

I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs:
Magic, Nationhood, and the Writer-out-of-Country

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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January 2016

To my father who I miss.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my supervisor, Professor Philip Terry for all his support and guidance. This thesis would have been impossible to complete without his input and advice.

Secondly, I would like to thank Dame Marina Warner who was the first person to believe in this project. In the three years I spent working under her guidance I grew both as a writer and as a researcher.

I am also thankful to Glyn Maxwell, Professor Sanja Bahun, and Dr Elizabeth Kuti, for serving as supervisory board members during my PhD. Their input and comments are highly appreciated.

My appreciation goes to every member of the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies, both academic and administrative, who in their own way helped shape my work and enhanced my academic life. A special thank you goes to my PhD companion, flatmate and friend Rasha Al Shalabi — most PhD crises are solved over coffee and biscuits. And Katya Alkhateeb for all the hours shared in an office laughing over our mistakes.

And to Ahmet Sozalp who might not be in LiFITS but is a member of the family. His friendship all this years and his help with the Turkish-Cypriot dialogues is invaluable.

Special thanks to my friend Loris Lysiotis who helped me make sense of political theory. Together we dream and hope for a united, peaceful Cyprus.

A great thank you to the Cyprus State Scholarship Foundation, the Ministry of Education, and the Government of Cyprus for their financial support which made this research possible.

Finally I want to thank my mother for always believing in me and standing by my side at every step. My sister for all the proud tears she shed and all the proud tears she made me shed. My grandparents who do not understand what exactly it is that I do but support me no matter what.

And lastly to Kostas, who keeps reminding me that I am able and capable, who pushes me and supports me — I told you before and I am telling you again, if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be able to do it.

Abstract

This dissertation includes a novel entitled *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* and an accompanying critical commentary which aims at examining themes and issues of post-colonial and commonwealth fiction in relation to the context of Cyprus. The novel is a magical realist story about a boy who sets out to find the girl he is in love with, while at the same time an anti-colonial fight breaks out in his homeland, Sarouiki. During his travels he is confronted with questions of identity, belonging and nationhood.

While extensive research has been conducted on post-colonial writing and the over-running themes in fiction which falls under this category, Cyprus has remained fairly unexplored, mainly due to the fact that its anti-colonial struggle and post-colonial trauma are not deemed important enough.

The thesis of this project is that magical realism as a genre is an organic occurrence that is interlinked with the post-colonial trauma in various countries. Magical realism serves as a way of *seeing* the world by using magic to understand the human dimensions of history. It is a way of reaching historical, national, and political truths and is thus a *natural* way of expression for post-colonial writers. By focusing on Cyprus, a fairly uninvestigated area of post-colonial writing, we can expand our understating of the issues and themes linked to this body of literature.

As a Cypriot writer, I look at the ways in which I wrote *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* and how post-colonial discourses emerged in their creative process, and by doing so, I create the space to further explore minor post-colonial literatures in the light of the global issues they are linked to.

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Introduction

When we talk about writers we usually refer to those individuals who write fiction or poetry - mythological creatures who hide in dusty attics, surrounded by ancient leather-bound books, endlessly sipping coffee and typing quickly on a typewriter. Yet writers have always been active members of the societies they found themselves in, and often manage to shape public opinions. Fiction, in its various forms was and still is a form of social commentary.

Aristotle explores the social impact of writing by looking at the poet in relation to universality and compares creative work to history. He discusses how poetry is more philosophical, as well as more serious, than history since the ‘function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but the kind of thing that *would* happen [. . .].’¹ As he points out, their differences are not in terms of verse or prose but in their functions, with poetry expressing universals and history particulars.

Aristotle explains the term universal (το καθόλου), as ‘the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity’², meaning that a person will act a certain way –in accordance to his character–in a given situation, which brings forth the interesting element of the self in writing.

In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera touches upon the idea of the self in novels. He says:

All novels, of every age, are concerned with the enigma of the self. As soon as you create an imaginary being, a character, you are automatically confronted by the question: What is the self? How can the self be grasped? It is one of

1. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 16.

2. Ibid.

those fundamental questions on which the novel, as novel, is based.³

The exploration of the self in fiction is what leads to the universality that Aristotle refers to. Writers, through the exploration of the enigma of the self, create scenarios of what would have happened and how those characters would react in the given situations. Often those situations are based on reality and allow us to imagine different possibilities or outcomes. This is a central idea explored in this project.

The novel, *I Dreamt of Saltwater And Eggs*, included in this thesis is loosely based on the historical events of the 1950s in Cyprus. It is set in the fictional island of Sarouiki – a possible Cyprus– and it explores the cultures of nationalism during the colonisation era. It follows Nikos, a boy of sixteen who sets out on a journey to find his neighbour Anastasia –the girl he is in love with – who one night disappeared from her bed. While on his journey he finds himself having to deal with the consequences of the anti-colonial fight in his country and comes face to face with questions about his own identity. The accompanied commentary is divided in five chapters, each dealing with a different theme in relation to the novel.

Chapter 1 deals primarily with the research and historical context which set the background for the story. I explore how education and politics in Cyprus gave birth to both the Greek and the Turkish nationalism, as well as how fiction, as a political act, can aid in the exploration of issues of conflict and peace. The decision to concentrate on the 1955-1959 enotic struggle is justified by explaining how this could be seen as the period during which the division of Cyprus can be traced back to.

Chapter 2 is a conversation on the theme of writing and homecoming. It's based on Salman Rushdie's idea of imaginary homelands — versions of a country created by writers who find themselves away from their homelands. I aim at connecting the idea of nostalgia as the state in which selective, intensified memories blur the vision of the writer

3. Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (London: Faber / Faber, 2005), p. 13.

out-of-country. I explore how the creation of a fictional country allowed me to, on one hand, escape the historical context, but it also awoke in me hiraeth – a nostalgia for place and a national history that have never existed.

Chapter 3 is a discussion on structures and the articulation of stories. By using Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*, a book with the overrunning theme of writing as a starting point, I discuss the ways in which writers choose to tell stories. I take into consideration the use of structures and I place it in context with my writing and the inspiration I drew from Oulipian practises. Reference is made to the use of creation myths in structuring beginnings and the idea is connected to Aristotle's proposal on the completeness of plot. The novel is also discussed in the light of other Quest stories and how the use of narrative styles influenced the way the story was told.

Chapter 4 follows up from where Chapter 3 ends and tackles a different aspect of storytelling; genre. I look at my journey towards deciding to write magical realism and through exploring the history of the genre I problematise the term in an effort to understand whether it is a style, a mode of narration or a distinguishable genre. Being myself a non-Latin American writer, writing in a genre that has been associated with Latin America, I move on to the issue of the translation of the genre to other cultures. By placing my work alongside other writers who write magical realism outside Latin America, including two Cypriot writers, I make connections between the post-colonial aspect of most of the included works and how they can help in the understanding of both the colonial history and the native identity.

Chapter 5 aims at bringing the themes explored in the previous chapters together under the umbrella of language. Here the issue of adopting a language for creative writing is brought forward and is linked to post-colonial discourse. I explore the place of commonwealth fiction in global literature and how the adoption of language can open a discussion on the treatment of history and identity in the ex-colonies, with special atten-

dance to Cypriot literature written in English. The chapter as a whole is in conversation with Rushdie's famous essay *Commonwealth literature does not exist*. I look at the way I used English in my novel and the layers in which the different languages of Cyprus, and their identity connotations, were manifested in the story. Lastly I touch upon the place of Commonwealth writing in the body of literature we refer to as English Literature.

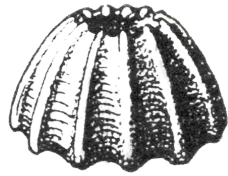
I hope that this thesis as a whole succeeds in demonstrating how my writing, and in extension Cypriot writing, relates to other literary sensibilities such as magical realism and post-colonial writing. From the seminal idea of a girl with translucent skin to the completion of this thesis, I was given the space to explore the social impact of writing. Even though there is a strong element of politics and history, I did not set out to write under a political agenda, but to write *a* story. The themes and issues discussed in this commentary emerged from the telling of the story and only became evident in hindsight but are interlinked with the politically charged history of Cyprus and the current affairs on the island that are aiming at a final solution that will bring permanent peace between the two communities.

I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs

THAT AWESOME PUBLISHER

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EMBRYO

1:1

He lived in a country that many might mistake for the island in the Mediterranean called Cyprus but I can assure you that it was not. This was a different island, an island that came to be known as Sarouiki. And I say *was* because it is no longer. On this island, that I have already assured you is definitely not Cyprus, he lived amongst those who called themselves Greeks and those who called themselves Turks.

They were nothing more than the descendants of Ancient Greek civilisations who lost their way while crossing the sea and ended up on this patch of land. Later on, many visited them on their way to more important lands and behind they left their traces. At times whole crews and ships would drop anchor at Sarouiki with no way of setting sail; for you see, ships would arrive on these ports but they would rarely depart. It is said that many sailors perished in the brothels of the ports, drunk and sick with longing. During their first week, they would think that they had discovered paradise in the arms of an olive-skinned woman who smelled like sweet wine and endless summers. Months and years would pass and the void in their stomachs could not be filled no matter how much Sarouikian wine they would drink. Their tears would run from their eyes to the floor, they would make their way across the dirty streets and when they would reach the sea they would dive and disappear, unable to find their way home.

And who knows why and who knows how, the descendants of those first travellers, continued to say that they were Greek. Maybe it was the glorified idea that was created around the Greeks that held their souls captive. Or maybe they could never be anything else so they remained what they always thought they were.

How the island came to be is not very clear. It seems that one of those sunny November

mornings, when the waves in the Aegean dance and jump and clash, the top of a mountain appeared amongst the grayish blue of the sea. It looked somewhat like a man emerging from the water, nose first. Up and up the waves pushed the enormous nose. How many fish were sacrificed; the first martyrs of this land. Ash and smoke licked the stones and pebbles that were to become the highest place of the new-born island. Lava spurred from the top of it, a bleeding nose amongst the salty foams.

The first to arrive were those who called themselves Mycenaeans. Only one ship reached the sand, alone. In groups they went round and round exploring but nothing of this place told them of people. Their only encounters were with animals. They settled slowly, at first around fire camps. Later on, they started building. One morning they set out towards the inland. From far away they could see this enormous mountain. They walked for days until they finally reached it. Who knows if it was human curiosity or boredom that led them to the top, but when they finally arrived they found me sitting in front of a cave, cooking a rabbit on a small fire. I had no language before that, I never needed one. You might think that I wouldn't be able to talk to them but you are mistaken. You see, when you possess a language it is very hard to understand another because you think you already know the meaning of words. But for me words had no meanings because they did not exist, so when I first heard them I accepted them and used them as my own without any problems. After we talked for a while and I grew accustomed of their language and their way of communicating, the men asked me what this land was called. I explained as best as I could that this land had no name. 'But how?' said this one man. And I said, 'let's call this land Sarouk.' You see, this word contained sounds that I liked the most from all the other sounds of this language.

Next day the men left me and travelled back to what had now become a small town. Many years later, when I decided to visit their cities, I heard how these first men had said that the island came out of my womb. Every so often another ship would lose its

way and more people would arrive. Those were the centuries when nobody could leave Sarouk. Their language, as I came to know, demanded for lands to be female so soon they started calling the island Sarouiki, and that is how it was written down on the first map to ever record the existence of this place.

That invention came with the colourful people; those who said that they were the Ottomans. I saw them sailing our way from the north. On their ship they had a skinny man, whose clothes weighed more than his body. Around the coast they went and the man slowly drew the island. That was when Sarouikians became able to leave and travel in other places. When the Ottomans set foot on Sarouiki they asked who the people of this place were and the people said that they were Greeks. 'Are you Christians?', the Ottomans asked.

'Yes' the Sarouikians replied, for before the Ottomans more ships had arrived, carrying with them a new religion. These were confusing times. The Greeks held on to their Christian religion, the Ottomans were trying to strengthen theirs, Islam. For four centuries the descendants of the first ship struggled to preserve what they considered theirs, until one morning, news arrived that the Ottomans were leaving.

People, the common people, the farmers and the sailors, the mothers and the nuns, they did not know politics. All they knew was that now they would have a new leader. 'The British are coming, the British are coming,' the voices in every street were saying. Alongside them came a new idea as well. The idea that Sarouiki, with all its Greeks, and all its Christianity should, like other islands before, be united with Greece. It travelled, this notion, from Cyprus where the people were already preparing for an uprising.

It did not take long for flames to light in the eyes of the people. 'Hayır, hayır,' cried those Ottomans, who now called themselves Turks, 'we have a right to this land too, we were born here, this is our place as it is yours.'

'Ohi, ohi,' the Greeks said, 'we were here first!'

‘Let’s divide it,’ the Turks said, ‘We’ll take half and you’ll take half.’

‘No, no,’ the Greeks said.

That was the time, you, oğlum, were born, just on the verge of a tragedy.

I AM

As a child, you believed that you possessed only a certain amount of words that you were allowed to use during your lifetime, so you were careful not to talk too much, otherwise you would go mute before you reached twenty. Your parents were wondering why you didn't speak. They took you to the church and prayed, they took you to the doctor to check if you were mute, they even called the old woman from the neighbouring village, who everybody said was a witch, to help you. She came with glass bottles and herbs wrapped in cloth. She boiled oils and sage until the air in the house changed to a foggy veil, until you were all chocking from the smell. Your father, between coughing and cursing, threw her out of the house. All was in vain.

You were relieved when you realised that you could speak as much as you wanted. You then began speaking to the trees and the rivers; you had long silent dialogues with the snakes in the bushes. You would exchange words with them, they would teach you the language of the earth and you would teach them that of humans.

Of all the animals, you liked sheep the most. They reminded you of the September clouds, full and white, soft and plump. You enjoyed their sleepy look, their endless chewing. You enjoyed hiding your face in their wool without caring about the foul smell of their coat. And they would welcome you as if you were one of them. They would generously give you their milk and allow you to run around the valleys with them. If back then you knew how much you would change in the following years you would have chosen to become a sheep yourself. You would have opened the lamb's mouth, you would have squeezed yourself inside and you would have been reborn through its womb.

But you had the misfortune to be the son of your father. You were unlucky by birth.

You were destined for suffering and sorrow. Back then, during the days you used to run away from home and spend your afternoons in the fields alongside the animals and the trees, suffering and sorrow did not exist. You heard those words often, spoken by adults with lined faces and rough rosy fingers. You were unable to comprehend their meaning but you knew they existed.

You asked the wind once to tell you what sorrow meant, how suffering felt. The wind embraced you and said that you shouldn't worry about such things. The wind told you to look at the stars and look at the moon and wait, because you, like all humans, were destined to experience suffering and sorrow. And you trusted the wind because you knew there was no reason for lies. And you gave him a goodnight wave and went back to your house, and lying in your bed you thought of growing up and of becoming a man.

A man. What is a man? What are the qualities that separate a boy from a man? Age? Bravery? According to your father a man is the one who has two arms and two legs and uses them to provide for his family. A man is he who has at least one son and who can drink half a bottle of raki and still make sense. A man has a beard and he wears long pants. According to your mother, you are a man. A small man but still a man. According to your brother you need to eat a raw snake, killed with your bare hands, and fuck a chicken to become a man.

'Why are you worried about such matters?' the mouse would ask you. 'A man is not made of trivial things like the clothes he wears or the amount of wine he can drink. A man has no size, height or weight and I am most certain that a real man would never do the horrible things your brother talks about.'

'Then what is a man?' you would ask. But the mouse wouldn't reply.

You would often sit on the sidewalk opposite the kafenion and you would observe the grown-ups, *the men*, sitting on the wooden chairs, under the shade of the overgrown geraniums, drinking their coffee, playing backgammon and cards, engaging in long

conversations about politics, Greece and football, with their komboloi in hand, counting time on its beads. You would repeat after them the curses, imitating as accurately as possible their deep voices. Holding a small twig between your fingers you would pretend that you were smoking and you would bring your lips together and act as if you are blowing smoke. *Is that a man?*

‘A man is he who was created according to the image of God,’ the priest would say at Sunday school, lifting his arms in the air, exposing his white skin from under the black raiison.

‘How does God look like *papa mou*,’ you would ask.

‘Like you and me,’ he would reply with a smile.

‘That means God is both old and young?’

‘Exactly.’

‘What about the blacks and the Chinese, they don’t look like me and you?’

‘But they do. We all have the same body, two arms, two legs, a head, a heart,’ the priest would reply.

‘So those who have one arm or one leg are not men?’ And the priest would cut the conversation short and he would go on to talk about this saint or that saint, that miracle or the other.

You heard a story once about a man who had a wife and a daughter. He was a farmer, a good one, and he took care of his family like a real man. But one day the man stepped on a rusty nail and when the infection spread over his whole leg the doctors said that they had to cut it. ‘Better dead than lame,’ the man said and he refused everything apart from analgesics. So the man died and his wife and daughter were left alone and had to take care of themselves. ‘That is a real man!’ your father would say. ‘He knew that a crippled husband is worse than a dead one. The women would have to take care of him while trying to make a living.’ ‘Coffee?’ your mum would ask and you could hear her

whispering behind her teeth, 'Coward!', while moving towards the kitchen.

Those were the years of bliss and joy. The adults were only worried when it rained too much, they would only pray when there was hail and they would ask God to protect their crops. They would discuss in silence about adultery or a cow disease that could leave a family without livestock. They would talk about the roads the British were building, the radio and the number of cars in the neighbourhood. 'You can reach Peras from Varkasi in four hours,' they would say.

You were three the first time you saw a radiophone. The owner of the local coffee shop had bought one and invited everyone to go the following Monday, at six o'clock in order to hear the show from the radio in Athens. Your mum made you take a bath and comb your hair. At five thirty you set out. In the street you met with the rest of the families from the surrounding houses. Everybody was cheerful. They all looked nice, clean and tidy and in loud voices they were sharing their previous experiences with the radio.

When you reached the coffee shop you begged your father to take you close to the strange machine but with his finger on his lips he told you to be quiet. You kept pulling his trousers in silence and when he saw your eyes watering, he lifted you up on his shoulders so you would be able to see. The broadcaster finished by saying, 'Dear listeners! As from today Cyprus is an independent state. We stand by our Greek brothers,' and the national anthem followed. People were crying and holding each other's hands. Years passed until you understood what those words meant. History classes at school and the AOS pamphlets taught you all about the struggle of the Greeks and their bravery against the British suppressors. And it was only towards the end of your life that you comprehended the full effect of those lessons.

By the time you were fifteen your father bought a radiophone. He paid six pounds but the small radio was worth a lot more. Of course the day he walked in holding the brown box neither you nor your mother could understand its value. Your brother and

your father kept exchanging looks of understanding. You didn't know a lot, but you knew they were sharing a secret.

'You can hear the Sarouiki Broadcasting Service with this mum,' Angelos said, 'I'll set it up for you.' Watching your brother pressing the buttons and showing your mum how to change stations, you felt a different kind of jealousy. As much as you loved him that was the moment you became conscious of the fact that your mum would never look at you the way she looked at Angelos. That was the moment that you retreated without realising it. That year your lives started changing. Your father was always pensive, your brother stayed out until late. They both had grey clouds in their eyes. They would get angry easily, every little thing, even breathing, was enough to annoy them. You caught them a couple of times whispering in the yard. 'What are you talking about?' you would ask.

'The weather,' your dad would reply.

'What about the weather?'

'Goddammit Niko! What do you want? Just go inside!' your brother would yell. And you would, without further question, without yelling back.

1972. Sir Walter Jefferson's first year at the island. Sir Walter, the Sarouk friendly governor, Sir Walter the one who understood the longing of Sarouikians to be united with Greece. Sir Walter, the one who was governor when the AOS struggle started. 'The teacher said that *Sir Walter* stated in the Daily Mirror that if we really wanted union we would have taken guns, just like the Cypriots did,' Angelos said to your father one day after dinner. A faint smile appeared on your dad's lips and he nodded a couple of times without commenting. You would have never thought that your father or your brother could be part of such a group. A man who could hardly read the paper without stuttering and a boy who only cared about pulling the tails of cats, chasing stray dogs and stealing cigarettes to smoke with his friends behind the church late in the afternoon. It would

have never crossed your mind that these two people were brave enough to even think of talking back to a Brit, their souls were not strong enough to give them the power to fight for freedom. Sitting between them, during one of the last peaceful dinners your family would have, you were unable to foresee what was about to happen.

