

**A New Model for the Greek Labour Market – Labour Minister Effie Achtsioglou delivers Hellenic Observatory Annual Lecture**

**An Evening with the poet Titos Patrikios | Greek Poetry**

**25th of March : Greeks celebrate their National Day**

**«Under the Stars» - Contemporary Greek theatre in the UK**

**The Desert Behind, a multi-visual book combining Photography and Poetry**

**Book launch “Greece – Biography of A Modern Nation” by Roderick Beaton**

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**Agenda**

## A New Model for the Greek Labour Market – Labour Minister Effie Achtsioglou delivers Hellenic Observatory Annual Lecture



On the 22nd of March 2019, Effie Achtsioglou, Greek Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity delivered the 17th Hellenic Observatory Annual Lecture.

The Minister focused on the reforms regarding the Greek labour market and on the government's strategy towards sustainable and fair growth.

The Minister highlighted the importance of the steps taken towards regulating the Greek labour market and she presented the specific policies implemented from the current government, with a focus on the policies that have produced notable results on tackling unemployment and undeclared work, the increase of the minimum wage and the restoration of the principles of collective bargaining.

Ms Achtsioglou spoke about the urgent need to alleviate the major humanitarian crisis that led to the collapse of the Greek society during 2010-2014, and to pursue the recovery of the economy by reducing the skyrocketing unemployment.

She elaborated on the important steps taken by the government to create solid social safety nets for millions of people that had to deal with poverty and social exclusion. She argued that against the model of internal devaluation, the government opposed the model of socially fair and sustainable growth, in which wage growth and labour rights are not bottlenecks but prerequisites of economic growth.

Furthermore, she mentioned the achievements of the Ministry of Labour:

- The unemployment has decreased by more than 8 percentage points and it is a safe bet that it will continue to drop as the Greek economy is in a phase of strong and sustainable recovery and growth. The first signs of the labour market after the min wage increase are very encouraging. The month the min wage was increased, a record high in hirings was reported and the creation of new jobs proving wrong the counter argument that wage increases have a negative effect on employment.

*«If we truly want to target the cause of the far right rise, if we really want to target the reason behind public discontent, we need to proceed with a new regulation of labour market which would include wage growth. We need to work towards a strategy that combines labour market new regulation with upward wage convergence»*

- The implementation of a great pension reform
- The adoption and implementation of a great welfare review; under fiscal constraints we increased the budget of social welfare by three times and proceeded in important reforms that set the basis for a modern social state;
- The implementation of policies to fight child poverty: school meals, free nurseries, increased family benefits, the introduction of a new housing benefit as well as a rent subsidy to support not only the low but also the medium income households.

Thus, the government set the basis for solid social policy that was never there in the country, not in the pre crisis period.

Last but not least, speaking of the European project, the Minister spoke of the necessity of new regulation to be introduced as prerequisite for the continuation of the European project.

She argued that revolutionary reforms are needed focusing on those who have a weak voice both on national and European level: youth, precarious, immigrants. These are the reforms that will reshape the concept of social rights as political rights. Ms Achtsioglou pointed out that the recent crisis has taught us that our responsibility is not to defend the past, but to think in adventurous ways about the future. To work on a common strategy that will render visible those that are invisible now, those that were invisible also in the past and through the protection of their employment to make them dynamic agents of modern social rights, the main actors of our political future in Europe. This is the only way the European project can gain democratic legitimacy and support. This is ultimately the only way we can safeguard our common future in Europe.



## An Evening with the poet Titos Patrikios | Greek Poetry

«You cannot have your own place nor your own poetry without your own language», Titos Patrikios



In honour of the renowned Greek poet Titos Patrikios, a retrospective of his much-celebrated poetic career took place on Sunday 10th March, at the Hellenic Centre, London, complete with audiovisual material and the participation of esteemed guests, among which the poet himself.

The Hellenic Centre hosted an outstanding cultural event on March 10th, 2019 to honor the life and the works of the acclaimed Greek poet Titos Patrikios, who has recently celebrated his goth birthday. The event was organized by the Greek Library of London and the Hellenic Hub, in collaboration with the Poetry Office (Γραφείον Ποιήσεως), under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Culture and the Hellenic Authors' Society. The Press and Communication Office of the Embassy of Greece supported the communication and publicity of the event.

The poet himself attended the cultural event, which combined greetings from the deputy ambassador of Greece and acclaimed British scholars, a documentary on his life, live readings of his poems, music, an interview with Patrikios by the Poetry Office's director and a conversation with the audience. The evening was presented by Anastasia Revi, theatre director and artistic director of the Theatre Lab Company.

Titos Patrikios is the only living Greek poet of the first post-war generation to remember and portray in his poems key historical events such as the German occupation, the national resistance and the Greek civil war.

The deputy Ambassador of Greece to London, Nikos Papageorgiou opened the event underlying in his address, that "Titos Patrikios maintains a direct, unmediated relationship" with the events of history. Poetry, he said, is set to "undermine certainties" and is "a benefaction in perpetuity that will always come to everyone's life, no matter when or where". Antonis Schiathas, director of the Poetry

Office argued that the event is to honor a poet with an international mark, who "knows how and why to use words".

Roderick Beaton, Emeritus Koraes Professor of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature at London's Kings College, described Titos Patrikios as "a great survivor of Greek poetry", who expresses a hint of survivor's guilt and continues incessantly to channel all his experiences gathered in the course of nine decades in his verses. David Ricks, Professor of Modern Greek and Comparative Literature at the Kings College, said that the Greek poet has never stopped the struggle to shed light on our lives, and he expressed the hope that more of Patrikios' works would be translated into English, by his next birthday.

The honorary evening also included a screening of a biographical documentary on Titos Patrikios' early years and poetic trajectory. The film included references to his first poetic attempts in childhood written whilst on a summer camp, his childhood memories from Sifnos, his exile in Makronisos and Ay-Stratis, his long stay in Paris and then in Rome. «You cannot have your own place nor your own poetry without your own language» he concluded pointing to the importance of language as a means to build identity and enable creativity.

Poems by Titos Patrikios were recited in Greek and in English, by John Kittmer, Former Ambassador of Britain to Greece, by Dr. Dimitra Tzanidaki – Kreps, actor and Lecturer in Modern Greek Studies, at Reading University and by the writer Konstantinos Alsinos.

Music was an integral part of the event and the audience enjoyed melodies improvised at the piano by the Italian composer Antimo Magnotta.

At a conversation with Antonis Skiathas, director of the Poetry Office, Titos Patrikios gave a short account of his meeting with the great Greek poet Yannis Ritsos during their exile at the isle of Ay Srtatis. Ritsos had then told Patrikios that "poetry was his destiny", he encouraged Patrikios to continue writing poetry and he advised him to remove from his poems "half of what he writes", a piece of advice Patrikios has always kept in mind.



*The Deputy Head of Mission Mr. Nikolaos Papageorgiou with the Poet Titos Patrikios*

Patrikios also talked about his quick encounter with the legendary Greek poets Kostis Palamas and Aggelos Sikelianos.

Answering to questions addressed by the audience, Titos Patrikios argued that the small readership of poetry is due both to the difficulty of capturing and assimilating poetry, as this requires some effort on the part of readers, but it is also due to the fact that for a very long period - at least in Greece - poetry was "imprisoned" onto paper. "Fortunately, in recent years we have seen a lot of public readings in Greece", he said. Commenting on the necessity and faithfulness of translation to the original literary works, Patrikios admitted that, although translated poetry and literature do not attribute

100% of a poet's perception, without translation the international audience would never have known great literary and poetic masterpieces such as the Iliad, the Divine Comedy or Shakespeare.

The great Greek poet was also honored by the young generation. A group of ten A Level students representing St Sophia's School attended the honorary event, and expressed their admiration for the poet offering him the last issue of the school magazine, where they had presented one of his poems.

Titos Patrikios thanked the organizers, key participants and all the attendants warmly and signed the books that were bought by participants on site.

## Participation of the "Aghia Sophia School" in the event honouring Titos Patrikios

On Sunday 10th, a ten member committee of the "Aghia Sophia School" participated in the event honouring our great poet Titos Patrikios. The students, amidst a room full of people and a very moving atmosphere, went confidently on stage, discussed with the poet and gifted him with a copy of their last year's school magazine, where they had presented one of his poems. Once more, they made us proud. Well done to the children!



## Poet Titos Patrikios talks to @GreeceInUK

1. *You were invited to London by the Greek Library of London, the Hellenic Hub and the Poetry Office. What does it mean for you to be here?*

It means a lot. First of all, it is a pleasure to find myself in a city which I have known relatively well. Each time I return to London there is something new to discover. That is a invaluable experience.

Furthermore, I cannot fail to mention that I am satisfied by the recognition of my work, which is the best feeling for a writer. It is even more rewarding when this appreciation comes not just from a stricto sensu cultural institution, but from organizations representing Greeks abroad. I was particularly impressed by the keen interest shown by the Greek Embassy; it is not something that happens often, so it is particularly gratifying.

2. *The students of the school "Aghia Sophia" studied your poems and dedicated their school magazine to your work. What were your feelings when they gave it to you last night?*

That was another moment of satisfaction last night! Unfortunately, I haven't yet managed to find the time to read it. My first impression is that it has an aesthetically pleasing front page.

3. *Yesterday, you heard your poems being recited in both Greek and English. Did they sound "strange" or familiar to you in English? Do you believe that poetry can be translated?*

Not only poetry can, but also it should be translated in order for the different cultures to communicate with each other. Without translation, we cannot get to know each other. I will give you an example; if it hadn't been for translation, would we have known anything about Shakespeare? Would English people have known about Homer or about the ancient Greek tragic poets? The same applies to contemporary poets; would we have known Goethe or Dante? Therefore, translation is a necessity.

**"Not only poetry can, but also it should be translated in order for the different cultures to communicate with each other"**

**"Language is what keeps up connected with one another and with our past, and offers a step into the future. Without our language, we feel orphaned and 'naked'"**

4. *In the documentary, which was screened during yesterday's event, you mentioned that one cannot write poetry unless using their own language. Would you ever consider writing poetry in a different language?*

No. That is because firstly I would have to learn the language in such perfection so as to be able to express my deepest feelings in it, and secondly because I would have to decide to cut ties with Greece. Language is what keeps up connected with one another and with our past, and offers a step into the future. Without our language, we feel orphaned and "naked".

I have written many things in French, including two books which were published a long time ago by UNESCO and were translated to English, Russian and Spanish -the official languages of the United Nations. Later, when I was working for another United Nations organization in Rome, I wrote two books on development issues in English. All of them had a sociological basis. When it comes to poetry, though, I have never written a single verse in a foreign language.

5. *During last night's event, you mentioned that your first experience with poetry was while you were in a summer camp. Do you remember the first poem you wrote there?*

I was eight years old at the time. We were taken to the beach disciplined in a military way. The supervisor would blow a whistle to indicate when we should get in and out of the sea. In addition, all the candy given to us by our parents were taken by the director and were stored away. Then, she would gradually give them to us in smaller portions, so we wouldn't eat everything in one go. All these things made me feel so suppressed.

That summer camp was located in Voula, it was called Zirineio institute and it had its own anthem. When we were going to the beach, we had to sing the anthem just like little soldiers. The anthem went

**“One thing that I wrote while in Makronisos was a letter reporting everything that was going on there, which I secretly passed it on to my mother... This brought very bad consequences on me. They pestered me a lot and interrogated me for 16 hours; two sets of 8 hours because the people who interrogated me were getting tired, so they were taking turns. In the meanwhile, I was forced to stand on my feet during the whole time...”**

like this: “What a great time and what a great life we have, here at Zirineio, a palace full of light” and I changed it to “What an awful time and what a bad life we have, here at Zirineio, a palace full of darkness”. Those were the first lyrics I had ever written. They were a parody of the original lyrics.

Still to this day, I continue making sarcastic or satirical verses. Every time I recite them, a friend of mine, who is a Cypriot philologist, collects them and jokingly threatens me that she would eventually publish them!

*6. What did poetry mean to you during the years of your exile in Makronisos and Ay-Stratis?*

In Makronisos the living was so bad, or if I may say hard and barbaric, that I didn't have the chance to write poetry; but I accumulated many experiences.

One thing that I wrote while in Makronisos was a letter reporting everything that was going on there, which I secretly passed it on to my mother. She gave it to a newspaper and then it got published on the front page: “The atrocities of Makronisos”. This brought very bad consequences on me. They pestered me a lot and interrogated me for 16 hours; two sets of 8 hours because the people who interrogated me were getting tired, so they were taking turns. In the meanwhile, I was forced to stand on my feet during the whole time, in order to confess that I had written the letter and to be sent to a military trial; I don't want to bother you with more details.

Later and after having accumulated many more experiences, I wrote a few poems about my time in Makronisos, some of which were published much later. One of them has the title “Drafts for Makronisos”, because I was planning to create a big,

synthetic poem. That didn't happen though, so the small drafts remained and got translated in many different languages.

*7. Would you like to talk about your acquaintance to Giannis Ritsos and about how it influenced your poetry?*

He had a very positive impact on me and I am forever grateful for everything he had to offer: he reconciled me with poetry from which I had been alienated, he taught me important things about poetry and writing, such as how someone can condense their writing or learn to cut down on words. He was always telling me that the most difficult thing is not writing but cutting down on what you had already written. He told me that anything you write should be worked and reworked at least 20 times, so that you can realize it has been completed.

I remember him telling me to be careful with adjectives, which are the biggest trap for a writer; we tend to overly accumulate adjectives in order to describe something better, which however might actually have the adversary effect. It renders the writing exaggerated and empty. Thus, a successfully chosen adjective is an exceptionally vital thing.

