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.’ Hannah Arendt, On Revolution

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

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

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2 Seneca Dialogues and Letters Penguin Classics 1997 p27

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

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

Loula S. Rodopoulos. Two poems: ‘Cameo bracelet’ and ‘Nostos’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 2, May 2012.
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

August 2010
NOSTOS

To Ithacan seamen who embrace forever the waves.

And the moral of it all? This.
You embark; you make the voyage; you reach port: step ashore, then.
Into another life? Marcus Aurelius

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.

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3 Return home, homeward.
4 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.
5 Marcus Aurelius Meditations Translated with an Introduction by Maxwell Staniforth Book 3 Penguin Classics 1964.p55
scurtails 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,
cling 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
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 Cavafy⁶ 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.⁷

_Loula S. Rodopoulos_

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⁶ Refers to _Ithaca_, a well-known poem by Constantine Cavafy about life, death and return.
⁷ 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.

Loula S. Rodopoulou. Two poems: ‘Cameo bracelet’ and ‘Nostos’.
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