Of course for a while you were not sure if it was true. You were too scared to ask, too afraid to know, so you tried to figure it out all by yourself. You would sneak out in the garden when the two of them would have one of their private conversations and you would try to listen to what they were saying. Other times you would pick their pockets even though you were not sure what exactly you were looking for. All that led to nothing though and it was only after your father was imprisoned that you, and your mother, found out about AOS.

But for now, you were free to enjoy the sun and the clouds, the grass and the rain. You had the privilege of not knowing the future; you were blissful in your ignorance of what was to follow. ‘Sing to me stories of the past,’ you would ask the swallows and they would tell you of princesses and knights, of wells full of treasures and of mermaids that swim across the Elasi bay. And every story would end in the same manner.

‘Be careful little boy, history repeats itself. It might not be witches and it might not be an enchanted well, but every boy lives an adventure before he becomes a man.’

A MAN

When the first explosion echoed nobody moved. Those who were still in bed crossed themselves and pulled the covers up to their necks; those who were awake stopped their breakfast rituals and stretched their ears. Nikos hand lingered on top of the table. A piece of bread was still between his fingers. *Boom*. The second explosion shook the house. He could tell this one was closer; this one was in his city. *Boom*. Peras? *Boom*. Varkasi. His mother did not stir. ‘Mother?’ She did not respond. Niko’s got up and moved towards the door.

‘It started,’ she whispered. ‘My boy . . . Dead . . .’

Nikos looked at her. He turned the doorknob. Everything was quiet. Peeking outside he could see the rush movement of curtains opening and closing, hesitant hands unlocking doors, worried eyes peeking out. ‘It started,’ he confirmed and closed the door. They were expecting it. There was a feeling of unease for weeks now. People were whispering. Some talked of hope, some of a doom that no one would escape.

The General took the shape of a spook. Boys dreamt of him shaking their hand as the Greek flag was being raised in the background. Mothers prayed that his abilities were as strong as his reputation. He expected, anticipated. When Angelos left, his mother cried. Nikos didn’t say goodbye. He observed him as he was packing some food, a spare shirt and some socks but he said nothing. ‘You’ll see,’ Angelos said, ‘in a year, maybe a year and a half, we’ll be united with Mother Greece. The General knows the way. He will train us, he will show us how. This is for the best mother. I’ll be back before you even notice that I’m gone. I’m telling you, only a few months and we will be free.’

All the mother did was to nod. She whispered prayers under her breath and hid a tiny

picture of the Virgin in the boy's clothes. 'Eh, take care of mother OK?' Angelos pinched Niko's cheek. Nikos looked into his brother's eyes trying to understand why Angelos wanted to join the guerrillas.

'You'll have to kill,' Nikos said.

'I know.'

'Then stay,' Nikos said. Angelos smiled and walked towards the kitchen table. Picking up his bag, he kissed his mother and walked out.

And that's how it started. A few explosions and there was no turning back. Nikos continued eating his breakfast. He could hear people outside, setting out for work. You could tell something was changing. No one was as loud as usually, nobody greeted others in the usual melodious way. They were silent.

'I'm going to school mother; I'll be back around two. Stay safe.' Nikos expected his mother to stop him, grab him and beg him to stay home, lock him inside. But she didn't. She just sat there, eyes absent, not even acknowledging his presence. 'OK then,' he said, 'I'll see you later.'

It was only a ten minute walk to his school. The streets were busy but felt lifeless. He made his usual stop at the bakery stool to pick a piece of cheese pie for school. 'Good morning boy,' the man said, 'a piece of tiropita right? They are nice today; I got the cheese from Limoun.' Nikos nodded. 'Did you hear the explosions? These men will be heroes one day.' The man was almost whispering while saying that. 'Union boy. Enosis!' and he gave a quick chuckle as he handed Nikos his pie.

'I don't know about heroes,' Nikos said, 'I only hope that we survive all this.' The boy walked away. The greasy wrap was sticking on his palm. Turning around the corner he saw three British soldiers running towards the police station, arms in hand. Nikos halted and with his back against a wall waited for them to pass, wondering whether there was a way for them to know that his brother was an AOS fighter. But the soldiers didn't even

look at him; they passed right next to him and rushed off to follow commands.

At the school he found himself sitting in a corner alone. His classmates were gathered in a small group and were talking about the explosions happily. They were singing revolution songs from Greece and were chanting the Greek national anthem. The teacher interrupted them when he entered but the silence didn't last for long; soon he joined them as well, spoke passionately about the bravery of the Greek race and the whole day passed in the same manner.

The following months went on quietly. Often there was some disturbance in the streets. Sarouikians with signs and rocks in hand; screaming for union with the motherland. One day a wall would be white; the next red letters would appear on it. 'Enosis even if we have to starve.' The following day the letters would disappear. Sometimes things would get out of hand. Soldiers would arrest students with accusations of carrying AOS notices in their school bags. Beating would take place in the middle of the street and men would be searched on the spot.

Nikos spend his days between school, home and the port. He couldn't stay in the house for too long. His mother's silence, his neighbour's gossip about his brother; all of it made life unbearable. As summer was approaching and he knew he wouldn't be able to escape at school, he decided to go back to the tailoring shop he worked at the summer before and ask for a job. The tailor agreed and so Nikos started spending his mornings there. He would return home around two, eat and then take walks around the port. There he would just sit and observe the boats being loaded and unloaded, he would chat with the fishermen at their stools and he would sometimes visit the castle. He would imagine princesses running down the stairs in their extravagant dresses and kings giving orders, their voices echoing in the big halls.

It was there that he first met Feriha. She was sitting outside the castle, calling passers-by to give her their palms for reading. She called out for Nikos who at first did not turn

to face her. 'A ođlan, come, come here, let me tell you what lies in your future. Beh! Come here. Boy, are you deaf?' Nikos felt sorry for the woman. Her voice made him feel sad. He turned around and approached her.

'I don't want to know my future,' he said.

'Then what is it that you want to know?'

'What is your name?'

'Feriha.'

'Turkish?'

She laughed. 'Evet, Turkish. Yours?'

'Nikos?'

'Greek?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! Nikolaos. Amma you don't believe in the victory of the people.'

'How is that relevant to my name?'

'Nikolaos . . . Don't tell me you don't go to school?'

'I go to school.'

'Then you should know. Nikolaos. From niki, victory and laos, the people. Am I wrong?'

'I don't know.'

'I'm not.'

'And what does your name mean?'

'Feriha?'

'Ne. Feriha.'

'Future, eternity.'

'Just because your name means future it doesn't mean you can see it.'

She laughed again. 'Is that so?'

‘I think.’

‘Gel, gel, sit with me.’

‘No, I’ll go in the castle.’

‘There is nothing in the castle.’

‘But . . . ’

‘You’ll have the chance to spend a long time in there soon. Now sit with me.’

And there the boy sat. Every afternoon. They would talk about the sky and the stars and they would laugh as if there were no worries in the world. At first Nikos was embarrassed by the woman’s appearance. He was ashamed by her long skirt and he would turn red due to her naked torso. You see, she didn’t wear a shirt. Her breasts were covered by her long hair, which she would tuck in her skirt. Her arms were full of beaded jewellery and on her feet she wore a pair of sandals that were so worn out that she would be better off walking barefoot.

Early in June Feriha seemed worried. Nikos took her some dried figs, which they sat and ate in silence. The heat was unbearable but the woman kept sipping zivania. ‘How can you drink strong alcohol in this heat?’ Nikos asked.

‘Ma if you knew what I know then you would as well.’

‘What do you know?’

‘Don’t worry too much now oğlum. Amma listen to me, next week them köpekler will visit you,’ she said and spat. ‘When they ask for your brother, tell them he left long ago and you haven’t heard from him since.’

‘Why?’

‘The letters he sent . . . Burn them oğlum . . . Tonight, when your mum is asleep.’

‘I . . . ’

‘You said that you don’t want to know your future amma accept my advice boy.’

And so it was. On the 20th of July everyone tuned in to hear the news about the

explosion in a police station in Peras the day before. AOS was responsible for the bombing. Nikos mother listened to the radio but did not respond. When the broadcast finished, she stood up walked to the kitchen to make coffee.

‘It will be all right mama. Angelos is OK. I know he is. It’s only been a week since his last letter.’ No response. ‘Mama?’

‘You know nothing,’ Nikos heard her whispering.

‘I . . . He is OK mama . . . ’

Nikos was interrupted by a knock on the door. A harsh voice called for them to open. ‘Mama?’ No response. Nikos walked up to the door and opened it. Four British soldiers and an interpreter walked in.

‘We want to know the whereabouts of a man named Angelos Georgiou. We have evidence that he was part of the group responsible for the bombing of the Antilia station.’ The soldier turned to the interpreter.

‘*Psaxnoume ena . . .*’

‘I understand English,’ Nikos interrupted him.

‘Good, good,’ said the soldier. ‘Are you related to this man? Georgiou?’

‘He is my older brother.’

‘Do you know where he is?’

‘No.’

‘If you cooperate . . . ’

‘I don’t know where he is,’ Nikos interrupted again. ‘He left us months ago. He said he was tired of having to take care of us and he left.’

‘Where did he go? Which city?’

‘I don’t know. He didn’t say.’

‘Did you have any correspondence with him in those months?’

‘No.’

‘Listen, if you know where he is and you are lying you will be in big trouble. Do you understand?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then I will ask you again, did you have any correspondence with your brother in the previous months? Any letters?’

‘No.’

The soldier turned to face the rest of the group. ‘Search the house.’ At that point Niko’s mother walked in. ‘Who is she?’ the soldier asked.

‘My mother,’ Nikos replied.

‘Is Angelos Georgiou your son?’ the soldier addressed the mother. The interpreter asked in Greek. She nodded. ‘Do you know his whereabouts?’ asked the soldier followed by the interpreter echoing his words. The mother stood there without responding. ‘Why is she not answering?’ the soldier yelled.

‘She is mute,’ said Nikos and moved in front of his mother in a protective way, ‘she can’t speak.’

‘I see. Search the house.’ The woman did not move but she was soon in tears. Nikos stood by her side observing the soldiers going around, moving furniture, opening and closing drawers and looking under pillows and mattresses. But they found nothing. ‘It seems,’ the soldier said, ‘that you were telling the truth. If at any point your brother contacts you then you should report it straight away. Do you understand?’ Nikos blinked but said nothing. As the soldiers were leaving he held his mum in his arms and stroked her head.

‘I told you he is alive mama. I told you he is alive,’ he said. His mother looked at him, full of questions. ‘I burnt them,’ he said apologetically. Her lips pouted, her pupils dilated. She turned around and walked away from him.

Next day Nikos went to see Feriha. ‘How did you know?’ he said without greeting

her. The woman laughed.

‘I just knew.’

‘Is he well?’

‘That I cannot know.’

‘Then what do you know?’

‘Ha, evet, I see. Now you wish me to tell you your future.’ Nikos did not reply. ‘It’s not long before you leave your mother as well.’

‘I am not joining *them*.’ Feriha nodded repeatedly. ‘I am not joining *them*.’

‘I heard you the first time oğlum.’

‘I will not leave my mother.’

‘Tell me about her.’

‘Tell you about my mother?’

‘Hayır.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Tell me about Anastasia.’

IN A ROAD

I remember the first time I saw her. No, not the first time I saw her but the first time I really noticed her. She was carrying groceries with her sister and her mum. She was wearing a blue dress. She had her hair tied back. She was smiling. I remember because I took the time to examine her, to really see her for who she is. Do I love her? That, I don't know. But I know that I think about her, sometimes, most times, all the time. I remember how the sun was reflecting on her white hair; how black her eyes looked compared to her white hair. She is nothing like her sister. She is nothing like her mother. She is more like her father, or maybe she looks like a great-great-grandmother or a distant aunt. They talk about things like that at the barbershop sometimes. They say that this is why Kyriakos' son is dark and has curly hair. They say the baby looks Egyptian, of course the barber says, his great-great-grandfather was Egyptian. I cannot know if that is true but who cares if it is? He kicked his wife out, the baby; he doesn't believe that that baby is his. Well, who am I to know. What would have happened to me if my father thought I was not his child? Well, there is no such issue, I look just like my father, my mama says, well my mama said. Speak! I cannot survive another one of her long silences, they make me feel like there is no time, like time vanished and left behind a void. Anastasia. She fills those moments, she makes time again out of nothing, it's silly, no, no it's not, it's actually true, like that time when I was sitting outside, in the yard, with mama and she was silent, after Angelos left, or was it before, I don't know, no, no it was before, he was still living with us, but mama was silent, why was she silent, it was when Angelos said he will join the guerrillas, yes, yes, that's why she was silent and then Anastasia passed by and she said hi and my mum spoke again and said hello back and Anastasia approached

us and I was shaking and she said come over for coffee sometime my mother would love that and my mum smiled and Anastasia left and my mama said to me that she would make a man very happy, such a lovely girl, so beautiful and she knows how to be a wife, her mother taught her well, my mama said and I wanted to be that man because I was unhappy, I am unhappy, happiness doesn't exist in this place now, not for long, maybe one day it will be back, maybe the General will bring happiness back and there will be no more crying, no explosions, no soldiers, but I will still be unhappy, she is the only one who can make me happy, when she smiles, oh, when she smiles at me I feel my chest exploding, not when she smiles but when she smiles to me because no one else deserves it, I am the only one who is worthy of her smile, I am the only one who appreciates her beauty and I am lucky, I admired her before her mother hid her, now she wears a veil, it belonged to her grandmother my mama said, because she is beautiful like a goddess my brother said and the family is afraid, you know the soldiers, they harm women, when they say harm, my brother and my mother, they use a different tone, I know, I understand what they mean, harm, yes they harm women, young girls, and she is in danger because the lieutenant might seek revenge, rumours say that Anastasia's father is a guerrilla, they say he is helping AOS, do the British know, they know nothing, I hope they don't, but if they do a veil will not protect her, yes right my brother said but at least when she wears it they cannot see how beautiful she is, you like her I asked him, he said yes, all the boys like her, yes I said but do you love her, he said no because he loves freedom and I told him that he can go and waste his life for freedom but I will marry Anastasia and I will protect her from the enemy, any enemy, even the enemies that we are not aware of yet because that is what you do for those you love and my brother said, oh my brother he thinks he is the wisest man on earth, he said, so now you understand and I said no and he said that you protect those you love that is why he has to join the General and he said he loved Greece more than anything, more than us and I said well you can marry

Greece, stupid boy, that's what he calls me, he says I plan too much because I want to go to the university, which university he asks, I say I don't know, the university is in Greece he says, well I know that, and he says what language do you speak, I say the one I was given, Greek he says, yes, yes Greek, and he says which God do you believe in, I say the one you believe in too, you are a Greek Orthodox he says, we must be united with mother Greece he says, I say OK and I don't say anything else because I don't care, I only care about her, like my father cared about my mother and I want to work and marry and have children and I want them to grow up even if we are not united with Greece, who cares about Greece, fuck Greece, shh don't say that my mama said, and then she says you are young, you haven't seen what I have seen, you don't know any better, 1st of August my paper says, I read the paper because I'm trying to understand the world and I am thinking tomorrow Anastasia will be back, same as last summer, she went to Varkasi to her grandmother and her uncle and her aunt and I ask my mama everyday if she knows when Anastasia will be back and she says why do you care but then she says on the 2nd and I go to sleep waiting for her. And in my sleep dreams chase me like wild beasts, faces I know and faces I don't, forcing me to hold a gun, point at the enemy, screaming at me 'kill him boy, kill him', the trigger hurts my finger, in those dreams rose petals fly around me as I walk out of a church in a black suit, I turn around to look at my wife but she is gone, in those dreams I cry as the rice that falls with the petals is not raw but cooked and sticky, bad omens, bad signs, something bad will happen, in these dreams I feel it, I am sure of it, I am worried about her, I don't want the dreams to end, I won't them to go on until I have an answer, until I know what I am supposed to do. 'Shoot him boy, kill him, shoot them boy, kill them all,' the voice of my father, the face of my brother, the smell of my mother, 'kill him boy, shoot,' my hands trembling, my eyesight blurred, I can't see him, I can't see the man I am supposed to kill, I chew my tongue, tastes like a dry fig, it's sweet, it's comforting, I try to speak, say that I can't see the man, I don't want to shoot

him,' kill him boy, just kill him,' I yell in my sleep, I scream for the visions to go away, I want to be left alone, I am not a killer, I don't care about leaders and democracy, I'm a traitor, I'm a coward, yes I am, I'm a boy, I will not help, I will not participate, if I'm interrogated I will speak, if I'm taken I will tell, show them the hiding places, point out locations, maybe that will help my father, save him, he comes in those dreams wearing the traditional foustanella, four hundred pleats forming a white skirt, four hundred as the years the Greeks were under the Ottomans, four hundred pleats reminding of men what it means to be Greek, come on son, put yours on, my father says, those four hundred pleats are so heavy I say and the Brits enter the house, I am confused, I don't know how we ended up in the house, they pull him violently, they kick him and they yell, they scream like dogs, they bark, yes they bark, my mother is running after them, calling my father's name, he says something, I can't hear him, I say louder, speak up, he says 'Make me proud son!', I say I don't know how. 'Angele,' he says looking right through me, fixing his eyes on my brother, 'make me proud son.' I turn to face my brother, he has a smirk on his face, 'kill him boy, kill him', he says and he shoots me. In these dreams I wish my father was never imprisoned, in these dreams I wish he was a coward, I cry for the sadness of my mother, the memory of that day awakes in my sleep, her face ageing instantly, twenty years' worth of wrinkles forming on her face in a few seconds, mother, oh mother, you are suffering for the foolishness of men, mother you idiot, you suffer for them and you forget me, you thick headed dumb woman, you mule, you cow, I hate you mother, I do, speak to me mother, hug me, tell me it's going to be alright mother, I am here mother, I am your son too, I am a man too, oh hear me mother when I speak, love me mother, I am scared mother, I would die for you mother but you don't think I'm capable of it, I thought you would understand, you would figure it out, you would realise that I love her mother, that I am suffering mother, and you would comfort me with love and sweet words, oh mother why you don't understand. And I twirl and I twist, I kick and I scream, I'm

a baby in a crib, I'm a hungry toddler, I need protection, Anastasia is singing a lullaby, for me, I hear it coming from the east and from the south, it surrounds me like a blanket, warm and fussy with love, I feel it on my skin, falling on me like sun rays, reminding me of the smell of Sunday food, after church, after confession which always leaves me feeling empty, sins washed away, the smell of jasmine during summer evenings, mixed with the heavy aroma of brewed coffee and humidity, drops of rose water on my hands, a mixture of everything I love wrapped up in her song, in her voice, I call her name, no reply, she doesn't stop her song, I call her again, I call her my love, I call her my life, nothing, she goes on singing, making me sleepy, more sleepy, but I am already asleep, I'm thinking that this must be death, death is the inability to wake up, this is how I am going to die, I don't care, I like this death, it's calm and relaxing, around me men are dancing, all wearing the foustanella, shooting bullets in the air, this is a celebration, have we defeated the British, are we free, are we Greeks? 'Not us boy, you are not one of us, you didn't shoot. We are free, we are Greeks, you are dead.'

OF QUESTIONS

You wake up covered in sweat. August is always the hottest month, dry and humid. You kicked the covers on the floor during your sleep; the mattress is soaking in your sweat. You notice that the window is open; your mother must have entered your room earlier and realising how hot you were, tried to cool you down by letting the breeze in. But there is no breeze; not a single leaf is moving; especially in midday. You turn your pillow around; you are trying to go back to sleep but the loud voices coming from outside bother you. *What is happening?* You stretch your ears. Somebody is talking about some shootings, this morning, in Varkasi. You get up, you look for your trousers, you need to go outside and find out what happened. *Anastasia. Shootings. In Varkasi.* With one shoe in hand you rush out of your room and sprint to the yard.

All the neighbours have gathered in the street, you look around trying to find someone to ask. They all look calm, men smoking idly, and women chatting about the events in a gossipy manner, children chasing each other and pulling their mothers' skirts. You notice an old man standing alone and you approach him. 'You know what happened?' you ask. He looks at you for a second.