He also told me to be careful with abstract nouns, because overusing them often leads to a sort of pompous rhetoric. Abstract nouns such as justice, freedom, frustration, desire, should be handled carefully. Listening to and absorbing all these things, is an invaluable learning experience for a young person.

From that perspective, I will never stop mentioning how greatly indebted I am to Ritsos. But I should also say –there is no point in hiding it since it is well

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known now- that there was a deep rift between us and from then on, we never saw each other again. Maybe, I was too absolute. But in retrospect, I realize we need to do what psychologists define as "killing our father". In order to be emancipated and obtain our independence and autonomy, we need to kill the "father", this icon in which we believed, in order to be free and move towards our own path. On the other hand, such a thing can be destructive; but everything in life is a risk.

Every once in a while, we have to make choices. It doesn't mean that you will choose rightly every time, however you must choose. I have often ended up being upset about many of my choices. And let me tell you a detail. The years after Metapoliteusi (political changeover), many common friends told me that Giannis (Ritsos) was really sad: "why doesn't Titos visit me anymore?". When they told me this I got really sad too, but it was too late to make amends for this gap.

*8. Which were some of the greatest influences for your poetry?*

There are many. I got my first influence when I started writing at 12 years old (12-13): the occupation had begun, the vibe was revolutionary, everybody was against the occupants and I was reading a lot. I was reading Valaoritis, because I knew his work "The Rock and the Wave" from school. I was reading a lot of Valaoritis, for instance "Foteinos" trying to write like him myself and express my feelings of patriotism.

Soon, Valaoritis was not enough for me. I read Palamas a lot and I knew "Dodekalogos" by heart. Then, I started reading lyrical poetry and, to this day, I know poems of Gryparis by heart. My greatest

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revelation was Karyotakis. Karyotakis thrilled me and when my poet aunt Lilly Iakovidou gave me his collection of poems to read, I kept it and never gave it back to her -like a mischief. But sometimes when you do something inappropriate, then someone else does the same to you; when I gave the collection to a friend of mine, he didn't give it back either!

Then at the age of 14-15, I discovered Kavafis. Yet another thrill. Mostly because I felt I was doing a liberating -almost revolutionary- act, since at the time both Karyotakis and Kavafis were rejected. They were condemned with the same arguments, both by the right and the left (political ideology). The reason was them being pessimists and morbid; Kavafis was homosexual which was considered unacceptable and Karyotakis was glorifying death and disease, leading to dead ends. So out of reaction, I constantly sought to read them again and again. Actually, the poems of Kavafis were hard to find. I remember there was an edition with a nice illustration, which I found at a kiosk that someone has turned into a bookstore. I told the owner that I would buy it, but it was so expensive that I had to gather pocket money from my father and my aunts. Unfortunately, when I went back three days later to buy it, he told me that I was late and that he had sold it already.

*9. Each time you start writing a poem, what triggers you to write?*

When I am writing, it is like something is pouring out of me, and it is happening imperceptibly. In retrospect, however, I realized that other great people and great poets have codified this process of writing.

Ritsos was saying to me that you need to write every day. One thing that struck me about Ritsos was his hard work. I have never seen a more hard-working person in writing. On a daily basis from morning till 1 p.m, he would write no matter what. I admit that I couldn't be so hard working. I was eager to stop writing every time a friend would ask me out for a walk or to hang out with girls, in which case I would stop everything I was doing and I would join him. I never managed to be consistent in writing.

I once read a text of Mayakovsky in French, about how to write lyrics. I translated it from French and it was published in the "Art Review" (Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης), a magazine we used to issue from 1954 and on. Mayakovsky argues that we should always keep a notepad with us in order to write down every thought, idea and observation that comes to mind.

**“Take this table. It has no particular meaning. However, if you start observing it , you start thinking several things, like which was the forest where the tree was cut, which was the construction office that produced the plank, who were the workers, the lumberjacks, the carpenters, the constructors of this desk, the transporters and also how it reached you, or maybe who else before you have written, eaten, chatted or quarreled face to face at this table. You can produce a million thoughts and observations from this inanimate object”**

From then on, we will work on it and it might turn out to be a poem or something else. But always keep a notepad.

Recently, I read a text by Alki Zei in which the writer mentions that Chekhov had also pointed out something similar about observing things and writing down your observations. It is something that Ritsos also used to say: anything might give you inspiration to write as long as you observe it. He used the following example: Take this table. It has no particular meaning. However, if you start observing it , you start thinking several things, like which was the forest where the tree was cut, which was the construction office that produced the plank, who were the workers, the lumberjacks, the carpenters, the constructors of this desk, the transporters and also how it reached you, or maybe who else before you have written, eaten, chatted or quarreled face to face at this table. You can produce a million thoughts and observations from this inanimate object. Chekhov has said the same thing, as mentioned by Alki Zei. By observing a glass ashtray, you start thinking about where the glass came from, how the glass was made, who used the ashtray.

Recently, I have been reading about a big biography of Leonardo Da Vinci that was published in the USA. The biographer studied the million manuscripts of Da Vinci and he found out that 500 years ago he was talking about the need to observe, to write down your observation and then to think on what you have written.

*10. Have you ever felt that words are not enough to express yourself?*

No. The difficult part is to find the right word. There lies the difficulty. Words are there; the problem is to find them.

I like something Flaubert said, who was not a poet but a great writer: “I might spend one week looking for the right word”. If you don’t find the right word, the poem will simply not happen at all. That is why the last years I have been comparing a poem to a bridge. A poem is similar to a bridge which needs every stone to be put at the right place in order to not fall apart. If you don’t find the right word and put it in the right place the poem collapses.

A way to judge if a poem is good or not is to see whether you can move the words around. If the words cannot be moved, then it is a good poem, otherwise it is not a good one; or at least, it is not perfect. We shouldn’t forget that the Greek language combines the word “telos” (end) with “teleiōtita” (perfection). Therefore, a poem or any work of art cannot be perfect, unless it has a closure, unless it has a “telos” (i.e an end), and that end should be “immovable”. You can see that all the beautiful, great poems which we often refer to have an end that cannot be “moved” not even a millimeter further.

*11. Pondering about the whole of your work, from your poems during the years in exile to your recent ones, do you make any observations as regards their format and content?*

In retrospect, I observe that I have been through many different phases, which is a necessary process. In other words, you can’t stay stuck in anything, as you will soon discover something new and then you will have to find a new way of expressing it.

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**“The future seems very difficult.  
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I have often said to myself: “how come you published these things, they are not important”. Some of the things that I published might strike me later as not great. That is why I believe that even if 10% of what I published survives, it will be a really important thing.

On the other hand, I say to myself: “look at this great past accomplishment, which I hadn’t realised”. So every now and then, I review the things I have written and I either feel sad or pleased.

*12. Are there any young Greek or foreign poets that you appreciate?*

There are many good female and male poets among the younger generations. I read foreign poets much less now. I used to read them much more when I was living in Paris or in Rome.

*13. You have lived many years abroad, but what does “homeland” mean to you?*

I am not at all a nationalist. I loathe nationalism. However, my homeland is Greece, I love my country without being nationalist or -even worse- chauvinist. I honor other people’s homelands. But Greece is my homeland, Greek is my language, my family is Greek. I also have many friendships with foreign people -fraternal friendships-, so every time I go abroad I don’t know which one of my friends’ houses to choose from to stay!

However, let me confess something. The year before last, I thought of going to Venice for two months in order to write a book. And then I said to myself: “Venice is the most magical city in the world but you cannot stay more than a week, because it is so melancholic that you will get depressed”. If I stay for two weeks all alone in an apartment in Venice, I will end up jumping in the canal. So I didn’t go!

*14. What do you think about the Greek society nowadays and are you optimistic about the future of Greece?*

The future seems very difficult. However, I am suffering from an incurable disease: incurable optimism! That is why I think that despite all these difficulties, problems and miseries, we will persevere. We shouldn’t sink in pessimism which leads to depression. Depression is the worst think that can

happen to you. That is why I often tell my friends: depression is forbidden by penalty of lacerations!

*15. You have lived in Athens during different historic moments. Which is the side of Athens that you love the most?*

It is Athens where I currently live every moment. There isn’t a more dangerous thing than reminiscing about the past and wanting to return to the past. That is impossible to happen. Nostalgia is only about the place.

Once in Paris, I met with a French linguist, with whom we followed the same seminars. One day he asked me “What is the origin of the word nostalgia?” Nostalgia, he said, is a word invented by a Swiss-Alsatian psychiatrist in 1700. He cured some of the Pope’s Swiss guards in the Vatican, who were suffering from dullness while living in Rome, because they were nostalgic about the Swiss mountains. The guards were mentally ill, so they went to this doctor who -based on their mental condition- picked two Greek words, combined them and created the word nostalgia. So, the word nostalgia exists from 1700 and on. Before, it was non-existent. As yet, I was convinced that it was an Homeric word, which spread around the world and became international. But it was this psychiatrist who gave us this gift!

*16. You have lived a long life intertwined with crucial moments of Greek history, which you have experienced as an active political being. Looking back to these moments, what do you cherish as an invaluable living experience?*

The fact that I was able, under certain difficult and crucial circumstances, to remain true to my beliefs . In retrospect, most of my beliefs were proved wrong but this doesn’t make me regret what I did. In the end what matters is being consistent with what you believe and what you say; not saying things and then acting differently. I see that this is the case for many people. I don’t want to pretend I am the exception, however the worst thing that they could accuse me of is being “two-faced”; that is to say other things privately and other in public, to say something else here and act differently there.

**“In the end what matters is being  
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**“I believe that the great power of poetry and Art in general is that they can bring people together. They make people communicate and they connect them. The great power of politics, on the other hand, is that it divides people. That, however, is not a terrible thing, considering that democracy is about the existence of various contradicting opinions”**

*17. You have been through both destructive periods and periods of growth and visionary spur, which defined politics as a tool to transform the world and conquer a collective happiness. What do you think about politics today, in Greece and globally?*

I believe that the great power of poetry and Art in general is that they can bring people together. They make people communicate and they connect them. The great power of politics, on the other hand, is that it divides people. That, however, is not a terrible thing, considering that democracy is about the existence of various contradicting opinions. Without different opinions, different currents and ideological conflicts, there is no democracy; there is totalitarianism.

However, we should not identify politics with culture. I believe that both politics and culture (in Greek: politismos) are necessary. After all the etymology is common. They both originate from the word “polis”. However, if I am not mistaken, the word “politismos” is not ancient; it was construed by Korais. I believe that art and poetry should also deal with the political problems and the political activity of people, but without becoming political instruments. In that case, they destroy themselves.

*18. Despite having left-wing political opinions ever since you were very young, there was a moment when you were criticized by people from your political spectrum. During these moments, did you ever feel that you don't belong anywhere?*

“To belong” can be correlated, as we say in Legal science, to physical possession. For example, this phone belongs to me, so it is my property, it is mine. In the light of this, during a certain fairly mature period -I was not a little boy- I rejected every notion of belonging. Because belonging somewhere means turning yourself into an object possessed by another force. In this sense, I stopped “belonging”.

Similarly, when I was mature enough, I rejected the notion of faith. Faith especially when it comes to civilization/culture as well as politics can lead to absolute religious faith; to the existence of the absolute good and the absolute evil; that I hold the truth and the other person holds the lie. Thus, I who possess the truth must obliterate the other one who lies. I came to the realization that all these are symptoms of totalitarian institutions and regimes. From this perspective, I rejected them, although I risked being left alone. But eventually, I see that I am not entirely alone after all.

*19. You are a citizen with strong political convictions, which you have expressed publicly many times. Why wasn't poetry enough for you as a form of expression and you preferred to directly express your political opinion?*

It is a good thing to express yourself by using the “means” and the “language” you have chosen, but when a crucial moment comes, you should not avoid exposing yourself, speaking your mind and facing up to the consequences of your opinion. Otherwise, you makes peace with everyone and you are always on top; however, if you are on top of a horse and you fall, you go to hell!

*20. During the event we heard three different poems about the same topic; death. What are your thoughts about death?*

It is something that, no matter what we do, we can't avoid. At least, we can define it by describing it and release ourselves from the stress. The most horrible thing about death is not that we will die, as we are destined to die. Life is not eternal. The horrible thing is that people we love will die and there lies the big suffering. Our death is absolutely natural, but our loved ones' death is terrible, especially if they are young and dear.

**“‘To belong’ can be correlated to physical possession. ....**

**In the light of this, I rejected every notion of belonging. Because belonging somewhere means turning yourself into an object possessed by another force. In this sense, I stopped ‘belonging’”**



Antonis D. Skiathas studied Chemical Engineering. Nowadays he lives and works in Patras, Greece. He is a poet, anthologist of poems and literary critic. He has published ten poetic books: *Border cemetery* (1983), *The horse of the waves* (1990), *The horse of the waves - Boarder cemetery* (1992), *Summer Windsock* (1993), *Fantasies of a walker* (1996), *Hail, Century* (2002), *Traces of people* (2006), *Poems - Summary* (2006), *Spring Eros Anniversary* (2008), *Hospitable City* (2010), *Evgenia* (2016). Poems of him have been included in Greek and international anthologies, and have been translated into eleven languages. His articles and essays on poetry and history have been published in journals and newspapers. He was co-director of the literary journal *Ελίτροχος* during the '90s. He is a member of the Greek Society of Writers and the Poets' Circle. He founded and is the administrator of the cultural action "Grafeion Poiiseos". Antonis Skiathas gave an interview to @GreeceInUK during his visit in London.

