

Costas Montis a Cypriot Poet (1914 -2004)

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RÉSUMÉ

Costas Montis a principalement écrit de la poésie, plus particulièrement de courts poèmes, mais il a également écrit de la prose, et, à un degré moindre, des pièces de théâtre, de la critique et de la traduction. Sa principale oeuvre poétique s'intitule *Moments*, une série de courts poèmes qu'il a publiés pour la première fois en 1958 et qu'il a continué à enrichir jusqu'en 2002. Il a aussi produit la trilogie *Grammata sti mitera/ Lettres à la Mère*, trois poèmes «complexes» dans lesquels sont développées les structures poétiques des *Moments*. Les problèmes politiques, les angoisses existentielles, les variations d'humeur et les remarques se rapportant à lui-même se rencontrent, convergeant de façon abstraite, tantôt avec humour et sarcasme et tantôt avec une satire amère ou une ironie limpide, et sont résumés dans des poèmes denses, concis, comprenant deux, trois ou quatre lignes et parfois même une seule.

ABSTRACT

Costas Montis cultivated poetry, particularly short poems, but he also wrote prose and, to a lesser extent, theatre, revue and translation. His poetic output is defined mainly by *Moments*, a series of short poems that he published in 1958 and that have been supplemented up to 2002, and by the trilogy *Grammata sti mitera/ Letters to Mother*, three «complex» poems in which the poetic nuclei of his *Moments* are developed. Political problems, existential anxieties, mental changes and remarks about himself are conveyed in an abstract way, sometimes with humour and sarcasm and sometimes with bitter satire or limpid irony. They are summed up in concise poems that are short, sometimes even a single line.

Costas Montis composed mainly short poems, but he also wrote prose and, to a lesser extent, theatre, revue and translation. Although best known as a poet, the rest of his work is important and in recent years his work has interested more and more scholars in Cyprus, Greece, and even other countries. His poetic output is defined mainly by *Moments*, a series of short poems that he published in 1958 and that have been supplemented up to the present day, and by the trilogy *Grammata sti mitera/ Letters to Mother*, three complex poems in which the poetic nuclei of his *Moments* are developed.

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Montis was born in Famagusta, as the sixth and last child of the large family of Theodoulos Montis, a civil servant from Lapithos (Kyrenia District) and Kalomoira Batista from Famagusta, who was from an old Venetian family. From 1915, the young Costas lived for four years in Limassol, where his father had been transferred, and from 1919 he settled in Larnaca. His childhood was marred by the successive deaths of members of his family. In 1922 his older brothers died; Yiorgos, aged 21, of tuberculosis and Nikos, aged 16, of leukaemia. Four years later, his mother died of tuberculosis, while in 1930 his father died of cancer. These deaths left an indelible mark on the poet's character and work.

Immediately after his mother's death, the Montis family settled in Nicosia where Montis attended the Pancyprian Gymnasium. He stood out as an excellent pupil and even rejected an offer from the colonial government of free education at the English School and a scholarship to study in England. In 1932 he enrolled in the Law School of Athens University, although he knew that, after the anti-British uprising of 1931, the colonial government had forbidden graduates of the Greek university to practise law on the island.

From his earliest years as a student, Montis was writing. He collaborated with the Nicosia newspaper *Eleftheria (Freedom)*, sending reports from the Greek capital on current political and artistic trends. His first short stories were also published in this paper. At age 20, he published his first book in Nicosia *Me metro kai choris metro/ With measure and without measure* (1934). It contains early poems and prose that justifiably received negative or guarded comments from critics. The poet himself makes no reference to them in his later publications. Nonetheless, although inept, these pieces reveal the youthful experiments of the author: for example, the light approach to daily and insignificant aspects of life and his use of parenthetical discourse as a second, different voice.

He returned to Cyprus (1937) with a law degree but never practised his profession. He accepted various positions, initially as an accountant and manager at the Hellenic Mining Company (he was later transferred to the mines at Mitsero and Kalavassos). Later he would teach at the Morphou School of Commerce.