'Riots in Varkasi,' he says, 'some college students and others, all of them together, I am not sure. They had signs with *enosis* written on them and they threw rocks at the British. Then there were some shootings.' You look at him waiting to hear something about Anastasia, but he says nothing more. You leave the man and you search for your mother. She is standing alongside the baker and his wife. You go to her.

'What happened?' you ask again. She looks at you but says nothings. *Damn you, speak to me.*

‘The students were rioting in Varkasi. It got out of hand. The British shot them,’ the baker says.

‘Anyone hurt?’ you ask.

‘I don’t know. We just heard about it on the radio, it happened early in the morning, around eight.’

‘Four hours ago? Then they should know if anyone is hurt.’ You feel your mother’s hand reaching for yours. She is holding you tight.

‘Well, do you know Anastasia? Maria’s daughter. She was there, it all happened close to the bus station. And they say she is hurt.’ The baker says that almost indifferently. He is mimicking an expression of consolation. You squeeze your mother’s hand.

‘Loukia told me that they are bringing the girl in Emesoun as we speak. Her uncle has a car. Do you know where he works? Apparently he makes a lot of money,’ the baker’s wife says. You can’t listen to all this anymore. You let go of your mother’s hand and you start walking. To where you are not sure. You are just walking. Without a purpose. Without stopping. You are still holding your shoe. You only realise when you step on a small sharp rock. You stop and you put your shoe on.

Your destination is always the same. You are headed for the port as if there you will find an answer. You notice people staring at you; you are not wearing a shirt. You don’t care. Right now, all that matters is getting to the port. You need to reach there, talk to Feriha, hear her say that everything is going to be alright and then go back. She might be back by then; she might be dead by then. You are the kind of man that knows exactly how many steps are required to reach his destination, because your destinations are always the same.

You reach the port and everything seems unchanged. The fishing stalls are there, the old men drinking their coffee are there, the hungry cats that beg for a fish bone are there. You head for the castle. The flower lady is trying to sell her last roses before returning

home. The man who usually sells newspapers is now enjoying a cigarette. And Feriha, she is not there. You look around. You try to find her. You rush into the kafenion. 'Have you seen that lady, the one who always sits outside the castle? Have you seen her?' The owner looks at you amazed.

'What lady? Are you alright boy?'

'The lady . . . She is Turkish, she always wears the same skirt, long, she sits there, everyday, all day.' You point to the spot where you spent so many afternoons with her.

'I have not seen her,' the owner says, 'I don't know who you are talking about'. You don't know how to respond. You have seen this man before, you see him every time you are here. How is it possible that he doesn't know Feriha. You leave. You are confused. You circle the castle twice. She is still not here.

You decide to walk back home. Now you are calm, calmer oğlum. You try to think positive thoughts about how Anastasia was not really hurt, it was someone who looked like her, another girl with white hair. But you know not of other girls with white hair. You are thinking that the island is big, you don't know everyone, how could you? You are strolling now; you are postponing your arrival. Is it because you don't want to know what happened or it is because you know that whatever it is that happened you cannot change it?

Eventually you reach your home. The neighbourhood is still busy. People are waiting for Anastasia to return. They want to be the first to see her, they want to find out if she is hurt, not because they are worried but because they want to go and tell others, inform everybody. You know that and it makes you sick. But you stay outside with them, you stand at the back and you wait. You are not losing your patience like some of them and you are not completely indifferent like some others.

When the car becomes visible all of them gather and like a wave they approach the vehicle. You are being pushed and shoved. You don't care. All you want is to see her.

The car stops and the driver's door opens. Her uncle steps out wearing a suit and a tie. He is screaming to people to move back, give them some space. Instead everybody is moving closer and closer. The uncle opens the back door. You see her white hair first, then her arm, her skin is radiating under the sun. He uncle lifts her up and holding her tight he tries to reach the front door.

You hear them screaming and purring and howling. 'Martyr! Martyr'. You see their hands, like claws, reaching for her. Strips of white hair flow around. Their nails turn red; they are tearing of her flesh. You are numb, you can't do nothing. You can see her muscles and her veins. Next to you a man is sucking on a piece of skin. You feel sick. There is a chanting but you cannot tell where it comes from. She is not moving at all, her arms hang down, exposed to the brutality of the people around her. 'Martyr! Martyr!', they chant.

You squeeze between the crowd, you feel someone grabbing your waist and pulling you back. You resist. You try to move forward. 'No.' You hear the woman's voice, gentle. You turn to face your mother. There are tears in her eyes. 'Come on son. Let's home.' Her lips are not moving but somehow you know exactly what she wants to say. You follow her.

Inside the house is cooler. You sit on a chair and you say nothing. *What is there to say?* Your mother sits opposite you, her arms crossed, hands tucked under her breasts, nodding repeatedly. 'Did you see them?' you say. She looks at you. You know she saw them. 'I want to go over there. I want to make sure that she is fine. Mother? Can I go?' She shakes her head. *No.* You don't ask her why. You don't ask her anything. You get up and walk in the kitchen to prepare lunch.

She follows you. She takes a pot, fills it with water and brings it to the hob. You cut some bread. You hand a piece to her but she doesn't take it. You know that she will only be having tea today. You abandon cooking, if she won't eat, neither will you. The

water is bubbling; she notices. She makes you a cup as well and even though you don't like sage you drink it. Your mother takes a sip and then approaches you. She places her hand on your shoulder, gives you a little squeeze and then leaves. There is nothing else for you to do than sit there and finish your cup.

Towards nightfall you find the courage to go to Anastasia's house. You spend the afternoon reading old newspapers and listening to the radio with your mother. You are expecting to hear something, but what? Some news maybe, more victims, that they captured another guerrilla? But they say nothing of that sort. So around six you make up your mind. You change your shirt and you comb your hair. You even spray some of your brother's cologne on you. You reach for a tie but then you realise how stupid you will look and you throw it on the bed. All set and ready you head outside.

Your mother is sitting in the living room peeling green beans. 'Are you cooking those for tomorrow?' you say. She nods. 'I don't like them.' She keeps peeling them, lifting her shoulders up just to show you that she doesn't care. You take two steps.

'Psss . . . ' she calls. You turn to face her.

'What?' She lifts her hand signalling to ask you where you are going. 'Out,' you say. She looks at you puzzled. 'I'll be back soon.' She goes back to her beans. You walk outside playing scenarios in your head. You are trying to think of what to say, you are worried that they might not allow you to see her. And if they don't, then what? Will you be able to change their mind? Dragging your feet while lost in your thoughts you reach their front door. You knock once, nothing. You knock again.

'Who's there?' you hear Anastasia's father calling.

'Nikos.'

'Nikos?'

'Georgiou.' You hear steps approaching the door, you hear him unlocking.

'Can I help you?' he says.

'I . . . I wanted to . . . ' He says nothing; he is looking at you, patiently. 'Is Anastasia alright?'

'She is resting.'

'Is she hurt?'

'The doctor is taking care of her.'

'Can I see her?'

'No.' You don't move, you look at the man, he looks back at you. His skin look aged, as if in a couple of hours years passed. 'Anything else boy?'

'Please sir, I will only stay for a couple of minutes, I want to see her.' He pushes you softly outside, following you as he closes the door behind him.

'Niko?'

'Yes sir.'

'She won't make it.' You don't react. 'She is not well.' There is a pause. 'Do you love her?'

'Yes sir, I do.'

'Then you need to stop loving her.' He gets up and walks towards the door. He stops. Turns and faces you. 'She might not be alive tomorrow.' And like that you learn how hard life is, like that you realise how easily those you love can just disappear, suddenly, as if they never really existed.

WINDS AND MICE

The couple stepped on the bus; the man's rat-like face shrunk, his pointy nose sniffing the air. Even though they looked kind and nice, wearing warm smiles and using their polite gestures with everybody, there was something disturbingly wrong with them. They were the sort of people who you wanted to like but still your stomach would be tied in a knot every time you met them. 'Smelly Sarouks, such filth . . . ,' the man whispered to his wife. She turned her head towards him, then looked at the back of the bus, still smiling.

'Good thing they don't understand English,' she said and looked at an old woman wearing a head scarf and holding a basket on her lap. The old woman, deceived by their kind blue eyes, nodded with a smile. The wife smiled back. 'We are the only Brits in here,' she said. The sun coming in from the windows was exposing her almost bald head. Her hair was fine and ash blond, shoulder length, and when light hit them one could see her skull.

'Threa selinia,' said the driver and held up three fingers. Then he pointed once at the man and once at the woman. The man gave him the fare while the woman, who was scanning the bus for a seat, moved towards Nikos. Next to him was the only empty spot and the woman took it while her husband stood holding tightly on the pole. The driver looked from his rear mirror. 'O.K.? I start *aro*,' he said and stepped his foot away from the break pedal.

Nikos kept looking down at his shoes. 'You speak English boy? *Agleka?*,' the man asked. Nikos turned to look at him.

'Yes,' he replied.

'Good, good. And I see you go to school? What year?' said the man pointing at

Nikos' cap that bore the school's emblem. If it wasn't rude Nikos would choose not to answer but he knew that the right thing to do was to reply back to the man, maybe smile to him a little bit.

'Second class of Lyceum. I was supposed to start today.' The man froze in a smile while the woman was nodding and as if it took a few seconds for both of them to realise what the boy had said. Then they both turned at the same time and looked at him.

'You were supposed to?' the woman said. 'Oh no, don't tell me you gave up school to join the guerrillas?'

'You should stay in school. That so-called General, he is a killer of young boys. Takes them from schools and lies to them about *enosis*,' the man whispered and checked if the other passengers had heard him.

'I did not leave school to join AOS,' Nikos said, using a steady tone, trying to reassure them that his schoolbag was not full of explosives. 'I didn't leave school. It was shut down.'

'Oh . . . ' the woman said. Then she looked at her husband who seemed to be frozen in the same silly smile. Nikos fixed his gaze on the woman. *Oh*. He was wondering how that can be interpreted. There was no sadness in it, she didn't sound worried. It was more like a plain statement. *Oh*. As if schools being shut down was so normal, so ordinary. As if it was the way things should be. *Oh*. He didn't like the couple. He decided to look away, avoid any contact with them. The man sniffed the air again. Nikos noticed this and paid attention to the odours that were reaching him from the surrounding seats. It smelled like hard work, a mixture of farmer's sweat and worn-out clothes. He didn't mind the smell. It made him feel at home, it turned the Brits into intruders. For a second he felt that he could understand his brother, for once he really wanted to kill someone, kill this couple whose soapy smell failed to blend in.

At every stop the bus driver would open the door and call out the name of the street.

Nikos prayed that the couple would get down soon. The woman kept looking at his shoes. She made him aware of his poorness; she made him feel ashamed of the holes in his soles, embarrassed by the state of his clothes. For a minute he bowed his head in an apologetic way but then he recalled his brother's rosy fingers, his father's cracked skin, brown and dehydrated from being exposed to the sun for too long, and he looked up again.

'Boy,' the British man said, 'you want to go back to school right?' Nikos nodded. 'So you need to influence everyone you know, you need to help stop this craziness. You know, do something about it, talk to your father. Is he alive? Or maybe if you have brothers, talk to them, tell them to drop this insane plan.' Nikos didn't respond. 'Boy, did you hear me? Is your father alive?'

'My father is in prison.'

'In prison?' the man said.

'Yes,' Nikos replied.

'Oh,' the woman said.

That *oh* again. Nikos was getting really irritated. *Oh*. The bus stopped.

'*Augoustas Theodoras!*' the bus driver called. Two stops before Nikos' house. He picked up his bag.

'You are getting off boy?' the man called. Nikos didn't look back.

Outside the air felt refreshing. He breathed in and felt calmer. He took his time to walk back home, he looked at the windows of shops and smelled the street food, the lamb, the beef, the chicken wrapped in pitta, filled with tzatziki and tomatoes and onions. He even made a stop outside a kafenion and watched a rather exciting backgammon game between two old men. He was trying to keep his mind busy, not to think of Anastasia.

She had been locked inside for more than a month now. The gossip went that her skin was slowly replaced by a transparent one which looked like a fine-weaved fabric. People said that those who saw her were amazed by her looks. Her veins were now visible

and one could sit and stare the blood circulating in her body all day. Her muscles, the women were saying, looked like craftily made ornaments and some even compared them to patterns similar to those found on Persian carpets.

Nikos was walking for a while before reaching her house. The windows were covered by black cloths to suggest mourning. His heart stopped for a second at the thought of her death. A second was enough for him to imagine life without her around, a second was enough for the sun to go away and be replaced by dark clouds; a second was enough for him to feel old and shattered. With hesitant steps he walked up to the front door and knocked three times.

Her mother opened. She didn't look like someone in mourning. If it wasn't for her black dress and headscarf Nikos wouldn't be able to tell that death had reached that house. 'You are Iroula's son?'

'Yes,' Nikos replied.

'How can I help you?' she said.

'Are you in mourning?'

'That's a rude way to ask what happened.'

'I'm . . . I'm sorry, I . . . '

'Yes, we are in mourning,' she interrupted him. His eyes dilated. He was too scared to ask. 'Our daughter, Anastasia, is gone.' The woman said it in a monotonous voice. There was a hint of sadness but it was overpowered by the look on her face; as if she was unable to say anything with certainty.

'Dead?' Nikos said so quietly he was barely heard.

'You can say that. She has . . . I don't know how to say it boy, she . . . disappeared. But do come in, don't stand there, come, come.'

Nikos entered the house. Everything was still. There were people sitting on chairs and sofas around the room but no one was moving. He could hear them breathing slowly,

their exhaling and inhaling synchronised, their eyes fixed on the floor. He followed the woman in the kitchen and he took an empty chair around the table. She pulled a stool and sat on his left.

‘Before going to bed last night I went in her room and rubbed her skin with some oil to prevent it from cracking. She was getting very fragile during the last few days. When we finished she told me to comb her hair and so I did. While I was brushing her locks she said she had a feeling that it was time to say goodbye to me. I started crying, you know my boy, no mother wants to bury her children, and my sweet daughter, my angel, my flower, she turned around, put her arms around me and told me that it won’t be for long. After that she got in her bed and asked me to kiss her once on each cheek.’

The woman stopped for a minute and looked around for an unidentified noise. When she noticed the cat scratching the cupboard she got up and shoed it away. Returning back to the stool she gave Nikos a small glass of cognac, as it was the custom. Nikos pretended that he was taking a sip and then he put the glass down on the table.

‘What was I saying boy?’

‘You were telling me what happened last night,’ said Nikos, eager to hear more.

‘Oh, yes, yes. So it happened and then, in the morning, I went to wake her up and, oh my boy you can’t imagine what I saw . . . The widow was closed, nothing was missing, but my daughter was not there. I looked at the bed and I found her nightdress between the sheets. It looked as if, God what am I saying? . . . It looked as if she had just disappeared. As if she . . . evaporated, turned into air.’

The woman crossed herself three times. ‘My daughter was always strange in her ways. Her father left as well. He said that since his precious daughter is dead there is no reason for him to be alive. You know he left to the mountains . . . You understand boy?’

He nodded. He understood. AOS. He went to join the General. ‘I am so sorry for your loss,’ he said under his breath, ‘I have to go.’

‘Boy?’ the woman called.

‘Yes?’

‘Why are you not in school?’

‘The school is been shut down,’ Nikos said and walked towards the door. ‘Again, I’m sorry for your loss,’ he said as he was walking out of the door.

But he didn’t return home. Instead he walked to the castle. He reached there faster than usual. On the way he kept praying for Feriha to be there. Remembering the last time he came looking for her and he couldn’t find her, he tried to extend his hope by walking around the castle instead of moving directly towards her usual spot. As he turned round the corner he saw her sitting there peeling oranges.

‘Nicholae!’ she called, ‘I haven’t seen you in a while.’

‘Where have you been?’ he asked.

‘Around.’

‘Around?’

‘She is not dead.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Evet.’

‘*Are you sure?*’

‘Have I ever lied to you?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t rush your decisions beh oğlum. Give yourself sometime. When the right moment comes you will know, and then you can set out to find her. *Amma* not now. Now you need to stay here.’

‘Stay here?’

‘Evet.’

‘Why?’

‘For your mother. She needs you.’

‘My mother doesn’t need me.’

‘Oh beh deliganni, trust me, she does.’

Feriha handed him an orange. He sat next to her and he started peeling. The smell on his fingers was a calling to the winter that was about to come. He remained silent but Feriha knew that he had made up his mind. She knew that it wouldn’t be long until his leave. She could see it all played in her mind. She could see him packing a bag, walking out of the house and heading for a destination that didn’t exist anywhere else apart from his mind. And she could see Anastasia, waiting for him, her blood circulating through her transparent skin, braiding her hair patiently, anticipating his arrival even though she barely knew him.



LARVA

REFUSE TO REPLY

September, October, November, how many months have passed since I left my house, since the last time I slept in my bed? The snow tells me it's winter, December, February, I don't know. All I know is that I hear her at night yelling, I see her walking through the deserted corridors, calling out names, she doesn't like that rock, she wants marbles, she wants two windows here and one there, no, no, one there and two here, they don't understand, she hits them, not her, she orders others to hit them, Rigaina the great, Rigaina the mighty, Rigaina the fearless, the evil, the kind, the helper, the commander, the queen. She never talks to me, she dismisses me, for her I do not exist. Every night the same story is unfolded in front of my eyes; first her loud voice, commanding the men to bring more rocks, built faster, faster, faster, then some whisperings, inside the walls, she is afraid, they'll tell her secrets, the enemies will know, kill them, kill them, kill them all. And then the men, their screams reaching me for outside, fading away as they fall off a cliff, meeting their death, every night, always, forever. I hear their cries and it breaks my heart, what did they do to deserve such fate? I cry for them and my tears fall and create a puddle. In there I see him, I know he thinks about me all the time, I only met him a few times, I never spoke to him though, but I know his family well, and in his sleep, when the falling men keep me awake, I hear him calling my name, Anastasia, Anastasia, and I sing for him a lullaby to calm him down, to help him rest. This must be death, I know it. The inability to communicate with others, the loneliness. I am sure I am dead. Or maybe not. Maybe this is just the in between, where one awaits death, salvation. There is no pain here, there are no feelings, just the passing of time, a long extended wait, but for what? Such a fate was given to me, like many before me, like Penelope, just like her,

at school they taught us all about her long wait for Odysseus, her endless weaving and unweaving, the suitors, they praise her faithfulness, but I have no suitors, I know of no Laertes that I have to weave a burial shroud for, I don't want to weave a burial shroud, not for my father, not for my mother or my sister, not for Nikos, especially not for Nikos. Maybe I should weave mine, I saw them mourning, I saw my mother in black, my father leaving for the mountains, he grew a beard to show his grief and he has now joined other men looking for freedom. I scream to my visions tricking myself into thinking that they will hear me, I call my father the most, I want him to know that he should take care of himself, that I am still alive, even though I doubt that most of the times. I call my mother to stop lamenting, to live her life until I return, I call my sister to blow out the oil lamp that she has burning by my picture. I often hear the church bells, that's how I know it's Sunday, and I pray to Panayia, to you I pray mother of Jesus, give me courage and give me strength, in your virtuousness I look for salvation, for all my sins, for all my mistakes and then I hear the waves and I pray to Ayios Nikolaos, the saint of travellers and sailors, the saint who protects unmarried girls, and I say Ayie Nikolae help him, the one who is named after you, give him your grace and aid him in his travels so he can come find me, help me for I am an unmarried girl, I am not asking for a golden coin, or a dowry, or a wedding dress, I am asking for liberation. And I sit by the window and I look at the sea and I wait but nothing happens, I see the seasons changing in the colour of the water, I count the months that pass on the scale of the grey clouds and I bring back the memory of my grandfather teaching me how to read the stars, to tell the weather, to tell the time, but my recollections stop when I hear Rigaina walking down the corridor. I rush to the door, I wish to see her face, but it seems that she is always faster than me, it feels like she knows what I'm thinking and by the time I reach the door she is gone. Just a glimpse of her would be enough, something to reassure me that all of this is really happening, that I am really in Peras castle, that I am still me. My skin is changing too,