1. *Mr. Skiathas, could you tell us a few words about what is the Poetry Office and what are its main activities?*

The Poetry Office is a cultural institution that seeks to register study and serve poets and poetry. The Office has a committee of literature critics, philologists collaborating with universities and university professors and it is promoting poetry, with a view to communicating it as well as making it more approachable to the general public. At the same time, it promotes the organization of poetry events abroad throughout the year. Our collaboration with the Greek Library of London showcases exactly that; we made an event about Titos Patrikios in London, the equivalent of which had already taken place in Patras.

2. *How did you come up with the idea for this collaboration in London?*

The Greek Library of London is promoting Greek literature, thus it was an institution capable of communicating about it. All we did was reach out to them, make the proposition, organize the structure of the event and talk to the Ministry of Culture in Greece in order to be under the auspices of the Culture Minister, Ms. Zorba.

Considering at the same time that Titos Patrikios and I are poets and members of the Greek Writers Association -in fact, Titos Patrikios is one of the

founding members-, I put the suggestion forth and we got the support of the Association which embraced the event with much pleasure. That is how we found ourselves in London to discuss the poetry of Titos Patrikios. The principal aim of this event was to demonstrate his poetic work and his social identity, considering that he has been socially active since the second half of the 20th century, as well as to discuss with important Hellenists like Beaton and Ricks who work on Greek literature and poetry.

All these gave us great satisfaction and contributed to the success of the event, which had a structured course and brought forth a discussion about the work of the poet and his biography, as well as texts about his poetry from important Hellenists.

3. *What was the reaction of the institutions here in London about the idea of the event?*

Personally I believe that this type of events are missing from Greece, so each and every one of us did their best to honor the poet and the Greek language. That is why the Greek Ministry was present by providing their auspices, as well as all the Members of the Greek Embassy, which shows their appreciation for the idea of the event. Also, the Greek Library of London and the Poetry Office from Greece were there to discuss with an audience from another country. At the same time, we owe a big thank you to the people that filled the room. The most

impressive thing was that they didn't just attend but they wanted to substantially communicate with the poet; as you saw, most of the books that came from Athens were gone by the end of the evening.

*4. Are you going to organize something else in London? Should we expect you back soon?*

Since this collaboration has already begun, I think you will receive the action plan of the Poetry Office in London very soon, which will include specific activities and suggestions about Greek literature and poetry.

*5. Could you also tell us about the activities you are organizing in Greece?*

The Poetry Office is organizing weekly the poetic portrait of a contemporary poet. Until now, we have presented 111 Greek poets and these portraits are compiled to one volume on an annual basis. So we have the 1st volume of 2017 and we are preparing the volumes of 2018 and 2019. At the same time, we organize two major meetings every year in Athens

and Patras, as an international meeting opportunity for poets from all over the world to discuss poetry. Also, this year we organize for the first time a meeting of young poets, which is going to take place in Patras as well.

In a month's time we will have the Jean Moreas awards, which are awards for Greek poetry and honor the best book of the year, the best book of a first-published poet and a poet for the totality of his work. In the working group, there are university professors, critics and poets who participate in the nomination of the books. Last year the biggest award went to the poet Katerina Aggelaki-Rouk, the one for the best book of the year went to Dimitra Christodoulou and the one for first-published poet went to two poets, Tonia Botonaki and Valia Tsaita-Tsilimenei who is a lecturer in Geneva.



*Antonis Skiathas with Titos Patrikios during the event in London*

## Η ΓΛΩΣΣΑ ΜΟΥ

Τη γλώσσα μου δεν ήταν εύκολο να  
 τη φυλάξω  
 ανάμεσα σε γλώσσες που πήγαιναν να  
 την καταβροχθίσουν  
 όμως στη γλώσσα μου συνέχιζα πάντα  
 να μετράω  
 στη γλώσσα μου έφερνε το χρόνο στα  
 μέτρα του κορμιού  
 στη γλώσσα μου πολλαπλασίαζα την  
 ηδονή ως το άπειρο  
 μ' αυτή ξανάφερνα στο νου μου ένα  
 παιδί  
 με άσπρο σημάδι από πετριά στο κουρεμένο  
 του κεφάλι.  
 Πάσχιζα να μη χάσω ούτε μία της  
 λέξη  
 γιατί σ' αυτή τη γλώσσα μου μιλούσαν  
 κι οι νεκροί.

## MY LANGUAGE

*It wasn't easy to preserve my language  
 amid languages that tried to devour it  
 but I went on counting in my language  
 I reduced time to the dimensions of the body with my language  
 I multiplied pleasure to infinity with my language  
 with it I brought back to mind a child  
 with a white scar on his cropped head where a stone had hit it.  
 I strove not to lose even a word of it  
 for in this language the dead spoke to me.*

## 25th of March : Greeks celebrate their National Day



The 25th of March is a double celebration for Greeks: a historical and a religious one. Greeks celebrate the Revolution and the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire, which was declared in 1821 and resulted in the liberation of Greeks from the Ottomans and in the creation of the independent state of Greece. On the same day the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary that she should become the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.



The Greek-Orthodox Diaspora of United Kingdom and Ireland has this year honoured the National Day of the Independence War, with multiple celebrations and speeches in Greek and Cypriot schools and community schools and doxologies in all Greek orthodox churches of the UK.

### Sunday 24th March: Doxology

The traditional official Doxology for the anniversary of the Revolution of 1821 took place on Sunday March 24th, at the Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom in London, officiated by Bishop Athanasios of Tropaion. A great number of Greeks living at or visiting London attended the 25th March Doxology which marks a great Anniversary for all Greeks of Diaspora. Pupils from the Greek nursery and primary school dressed uniformly in blue and white or wearing traditional folk costumes and holding Greek flags along with their teachers attended the ceremony. Members of the Greek and Cypriot diplomatic missions and armed forces officials appointed to the missions in the UK attended the Doxology.

At the Doxology, the Archbishop's Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain Encyclical on the Anniversary of 25th March 1821 was read to the congregation:

#### Encyclical on the occasion of the anniversary of the 25th March 1821

*In the name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of the Greek State existing under the horrid ottoman dynasty, being unable to suffer the unbearable and unprecedented yoke of tyranny and having rejected it through great sacrifices, declares today through its legitimate representatives at the gathered National Assembly, before God and men, its political existence and independence.*

*Epidavros 1st January 1822 and 1st year of the Independence*





Photos Courtesy :

The Greek Revolution of 1821, the third successful Revolution in Europe and the first in the Balkans, is the only one of the revolutions of modernity that did not break out spontaneously but on the basis of a plan designed and organised by a political entity, a secret organisation, the Friendly Society. The goals of the Fight for Independence, its values and its central message 'Freedom or Death', adhering to the French model, caused a critically serious rift in the fragmented identities of the Ottoman rule, thus suggesting to the rayā (subjugated subject), a new National and liberal identity, that of the Greek.

The Revolution of 1821 comprises part of that ecumenical dynamic of the great social and political currents of modernity, the clashes and revolutions which swiftly led almost all of the European peoples to the radical overthrow of the Regime Ancien and the irrevocable transformation of its unbearable suppression. The Struggle for liberation of 1821, now accepted in the historiography as a European Event 'constitutes the most European instance of the Greek history' as Spyros Asdrachas writes. But it also constitutes a unique Event for the Ottoman Empire itself, since it comprises the bridge and guiding path connecting it to the fringes of European Modernity.

Starting from the quotation in the beginning, we can say that the first National Assembly, with its declarations and voted motions institutionally crystalizes the meanings and ideals of Freedom and of National Independence of the revolted Greeks, thus underscoring the need of acquiring a modern and self-determined homeland within the confines of the Greek State. Into the forming admix of the Revolution have gone, in confluence and many times in contradiction, ideas of the Enlightenment, the pains and sorrows of the rayā, commercial ambitions with utopian ideations, popular myths with political initiatives, progressive enlightenment of a reactive tradition and vice versa. All those elements make up and inspire all kinds of revolutionary subjects, who, in a completely surprising manner, converge to light the spark of the Revolt.

Enlightened teachers, merchants and traders, revolting world monks and armed priests, donors and benefactors and politically expedient Phanariots, all those and many others fall in under the revolutionary banners and claim their collective ideal, the Homeland – Nation. Naturally, the prototype and inspiration of the Struggle for Independence was the age-old struggle of the freedom of Mankind from the enslaving shackles of the Fall, the maximally celebrated greeting from the Lord's Angel

descending from the heavens 'to say to the God-bearer, Rejoice'. This feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God, of the other unique liberation, we also celebrate today. To those two great anniversaries of Hellenism, another 'rejoice' is added, taken from the 'Ode to Freedom', our National Anthem, sung by the fighters and the youth of the Cypriot Epic of 1955-1960, whose official beginning on 1 April 1955 we officially celebrate in our motherlands and in the diasporas of our toil.

During these days, as is customary in our own Community every year, the official Te Deum of the National Rebirth will take place on Sunday 24 March 2019 at the Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom London, His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain, presiding. The address of the day will be delivered by His Excellence Mr Demetrios Karamitsos-Tziras, Ambassador of Greece. Similar celebrations will be held across all our Churches and Schools to honour this magnificent Anniversary and reference will be made to the Heroes of the Fight for Independence. Please note that the general Celebration of the 25 March 1821 and 1 April 1955 will be celebrated by the Greek Diaspora in the United Kingdom on Sunday 31 March 2019 at 3:30 pm at Ashmole Academy, Cecil Rd, Southgate, London N14 5RS with Dr Kypros Nikolaidis, Professor of Prenatal Medicine as the main speaker. We are looking towards seeing each and every one of you in these celebrations with joy and wishing you health and happiness during the rest of the Holy period of the Great Lent, I remain, with blessings in the Lord and honour.

London, 25 March 2019  
Archbishop Gregorios  
of Thyateira and Great Britain

After the Doxology, the Address of the Day was delivered by HE the Ambassador of Greece in Great Britain, Mr Dimitrios Caramitsos-Tziras who commented on the messages the National Day conveys to contemporary Greeks. The key points of his speech are as follows:

#### Extracts from the speech by HE Greek Ambassador Mr. Dimitris Caramitsos-Tziras addressed to the congregation at the 25th March Anniversary

Today celebrates anniversary of the revolution, the resurrection of the nation and the creation of the Modern Greek state. The 198th anniversary of the National Day, is a source of national pride and inspiration for every Greek. The revolution of 1821 broke out under unfavorable circumstances, at a time when the existing geopolitical balance and alliances between the big powers of the time did not constitute fertile ground for a Greek national revolution. Despite this, on the 25th of March, our nation revolted and fought with unparalleled altruism for the conquest of freedom and the safeguarding of our sovereignty.

(...)

The fighters of Greek warriors of '21 remain an example to us, both through their individual actions and their collective struggle. These fighters, aware of our history and with national consciousness have provided us with brilliant examples of dedication to common duty, unity, offering and self-sacrifice. These examples should accompany us into the present day and future.

Following their paradigm, all Greeks living in the country, and expatriates around the world, we ought to build a common front for the promotion of our national interest, our principles and our values. This is more pertinent at the present circumstances, where the future of Greece, Europe and the broader system of international institutions are being challenged.

Today, Greece is a force of peace and security in the Balkans, and broader South-Eastern Mediterranean region. It maintains friendship and cooperation links with all neighboring countries and is an integral member of the European Union, the Eurozone and NATO. Its international behavior is governed by the fundamental principles of law of the enlightened states, and it is characterized by stability and consistency.

In both bilateral relations and on issues relating to international law, the approach of our country is dictated by national interest, and the core values of international law.

(...)

As regards the relationship between Greece and the United Kingdom, we are moving towards broadening and updating our bilateral relations, something which is quite essential when considering the UK's imminent exit from the European Union. Current bilateral relations between Greece and the UK are excellent, as it was confirmed by the high-profile bilateral visits that took place in the course of the past year, as well as by the plethora of contacts and the joint cooperation, all of which prepare the solid foundation for a new bilateral framework after Brexit.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will, as I have on many other occasions, repeat the saying that "our past is our future", meaning that our history determines our future. Greece is exiting a period of crisis, and is aiming for a safe navigation through the vague, dangerous and precarious national environment within its immediate and wider geographical neighborhood.

Greek policy of stability in the wider region has projected our country as a reliable guardian of the interests of Hellenism and a strong player in regional co-operation. At the same time, the powerful bonds of the Greek Diaspora constitute an integral part of Greece's historical and sociological DNA. It is well known that the strength of the Diaspora and the close attachment to Greece is a constant source of support for national efforts, and it is not an accidental fact that when at times of crisis, human resources outside Greece rally together in order to support the motherland.

The commemoration ceremony of the National Day closed with the congregation singing the National Anthem.



*Photo courtesy of the Peloponnesian Association of Great Britain*

The double celebration of the Greek War of Independence and the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary was celebrated by the Peloponnesian Association of Great Britain, on Monday 25 of March at Westminster University, Regent Street. Professor Athina Georganta gave a speech titled "Kalvos and the Greek War of Independence".

The event attended the President of the Peloponnesian Association of Great Britain, Mrs. Lena Markou, the Head of the Consular Office of Greece Mr. A. Rizos and his counterpart of Cyprus Mr. Gkotsis, Professor Gonda Van Steen and Peter Mackridge, as well as members and friends. The speech was followed by a reception.

## The children of Aghia Sofia school celebrating 25th of March

On Saturday March 23rd, the "Hagia Sophia School" honoured those who sacrificed themselves during the revolution of 1821 and the fight of the Greek Cypriots of EOKA for liberation from the British Empire. Through a variety of narrative texts, poems and songs, we all celebrated together the day when our people chose to combine the celebration of their national reinstitution to the celebration of Evangelismos, thus imprinting to the collective memory the beginning of salvation and resurrection of the Hellenic Nation as something identical to the beginning of salvation and resurrection of humanity.

