



Loula
Rodopoulos
our tribute



The very young Loula

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Foreword

In all of her personal and professional spheres of endeavour, Loula Rodopoulos was, as this publication highlights, an exceptional person.

At the Victorian Women's Trust, after three decades of existence as a uniquely feminist and philanthropic organisation, we give huge thanks for her vision, commitment and capacity in leading the Trust for its first crucial years.

To start a women's organisation with a state government gift of one million dollars has few, if any, parallels around the world.

But this is what happened in 1985 as Victorians were encouraged to pause, reflect and celebrate 150 years of European settlement – and the role played by women.

A million dollars might have seemed a lot but it wasn't really. This meant that the first phase in the Trust's life was especially critical. Apart from money in the bank, and all of the initial fiduciary and compliance demands, there was the not small matter of managing, and satisfying, the early and high expectations that surrounded the formation.

Justice Peg Lusink was the first bridging convenor of the Trust. After six months, the role was taken up by Loula Rodopoulos.

Early Board member Heather O'Connor recalls Loula as 'far and away' the best chairperson she has ever worked with. According to the Trust's first Executive Director, Jenny Florence, Loula helped everyone find a sense of direction, and that without her at the helm in those early years the organisation could easily have gone under. Solid foundations make all the difference!

Since Loula's early and inspired leadership, the Trust has grown from strength to strength, and gone on to play a critical role in the achievement of a more equal world for women and girls. This is in large measure due to the extraordinary support of women donors from across Victoria and an increasing number from interstate.

In our significant birthday year, we could not think of a greater gesture to mark the milestone than to establish a Sub-Fund in Loula's name, and to identify charitable purposes that would have been dear to her heart.

In the process of establishing this Sub-Fund, we have enjoyed yet another writing and editing partnership with the redoubtable Susan Powell. Through her commitment and skilled endeavour in bringing to fruition this written 'life and times' tribute to Loula, we have had the absolute privilege of connecting to many others who have appreciated at close range Loula as an extraordinary woman and who have understood the enormity of her contribution to the Victorian community. It has also been a delight to collaborate with Loula's beloved husband George and family members in making this Sub-Fund a reality, and adding to the capacity of the Trust in its quest for gender equity.

Mary Crooks AO
Executive Director

'Exceptional' is not a word to be used lightly with regard to anyone. In the case of the late Loula Rodopoulos, BA, Dip. Social Studies, MSW, 'she was exceptional' is the way many people, especially those who knew her well – personally or professionally – sum up her character and her achievements.

Loula seemingly impressed in the same way virtually everyone with whom she came into close contact. Her calm force of personality, intelligence, integrity, empathetic and compassionate nature, insight, energy, focus and her firm stance in relation to her values made their mark on colleagues, family, associates, clients, friends and students alike over the decades. These qualities left a strong legacy in the wake of her untimely death in January 2013.

Wherever Loula's energies were directed – social work, academia, participation on statutory tribunals, boards, councils and committees, writing – they went hand in hand with her unwavering beliefs in equity, social justice, and the importance of working towards the best outcome for women, the poor, and those of different backgrounds.

Born in Melbourne in 1944 to parents of Greek heritage, all her working life Loula employed her talents and capabilities for the benefit of individuals and of organisations. It was the good fortune of the Victorian Women's Trust (VWT) to be among those beneficiaries: first as a founding trustee and then as convenor she played a vital role 1985-90 in setting the fledgling foundation on the path to itself becoming exceptional.

Loula's leadership skills, fine judgement, and experience of the spheres of government, education and community helped put the Trust's inaugural board – dauntingly tasked with disbursing grants of state money to women's enterprises – on the road to becoming a model of its kind.

To honour Loula's achievement and contribution to community, and with generous donor support, the trustees of the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust have established the Loula Rodopoulos Sub-Fund. It will make grants to 1) assist women recovering from mental illness or other difficult personal circumstances and 2) support and enable programs which encourage young and established female writers.

This publication marks the launch of the Sub-Fund. It chronicles Loula's life and work over the years including the early period of the VWT and her involvement in it.

In bringing this together, I want to acknowledge the vision and leadership of Mary Crooks, Executive Director. Initially, when George and Maria Rodopoulos came to see Mary, it was she who joined the dots between the life of Loula and previous Trust endeavours to put women's contributions rightfully on the public record, including the pioneering exhibition, *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*. As always, Mary matched this vision by bringing the idea to a practical reality, including finding a creative way to publish some of Loula's beautiful poetry as well. This is why you will find many of Loula's poems interspersed throughout the text.

I feel honoured to have been given the opportunity to research and write about Loula, and to discover an amazing woman I had never met (but who had, as it happened, attended the same school as myself). It has been a joy to meet with the many women and men who formed key parts of Loula's life and times and I thank them for their time and great recall. The final product could only be as it is because of the wonderful support accorded to me by Loula's family.

The support of Trust staff is also very much appreciated. In particular I would like to acknowledge Janya Clemens for her positive collaborative spirit in working to bring the text to publication.

Susan Powell

Morning in Vienna

Coats, scarves shiver on hooks near door.
Smudged grey clouds curtain frosted windows.
Moustaches stir cappuccinos, top hats thaw.
Clocks turn forward.

Smudged grey clouds curtain frosted windows.
Coachmen's eyes blanket horses, wait for tourist trot.
Clocks turn forward.
Believers flock to Stephansplatz Cathedral doors.

Coachmen's eyes blanket horses, wait for tourist trot.
Beggars, Mozart clones, emerge, the warming day to fleece.
Believers flock to Stephansplatz Cathedral doors.
Elite conquers Kaertner Strasse with slippery feet.

Beggars, Mozart clones, emerge, the warming day to fleece.
Buses to Schoenbrunn Palace profit from Sisi's legacy.
Elite conquers Kaertner Strasse with slippery feet.
Hotel Sacher chocolate torte retreat.

Buses to Schoenbrunn Palace profit from Sisi's legacy.
Moustaches stir cappuccinos, top hats thaw.
Hotel Sacher chocolate retreat.
Coats, scarves shiver on hooks near door.

X Celsion Caffè-Bar
Di Dario Trucco
Vienna
2005

Highly Commended, Society of Women Writers NSW Competition 2011.
Published in: *Images*, quarterly newsletter of The Society of Women Writers NSW Inc.,
December 2011 – February 2012.

A world first for women

The Victorian Women's Trust of which Loula Rodopoulos was convenor of the Board in its formative years is an organisation unique not only in this country but probably internationally...an independent, non-profit body founded by government and run by and for women, dedicated to improving the status of all women, and providing financial and other resources for initiatives undertaken by them.

When in early 1985 Loula and her fellow Board members – the Hon. Mrs Justice Peg Lusink (convenor and Family Court judge), Heather O'Connor (secretary), Joan Baird, Fran Kelly, Jenny Florence, Jenny McGuirk and Jean Tom – were chosen after careful consideration and from a long list of candidates to 'grow' the Trust just established they could not possibly have known what they were in for.

The eight – only two of whom had known each other previously – brought to the job an impressive range of personal and professional skills and experience, including substantial contributions to community-based women's activities and connections to a range of women's networks. But they had to build this new venture from the ground up, working out everything as they went while not yet used to working together, and in the face of much external pressure and scrutiny. There was a lot at stake, and expectations were high. The outcome could have gone either way, according to those who remember.

The new Board held its first meeting on 10 May 1985; it took place in the Premier's Department. After that, for lack of a permanent base, meetings were held for some time at the Lyceum Club of which Peg Lusink was a member, followed by a longer stint in borrowed State Bank offices in Swanston Street.

A groundbreaking initiative for government, the Victorian Women's Trust had been founded that year with the gift from the Cain Labor government of one million dollars in acknowledgement of women's contribution to Victoria's history and achievements over 150 years of white settlement.

That in 2015 the VWT celebrated its thirtieth anniversary is a tribute to all who have worked for it over its three decades in both paid and voluntary capacities. As a pre-eminent philanthropic body, it has to date disbursed over \$6 million in close to 540 grants for projects designed and run by women, and to stage or support events, initiatives, activities, publications and other projects and programs that put it at the forefront of issues affecting women and girls. The Trust has become a leading advocate for women in championing the rights and entitlements of women, and working to bring about positive long-term change.

An early, and fundamental, difficulty for its first Board was the lack of a model for a trust that was community-based. Existing Australian foundations, such as Myer, Stegley and Reichstein, had been established and were run by those respective families (who provided valuable advice to the new-minted VWT), or were those administered by trustees appointed for their expertise in the areas of law and finance; these latter thus had a very different

orientation. The VWT Board canvassed philanthropic bodies overseas for similarities but none were found – trusts for women in other countries were typically set up, and administered, by women of wealth, not by government.

While the octet struggled to get a handle on their multi-faceted task, an overwhelming number of submissions began to pour in from women's groups around Victoria as it became known that funding could be available to innovative projects that would have struggled to attract financial support from other sources. (Laughably in retrospect, prior to appointment, the trustees – over-stretched in the rest of their lives, paid just expenses for this new involvement and with limited administrative assistance – had been informed by the premier's advisor that they would only need to convene a few times a year for evaluation and disbursement. In the event they started off meeting weekly, then moved to fortnightly and after that never less than monthly, with sub-groups and committees getting together in between and other work done individually. The load for the convenor was even greater.)

When the Cain government came to power in 1982, it responded to long-term lobbying for a dedicated centre for the women of Melbourne by announcing that it would donate one million dollars to set up and run such a space. When research revealed that this amount was insufficient for the purchase and upkeep of a building in the CBD (Flinders Street Station was an early candidate among some sixty sites under consideration), the idea of a physical centre was relinquished. It was decided instead – after an intense process – to use the money to set up a Women's Trust which would make grants to women's initiatives in the community from interest accrued on this capital, and from further donations.

A specially appointed Implementation Committee fought hard to ensure that such a Trust, in itself a radical departure, would be administered by an all-female Board. Solid support for this came from Joan Kirner and fellow Labor caucus members, as well as other female politicians, highly placed public servants, and community leaders. They had a difficult time, then and for a surprisingly long period afterwards, convincing males in power that women could and would run this initiative successfully on their own. Despite the many impressive women in public and community life, in the 1980s women were not well represented on boards of any kind.

Chestnuts

chestnuts brood in embers of cynicism
hiss their anger

weeds engulf railway lines
supplanted by unfinished road works
lone cinema hotel closed
denuded shops plastered with yellow For Rents signs
hospital staff unpaid closure rumoured

decaying rural properties entice foreign takeover
austerity measures elderly recall famine
hooded masses protest politicians grovel to EU
youthful gloom lines coffee bars overlooking
the bay of Nafpaktos

scruffy males stake an intersection wash windscreens
to wipe destitution from their lives lounge on median strips
wait to jump a dalika [2] to their destiny
lives scuttled through crime and exploitation
across inhospitable borders

unease squelches underfoot
bitter orange fruits that litter pavements
in this layered country of poverty
rivulets of melting snow fan out from mountain peaks
endeavour to expunge despair

but chestnuts brood in embers of cynicism
hiss their anger

Written in Greece, May 2011.

Received commendation in All Poetry Competition NSW 2011.
Published in: *Yarra Works*, Yarra U3A, September/October 2012.

Touch and go

Heather O'Connor had never met fellow trustee Loula Rodopoulos prior to their being on the Trust Board, although both were academics and Heather had previously been aware of Loula's work within their union.