In 1939, he published his collection *kamiles kai alla diigimata/Camels and other stories*, while five years later he brought out a second collection of short stories called *Tapeini zoi/Humble Life* (1944). In the first stories he outlines with emotion the humble figures of simple people (the camel driver, the nut seller, the shoemaker and the carpenter), who emerge as totally dedicated to

their work. He goes on to deal again with small and insignificant beings, with animals and also inanimate objects, which he personifies to hint at problems of contemporary man, such as loneliness, alienation, social injustice and human cruelty.

From 1942 on, he settled permanently in Nicosia, and together with Achilleas Lymbourides and Phivos Mousoulides, founded the first professional theatre on the island. He began to write lyrics in the idiom that were set to music and became very popular (especially *Drosoulla's song*), as well as revue numbers. For two years (1944-1945), he brought out the magazine *The Theatre* with Phivos Mousoulides, the first periodical of its kind in Cyprus. Some of his own work was published therein: poems and short stories, lyrics for revues, notes on the writing of verse and comments on the theatre and books.

In 1945, Costas married Ersi Constantinou by whom he would have four children, Theodoulos, Marios, Lellos and Stalo. In the same year, he brought out the short-lived newspapers *Eleftheri Foni* (*Free Voice*) and *The Cyprus Chamber of Commerce Journal*. At the same time, he published a column in the newspaper *Ethnos* (*Nation*), wrote revues and translated film subtitles.

His first collection of poems, *Minima* (1946), contains mainly light love poems. There are also, however, poems that intimate/hint at the subsequent development of the poet. We pause at the poem *O misthoforos apo tin Atlantida/The Mercenary of Atlantis*, which seems to converse with but also to clash with the anti-heroic *Michalios* of Karyotakis. This relatively developed piece refers to a labourer in the Anglo-Cypriot mines, who loses his job because of the war and is compelled to enlist in the army. He fights on various war fronts and kills men to earn a living. His new life does not seem to him as hard as his work in the underground galleries of the mines. At the end of the poem, when the mercenary soldier returns to his family, he presents himself as happy, since he has secured a sizeable fortune. The mental alienation and the suffocation of human feeling are complete; the lament of the mother of his dead childhood friend sounds to his ears as a “frightful row”! But three texts in the collection, that are characterised by the poet as “forerunners” echo the poetry of Cavafy: the psychological vacuum and the loneliness that follow a grand ceremony (*Sternos fovos/Last Fear*), the litter that remains after a fair (*Panegyri/Fair*) and the fear that a long absence alienates people (*Mi fovitheis/Don't be afraid*), convey in an allegorical or metaphorical way existential and other problems of contemporary man: the transience of life, the passing of joyful moments, the upsetting of inter-

personal relationships, human loneliness and psychological desolation. It is of note that in these three pieces the verse has escaped traditional moulds and rhyme has disappeared.

Eight years elapsed between *Minima* and the publication of his next collection of poems (*Ta tragoudia tis tapeinis zois/Songs of the Humble Life*, 1954). During this period, Montis collaborated with various periodicals and newspapers (*Agonistis*, *Ethnos*, *Kypriaki*), while in 1953 he published the *Cyprus Trade Journal* in both Greek and English. In 1950 he was appointed General Secretary of the Cyprus Federation of Trade and Industry. During this same period, another two deaths left their mark on his family. In 1950 his sister Elengo died of cancer, while in 1954 his sister Chrystalla died of intestinal collapse.