*Photos Courtesy of Aghia Sophia School*



Extracts from the Message of HE the President of the Hellenic Republic, Mr. Prokopis Pavlopoulos to Greek Diaspora on the Celebration of National Day of March 25th  
18.3.2019



We are celebrating a crucial event in our Modern History, the "Resurrection" of our Nation, which led to the establishment of the contemporary sovereign Greek State. This national Anniversary should always be an inspiration and a learning opportunity for every Greek.

(...)

The inimitable example set by our ancestors, who resisted occupancy in 1821, should inspire and guide us in perpetuity. Both Greeks who live in Greece and Greek expatriates should create an unbroken front of co-responsibility and coordination in order to promote our country's interests under of course the self-evident condition that Greek expatriates should respect the society where they live and prosper. This collaboration is an imperative under the current critical circumstances in the course of which high challenges emerge that will define the future of Greece and the future of our European family whose Greece is a stable member. I am clearly referring to the European Union and the Eurozone.

The verse from Andeas Kalvos's poem which says: "Freedom needs Virtue and Courage" should be our guide in this endeavour.

(...)

Nowadays, Greece is a force of Peace and Security in the Balkans and in the greater area of the Southeastern Mediterranean. Greece fully respects European and International Law as a whole, and therefore pursuits friendship and cooperation with all its neighbouring countries. At the same time, Greece, as a Member of the European Union and the Eurozone, seeks to actively participate in the creation of a European Federation which shall uphold the principles of Representative Democracy, Rule of Law and the Social Welfare State. These fundamental principles have always guided our country's international relations. More specifically:

As regards the Cyprus issue, which is clearly an international and particularly European issue, Greece strives for an immediate, just and viable solution. (...)

Concerning the Greece-Turkey relations we strive for relations of friendship and good neighbouring and we support Turkey's European prospect. However, support for the latter means that Turkey should respect International and European law as well as the Acquis Communautaire whose integral part is the "NATURA 2000" project. (...)

As concerns the Republic of North Macedonia, we also favor its European prospect. However, this prospect preconditions the full and sincere respect of the Acquis Communautaire as a whole, hence of the International law in its entirety, and in particular of the Prespes Agreement, from its part. (...)

As regards Albania, Greece does not oppose its European future. However, this preconditions that Albania should totally and sincerely respect International and European Law, hence the Rule of Law and all fundamental Human Rights. (...).

In conclusion to all the above thoughts about the National Celebration of 25 March 1821, I would like to express once more the gratitude of the Greek people towards Greek expatriates, wherever they live in the world. I need to emphatically reiterate that Greek Diaspora is an integral and valuable part of our Nation that has greatly contributed to our country's historic trajectory in accordance with its legacy and destiny.

## «Under the Stars» - Contemporary Greek theatre in the UK

«Under the Stars» - «Οι κάτω απ' τ' αστέρια», a contemporary Greek play written by Tilemachos Tsardakas, starring Lila Baklesi and Konstantinos Bibis, was presented last month in Manchester and London. Late 80s, early 90s. A small Greek town on an Aegean island. Mania and Nickolis go to the same school, spend their summer holidays together, dream together, fall in love 'for ever.' Years go by but between them, there is a wild fire burning. A meeting full of emotion, humour, conflict and nostalgia. The play was performed in Greek with English surtitles.

*Photo Credits: Sophocles Bibis*





*Tilemachos Tsardakas*  
*Photo Credits: Konstantinos Pilavios*

Tilemachos Tsardakas (born 1978) is a writer and poet, with nine published titles. He manages Act Theater in Patra, Greece. He has directed more than twenty plays in various theatres in Greece. He has lived in the UK for more than six years as a student in Reading College and Coventry University, and as a post-grad student in School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL.

*1. You have studied in the UK, therefore you are familiar with the environment. How did you feel connecting with the audience in London as the writer of the play «Under the Stars?»*

It was a pleasant experience for me. It was a return of some sort. I was looking forward to it and indeed I enjoyed it. Lots of people came to talk to me about the play including old friends that I hadn't seen for quite some time. I am used to being part of the audience when I visit theatres in London, now that was a little bit different, an important step for me for sure.

*2. Your play deals with perennial questions: Love, Death, and Frustration. It can be seen as a submerging in the psyche of two individuals whose love of their youth was left unvindicated. It can be viewed as an ode, an hymn to innocence, or a mourning for its irrevocable loss. Where did you draw your inspiration from?*



*Tilemachos Tsardakas*  
*Photo Credits: Periklis Papandreopoulos*

The play is not based on true events but it does use material from things and developments that happen in one's life. It is a story that could have happened to me or to someone I know or to someone in our audience. It could have happened in the places we spend our summers, in our villages, in our islands, in the beaches we lay while on vacation. We remember all these places in detail from our youth when we were more innocent and – maybe – more happy. This is where all inspiration is drawn from. From places and memories we can relate to.

*3. You have written poems, prose and plays. What motivates you to write? If you were asked to encapsulate in a few sentences the spirit permeating your work, what would you say?*

I am interested in how the senses work in relation with observation and memory. I like to write about little details that we pass-by, that we don't pay too much attention to. But if you observe a bit closer you can see a whole story hidden in little details, how people react, how they hold their bag, what they read in the underground, what they do with their faces when they are happy or sad, how they touch each other depending on the circumstances. I like to try and remember such tiny details from various occasions from time to time. It gives me a lot of ideas on what to focus on as a writer, and a perspective on how humans behave.

*4. You live and work in Patras, a large town of provincial Greece, that has a long tradition in theatrical affairs, and you are the director of the Act Theatre. Would you like to elaborate on your experience?*

I am managing Act Theater for ten years now. It is a small venue, a blackbox, "Berlin style" theatre. It is located in a lively area of Patras that is full of bars, cafes, restaurants and nightclubs. The audience of Patras has embraced it despite the fact that it does not have the comforts of older, established venues like the 19th century Municipal Apollo Theater. But we do produce our fair amount of contemporary Greek cultural production, we employ actors and other professionals, we try to give as much room to younger artists, musicians and writers as possible. It has not been easy, if you consider that we are not in the capital where the center of events is, and this decade has been the most difficult for all economic activity, with no subsidies of any kind (up until very recently). But it is a healthy small business with lot of things to offer to local arts and culture. Anyhow, after 7 years in London and Coventry, and a few attempts in living in Athens, I am now very certain that I prefer to live, work and write in a smaller

Greek city. I have thought about moving abroad sometimes, especially when I face the complexities of trying to make a living within the "Greek system"; it would have been a very easy decision for me to move to London, it is a very familiar place, but, you see, I have a very intimate relationship with my language, I want to write and live my everyday life in Greek.



*Konstantinos Bibis  
Photo Credits: Sophocles Bibis*

**Konstantinos Bibis, the winner of 2017 'Dimitris Horn Prize' for young actors is a very talented, restless and diverse actor, with a lot to offer. Konstantinos, amongst many other performances, has performed 'The Birds - Ornithes' by Aristophanes at the Epidaurus Festival, and at St. Ann's Warehouse in New York for a number of sold-out performances. He is a founding member of the Alfa-Idea theatre and team.**

*1. You have traveled abroad extensively for performances of Greek plays. What motivates you to seek to communicate with audiences outside of Greece?*

You know, theatre in my opinion, is a homeland on



its own. It doesn't have and it shouldn't have any national attachment. It's an universal art which has the human soul at its ultimate core. From Mexico to South Korea and from London to Serbia, and in all the other countries that I was lucky to visit, that's what I understood. Theatre is the Art of Arts and has to do with the human being, wherever it may be located.

2. *You performed in London, in front of an audience that was mainly Greek, but not entirely Greek. They seemed to receive your performance in a rather warm and emotional way. During your bow at the finale, you and your acting partner seemed to be still under the influence of your role, almost exhausted. Was there anything special about the performance in London, was it this particular play, or is it always like that?*

When you travel far from home in order to present your work, you somehow have a duty, and a harder effort is demanded so that you can communicate with the audience. Let alone in a show like this one, which inevitably necessitates us digging deep in our souls and putting them on display so openly for the people to see them.

3. *In the "manifesto" of your theatrical team "Alfa. Idea" you state with clarity where you stand, on what kind of theatre you believe in. At the same time you open a front against the prevailing "postmodern aesthetics that define the art of theatre, as a cold alternation of images and words, with not the least shred of humanity and emotion". Someone could get the impression that you have a very clear sense of purpose, like a soldier on the battlefield "waging war" against a perception of theatre you consider as hostile. Is this the case?*

It's partly true. "War" is a very strong word, and nowadays I would replace it with the word "strife". We are striving to create theatre that is accessible to everyone, regardless of educational background or social class. This of course doesn't mean that we are demeaning our art, nor the power of the symbolisms that permeate it.

4) *It looks like you have found companions on your journey in the art of theatre. Meanwhile, several colleagues of yours, walk the lonely path. How important do you think the existence of a community or a creative "nest" is for a theatre person?*

I'm so frightened of loneliness. This might be something completely personal though. But I believe that theatre is the others, my colleagues, their eyes on the stage, my collaborators off the stage. Not me. I believe in the togetherness. I could paraphrase the famous saying that "groups of friends make history"

and say instead that "togetherness makes history".

5. *Almost two years ago, you won the Horn Prize (Βαβείο Χορν). What does this mean for you?*

It was a fulfilling and beautiful moment. A gentle pat on the back, like I'm doing well at something. I was as happy as a kid that won a Cup with his team at football.



Lila Baklesi

Photo Credits: Sophocles Bibis

**Lila Baklesi, is one of the most promising young actresses in Greece. Originally from Patra, Lila amongst others, has starred in the successful Greek television series TAMAM and in the film 'Boy eating the bird's food' which won 12 international awards. She is currently between Athens and London to expand her professional career.**

**Lila Baklesi, playing the part of Menia, spoke to @GreeceInUK. Following is her interview.**

1. *You are a Greek actress in London. You came here to stay. At least for a few months. What are your feelings, the challenges, and your expectations?*

The main reason I came to London two years ago was the lack of film acting training for actors in Greece.

My knowledge was empirical, and I felt I needed to study more extensively methods of acting in front of the camera. Some of my best friends have been living in London for many years, thus my decision was made easier. This city is a source of inspiration to me, mainly due to a sense of freedom you get from its multiculturalism. I decided therefore to return and face up to the challenges offered in this city, to experience a different way of living, and to enable myself to receive the stimuli that this modern Babel has to offer.

*2. In some of your previous interviews you spoke about the need for the Arts to be taught at schools. To what extent has this need been addressed in Greece, in your opinion?*

I think we all need to realise that integrating Art in the Curriculum is an imperative. There have definitely been steps of progress taken, but we still have a long way ahead of us. Our society needs our support, especially at moments like this, when fascist activity is on the rise. Including Art education in schools can create citizens with critical thinking that will embrace diversity. Therefore, we will manage to achieve the most desired social and personal fulfillment.

**«This city is a source of inspiration to me, mainly due to a sense of freedom you get from its multiculturalism»**

*3. The performance that you are part of is the fruit of your collaboration with people with whom you have some sort of special connection. How important is it to have this kind of 'chemistry' with your partners in theatre? Or does professionalism negate such a need?*

The chemistry you are talking about was not granted to us, we forged it through the dramaturgical analysis of the texts, the rehearsals and the performances. This could definitely not have been achieved without a common aesthetics perspective and a shared vision for art and life. Konstantinos Bibis, Telemachus Tsardakas and Artemis Grybla push me to explore the limits of my creativity. And I am grateful for that.

**«Our society needs our support, especially at moments like this, when fascist activity is on the rise. Including Art education in schools can create citizens with critical thinking that will embrace diversity»**

*4. How did your clicking with Telemachus Tsardakas' play occur?*

Love as a universal human trait has a revolutionary streak in it, and Telemachus managed through the poetry and realism of his play to create two familiar characters, to which anyone of us could relate. After all, who hasn't struggled growing up? As a matter of fact, "Under the Stars" is exactly that, a story about the tragicness of reaching adulthood.

*5. You performed in London, in front of an audience that was mainly Greek, but not entirely Greek. They seemed to receive your performance in a rather warm and emotional way. During your bow at the finale, you and your acting partner seemed to be still under the influence of your role, almost exhausted. Was there anything special about the performance in London, was it this particular play, or is it always like that?*

Each time I go on stage with Konstantinos to tell the story of Menia and Nicolis, there is a price to pay. I don't think there is any other way. In the framework of the stage direction, I know that I have the freedom to make choices during the performance. I am always excited to be surprised by Konstantinos's choices; we improvise and let ourselves free in this world we create, the world of the «Under the Stars». This makes each performance special, both for us and for the audience. However, performing in front of an audience that have already made hard choices in their lives, in combination with the uniqueness of the theatre house, a building that was built in 1887 as a church, enhanced further this emotional atmosphere.

**«Who hasn't struggled growing up? As a matter of fact, "Under the Stars" is exactly that, a story about the tragicness of reaching adulthood»**



Photo Credits: Sophocles Bibis



*Vasilis Kritikakis, Marian Pissaridi and Vasiliki Tseperka  
Photo Credits: Sophocles Bibis*

**About Prosopa:** Prosopa Events is the vision of three young Greek professionals, Vasilis Kritikakis, Marian Pissaridi and Vasiliki Tseperka, to create a cultural hub embracing not only the Greek and Cypriot audience but also the international audience that loves Greek culture. The aim of Prosopa Events is to re-introduce and celebrate the achievements of the contemporary Greek culture and spirit, inspiring more people to do the same.