'As a Board we were focussed and dedicated,' she says, 'but a million dollars was a limited amount on which to set up a foundation. We were immediately faced with some serious issues to do with taxation and legal aspects, and how to prudently invest on behalf of others. It was a scary thing that we were doing and it was touch and go for the first couple of years as to whether we'd survive. In the wake of Peg Lusink leaving in 1986 after serving in a bridging role, it was clear that we badly needed direction and strong leadership.' These requirements were met with Loula's appointment as convenor.

Heather found Loula to be 'far and away the best chairperson I have ever worked with – a woman of formidable intellect, discipline and commitment who took the position very seriously and who had an unswerving dedication to social justice.

'She never lost her cool, and was good at reining us in when needed, including myself! Always very calm and professional, she was at ease meeting with John Cain and other politicians and officials as well as everyone else who needed to be dealt with – the women's movement at the time was full of vibrant, active, highly opinionated individuals and organisations requiring management!

'An invaluable aspect of her leadership lay in her getting some top women in finance to advise us, and as a result of that input the Board began to feel a bit more confident.'

With Loula at the helm, the Trust over the next few years 'absolutely clawed itself into viability. I was in awe of her handling of an incredibly difficult job.'

Even after three decades, former trustee Jenny Florence recalls 'Loula's focus and guidance, her knowledge of systems and what we needed to do as a philanthropic body in the face of competing ideologies and pressure from various directions to use the money in certain ways. She helped us to find a sense of direction without causing rifts or alienation of people inside and outside the Trust.' Jenny agrees with Heather that given the 'total underestimate of time and expertise needed, the organisation could easily have gone under'.

Bill O'Shea, former ministerial advisor and speechwriter to John Cain 1984-87, also has the clear recollection that 'From the point of view of the premier, good governance was needed for the Trust, and Loula was the ideal person in develop this and thus the credibility of the organisation. She had a cool head, and kept it. With her great understanding of process and fairness, and knowledge of how to run things appropriately, politicians could see she was a safe pair of hands.

'At the time Loula came on board there was a danger that the Trust could start looking like a collective that wouldn't appeal to the big end of town or the broader community. She brought confidence and capacity and professionalism that helped the organisation attract a much wider audience and the respect of people who didn't necessarily have the emotional attachment but were quite impressed that someone like Loula was at the head.'

In 1986 a most generous private donation enabled the Trust to move to premises in Hardware Lane and to employ Jenny Florence for several years as executive officer, her duties centring around fundraising. Over this period Board members and supporters undertook speaking engagements, consultations and briefings to also raise the profile of the Trust and promote its work – and the particular needs of women – to individuals, corporations, institutions and other trusts. People who wished to gift, donate or bequest to benefit women’s community-based projects, businesses and enterprises, and for their money to have a multiplying effect, now had somewhere of independence, focus and integrity to direct their generosity.

In the first couple of years of its existence, in response to requests, the Trust distributed to projects as diverse as: a women’s garage; a Women’s Art Register to record the work of Australian women artists from 1850; books for and by women with disabilities; a migrant women’s musical; a women’s drama group that performed in metropolitan housing estates and regional community venues; the formation of the first association for home-based care givers; the group Women in Film and Television (WIFT, still going strong) to employ its first part-time co-ordinator (Sue Maslin, director of the recent film *The Dressmaker*); Kensington Catering Inc.; and the Moorabbin Rental Housing Co-op. Rural, ethnic and Koorie women and women with disabilities were all represented from the beginning.

The Trust also provided a service to assist women identify and negotiate with relevant funding bodies and local resources, develop projects, and write submissions; and itself worked in with other organisations and foundations.

Women’s business enterprises at the time were often disadvantaged because traditional banks would not lend to a woman without the security of her husband. The setting up in 1987 by the Trust of the visionary Guaranteed Loan Fund (Women’s Enterprise Guarantee Program) in response to this was another national first. Loula as convenor described the initiative thus in an *Age* article of early 1987: ‘We will be the guarantors for the bank for any projects that we feel are viable that would not have access to credit rating unless we were there to guarantee a certain percentage (in this case 50 per cent) of the total financing needs of the project’. She went on, ‘We are looking for projects that have potential for some long-term impact...something that will bring about structural change’.

The Loan Fund immediately attracted a large degree of interest from women exploring the establishment of small businesses, and many success stories flowed from the innovation, which also had an impact on the way major banks henceforth operated. In addition, the Trust provided to women, for their new or existing enterprises, management assistance, financial planning, and networking.

Only three years after it was founded Loula was able to report to the premier of the ‘growth and great progress for the Trust’ which had won it ‘a very considerable position of support from the broadest spectrum of women in the Victorian community’.

In the annual report of 1988-9 she stated that the Trust had ‘become a source of information for individuals and organisations etc, and was consulted daily on all sorts of relevant issues...relying on commitment of board and staff to implement its work... continually expanding demands on services and programs’. At the same time, pulling no

punches, she alluded to the ‘...sustained and often overwhelming demands placed on the directors to oversee a multitude of developments that in other organisations would be fully staffed and resourced’.

Loula relinquished her position at the Trust in 1990. The Board acknowledged in writing her input of ‘tremendous, skill, energy and commitment’...and her encouragement of ‘dynamic debate, diversity of opinion and ongoing scrutiny and evaluation’.

The scope and expansion of the Trust’s work over the following decades would have very much been in tune with her own values. The Sub-Fund that has been established in her name, and which responds directly to the needs of women in areas of particular interest or concern to her, once again links Loula with the organisation.

Before, during and after her years of active contribution to the VWT, which took place when she was in her early to mid-forties, Loula’s long and productive working life went in various directions and directly and indirectly positively affected large numbers of people. It was a full, rich existence, which for the last twenty or so years of her life ran parallel with the creative outlet of writing poetry, short stories, and other prose pieces. These compositions came to mean much to Loula and also found favourable assessment and appreciative readers. Her quite prolific output reflected her cosmopolitan and transnational nature, an intertwining of her background, subjects that were important to her, and her discerning eye.

Mere listings of the dates and places of Loula’s achievements in the area of social work and academia and the noting of her active membership of a considerable range of statutory boards and other bodies over a long period in themselves give little flavour of the influence and impact of this remarkable woman. Although her professional researches and writings add further to the picture, the recollections of a number of people who knew her in different ways at the different stages reveal yet more of her approach and personality.

The story of Loula Rodopoulos has many dimensions. Fundamental to all she achieved was her long, happy marriage to George, a true partnership, and her loving relationships with her daughters, Maria and Katie, their partners, and her grandchildren.



Beginnings

Loula was born in Melbourne on 8 March 1944 to Evgenia and Panoyiannis (Peter John) Raftopoulos. Her brother Spearos, who also had a notable academic career and is now retired, arrived three years later.

Loula's mother, Evgenia, was born in Australia, and lived here all her life. Evgenia's parents, Katina and Spearos Raftopoulos, were both born on the island of Ithaca, in Greece; he migrated here first and she followed in order to marry him, which they did in 1921, at Evangelismos, the first Greek Orthodox church in Melbourne. Katina's siblings also migrated to the same city, as well as other relatives, so that Loula and her brother grew up in an extended family of various generations and as part of a tight-knit community from Ithaca settled in East Malvern.

Loula's father, Peter, was born in Romania but grew up in Ithaca, his parents' birthplace. He arrived in Australia in 1937 as a young man; after meeting and marrying Evgenia he joined the business, the Regal Trading Company, that her father and brothers had started in the 1920s – packing glazed and crystalised fruit and nuts, and running a wholesale grocery that supplied most of the cafes in the central business district and suburbs of Melbourne; the majority of these were owned by Greeks, many of Ithacan origin. For many years the family company also ran the refreshments kiosk at the Capitol Theatre in the city; the theatre had itself been founded by a Greek immigrant.

On their marriage Peter and Evgenia lived with her parents, Katina and Spearos, in their substantial Art Deco house in East Malvern, and raised their two children there. Loula's brother recalls a 'happy and harmonious home'...nurtured by the example of 'love, gentle discipline, integrity and hard work'. The family stayed on with Nona Katina – to whom Loula was close all her life and who had a strong influence on her – after her husband died, when Peter took over the running of the family business with great success (helped in later years by Evgenia). The couple went on to enjoy a long retirement in the same house (Peter died in 2004 at ninety-three, and Evgenia in 2010 at eighty-seven). Loula was fortunate to experience the unusual continuity of the home she knew pre-marriage always remaining in the family; her brother still lives there today.

In her father, Loula had a model of community involvement – both Greek and Australian – and active concern for others that was no doubt a factor in her own passionate awareness and activism which took various forms. A man known for his dignity and high principles,

Loula as a teenager

Peter Raftopoulos helped raise money for various charitable causes and for some ten years after retirement was a volunteer interpreter at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Loula and her brother were delighted when in late 2012 the Ithacan Philanthropic Society announced that, as a lasting memorial to Peter Raftopoulos, the VCE bursaries (aimed at helping support students through university) it had awarded annually since 1988 were henceforth to be named after Peter, a long-term and active member. The bursaries, which were originally Peter's idea, go each year to the two VCE students (children of members) with the highest ATAR scores.

Education was important to both Peter and Evgenia (who was educated at St Michael's Grammar School in Melbourne until her mid-teens, and then went to classes at the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy) and they encouraged their own children in their ambitions. The siblings attended Lloyd Street Central School in East Malvern until Grade 8 (Form 2), after which they were both accepted into academically selective, single-sex high schools, springboards to impressive tertiary achievement.

A further connection between Loula and her father was that he liked to recite poetry, learned in his childhood, and she loved to listen to it. Much of her own later writing of poetry was about or inspired by her time spent in Greece and other European countries.

All his life Peter retained his love of his homeland, particularly Ithaca and his home village of Kioni, although he only went back there once, later in life. Loula, by contrast, was to visit Ithaca and the rest of Greece many times, and she and George eventually bought a house there.

The island of Ithaca lies in the Ionian Sea off the north-east coast of Kefalonia, between Greece and Italy. The second smallest inhabited island (about 120 sq kilometres) in the Ionian group, its population these days is reduced to about three and a half thousand people living in fourteen scattered villages. The capital, Vathy, the largest settlement, is situated on one of the world's largest natural harbours.

Continuously inhabited for six thousand years, Ithaca is famed as the kingdom of Odysseus, whose journeyings are immortalised in Homer's epic poem 'The Odyssey'.

Over the centuries, Ithaca's geographical position meant it has had many conquerors—including Romans, Byzantines, Normans, Venetians, French, Russian and English – all of whom left their mark in different ways.

Ithacans have always travelled, as seafarers and as settlers seeking a better life. The earliest Ithacans arrived in Australia in the 1840s. Many thousands have migrated here since, especially to Sydney and Melbourne, and have made significant input into Australian and Australian-Greek life in the areas of food, business, sport, the arts, politics, and social and community clubs.

Nostosⁱ

To Ithacan seamen who embrace forever the waves.ⁱⁱ

And the moral of it all? This.

*You embark; you make the voyage; you reach port: step ashore, then.
Into another life?*

Marcus Aureliusⁱⁱⁱ

Nostalgia disembarks from ferry Kefalonia in the quivering Ionian seas at Piso Aetos, welcomed by stone laden mountains, torrents of rain; drives through winding roads to the harbour promenade of Vathy, where shoals of fishes swim close to shore & octopi taunt townsfolk chasing a tasty morsel.