at night it sparkles, when the moonlight meets the transparent veil that covers my muscles and my bones, a glow radiates, enough to give out a dim light, the only light apart from the stars and the moon that I have in this wretched place. I go out sometimes, I collect prickly pears, lemons and mandarins, I pick almonds and chestnuts and mushrooms and for the first time in my life I killed an animal. I usually go for hares and sparrows but I have great difficulty in catching them. There are the snails of course but they don't taste as good without the tomatoes, which I cannot find. I seem to be craving yiazi food a lot, making a stew out of the snails, the sparrows and mouloukchie but I gave up any hope I had about finding tomatoes. I eat most of my food boiled and unseasoned. In the old castle there is nothing left so I make do with whatever I can find. I don't mind sleeping on the floor but now that is getting colder I feel as if I am freezing at night. I tried leaving this place, I tried more than once, but it seems that an invisible barrier had been set around the periphery of the castle and even though I walk forward with the intention of leaving I just seem to be turning back after a while, I lose control over my body and my legs just walk me back. And every time it happens I stay inside for two days crying, out of frustration, out of sadness, out of disappointment and anger. 'Let me go!' I shout, 'or let him come!' No reply. 'I will love you forever,' I whisper as I watch him, reflected in my tears, 'come to me and I will love you forever.' I observe his beautifully shaped hands folding and unfolding fabrics, I watch him walking down the road, his thin frame seems too weak to protect and help anyone, a sound catches his attention, he looks back over his right shoulder, his eyes meet mine but he doesn't know it, my heart forgets her usual rhythm, dum dumdumdum dum dumdum dum dumdumdum, I wonder if this is the moment that I fall in love, this must be it, the moment that you are ready to accept a stranger's touch on your skin, the moment you can't wait for that stranger to touch you, the moment when he is not a stranger. Time doesn't pass fast enough, he can't reach fast enough, I dream of him when I sleep and I think of him when I'm awake. I lay on the

floor to rest and I imagine how it would feel to have him next to me, how it would be if he had his arm around my waist, how would his breathing sound, how would his kiss feel, I have imaginary conversations with him, I ask him ‘what do you like about me?’ and he says ‘your eyes, your lips, your hair,’ and I smile, I cook and I pretend he is sitting there with me, watching me while I cut and stir, he comes up to me and with his finger takes a taste, I imagine that he likes my food, that he has never tasted better and then I imagine him introducing me to his relatives and to his friends. When I return back to the cold and empty castle I feel drained of feelings, the thought of how beautiful this life can be brings this place closer to hell. September, October, November, how many months have passed, unbearable loneliness, I scream early in the morning, when the shadows of the past go quiet, I scream to remind myself that I have a voice, the sounds come out harsh, rough, I say no words, I only scream, I don’t wish to be heard, I just scream. I have stopped scanning the surrounding area for the presence of other people, I am no longer looking for lights in the night, I don’t stretch my ears for distant noises no longer, I don’t sit still waiting for my ears to pick up the sound of footsteps, I anticipate Rigaina now, I create games, I try to reach the wall before her, I hide in the corridors and I try to jump out as fast as possible so I can see her face, I wait for her to order the killing of the men and then I count how many screams can be heard, how many seconds between them, how many of them call for God, how many call for mercy, how many cry, I particularly enjoy the speech of a man whose words give out that he must have been a Greek from Crete, he tries hard to seduce her, he tells her that he knows tricks in bed and that he will be forever her lover, that he will love her until the end of time and then she laughs, genuine laugh, I can tell she must have been really entertained by his speech and his screams blend in with her laugh until they both fade away. I practice my seduction skills, I talk in a low voice, I say ‘my love and my moon’, I repeat the Cretan’s words, ‘I’ll be forever your lover, I will love you until the end of time,’ but my words are not followed by laughter, no, no,

my Nikos smiles and then he kisses me and then he says the same and more. The same and more my love, the same and more my moon, and soul and heart, my life, the same and more. I take his hand and I lead him to a window, 'look, look my love, the sunset, so beautiful, so so beautiful,' and he kisses me again, he fills the castle with kisses, 'no' he says, 'you are more beautiful,' and then I fall in a silence that makes me feel stupid, I realise I was talking to myself, my last word echoes in the emptiness of the room, the sunset loses its beauty. And leaving the sunset behind me I sit next the puddle created by my tears and I watch my family going about with life, our house that has turned black, not opening the curtains, not even once, not cooking meat, saying that it's too early to cook meat, no music, no singing, no laughing, no colours, keep the scarfs on, don't wash your hair, don't add honey in the tea, don't shave, don't kiss, don't hug, no good news, it's too early for good news, don't open the windows, it's too early to open the windows, don't wear perfume, it's too early to wear perfume, it's too early to go on living. And I scream, I scream until it hurts, I scream until I'm heard.

ENQUIRIES ABOUT

It was February evening. The day before was meat Thursday, the start of the Emesoun Carnival. In all the households of the area families cooked their meat on warm charcoals. Sausages and smoked pork were brought out of the cellars, lambs were slaughtered and skinned, the rosy flesh cooking slowly, leaving behind the smoking smell of the week to follow. The children stole sheets from their mother's chests and cut holes for eyes, inspired by the stories their grandparents told them during the long winter. Some of them collected mud in buckets to paint their faces and others sneaked into their parents' bedroom, stealing some kohl to draw signs on their bodies. They recited their song for the next day when they would go around the neighbourhood, knock on the doors and scare people. 'Open up, open up, the scary masks are coming, we've got the curse, Dionysus spell and on sweets we shall be fed.'

Nikos did not dress up, he couldn't afford it. He had ideas, plenty of them. He could be a pirate or a knight, a ghost or an Arab. But there were no pounds to spare, so he went to the carnival dance in his everyday clothes. He added a red flower on his shirt and he decided that if anyone asked he would say he was dressed up as a lover. The old castle was lit, the Carnival singers could be heard as far as Niko's house, singing harmonically with their guitars and bouzouki. The smell of mahalepi and syrup dipped sweets tickled the boy's nose. There was sweet koumantaria wine and zivania too; one selini for a cup but Nikos was not much of a drinker so he knew he wouldn't taste them.

With his flower and his worn out trousers, he looked rather strange. For a boy his age he was too skinny and too tall. Almost a head above the other seventeen-year-old boys, his legs looked like sticks. Although his body structure was not what one would consider

attractive, he had an interesting face. His eyebrows were low and thick, below them a set of sparkling light brown eyes. He had a typical Greek nose, long and arched; his lips were full but not feminine. The most striking thing about him though was his hair. Unlike the Greek boys of Sarouiki he did not have thick black hair or the dry brown, common in girls of his age. His hair was soft, dark blond.

The boy was walking slowly but because of his height he quickly caught up with the rest of the crowd heading towards the Emesoun Castle. He begged his mother earlier that day to join him for the carnival celebrations but the woman refused to respond to her son's words. 'It's because he left, isn't it? Because he decided that *enosis* is more important than our lives!' He didn't enjoy shouting at her, he despised himself for all the things he said to his mother when he was angry, but the truth was that he was right. He knew that his brother was the reason why his mother had fallen silent for the past few months. She refused not only to speak but to eat as well. Nikos would make her tea and let a piece of bread soak in it before handing it over to her just so at least something would go in her stomach. But she figured it out soon enough and from that day on she made her own tea.

He loved his mother and she knew it. What hurt the most though was his realization that he was not as precious to her as his older brother. Angelos would always be her first-born, her hero, her protector. He took up this role willingly when their father was taken to jail on charges of treason. And Nikos loved him and appreciated him deeply for that. He knew that if Angelos had not given up school to work he would have never been able to continue his education that year. He knew that if Angelos had not proven as responsible in those few months before joining the guerrillas, he would be wandering the streets barefoot and hungry. But still he could never forgive his brother for joining AOS, he could never understand why Angelos had to fight, there were other men, older, stronger, men who knew how to handle guns and make bombs out of scrap material. Angelos was

only nineteen, his responsibilities were working and helping around the house, his world limited to the port, loading and unloading boats, spending his afternoon at the taverna looking at girls and choosing a wife. But Angelos fell in love with freedom and left Nikos to take care of a mother who never ceased mourning for a death she knew was bound to come, left his younger brother to take care of a ghost.

A group of girls passed by Nikos. Their gurgling laugh tickled his ears. He decided to follow them, let them guide him towards the magical night he anticipated during the last couple of months. He could smell their heavily scented bodies; he could sense their anticipation for flirting. They were somewhere between fourteen and sixteen, their curves not yet fully developed, their womanhood lurking, waiting for six more months, a year maybe and then strike and turn them into wives, mothers, grandmothers. He liked the idea of time pausing, of the girls staying still, their costumes paused in motion, giving him the chance to walk around them, understand them, take in their beauty and innocence and preserve it so that none of this violence that was bursting around the island could touch them. He wanted to save something, even if it was something as small as the memory of those giggling girls so that when it was all over, when the British were gone, when the nationalistic frenzy was put to sleep he could let their memory free to hover on top of the city and remind people of what it feels like to be alive.

It was not long before Nikos reached the castle. He lost the girls in the crowd but he didn't really care. He felt the music covering his body and entering his muscles taking over and forcing him to join the dancers. There was a warm smell in the air, a mixture of celebration cooking, perspiration and alcohol that could easily make anyone dizzy. Colours were swirling, voices were happily ringing in his ears. A woman pulled his hand and forced him into a quick waltz. He looked at her and smiled. It wasn't long before guilt kicked in.

How could he dance and smile and celebrate when it was only a few months since

Anastasia disappeared? How dared he enjoy himself when his father was in prison, when his brother was fighting on the mountains? He slowly withdrew in a corner. He had been thinking about Feriha's words for months now. He had been waiting patiently for a sign, something to tell him that the right time had come, that he could set out and bring flesh and blood to the plan he had been perfecting for so long.

Setting out would be the easy part, finding Anastasia the final goal. In between a grey area, the unknown. He was aware of the dangers; he knew very well that this was the worst time for a journey like this. Travelling would be at the very best risky. The Brits left no traveller unquestioned; the guerrillas looked to recruit any boy capable of holding a gun. And he had to consider other treacherous creatures too. Not that he believed in the wild and magical creatures of the woods but one could not be cautious enough. There were stories told in whispers, rumours and myths and it didn't matter how much he tried not to believe in them, deep inside he feared that some of them might be true.

And what if he couldn't find her? What if Feriha was wrong? He hadn't seen the old lady since November. The last time he saw her she said she was travelling north. To Elasi. 'What for?' he asked.

'There are things I can tell you oğlum and things I can't,' she said.

'Are you staying for long?'

'You won't see me again.'

'Never?'

'Never does not exist deliganni.'

'Feriha?'

'Evet.'

'Don't leave, not now.'

'You don't need me beh deliganni. It was a great pleasure getting to know you.'

Even though he knew Feriha's words were always true he still hoped that she would

come back, that he would see her again. And the thought that she might be wrong was the thought that scared him the most. If there was any chance of Feriha being wrong, it would mean that she might have been wrong about Anastasia being alive. After all there were no signs to prove that she was.

Nikos must have been lost in his thought for a while when one of his classmates approached him. Loukas was a short, thick boy. He was always dressed in scruffy clothes. There was a cigarette resting on his right ear at all times, even when he was smoking one. The other students in the class used to make up stories about how the cigarette was glued to his ear and how the barber had to cut around it every time the boy had a haircut.

‘Op! My good friend. How are you re Niko?’ he said tapping repeatedly on Niko’s shoulder.

‘Good, good. You my friend?’

‘Eh, I’m alright. Been busy working at my father’s shop. Now that school’s closed he says I have to go down there and help.’

‘It’s good my friend. Be a shoe maker, it’s a decent job.’

‘A decent job uh? Why don’t you do it? Or are you too good for it? Too smart ah?’

‘E re Louka, I didn’t say that.’

‘Then why did you say?’

‘The school might not open again for another year. Learn the craft, you might need it. Look at me? What am I supposed to do?’

‘Why don’t you go work for the tailor? You worked there the whole summer, ask him to take you now as well, you know, for a couple of pounds or something a month.’

‘I asked.’

‘And?’

‘And, and . . . He said no.’

‘No! Why?’

‘He doesn’t need anyone now he said. Things are difficult, people are not spending, this whole AOS thing you know.’

‘Are you thinking about joining them?’ Loukas said in a very low voice that could barely be heard amongst the loud music and the chatting.

‘Me? No, no . . . ’ Nikos replied.

‘Why not? We can be heroes if you join.’

‘I don’t want to be a hero.’

‘No? Why re? Think of the girls.’

‘I said I don’t want to join them!’

‘I might,’ said Loukas leaning close to Nikos. ‘Look at this. Look re!’ He shoved a piece of paper on Niko’s face.

Nikos gripped it and read quickly through it. ‘What is it?’ he asked.

‘A poem. I thought you were the smart one.’

‘Who wrote it?’

‘A guy in Cyprus, student, Pallikaridis, I can’t remember his first name. He left to join *them*, the fighters you know, on the mountain, back in the 50’s. He left this in the classroom, for his classmates. See this line? It’s the one I like,’ Loukas said and run his finger over a line. *I will walk up a hilltop, I walk through tracks, to find the stairs that lead to Freedom.* ‘You understand re? He says he will go up to the mountains and look for Freedom, as if freedom is a girl! I think it’s stupid to be honest but the girls like it and my father thinks that boys our age should be as brave as this guy. I’m telling you I will join *them*.’ Nikos said nothing back. Still holding on the piece of paper, he started walking away from Loukas, walking back home fast. He could hear Loukas calling ‘Re Niko, re Niko, where are you going?’ but he didn’t look back, he had to leave, he had to go up the hilltops and walk through tracks, he had to find the stairs that lead to her.

‘Fuck freedom,’ he thought. In his head the image of Anastasia projected clear. ‘I will

find *her*.' As if finding her would ensure him that the future would be as he imagined it.

THE DAUGHTERS

You decide to set out in the beginning of March. The weather is changing, the days are getting longer, it rains less often, the sun warms up the ground. The old women have started setting their chairs out on the sidewalks where they have their coffee and gossip endlessly. With school being shut and no job, you have all the time need to think you plan through. You plan the route in your mind. Should you start your journey and travel towards Karkas first, or head North, through the Mouttin mountain range and then towards Perras?

You are insane for even considering this, you know it. You don't expect to find her; you are not sure if she is alive. You place your hopes in Feriha's words. That woman could be crazy! She was right the last time, about your brother, though. Then again that could have been a coincidence. But she knew Anastasia's name without you mentioning it. You refuse not to believe her; you force yourself to snap out of doubting her. You need a map. Yes, yes, you need a map. If you are going to do this, you will do it right.

You visit a bookshop early on a Monday morning. The man behind the counter doesn't pay attention to you when you walk in; he keeps his eyes buried in the book he is reading. You take your time, you look through the shelves, various titles sitting there, waiting to be read. You go through the history section, and then through poetry, you pick up a collection by Odyseas Elytis. You read a few lines, you put it back. You move on to literature, brushing the spines of the books with your fingertips.

'Can I help you?' you hear the man saying from across the shop. 'Are you looking for anything in particular? Textbooks?' He gets up, book still in hand, moving towards you. 'We don't have any textbooks, we used to, we don't stock them anymore, they don't

ship them from Greece now, we sold the ones we had, now we don't have any, but I can recommend some other titles for you, appropriate for your age.' He puts a lot of effort in playing good salesman with you; maybe he wanted to finish the chapter he was reading and then help you. 'How old are you? Fifteen? Sixteen? Seventeen? You don't look more than seventeen?' You are given no space to speak. 'Oh well I would say you are sixteen. I have some great books for you, depends what you like of course. I'm a Papadiamantis man myself, best writer to come out of Greece in years, have you read him? Every Greek should, his Christmas stories are beautiful, great prose, ah here it is, *The Murderess*, and what an excellent edition this one is! Only one lira and seventy five.' He moves towards the till. 'Gift wrap?'

'Um, actually I'm here for a map. A map of Sarouiki,' you say.

'Ah! A map,' he drops the book on the counter and moves back towards you. 'I have a great collection of maps. May I interest you in a map of Greece? This one is 120 by 160 centimetres; you can see even the smallest village. And this one, this one is slightly bigger, 140 by 180, includes Sarouiki on the right hand corner, in a small box, ha, ha, ha, you have probably seen one of those at school before, you go to school? You look like you do.' He pulls up the maps one after the other, each of them rolled individually, placed in carton cylinders. 'Unfortunately I can't spread them for you to see but you can take my word, they are excellent! So . . . A 140 by 180 map of Greece? It's two lira eighty.' He moves towards the counter. 'Gift wrap?' Smiles.

'I am sure that this is an excellent map,' you say, 'but I need a smaller one and I only need a map of Sarouiki, not of Greece, do you have those?' He looks at you for a second, then suddenly turns his head on the right and points towards the corner of the shop.

'A small map of Sarouiki! Yes, we do indeed have those.' Unlike the big maps, the smaller ones are placed on a table in separate transparent folders. 'As you can see, we have different versions, this one,' he says pulling a map from the bottom of the pile,

'is a medieval style one, showing the towns and villages as they were called back then and this one,' he says pulling a random map from the pile, 'ah, this one is just a simple contemporary one, let me just find you something more interesting, let me see this one, no, no, this one, ah no . . . ,' he keeps going while pulling random maps from the pile one after the other.

'I'll take the contemporary one please,' you say. He keeps going. 'Sir, excuse me sir, I'll take the contemporary one.'

'Oh . . . ' he looks at you, you see disappointment on his face. 'Fifty cent then please,' he says and moves towards the counter. 'Gift wrap?'

Back home you place the map on your bedroom floor. You know the guerrillas are mainly active around the big cities and Mount Mouttin. You think of ways to avoid them, maybe go from Emesoun to the North, reach Limoun, from there go to Varkasi and then through the valley of Rastia reach Peras. AOS is less powerful there. But there are fewer villages in Rastia. With a pencil you draw a different route, from Emesoun to the Akriti bay then Pambola, Karkas, Elasi, and, no, no. Maybe the only way is through Mouttin, go up the mountain, then reach Varkas and from there head North. But that's a dangerous path, full of rebels and mischievous creatures.

You give up and leave the room. Your head hurts from looking at the small print of the map for a long time. You go to the kitchen to find something to eat. Your mother is sitting there, a cup of tea placed in front of her, a newspaper wrinkled from being read for a long period of time next to it. She has been very distant lately, you rarely interact. Sometimes you get the feeling that she doesn't recognise you anymore. You take a cucumber and leaning on the kitchen counter you take a big bite. She doesn't move, her eyes are fixed in the empty space in front of her.

'I'm leaving.' No response. 'Tonight.' Nothing. 'I might not come back.' Silence. 'I might get killed, or lost, or . . . '

‘Take your coat with you; it’s still chilly outside at night.’ Your eyes burn, you feel the tears running on your cheeks.

‘Yes mother, it’s still chilly out,’ you say and then you say nothing more.

Not a goodbye, not a kiss, no hugs and no blessings. You leave home that night, after your mother falls asleep. You pack a few things, some food to last you for a couple of weeks, the little money you managed to save, including the liras you were hiding under a loose tile in your room since last summer when you were working. You close the front door behind you and you instantly regret it, you feel the need to go back and hide in your bed, you are not brave, just lie under the blanket and pretend that none of this has ever happened, that all this planning was part of a dream.

‘My old friend,’ the wind whispers in your ear, ‘have you forgotten about me, your old companion, the adviser of your childhood. My old friend, did you think that you are alone?’ And you breathe in those words, and somehow you know that you are travelling to Mouttin, somehow you make up your mind, this is where you should be heading, and your steps are now light and confident, your heart filled with courage, your soul feels like the soul of a man. And you know the moon is looking at you and sheds light so you can see the path and you hear a mouse following your steps, you are amongst friends now.

It takes you three days to reach the village of Pambola. You ask around for a place to spend the night and you are directed to a small bed and breakfast. The owner looks at you suspiciously at first. You know he is measuring you up to see if you are a rebel. ‘How long you staying here eh?’ he asks. You say a few days. ‘And where you going eh?’ You say that you are visiting family at Dali. ‘Why you didn’t take the bus eh?’ You say you didn’t have money for the fare. ‘And you think you can walk there ha, ha, ha, eh?’ You smile and ask for a room again.

