its roots deep in the past, right down to the time of Homer and through the centuries they have been fertilised by what was left of the conquerors, travellers, pirates, pilgrims who have passed through the island. The beauty of the landscape, the mild climate, the colour, the fragrance, the sea and the warm mediterranean nature of the Cypriot find a wonderful outlet in poetry. If you add to all this the tragic and senseless fact of war - or rather wars which have - like a bad fate altogether inconsistent with the mild character of the people - been provoked by aliens, organised and executed by aliens, then poetry in its lyricism unavoidably assumes that very dramatic element which makes it doubly powerful, doubly felt.

This poetry, which in recent years has flourished on the various tragic stimuli is so little known to the world beyond the coasts of Cyprus. I dare say it is even little known in Greece itself and one of the basic reasons for this is the lack of criticism to raise it up out of obscurity and provide it with the necessary wings for its flight.

However, as I have mentioned above we also have another peculiarity.

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In the little space of 9 thousand square kilometres the two communities live completely apart, without any kind of contact. In order to emphasise the artificiality of the barriers between us I will tell you a story. I correspond - via another country - with a young Turkish-Cypriot poetess. We have never met even though we live less than 50 kilometres apart from each other. Despite that, we write to each other at this time when the telephone, telex and telegram seem to have made the writing of ten or twenty-page letters an anachronism. These letters are documents that could shake the comfortable armchairs of the gentlemen at the United Nations sitting and talking about "impasses" and "lack of understanding between Greek and Turkish Cypriots".

My friend writes to me:

" I feel I am a Cypriot. I feel the need to discover my roots, to study them. I ask my friends, the poets in Turkey: "Where do you find your roots?" They reply: "In the great classical poetry of Turkey". I study them too. However, I am Cypriot. I want to study my roots, those of Cyprus. And suddenly, I discover the gap that divides us. Where can I find the sources? I have no books, I do not speak Greek, I have nobody to help me".

I understand my Turkish-Cypriot friend. She has every right to consider herself a Cypriot. Her ancestry is older than that of the Canadians, The Australians the inhabitants of the United States. Nobody would dare tell the Canadians they are not Canadians or the Australians they are not Australians.

In conclusion, literary criticism could contribute to the solution of our so many tormenting problems, big and small. It could break yet another path, even an indistinct one initially, leading towards the mutual knowledge of the poetries of the two communities. It could, in other words, directly and indirectly play a political role by bringing closer the two communities now inevitably drifting further apart as time goes by.

My dear colleagues,

I would not like to ^{go} on tiring you with our own problems. All of us Cypriots are crazily and irrevocably in love with our little country. We feel for it not as a child feels for ~~xx~~ its mother but as a mother feels for its little helpless child. This is why issues like the one

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before us now, "The importance of literary criticism in the cultures of small countries" are burning issues for us. We believe that the salvation of our country depends not only on the peaceful solution of our problem but also on the preservation of our culture. And in the battle for the salvation of our culture the critics have to take their place in the front line and show the way.

It is a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to attend the International Literary Critics Union Congress, which gives the voice of the small countries the chance of being heard from such an important rostrum. I believe that the International Critics Union ~~the~~ can do a great deal to advance the "small literatures" and bring them out of obscurity. At this point I should like to stress the role of the Critics Union Journal and wish that it could come out more often and in a greater number of languages.

Finally I wish to thank our Spanish friends who have-with their warm hospitality - made this visit to their beautiful country an unforgettable experience.