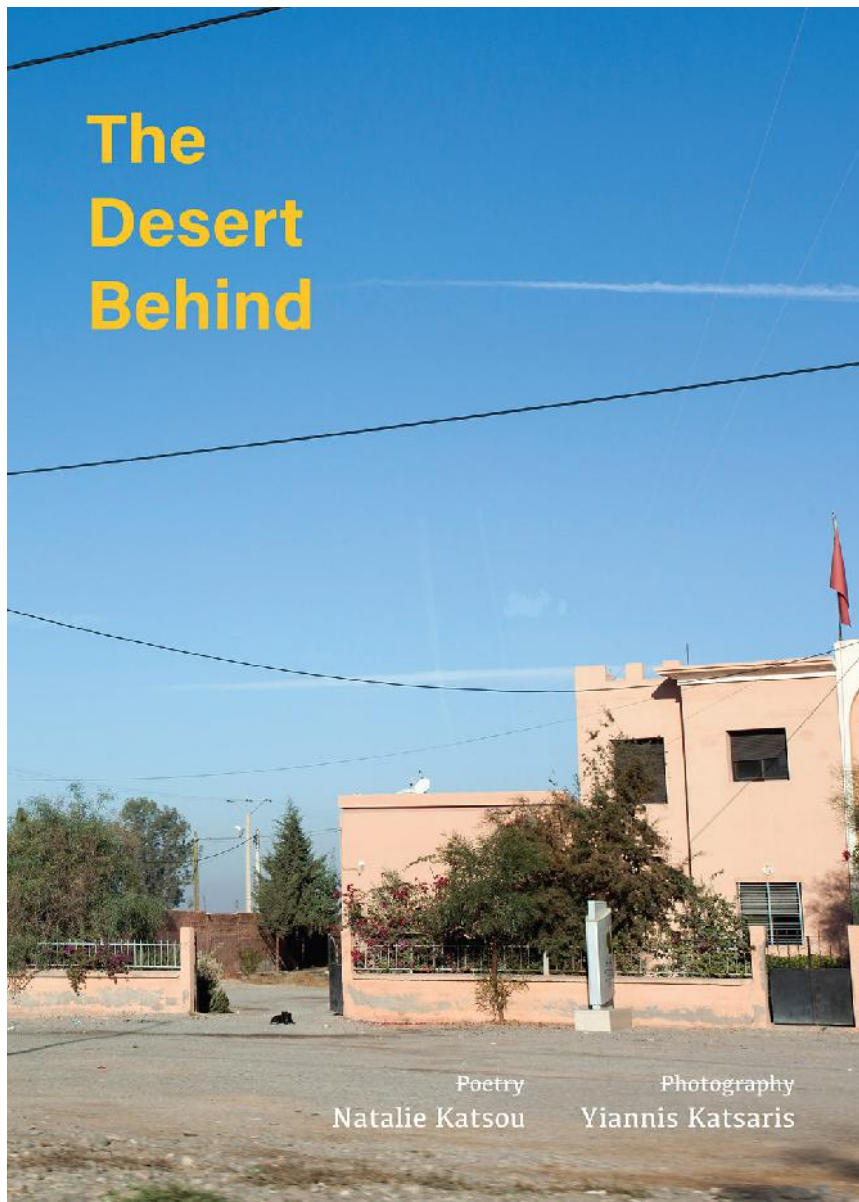
Building a cultural bridge among countries has become the starting point of offering high quality experiences to their audience. Prosopa Events started in 2015 focusing mainly on Greek theatre shows, and had the pleasure to work closely with popular actors and directors from Greece such as Thodoris Atheridis, Katia Dandoulaki, Stamatis Kraounakis, Smaragda Karidi, Pantelis Kanarakis, Myrto Alikaki to name a few. Recently Prosopa Events expanded their activities to Amsterdam where the theatre show 'Under the stars' was presented.

The love for Greece, the need to stay connected and the belief that Greece has a lot to offer were the focal points and the main reasons why Vasilis, Marian and Vasiliki invest their personal time to create these experiences. The three founding members of Prosopa Events graduated from the Department of Product and System Design Engineering in the University of Aegean in Syros, where they first met. Marian and Vasilis are currently based in London while, Vasiliki has recently moved to Amsterdam.

Their next project is the Greek romantic comedy 'A dog called Friki' with Maria Solomou and Dimitris Kouroubalis, on Sunday 2nd June, at the Tabernacle theatre in Notting Hill, written by Dimitris Kouroubalis.

## The Desert Behind, a multi-visual book combining Photography and Poetry

Over the last year, playwright, stage director and poet Natalie Katsou, and photographer Yiannis Katsaris have been developing a collaborative project merging photography and poetry. Their book *The Desert Behind* is the outcome of their work together. The inspiration and the raw material came from their joint trip in Marrakech a couple of years ago. Both artists focus on the cross cultural communication and the exchange between humans, and hold a holistic view on language, identity and homeland and that is why the book is bilingual (in Greek and in English). The book launch took place in the Hellenic Centre in London on 20 March! A fruitful and wondrous interaction between photography and poetry!



'The Desert Behind' is a collaborative project between photographer Yiannis Katsaris and poet Natalie Katsou, based on material from their joint journey to Morocco. As a response to their experience and to the ways it imprinted itself in them, they developed a bilingual multi-visual book that combines Photography and Poetry. The photographs by default document the people and the place unmistakably and vividly. The poems, both as stand-alone and in dialogue with the pictures, de-construct and re-construct that visual reality, while challenging memory.

The creative conversation reflects the artists' impressions within an awareness of being constantly present and simultaneously alien in a mystical story where the exotic merges with the familiar, the unknown with the longed for. Moroccan culture and identity function here as a reflection of an oasis to be reached and inhabited from afar, in a perpetual transit. Born in a Mediterranean country, living in a multi-ethnic yet western metropolis, visiting a new yet very old land of myths and tales and fears, the whole 'being here now' takes the two artists by surprise. The negotiation between

stereotypes, archetypes, routine, fact, fiction and meta-analysis shapes a new reality that emerges from 'The Desert Behind'.

The exhibition at the Hellenic Centre established the project as a three-dimensional conversation between the two mediums in the space by presenting photographic prints of both Photography and Poetry. Searching for a common ground between written words, symbols and colourful shapes, the artists opt for an enriched creative language; re-figuring communication and context reveals a very different understanding of the world around us. The two artists now invite the visitor and the reader to an immersive experience of a re-imagined landscape with acquired meanings and over-lapping impressions of an original that still evades us.



A meadow of boats tied by the nose and the arms  
Dancing in chains

Planks intertwined with sea blue  
The cranes in the background  
Because no construction  
Can float and climb over seas  
Indefinitely continuously endlessly

Somewhere there the cement ends and the void appears in between  
the foot that ran to explore and on the sea surface  
-what you counted as a meadow  
Are the waves

You gape beyond what humans came up with  
And what we ignore  
Waiting for a blow to prove  
The beauty of this flock  
From the arrangement to the uniform ambivalence

After the aria to symmetry  
You notice the disarmed bodies  
Hanging on wood

Straining every grain of salt and ocean  
Taxidermied occupations  
Reminders of the gone-by

Yiannis Katsaris is a photographer and a lighting designer based in London. He studied photography at the Technological Educational Institute of Athens (Greece) before completing his Master's Degree in Photographic Journalism at the University of Westminster in London under the Greek State Scholarship.

Yiannis is an associate lecturer of Photography at the Sir John Cass Faculty of Art Architecture and Design (Metropolitan University) and the Post Production Editor at Panos Pictures.

His photography has featured in solo and group exhibitions, in galleries such as IKON gallery (Birmingham), Proud Archivist (London), Reading Room Gallery (London), The Hellenic Centre (London), Photosynkiria (Thessaloniki), as well as in numerous editorial and commercial commissions. He has worked as a Director of Photography for music videos and films and he has created video art installations and lighting design for numerous theatre and opera productions in venues in the UK and across Europe, including Sadler's Wells, Arcola Theatre and Riverside Studios (London), Avignon Festival (France), National Theatre of Northern Greece (Thessaloniki), International Festival of Ancient Greek Drama (Cyprus), Alma Theatre (Athens).

[www.yianniskatsaris.co.uk](http://www.yianniskatsaris.co.uk)

*1. Have you ever tried travelling without your camera, or do you believe that there can be no journey without it?*

Whereas I always travel with my camera, I don't consider myself a photographer that wants to capture every moment obsessively. I believe that a place should be experienced first, allow emotion to grow and to photograph after. There have been moments I didn't photograph but I am deeply grateful I experienced them.

*2. I have this feeling that a photographer has two lives, one like everybody else's, and another one through the photographic lens. Is that true? And to what degree these two lives take over on one another?*

I can't make a distinction between the two. Being a photographer is a way of living. You think, act, react and interact under that observational spirit that is cultivated over the years. Sometimes this makes it difficult or curious for people in the immediate environment, as the lifestyle can be demanding practically and emotionally.

*3. How did you come up with the book title "The Desert Behind"?*

'The Desert Behind' is a project that was conceived with writer Natalie Katsou in reflection to what we experienced during our journey to Marrakech and Essaouira in Morocco. Back in London, I narrowed down my selection of pictures and Natalie wrote poetry in relation to 21 images out of the 40 that are featured in the book. The title 'The Desert Behind' summarizes accurately and in a very poetic way the 'meta' process of creation of the concept. It's an extract of one of my favorite lines in one of Natalie's poems: "We neigh silently and we proceed, we left the desert behind to become dust".

**«It was the first time that both of us were traveling to an Arab country, driven by curiosity, excitement and interest to experience a different culture»**

*4. Had you already had an artistic agenda, a specific idea, more or less processed, when you embarked on this journey to Morocco? Or was it spontaneous and not planned?*

When we traveled to Morocco we had no predefined idea of making a book – there was no project in the making. It was the first time that both of us were traveling to an Arab country, driven by curiosity, excitement and interest to experience a different culture. When we came back, in awe of our experience and through conversations, we decided to join our artistic forces and create a book that would encapsulate what we saw and felt from our encounters in that beautiful country.

**«My personal work is driven by a strong interest in understanding the human psyche, other cultures and identity. London offers a lot of diversity, with all kinds of interests and plenty of subcultures to discover. I have an innate curiosity for the unknown and the original»**

*5. At the event in the Hellenic Centre, you mentioned that Natalie's poems made you revisit some of your photographs and see them in a new light, from a*

*different angle, and also assess them in a different way than you did before reading the poems. Would you like to elaborate on that?*

As a photographer, I react to my surroundings instinctively and intuitively. This is something that many experienced photographers can agree on. This instinct is informed by my experiences, the literature I read, the movies I watch, the news I follow, in overall my education. The way I see the world reflects who I am as a human being, and eventually gets imprinted in the photographs. It is very rare, however, to analyse my images in written words and understand how different elements within a picture trigger emotional reactions to another person.

This is what Roland Barthes describes as the 'punctum' in his book *Camera Lucida* – small elements or points in a photograph (an object, a face, a hand movement perhaps) that function as piercing emotional triggers. Often the response to those details happens unconsciously.

Natalie's poetry is doing exactly that; she points our direction to a specific point in an image to describe, beautifully, feelings, history, experience, and myths, often all in one poem. It can be different or the same of how I felt, both equally surprising, as we were both present when the image was taken.

**«Wherever I lived - in Hungary, Italy and the United Kingdom-, I never felt each country as my Home. Home has always been Greece. I might have adapted to certain 'European' ways of behaviour but my personal temperament has always remained Greek. In a unified world it is vital to safeguard heritage and culture. It is a matter of identity»**

*6. You studied and started your career in London. What would you think of a potential return to Greece?*

I will return to Greece once I feel a circle in London is completed. I have been active in Greece all these years, and I have often considered returning. But what I would find most difficult for the ultimate move, would be the bureaucratic philosophy within a system that overlooks real values, and the non-viable financial structures. If these were to change today, I would be moving back tomorrow.

*7. With rapid developments in photographic equipment, where do you think the artistic element lies in the creative process? Is it in the 'click' or in the edit?*

There is no question that technological evolution has affected, not only the photographic industry, but also the way everyone is communicating nowadays. We consume photography daily, which paralyses our good taste. The artistic element can be found in the original idea. The 'click', the selection, or the edit are part of the process in visualizing that primal concept. In the sea of images that inundates us today, a project with a great concept stands out from the crowd. In a way, the oversaturation of images forces photographers to think more, to be more inventive and to challenge the medium constantly.

**«I will return to Greece once I feel a circle in London is completed. I have been active in Greece all these years, and I have often considered returning. But what I would find most difficult for the ultimate move, would be the bureaucratic philosophy within a system that overlooks real values, and the non-viable financial structures. If these were to change today, I would be moving back tomorrow»**

*8. Can the trivial and the ordinary, the everyday and the mundane transform into magnificent works of art through photography?*

Definitely. The mundane and the everyday influence our dreams. When reality is framed intelligently, it transforms to artwork surpassing the most canning imagination.

*9. What is the most exciting part of the creative process? What excites you the most about the creative process of photography?*

What excites me in the creative process of photography depends heavily on the project. For example, in personal projects that I work on with medium format film camera, I enjoy the meditative aspect of the analogue equipment that forces me to work in a very introspective way. These are usually long term projects that I revisit on my own time and I don't feel the need to develop and deliver on a deadline. That allows for great freedom to work on the visual language and presentation. On the other hand, I really enjoy working on collaborative art projects and commercial commissions, where a team of creative individuals invest their talents together to achieve a goal. I get great satisfaction

from the twists and turns an idea might take, listening what my collaborators have to say, and ultimately stretching and understanding the possibilities the medium of photography has to offer. 'The Desert Behind' is a good example of such a project.