In his third collection, *Songs of the Humble Life*, although traditional poems are there, the quests of the poet in the direction of “contemporary style” gain strength. These would lead to his collection of poems *Moments*. The poet himself classifies nineteen of the poems in the volume as “forerunners”. The grief at the death of his loved ones, the extinguishing of youth, human vanity and frivolity, the sense of the futility of worldly matters, the inner vacuum and the tyranny of loneliness, tender family moments and stoic endurance are conveyed in free, blank verse and sometimes in melancholic, Karyotakis-like mood or with Cavafian sagacity. In other poems closer to traditional verse, the (sometimes renewed) conversation of Montis with the Greek poetic tradition, and particularly with his favourites, Cavafy and Karyotakis, is worth noting. In the poem *Oi grammes/The Lines*, the speaker feels that his city is being transformed into a lethal spider’s web that is tightening round him. His former hopeful self is developing into a melancholy Karyotakis and dull Nicosia is compared to “merciless” Preveza. Also, in *Ein’ ligo na prosmeneis tous varvarous/It is a small thing to await the barbarians* he converses openly with Cavafy’s well-known poem *Perimenontas tous varvarous/Waiting for the Barbarians*, to give the reply that it is more dramatic for someone not to wait for anything. Desolation and abandonment leave no room for the Karyotakian speaker of the poem to hope that something will change his life. Yet, even here, there are also light, erotic songs with joyous moments and experimentation, that are written in regular metrical verses (*Kordella.../Ribbon ...*, *Matia/Eyes, Ki’alli lemonia/And another lemon tree*, *Kakologimata/Slander*, *The mou/My God*, *Figil/Flight*, *Poli mou viazesai/ You’re in a great hurry* etc.).

The outbreak of the Cypriot struggle against the British (1955-1959) did

not leave the poet indifferent. He took on the role of political advisor to the members of EOKA in the Nicosia District. From 1956 he was in charge of the literary pages of the non-specialised Greek magazine *Times of Cyprus*, which was published in Nicosia by Charles Foley. He published a number of pieces in this magazine, poems, prose, comments on literary and other subjects, and later a correspondence column. The national exuberance which the Cypriots' struggle for freedom from British colonialism aroused, and also the frustration of the vision of unification with Greece by the Treaties of Zurich and London, in accordance with which the Republic of Cyprus was founded, inspired and sealed the subsequent literary work of Montis.

The collection of short poems entitled *Stigmes/Moments* (1958), the *Simpliroma ton stigmon/Addendum to Moments* (1960) and the supplementary edition entitled *Poetry of Costas Montis* (1962) constitute the prelude to his new poetic course and are a milestone in the development of his work. The bulk of his later poetic work (with the exception of the three *Letters to Mother*) is nothing other than a continuation and an elaboration of Moments. In these "telegraphic" poems, the inspirations of the poet, the themes from the daily aspects of life which preoccupy him, are concentrated and laconically imprinted. Political problems, existential anxieties, mental changes and remarks relating to himself are conveyed in an abstract way, sometimes with humour and sarcasm and sometimes with bitter satire or with limpid irony, and are summed up in concise poems that are short in form, of two, three or four lines, sometimes even of a single line. The poet avoids developing the theme. He keeps only the poetic nucleus to leave the reader the possibility of "finding the steps that lead to the nucleus/core and the steps that lead beyond the nucleus". In other words, the reader is called upon to fill in the gaps and silences, to suspect the allusions which underlie or glimmer through the cracks of the discourse, to investigate the ambiguous and untold layers of irony or to develop and extend sibylline phrases and dark or rather vivid metaphors and personifications.

Critics have justifiably called the poet of *Moments* "Socratic", "tragically dialectical" and "dual-natured". Utilising lessons from the irony of Cavafy or from the satire of Karyotakis, Montis approaches people and things, bigger events and the small, insignificant moments of daily life from an unexpected and subversive viewpoint. He lays bare established values, removes the halo from august figures, satirises and mocks, plays with the words themselves, plays seriously and is serious in a playful way. He creates puns and paradoxes; he dissembles and hesitates, has doubts about his doubts, retracts all that he

has claimed earlier, matches the unmatched and undermines the certainty and seriousness with an ironic and cagey smile. The darts of his irony and satire are not directed solely at others; he often turns his irony and sarcasm against himself or lays bare his own poetic adventure, his continuous and Sisyphean endeavour to touch elusive poetry.

