

The Trumpet

NIKOS ENGONOPOULOS

translated by MARTIN MCKINSEY

Une vielle faisait cuire des aubergines,
Sur l'herbe, sous un toit ...

Comtesse de Noailles, *Constantinople*

since up in Constantinople that unholy wind
the Karayialis so unmercifully blows
down from the north
and in Thessaloniki the dread Vardharis
relentlessly rages
a great percentage of the houses there
are built out of wood
as a means of keeping warm in winter
and not freezing to the bone

but come high summer when the eggplants ripen
and folks start in frying on the open coals – watch out!
one spark's all it takes to unleash the great evil
with wildfires blazing day and night
and walls collapsing in a cindery mass
transforming these metropolises
into vast heaps of charred and smoky rubble

therefore the inhabitants – Greeks through and through –
 hoping to find some kind of solution
 to this seemingly heaven-sent – and oft-recurring – divine malediction
 recall the ancient myths of the Tribe
 especially – it's to their advantage – the old one about the Phoenix
 rising up reborn from its ashes
 unscathed and entire

as a result: my father was born
 in Constantinople
 on a lovely square in 'Saloniki they raised
 a fine-looking statute of the hero Pavlos Melas
 and I know someone – don't I? –
 who one day, up in Istanbul, happened upon
 – among other assorted miracles and adventures –
 a certain laurel tree
 equally lovely in sunlight and gloom

to bring back the memory of that sweet laurel
 he goes – after dark – to drink his pint
 down at Kahrmani's place in Psyri
 (once the haunt of Papdiamantis)

sometimes – in barely a whisper – he sings of his aching heart
 while discreetly
 the old Anatolian
 plays along on the bouzouki
 (this too – property of Papdiamantis)