**«I have missed so much: good friends getting married and giving birth, the contact with nature, the colours, the sea, the sun, the food, the animals, the light, the architecture, the language. I am in love with Greece. Which is why we are now planning to bring "The Desert Behind" in Athens, hopefully soon»**

*10. You live and create your art in London, a modern multicultural Metropolis. Do you think it's necessary for you, as a person and as an artist to 'spy' on other 'parallel universes'?*

I love working as a photographer in London for many reasons. First of all, because I am exposed to a plethora of art-related events, exhibitions, lectures and talks. People I read about in books, might give a talk or have an exhibition at a 20 min walk from my house. This gives you invaluable exposure to great art and the feeling that culture is accessible. Secondly, my personal work is driven by a strong interest in understanding the human psyche, other cultures and identity. London offers a lot of diversity, with all kinds of interests and plenty of subcultures to discover. I have an innate curiosity for the unknown and the original.

*11. How significant is your origins and roots to you? What does 'hellenikotita' or 'Greekness' mean to you in the contemporary world, in the era of globalisation?*

I have been living and working abroad since 2003. The world since then has changed and today you can be more in contact with your family and friends, listen to music, buy books or watch TV from Greece which contributes to the preservation of heritage in a globalised world. Also, organizations such as The Hellenic Centre play a very important and necessary role in promoting the Greek culture abroad. Wherever I lived - in Hungary, Italy and the United Kingdom-, I never felt each country as my Home. Home has always been Greece. I might have adapted to certain 'European' ways of behaviour but my personal temperament has always remained Greek. In a unified world it is vital to safeguard heritage and culture. It is a matter of identity.

*12. Is there any project that you are working on at the moment, something that excites you and you would like to share with us?*

I am working on an ongoing series that I call 'This is how low you brought me, for I am in love with you'. The title is taken from a graffiti on a wall in the island of Syros, Greece. It is a personal investigation of my relationship to my home country as an ex-patriot. I moved back to London in 2008. In 2010 the political crisis in Greece erupted and the nation remained in limbo ever since. Now the whole European terrain is changing again with Brexit. Inevitably the options to go back have been shrinking. The country itself

feels like castle in the sand. I have missed so much: good friends getting married and giving birth, the contact with nature, the colours, the sea, the sun, the food, the animals, the light, the architecture, the language. I am in love with Greece. Which is why we are now planning to bring "The Desert Behind" in Athens, hopefully soon.





Natalie Katsou is a theatre director and a writer. She studied Acting (BA) at Delos Hatoupi Acting School and Theatre Studies (BA) at the National University of Athens, graduating with distinction, having already obtained her law degree from the University of Athens. She took her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Theatre Directing at East 15 Acting School, University of Essex under the prestigious Minotis Scholarship, granted by the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

Natalie is the Artistic Director of Operaview. She has worked extensively in the UK and abroad (Greece, Germany, Sweden, Turkey, and Hungary) in theatre and in creative environments. She lives and works as a theatre director and as a drama lecturer in London.

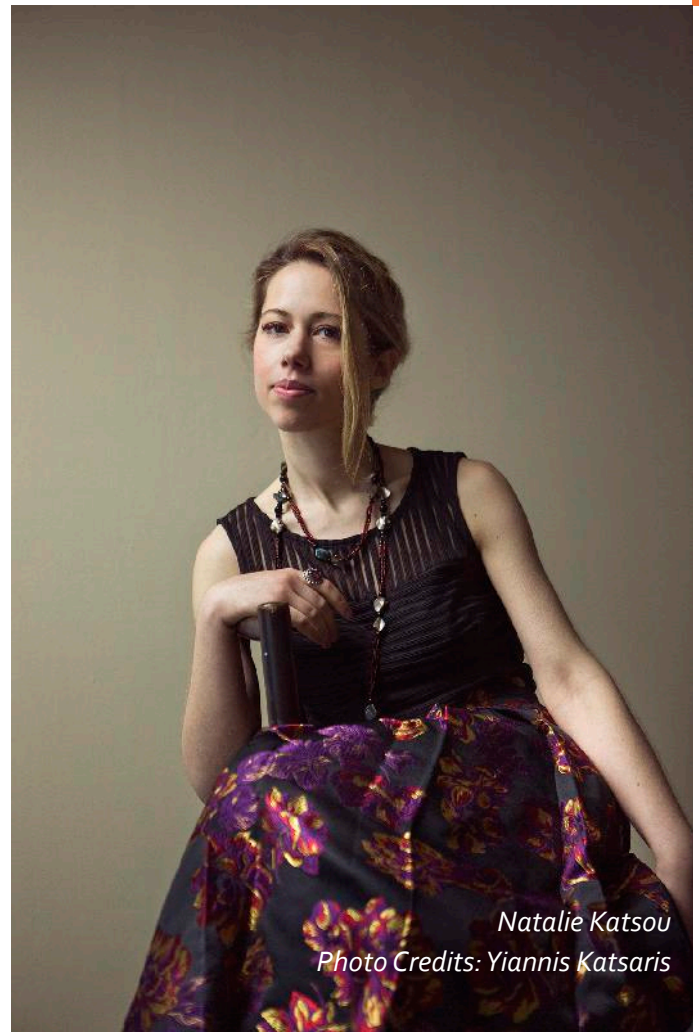
Natalie has published the following poetry collections: "Magodos" (Kastaniotis Puications 2008), "Cochlea" (Kedros Publications 2012) and "Nymfalidae" (Kedros Publications 2015). Her poems have been translated in English by Yiannis Goumas, in French by Michel Volkovitch and in Spanish by Mario Dominguez Parra. Her poetry features in magazines such as POIHSI, and poihtiki and in various e-zines such as poeticanet.gr, e-poema, Mediterranean.nu, Quarterly Review a.o. She has written plays both in Greek and in English.

[www.nataliekatsou.com](http://www.nataliekatsou.com)

[www.operaview.org](http://www.operaview.org)

1. They say, "a picture is worth a thousand words". On the other hand, a poem can be a thousand pictures. What is the relation between your poems and the photographs in the book? Would you say that they function as a kind of 'extended captions'?

Poetry implies creating strong imagery in the most compact way possible – like photography, only with words. It is much more abstract, of course, and it relies on the ability of human to "interpret". The poems in the book were written on specific images, opening a dialogue with them, challenging the obvious first image. They are an extension of the whole photo, a new part of the photo- they don't explain it and they don't describe the photo, like a caption would. The poems suggest an undercurrent story that might not be immediately exposed on the photo –most of the times, it's not even true; yet it's possible.



Natalie Katsou

Photo Credits: Yiannis Katsaris

2. Did Yiannis' photographic lens give you an image of Morocco, different from your unmediated perception of the surroundings? If his pictures had not existed, would you still have been inspired to write? If yes, would those poems have been different?

When we travel together, I have no idea what Yiannis is actually "seeing" through his lens. I usually imagine or suppose that we observe similar things, in terms of events, particularities, and, occasionally, some details – things that allow us to function within relevant aesthetics. However, in Morocco especially, I was too overwhelmed to even ask to see the photos as they happened. I only discovered them upon our return and the images really hit me. I was paying attention to things I had not noticed back then, of course. But what was more striking, the things I thought I remembered, looked under a very different light once we were back in busy London. Morocco is very inspiring and many writers have been triggered to write something –often extraordinary- when in or after having been in Morocco. I'm not sure whether I would have written any poem, had I not seen Yiannis' photos. I'm not sure I would have been to Morocco without Yiannis in the first place.



**«Art is the hide-and-see of collaboration and of communication. No doubt that trying to keep forms of art “pure” sounds very controversial. Most artists suffer from loneliness and isolation. The secret longing for meeting someone that can understand, contribute and co-shape each other’s dream, is definitely not new; in essence collaboration sometimes requires a sort of a “common inception” that materializes»**

*3. Did the photographs exist prior to the poems? How has this synergy, this collaboration sprung up? Do you believe that the future belongs to a partnership between different forms of art?*

The photographs happened in Morocco –as one would naturally assume-, and the poems happened upon our return, starting almost a week after, in a span of a few months –without including editing and translating. The project started before we knew it had started. The need to write was impulsive, we didn’t discuss about it, and after a few poems, Yiannis and I started looking at things together. This is extremely rare for me as a poet, as I never share my work before it’s ready to be published. It’s also rare for Yiannis, as he didn’t originally choose which photos would earn a poem – he made suggestions later on.

Art is the hide-and-see of collaboration and of communication. No doubt that trying to keep forms of art “pure” sounds very controversial. Most artists suffer from loneliness and isolation. The secret longing for meeting someone that can understand, contribute and co-shape each other’s dream, is definitely not new; in essence collaboration sometimes requires a sort of a “common inception” that materializes.

This is not the first time that I personally work on a project that merges different disciplines. My company, Operaview, is based on the idea that contemporary opera should be part of all things contemporary, including all the other art forms. Opera is meant to be cross-disciplinary by nature. Operaview stretches that a bit further, without

indulging in the luxury that a large opera house can offer: the opera “The Bear” was staged within another photography exhibition that Yiannis had created in a gallery, in “the Medium” I incorporated aerial circus arts, whilst in “Savitri” I brought in shadow puppets a.s.o.

*4. Reading your poems on the “The Desert Behind”, one gets the feeling of an existential quest, a talk or an exchange with the invisible, the unseen. Would you say that the existential quest is something that already existed in you, something that defines you? To what extent and in what way has Morocco triggered or rekindled this?*

On one hand, I am not surprised that this quest is clear in that project, on the other hand, it slightly worries me that this existential pursuit does not stop, not even at the sight of Morocco’s colourful splendor! (laughs.) Although it’s not something intentional, –as none of those disturbing and relentless questions are-, one can recognise that this is something that lurks in all my work, in poetry and in theatre too. There is a disquiet and a shadow in my writing –I first discovered it through the response of readers, and through the shock of my most closed ones. It does not bother me, since it’s probably the most personal element that survives through the cracks of artifice.

Morocco is a unique place of myth; the idea that none of this is real, definitely marks that land. I am referring to both the fairy-tale aspect and the endless beauty of it, and to the constantly open negotiation, the basis of the bazaar, where anything can reverse at any point, anything can disappear, be previous or tin in seconds. Both those aspects follow

the visitor throughout. This playfulness and this openness disguise a danger, a bluff, an overwhelming surrealism. Surely, a place of contradictions like Morocco lends itself to existential questions. Yiannis' photographs do not embellish it either. His view is very honest –as ever- and he is even searching for the mundane and the disguised, he is looking to unveil things. Those contradictions and that sense of the unknown that evades us are embedded in the images. So, in a sense, the photographs, not just the place itself, invited that innate disquiet of my writing.

5. *Animals, plants and humans; the urban environment; the ruins; the desert; How did each of these things inspire you?*

As mentioned, one needs to accept Morocco as a big bazaar, in the sense that everything wonderful is available, and at the same time, everything can disappear or morph into something even stranger in seconds. The historical centre of each city and the "areas for tourists" are patched –sometimes quite badly- with the areas of "real life". And it's those patches that usually attract Yiannis and myself. In spite of arriving in full throttle for buying the fairytale and falling for the romance of the exotic, we found ourselves immediately negotiating the realm on which we would experience that journey. We both believe that the environment is a rather dead set without humans and we are intrigued to discover how people live when no one is looking. When do they decide to now chase tourists? What does the other half of the population do, those that do not guide caravans or tourist troupes, or those that do not weave magic carpets?

Within that curiosity, we both were quite aware that we would never penetrate the mystery, we would be strangers, even if we pretended to understand things and tried to fit in. Not that our target was to inhabit Morocco or go native, of course, but even crossing the street unnoticed, was impossible – even more impossible for us, than for the most unusual individual to cross our path and for us to not be amazed. In that sense, the desert, the infinite, the unknown, the past, the myth, the real life, was always away and hidden for us; the desert was, and still is, behind, waiting to be discovered, or rather, imagined.

6. *Besides poetry, you have been involved in playwriting. What does theatre mean to you? To what*

**«We could compile a library on what theatre is and what it means to a creative person, so I'll just skip to one element that, personally, I find liberating: the endless possibility. The manipulation of the artificial, which is very genuine and real in itself, is one of the most exciting things in theatre- the same is true for every art, of course. In theatre, though, the raw material is humans; that is frightening, it is a huge responsibility for both sides, stage and audience, and it is also exhilarating»**

*extent is theatre a podium, a sort of pulpit for getting across your views to the public?*

Theatre is my "official" work – because I am very suspicious of introducing oneself as a poet - and my everyday life. I am a theatre director and a playwright, and I also teach as a Lecturer. Theatre is universe of its own. It is the place, "topos", that reconstructs the idea of time and that allows ideas, thoughts, dreams, concepts and wishes, to acquire shape, form and presence. It also is the place where people meet, communicate and connect beyond language and conventions, under the larger convention of acceptance and of shared experience. We could compile a library on what theatre is and what it means to a creative person, so I'll just skip to one element that, personally, I find liberating: the endless possibility. The manipulation of the artificial, which is very genuine and real in itself, is one of the most exciting things in theatre- the same is true for every art, of course. In theatre, though, the raw material is humans; that is frightening, it is a huge responsibility for both sides, stage and audience, and it is also exhilarating.

Our views get across to the audience or the readers even if we try and hide them. I am questioning the wish to "express oneself" and "communicate my view", especially in a time where "expressing an opinion" has become an end in itself, an activity per se. Of course I am thirsty for communication and

certainly I've got ideas that I want to share. But what is most stimulating, is the interaction, the dialogue, the provocation and the response. I am not fond of podiums, and I don't like pedestals either.