Catlike nostalgia

slinks through unfamiliar territory
where repositories of lost generations await resurrection –
in Kioni, alongside cemetery beach,
weaves through iron gate, long grasses,
over rubbish & broken stones, to find family graves.

in Vathy, scrambles up steep road,
seeks directions
*Why bother to go to a cemetery! a toothless man asks,
You're not from here!*

slithers around headstones, bristles in disappointment
until smell of brine stakes its territory & she sprawls
on the Dracoulis Mansion door mat, embossed in family history,
strokes cream parchment museum records of
forebears, who sailed to the antipodes.

scuttles over the promenade, where tourist yachts moor & cafés tout for euro
rich customers, to catch a tidbit of conversation, clues to her heritage,
a writhing octopus, trawling through unfamiliar ocean beds,
clinging to fragments of generational anecdotes & embroidered lace heirlooms,
questioning shopkeepers, gleaning ancestor's lives from postcards & sepia
photographs, exploring handmade seafaring arts & craft artifacts,
responding to curiosity about identity & absence.
treads pebbles in bay of Filiatro

i Return home, homeward.

ii The inscription on a memorial overlooking the harbour of Vathy opposite the Dracoulis Mansion. The memorial features a giant black anchor that frames the harbour and mountains.

iii Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*. Translated with an Introduction by Maxwell Staniforth, Book 3 Penguin Classics, 1964.

where a woman bathes in speckled seas, near a rusted caique, with her dog,
where youths prepare for the tourist season, slash overgrown grasses
that choke adjoining olive groves, then on the road to Anoghi,

meets a grizzled white haired shepherd who
bemoans the exodus from Ithaca in the early 1900's,
first to Romania then Australia & America,
now Albanian children populate village schools.

In a Cavafy^{iv} moment that can no longer ignore her dual identity
tearful nostalgia embarks from Vathy in a misty dawn,
chattels overburdened with unresolved questions,
placated by a vista of mountains & seascapes
that glitter in farewell, command return.

Like Byron, who visited Ithaca in 1828, she
desires to bury her books here & never go away.^v

iv Refers to 'Ithaca', a well-known poem by Constantine Cavafy about life, death and return.

v Memorial stone in Vathy for the Commemoration of Byron's stay in Ithaca, August 1828:
'If this island belonged to me I would bury all my books here and never go away'.

Early impressions

Some insights into Loula as a child and young person come through the lasting recollections of two women of similar background with whom she was to remain in warm contact for the rest of her life. One, Iris Lucas, initially met Loula through their families' involvement in the Greek community; in due course they further bonded through overlapping at the same schools. The other is her first cousin, Nina Mills.

Iris remembers: 'When Loula and I were small we occasionally saw each other because my parents were of Ithacan origin too, and were friendly with Loula's parents and grandmother. When I was about to go into Grade 6 our family moved to East Malvern, which meant I would be switching to Lloyd Street Central School, where Loula was already a student.

'This was the early 1950s and there were very few children of Greek background in the area. When I started at Lloyd Street I found it very difficult. The first day my father came along to enrol me, and the other girls stared at him and sniggered at me; I think they thought I was Indian because of my dark suntan and my long black plaits! Anyway, I looked different, and they weren't used to that. For the first few days no-one wanted to play with me. Then, despite the age gap between us – she was about four years younger – Loula came up and said that her parents had told her I was now at her school, and asked if I wanted to play with her. She was very caring even then, wanting to make me feel comfortable...

'After this we didn't play together again during school time but living only a street apart we'd walk to, and sometimes from, school together. Loula also helped me when I fractured my ankle later that first year, and for a long period had to hop everywhere!'

After Year 8 Iris went on to The Mac.Robertson Girls High School (Mac.Rob) in Albert Park, one of the top girls' schools in the country in terms of academic excellence, where she was followed some years later by Loula. In addition to their outside connections, they travelled there together each day by train.

'Post-school Loula and I moved in different circles,' says Iris, 'but we'd speak or catch up occasionally, and I'd also hear from family members over the years what she was up to. I was very impressed by what I learnt of her achievements and involvements, about which she was always humble and modest. Even when she was pretty young I recall her as sensible, organised, studious, not easily swayed by her peers; she had a strong set of values, which she no doubt got from home, and wasn't afraid to speak up.' Like everyone else who knew her well, Iris also remarks on her friend's dry sense of humour.

For her first cousin, Nina Mills (Loula's father was her uncle), 'Loula was always an important part of my world. All our lives our families were very close'; over the years the two girls met 'on a great many occasions, particularly on some of those more structured observances such as Christmas, Greek Easter, name days, and birthdays...Many of these shared times and celebrations reflected the Greek cultural practices and observances of our inherited background.' As they grew older and the age difference of five years of no significance they became friends in their own right.

Nina recalls Loula as 'a devoted family member who attended with empathy and compassion to the needs of her immediate family as well as reliably and efficiently supporting a wide arc of extended family and friends. Throughout her school and university years, and later, when she assumed a formidable number of professional responsibilities, she always had time for family. She was present for me on those particular days one never forgets...as bridesmaid at my first wedding and when my father died unexpectedly.

'Given the demands of work and family we didn't necessarily "see" each other as frequently as we would have liked, but we were in regular contact. She was undoubtedly the most dependable, reliable, and empathetic human being and it was my very good fortune to know her as a person and as a cherished relative.'

Loula's brother, Spearos, is in an ideal position to assess how 'multi-faceted' his sister became, and one of these facets was the way 'she carved out a niche for herself from her particular background. She had those strong traditional values and she kept them. Of course, they became modified over the years as she grew up and went in different directions, including becoming a feminist and active in women's affairs. She had great empathy for people who didn't grow up with her advantages. She understood where they were coming from and did what she could to help.'

Future directions

Loula enjoyed her four years at Mac.Rob, although she did not particularly shine in her studies while there, nor at that stage was there an indication of her future career path. In her Matriculation exams in 1961, besides essential subjects, she gained passes in modern history, musical appreciation and biology. Musical (Loula had a fine singing voice), she was one of the few girls selected from the upper forms to comprise the school's highly regarded madrigal group.

After leaving high school, Loula enrolled at the Kindergarten Training College at Kew; on completion of her first year there, at the suggestion of her teachers, she switched to an Arts degree at Monash University. Some years later she went to Melbourne University to do, part-time, a Diploma of Social Studies, signalling the real start of a passionately engaged working life. This was to take her in a number of different but related directions, each informed by what she had acquired through learning and underpinned by what she understood innately in relation to what would improve the lives of others, especially the powerless and those lacking a voice.

Meeting George

Loula was eighteen and not long out of school when she met George Rodopoulos, aged twenty-three, who had arrived in Melbourne in the late 1950s from Aigion in Greece. He had emigrated to Australia on his own, leaving behind his parents and siblings. George, who was at that stage working for the state government, met Loula's father, Peter, before he met his future wife; both he and Peter used to lunch at the Ithacan Philanthropic Society in the city.

George and Loula first encountered each other at one of the dances regularly held by the Society. She impressed him as 'a serious young lady who read a lot' (something she was to do for the rest of her life). The couple got engaged in 1963, and married in late 1965. Their first daughter, Maria, was born in 1968 and their second, Katie, in 1974.

The young couple initially bought a villa unit near Loula's family in East Malvern, and then a house in Ailsa Avenue, also in East Malvern. They remained in Ailsa Ave for over thirty years, raising their daughters, working extremely hard at their different careers, maintaining otherwise busy lives, and making close relationships with their neighbours, especially Anne Kupcis and Jane Fyfield.

Unusual for the time to be studying and working while her children were very young, Loula received a great deal of practical help from her husband and from her parents, especially her mother, to enable her to do so. Sharing her beliefs and values, George supported and encouraged Loula in whatever she did, and was immensely proud of her.

He recalls his wife as always 'a happy person with lots of energy, physical and mental. She was an unusual human being...very giving to everyone...a caring person with great humility.'

His own work was in the area of finance and marketing at BP oil company; Loula supported his further tertiary studies.



The path emerges

After she graduated from Monash in 1967, Loula began her working life as a librarian at Dandenong High School. In 1972, she gained a Diploma of Social Studies from Melbourne University, becoming the first person of Greek background to graduate in that discipline. Her future in the sphere was much influenced by her reading, by her politicisation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and by the women's movement.

Loula embarked on her first position, 1973-75, at a period of great change in terms of migration policy and practice. As a social worker with the Victoria Department of Immigration, she was placed as a grant-in-aid worker for Greek-oriented casework at the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), then located in Richmond. Since its beginnings in the 1960s the EMC had been an innovative community

agency/think tank providing, among other activities, a wide range of services to assist newly arrived migrants, whose numbers from Southern European countries peaked in that decade and the early 1970s.

Despite Australia's history of migration especially since World War II, government services in terms of practical assistance to migrants and relevant information about life in Australia – housing, employment, the welfare system, learning English, cultural, social and educational differences, gender roles, exploitation and discrimination, legal rights and so on – were markedly lacking or inadequate. Non-government organisations of many kinds took up much of the slack; the government's grant-in-aid scheme was in response to their call for more and better official involvement, including improved training for social workers and for an increase in the number of ethno-specific workers and interpreters to liaise with new arrivals and longer term settlers. The founding of welfare agencies set up by specific migrant groups, the growth of the ethnic press, and the establishment of the Australian Assistance Plan which re-united families were also features of this transitional time.

As was the end of the official policy of assimilation and the emergence of a new official policy – multiculturalism... This change signalled the clear need for community education to assist Australians to accept, and adapt to, the different way new settlers were now to be regarded.

Loula on her BA graduation

Until Next Time!

-All things vanish. For each a time is due.
-All things remain. I go. Now it's left to you.

Odysseus Elytis 1998

Dawn mist rouses him,
flings open iced shutters
embraces chilled air.
He drives to town
past cemetery gate.

Waking streets,
enticed by aromas of baking bread,
pungent coffee bean roasters,
repelled by fish stalls drowned in flies
slaughtered goats hooked on high,
pause to read death notices.

He joins bakery queue,
behind pregnant woman jostled
by toddlers,
makes way for trembling old woman,
frowns at another who shouts I tremble too!

He retreats to kafenion, embraces his brother,
shouts him a thick brew, ouzo, mezethes.
They chat with village elders and émigrés,
spurn whining beggars.
Raucous recollections of youth, deceased compatriots,
the weekly funeral tally,
the farewells Until next time!
But there was no next time.

Remembering Adonis
2009

This is a revised version of the poem shortlisted in The All Poetry Competition, NSW, 2010.
Posted on: Diasporic Literature Spot.

At the EMC Loula's dual-cultural understanding, her ability to empathise, her grasp of issues, and her determination that the utmost be done to assist those of minority status found outlets that made her an asset to the organisation and in her specific area of work.

It didn't take her long to start speaking up. An article solely quoting her views that appeared in the *Richmond Advocate* of 22 August 1973 gives a prescient flavour. Under the heading 'Communication: more than just knowing the language' she is reported as saying that understanding someone else is more than just hearing the words, that one must understand the context, including the culture, the way the family operates, the position of women; and that in the case of Greek migrants, the major problem they face is economic and that until that aspect is dealt with they cannot move on to other aspects of life such as language. She speaks of the importance for social workers of rapport, of being seen to be trustworthy, of taking into account migrant parents' lack of education, their concerns about Australian education for their children, their fears that their children may grow away from them, and mentions the particularly difficult situation for parents of children with disabilities.