The man charges you three liras for the night and you know that your savings are not enough to stay there next day as well. You drop your belongings in your room and you

go out with the plan to ask if anyone has seen Anastasia. The village is still buzzing with voices; the main square is packed, farmers selling vegetables and fruits, children playing chase, donkeys flapping their tails idly. You make your way to the kafenion where four men are playing a game of pilotta. They shout as they throw the cards on the table, one after the other, very fast, so fast you can hardly follow the turns of the game or count the points. Around them other men are watching, supporting them, swearing and laughing.

You take a seat. The kafetzis comes over and asks you what you want to have and you answer that you would like a lemonade. The man asks you if you want mahalepi, you look unhappy he says, something sweet will make you feel better he says. You say no thank you. Before he leaves you ask him if he has seen or heard of a girl with white hair, you speak of her beauty, you describe her transparent skin, you tell him all you know, Anastasia, her name is Anastasia you say. The man says no, never heard of such a girl, other men say no, never seen her, women say no, no gossip about her around here, the children say, yes, yes, she is a princess, you smile and you walk away.

The same in Tris, same in Telia, same in Kalotzin, time passes quickly, no, no, we have not heard of such a girl they tell you, no, no, you dreamt of her and they laugh. Your shoes are worn out from walking too much. You work when you can get a job, here and there, loading and unloading for farmers, you are always short of money and you barely make it through. You spend your night outdoors; you are lucky that the weather allows you too. You lie in the fields at night and while you wait for sleep to come you talk to the wind and to the moon. 'Have you seen her?' you ask them and they tell you to keep going, keep going boy, towards Mouttin, up the mountain.

Week after week, you walk, you take rides, on buses and on cars that are willing to drive you to the next village, to the end of the road. It takes you a while but you finally reach Palari. The heat is more bearable here than in Emesoun. You try to imagine the humidity, the dryness, the mugginess of your city. You think of your mother, sitting

outside, on the porch, fanning herself with a newspaper. You try to imagine your father, locked up in a cell without windows, surrounded by other men, covered in sweat and filth. You bring yourself to tears thinking of him beaten up and thirsty. You try not to think of your brother. You see a cart entering the village square; if the man is heading to Kiprisi you will go with him. You will pay him to take you with him.

OF A GLEAMING SUN

Nikos adjusted his shirt and used his palms to fix his hair. The man was unloading red grapes from the back of the carriage. ‘Hello sir,’ Nikos said, ‘if I may ask, where are you travelling after you leave here?’ The man stopped for a minute and looked at Nikos, a big smile formed on his face.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I am travelling to Antilia.’ Nikos made a pause, the man kept unloading his grapes.

‘And are you travelling through Marou and Lipia or through Varkasi?’ The man smiled at Nikos while lifting another box.

‘Aren’t you asking a lot of questions for somebody who has not even introduced himself?’ he asked.

‘I’m sorry sir, I do apologise. My name is Nikos. I come from Emesoun. I am travelling around Sarouiki looking for a girl that was lost, her name is Anastasia. I would appreciate it if you would let me travel with you, I can pay you, you can take all the money I have,’ Nikos said in one breath and took out of his pockets the few wrinkled notes he had left and some coins.

The man laughed, he laughed loudly, his whole body shaking. ‘Put your money back Niko,’ he said between the deep breaths of his chuckling. ‘My name is Manolis,’ he went on and extended his hand for a handshake, ‘I’m soon to be the richest man on this island.’ He had a firm, strong hold and as Nikos came closer to him he was hit by his smell. Manolis smelled like a farmer. Not like any farmer but a farmer from Tarou. The aroma of the soil from that area was hanging on the man, under his nails the red dirt had gathered.

‘So can I come with you?’ Nikos asked again.

‘Of course, of course, it’s a long journey, I can use a companion. Why don’t you help me carry the grapes down there and sell them? The sooner we finish, the sooner we can leave!’ Nikos noted, dropped his bag with his few belongings at the back of the cart and picked up a box. When they had set all the boxes one next to another, Manolis stood beside them silent. The other farmers were yelling, praising their goods, repeating how tasty their oranges were, exhibiting their flavourful figs by cutting a few up and handing out pieces to people. Manolis did none of these, he just stood there smiling, his hands in the pockets of his ragged trousers. *This man is an idiot*, Nikos thought, *he won’t sell anything if he goes on like this.*

‘Why don’t you do what the other farmers are doing?’ he asked Manolis. The man shrank his shoulders. *This man is a fool*, Nikos thought, *a fool*. He remembered what the man had said to him, about becoming the richest man in Sarouiki. *How could it be?* He observed Manolis’ worn out, tattered clothes, his rosy fingers. He certainly did not look like a rich man. The other farmers had almost sold all of their goods but Manolis had only managed to sell one box out of the eight he had.

The market was slowly becoming silent, it was almost deserted. A few people remained and were trying to convince the sellers to drop the prices, because as they were arguing the fruits were exposed to the sun for too long and they were not as fresh as in the morning. ‘Well, I guess that’s it for today,’ said Manolis.

‘What should we do with the rest of them?’ Nikos asked.

‘We’ll eat them!’

‘Eat them?’

‘Eat them!’ Manolis said and laughed.

‘There are too many grapes, we can’t eat them.’

‘Once I’ve eaten fifty kilos, fifty,’ Manolis replied while taking some grapes in his hand.

‘Fifty kilos boy, and I ate them all alone!’ and he threw the grapes in his mouth. ‘Come on now, let’s carry them back to my carriage, we’ll set up a fire and the blankets to sleep outside the village, down that hill. Grapes make perfect dinner,’ he said lifting a box, ‘especially with some bread and cheese.’

‘That sounds very nice,’ said Nikos and following Manolis’ example picked up a box as well. ‘What kind of cheese are we having then?’

‘Well, I don’t have any cheese,’ he made a pause and looked back at Nikos who was following him, ‘to be honest I don’t have any bread either.’

On their way back to take the rest of the boxes, Nikos sneaked in a bakery and bought bread. On the counter he saw some pickled eggs and bought those too. When Manolis saw them he jumped of happiness and said that pickled eggs were his favourite food. As he was spreading the blankets for them to sleep he explained to Nikos how they pickle eggs. ‘You know,’ he said, ‘these are white because they boil them just to pickle them, but we usually only pickle the red eggs from Easter, you know, the ones we dye with beat root, that’s why the oil in the jar looks red.’

‘I know,’ said Nikos, ‘my mother pickles eggs every year after Easter.’

‘You take the boiled eggs and you remove the shells. Then you take a jar, big enough to fit them all and . . . ’

‘And you add everything else, I know.’ Nikos interrupted him but he didn’t seem to care. Nikos wasn’t even sure if Manolis heard him.

‘You add olive oil, vinegar, rosemary, bay leaves, garlic, some peppercorns, coriander grains, a lot of them, I really like coriander, and then you close the lid, and you turn your jar upside down, once, twice, three times and you let them for a week, then you open your jar and you served them with ouzo!’ he said and pulled a bottle of ouzo out of one of the blankets.

After putting on a fire and laying the blankets, they were ready for dinner. The stars

were more visible here than in Emesoun, Nikos noticed. He said that to Manolis and the man went on to explain there were not as many lights in Palari as in other the big cities and that's why one was able to see the stars clearly. Manolis was gulping down ouzo as if it was water and he was soon drunk. Nikos found it hard to eat the grapes in the semi-darkness. He never really liked red grapes; the ones people call Corinthian grapes, because they had pits. He tried to eat them though by biting half a grape and then with his finger nail removing the seeds.

'That's how the Greek gods eat,' Manolis said rubbing his stomach.

'Can I ask you something?' Nikos said.

'About the Greek gods? I don't know much about them.'

'No, not about the Greeks gods, about something else you said.' Manolis said nothing. Nikos waited for a few seconds. 'You said you were soon to be the richest man in Sarouiki, and I was wondering how you are planning to do that.'

'Oh well it's a secret,' said Manolis and got up, 'you want more eggs?' Nikos nodded negatively and turned his gaze to the fire. 'Okay, okay, I'll tell you, but only because you seem like a good boy, even though I am not known for my judgement,' the man said and laughed out loud filing the silence of the night. 'I am going to find the treasure of Rigaina,' he went on whispering, 'I'll find her jewels and her golden chariot.'

'Rigaina? From the myth?'

'She is not a myth, don't be stupid. She lived here once, back when the Arabs were attacking us. Who do you think builded the castles in Peras? Koulia? Barroun? Saint Margarita?'

'The Byzantines?'

'What about the Byzantines?'

'The castles were built by them.' 'Bullshit boy! Rigaina was the one who builded them, I'm telling you, I know, the stories are true, there is no smoke with no fire, you

know? The stories are there for a reason, and the reason is that they are true.'

'Okay, okay,' Nikos said trying not to annoy Manolis, 'and where do you think the treasure is?'

'Koulia,' said the man and pointed to the north where the Peras mountains were, 'her favourite castle, where her rosebushes grow,' and he fell on the ground.

Koulia, the wind was singing and Nikos looked up towards the stars once again. *Koulia*. Manolis was snoring at the background loudly. The boy sat there looking at the stars. In a few hours they would be on their way, both of them looking for something they couldn't be sure of finding. The night passed slowly for Nikos, he was haunted by thoughts and worries that didn't let him sleep. And with the first light of the day Manolis was up, smiling and singing.

'Breakfast?' Manolis asked. Nikos looked at him holding some grapes. 'The rest are for the road!' Nikos didn't take any; he sat there watching the man eating. Sleepless as he was he felt disgusted by the juice dripping from the sides of Manolis' mouth. 'Are you sure?' Manolis said exposing the mashed grapes between his teeth. Nikos nodded. The man was soon finished with his breakfast; they gathered the blankets and made sure the fire was out. Manolis took some barley straw and he fed the donkeys that were pulling his cart. 'They need the energy,' he said and laughed.

Nikos was not talking much. He had a feeling of uneasiness in his stomach. He knew that when the wind was speaking to him something was going to happen, a big change. When Manolis was not looking, Nikos checked the cart for explosives, guns and AOS pamphlets, anything that could get them into trouble with the Brits, but there was nothing. That made him feel a bit better, less worried. Manolis had seen this, he knew that the boy was anxious but he decided not to say anything. After all he looked like a good boy, a young boy on a big journey.

'You know,' the man said, 'today you will see something that not many have seen!'

Nikos looked at his companion with a question on his face. 'You'll see the weeping cypresses. They really do cry, I know, I know, it sounds crazy to your young ears, but I've seen them before. They are up that mountain, on our way, hundreds of them. I heard them many times when passing around them but I never went through that forest. They say that the trees cry for Ayia Eleni, you know her?'

'I've heard her story many times,' Nikos replied.

'The monks believe that their roots came from seeds she planted when she brought the Holy Cross here and the trees grew big and sad. They mourn for her day and night. We'll scratch some wood from their trunks when we reach there, it is said to be blessed, it heals anything.'

Nikos nodded but he was filled with disbelief. *A fool he is*, he thought. 'Are you sure it's safe to go through the mountains?' he asked the man.

'Why not?'

'The fighters . . . '

'AOS? They are only boys who play war, they can't even grow a moustache and they want to be heroes,' said Manolis and laughed. That was one thing they both agreed on. 'And after all why would they hurt us? We are their brothers; you are not British are you? Or are you a Turk?'

'None.'

'Then you shouldn't be afraid.'

They were soon on their way. As they were leaving the village behind them Nikos thought of Anastasia. He was sure she was a believer, like all women, he was sure she would love the weeping cypresses. *If they really do weep then I'll bring her to see them*, he thought. Next to him Manolis was whistling a tune.

'The song of Arodafnousa, the most beautiful daughter of Sarouiki, Aphrodite's daughter,' the man said and went on whistling.

TREADING THE FIRE

Weeping cypresses, I thought I'll never see them; never feel their glorious song on my skin. The boy doesn't speak, he says nothing, the boy didn't believe me, the boy thinks I'm a fool, and he is only sixteen, seventeen, I don't know, a boy, scared of the fighters, scared of the Brits, scared of me, of the trees, scared of his own shadow, he looks up to them, his mouth wide open. He must be thinking this is some kind of a trick, he must be thinking this is a dream. But no, no, no this is our land, these are our trees. I scrape and scrape the trunk, the tree bends down and looks at me, I think the tree is looking at me, it says don't be greedy, it says that I am hurting it, I cannot stop, I apologise to the tree and I scrape some more, more, more. Glorious trees, they smell of old times, they taste of saints and miracles, scrape, scrape, scrape. The wound on the trunk is leaking of tears; they smell like gardenias, they smell like the Ayia's skin, I am poor I tell the tree and being poor makes you greedy, tree. The boy, I lost the boy, I hear him saying something but I cannot see him. 'Take some wood,' I tell him, 'for your girl,' I tell him, 'it will heal her from death,' I tell him, 'just like the water of immortality, he asks me what I say, I said the water of immortality, guarded by the bird of death, the one that sits on the tree of fire, stupid myths for stupid women, I hear him say, the trees are weeping, they moan and they cry, 'hear them boy, can you hear them boy?' He says we should hurry up, get out of the forest, a dangerous place the forest he says, I laugh, 'stupid boy, forests are the home of everything that's good.' I look up to see the sky but I see nothing, the trees are too tall and too many, it's dark in here, it's like they are embracing us, it feels good, it feels like home, 'take some wood boy,' I scream. I turn and I see him sitting on the carriage, eating grapes, I smile at him, 'I won't be long I say.' I question the trees

about Rigaina. 'Have you seen the queen? Have you heard of her treasures, did she ever visit you? Do you know where I can find the queen?' The boy asks what I've said. 'I'm talking to the trees,' I say. 'Trees don't talk,' he says back. 'Hear, hear, hear them boy, they will tell us of treasures lost.' Scrap, scrap, scrap. 'Trees cannot talk,' the boy says again, again and again. If you say something out loud many times you might believe it. The trees say to me to keep going, I'm on the right journey, the queen is waiting for me, they saw her they say, Rigaina came here they say, on her golden chariot, with her son, she passed here going from Kati to Barroun. I have to remember what they are saying, Barroun, map out her track, figure it out, where she went, what routes she had taken, how did she travel. Mules? Horses? Donkeys? Horses the trees yell, horses! She is a queen, queens travel with horses, white and gold, you know those three hills in Alona, those used to be her trade goods, straw, wheat and pencils and when she saw, seated on her high throne, the Sarakenoi approaching she called for her great Mother for help, and she rose from Makas, where her sacred cave is and send the wind to help her daughter. And the wind turned the three piles of straw, wheat and pencils into rock and kept it safe from those bloodthirsty intruders. And many tried to break the stone, many tried to move it, they tried to bribe the gods with gold, but all in vain for the will of the Mother is strong and her words a rule. From there Rigaina fled and travelled forty days until she reached her favourite castle, the one of Barroun. Did you hear that boy? Did you? Rigaina was here, I told you, I was right. I eat the scraps of wood, I gulp them down, they taste like earth and blood, I want to eat those trees down to their roots, I want to digest their knowledge! Eh, eh boy, I can see your shade, I can hear your breath, come here boy, come here. The queen wants a sacrifice, the trees call for it, she is expecting us, come on boy, death is sweet, boy? Boy? They guide me, those wise leaves, her son was your age, they guide me to you, when your heart stops she will lead the way, he fell in a pit her dear son and died and that's when she hid herself in the cave, chariot, horses, servants and all or

did she left the island, maybe she left the island, it doesn't matter boy, after I sacrifice you I will know. 'Eat us, eat us!' the trees are calling, they point their branches, they lead me to you, they want me to find you, eat, eat, scrape, scrape, eat some more, I can sense you boy, I'm a good man, you know I'm a good man, but my poverty made me greedy. I look around and I can't see him, where did the boy go? I feel someone walking behind me, approaching me; I slowly turn around, the cypresses call out a name, Anna, Anna, Annoula! I slowly turn around, my heart is pounding, Anna, Anna? Is she here or is this a trick? Anna always comes when it's winter, with the snow and the piercing cold. But here she is now, I am looking at her. Anna? Anna mou, why you are not talking to me? She is drifting on the fallen leaves, she makes no sound, she looks as beautiful as the last time I saw her, laying in her coffin. Her long braid moves against her back like a pendulum, the maroon stripes on her dress are bleeding, Anna? I was married once boy, where did you go? I had a wife, her name was Anna, Annoula, and she was the most precious jewel, the greatest achievement of my life. What did I do to you my dear? How could I? But isn't that what married couples do? Isn't that the way life is? Who wouldn't want a child? Oh Anna, Anna, Annoula mou! And your tummy grew, and I could feel him growing and we were happy. Boy, boy come see her! Isn't she divine? She is approaching me. The trees tell me that you are abandoning me, waking away from their shade, up, up you go, towards Holy Trinity, I promised to take you all the way to Koulia, to find your girl, I promised, I promised Anna mou to always love you and protect you, nothing, nothing, nothing and no one will hurt you and I failed. I always fail. My vines have dried, my wife is dead, the boy has left. Anna mou, Anna mou, where have you gone? Come back and we will try again, we'll have another child, this time it will be different, this time I will not hit you, I will not push you, I promise Anna mou, this time I will treat you well, I love you, I am a simple man, I don't know much about these things, but the doctor said it was the fall, the blood came after the fall, and I fall on the ground

and I hold on the fallen leaves and they taste like blood, whose blood? I try to call for the boy but he is already gone, the trees tell me he is gone and my mouth is full of blood so I can't scream, I can't talk. And I lift my head, just a little bit, as much as I can, and I see her, she is standing in front of me, right there, looking down at me. And she lifts her dress up and I see more blood, her pudenda pulsing like a crazy mouth, blood gushing out of it, covering me, drowning me. Anna, Anna, oh Annoula, you always come to my sleep dressed as a bride. And she bends down as if to kiss me but instead she spits on me, her eyes are cloudy and angry, she is still holding her dress up, as if to make sure that I won't forget how it all happened, and as she is rising up her tummy is growing, and I hear a distant cry, it gets louder and louder, boy is that you? Are you hurt? And she lets go of her dress and she starts pushing her tummy, kneading it as if it was bread, her eyes not losing mine, the cry getting louder, coming closer, and then she lifts her dress again, and then I see it, black and bruised, a baby, crying in high pitches, and it just hangs there, the umbilical cord bonding them together, I am an outsider, come boy, come see my child, he is not dead. Is it a he? And it's growing, the baby turns into a toddler, the toddler to a child, the child to a young man, a man! He is a he! Boy come, come see my son, he is black and bruised and skinny, he is corpse but he is my son. I force myself up and I extend my arms to embrace him but he doesn't respond. 'Anna mou, is he our son?' She takes him in her arms. 'My love, tell me is he our child?' She strokes his bald head. 'My wife, is this our boy?' She takes his hand and they walk away. No, no, no, trees don't let her go, bring her back, I reach for a trunk and I scrap, scrap, scrap, I need more, more of their wood, more of their knowledge, just more. And I swallow so fast that I lose my breath and I realise, that I will never find the treasure because this is where I'll meet my death. Under the shade of the old trees, caressed by their song my end is coming. And it's not as bad as I thought it would be, not as scary, it's not full of regrets and sadness. I prayed for it many times, I longed for it, for everything to finish, for the great nothing.

If this is the end then let it surround me, I will not fight, I will not resist. If this is the end then I will give up and accept it. I am tired and weak, all I want is to sleep. Take care boy, wherever you are, take care. When and if you reach Koulia remember me and remember to look for her treasure, Rigaina's treasure, and if you find it let it bring you the happiness and joy that it couldn't bring me. I am tired now, I am sleepy, my eyes are closing, I need to rest, I need to forget, it's time now to just relax. The smell of blood is fainting and so does my breath. The trees are swinging; the sun is reaching me, weak. I was a poor man and that made me greedy. Be careful boy . . .



PUPA

WAITING FOR STONES

You walk uphill, towards the monastery thinking that this is not right. This is not where you are supposed to be. You go through the record you have in your mind. A list of all the places visited, all the places where you looked for her. Your steps are slow and unhurried. You are unsure whether you want to reach the enormous timber door. The bells sound, filling the mountains with their deep reverberation. You notice a movement on your right; you turn to look, nothing there. You hear laughter on your left; you turn to look, nothing again. You halt and wait. *Mountain fairies*. You heard the stories, you know all about them. You stretch your arms and you call for them. 'Come, come and let me join your dance.' Nothing. Nothing but the distant sound of a giggle. You are hungry and tired and sleepy. You let your arms fall. You are dizzy. You fall.