I observed the concept and the power attached to a podium when I was still a Law student; it does not charm me. By getting on a podium, one acquires a superiority that is rarely justified. On a podium, one speaks and expects people to listen, sometimes to follow - through their rhetoric, through the literal and straightforward meaning of their word. And the best thing they've got to offer is their literal self. Very few human beings are naturally that intriguing, charming and, truly important. For me, theatre, and poetry, are the opposite: they imply, they suggest, sometimes they show, they point to a certain direction, they transform, they abstract, they reveal ... and, they invite the collaborators, as well as the audience / readers, to infer, to project, to interfere, to question, to expand, to dream ... and, to respond in whichever way they feel suitable; most of the times, in a way that we will never find out.

*7. You live and create your art in London, a modern multicultural Metropolis. Do you think it's necessary for you, as a person and as an artist to 'spy' on other 'parallel universes'?*

It is impossible to be creative without observing, without peeping through and without challenging the boundaries. I am fascinated by looking at the world, so much that sometimes I think I'm invisible. On the other hand, I am cautious not to indulge myself too much, not to forget to be part of this world – not to forget that I am part of this world. The idea of a matrix happening alternatively somewhere else is a subconscious trick in order to manage starting your life in a foreign place. This constant hypothesis, this vision of oneself in a totally different environment, under totally different – whether that is another new adventure, or “back home” - sometimes hinders one from moving on and sometimes saves them from impulsive and desperate choices. It's a defense mechanism that sounds more theatrical than it is. Artists and creative professionals are more prone to exercise and apply that mechanism, to the point where sometimes they see others in their own scenarios. Personally, I think that there is a strong meeting point somewhere inside. Those different universes are not parallel; they form windows and fragments of a larger whole. It's much more soothing to know that there is a bigger picture, an image so

large and generous that no satellite can capture, which includes everything and where each event has its own place, without having to compete with any timeline. I prefer intertwined rather than linear structures.

**«“Hellenikotita”, as with most elements that contribute to one's identity in relation to history and culture, is an ever evolving element – it should reflect what's naturally following from a very interesting past, along with the necessary “alterations” that are taking place by the minute, even if someone tried to resist it»**

*8. How significant is your origins and roots to you? What does 'hellenikotita' or 'Greekness' mean to you in the contemporary world, in the era of globalisation?*

I find the term “roots” extremely accurate in its symbolism and in its simplicity. My place of origin and my upbringing within the Greek culture defines a great part of my identity, and perhaps, my personality. Roots are constantly feeding whatever sprang, they hold it in place, and maybe, sometimes, they hold it too tight. I'm not sure how “hellenikotita” absorbs all the various layers from the past and the future, as well as from the “here” and “there”, in times of general disorientation and devaluation. Theoretically, “hellenikotita”, as with most elements that contribute to one's identity in relation to history and culture, is an ever evolving element – it should reflect what's naturally following from a very interesting past, along with the necessary “alterations” that are taking place by the minute, even if someone tried to resist it. It probably means something different for the people living away from Greece, as they can observe and understand the core essence of the country from a lucid distance. I suppose language is always a strong point of reference, both verbal and physical, and the general code of communication, a presumed openness and a willingness to explore and adapt – otherwise, the Greeks living abroad would not be there in the first place. Language is very significant to me – I am exploring the Greek and English language through poetry and through theatre, in their written form

and in their performativity. Words and structure, and how language helps us shape our own thoughts and ideas become more obvious once one lives as a bilingual.

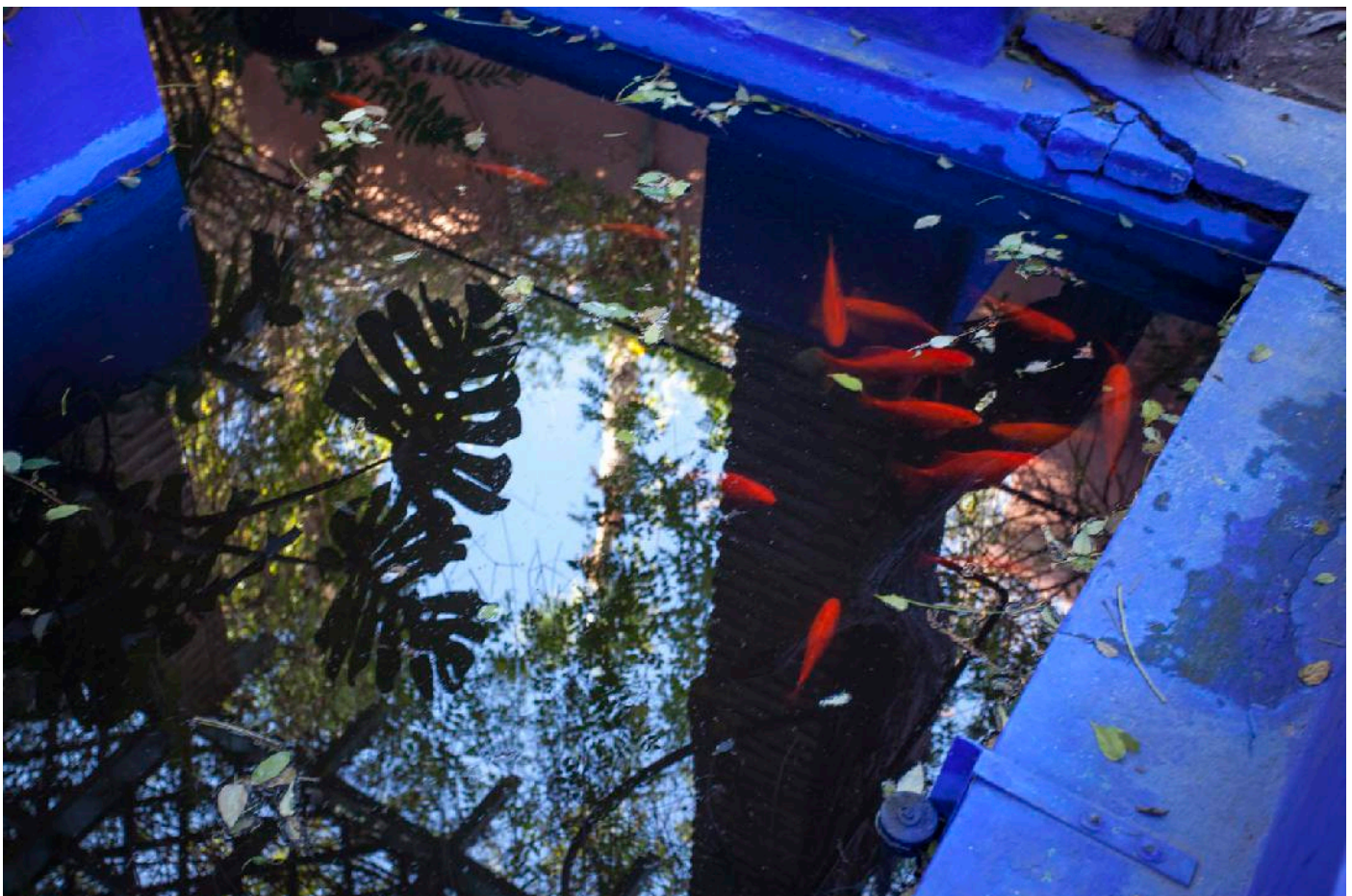
9. *Is there any project that you are working on at the moment, something that excites you and you would like to share with us?*

At the moment, I am preparing for a collaboration with Analogio Festival in Athens, the brilliant institution founded and managed by Sissy Papathanasiou, currently Director of Literature and Arts. I've been part of Analogio Festival before, when my play "Commodity" was directed by Lilly Meleme in 2017, but this time we are preparing a rather special tribute for September 2019. Meanwhile,



Yiannis and I are looking into bringing the exhibition "The Desert Behind" in Athens, where we will have a presentation of the book as well. We are exploring spaces and funding options, as we believe it is crucial for artists that work and develop abroad to be presenting their work in Greece.

*Photo Credits: Yiannis Katsaris*



## Book launch

### “Greece – Biography of A Modern Nation” by Roderick Beaton

On Thursday March 14, the Hellenic Centre and Allen Lane Books organized the presentation of Prof. Roderick Beaton's new book “Greece – Biography of a Modern Nation”. The book was presented to the audience by the author, Roderick Beaton, Emeritus Koraes Professor of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature at King's College London in conversation with Bruce Clark, journalist at The Economist, and author of the book “Twice a Stranger: Greece, Turkey, and the Minorities they Expelled”.

The event was introduced by John Kittmer (HM Ambassador to Athens 2013-2016) and Simon Winder (editor, Allen Lane Books, Penguin Random House), and author of “Lotharingia: A Personal History of Europe's Lost Country”, 7 March 2019.

Roderick Beaton grew up in Edinburgh where he first studied Latin and ancient Greek before going on to Peterhouse, Cambridge, to graduate with a BA in English Literature and a PhD in Modern Greek. He came to King's in 1981 as Lecturer in Modern Greek Language and Literature, and in 1988 was appointed to the Koraes Chair. For ten years he headed the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies (whose functions since 2015 have been taken over by the Department of Classics), and from 2012 to 2018 was Director of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, part of the Arts & Humanities Research Institute.

From October 2009 to September 2012 he held a Major Leverhulme Fellowship, and during autumn 2010 the Visiting Fellowship of the British School at Athens, on whose Council he also serves. His most recent book, arising out of his Leverhulme-funded research, is *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (2013), which won the Runciman Award and the Elma Dangerfield Prize and was shortlisted for the Duff Cooper Prize. In 2013 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA).



We think we know ancient Greece, the civilisation that shares the same name and gave us just about everything that defines 'western' culture today, in the arts, sciences, social sciences and politics. Yet, as Greece has been brought under repeated scrutiny during the financial crises that have hit the country since 2010, worldwide coverage has revealed just how poorly we grasp the modern nation, said the Allen Lane Books editor. This book sets out to understand the modern Greeks on their own terms.

“Greece – Biography of a Modern Nation” is a new account of Greece's modern history starting the story from the 18th century, the century that led up to the nation's birth, and in particular from 1718, when the Treaty of Passarowitz, signed between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans established the

boundaries to mark off Muslim Turkey from Christian Europe.

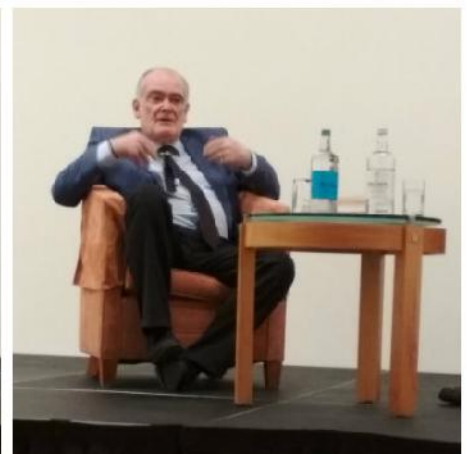
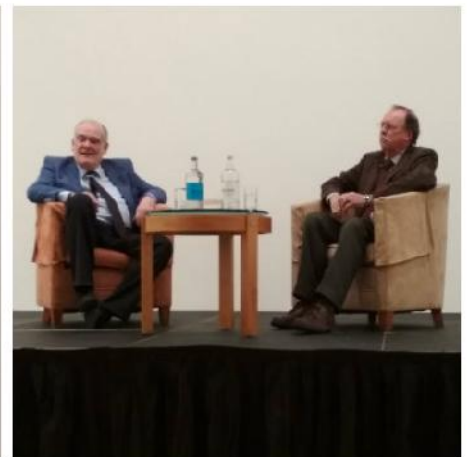
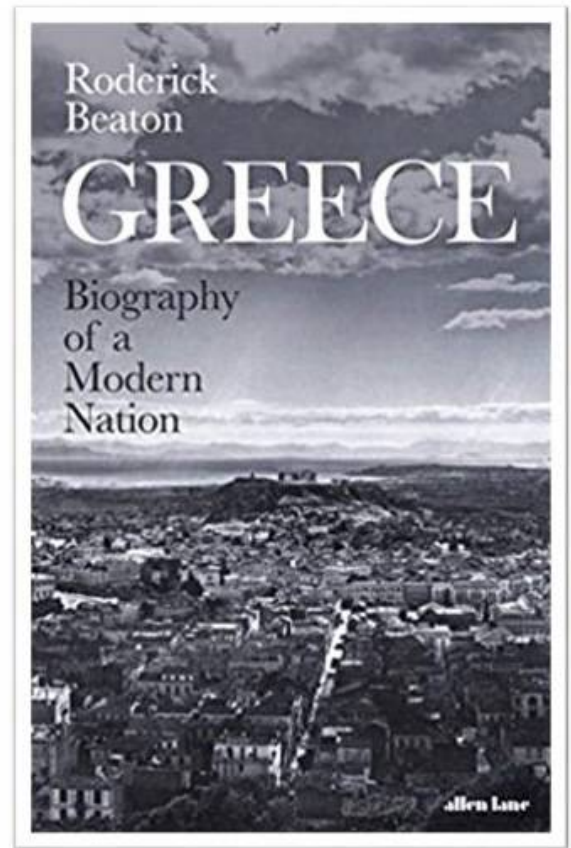
How did Greece come to be so powerfully attached to the legacy of the ancients in the first place and then define an identity for itself that is at once Greek and modern? This book reveals the remarkable achievement, during the last three hundred years, of building a modern nation on the ruins on an ancient civilization. This is the story of the Greek nation-state but also, and more fundamentally, of the collective identity that goes with it. It is not only a history of events and high politics. It is also a history of culture, of the arts, of people, and of ideas. Above all the book is about the evolving process of collective identity over the past two centuries. By focusing on the Greek 'nation' instead of 'state', the author

brings in the broader Greek diaspora (which today numbers fifteen million), from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.