The previous month Loula had also been quoted in the press, this time in an *Age* article headed the 'Special needs of migrant women'. The piece was based around a WEL survey and also featured the views of social workers from various agencies highlighting the many shortcomings of the system in relation to migrant needs, especially those of women. Loula repudiates the claim of the Immigration Department that it offered language courses to social workers; she says that she is 'the only bilingual social worker working with migrants in Melbourne', and deplores 'lax Australian officialdom' which through carelessness was the cause of many avoidable problems.

Her own article which appeared in *Australian Social Work*, March 1975, about her work with Greek migrants, was the first of her many publications over the years on welfare practice and ethnicity.

Into academia

In 1976 Loula returned to Melbourne University to do a MA Preliminary course, after which she went into academia, lecturing in social work at Monash and Melbourne universities from 1977 to 1980. Between 1981 and 1984 she lectured at Victoria College (Toorak campus) in Interpreting and Translating for BA students. In this role she was instrumental in developing an accredited course for interpreters and translators in Victoria, with the aim of ensuring that they acquired the appropriate professionalism for their complex role and responsibilities, which had in the past too often been overlooked or minimised. She was also concerned that wherever specialised or bilingual services existed or were being developed their delivery was built into the mainstream as a matter of course.

Dora Hetrelezis, who today works as a social worker in a community health centre, met Loula when she was a student at Victoria College. 'She was one of our sociology lecturers over the three years I was there, and I've never forgotten her. She was a very good lecturer and role model, and very encouraging to someone like myself who was first-generation Greek and whose Greek at that point was better than her English.

'Loula was very positive about our studies and the future; she taught us how to write academically, to do research, and to think and speak up for ourselves, despite our Greek family backgrounds that were often limiting in terms of ambition and independence, especially for girls. She understood where we were coming from and what we had to overcome...and this made a big impression on me.

'After I graduated from Victoria College as an Interpreter and Translator at NAATI Level 3, Loula's ideas about being out in the community and giving led to me later becoming a social worker myself. When working with individuals/families/groups from different CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) backgrounds I look back and reflect, "Now what would Loula say to this or what would she do to improve the situation?" Would the presence of an interpreter or translated information help? Where can they learn English locally? What if a woman from a CALD background is experiencing a difficult situation? Are her choices restricted because of her cultural background and lack of spoken English? What are the implications on her as an individual, her future, her family and the community?

'Loula stood for many ideas. Some were radical at the time and perhaps even today. She will not be forgotten.'

Social worker Helen Goodman is someone else who was positively influenced by Loula's ideas and insights early in her career. The two women, who later went on to have contact in other professional capacities, and to become friends, met when Helen was in her first job as a young social worker at the Alfred Hospital in the 1980s, and Loula was at Victoria College. 'Loula was brought in in a consulting role, invited by the head social worker. It was an unusual move but a very good one. She was to be available to the social workers in relation to liaising with non-English-speaking patients and their families, with particular focus on the use of interpreters.

'I was "green but keen" so I was happy to benefit from Loula's expertise and insights. We had many different kinds of patients with all types of illnesses, and of various nationalities and cultural backgrounds. They and their families had a right to understand what was happening to them, and to know about other services etc., even if English was not their primary language. I'd realised that there were subtle, complex interactions that went on in interpretation (and that too often in earlier times family members or unskilled workers around the place were called on to translate) but that the medical and social work staff were probably only ever getting half the story. Although this was an area of practice that was fraught it was groundbreaking at the time for attention to be paid to these issues, with the aim of improved comprehension and communication on all sides.'

Sunday afternoon in Bratislava

We embark from Vienna on the hydrofoil
bounce over Donau slime wait at the Korneuburg Lock pick up speed
pass elongated freight barges luxury tourist boats fisherman's huts picnickers frolicking
in Donau-Auen Park
a Hapsburg coronation street performance with celebratory cannon boom
welcomes us to Bratislava
we stroll down Namestie Square where the statue of Hviezdoslavovo nationalist poet
presides through the Jewish quarter conquered by the Novy Most Bridge into an
enclosed courtyard where artisans sell their wares
wood carvings woven flax clay artefacts crocheted thread but Euros not accepted
as the trolleys rattle past we sit on Coca Cola deck chairs lining the American embassy
barricades sip cappuccinos in the Hotel Radisson & Coffee Restaurant ponder at the
contradictory ideologies the illusion of progress
question as some claim whether the 1989 Velvet Revolution put everything in order

2005

As part of her assistance at the hospital, Loula requested that Helen tape some interviews with interpreters which she then went over with her. Recalls Helen, 'This provided some wonderful, insightful and educational experiences; it was great to have this input and it made a big difference to my understanding.'

Jack Nalpantidis worked as a social worker at EMC from 1980 to 1986. He met Loula when, as a lecturer in social work at Melbourne University, 'She became re-involved with the organisation as part of her teaching, helping us to develop resources, devising workshops, writing and speaking about the need for appropriate services and approaches, and also exploring ways to enable social and welfare workers, especially those in more generalised organisations, to work more effectively with people of non-English-speaking backgrounds. She could identify common themes and issues as well as the ethnic dimension.'

He recalls that 'she was particularly aware of the issue of deinstitutionalisation, including the impact for those with ethnic backgrounds and their families'.

'Loula did a lot of very positive work with community groups in an era when there were still not a lot of qualified people around encouraging these approaches. She was a pioneer and a wonderful mentor who had no hesitation in giving support and guidance where she could, and put a lot of time into people. EMC staff found her very helpful; they benefitted from her broad views.'

'My lasting impression was that she was never static, always expanding her field of work and understanding.'

In later times both Loula and Jack sat on the Mental Health Review Board (now the Mental Health Tribunal). Jack recalls Loula's compassion and her professionalism as a member in making decisions that would deeply affect the lives of others, her strong commitment to quality practice and in particular practice with non-English-speaking communities, and her strong contribution to the training and development of the membership and Board generally.



Further influences

Loula returned to study in the late 1970s, graduating from Monash University in 1981 with a Master of Social Work. The title of her thesis was 'Social work curricula development in a culturally plural society: An exploration of issues'.

She then left academia to spend most of rest of her career serving on a wide range of boards, tribunals and committees, which she experienced as a very satisfying avenue of contribution to the community. There were so many of these appointments over time, separately and concurrently, that she was able to make her living in this way.

A partial list of Loula's participation includes:

1980-84, part-time member and chairperson of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal; 1984-89, member of the Council on Overseas Professional Qualifications, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs; 1984-2001, part-time member Commonwealth Administrative Appeals Tribunal; 1985-1991, part-time member (director) of the Commonwealth Merit and Protection Review Agency; from the early 1990s, independent chairperson of appeals and grievances with CSIRO; 1989-99, member of the formerly titled Nursing Home and Hostels Standards Review Panel; 1990-93, member of the Victorian Seniors Card Vetting Committee (Department of Health and Community Services); in mid-1998 appointed chairperson of the reconstituted Eligibility Membership for Overseas Qualifications of the Australian Association of Social Workers; 1992-2001, community member of the Victorian Intellectual Disability Review Panel; 2000-2003, 'Not registered dental care provider' member of the Victorian Dental Practice Board; 2001-2003, appointed to the panel of Administrators and Panel of Advisers Aged Community Care (C'wealth); 2001-2004, 'not psychologist' member of the Victorian Psychologists Registration Board; 2003-2006, sessional member of the Victorian Institute of Teaching; 2006-2011, community member, Victorian Mental Health Review Board.

Being an effective member of a tribunal was not easy work. Among other attributes and aspects, it required: knowledge of many areas of life, specialist reading and understanding, advanced skills in listening and deduction, the capacity to work co-operatively with professionals from the fields of medicine and the law and other disciplines, and the ability to write up detailed and complex decisions.

Loula with her daughters, probably taken in the early 1980s

Helen Goodman, who years previously had met Loula when a young social worker at the Alfred Hospital, was later to sit with her as a fellow member of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT). She recalls 'one of Loula's groundbreaking achievements' of that period, her convening in late 1992 of a one-day conference entitled 'Non-legal members of review bodies, in social welfare jurisdictions. That a non-lawyer would convene such an event, for non-legal members, raised lots of eyebrows. I gave a paper on this day also, which raised eyebrows as well. The thought of "us" (non-legal members) expressing our views independently of the legally dominated tribunal cultures was challenging...This memory summarises some of why I valued Loula's contribution and leadership so much. She helped me to "be brave" (although not as brave as I felt she was through many years of her professional life)...I don't know that I found that collegiality and comradeship again in a work setting.'

Helen and Loula formed a strong partnership over their joint work on tribunals. They spoke publicly and at conferences about issues; wrote about the roles of community members like themselves, which were not always clear-cut or unvexed; they sought to improve the system for people presenting their cases, especially migrants; they pushed to make the writing up of decisions a shared activity; and for each member to take turns at presiding.

Helen says: 'Loula was very firm that all members have a chance to do this last, and to bring their own perspective and values to the position. Even where there was opposition she was never unpleasant, never put anyone down, including opponents. She had a lovely manner with clients, and moved between different worlds with grace and ease and strength.'

Although the two lost touch from the early 1990s, Helen retains vivid memories of the woman who 'made a big impact on me. She was different...very balanced and incredibly incisive, which I found an attractive combination.'

Social worker and lawyer, Helen Kiel, first met Loula at Monash University in the fledgling School of Social Work in the mid-seventies. What happened there brought them personally close. According to Helen, some of the senior staff at Monash who had been recruited from the UK had particular ideas about the direction the course should take. As a result, some of the students went on strike in protest, and she and Loula found themselves more in sympathy with the students than the staff, making them somewhat unpopular with their colleagues. It was through this difficult period that Helen developed enormous respect for Loula, both professionally and personally, and their friendship was cemented.

Helen found Loula to be generous and caring, although not everyone saw that side of her in the workplace. She was very serious about her work, and did not suffer fools gladly. At Monash at that stage she was intellectually quite frustrated; her career really only flowered later when her conceptual and other capabilities were recognised.

Helen and Loula's friendship continued after Helen moved interstate in 1980. It is one, she says, that she misses and treasures.

Salutation

A stranger acknowledged in gesture and glance.

'your belt is hanging loose,' observes the elder protectively.

'I'll be with you in a moment,' murmurs the embarrassed village baker, his diatribe interrupted -

Local products deteriorate, staple costs escalate, irresponsible politicians oblivious to the monotonous toil of the *fiery furnace* - momentarily relieved by this unexpected customer.

'From where?'

their inquisitorial eyes question as she fumbles for the drachmas.

Mutual curiosity freezes this international transaction and overwhelmed by the baking aromas, she stumbles out pondering the anonymity of urban supermarkets and the smoldering embers of political discourse in Selianitika.

Contrasting words acknowledged in awkward salutation.

Bakery

Peloponnese, Greece

Published in: *Australian Women's Book Review*, Vol. 9.1, Autumn 1997.

Margaret Gibson's connection with Loula spanned several decades and a diversity of settings. They first met when they were both professionally involved with the development of the interpreting and translating profession in Australia. Margaret was impressed by 'Loula's understanding of what it felt like not to have a Celtic background', an invaluable standpoint, especially on tribunals.

Margaret, who had lived in Greece for many years and spoke Greek, was aware of Loula's writings about Greece before they encountered each other once again in 2012 in a U3A writing group. By coincidence she had previously met George independently when they happened to study Modern Greek at the University of New England at the same time. In due course Margaret was introduced to the rest of the family – Loula's mother and her daughters.

