

**Poems by Michal Held**  
(Translated from Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish by the poet)

**From *Time of the Pomegranate*, 1995**



i read in a book of magical plants the pomegranate is missing for  
the pomegranate silents its wisdom gathers its transparency  
in the endless reds of the wrappings

and it is my lover detained



i am an olive tree  
in almond blossom  
my crown  
is hung with letters  
in anticipation  
in Safed



the liquid hills on the way to the dead sea are  
the act of love  
that cannot be put  
into words



i was a pomegranate

and i was the boy who bought the pomegranate

for the girl

and i was the girl and when i received the pomegranate

i was the sky and when i was the sky

i was a pomegranate

**From *Over the Face of the Waters*, 2009**

**Tree / Arvoles**

A Ladino song torno i digo ke va ser de mi  
Wandeing i ask what shall become of me

In the song trees cry for rain and mountains for air  
arvoles yoran por luvias i montanyas por aires

In the song an angel stands upon me beholding me with his eyes  
and i beg to cry  
but cannot

And you in the song are draped in  
white  
white flowers are dropping from you  
from your beauty

When i sing this song once chanted by Sephardic women  
draped in white and shedding white flowers  
in Izmir and Salonika in Jerusalem and Tangiers

When i sing this song  
trees cry tears of rain and mountains tears of air  
cry for you singing women who have vanished from the world leaving your song  
inside me  
deserting me to wander and sing ke va ser de mi  
what shall become of me and to seek  
the angel

## Arvoles

Kantika en Ladino

torno i digo ke va ser de mi

En la kantika arvoles yoran por luvias i montanyas por aires

En la kantika un andjelo aparado enfrente de mi ke kon sus ojos me mira

I yo yorar kero

ma no puedo

I tu en la kantika blanka sos

Blanko vistas

i blankas flores eskurren

de ti

de tu ermozura

Kuando kanto esta kantika ke kantavan antes de mi mujeres djudias

Blanko abrigadas en Izmir i en Selanik en Yerushalayim i en Tandjir

Kuando yo la kanto

*Eskurren arvoles lagrimas de luvias i montanyas lagrimas de aires*

Yoran por vozotras mujeres kantadoras ke vos esparesitesh del mundo i solo

vuestro kanto sona dentro de mi

Me abandonatesh i yo kontinuo a tornar asolada i kantar

Ke va ser de mi i bushkar

El andjelo

\* Trezladado en djudeo-espanyol kon la ayuda de Vitali Haim Ferera.

## **Wearisome Nighths / Dando bueltas por la kama**

A thousand and one nights dreamless we spent  
no teniamos suenyo kuando viajimos  
sharing a quest in sleep as we voyaged  
inward

On ship ferry boat train  
Stopping at Kushtandina tasting figs in Crete  
and in Jaffa  
searching for a dream to the light of Aladdin's magic lamp  
a thousand and one nights  
we spent  
dreamless

And when we had no dream  
i was silent

And we shared wearisome nights until we reached  
the marzipan point el punto de masapan \*  
for which the women of Sepharad yearn but only the most wondrous  
reach

And returning to Jerusalem we knew  
that even in dreamless wearisome  
thousand and one nights  
there are pathways of milk and honey  
kaminos de leche i miel \*\*

\* The point in making marzipan at which the ingredients are integrated. Overcooking the sweet beyond this point, or stopping the process before reaching it, ruins the marzipan.

\*\* Ladino for "Bon Voyage."

**Isle of Roses (or Pomegranates) \***

The wild streets of Rhodes  
are all vacant to my eyes  
blue waves of joy run to shore  
i see a mikveh\*\*  
of tears

When Evreon Martyron Square  
dons color  
my eyes see only shadows  
of infants old people men and women  
expelled  
Ladino on their tongues

Past midnight the old town  
fills with Greek music  
strains of longing  
but i only hear the maidens  
who once sang here

Throw yourself into the sea  
they sang to the bride  
and where she emerged an almond tree bloomed  
between the river and sea  
the groom already waited  
when a quince tree sprouted  
before them

Wrapped in my soul  
i stride along the lanes  
of the Isle of Pomegranates  
when before me i come upon  
a bath all sealed and shut  
with no  
immersion  
and no  
bride

and only i plant  
almond and quince trees  
between the sea and the shore  
within me

\* According to tradition, the name "Rhodes" derives from an ancient Greek word meaning "Rose" or "Pomegranate", and thus Rhodes is often referred to as the "Island of Roses" or "Island of Pomegranates".

\*\* Hebrew: A water reservoir in which a Jewish bride ritually immerses before her wedding. According to Jewish law, the sea may serve for this purpose as a purification bath.

### **Izla de rozas izla de granadas \***

Son yenas de djente las kayes de Rodes  
ma a mi me se ven todas abandonadas  
Las olas de alegria mavi  
me paresen mar  
de lagrimas

La plasa Evreon Martyron  
'sta yena de kolores  
ma yo no veo nada mas ke las solombras  
de viejos i kriaturas mujeres i ombres  
ke avlando espanyol  
'stan deportados

Despues de media nochese inche la izla  
sones maraviyozos de muzika grega  
Yo no esto oyendo nada mas ke la kantiga  
ke fue kantada aki  
en los banyos de novias

Echate a la mar kantavan a la novia  
las galanas rodeslias  
i en saliendo eya de la mar  
les kresio un arvol de almendra  
el novio ya 'stava asperando  
entre la mar i el rio  
kuando les kresio  
un arvol de bembrio



En kaminando yo por las kalejas  
de la izla de granadas  
abrigada en las memorias  
se aparese enfrente de mi  
bien serrado el banyo  
manko de novias  
itivilas

I solo yo planto  
arvoles de almendra i de bembrio  
entre la mar i las arenas  
de mi alma

\* Sigun la tradision, el nombre Rodes signifika en grego roza o granada.  
Ansi ke Rodes es nombrada komo, “izla de rozas” o “izla de granadas”)

## **Irme kero madre**

irme kero madre a Salonik  
a kantar kon sus viejas  
romansas perdidas

i a Monastir kero ir  
a riyir kon sus kriaturas  
en lingua dulce

madre kero ir a Izmir  
a meldar el Meam Loez  
kon sus hazanim

irme kero madre a Kastoria i a Brusa a Bitola i a Edirne  
kero ir a Tetuan i a Tandjir

i a todas las sivdades muertas  
de los sefaradis

esto en Yerushalayim i a Yerushalayim  
kero mucho ir  
aki onde nasi antes siete jeneraciones

en las kayes nuevas las viejas no  
kantan romansas

las kriaturas no riyen en lingua  
dulce  
los hazanim estan  
mudos

vengo a las sivdades ke biven en  
mi korason madre  
a bushkar ayi  
el Sinyor del mundo