The shortness of the poems and the ironic approach to things do not allow the poet to develop clear positions and inviolate views. Matters great and small, personal, private moments and collective or universal problems, existential anxieties and individual impasses, national exaltation and political disappointments, are all summarised in poetic *Moments* of a single breath, that are condensed with exceptional economy of discourse, with abstract expressions, persistent repetitions or variations. The discourse is frequently fragmented and carved up into apothegms or it becomes intensely self-referring and lets the limits of the writing and speechlessness appear. He ends in a pun, a witticism, a joke. The poet “plays” between discourse and silence, between what is said and what is hinted at. His informed reader is called upon to suspect concealments and innuendos and to recognize (according to the theoretical view of Linda Hutcheon) the latent ironical point at which the spoken and the unspoken culminate.

In general, Montis avoids naming people and things or calling events by their name. He prefers the innuendo, concealments and ambiguity, the most unlikely personifications and metaphors. He often transfers his attention to inanimate objects and to images from nature, in order to conceal personal worries and collective problems in them. Even when he is called upon to demonstrate his national enthusiasm and emotion over the heroic sacrifices of young men during the Struggle for Freedom against the British, he does not break out into high-flown and enthusiastic words, but confines himself to indicating in an exceptionally abstract way and with pointed expression, the reflection of a supreme act or self-sacrifice in the mental world of the speaker or in the way in which the speaker faces the simple and commonplace things that surround him. The latter (for example the Greek flag, a photograph, an inscription, the song of a bird, the rain, the wind) often acquire autonomy and absorb the emotion and the emotional outburst. The tone of expression is controlled and confined to low tones. Pain, anger and disappointment are conveyed discreetly, often with unexpected imagery or with eloquent concealment.

With the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus and appearance of the first cracks in the relations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots

(the inter-communal disturbances of 1963, the activities of extremist elements on both sides, the bombing of the Tillyria region by Turkish planes etc.), the demand for the union of Cyprus with Greece was rekindled on the one hand and for the partition of the island on the other. Montis was one of the ardent supporters of the ideology of union. In 1961, he was appointed Director of the Department of Tourism and he served in this position until 1976. Alongside his creative work, he continued to play a role in the cultural affairs of the island. In 1964, he began his cooperation with the Cyprus State Radio. He had a programme in which he followed and encouraged the first steps of young writers.

In 1964 he published his novelette-chronicle entitled *Kleistēs portes/Closed Doors*, a dissenting work of post-colonial literature, in which he refutes the positions of the English writer Lawrence Durrell put forward in his novel-chronicle *Bitter Lemons*. It is clear that the Cypriot writer does not aspire to exploit myth-making in a substantial and complex way, but hastens to set down his testimony about the struggles of his compatriots against the British in emotionally charged language that would convey national elation. In all probability this work constitutes a direct reply to the novel of Rodis Roufous, *I chalkini epochi/The Bronze Age* (1960) as well, in which the author wanted to give a more mythical depiction of the Cypriot struggle, reproducing and overturning the myth-making ways and ideological positions of Lawrence Durrell.

In 1965, a new, different poetic statement by Montis came out, *Letter to Mother and other verses*, in which a composite poem, the first part of a trilogy, dominates. In this developed text, the poet finds the opportunity to accumulate and analyse further the nuclei of his poetic *Moments*. Here, also, he tries to include and combine the big and small matters that occupy him. The sensitive speaker of the text addresses his words to his dead mother (or to the ideal maternal figure), to expound to her his personal anxieties, national yearnings and universal problems : personal impasse, existential stress, carefree memories of childhood, the thwarting of dreams at a personal and national level, the heightening of political affairs and the threat of war, the death from starvation of little Ali in Somalia, human cruelty and psychological desolation etc. The discourse now flows analytically, while there is a return here to persistent repetitions, personifications and metaphors.

In the same year, in collaboration with the critic Andreas Christofides, Montis published an *Anthology of Cypriot Poetry* from ancient times to the

contemporary period. This anthology also came out in English (1972), while a second, enriched edition in Greek was published in 1973. A first selection from *Moments* was printed in English in 1965, translated by Amaranth Sitis and Charles Dodd.