Like some of Loula's other friends, Margaret experienced Loula as not revealing anything very personal; she had the feeling that there were aspects that Loula chose not to share. 'She didn't go into anything too deep and close. I knew she had to deal with some things that were difficult, and that she'd faced them, and got through them.'

'She was shy, but showed a prickly side if people said things said or assumed things about her because of her background, or what they thought was her background. I have no doubt that she was patronised at times. She would have been very aware to that, and reacted defensively.'

Margaret's assessment of Loula is that she was 'a very loyal person, a very loving mother... and the ultimate professional'.

Linette Hawkins, a field education co-ordinator at RMIT, knew Loula for many years, having first encountered her when both were on the Social and Community Services Advisory Committee to the TAFE Board in the 1980s. She was impressed by Loula's strong stand regarding TAFE's Interpreting and Translating course at RMIT: 'Loula was very aware of the multi-dimension aspects of interpreting; from her theoretical perspective and the fact that she was already lecturing in that area, she tried to make the point to the Board about the significance of high standards of training'.

Linette later helped Loula in relation to her successful application to Deakin University to become Associate Professor and establish the new social work course there, 1993-94. She got to know her better at this time; in her view, 'Loula was very principled; she regarded her values highly, didn't sell herself short. She got her fingers burnt because of this, and because of sexist attitudes, and remained in the position for only two years.'

When Loula was made Adjunct Professor at RMIT, 1999-2008, Linette was witness to her contribution: the broad, cross-cultural perspectives and cosmopolitan attitudes, her significant professional writings. 'Loula had a high profile but she was quiet in the way she worked, very grounded, very stable. She was also intriguing – in some ways she was radical, in others not...it was difficult to stereotype or categorise her.'

Lawyer and Senior Member of the SSAT in the mid 1970s, Deirdre FitzGerald was the chair in a number of cases in which Loula participated as a part-time member (one of eighty who could be called on). 'The appellants were people from the community who were dissatisfied with decisions made by the Department of Social Security regarding pensions or benefits, child endowment, asset and income tests, or whether someone was living in a de facto relationship, among other grievances,' explains Deirdre. 'The decisions of the tribunal were recommendations only but the department generally accepted them.'

'We had high quality members, socially conscious doctors and lawyers and so on who were prepared to be paid considerably less for their work on the Tribunal than they could have earned outside. Being on the tribunal exposed members to a wide range of situations which informed their view of the world. For instance, they learnt firsthand how badly women were often treated, especially single parents, by both the department and their partners.'

The hearings that Deirdre ran were closed ones, in order to protect people's personal details. 'Many appellants were of Greek and Italian background so I started holding hearings in those languages, something you couldn't do in an open court. I felt that if witnesses couldn't understand sufficient English it put them in the one-down position, and it was foreign for them to have to go through interpreters. So I called on social workers, lawyers, and doctors who could speak whatever language was needed. It was a great help to have someone well-rounded like Loula on board, who was born here and straddled two cultures and who brought other qualities. She was quick, intelligent, sensitive to people, contributed very good ideas, and made very careful decisions.'

Anne O'Shea, wife of Bill O'Shea quoted earlier, came to know Loula when they were fellow-members of the Mental Health Review Board, and through Anne being on Stonnington Council and later Mayor of Stonnington in 2006. Through Loula she went on to meet George and the two couples became good friends.

'Aside from our friendship I had great respect for Loula,' says Anne. 'She knew a lot about the politics of boards and tribunals generally; she was on them as a community member with some sort of standing but with her soundness and her steadiness she could easily have taken many of them over!'

'Loula could rub people up the wrong way, sticking up for her principles. Some found this confronting, although her manner not combative. But she would stick to her guns.'

'Loula the resident and I had various points of contact through my being on the council. She knew a surprising amount about what was going on locally, especially the politics of the local Greek churches, which were big in our area. It was a mystery to me how it was that her assessments were so spot-on when she was not directly involved and never went near a church!'



Over these decades with their various activities, Loula's extensive output of articles and reviews and other pieces of professional writing on social work theory, education, practice, working with interpreters and her experiences drawn from working on tribunals appeared in a range of professional journals, and were presented as conference papers.

Her underlying themes continued to be the need for the integration of multicultural attitudes and service delivery into social work education and practice, as well as other areas of service delivery. As her colleagues have recalled, her views about the importance of ethno-specific services within the mainstream, her awareness of the inequality and discrimination that minority status could bring, were not always understood and appreciated at the time, nor her staunch stand.

As seen by others

Her daughters experienced Loula, in Maria's words, as a 'loving, strong and determined person, very committed to both her family and also to what she believed in'. Maria recalls her mother studying and travelling as a young woman, and even more so as life went on. 'Work came before her own inclinations', she says, 'and it was not always easy for us to understand that'. Both Maria and Katie have inherited Loula's work ethic, allied to raising a family. Maria's career is as a doctor in general practice, while Katie is highly successful in the travel industry.

Maria feels that Loula was driven to break out of the mould and expectations of her own family of origin, much as she loved its members. 'They would have wanted her to study and go to university but then

maybe join the family business,' she says. 'They were traditional and conservative and wouldn't have foreseen the directions she went in.

'The family background gave her solid roots in one culture but she crossed boundaries, was at home in different contexts. She was very proud of her heritage but didn't want to be labelled, or put in a box by others. She didn't want to help just her own group; in every phase of her life she wanted to make changes for the better for others.'

Loula was the doting and much loved grandmother of Maria and her husband Costa's two daughters, Alicia and Penny Vakalopoulos, now in older teenage, and their son Lucas, now five, whom Loula knew in his infancy. She was much involved with her older granddaughters, and a strong influence on them.

Since her mother's death, Loula's younger daughter, Katie, and her partner, Steve, have had a daughter. This is Sophia, now two years old, in whom Loula would also have delighted.

Loula as convenor of the VWT.

Like her sister, Katie was close to their mother, and in the years before Loula's death the two women spent a lot of time together at Katie's home, talking and pottering, and sometimes enjoying outings to movies together.

Katie recollection is of 'a happy childhood with the best mum...although growing up it was hard for me to understand what she did and how prominent and respected she was. I didn't have a real appreciation until late in the day as to how many roles she played. When I was young I wanted her to always be around but she was very busy, always juggling, and often away. She dedicated a lot of time to what she cared about, to what was important to her, although somehow she mostly managed to be there for us as well.'

The equality between her parents impressed Katie and their 'caring about and helping of each other'. Their younger daughter went on to study sociology due to Loula's influence; 'she influenced some of my friends as well,' says Katie. 'She didn't impose her views on us, she showed by example. She and Dad exposed my sister and I to a lot of good things and ideas, and also took us travelling overseas a great deal, to Greece and other countries, from a young age.' Katie recalls how in her father's village the men would traditionally gather in the café and how she as a child, encouraged by Loula, she would go and sit with them...something that girls definitely didn't do.

Anne Kupcis and her family lived next door to the Rodopoulos family in Ailsa Avenue for over three decades; the families became personal friends as well as sharing many neighbourly interactions. Anne recalls the Rodopoulos' 'comfortable and ordered home life', their 'rich cultural life', Loula's ability to focus and be productive, her growing involvement in writing poetry...and, coming from the adjoining house, Loula singing Greek songs and the sounds of 'lots of Greek music being played'.

Anne experienced Loula as seeing herself as a controlling influence in neighbourhood situations requiring intervention; 'she had firm views, and was not backward in taking action if necessary. She knew what to do and she did it!' She reflects: 'Loula enriched my life in lots of ways – I drew on her wisdom and assistance in various circumstances. She could deconstruct tricky situations and, through her extensive knowledge of many areas, would construct remedies.'

Jane Fyfield and her husband David Reece lived in Ailsa Avenue, opposite the Rodopoulos family, for more than twenty years. Loula and Jane both worked in the health area and this initial bond gradually developed into a friendship that over time became very deep, and involved their husbands: 'A lot of talking went on, and also sometimes concerts and films, and meals out'.

'There were lots of really interesting facets to Loula's personality,' says Jane. 'She was deeply intellectual, a feminist through and through, and was passionate about women being educated and people being able to think. She was very interested in politics, and was not religious at all. It was very clear that she didn't like to be categorised by gender or ethnicity, and she didn't want other people to experience prejudice or discrimination either. That attitude was behind a lot of the work she did on the tribunals.'

Jane found her friend 'outspoken but considerate. If she didn't agree with you she'd say so, but in a nice way. And if she was speaking to you she was speaking to you and no one else! She didn't like chit chat...she got straight to the point, which could make her a bit formidable to others.

'She'd bring a very incisive and logical way of thinking about things, but at the same time she was compassionate; she had an understanding of human endeavour and human need. She didn't tell you about things about herself much unless you asked...her interest was in others.'



Later years

When her academic career was over, and her participation in all but one of the boards and tribunals at an end, in her later years – with much achieved and much to look forward to – Loula enjoyed a slower pace. She still sat on the Mental Health Review Board, which was in itself stressful but something she was committed to doing; and she wrote book reviews and

other material. Compared with the past this was a different phase, and as part of it she and George relocated in 2010 from the family home to a spacious, modern apartment in Wattleree Road, Malvern.

This new stage brought increased opportunities: to focus on writing poetry, short stories and other personal pieces, to read, to follow up her interests which, in Loula's own words, included 'literature, philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, social theory and politics', and to travel, as well as spend more time with the grandchildren.

The importance of poetry



The poetry that Loula had begun to write some twenty years previously and which had increasingly become important to her had now become a passion. This emotional, intellectual and creative dimension to her life brought a lot of pleasure and growing confidence, as her output increasingly found recognition in respected quarters.

In her writings, which are characterised by vivid imagery and social commentary, Loula drew on her personal and professional experiences and observations, her Greek

heritage, her love and understanding of Australia and Europe. Often, she made reference to writers, thinkers and artists from other times and other countries.

Some of her poems appeared in literary and on-line journals, university publications, and in collections. A number were also published in Greece, and in this country in Greek-Australian journals and other transnational publications. Many of her poems and prose pieces she published herself (in volumes called *Important at the Time – reflections of a rotten apple*; *No Sleep No Peace*; *Confronting Richter*; *Paparounes*). Her poetry publication 'Until Next Time' was shortlisted in the East Wood Literary Competition, her poem 'Chestnuts' was commended in the All Poetry Competition NSW, and 'Morning in Vienna' received a high commendation in the Society of Women Writers Competition NSW.

In 2010 she joined the Yarra City U3A writing group called Workshopping Your Manuscript. Nola Frawley also belonged to this group, which met fortnightly to discuss members' writing that was circulated prior. 'Loula was always working on her poems and other pieces between meetings,' she recalls, 'and would have edited them quite a lot by the time we met. She was a perfectionist, a dedicated writer, and very focused. It was important to her that she identified herself as a poet; she had a strongly held belief in this. She treated other members of group with respect in relation to their writing, and noticed people's strengths and encouraged us.

'I came to regard Loula as a good friend as well as a writing friend; we'd meet for lunch sometimes, when we mostly talked about writing. Loula was interested in how her culture had formed her, and was exploring lots of avenues in relation to that. I also liked the fact that she was very loyal: on one occasion when I told her about a well-known jewellers that had not treated me well she immediately said that she'd never go there!'

