

Summary

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The book entitled *Literature is the breath of life*, words that paraphrase the statement by the poet Kiriakos Charalambidis himself – *poetry is the breath of life* – is a small attempt to fill the pages of the history of Cypriot literature, which seems to be relatively unknown in Poland. We are familiar with works written in Greek, from antiquity to the present day, especially thanks to the popularity of authors such as Konstandinos Kavafis, Nikos Kazantzakis, Jorgos Seferis, Odisseas Elitis (the latter two being Nobel prize laureates in Literature), not to mention Poland's familiarity with the masterpieces of Homer's epic poems, the works of the Athenian tragedians, the comedian Aristophanes or Plato's dialogues, which all cloaked in beautiful literary garb, especially that of the early and middle periods. However, literature created in Greek but by Greek Cypriots remains a great unknown.

In this book, which is now available to the Polish reader, we have attempted to show the complex history of a literature that is Greek in origin and often brutal towards Cyprus and its inhabitants, but which is nevertheless different, autonomous, woven from painful historical experiences, immersed in a world that is half mythological, half ancient history, a literature imbued with faith in freedom, and full of reverence for what lies in the sphere of the sacred.

Among the many artists that the land of Cyprus has produced, the premier and most honourable place belongs to Kiriakos Charalambidis, whose work this book is dedicated to. By drawing copiously from the treasure trove common to all educated Europeans, from Greek mythology, from references to the history of the Greek people, Charalambidis'

writing is accessible, comprehensible and close to every citizen of the old continent.

However, our intention was also to show the otherness of Cypriot culture, which shines through the pages of Charalambidis' poetry. Within it is the pain caused by the Turkish occupation and, above all, by Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974, which resulted in the north-eastern part of Cyprus being located in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, unrecognised by any state in the world except Turkey. Indigenous in its tradition and culture, the island has never lived to see itself incorporated into the Hellenic Republic. What's more, conscious of its own cultural value, it no longer seeks this.

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The book was written thanks to a grant obtained from the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Cyprus, which the donors awarded for the promotion of contemporary Cypriot culture in Poland. Following the advice of Professor Michał Bzinkowski, the grant was earmarked for casting the spotlight on the literary works, primarily the poetic ones, of Cyprus' greatest contemporary singer, Kiriakos Charalambidis. The historical anchoring of the poet's legacy is served by the prologue, which offers a cross-sectional view of Cypriot history and literature. The title *Literature is the breath of life*, a paraphrase of Charalambidis' words, seems to be a natural choice, as once again something has happened in human history that contradicts the Latin maxim – *Inter arma silent Musae*. Kiriakos Charalambidis' poetic muse has never fallen silent, even in the most tragic moments for the Cypriot people.

I am firm my conviction that the Muses of Literature will not fall silent even in the most painful times. And this conviction brings hope...

I would like to extend great thanks to the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Cyprus for providing the opportunity to engage in a cultural dialogue over immutable values.

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Translated by: Rob Pagett