You wake up hours later feeling rested. The inside of the cave is cool and protective. *This is where I want to spend the rest of my days*. Around you, there is scattered food. Bread baked with sunflower seeds, fresh tomatoes, plum and full. Smoked meat, enough to feed three; and olives, black olives, green olives, olives dipped in olive oil, dry coriander and garlic. You scan the place. Nobody is around. Should you eat? Go ahead, try the food. You haven't eaten in four days. There is wine as well. Pure red wine from Telia. And water from the river, cool and refreshing. Drink. But you don't move. You sit there staring at all the blessings that are laid around you.

An hour passes, maybe two. Everything is still, motionless, a great silence is stretching around the cave. Nobody came. Maybe nobody will come. You take some bread and dip it into the wine. Yeast, flour, oil, water, salt. So simple yet so powerful. You can't stop. Your fingers are dripping oil and wine, dry coriander hides under your fingernails. Your

shirt, filthy as it is from travelling, sticks on your skin. You are hot, the wine makes you feel hot, but you can't stop drinking. Drops of sweat fall from your forehead and mix with every bite you take.

Sleep comes to you; sweet and sudden. The cold ground relieves you from the wine drinking and the pepper-smoked meat. Dreams don't disturb you. Orpheus casts his spell and you bring your legs together in an embryo position. You are safe here, you feel safe. All you need is rest. A last thought crosses your mind: *When I wake up, I'll leave this place. I have to leave this place.*

It's night when you finally wake up. You are unsure whether you've slept for a few hours or for a whole day. *How many days have I been in this cave?* A rustling sound grabs your attention, low as a whisper, silent as the wind. You turn on your left to face the source of your disturbance. A lady is sitting there, by your side, rubbing dry mint leaves in her palms. The tiny flakes fall in a small bowl which is resting between her crossed legs. You can't see her face; it's dark and your vision is blurry.

She notices that you are awake. You try to talk, ask her who she is, but instead when you open your mouth, no sound comes out. She has soft fingers; they remind you of a velvet dress you once saw at a shop. You were six. You sneaked below its hem and enjoyed its smooth material while your mum was trying on a cheaper cotton replica of it. You feel her soothing touch as she brings a cup to your lips. You smell the jasmine and the orange, a beautiful blend of herbs, flowers and fruits. The warm tea takes over and you find yourself slipping back to sleep.

But you are still aware of her, sitting there, next to you, mixing flour and water with chopped onions and dry mint. You are still conscious of her moving around the cave, cleaning your face with a cloth. Her breath is sweet, so sweet that your head hurts. She is young, not younger than you, somewhere around twenty. You can tell when her breasts accidentally touch your torso while she is trying to comb your hair. Not that you are very

experienced when it comes to women; but somehow you know. And that makes you feel better. *At least she is not a mountain fairy, at least I am not kept captive, she is trying to help me.*

Once again you try to say something. Your mouth is dry and speechless. She thinks you need water. She wets your lips. You try again. She leans close to your ear and breaths a light *shh*. *At least she is not a fairy. She is trying to help me. Maybe I'm hurt.* She is singing a lullaby, calling the trees and the wind, the birds and the clouds to join. *At least she is not a fairy.* But like so many protagonists of tales like this, what you don't know is that she is indeed a mountain spirit.

And this is how your days go by. You sense the seasons changing. The autumn leaves decay and are followed by a frost strong enough to break your bones. The lady never leaves your side. She sits next to you, feeding you and keeping the fire alive so that you don't freeze. She knits you a sweater and a pair of socks. She lures you into a dream of safety and protection. One of the frosty mornings you open your eyes and you see the first snowflakes falling. You've never seen snow before, it never snows in Emesoun. Before you even shiver, the lady covers you with a colourful blanket made out of scrap woollen yards.

'This is a heavy winter,' she says while cleaning you with a wet cloth. 'The farmers will suffer. But spring will be here soon. I've heard her last night, calling the flowers to awake and begging the sun rays to warm up the fragile roots. Spring is arriving. Don't worry my dear, she will be here soon.'

She speaks like a fortune-teller. She reminds you of the old Turkish women who chase people around the castle square, reaching and grabbing their palms, point at lines and giving omens below their breaths so that others won't hear. She reminds you of Feriha. You dream of her voice sometimes. It reaches you from the past and it muffles lies about love and prosperity. In one of those dreams you see her again, your Anastasia. She is

walking at the market, amongst faces you don't recognise. You try to reach her, pull her close to you but she evaporates. You wake up to the smell of boiled raki mixed with honey.

Outside the cave an almond tree is blossoming. 'They always hurry, those almond trees,' you hear the lady saying. 'They blossom with the first sign of sun. Silly trees, they remind me of dreams. They chase the slightest of all rays in the hope of reaching spring before anybody else. But you are not silly my dear, right?' She leans towards you, running her fingers through your hair. 'You know that you are not ready to leave me yet.'

She gets up and leaves the cave. It's quiet for a while but then you hear it. It starts as a whisper and slowly develops into a fully fleshed voice. 'Get up, rise, you need to go. Leave now before Circe's daughter returns.' You push yourself to get up. *Where all this strength came from?* You feel your body plump and well-fed. You reach for your sack and your shoes. You think for a while. *Should I take some food? Yes, some food will be good.* But the voice goes on, as if she can read your mind. 'No food, do not touch the food, it's enchanted with potions from Smyrna. Same as those used by the witches there. Go oğlum, knock on the monastery's door and there you will find the help you need.'

You hurry out of the cave, still disoriented and dizzy. You look up trying to find the monastery. There it stands in all its glory; a fort of faith as it is called. You move a few steps and then you look back. For a second you think that the almond tree is weaving goodbye.

You walk fast, no, no, you run, you want to reach the door, enter, ask them if they can help you, you need help, you know you do. You are heavier now than before, your weight is slowing you down, but you keep going. You feel your legs aching, you think that it's because you spent a long time without using them, you breathe heavily, nostrils and mouth fill up with the frosty breeze. A few more steps, just a bit more, almost there, almost . . .

Gunshots! You cover your ears and you fall to the ground. Voices. Greek. AOS. You crawl. You try to hide. More voices. English. The army. You look for a hiding place. Gunshots. Boom! Grenade? Boom! You can't think clearly. You look over your shoulder. A harsh voice. *GO, GO, GO!* You hide behind a tree trunk. Heavy boots. Your heart is pounding. The bullets hurt your ears. Orders. 'Kosta! Kosta! Come on re, no, don't give up.' You close your eyes. You cross yourself, once, twice, as many times as you can.

With all your senses activated you decide you need to move, you need to get as far away as possible. You try to take a peek, you are too scared. You look up at the monastery, then down the hill, you can't make up your mind. Maybe you should have never left the cave, you should have stayed there, turn grey in there, die in there. You decide to go up. You stand and you take a few steps, then you hide behind another tree. Gunshots!

You freeze. You wait. You move again. Hide behind another tree. You stretch your ears. The voices sound further away. You feel braver, a few more steps, you hide again. You look around, no movement. You move forward. You can hear the British, they are very far away now but the sound of their orders is still in ratio. You take a deep breath. You think that this is it, now you need to run, run as fast as you can and get inside the monastery. Your mind plays tricks, what if they don't open the door, what if the monastery is abandoned, no, you know it's not, everybody knows it's not.

Man up! You came all this way, you will not give up now, you have nowhere else to go. You will not run, no, no, you will walk, slowly, try and hide, they must not see you. You take another look around, and then you a few steps, leaves and twigs crush under your footsteps. *Did anyone hear me?* Everything is still. You move further ahead. Even the distant voices cannot be heard now. You feel more confident, they are gone, you are sure you are alone again. You calm down a little bit, you feel safer. Your steps are more certain. You've escaped unharmed.

And just as your heart gets back into rhythm, just as your breathing becomes more

stable, you feel a hand on your shoulder, a strong hand pulling you down and throwing you on the ground, face down. The man is sitting on your back and is firmly holding your hands tied behind you. You feel him leaning down. 'Be quiet ha! Shh, stay still, stay still.' You don't move. 'You Greek re?'

THREADING COCOONS

Nikos found himself in a hide-out, arms and legs both tied-up. In the small, badly lit cave there were four more men. As his eyes were adjusting to the dim candle light, he recognised Loukas, his old friend and classmate. ‘Lou, Lou . . .’ Nikos whispered. The man who had his back to Nikos turned and looked towards him over his shoulder. ‘Louka . . .’ he managed to say.

‘Re Louki, he is saying your name. You know him?’ Loukas approached Nikos, squatted and pushed the hair away from Nikos’ face.

‘Re, re! Fuck your God and the Christ you believe in! You ask if I know him? Niko!’ he said and he bend down to embrace him. ‘Niko, my friend. Untie him re, come, hurry!’ The other three men took their knives and started cutting the ropes.

‘Lou, Louka, wa . . .’ Nikos whispered.

‘What is it my friend? Re, are you all dicks, give him water, water re!’ As he was gulping down the water Nikos felt a bit better. Loukas tapping him on the shoulder made him feel more reassured. He was amongst friends, or at least he was not amongst enemies. ‘Those fucking British cunts found our look-out, took two of our men, the third escaped, we met them halfway and tried to set them free but we failed.’ Nikos could not really concentrate on what Loukas was saying. One of the men stepped outside and rushing back in told them that it was now dark outside and thus safer for them to move.

‘We are meeting *him* at the monastery’ Loukas told Nikos.

‘Meeting who?’

‘The General!’

‘The General?’

‘Yes, my friend. I’ve been waiting for this since I’ve joined the fight.’

They had soon packed and they were ready to leave. Nikos appreciated Loukas for not asking him why he was roaming the mountains. He knew that it would have been very hard to explain. The other men showed little interest in the newcomer. At first, as Loukas explained, they mistook him for one of the traitors and their intention was to execute him. ‘I didn’t recognise you re Niko, you have put on some weight eh?’ Nikos knew he had, he could feel his clothes suffocating him, he was now using the first hole on his belt. ‘We were planning to wait for the General to see you. We thought maybe he would interrogate you before killing you, at least that was the plan.’

‘Will he still interrogate me?’

‘He will certainly ask to see you!’

‘What for?’

‘We’ll see, we’ll see, don’t worry about it now.’

The monastery was not far away but Nikos was slowing them down. He was still confused and his legs were weak from lying down for a long time. They soon reached the timber door. The eldest man of the group knocked with the back of his rifle. Everything was still. He knocked again. Nikos could make out some rushed steps and then a loud noise which he figured out was the wooden bar used for locking the door. A thin, grey monk appeared.

‘Maria is sending you eggs,’ the man who knocked on the door said. The monk nodded and opened the door a bit further so they could go in.

Nikos had never been to Holy Trinity before. He heard about its beauty and wealth many times. In front of him he could see the church and next to it what he assumed to be the dining hall. A bit further back he could make out the dorms where the monks slept. They passed the well where two monks were filling buckets with water.

‘They will boil it for you to wash,’ the monk guiding them said.

‘He is taking us to the dorms to get some rest, we will see the General tomorrow,’ Loukas whispered in Niko’s ear. ‘We will share a room the two of us, they did not expect you, I hope you don’t mind, eh my friend?’ Nikos smiled faintly. Going up the stairs was painful. His knees were shaking. One of the men noticed this and rushed to support him.

Inside the small room it was warm and cosy. Nikos sat on the only chair which was placed opposite the single straw bed. ‘They make them themselves you know,’ Loukas said when he notices Nikos starring at the mattress.

‘Hmm,’ Nikos managed to say.

‘I will not undress but you can if you want to. After a while you get used to the stink of not changing your clothes,’ said Loukas and laughed. There was a knock on the door and a monk came in carrying a bucket filled with water.

‘I’ll come back and bring you some food. God bless you,’ he said and left. Loukas knew his way around the room; Nikos could tell he had stayed there before. He reached under the bed and pulled out a basket full of clean white cloths. He took off his top and wet a cloth which he used to clean his underarms. Nikos gathered his strength and followed Loukas’ example. They both washed their faces and scrubbed the back of their ears with a small piece of green soap that Loukas had. As they were putting their shirts back on there was another knock on the door and the same monk came in carrying a small wooden tray with bread and olives, which none of them touched.

Loukas fell asleep quickly; his loud snoring filled the silence of the room. Nikos on the other hand couldn’t even close his eyes. He sat on the chair staring at the floor, observing the ants making their way up the set of drawers where the tray was placed and carrying back down crumbs. His breathing synchronised with their rapid walking, his eyes remained fixed on their unbreakable line, his mind mesmerised by how focused these tiny creatures were, how committed they appeared to be. He sat there observing

their route until the first light of the day reach the monastery.

What woke him up from the hypnotising dance of the ants was Loukas foot as he stepped violently on them. Nikos looked up. 'You didn't sleep re? You look like Lazarus coming out of the grave,' said Loukas. Nikos nodded. The church bells were calling the monks for the Third Hour liturgy. 'Do you want to go? You might not get another chance to attend church at Trinity,' Loukas went on cheerfully. They put on their shoes and walked towards the church.

Just like the ants, the monks, all dressed in their black raiissons, were walking one behind the other in a perfect line. Nikos was not sure if the line was indeed infinite or he was imagining it because he hadn't slept. None the less, it was a beautiful scene. Their faces looked calm, serene, almost saint like. The bodies, thin and fragile, appeared to be perfectly connected to their environment. Young or old, they all had an eerie touch and their faces, covered in beards and overgrown, bushy eyebrows, were shining through, in a very pale olive shade.

Inside the church, the smell of incenses burning in the censer was embracing the walls. The priest was rhythmically moving the metal vessel up and down, following the terce psalms. The priest was was making his way across the church, holding the Holy Communion. *Lavete fagete . . .* The priest's voice was echoing in Niko's head. *Lavete fagete . . .* A sweet invitation, yeast floating in sweet wine, the best koumandaria he had ever smelled, his mouth was watering, he was realising his hunger, not a mortal hunger, but a divine one, a hunger for blood and flesh. *Take, eat . . .* The words of Matthew . . . *This is my body . . .* He wanted to feed on holy flesh, swim in divine blood, taste God on his lips. He felt the monks moving around him, their black clothes fondling him; they were once again forming a line, following the flesh and the blood. And he was walking behind them.

It doesn't matter if you didn't lent, his mother's voice, it doesn't matter if you had

meat, he could hear her clearly, *you are just a child*, the way she used to talk to him on Sundays at church, *you are still young*, when full of guilt he refused to commune, *children don't need to lent*, and she would manage to convince him, *God will forgive you*, and he would walk to the line along with the other children, *you are not a sinner*, and the old people, *what sins can a person your age be blamed for*, and the sick, *milk is fine*, and those who lent meat and oil and milk, *oil is fine too*, and the religious girls with their bodies well-covered, *young boys need to eat*, and he would anticipate the taste of the wine on his lips, and he would try really hard not to be disgusted by the thought of sharing a spoon with all the others, trying not to think of the old man, toothless and wrinkled in front of him, licking the spoon that he was about to put in his mouth, because nobody ever got sick by sharing the Holy Communion, it is impossible.

Now he was closer to the priest, he could see the sun rays reflecting on the golden spoon, the moist of saliva capturing the light. And as his mouth reached for it and the alcohol tickled his nose, he took hold of the vessel containing the communion and started drinking straight from it. Drops were falling on the carpet. The priest bended down and was licking it. *The holiest of the holy my child, the blood and flesh of Christ*. And it does taste like flesh, and it does taste like blood, this holy thing, the holiest of all.

Nikos woke up, covered in sweat, laying on the straw bed in the small dorm room. On the chair Loukas was sitting, smoking a cigarette. 'This is going to kill me,' while letting out a small cough. 'Getting drunk on communion eh? You should have told me you wanted to drink; there are stronger things around than koumandaria.' Nikos held his head with both hands. He felt heavy. 'Our head is hurting eh? I bet the monks are still laughing. You should have seen yourself, like a madman re! You wouldn't stop drinking! Is it about a girl?' says Loukas laughing. 'Now that I think about it, you didn't tell me how you ended up here? What were you doing walking alone on these mountains?'

Nikos said nothing. 'You know, after I joined the fight and came up here, I dreamt of

you one night. Listen to this re! We were together and we were eating grapes, big, red, juicy grapes. And you know who else was there? This is the part where I got confused! That girl, you neighbour re, what was her name? The pretty one. The one with the white hair and the good tits. The one who got shot, remember? Is she dead? Amalia? Athanasia? What was her name?’

‘Anastasia,’ Nikos whispered.

‘Ah! Yes, yes, Anastasia, beautiful girl eh! Did you know her well? I remember her parents made her wear a veil at a point, saw her a couple of times at the church, wearing it. My cousins told me her grandmother made it. You know after her grandmother died the other women tried to copy her cross-stitch designs but they couldn’t because she used her left hand and they use their right. Women’s talk; all gossip and pointless stories.’

Nikos said nothing. There was nothing to say. Loukas stared at him for a few seconds, then he put off his cigarette and walked towards the door.

‘Rest a bit more; you are meeting the General in an hour or so.’

SCREAMING SILENTLY

The General, the General, the great General, came all the way from Greece, to help us, to show us the way! Us? Who is us? He is one of us . . . The man with the moustache, always wearing the same knit, the same beret, short and stubborn, his head costs ten thousand pounds, ten thousand! He will see me in an hour, as if he is doing me a favour, he didn't ask if I want to see him in an hour, maybe I would like to see him in two or maybe in three or maybe never, yes, yes, never, why would I want to see him, I don't believe in his vision, I don't believe in his fight, I don't believe in his authority, but as they say the priests loves him, the priests ha! That's what the Brits call the church, they don't know, I don't blame them, they don't understand, it's not a priest, it's a body, and an Archbishop, the highest rank, leader of our Church, the priest! What good will it be if I see him, what us two can talk about? Politics? War? The Sarouikian Mountains? Freedom? The General! He studied at the Military Academy, he fought in the Great War, it's him they say who led the operations against the reds. Tell me all of you; tell me, what kind of hero is he? A retired army man, tired from trying to become a politician! No, no, you all say, he is a hero, he knows the secrets of warfare, he will lead us to freedom, he will unite us with Mother Greece, he will fulfil our greatest desire, our desire? How is it our desire? Why should I care about this desire? He is one of us, they all say, a Greek, a Greek Sarouikian, a Sarouikian, as my brother says he is The Sarouikian! This General has taken over, what does he know I wonder of politics? Twice he was captured. Twice! He calls the fighters field mice, he told the Brits they don't need tanks to catch them, no, no, they need cats, witty, fast, sneaky cats. He is our doom, this General, I know it, he will be our destruction, he makes us believe in dangerous stuff, he uses big

words, Enosis, self-determination, struggle, freedom, nation, he poisons us with all these ideas, he tells us not to carry simple lives, but to sacrifice ourselves, sacrifice our life but for what, what is it that we are dying for General, that is my question, this what I will ask him, the moment I see him, that will be my question, tell me General, tell me you self-proclaimed leader, what are we fighting for, what is our death worth, and if he says for our Mother, for Greece, for the greater calling of our land I will spit on his face, with no shame, without any regret, I will not apologise, I will not ask for forgiveness, I will keep my head up high and I will say to him 'take that General, take that Mr. Leader, is that good enough for the Mother Land, is that good enough for Greece? Or maybe you would like me to take a piss on your stupid beret? This anger scares me more than their guns; it scares me more than the British soldiers with their authoritarian looks. I dislike anger, it is a tricky thing to control, it drains you from everything that is good, it leaves you feeling helpless, it opens up a hole inside your chest and then your whole being slowly gets sucked in, makes you swirl around dark clouds, covers you in waves of uncertainty and pain, you feel restless, unable to sleep, you walk the narrow, badly lighted corridors of your mind and you wander in pathways you were never aware of before. Anger tears your skin, cracks it up, depression and mourning leak from the cracks, it wrinkles your eyes and your mouth, leaves you ageless, unable to defend yourself. But anger is not merciful, it doesn't kill you, it only tortures you. It grows like a branch inside you and expands until you reach your limits. The fear of anger and the anger of being afraid. Will the General understand? Will he be able to detect this air on me, this uncertainty of who I am and where I'm going? He will ask me, 'what were you doing up on these mountains, who are you working for, which side are you on?' And what will I answer? I am on nobody's side, I work for me. Or maybe I will say that I work for the tailor, just for the sake of it, just to see if the General has a sense of humour. 'What were you looking for?' The treasure General, I was looking for the treasure. 'What treasure?' The treasure