When Margaret Gibson, whom Loula had known previously, was to join the same U3A group she was pleased to find that Loula was a fellow member. For the period they overlapped they rebounded over their writing and the mutual connection to Greece.

Loula and George, 2012

(Some weeks after Loula's death in late January 2013, her two teenage grand-daughters Alicia and Penny read five of her published poems at a Poetry Salon held in Federation Square in March of that year. Loula had helped to organise this event, in which she was to have participated. Her family plan to publish more of her poetry in the near future.)

Walter Veit – close family friend and retired Associate Professor of Comparative Literature in the Department of German Studies at Monash University – was someone with whom Loula shared her poems for his considered opinion. He had met her as a consequence of the friendship between Loula and his late wife, Li, Associate Professor in Philosophical Studies at Deakin University, whom Loula got to know during her time there as Associate Professor of Social Work 1993-4.

From different disciplines, the two women shared a strong affinity on many levels, and also worked well together on academic boards; a further connection was that they were both mothers of two daughters. 'They had a lot to talk about,' says Walter. 'This included much discussion over the years between them regarding how much they should give up while working in order to run older children around, oversee homework and so on.'

The friendship came to include their husbands, both of whom had classical educations, and the four enjoyed many occasions of various kinds together. 'It was a meeting of minds in different ways and combinations,' he says, 'and very satisfying'.

Over the years Loula showed Walter many of the poems she was working on or had completed. He discussed these with her, and poetry generally, and annotated her work. 'I'd say to her, "Poetry is not telling a story. Poetry is creating reality...through images, metaphors, and putting into words." This I thought Loula did very well.

'Loula liked me to correct her work, make suggestions, encourage, critique. My particular forte was to find the origin of literary clues to what she was hoping to convey. I found this aspect enjoyable because it challenged me, and gave the friendship a particular edge.'

As a person and a poet Walter experienced Loula as 'a very beautiful, strong, female persona, very intellectual, very combative, with emotionality and intellectual rigour, a creative personality in terms of the environment and absorbing it'.

George and Loula supported Walter when Li died in 2010. Walter in turn was a great support to George and his family when Loula passed away three years later.

Last days

On 18 January 2013 Loula suffered a stroke. She never regained consciousness and died five days later, on 23 January. Her unexpected death shocked and stunned everyone who knew her, and over three years later her loved ones and many of her friends and colleagues are still coming to terms with their loss.

On the morning of the day she became ill she had attended a meeting in the city of the Mental Health Review Board. In the afternoon she went for a walk in the streets around her home accompanied by her brother-in-law, Andrew, then visiting from Greece. In the course of the walk Loula collapsed and was taken to the Alfred Hospital, where family and close friends kept vigil over her final days.

Hundreds of people representing different areas of her life attended Loula's funeral on 31 January at St John's Anglican Church, Malvern East. At the service, which included sections in Greek, some Greek rituals and a Greek cantor, eulogies were given by her two daughters, her grand-daughters Alicia and Penny, her brother, and her former neighbours/ close friends, Anne Kupcis and Jane Fyfield.

Many people loved the multi-faceted, somewhat elusive-seeming Loula. While Jane's words at the funeral reflected her own impressions they no doubt resonated with her listeners when she spoke of 'a complex person...shy but determined, humble but not retreating, loving but not sentimental, serious but not without a sense of humour'. She recalled Loula's courtesy and consideration, her appreciation of ideas and her delight in the cut and thrust of discussion and argument. She had 'lived her life,' Jane said, 'dedicated to imagining and working for a better world for everyone'.

Tram Ride

Sighs of
workers
echo through
a hot air balloon morning

At tram stop
tall man with peeked cap
large leather backpack
glances around as if lost

Disheveled man rummages
through bum bag
zips and unzips
paces up and down

Breathless man
white T-shirt stretched across girth
jostles others
as we board

On board
I grab a strap
squashed in solitude
rock back and forth

Bag slung on shoulder
ears plugged with iPod
beefy girl yawns
pulls cord with umbrella handle

Woman edges across
pair of knees
trips over stubborn feet
a whiff of cheap scent

Man gawks at woman
she gazes out of window
opens newspaper
blushes

Tram rattles on
stops and starts
smell of scorched
sanded rails

Sighs of
workers
echo through
a hot air balloon morning

Published in: *Poetry Matters*, Issue 14,
February 2012.

Sprig of Silver Wattle

Fur encumbered women swing designer label bags
hold sprigs of silver wattle push into Caffé on Condotti
walls lined with burgundy damask wallpaper
settle at marble topped tables seated under ornate gilded mirrors and
framed memorabilia – Goethe Stendhal Milosz Liszt Keats Shelley Byron
heavy curtains cocoon grey suited man who fondles his young blonde lover
the resident artist Baccellieri sits alongside the espresso machine winks at the couple
he wears silver glasses shabby hat and a thick woolen coat draped with a long red scarf
he whips streaks of paint across three small canvasses depicts ornately dressed
patrons of an earlier era faces smudge figures highlighted in black
he pushes his brushes aside removes his hat leans back on his chair
an elongated El Greco like image reflected on the silver espresso machine
amidst coffee cup clatter a waiter pauses to admire barista beckoned familiar chatter
beans scooped pressed into filter inserted with a twist steamy brew drips milk
frothed cinnamon sprinkled cosseted women savour cream cakes
i catch Baccellieri's eye Are you selling? he smiles proffers a pictorial biography
frames each canvas in turn with his hands pronounces Impressionistic!
gifts me a sprig of silver wattle

Antico Caffé Greco (Roma, 1760 AD).
Piazza di Spanga, Rome 00187 Roma, Italia.
International Women's Day 08/03/08.

Ink-stained Women

...ink-stained women are, without a single exception, detestable.
Nathaniel Hawthorneⁱ

ink-stained woman scribbles in a mixed gender workshop
recalls schooldays of inkwells on desks nibs & pens
navy blue & black ink her wardrobe's favoured colours
contrasted with red & orange
not worsted blue stockings but blue stocking sentiments
not elegant black silk stockings but attire of mourning & image of power
stained index finger scribbled school assignments tertiary essays
professional papers legal decisions
fountain pens biros Ball Pentel R56's illegible hand
replaced by keyboard precision

ink-stained woman encapsulates her experience a moment in a day
transposes silence into words of grief & protest that burn through thrashing seas
that melt into a fiery horizon with the arc of a crimson sun
at dawn revived she opens her books notebook & computer picks up
her R56 creativity erupts as she seeks companionship in the voices of
other ink-stained women writers poets artists imbued with optimism
buoyed by the iridescent light of blue Murano glass & the contrapuntal colours of a
Matisse canvas

Posted on: Transnationali Literature, Vol. 5, Issue 1, November 2012.

ⁱ Quoted in Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers, from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proux*, Chapter 5, 'Masterpieces and Mass Markets'. Virago, Great Britain, 2009, p83.

Melbourne Streets

Sydney road awakes
sticks walk
bags loaded
trolleys roll

market day

indian woman
colourful attire
flows against the wind

chapel discontent
frappe, smokes, flirtation
diaspora's youth

Brunswick tram flight
pensioner beams delight
no cent to spare

grimy acland stroll
companions
monotony foil

multicultural meet
sip grinders coffee
in lygon street

clear blue Sunday
hot air balloons float
over Clifton hill

Published in: *Reflecting on Melbourne*, Poetica Christi Press, 2009.

Cobblestones

Euros tumble from my pocket
tinkle in tune with Mozart
sway in companionship with Strauss
sweep cobblestones once tarred in blood
bounce in unison with motley street performers
rebuff touting restaurateurs
weave through tourist loom
visit Hapsburg sites art galleries Klimt Schiele
stride Kärtnerstrasse with opulent women & their leashed
companions
pause at monument of Gutenberg
reflect on printing press power
slide over fragments of history cultural & religious schism
holocaust
cobble my impressions in words

Vienna & Salzburg
2005

Posted on: Townsville Micro Poetry Journal.

Throwing pebbles

For G

*On viewing Aivazovsky's painting, The Tenth Wave, 1850 in the Russian Museum
St Petersburg*

In the glare of the sun as it slides between the mountains,
feet trundled by pebbles,
he sits on a rock serenaded by the tide.
Suddenly he stands,
secures a foothold, bends down, selects a pebble,
grips it in his right hand and stretches behind his shoulder.
He catapults it out to sea,
watches it skim through the watery glare,
a dazzling corona of fragmented light that fires the horizon.
He rubs his hands together with delight,
manhood immersed in adolescence.
Then, startled by the clang of the freighter and
the impetuous temper of the sea, he is thrashed off his feet,
staggers,
manhood saturated with fear.

Published in: *Horizons*, Poetica Christi Press, 2012.

Silver bracelet

Silver bracelet two lion's heads clasped on my wrist
Gift from my loving grandmother
Now granddaughters for answers insist
Will you die before us grandma?

Gift from my loving grandmother
They touch twist snap open wear admire
Will you die before us grandma?
Didn't she take Panadol? They enquire

They touch twist snap open wear admire
Anxiously visit great grandmother's bedside
Didn't she take Panadol? They enquire
They stroke kiss *When will she die?* They confide

Anxiously visit great grandmother's bedside
Graveside rituals love heart pillow & red roses toss
They stroke kiss *When will she die?* They confide
Peer into muddied chasm casket engulfs their loss

Graveside rituals love heart pillow & red roses toss
Now granddaughters for answers insist
Peer into muddied chasm casket engulfs their loss
Silver bracelet two lion's heads clasped on my wrist

31/05/2012

Published in: *Positive Words*, Rainbow Press, Vol. 11, No. 8, August 2012.

Number Five

For AR.

*'Death is the first truth. The last to be known....This is why I write.
Because poetry begins where death is robbed of the last word.'
Odysseus Elytis'*

To join the pack in mitotic frenzy
he travels far, jostles for a seat,
pushes to corner a breathing space,
shares malignant stories to pass the time,
no time to waste, but he waits and waits.
As impatient arms receive their cocktail infusions,
furtive cells to impede,
relatives invade corridors, confused ,
harass nursing staff,
wait and wait in line, prescriptions to fill.
Two days until accufuser removed. Two weeks until the next hit.
Today in bed, dry retching to placate,
blood pressure erratic. Hands numb, eyes fired,
mouth inflamed, limbs drained –
anxiety mutates to rage and in Emergency he waits.
"My hands are numb too! Wait in the holding room! We'll do some tests!"
The night duty doctor yawns.
He urinates in a faeces encrusted pan
and tries to sleep on the rusted bed.
The call button echoes in despair but
he must repel the marauder so waits.
Bruised arm swells as *Number Five* stands in line,
ticket held firm, waiting for the X-Ray machine to mend.
When *Number Four and a Half* jumps the queue
he barks abuse , until subdued, films in hand,
staggers back to his lair where he waits and waits,
for the cardiology review, meantime
no food or drink or reassurance.
Up and down the stairs he drags his anonymous scourge
to get hold of blood test results - then escape.
Finally in hand, he waits for the cardiologist who reads
the report then utters a rebuke -
"Go home, avoid stress, chemotherapy man!"

2008

Published in: *Diasporic Literature Magazine*, February 2012.

i Elytis, O. *Open Papers*, translated by O. Bouras & T. Begley Cooper, Canyon Press, Washington, 1995.

The Peddlers Of Monastiraki

Shutters clatter open ,feral cats snarl,
dart underfoot. Yawning vendors
perch on stools, guzzle their first thick brew.
Albanian lackeys swish worn brooms. Vermin scatter.