There followed a spate of collections of poems: *Agnosto anthropo/To an unknown human being* (1968), *Ex imertis Kyprou/From beloved Cyprus* (1969), *En Lefkosia ti.../In Nicosia the...*(1970), *Second Letter to Mother* (1972), *Kai tote en enalia Kypro/Then in sea-washed Cyprus* (1974). In 1970 he brought out the collection *Short Stories*, in which elaborated versions of stories from his earlier publications are also included. He also supervised the publication of an *Anthology of Young Cypriot Poets* (1969), which stemmed from his collaboration with the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, a volume of *Cypriot Folk Songs* (1970), pieces of criticism developed by himself, and worked with Gaston Henry Aufrère and A. Christofides on the French edition *Anthologie de la poésie chypriote* (Paris 1972).

The first official recognition came with his collection *To an unknown human being*, for which he was awarded the First State Prize for Literature by the Cyprus Ministry of Education. Then, in 1973, he was awarded the State prize for his overall contribution to Cypriot Literature. The poetry of Montis began to claim the attention of more critics, both in Cyprus and in Greece. G.P. Savvides considers that the poetic coming-of-age of Montis is completed by his collection *Ex imertis Kyprou/From Beloved Cyprus* (1969). In any case, both in these collections and in his later books of poetry, he elaborates with his familiar techniques the short poems he inaugurated with *Moments*. More and more the poet captures mature simplicity. He draws his inspiration directly or in retrospect from local and international events (the sufferings of Hellenism during the years of the Occupation, aspects of the struggle for freedom (1955-59), clashes between Greek and Turkish Cypriots during the inter-communal disturbances of 1963, the Russian invasion of Prague etc.), which, however, are summarised and presented with emphasis on human moments. Or he meditates on life, man, God, or his poetic art, turning to advantage and effectively promoting the technique of personification and metaphor, abstract expression and innuendo, humour and irony.

Gradually he began composing with greater frequency poems that deal with poetics, in which he reveals his poetic experience and expresses doubt about the possibilities and the limits of poetry and his poetic art. The self-referring speaker sets down his anxieties and his ups and downs in relation

to the effectiveness of writing; he attempts to capture and enclose in words the elusive figure of the Muse of Poetry; he converses and clashes with his personified verses or accepts their harsh censure. He sketches with humour or irony the character of the poet (and indeed the tenacity and megalomania of every aspiring poet), his inharmonious or intense relationship with people and objects. Also, he makes a theme of the struggle and the anguish of the poetic subject to shake the anxiety of the poetic tradition off his shoulders and converses teasingly and subversively with the earlier, respected poets whom he chooses to be his poetical forbears, Montis is perhaps one of the few modern Greek poets to occupy himself to such an extent and with such intensity with his poetic experience, a fact which indicates his obsessive friction with the art of poetry.

The *Second Letter to Mother* (1972) is considered a “crowning poetic achievement” by well known critics and scholars (A. Christofides, Y. Kechagioglou, Y.P.Savvides, M. Pieris). Savvides wrote with admiration that the work “constitutes one of the most revealing and at the same time victorious testimonies possessed by modern European art, after the music of Bach, on the daily struggle of the conscientious craftsman to give a positive meaning and new shape to our disruptive, incoherent age, which has been rightly named ‘the age of non-continuation’, or more simply ‘the age of the fission of the atom’”, and that Montis “has managed to overcome the fission, transforming the very elements of the fission into an unprecedented unity.” Truly, the *Second Letter to Mother* is more demanding and more compact in relation to the first or the third. In contrast with the latter (1980), metaphorical language and personification, associative and allegorical expression dominate in the second. Yet again, the subject of the disruption and cohesion of the structure, the coherence of the writing, occupy him. The “I” of the narration blends with the collective “we”, local matters are linked with international problems. The hungry children of Africa, the self-immolation of the fifteen year old Jan, the death of the twenty-three year old officer in Vietnam, the murder of the child with the kite and other subjects occupy him in connection with personal anxieties, existential impasses and the thwarting of the “enosis” dream (union of Cyprus with Greece).