of Rigaina. He will laugh. He will call me stupid. Myths, myths, it's all myths. I was looking for Anastasia, General. 'Anastasia? Who is she? Your mother? Your sister? Your fiancée?' None! 'Then why were you looking for her?' I don't know. And why should I know, why is it that my actions must be justified when the General never gave an explanation for his actions. They don't question him, they don't look for reasons behind his decisions. The General knows, they say, the General has a plan, he has experience, he will lead us to the arms of our Mother. I could reverse the roles, the moment I face him I will start questioning him, about the fight, about his past, about everything. And he will have to answer, I will make him answer, I will look deep in his eyes and request information about my brother. I will tell him how he is to be blamed for my father's imprisonment, how he is guilty of my brother's departure and my mother's silence. Do you know General, I would say, how it feels to share a house with a mother that refuses to talk to you? Have you ever felt so unwanted by the woman who gave you life that you decided to go after a dream, the most outrageous dream? Have you ever looked for your mother's love in the eyes of another woman? Have you ever searched her touch from a girl whose skin is so fragile it tears apart with the slightest movement? Have you ever fallen in love with such a delicate, fragile creature, just to feel a man, just so you feel needed? And I am guessing he will say yes! He will say that he might not be chasing after a girl but he is chasing Freedom. Freedom is female. Eleutheria . . . He is going after a woman called Eleutheria . . . Freedom, how sweet she is in the eyes of the General, how beautiful she must look to him. What would her portrait look like? In what colours would he paint her in if we could? What is her age General? Is she young, fresh and plump or old, strong and demanding? Is her skin olive, sun-burned and smooth or fair, blond and reddish? Describe her to me General, tell me about her beauty, about her hair, her legs . . . Where does she live? How can we tell her apart from all the other women? I am young and full of questions sir, I am nothing but a boy, I have no knowledge of all

those things you preach, teach me sir and I might agree, explain and I might join! No, no . . . I will never join, I will never agree, I don't believe in your beliefs, I don't share your nationalistic feelings. Just leave me alone General! Why do you want to meet me General? What is it that we two can talk about? Yes, yes General I was taught history at school, I say I was because now there is no school. Oh, you didn't know? It's because of you, because of your stupid fight! Yes, yes General, I said your stupid fight. Because this is not my fight and it is definitely not a smart one. Later on history will judge you. Praise you, you say? I don't agree with that. Let's place a bet! I say you will never succeed. Your turn? I won't act so stupid, I will try and talk to him seriously. I will ask him about my brother. I will request information about his location. Is he alive? Is he alive? I will scream in General's face. Tell me! Answer me! Is he alive? I need him! My mother needs him! We need him! And then I'll ask about my father. I'll say 'General, do you know where they are keeping my father? Do you know if he is alive or dead?' He travelled a lot, this General, the fighter, he travelled to every corner of the island. I'll ask him, 'General have you seen a girl with transparent skin? Have you seen my Anastasia? Tell me General, where can I find her?' And he will ask me why, he will want to know what will change if I find her. And I will tell him that everything will change when we are together. When I find her there will be no more fighting, no more AOS, no one will care about Greece. Life, after I find her, will be like life was before losing her. We will carry on marrying and raising children, we will go on working, eating on Sundays in big groups, growing old. Living General, we will go on living. The simple life sir, can you taste it on your tongue? Roasted lamb covered in oregano, potatoes fried with coriander seeds and red wine, feta on bread, feta with salad, feta with honey, feta with everything! Life as it was sir, do you remember life before the fighting? Of course you don't! You are always fighting, you are always part of some sort of war, and you don't feel guilty, you have no shame for all the lives killed under your demand, no regrets for the bullets that were fired

on young chests, and I wonder sir, and I ask you with respect, do you think it's worth it? Do you really think that something will change? Don't ask me about me, my opinion does not matter, that has been proven long ago. Your ears are immune to the poison of doubt, the only poetry you understand is the one that is weaved around your values, you only listen to music that synchronises with your marching, you preach the mountain life of a guerrilla as any other choice is wrong and you look at boys like me with despise, you look at men like me and there is one question in your eyes, you ask with your look and you request to know how can I not feel guilty for sleeping in a warm bed, for eating fresh bread, for wearing clean underwear. How can you, boy, you will ask, sit here in front of me and talk to me about the simple life, when your brother is out there fighting? What General, you've seen my brother, is that what you are saying? How could you, boy, he will go on, sit here in front of talking about love and girls with transparent skins, when your father is in prison, his skin red and bruised and blackened from the hot iron and the brutal beatings? What are you saying General, you know where my father is? I have nothing to say to you, General, I do not wish to talk to you, you don't scare me, I don't look at you with awe; I have no respect for you. Just let me go General, just set me free, whatever that means. And you will go after your girl and I will go after mine, and if we ever meet halfway you can share some wine, like old friends.

FACES BORN HATING

Loukas walks in and disturbs your stream of thinking. You do not stir though. You keep your eyes fixed on the empty wall in front of you. 'Ready?' he asks. You do not respond. 'Come on, let's go, he is waiting, his time is precious you know.' He holds your arm and pulls you up. You allow yourself to be carried outside, down the stairs, then across the yard. You can barely keep up and you feel lost, as if you are walking in a maze. The smell of the church sickens you, Loukas hurried steps tire you. 'Alright my friend, you are here,' he says and stops suddenly. 'What a great honour eh? You will meet the General,' he goes on. He knocks on the door.

'Come in,' the General's harsh voice makes your legs shake. The door opens; in semi-darkness you see the figure of a man sitting on an armchair.

'Sir, this is the young man we found,' says Loukas. His voice is different now, there is no sign in it of your friend, there is nothing youthful in his tone. He sounds harsh, like an old man, serious and stoic.

'Yes, yes,' says the General, 'come in, sit. You can go now,' he continues pointing to Loukas. You want to hold on to his arm, make him stay there with you, but before you can even lift your hand he is out of the door. 'Sit,' he tells you again. There is only one other chair in the room, right opposite him. You sit. He observes your face, you observe his. You are not sure how long you sit there without talking but you like it. You wish he will not speak, you beg for silence. 'Name?' Your wish is not granted.

You take a few minutes before you reply. He waits patiently. 'Nikos.'

'Nikos,' he repeats. 'From?'

'Emesoun.'

‘Good.’

Good? What’s good about it, you think. The General remains silent for a while.

‘Are you with us, *Niko?*’

‘I don’t understand, *sir.*’ He runs his hand over his moustache. Takes a deep breath. You don’t break eye contact.

‘Have you joined AOS, *Niko?*’ You hate the way he stresses your name.

‘No.’ You expect him to ask you why, he says nothing. He gets up and moves towards the window. While he is looking out you take your time to observe his posture. ‘I don’t believe in your cause,’ you say. Silence.

‘Do you know how many hideouts are located around this monastery, *Niko?*’

‘Do you know where my brother is, Angelos Georgiou?’

‘There are twelve, twelve hideouts. It’s like a chessboard here. Do you know the names of the groups?’

‘My father was taken prisoner. Will you help me find him?’

‘I need to escape this place.’

‘I need to find Anastasia.’

‘You will help me.’

‘Will *you* help me?’

‘You will play an important role in my plan.’

‘I need to leave this place, sir.’

‘Silence!’

You hold your breath. You realise he lost his temper. ‘You will help us! It is your duty, towards your country, your brothers, Greece!’

‘I only have one brother!’ You stand up suddenly. ‘You and Greece have taken him away!’ You are yelling. ‘Enosis! Enosis! You split families apart to achieve union, strange isn’t it?’

‘You are not allowed to yell at me!’ He storms towards you, his face on your face, your noses touching, your breath his breath, a taste of cigarettes and worrying reaches your lungs. ‘I am fighting for the good of this country, this is not only my struggle, this is *our* struggle. Take the oath!’ Your legs are shaking. ‘Will you take the oath, please?’ His voice is softer now. You nod. Why? Why are you agreeing to do this? This is not your cause; these are not your beliefs.

‘I will take your oath,’ you say. The General steps back, you feel more comfortable. He walks towards the door and open it slightly. ‘Call the priest,’ he says. The silence in the room is unbearable.



The priest arrives shortly accompanied by Loukas. He presents a Bible and a piece of paper signed, from what you can see by the General and someone else whose name you do not recognise. ‘You will repeat after me,’ says the priest. ‘Now place your hand on the Bible. This is a holy oath, blessed by the church, an oath that should not be taken by cowards and the faint-hearted, an oath you must protect with your life.’ You say nothing, what is there to say?

‘Begin,’ you hear the General whispering to the priest. Your hand is sweating as you touch the gold-covered Bible.

‘I swear in the name of the Holy Trinity that,’ the priest begins.

‘I swear in the name of the Holy Trinity that,’ you follow.

‘I shall work with all my power for the Liberation of Sarouiki from the British yoke, sacrificing for this even my life.’

‘I shall work with all my power for the Liberation of Sarouiki from the British yoke, sacrificing for this even my life.’

‘I shall perform without question all the instructions of the organisation which may be entrusted to me and I shall not bring any objection, however difficult and dangerous

these may be.'

'I shall perform without question all the instructions of the organisation which may be entrusted to me and I shall not bring any objection, however difficult and dangerous these may be.'

'I shall not abandon the struggle unless I receive instructions from the leader of the organisation and after our aim has been accomplished.'

'I shall not abandon the struggle unless I receive instructions from the leader of the organisation and after our aim has been accomplished.'

'I shall never reveal to anyone any secret of our organisation neither the names of my chiefs nor those of the other members of the organisation even if I'm caught and tortured.'

'I shall never reveal to anyone any secret of our organisation neither the names of my chiefs nor those of the other members of the organisation even if I'm caught and tortured.'

'I shall not reveal any of the instructions which may be given me even to my fellow combatants.'

'I shall not reveal any of the instructions which may be given me even to my fellow combatants.'

'If I disobey my oath I shall be worthy of every punishment as a traitor and may eternal contempt cover me.'

'If I disobey my oath I shall be worthy of every punishment as a traitor and may eternal contempt cover me.'

The priest takes the Bible away and you are instructed to sign at the bottom of the oath along with the General and Loukas. 'Heroes, my friend, we will be heroes,' Loukas whispers in your ear as he heads for the door. The first time you put your signature on any official paper, and what a paper that is, a contract of death. Once again you are left alone with the General. He shuffles through some papers, picks one and spreads it over the bed.

‘Come, come close Niko, so you can see,’ he says. As you approach the bed you can see a badly drawn map of the area. You scan the paper with your eyes and you spot the Holy Trinity Monastery. All around it you can see tiny houses, drawn in a childish way, marked as hideouts. Arrows across the roads indicated the usual routes taken by the British. ‘We are here,’ the General says and with his finger points at the place where the monastery is drawn. ‘You do understand that revealing any information will lead to your execution?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you realise that anything I show you and anything I tell you must remain a secret to carry to your grave, unless I command you otherwise?’

‘Yes.’

‘The monks will give you a donkey and two big baskets filled with olives and wine. You must not look inside the baskets. When you reach this point here,’ his fingers moves across the map and stops at a crossroad, ‘you will meet a British blockage. They will start asking you questions, you know, name, age, where you are headed. You must take as long as possible to answer these, take your time, try to confuse them.’

‘And how will you escape?’ you ask.

‘I shall perform without question all the instructions of the organisation which may be entrusted to me. Remember? And the less you know the better it is. Just do as you are told. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Yes *sir*, I do. I am your general now.’

‘Yes, *sir*, I do.’

‘Now go, I need to rest.’

You step out of the room. You feel the oxygen in your lungs. You are yet to realise what has happened. For the first time in your life you need a cigarette. In a way, you

begin to understand the old men smoking constantly, you share, suddenly, the same feeling of worry. You think of your father, during those evenings, after dinner, smoking alone in the garden. And your bother, later on, just before AOS, the two men standing between your mother's flower beds, smoking one cigarette after the other, and you? You had no permission to join them, you had nothing to worry about. Your mother's voice breaking the concentration of your observation. 'Have you finished your homework?' And it is only now that you understand what lingered in the ashes of those cigarettes.

A mouse is standing next to your foot. You welcome it like an old friend. You pick it up and bring it close to your face. 'Am I a man?' you ask but there is no reply. You wonder if it was in dreams that the mice and the trees would talk, if those were the fantasies of a childhood you lost and will never return. You wonder if you had ever really experienced those memories of if you had only made them up. But how can dreams feel so vivid, is it possible to remember things that never happened?

And your mind twists and turns so much it begins to hurt. Is Anastasia even real? And you remember Feriha and her long skirts, you remember your house with its white tiles and breezy rooms, you go back to the days when you would sleep in the same bed every night, your school uniform hanging on the chair, tidy and clean, your shoes freshly polished right below, your bag in the corner supplied with your books and pens.

You look at the little creature. A field mouse, like the fighters, so small that if you close your fist you can crush it without much difficulty, so fragile, you can kill it in seconds. And yet you know that if you move too fast, if you don't wait for the right moment, it will escape, it will run before your fingers meet in your palm, it will hide in a shadowy corner and you will not see it again.

You look in its eyes. You wonder if it knows all this. You want to know if it realised that you can crush it easily; if it has figured it out that you can kill it, if it has an escape plan. You want to try and crush it just to see if it will succeed in escaping. On the other

hand you are fond of this little mouse, you enjoy its warmth on your palm. Once again you lift it close to your face; its little nose sniffs the air. 'Am I a man?'

'She is in Koulia,' you hear the little mouse say.

'What did you say?' But it's already gone.

DRINK THEIR FEARS

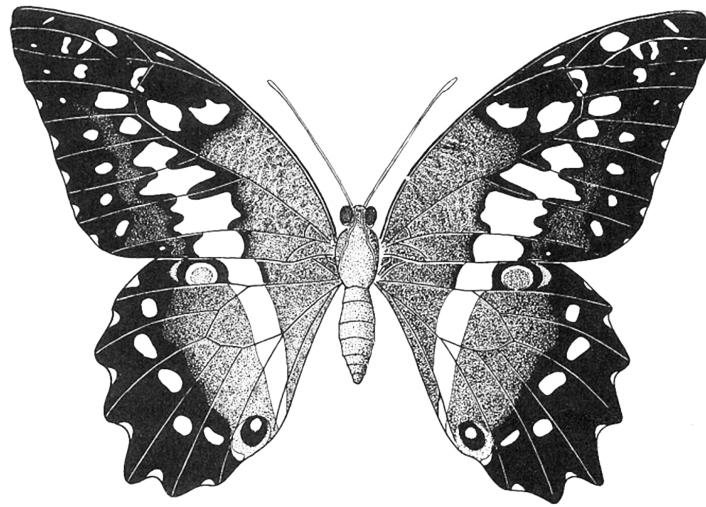
Voices disturb me in my dreams, visions come and go, I feel helpless, sad, more sad that I have ever felt in my life, there is no reason to even pray anymore, pray to whom I wonder, who can help me. I don't see Nikos anymore, my tears only show me my house, focusing on my mother. She has lost her hope, I know she did, even her, the most devoted person I know, has given up. She used to call the saints, she used to beg God, but now nothing, her mourning is silent. Something strange happened the other day, I cannot explain it, it was dark, I was asleep, and then that feeling, like somebody was staring at me, I did not move, I kept my eyes closed, it wouldn't go away, that horrible feeling, then I crossed myself, once, twice, three times, still, a pair of eyes was burning my back, I found the courage, I opened my eyes, I had no intention of turning around, I knew it, I could sense it, somebody was standing behind me. Her voice followed, 'Anastasia,' I remained silent, 'Anastasia', again and again and again until I whispered a faint 'yes'. It was a woman, I thought it was the queen, she said, 'look at me Anastasia,' I had no power over my own body, no strength to resist, my body moved on its own, I turned to face her, her long skirt was dirty and ragged, her torso naked, her breast hanging like sacks, her nipples black and swollen, she lifted her hands, heavy bracelets chanted, she said 'come in my arms güzel kız ,' and I did, she smelled of burned flesh, 'how are you feeling Anastasia?' but I couldn't speak, I knew, how don't ask, but I knew that she could tell me about Nikos. 'He will be here soon, you need to be patient child, he will be here soon.' The old woman spoke in the language of my childhood, the language of my grandmother, soft Turkish words, I felt feverish, like a sick child and no matter how hard I tried to talk I couldn't. Her arms held me tight, they extended from her shoulders like the roots of an old tree, her fingers; long

and thin were piercing my skin, her dirty nails impaling my back, reaching through my spine, poking my heart. 'Don't worry, it will leave no scars,' she whispered, 'The heart is powerful thing, it can swift the wind and turn mountains upside down.' Then I woke up more tired than ever before. When the two men arrived I was expecting them. Not in a prophetic way but in the way you expect events that you know they would happen because they need to happen, when you feel the anxiety dancing in your stomach, when your eyes twinkle and shake, and they did come those men, not to rescue me, I knew it, they came for something else. I smelled their breaths in the air; I heard their steps before they were even inside and Rigaina was whispering to me her vicious words. 'They want my treasure; they are here for the gold.' What gold? There is no treasure in here. 'They are here for the gold, to the chariot, to the chariot, hurry, before they reach us.' I was crying loudly and ferociously, to such an extent that my lungs were hurting me. 'Why are you crying?' Rigaina would say, 'what do you have to lose?' I should be crying, they will take my treasure.' But what else was there for me to do but cry? What other choices were laid in front of me? I didn't want these strangers to see me but I also wanted them to find me. The wall was cracking, I felt the fresh breeze of the outside world on my cheek. Then I saw him . . . Tall, as tall as a cypress, lean and straight. A big, crooked nose was sticking out of his face, two un-proportional ears that looked like the sails of an old ship on the sides, a set of yellow, misplaced teeth. But he was handsome, in a weird, perverted almost way, yes, he was handsome. The way he looked at me, his lustful gaze, the piercing apples of his eyes, as if there was nothing else in the world, as if the only important thing was to look at me and I had, from the moment our eyes met, reached my predestined conclusions, I was given permission by him to realise in that fragment of a moment that he would love me to death, not that it would be long until his final moments on earth, but I knew that those few minutes that he had left burning in his lamp, he would be devoted to me, with all his heart and all his being, his every bone and every hair of his pale skin. The power

that was given to me is unbearable, the gift of turning men into puppets that I can use and dispose of to my liking, how awful that is, how painful, especially when you have not asked for such an endowment, when all you want is to be free to love a man and be loved back, when all you need is the painful and mortal feeling of completely giving yourself to another person when you know that your love will run short and you will be left empty and hurt. There is no greater curse for a woman than the curse of being wanted by all men, being the object of their lust and their deepest desire, that is the worst misfortune for young women who lack the protection of the one they can call their husband. I could see that lust in his eyes, I could sense his crotch being set on fire, my body like a magnet pulling him closer while I was trying to stay away, the fear of being held in his arms, being drowned in his kisses, rising in my body. I was trying hard to stay away, out of his reach, out of his touch, the sadness on his face was breaking my heart. I wanted to run away and then I wanted to embrace him and sing a lullaby to him, help him rest and help him smile, tell him tales of happiness and joy. When I saw him raising the gun to his temple I wasn't worried or shocked or afraid because I knew that this was destined to happen, it was written down in the book of life before we even came to be, this was the way things must take place, not destiny, this man was not here by chance, this was not destiny, no, this was another fact in the passage of time, it was like ink has marked us with the course of the exact events that were now taking place in an empty and abandoned castle, he had to find me, he had to see me, he had to fall in love with me, he had to lose himself in this spell and then die, his blood was meant to stain the floor I sleep on every night, his body was supposed to rot and feed the insects that made their home in the cracks of these very rocks. Life as we know it does not reach this place, the only thing that passes these walls is the unbearable sequence of predestined events that were laid like a set of cards on an old wooden table, in the presence of all the gods and all the graces and all the muses, and we are nothing more than characters, craftily drawn in lively colours, placed in the middle of

each card with decorative borders locking us inside, keeping us captive to the will of those powerful forces. What will happen to the end of their game? Where will we end up? I see the border closing on me, I feel its thorns impaling me reaching my heart, poking it, I am lost in between this reality and a dream, I smell the old lady on my skin 'Don't worry, it will leave no scars,' she whispers 'The heart is a powerful thing, it can swift the wind and turn mountains upside down.' Is this the answer? Will my heart change the course of this? Does she mean that I should love him more, love Nikos more? I scan the room for the man's body but I cannot see it, a pool of blood remains where he fell, I touch it and it's hot, boiling, it burns my fingers, but no body, and I realise that I haven't even heard his voice, I don't even know his name. I make up stories featuring him as a prince, as a beggar, as a father, as a son, I try to imagine what his life was like, if he liked oranges or mandarines, if he enjoyed dancing, if he took pleasure in taking long walks, I narrate to myself his imaginary daily activities, what paper he read, how he used to drink his coffee, I add Nikos to these stories, maybe they had met, at a coffee shop or a taverna, maybe they played a game of tavli together, or a game of cards, I wonder if they ever passed each other in the street, their shoulders accidentally touching, the man giving a rushed apology, Nikos nodding to him that it's alright, I imagine them as friends, sitting in what I picture to be the yard of our house, our children running barefoot around them, they take turns in playing my husband, I compare them to decide who is the most suitable and then a thought crosses me, so bitter that it leaves me miserable an in agony. The man is dead, I saw him putting the gun to his temple and pulling the trigger, this man will never be my husband. And what about Nikos? Where is he? What if he is dead too? What if he never comes? Maybe on his way to me he found love in another woman's face. Maybe I meant to spend my days here, slowly turning into another Rigaina, repeating time, merging with her. I resist with my whole being, I have stopped chasing her, I do not want to see her face anymore. But now, oh now it's all very different. I can hear her voice in my head,

louder and clearer than before, sometimes feeling as if it's not her that I hear but my own thoughts, I walk around the castle thinking that the steps I hear are hers but then I realise that those are mine, I walk faster and they walk faster, I slow down and they follow, I stop and they are silent. I have entered the endless swirl of what it means to be a woman, I am unable to escape the rules set upon us since the begin of time, I take responsibility unwillingly about Eve's mistake, I become the temptation, I am held liable for the suffering of men, I am the one who dragged them away from God and forced to lead miserable lives. I am not a murderer, I tell her, he did not die because of me! But she doesn't reply . . . I lay my body on the blood stain, I feel it's warmth on my body, I try to detect a fragment of the man's smell, I pretend his arms are around me, I beg him to tell me a story so I can fall asleep, I ask him what happens after you die, is there pain, are there tears, joy, songs? The stillness of those moments brings me to tears, deserted as I am, detached from the rest of the world, I let them run on my cheeks without shame, and along come my mourning, my lament full of pleas for forgiveness and I scream them to the wind, again and again and again.