In order to discover what makes a nation, said Prof Beaton, we have to look farther than the headlines facts of the history, beyond the actions and words of leaders, or the graphs and statistics that can capture human activity across groups and populations. The story of a nation must also be the story of how people have thought about themselves and the world and their place in it. This is why I have chosen to call the history told in the book a “biography” rather than a “history”. A biography requires long and deep acquaintance with the subject but also a certain distance.

By treating modern Greece as a biographical subject, a living entity in its own right, Prof. Beaton encourages readers to take a fresh look at a people and culture long celebrated for their past, even as they strive to build a future as part of the modern West.

Focusing on the birth of the Greek nation-state, which emerged from encounters between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire, Prof. Beaton carries his story into the present moment and Greece’s contentious post-recession relationship with the rest of the European Union. Through close examination of how Greeks have understood their shared identity, the author reveals a centuries-old tension over the Greek sense of self. How does Greece illuminate the difference between a geographically bounded state and the shared history and culture that make up a nation?



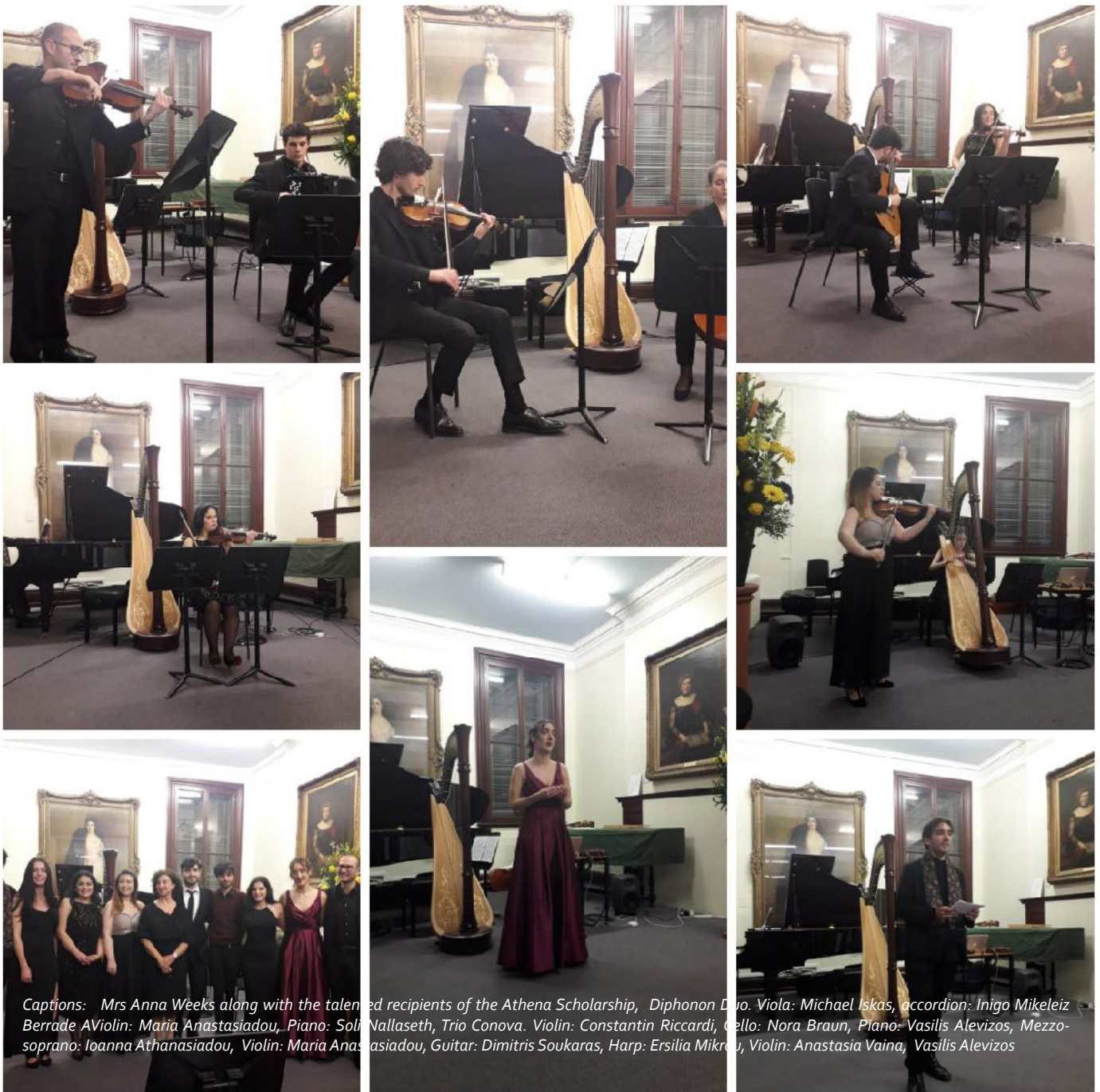
## Athena Scholarship Annual Concert

### A superb performance at the Royal Academy of Music

On Friday 8th March the talented recipients of the Athena Scholarship performed in a concert hosted by Mrs Anna Weeks. Using a variety of instruments they presented a selection of musical pieces by classical and modern composers including Chopin, Massenet, Piazzola, Constantinidis, Markris and Hadjidakis. The inspiring, virtuoso performances attracted enthusiastic applause.

The Athena Scholarship, generously provided by Mrs Anna Weeks, is in its seventh year and appeals to classical and jazz musicians and vocalists. So far there have been 11 graduates and there are currently six Athena scholars enrolled at the academy. They are the musical talent and expertise who come from all over Greece and continue to blossom in the fertile grounds of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

The Athena graduates have gone on to have successful careers as soloists, orchestral members, teachers, composers and so on. It was an honour getting to know them all and we wish them the best of luck!



Captions: Mrs Anna Weeks along with the talented recipients of the Athena Scholarship, Diphonon Duo. Viola: Michael Iskas, accordion: Inigo Mikeleiz Berrade AViolin: Maria Anastasiadou, Piano: Soli Nallaseth, Trio Conova. Violin: Constantin Riccardi, Cello: Nora Braun, Piano: Vasilis Alevizos, Mezzo-soprano: Ioanna Athanasiadou, Violin: Maria Anastasiadou, Guitar: Dimitris Soukaras, Harp: Ersilia Mikrou, Violin: Anastasia Vaina, Vasilis Alevizos



## The Thread - WORLD PREMIERE Russell Maliphant & Vangelis

Making its world premiere at Sadler's Wells, *The Thread* unites the rare talents of Olivier Award-winning choreographer Russell Maliphant and Oscar-winning composer Vangelis. Through producer Georgia Illiopoulos's conception, *The Thread's* promising young cast of 18 Greek dancers combines Greek traditional dance with Maliphant's unique movement language, exploring the changing forms of traditional and contemporary dance.

Featuring the explosive electronic music of Greek composer Vangelis, whose famous score for *Chariots of Fire* won him an Oscar in 1982, *The Thread* sees Maliphant and his partners unravel these transformations through the union of movement, music, costume and lighting design. Costumes for *The Thread* are designed by award-winning fashion designer Mary Katrantzou, whose work is highly appreciated internationally. Joining these exceptional creatives is Maliphant's long-time collaborator, lighting designer Michael Hulls.



*Photos Courtesy: Sadler's Wells Theatre*

## Greeksconnect - The new online platform by Maria Lykos



# GreeksConnect

## LONDON

*"Whether you are a Greek living in London or simply someone who loves Greek culture, we welcome you to join us and become part of the GreeksConnect community"*

Greeksconnect is an online platform which aims to provide a social and business hub for the Greek diaspora, with a particular focus on London. The platform is the brainchild of Maria Lykos, who as a former Mckinsey strategy consultant specialising in digital strategy and AI, has made a career working with big name clients like Vodafone, O2, EE and Mastercard. Lykos describes Greeksconnect as a "survival guide for Greeks in London" and a way to connect the "London community and Greeks back home". The platform is also home to a business directory with "400-450 registered Greek and Cypriot business", and Lykos says it aims to "empower" through the provision of "additional services and ad hoc events". We spoke to Lykos to ask her about how she went about creating the platform, and to discuss what it means for Greeks in London.


Maria Lykos originally came to London in 2005 as a student, and did not return until 2011. Upon her return she claims to have noticed a key change in the Greek community; "People used to come for a short amount of work experience", but for the "first time, the Greek community was looking to settle" permanently. It was in this period where Lykos realised the idea for a platform like Greeksconnect. With the new community there was an increased "need for Greek professionals", who up to this point were being sought out through facebook groups. Lykos says these lacked structure and organisation, Greeksconnect was a way streamline communication

avenues and meet the demands of the community by "creating something that did not exist".

We asked Lykos how she was able to develop awareness of Greeksconnect, and whether she faced any obstacles in doing this. She answered saying it was a gradual process that started about a year ago when they were initially building the platform. This meant creating a social media presence, enlisting support through word on mouth, and being present at a number of Greek cultural and networking events. Lykos admits that some businesses were skeptical at first, and unsure what they "would get out of it", however "when Greeksconnect went live, people saw a tangible product" and enlisting support became much easier.

With so many online platforms providing social media, business networking and news services we also wanted to know what makes Greeksconnect particularly unique. Lykos answered saying that Greeksconnect is unique in that it ties in together everything a Greek person in London might need, as well as connecting Greeks to useful services back home. She also argues that Greeksconnect is unique as an integrated easy to use website, everything feels connected, other platforms Maria claims can "feel like loads of little websites".

As a platform which provides news and information on upcoming cultural events, we were also interested in hearing Lykos' take on whether Greeksconnect



**INTERVIEWS**

**"Πάντα ένωθα γεννημένος σε λάθος χώρα"**  
Ο Μίκης μόλις λίγες μέρες πριν την παράσταση του "Mikis Rocks London" στο Ασπίου μιλάει απευθείας στο GreeksConnect.  
[GreeksConnect Team](#)

**FRESH NEWS**

**Survival Rules as an Expat**  
How is it to live a Life like an Expat? 9 Cities in one story. Hope you enjoy this journey!  
[Penny Mooton](#)

**LIFE IN THE UK**

**Brexit: Όλα όσα ρωτήσατε και πρέπει να ξέρετε**  
Ο Immigration Lawyer, Toli Savaris απαντά στις ερωτήσεις των "Greek Professionals in London"  
[GreeksConnect Team](#)

## #trending



**LIFE IN THE UK**

**Πώς να εξασφαλίσετε τα φθηνότερα αεροπορικά εισιτήρια...**  
Μόδα και αλήθειες...



**BUSINESS MATTERS**

**Greek Shipping: More than 150 Years in the Heart of London**  
The history, the people, the milestones.  
[Eleni Wasthine](#)



**GROWING BUSINESS**

**10 Years of Fashion Success**  
"Think in a lot of fashion cities, you just don't get the opportunity that you get in London!" May Katsimira

has any part to play in raising the profile of Greek culture in London. Lykos says that she has noticed "more and more Greek artistic events in London", and although she admits this is partly due to the increased size of the Greek community, "this is not the only reason". She believes that increasingly "Greeks are more integrated into the London community", giving non Greeks exposure to Greek artistic forms. Lykos proudly boasts, Greece is so "more than just a place to holiday and eat food, there is so much history, culture and theatre". Lykos also reveals that going forward, she would increasingly like to open up Greeksconnect to non Greeks, continuing with English as the main language for the platform, bringing awareness of Greek cultural events to the London community as a whole.

We finished the discussion with Lykos by asking what sort of impact she anticipates Brexit could have on Greeksconnect and the Greek diaspora and businesses residing in the UK. Maria answered in theme with the recurrent uncertainty surrounding Brexit; "it's a tough question because no one really knows what will happen". Lykos does however admit that if less Greeks settle in the UK her client base could potentially struggle, and that businesses which rely on the import of Greek goods may face difficulties. Despite this Maria admits that she has not noticed any rapid change in the wake of Brexit, and that even in this climate Greeksconnect continues to thrive.

<https://greeksconnect.co.uk/>



## Events to come

In the Flow of Self-Knowledge, Tracing Roots of Psychopathology and Identity

When: 7 May, 7 pm

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

Aspects and Visions of Greece in European Travellers' Imagery from the Renaissance onwards

When: 8 May, 7 pm

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

Sinop Kale Excavations: Investigations of an Early Greek Settlement on the Turkish Black Sea Coast

When: 9 May, 7 pm

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

Spring at the Cathedral 2019

Manos Hadjidakis's 'Gioconda's smile' at the Archangel Michael church in Golders Green.

When: 10 May, 7:30 pm

Where: The Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Cross & St. Michael, Golders Green Rd, London NW11 8HL

Ηρθες σαν την Ανοιξη /You've arrived like the Spring

When: 10 May, 7 pm

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

Natassa Bofiliou – "Monologue"

When: 16 May, 8 - 10.30 pm

Where: Union Chapel, Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN

Workshop: 'It sounds Greek to me': Greek art music since the nineteenth century,

When: 10 May, 10 am – 6 pm

Where: King's Building, Strand Campus, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS

Macedonia after the Prespes Agreement

When: 17 May, 7 pm

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS: Diversity and Inclusivity in the Age of Brexit

When: 19 May, 5 pm

Where: Andipa Gallery, 162 Walton Street, SW3 2JL

Contemporary Iconography

When: From 21 to 24 May

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

Book presentation 'Forty-nine days in hell'

When: 23 May, 7pm

Where: The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

Niki Marangou Lecture: Blowing up the Parthenon –

Greek antiquity as a burden and as a rival on the modern Greek stage

When: 23 May, 6.30 – 8 pm

Where: Strand Campus, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS

@GreeceInUK is a newsletter with a monthly roundup of news related to Greece, Greek Politics, Economy, Culture, Civil Society, the Arts as well as Greece's distinctive vibrant presence in the UK. Our ambition is to offer an accurate and rich source of information to those interested in Greece and her people.

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