Towards the end of the 1960s and the early years 1970s, the political situation on the island degenerated. The activity of EOKA B’ on the one hand and of the TMT on the other divided the people of Cyprus and sowed discord between the leftists, who supported Archbishop Makarios, and those on the right, who were led by General Grivas, and also between Turkish and

Greek Cypriots. The seven-year dictatorship in Greece (1967-1974), that repeatedly tried to overthrow the government of Makarios, made the situation even harder and, finally, served the partition plans of Ankara and Denktash. The military coup d'état against the life of the Archbishop (15 July 1974) gave the pretext to Turkey to invade the island with her troops five days later, and since then she has occupied a large part of the island. The Turkish invasion shattered every aspect of life in Cyprus and fed the inspiration of the poet with new, painful material.

The poetic output of Montis written after the unlucky year of 1974 is stamped conclusively by the tragedy of Cyprus: *Pikramenos en eaftol/Embittered in oneself* (1975), *Kypros en Avlidi/Cyprus in Aulis* (1976), *Kypria eidolia/Cypriot Idols* (1980), *Third Letter to Mother* (1980), *Antimacha/Fighting against* (1984), *Os en katakleidi/As in conclusion* (1984) and others. The bitterness and disappointment are epitomised in a number of short poems with the favourite techniques of the poet. Often the pain is filtered and transposed into inanimate objects or elements of nature for it to be shown that the destruction of war touched these too: the doll with the broken arm drooping at the window of a bombed house, the sea of Kyrenia that allowed the passage of the Turkish warships, the occupied mountain range of Pentadactylos, that evokes terror and suspicion in those who once lived there, the lemons of Karavas that were likely nourished with the blood of dead soldiers are just some of the images to which he transposes the drama of Cyprus. None the less, the other side of the story is also shown. Nature appears to bloom carefree, as a dissonant contrast to the dismal climate of the war and post-war reality. Indeed, these collections contain a large number of poetic *Moments* that refer to a variety of other themes familiar from Montis' previous books.

More than at any other time, the poet allows his bitterness and disappointment to overflow in the *Third Letter to Mother* (1980). Here he writes "in violence and in sorrow and in pain" to describe things as they really are. The discourse is now openly referential. The poet is no longer interested in concealing the painful results of the tragedy behind metaphorical and allegorical images or to take refuge in personifications and concealment. He speaks of the drama of the missing, talks of the dead and informers, names the Turkish occupation, severely criticises Greece for not being able to support the defence of Cyprus and avert the evil. In the end the poet wishes that this letter may never reach the hands of his mother, and he declares that he is not going to write to her again. The emotional

charging, the anger and the bitterness do not leave the creator much scope to recast his material more calmly in this third part of the trilogy, which is more condensed and vociferous and perhaps inferior in quality in comparison with the previous two parts.

In the meantime, the poetry of Montis also attracted the interest of critics at universities in Greece. In 1977, he was invited to a class by Professor Y.P.Savvides and he read his poems to the students of literature at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. A year later *A Selection from Moments (1958-1975)*, edited by Y. Kechagioglou, was published by the Athenian publishing house Kedros. In the same year, Kechagioglou published an essay on the poem *Mia lefka stin Kakopetria/A Poplar Tree at Kakopetria*. Then Y.P.Savvides gave a lecture on the poet at an event of the National Association of Greek Writers of Cyprus (1979) and shortly afterwards wrote his prologue to the collection of poems *Meta fovou anthropou/In Fear of Man* (1982). Under the editorship of Y. Kechagioglou and M. Pieris, a collection of twelve essays was published, mainly referring to the poetry of Montis.

His only novel, *O afentis batistas kai t'alla/Master Batistas and the others* was published in Athens by Hermes in 1980. Here the author makes use of, but also upsets, techniques of the historical novel. Sometimes with the innocent glance of a child and sometimes with the demystifying mature conception of the basic narrator, he aspires to make memorable autobiographical memories, to feel the identity of himself and his country and to sum up personal and collective experiences from the period of Turkish rule to the present day. At the same time, he sets out, with self-referring comments, his anxieties and his impasses with regard to the art of writing, he attacks the illusion of plausibility and lays bare the imaginary world of mythmaking.