Close to ancient Minaret, subway commuters stream out
past barrows of hormone plumped strawberries,
scurry through peddler's alley-
fake artifacts, replica statuettes, jewelry and leather goods,

clothing Made in China. Hunchback,
covered with a heavy shawl, lugs her belongings,
begs for breakfast. Corn cob seller shouts-
She's rich, owns properties, sleeps with cats, Euros to me next time!

Vendors flick fags at commuter's feet,
wait for Acropolis magic to ignite.
Tourists saunter through, explore souvenirs,
barter, rest their feet in a tavern where the

owner barks on a mobile, Mr. Bulgarian no work today,
business slow, ring again! I reach Mitreopoleos square,
where itinerants sleep on benches oblivious to
the pulse of life that surrounds them.

I perch on a concrete bollard outside
Cathedral where believers
dart in and out to light a candle, pray,
before their morning coffee.

Sun glares down Ermou Street.
Munching a koulouri I clutch my handbag
wary of motorbikes in this pedestrian lair.
Illegal peddlers drag wares in black rubbish bags. Run as police swoop.

Foreign waifs chant, lick a shoe box,
pedestrians toss a coin.
Asian girl hawks two large dolls, snubbed by elegant shoppers,
who peruse fashion windows.

In Syntagma Square, where McDonalds excised the
soul of Athens, workers protest globalization, shopkeepers lock
doors, banks batten windows. I retrace my steps
down the alley where shutters clatter shut.

Cats, satiated with souvlaki droppings, groom and stretch,
vermin invade dumpsters in the lull;
vendors disappear for their siesta
and silence blankets Monastiraki station.

Published in: *Poetry Matters*, Issue 12, February 2011.



Scented words

words brewed while on the couch I dozed
absorbing the spices of family life infused with barbecue smoke
jotted down like potpourri tumbled in the still
with rainbow-soaked petunias radiating musk on a summer's day
as they gather force words bubble on the page
a riot quelled
in volumed companionship with scented ribbons
bundled tight in ferment until
words distilled their essence explodes
like the stopple of poison perfume
leaving a scented trail of tension
and recollection
an identity reclaimed reframed
in the fumes of photography ink
a black-flowered bouquet of fabricated words
pungent reminders of the pen's power
to excite then
words soured malodorous gossip incites
the chicken coop stench that
wafts around the hearth of misunderstanding
where fire logs goad
the stranger on the family rug
unfamiliar cooking smells
and the whiff of charcoal smudge my page
for the pen no respite
as it writes into the damp of night

Published in: *Poetrix*, Vol. 29, November 2007.

Stone hearts

Amongst thousands of pebbles

After countless years

One palm sized grey streaked white

One diminutive cream gossamer light

Fragile as fluttering butterflies

Stone hearts feign insouciance

Yearning unfulfilled

Offshore reef impedes companionship

Stone hearts swept out to sea

Two stone hearts swept onshore

Bouncing through unknown seas

Tumbled through a girls dream

Tumbled through a boys dream

Brittle as drying roses

Rejoice silently in soothing moment

Caterpillars touch fleetingly

Warmth of a sunlit homecoming

Submerged in their dreams

Mendicants

on the trains of Athens 2000

duck spittle spurts
wait for rails to rattle
clamber on board in anonymity
seek a seat soiled by inhumanity
poise precariously in malodorous space
alert to pick pockets in the crush
peer at a book bible or newspaper foils of indifference
to drone of beggar whine of gypsy
hawker of trinkets merriment of accordion player
whose child holds out a plastic begging cup
credentialed mendicants wave medical and death certificates
flit on and off trains across platforms derail our lives

Published in: *Yarra Works*, Yarra U3A, September/October 2012.

Words

Words, garlands that link continents,
shorelines stretching imagination,
rainbows bridging conflict.

Words, tendrils reaching above life's canopy,
secateurs of experience, protest, rage,
bouquets of desire, pleasure.

Words, spades of loneliness,
sods of grief turn, unearth poetic pathways-
Ritsos, Cavafy, Rich, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova.

She sits at end of pink table,
legs crossed, head propped on left arm, eyes shut
black hair, black skirt, red top.
Papers, books set aside.
Giant vase of flowers reflected in mirror,
hanging with paintings on black walls.
Matisse's *Liseuse sur fond noir*.ⁱ

Reader sits in Village Square, goats pause,
stare at stranger, turkeys cackle, donkeys bray,
valley explodes in pain.

Words, hibernating fragile petals,
creep slowly along blackened trunk
of carob tree, purple outbursts.

Words, furtive snowflakes,
decant gestures of love,
confront androcentric scholarship.

Her dour face, framed by back seat car window,
peers out vacantly, sluggish eyes,
taut lips, bony shoulders.
Black and white photograph.
Besankos' *La Pensée*.ⁱⁱ

Thinker writes, her balcony vista a shifting canvas,
temper of Corinthian Gulf,
mystique of Parnassus.

Poet celebrates her framed gifts of affirmation.

Posted on: Transnational Literature, Vol. 3, Issue 2, May 2011.

i *Reader on black background*. Print, gift from G.

ii *The Thinker*. Photograph, gift from M.

Checkpoint Charlie

Without consideration, without shame
They have built big and high walls around me.
C.P. Cavafy, *Walls*

And now what shall become of us without any barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.
C.P. Cavafy, *Expecting the Barbarians*

East/West once divided
ideology now derided
tourist hats provided
reinforced perimeters submit
to rebuilding permits

East/West once divided
family lives impeded
protest escape to gunshots ceded
walk past Topographie de Terrors
underground third Reich repository

East/West once divided
Cavafy writes of unobserved walls
that shut him out of this world
of fortifications built
to forestall the Barbarian threat

East/West once divided
trace cobblestone demarcations
photograph sentry boxes mingle with other travellers
divert thoughts from oppressive years
pick up postcards here & there

Berlin
2004

I hear the colors of your voice

Adrienne Richⁱ

Everywhere blue purple jacarandas
Trumpet to placate tempestuous sky
Flame red petals lilt over veranda
Chorus of bellbirds chime from high

Underfoot intonations of covert emotion
Covet voice of orange and yellow marigolds
Recognise greying monotones of devotion
Stir dissonant fugues of stories untold

But hues of hope in verbal nuance
Enfold tears with songs of celebration
Enjoin moonlit shadows and inquisitive stars in dance
Sublimate color of beauty in sonorous realisation

A canvas of silence where we confessⁱⁱ

i Adrienne Rich, *Black Locket, Tonight No Poetry Will Serve, Poems 2007-2010*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London, 2012.

ii Simon Van Booy, *Love Begins In Winter, Five Stories*, Harper Perennial 2009. *The most significant conversations of our lives occur in silence*. Chapter VII.

Amulet

Years pass prise open tomb of migration
Amulet brown roughshod stitched leather
Nestles in palm of aspiration
Flaminia buffeted across seas Piræus to Fremantle stormy weather

Amulet brown roughshod stitched leather
Loving maternal hands prepared it in sorrow
Flaminia buffeted across seas Piræus to Fremantle stormy weather
Her son leaves for the antipodes tomorrow

Loving maternal hands prepared it in sorrow
Filled it with mountain soil votive to ward off evil eye
Her son leaves for the antipodes tomorrow
Boyhood dreams dance with stars under village skies

Filled it with mountain soil to ward off evil eye
Dormant in suburban dresser drawer for years
Boyhood dreams dance with stars under village skies
Talisman placates his fears

Dormant in suburban dresser drawer for years
Nestles in palm of aspiration
Talisman placates his fears
Years pass prise open tomb of migration

For G.R & M.R.
15/08/1959

Posted on: Diasporic Literature Spot.

Caldera

For Elly

in a hotel cave
sculptured on the caldera rim
our sleep is stirred by the ferry boat hoot
as the tourist ooze disembarks and descends the cobbled path
we creep up step by step - unlike the donkey -
crouch close to the earth and cling to rocks
like clumps of vines or tomato plants

lest our steps be subverted
we inhale the seascape
rather than lift our gaze to the Santorini horizon
we shiver in the morning mist
until teased by the red scoriae that dazzles our eyes
we explore the geometric buildings
painted blue and white

at dusk
we clamber down with the camera laden throng
to find a perch
and wait for nature's palette to ignite
a friendship as steadfast as the Sun that tinges the clouds
each night to applause over Armani Bay
our aching feet - cauldrons of fire - erupt with delight
as the Moon slithers across the sky
to quench our fears

Fanari Villas
Oia, Greece
October 2005.

Published in: *Rainbow Press*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2010.
Shortlisted by *Page Seventeen*, 2008.

Millipedes

Now here's another kind of traveller for you. I said to myself. It was amazing to me that a man who, in this way was well educated, brave and decent could travel without noticing anything in the world outside himself.

J.W. Goetheⁱ

millipedes in speed
disembark to international gateways
walking running limping bumping
carrying sliding loading yawning –
different creeds
from their swagger deeds we gather

millipedes in speed
elegance dishevelled conversations shattered
reading matter battered
queuing waiting to embark –
multi lingual larks
from here & afar no one knows who we are

millipedes in speed
partners in flight hankering for different sights
from strangers recoil
sipping snoozing dreaming praying –
shopping duty free
others from poverty flee

Wien – flughafen 2004.

ⁱ Goethe, J.W. , *Italian Journey (1780-1788)*. Translated by W.H. Auden & Elizabeth Mayer, Penguin Books, England, 1970.

Raven

*For Evgenia
1923-2010*

In the vase rose petals flake tulips wilt
Cheyne-Stoke breathing
rapid shallow
blurred sight muffled hearing
white quilt still

Raven shrieks wings extended
Caw caw Caw caw
lungs drown the past
polyps bleed
creatinine rises

Raven shrieks wings swoop
Peck pull pluck Peck pull pluck
psychotic utters oedema flirts with hope
imaging imed shunts
lasix and dopamine

Raven cowers to the pigeons call
Coo coo Coo coo
urine streams
bowels purge
heart rate crackles

Raven dives diaphragm flutters
Peck pull pluck Peck pull pluck
life duped
raven satiated feathers preened
vigil ended

Sods of grief
Raven appeased her suffering released her from life
mounds of tributes
black cloaked mourners
prowl kin and friends for reprieve

Death severs and connects
On the grave rose petals flake tulips wilt

Published in: *Rosemary Branch*, Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, December 2010.

An earlier version received a Commendation certificate for the Free Verse section of the Eastwood/Hills Fellowship of Australian Writers, August 2010.

Snowfall

Beauty defines itself as the antithesis of ugly
Susan Sontagⁱ

Yesterday morning our walk was powdered with snowflakes.
Today, after a hushed night, we wake to a township layered with snow; rooftops encrusted with snow, roads covered with swirls of silvery still waters and slushy brown skids.
We peer over our diamond iced balcony rails, the mountains across the gulf invisible, grey sea and clouds indistinguishable.
He rubs his hands briskly, beams, recalls boyhood winter memories in the village where mother brewed chamomile tea and baked corn bread in the fireplace,
where brothers sculpted snowmen decorated with stick noses and slid down mountain slopes in sodden pants smashing icicles hanging from pine trees.
We were happy – a wonderful, wonderful childhood!
He sighs; ugly incidents overshadow happy memories.
Austerity measures freeze townsfolk pride, electricity and heating fuel costs rise, firewood yards deplete.
Twilight rebuffs slithers of sunlight, welcomes melting snows and warming raindrops.
We stroll over slippery pathways, shelter under pine trees permeated with pessimism.

Aigion, Overlooking the Corinthian Gulf,
Greece, 2012.

ⁱ Susan Sontag, 'An Argument About Beauty', in *At The Same Time (Essays and Speeches)*, Paolo Dilomando and Anne Jump (eds), with a preface by David Reiff, Penguin Books, Great Britain, 2007.

Survival

*We are the echo of the future
On the door it says what to do to survive
But we were not born to survive
Only to live*
W.S. Merwinⁱ

precarious lives shelter in filthy debris filled yards
dilapidated houses derelict cars along highway verges
in hovels of cardboard boxes

along port side plastic sheeting
held down by stones metal waste
squatters cling to barbed wire tipped mesh

peer intently at transport trucks
offloaded from ferries
what do they seek?

precarious lives forage in dumpsters for food scraps
discarded clothes bric-a-brac lug backpacks full of
Chinese fakes to hawk

beg for Euros stalk bejewelled women
plead shopkeepers for jobs unmoved by hunger strikes
residents spurn greetings

youthful refugees forced to scavenge the streets
with yelping wild dogs scuttling stray cats and vermin
deftly evade capture dispossessed their grief hide

at the rubbish dump of Ano Liosiaⁱⁱ
six dismembered bodies found in plastic bags
Pakistanis who did not pay their dues?

and at the funeral of resistance hero Lakis Santas
his then nineteen year old compatriotⁱⁱⁱ, Manolis Glezos pleads
for a society where youth can drink the wine of joy

Selected by Judge, 2011 Annual Poetry Competition, Poetica Christi Press

i *River of Bees* in Merwin, W. S., *Migration, New & Selected Poems*. Copper Canyon Press, USA, 2005.

ii As reported in the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*, 'Rubbish and Blood – People's Rubbish', Thursday 5 May 2011.

iii Aged nineteen years, the pair lowered the flag of the Nazi occupiers from the Acropolis, on the nights of 30-31 May 1941.

Sound Bites

homeless
recently unemployed
depleted pensions
reduced incomes
increased taxes
unpaid mortgages
homes requisitioned
rentals rising

Some avoid the lens gaze in shame

Others the microphone embrace politicians blame

shove others aside to grab vegetables handouts
rummage through piles of second hand clothes
line up for hot meals offered by volunteers
in home street & church kitchens
cull food scraps at night from supermarket refuse
beg a few coins to buy bread & milk
cajole shopkeepers for a free feed
buy snacks of potatoes direct from producers

Some avoid the lens gaze in shame

Others the microphone embrace politicians blame

join long street queues to pay electricity accounts
otherwise power supply cut off
siphon fuel from tankers & trucks
hand in vehicle registration plates
curtail daily car trips
fuel & related costs prohibitive
road works in abeyance
ferry & train services terminated

Some avoid the lens gaze in shame

Others the microphone embrace politicians blame

arrive outside health insurance offices after midnight
fight with angry compatriots
seeking a numbered appointment ticket from the day's allocation
expose extortionist public servants who fake claims for a fee
deceased still listed as recipients
anxious about pharmacy strikes
depleted supplies of government funded pharmaceuticals
introduction of generic brands

Some avoid the lens gaze in shame

Others the microphone embrace politicians blame

decry escalating rate of daring crime
jewellery plucked off women in the streets
distrust of banks
euro savings hidden in apartment basements once gnawed by rats
now purloined by home invaders
ransacked cupboards & intimidation
Paltry gain
exclusive shops plundered masked criminals filmed on camera
Some avoid the lens gaze in shame
Others the microphone embrace politicians blame
predict grim futures for children
reminisce about hardships of the past
begudge their sacrifices under the austerity measures
university graduates without career prospects
occasional work in fish markets
seek opportunities overseas
forecast an anarchic path to recovery
Some avoid the lens gaze in shame
Others the microphone embrace politicians blame

On 9 March Greece's debts of billions significantly reduced - the PSI and OSF negotiations successful.

Government ministers thank the populace for their sacrifices.

11/03/2012

Published in: *Poetry Matters*, Issue 15, June 2012.

i Private Sector Involvement.

ii Official Sector Involvement.

Cameo bracelet

'...no matter how new...the new and young, might turn out to be, they were all born throughout the centuries to a natural or historical spectacle that essentially was always the same.'ⁱ

'O how many noble deeds of women are lost in obscurity!
Seneca Consolation to Helvia (XIX, 5)ⁱⁱ

i.m. Irmline Veit-Brause

cameo bracelet
women facing opposite directions
looking to the past to understand the present
tenuous balance

hyphenated surname
yet feminism denied
until male colleague quipped
Saved from the kitchen sink!
fond memories camouflage bitterness
childhood in Hitler's Germany
peripatetic schooling
post graduate studies
circuitous daily trips
east to west – west to east
marriage – motherhood – migration
Sri Lanka – Australia
family life – domesticity – academic career
histiography – nationalism – philosophy of science
international committees – study tours – Max Planck Institute
archives Vienna – Berlin

i Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin Books Reprint, 1990.

ii Seneca, *Dialogues and Letters*, Penguin Classics, 1997.

cameo bracelet
women facing opposite directions
researching the past to understand the present
carved path of creativity and contradiction
mother visited
unlike you cowed by generational tradition
unfulfilled professional ambitions
daughters – medical – architectural – achievements
then youngest succumbed to brain tumour
and you – assaulted by Myeloma – flouted pessimism
red dyed hair – swirling gypsy skirt
bold crafted dress rings
diamond pearl earrings
colourful pashmina shawl – feathered hat
greeted chemo nurses who flaunted optimism
flowers in their hair
countless tests – creatinine battles
elegance submitted to white gown
bruised arms – blood shot eyes
Pamela Bone's bad hair days

cameo bracelet
women facing opposite directions
mourning the past to understand the present
strong willed – attuned to mortality
engagement in political – social debates

frustration with colleague indifference
paucity of email interchange
cancelled overseas plans
isolated intellectual
reading – writing – reviewing letters of Isaiah Berlin
last coffee outing at Fleischers
drooping potted cyclamens – orchids – daffodils
flank your study door
tended by distraught partner
saddened by loss of a scholar
who rejoiced in her overflowing book lined sanctuary
memorial to their deceased daughter
decorated with pottery – photographs – countless files and offprint piles

cameo bracelet
women facing opposite directions
preserving the past to understand the present
sticky yellow notes attached to companionless computer

Let Them Burn!

What we expect from poets is that they should avenge evil [...]

Let them burn! Let them burn!
Let them pay! Let them pay!

Grey suited stooped man carries red rose

Stadiou Street Wednesday 5th May
ordered to work, union syndicates claim
Marfin Egnatia Bank a burnt out shell
molotov cocktails thrown

Let them burn! Let them burn!
Let them pay! Let them pay!

swings stem wrapped in silver paper

Strike breakers, three in all, asphyxiated
infant in utero sacrificed
anarchists, some observed, blocked the fire brigade
applauded by a chorus of sympathisers

Let them burn! Let them burn!
Let them pay! Let them pay!

behind his back awkward demeanour

Stadiou Street Thursday 6th May
mourning sunrays fan over bouquets
flickering candles and soft toys
create a mausoleum of grief

i Orhan Pamuk, 'A note on Poetic Justice' in Orhan Pamuk, *Other Colours – Essays and a Story*, translated from the Turkish by Maureen Freely, London, Faber and Faber, 2007.

Let them burn! Let them burn!
Let them pay! Let them pay! 'Let Them Burn!'

pushes through sombre crowd poignant offering

Hooded murderers condemned
collusive rich, politicians should pay
not workers
austerity measures for all, their refrain

Let them burn! Let them burn!
Let them pay! Let them pay!

shakes his head at those who saunter by

Police and media scrutinise the outrage
capture dissonant choruses
of civil disobedience
bankrupt apathy

Let them burn! Let them burn!
Let them pay! Let them pay!

wipes his tears and hurries off silently

Friday 7th May, complacent tourists
indebted to the Acropolis, amble through Plaka
serenaded by public sector protesters in Syntagma Square
Marfin Egnatia family affirms respect for human dignity –
right to work, right to strike

can words ever avenge evil?

May 2010.

Posted on: Transnational Literature, Vol. 3, No. 1, November 2010.

Notebooks

In dialogue with philosophers and poets
others trod these paths;
recorded ecstasy and despair;
confronted desolation and rage;
exulted in the yellow spring;
succumbed to the mountains and,
intoxicated by deceptive mists and
penetrating sunlight, scribbled their
insights in agricultural metaphor.

This land, imbued in centuries of
androcentric scholarship, toils to the rituals
of Greek Orthodoxy.

Words translated,
dissected and expunged in the monastic
archives of life and death.

The philhellenic experience extolled and
damned.

An eternity of quiescent patriarchy awaits
the dawning of feminist challenge.

The Corinthian Gulf-Greece

Published in: *Australian Women's Book Review*, Vol. 9.1, Autumn, 1997.

I'll leave you now so you can read

i.m. M.D.R. 1908–1986

Perched on hearth's edge we sip mountain tea in silent companionship
as flames sculpt the olive tree stump slowly reduced to charcoal
like her black dress & scarf tied over her grey hair & pallid face
mother in law Maria lived through poverty hunger wars miscarriages
birthed six live infants laboured on the land harvesting grapes olives corn
gathering wild vegetables cooking baking spinning weaving cleaning
Eau de Cologne a luxury *Should widows wear perfume?* she'd asked after I bathed her
minimal primary education reliance on the spoken word unlike my pen that rekindles
village experiences – the procession of goats that paused & stared at the stranger reading
in the square disheveled farmers who asked *Why do you write?*

a contrast with Australian female friends & colleagues who asked *Why don't you write?*
they'd read accounts of marriage in a Greek village written by Beverley Farmer &
Gillian Bouras both foreign wives who hid their books & pens from their respective
mothers in law

Beverly writes that when Sofia entered the room she slid the book she was reading under
her notebook

Gillian records that Aphrodite scolded her for reading & writing
flames extinguished we stare into the glowing coals until Maria announces
I'll leave you now so you can read a life of reading & writing fired & sculpted by her
understanding

17/04/2012

Posted on: Diasporic Literature Spot.

LUNCH

HAT

grey haired lady wears black bowler hat.

long black dress
swirls around her stockingless ankles,
caresses parquetry floor
as she clutches handbag, waits, peers at
door
floral decked friend arrives, hands pressed.

ushered to table, waiter rebuffed with an
aside,
menu perused, pretzels crunched, wine
sipped,
meals ordered with a sigh,
what secrets will they confide?

grey haired lady wears black bowler hat.

RAGS

aroused from urinal bed
dressed in rags
he bundles tattered blanket
gathers torn plastic bags
shuffles down street
showered with cake crumbs
meanders through Mc Donalds
in a city that swims on sushi
floats on fast food
swills on caffeine
peers through café window
sandwiches overfilled
unlike his pocket

The Maid

She is the coastline that stretches across borders
with clouds that dance to echoes of revolution and economic tides
She is the gush of water that seeps into parched generational history
wild grass buffeted in one direction then another
She is the leech that infiltrates domesticity scheming inheritance
She is the basalt rock restrained on the cliff by a mesh of cunning -
a victim of expedience and gendered servitude

Can you hear the wail of her child left in the homeland?

Victorian Women's  Benevolent Trust

Investing in Women and Girls.

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