In the same year the collection *Sti glossa pou protomilisa/In the language I first spoke* (1980) was published, with a prologue by Y. Kechagioglou. This is the first concentrated edition of his poems written in the Cypriot idiom. As mentioned earlier, Montis had been writing verses in the local linguistic idiom since 1940. Writing in the idiom became much more frequent later on, after 1970 and particularly in his late work. The poet, himself, authoritatively maintained in a speech in 1980 the view that Cypriot poets should write in the linguistic idiom of their island too, because it can offer “unique and precious sap to the trunk of the Greek language.” At the same time it can make known the cultural peculiarities and the character of the world of Cyprus and the invisible aspects of its history. The output of Montis in the idiom is noteworthy and increases and is enriched still more

in the late phase of his work. Y. Kechagioglou was right when he observed that this output is basically traditional and prosodic. At an initial stage at least, his texts in the idiom constitute “intervals of joy” (to quote A. Christofides), since they shake off the pessimism of the rest of his work and deal with carefree love or other happy moments of life. Nevertheless, his idiomatic poetry gradually extends to “serious” subjects as well, such as the historical vicissitudes and the political problems of Cyprus, the existential man, poetics etc.

The creative use of the Cypriot idiom is extended to other areas as well: to the theatre, revue or to the elaboration of folk songs. In 1981, the Cypriot version of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes (an earlier work by Montis) was successfully put on. A second comedy by Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazousae/Women at the Assembly* was also performed in the Cypriot idiom. Also, in 1981, he published in a collective Athenian edition, his one-act play *Apagorevetai I eisodos sto agchos/No Entry for Stress* (written in 1973), in which he approaches modern, existential man.

After 1980 recognition of the poet extended to the international plane. In 1981 he was awarded the title of Poet Laureate by the World Academy of Arts and Culture. The Hungarian scholar Kalman Szabo published a notable study on the short story *Ena palio aftokinито/An Old Car* (from the collection *Tapeini zoi/Humble Life*) in the Budapest journal *Homonoia* (1982). In the year that followed his books were translated into European languages: *Letters to Mother and other verses* (translated by A. Sitis and C. Dodd, 1984), *Momenten* (translated by V.H. Hokwerda, Leiden 1987), *Afendi Batistas und das Übrige* (translated by K. Jablonowski, Köln 1988), *Brieven aan Moeder* (translated by V.H. Hokwerda, Gronigen 1991), *Poems* (translated by M.B. Raizis, Athens 1999). In 1984 he was nominated by PEN Cyprus for the Nobel Prize. He was nominated for the same prize a second time in 1999 by the School of Philosophy of the University of Cyprus and by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture. Among other awards, he was honoured with the Award for Excellence in Letters and Arts of the Republic of Cyprus (1994) and awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the School of Philosophy of the University of Cyprus (1997).

From 1986 onwards, with financial assistance from the A.Y. Leventis Foundation, the poet has been working on a revised edition of his *Complete Works*, which is being supplemented up to the present time with his most recent poems. This edition, however, in which the poet spreads his poems over a variety of units, is rather difficult to use. The recent dedicatory

volume of the Athenian Journal *Lexi* (edited by M. Pieris, 1999), to which critics and scholars from Cyprus and Greece have contributed, is an important contribution to the poet's becoming known and respected in the Greek world.

In summary, it can be said that the poetry of Montis, whether in the form of the short *Moments* or with the developed compositions *Letters to Mother*, constitute an important stage in the poetic output of Cyprus and possibly contribute something new to the body of contemporary Greek poetry. Already in Cyprus, a series of young poets are making use of the poetic example of *Moments*. Also recently, in Greece too, younger notable poets are discovering his poetry and sometimes converse fruitfully with it. Among these poets, what seems to be gaining ground is the opportune and well-condensed expression of his short poems, which permits the instantaneous promotion of the thematic core, without this being lost in the development of the discourse or in peripheral themes.

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