IMAGO

THEY TRY TO TRICK

The plan was easy, straight forward. The General said all you had to do was confuse the British soldiers, buy him some time so that he could escape. Easy. You returned back to the room. You opened the door and found Loukas sitting on one of the beds along with another man, drinking coffee and playing cards. The other man, he must have been around fifty, looked up, his eyes shadowed by a set of thick grey eyebrows, started at you for a few seconds and then returned his gaze to the cards that were spread on the bed.

Loukas got up. You noticed a wound on his left side, just below his ribs. It looked fresh, not yet fully healed, red and swollen. A cigarette was resting on his ear, another one was already lighted and he was blowing the smoke while saying something to you. It took you back, that cigarette, back at the school yard, when Loukas used to hide behind the canteen and smoke, back to when you used to make up stories about his cigarette been stuck permanently on his ear.

‘You want some coffee re?’ you heard him saying. You turned your head away. ‘Coffee re?’

‘No,’ you said.

‘Come, sit down . . . Niko!’

‘What?’

‘Come, sit . . . Are you alright?’

‘Yes,’ you said but you avoided looking at him.

You didn’t turn to face him for a while. You pulled the chair and sat with your back to them. You heard the tin mbriki touching the small coffee cups; you could almost make out the sound of the thick coffee pouring, the grains settling at the bottom, you could

almost discern the cards changing hands without actually seeing them.

‘Four years Louka, my friend, four years . . . ’ you said.

‘Four years,’ he repeated.

‘Tomorrow is 25th of March.’

‘It is,’ he confirmed.



And a week later you find yourself walking a donkey downhill, leaving behind you the monastery. The animal hesitates, its steps are unsure. You bend towards its ear and you beg it to continue. In vain. You pull the rope. The animal is still slow. You are tempted to look inside the baskets. Wine and olives. That’s what they told you that you are carrying with you. Wine and olives. ‘You must not look inside the baskets,’ you remember the General’s words. You keep moving.

You hear voices. You recognise the language. English. Your steps are heavy. The donkey is slow, so slow. Wine and olives. Relax now, you need to be careful, you need to say the right things. ‘Halt!’ you hear someone saying. Don’t stop, get closer. ‘Halt!’ You can see them now. There are about eight of them. You put your left arm up, showing them your palm, showing them that you are not armed. With your right arm you hold on tight to the rope of the donkey. Wine and olives. You see guns pointed at you. You approach a little bit more, and then you stop.

A soldier moves closer to you. ‘Do you speak English?’ You nod.

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Name?’

‘Nikos. Georgiou.’

‘Age?’

‘Eighteen, going nineteen.’ The soldier looks back to the group.

‘Where are you going?’

‘To the next village.’ The soldier stretches his neck and looks at the baskets.

‘What are you carrying.’ Wine and olives, wine and olives, wine and olives.

‘Wi . . . wine . . . a . . . and . . . wine and . . . olives.’

‘Wine and olives?’

‘Yes.’ You see another soldier signalling to search the baskets. ‘I . . . I . . . I am taking them to the next village.’ The soldier stops right behind the one who is asking all the questions. They both look at you waiting for more. You notice the difference between the colour of the skin on their faces and the small patches visible inside their collars. You imagine they must have been on the island for a while now. They are not white boys.

The second soldier looks back at the group. ‘We still need to search, right?’ he asks them, ‘or not? It’s wine and olives he is carrying, that’s what he says, should we search?’ A dark haired man takes a step forward.

‘Search him, come on!’ he says.

‘You sure? I mean . . . We searched four people today, nothing suspicious . . . ’

‘Why are you so hesitant huh? Go on, come on!’ ‘I don’t know Andy . . . Got a bad feeling mate . . . ’

‘Oh shut up you little cunt! Just search the fucking baskets!’

‘From the monastery,’ you continue interrupting them, ‘I picked them up for the monastery and I will take them to the next village, I . . . ’ You clinch on the rope. ‘They told me . . . ’

‘They told you? What?’ the soldier asks.

‘The monks, they said to take the wine, wine and olives, take them and sell them, they want money, some money, the monks want some money.’

‘We understand but we still need to search the baskets.’

‘Why? Why? It’s only wine and olives, wine and . . . ’

‘Please step aside,’ another soldier from the back says.

‘We need to search the baskets,’ the soldier closer to you says.

‘It’s only wine and olives,’ you say, ‘wine and . . . ’ You feel the rope on your skin. You wonder how long you have been talking to them. You are not sure, it’s not enough, you know, it’s not enough, you need more time. You hold the rope tight. ‘They shouldn’t be opened,’ you say, ‘they might go bad, I don’t know, the monks, they said, the monks said not to open them until I reach the village.’ Think, the General will need more time.

‘Are you in any way affiliated with AOS?’ the first soldier asks. You hesitate a bit.

‘No.’

‘We have to search the baskets,’ the one named Andy shouts from the back.

‘No.’

‘Please step aside.’

‘No.’ The soldier closer to you gets hold of you. ‘No!’ He pulls you away from the donkey. The rope burns your palm. ‘No, please, no!’ You see the others running towards you. Two more soldiers put their arms around you. They are forcing you away. The ropes slips your grip. You feel your pulse in your hand. All four of you fall on the ground. ‘No!’ Then a sudden blast.

When you open your eyes you are unsure about how much time has passed. On top of you lays Andy, his body heavy on yours. You smell burned flesh and explosives. ‘Fuck this shit hole! Bloody Sarouikians! Just stay still Ben, just stay still for a minute will you? Fuckers! I’ll chop their balls off, every single one of them!’ You hear some moaning. ‘Ben, what the fuck, just stay still mate! AOS scams . . . ’ The voice is breaking, as if the person is tearing up. ‘Cassey is back there, waiting for me and here I am patching you up! Motherfucker would you just sit still?’ You shut your eyes again. In the distance a transceiver tells you that the General has escaped. Andy moaning faintly in your ear is the last thing you hear.

The next time you wake up you are in a military car, on your left is Andy with his eyes

shut and on your right a man badly wounded. You can make out the engine of another car following, not too far behind. From the rear mirror the driver looks at you. 'Chris, the Sarouk is awake.'

'So?' the man sitting next to him.

'I don't know . . . '

'Just drive.'

You look at the passing scenery unsure of where you are heading. 'Excuse me,' you say. The soldier named Chris looks at you over his shoulder. He raises his eyebrows and waits for you to talk. 'Where are we going?' Chris looks at the driver.

'Tell him,' the driver says, 'it's not a secret.'

'The hospital,' Chris replies.

'Which hospital?' you say.

'Does it matter?' Chris says. You look at him thinking that it doesn't. He goes on. 'The one in Peras. You need to get you fixed you know, patch you up.'

'And then?' you say.

'I don't know. I reckon you are probably going to be joining the rest of the AOS scams in a cell or something.'

'I am not . . . not a member of AOS.'

'We'll see about that.'

'Chris,' the other soldier says, 'leave him.'

THE PASSING TIME

It was the most depressing Easter the house had seen in years. The gas heater was burning in a corner of the living room but its heat was not enough to warm the bones of the grandmother. She was sitting on a silky green armchair, its fabric grey and dirty from the long years of serving the inhabitants of the house; both people and cats. The grandmother's arms were placed on her tummy, tucked under her breasts and her chin was touching the upper part of her chest as she was leaning forward to listen to the radio. On the sofa the grandfather was lying with his feet stretched across the floor towards the coffee table and was taking a nap. It was already very late for both of them. Old age, the long years of working day to night and the worries of their children and grandchildren wore them out and now they were used to going to bed from six in the afternoon. Tonight, their daughter invited them over, like she did for every holiday, to wait with them until it was time to go to church. Both of them looked tired and sleepy. The daughter tried to cheer everyone up with nuts and wine, the table full of chocolate treats, a cheese platter and homemade bread. They barely ate.

The two granddaughters were in their room getting dressed. They would follow their mother and grandparents to the church and then they would go out to a party. Dressed in their lined stockings and their dresses, wearing red lipsticks and perfume they looked out of place. As soon as they went downstairs the living room looked even more miserable, like a place forgotten by the gods.

Before the death of their father, two years back, Easter Sunday meant celebrations. Friends came over after the liturgy for egg soup, music was on loud, red eggs were passed hand to hand and all of them dressed in new clothes. They would exchange wishes and

the happy news of resurrection. But then father was gone, and the other grandfather followed and now it was just them four waiting for another year to come and go, hoping that there will be no more hardships, no more deaths and no more debt.

‘Girls,’ their mother called, ‘come join us, we will be leaving soon.’ The heels sounded in the corridor, rushed and full of excitement.

‘My beautiful flowers,’ said the grandmother looking up towards them.

‘Come, sit next to me,’ their grandfather said as he was slowly waking up. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. ‘Who is it?’ said the old man. His voice was coloured with worry. Since the fighting started they often had British soldiers and officials visiting them, asking questions about hideouts and fighters.

‘I’ll get it,’ said the older sister.

‘No, no, you sit down, I will open,’ rushed the mother. She opened the door slowly. ‘Marie?’ she said. ‘It’s Marios! Come in, God, you are drenched!’

‘It’s raining chair legs out there. You haven’t left for the church yet? What time are you planning to leave? I was hoping that you were still here,’ the man said and walked in leaving muddy marks on the floor. ‘I was up at the castle with one of the officials.’

‘The castle? What kind of business did you have at the castle? Especially on a night like this?’ The mother was saying all this while helping her brother-in-law take off his wet jacket. The grandparents tried not to respond. They knew well what kind of business Marios had with the British officials. The whole city knew. It was a shared secret.

‘They arrested a man a few days ago, some guy from Tarou, a grape seller. They found him wandering the woods and brought him up here for interrogation. He had no connections with you-know-who but they have to be careful, you know, he had a carriage so they suspected he was helping the so-called General.’

‘What happened to the man?’ The mother looked worried.

‘They let him go. But Mr. Roberts had an interesting talk with him, or so he told

me.'

'Come sit down, do you want some wine?'

'No, not wine. Do you have whiskey?'

'I think I do,' said the mother and went to look.

'Not my bottle!' the grandfather said and looked at the man with the corner of his eye. The girls were always happy to see their uncle. He always came with gifts and treats. The both sat on the floor next to his feet waiting for his story. The mother came with a bottle that only had enough whiskey for one serving. She poured some in a water glass. 'So what happened?' she said as she handed him the glass.

'The man was crazy, crazy for sure. He was talking nonsense, telling Mr. Roberts about Rigaina and her treasures. So he said on Ressurrection night a small door opens at the castle. The door leads to one of Rigaina's halls, where her treasure is hidden. He went on and on about this shepherd who succeeded in entering the room but he was too busy gathering as many precious stones and gold as possible that he didn't see the door closing and was locked inside forever. Mr. Roberts believes in such things! I told him these are old stories, told by women to women for entertainment. He wouldn't listen. He asked me to take him there, he said it is a sign that he should go after the treasure.'

'Is that why you took him up there? Or did you went out looking for the boys?' said the grandmother under her breath.

'What boys? I'm telling you we went up to the castle and you will not believe what my eyes have seen.' The grandmother was trying very hard to stop herself from calling him a traitor. She was ashamed to be associated with such a man. Her son-in-law would never have betrayed AOS but Marios, well, Marios was different. He was a lover of money and power, he liked the British, he supported them.

'So what happened then?' the younger sister asked eager to find out if her uncle had managed to find a treasure.

‘Well, we took the car and drove up the mountain until the point where the road stops. He asked me to get down and walk in front of him to show the way. I kept telling him that it’s all stupid stories, myths, he wouldn’t listen. Let me spare my words. We finally reached the castle and went inside. You know there is a staircase that leads up all the way to the roof. We started climbing the stairs until we reached the next floor. He stopped and said that he thought the treasure room is on that floor. So we started looking around for a secret passage or something of that sort.

After a while I noticed him putting his ear on the wall. He signaled me to be quiet. Can you hear this? He asked me. I paid attention. Indeed I could hear something. Like a girl crying. And then it happened! The wall was splitting in half, a small passage was being opened in front of our eyes,’ the uncle said showing with his hands how the wall opened up.

‘We walked in. One would imagine that it was dark in there but no, that was not the case. It was nice, well-lighted. You know how in the afternoon the sun hits the white walls and gives out a warm, orange light, that is how it was, I’m telling you, beautiful! Mr. Roberts was walking in front of me. Suddenly he stopped. I asked him what was wrong. With his hand he told me to stop talking. Then he took a few more steps, I followed. The crying was louder now; I knew we must be approaching its source. And as we entered the room there it was. The most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes upon.’

The girls were looking at him, hanging from his lips, their mouths opened in awe. Even the grandparents turn their bodies to face him. ‘I am telling you she was stunning. But the most beautiful thing was her skin, transparent like a veil, I could see all her muscles and veins, God, I could see the blood running across her body.

‘Miss,’ said Roberts and she turned around and looked at us. Not us, him. And then something very strange happened. His expression changed, he was bewitched, I’m telling you bewitched. He didn’t talk; instead he started moving towards her, as if drawn by an

invisible hand. And the more he would walk forward the further away she would go, but I was sure, I can assure you of that, she didn't even stand up, it was magic, strange magic. He had his arms extended to touch her and the more he tried the sadder he looked. There were tears running from his eyes. I called for him, I said we must go sir but he was not responding. Suddenly I see him reaching for his revolver. He takes it out of his belt case and places it on his temple. I was so scared, frighten, and then boom! He shot himself. Dead, he is dead!

Everybody was silent. 'I started running,' Marios went on, 'running fast. I looked back and the passage had closed. I got in the car and drove half-way, the rest of the way I walked, until I reached here.'

'Did you kill him?' the grandfather said.

'No, no! Why would I kill him?'

'I had some hopes that you might one day change sides.'

'What are you saying old man? I am on nobody's side!'

'Don't say that to me!'

'I didn't kill him!'

'Will they arrest you?' the older sister asked.

'Nobody knows he is dead,' the mother tried to calm the girls down by saying. 'And if they find him they will suspect AOS.'

'Yes, yes, that is what I thought. Nobody apart from you knows that we went there together.'

'For once,' said the grandfather, 'you did something right.'

'What do you mean old man?'

'What do I mean?' said the grandfather and stood up, 'even though it wasn't from your hand, a Brit is killed! And that is a good thing!'

'Stop it! Let's go to the church, He will be resurrected and we will be here fighting.'

Come on girls, get up, mother? Come on father, let's go. Marie? Are you coming with us?'

'No, I will stay here and wait until you get back. I have no place to be in a church now.'

'Good thing you know it,' said the godmother, 'God doesn't like traitors.'

Marios bent his head and said nothing. The sudden movement in the room seemed too much to bear as they were used to the silence that was normally hanging in the house.

'We will be back around one,' said the mother, 'we will pass by the cemetery and light the lamps at the graves with Holy Light. Stay and wait for us, I made soup.'

'I will.'

'Uncle,' said the younger daughter, 'it's alright, you didn't kill him. Do you think it was a witch?'

'Shh child,' said the grandmother. 'Don't talk about witches during this holy night. It's probably all lies.'

'I am not a liar,' the uncle whispered. They were all standing by the door.

'Well, we will see you after church,' the mother said. And as they opened the door to go outside, in came along with the cold breezy of the spring evening a scream. A scream so loud and sad it made them shiver. The scream of a mourning woman.

AS IT SWEEPS ON

Will you just let me be? When is this going to stop? Why are you doing this? These men, how did they find me? I cannot be calm anymore; there is nothing that can keep me calm. Just take me back, will you? Just please take me back. Where is Nikos? Why are you not answering, why are you not saying anything to me? I know you are here! I can sense you. Months have gone by, years, is it years? Yes, I know it's years, and I am still here, alive amongst shadows, dead between immortal stones, and this feeling that something is always about to happen but never does, visitors who are never quite here, tears that have dried out, bones and skin and hair that have forgotten how to be part of a being. Now speak, for once answer me, and say why? In which twisted plan are we the pawns, in what kind of tragedy are we the heroes? Speak to me! You cruel creature, what kind of powers do you possess that make you capable of ruling over me. This man, think of this man, in all his beauty and youth he roams the cities and the villages and the mountains looking for a spook. What am I but a spook, ruled by a shadow, untouched by the love that surrounds me but cannot reach me, taken for dead, long gone, never to return? Who else but this young boy cares about my fate? And what fate is that which awaits me? I wish for this world to fill the room with answers, to explain this suffering, for someone to give me guidance. What am I but a character in a story, what else could I be but letters, signs on a page put in order to form words and sentences, to form me? I see it clearly sometimes, what is happening, I know it. And other times I feel like I know nothing. My tongue is green; I saw it yesterday when I looked at my reflexion in the pond of my tears. I eat and eat and eat those muddy leaves, I suck the nectar out of the ivy and I crawl against the mould on the walls in search for more greens, different greens. My

skin cracks and sheds and grows again. Who are these men who found me? Why did he have to die? No more leaves, no more crawling, no more loneliness, no more shedding. Just let me be . . . I can't see them in the pond no more. It doesn't matter how much I cry, they are no longer there. And I can only assume that they have forgotten me and that is why I cannot see them anymore. They don't care. For them I am dead. For all of them. Apart from one. The one that is refusing to let me go. Only him. I believe that I am dead but I am yet to realise it . . . Speak! Why are you not answering, why are you not saying anything to me? I know you are here! I can sense you. Just talk to me . . . Give me some answers. And I promise, oh yes I promise, if you explain everything to me I will then just stay here, calm and quiet and I will accept my destiny without any more questions, without complains, I will just stay here and wait, in this vicious circle of eating, shedding, crying, wait until the right time.

FOOLS' PATHS

The car ride makes you dizzy. The road is bumpy. You doze off every now and then. The soldiers don't speak much, the one named Andy moans without opening his eyes. Your ears stretch at the noise coming from the transmitter. At first some white noise, then a voice. The darkness around you, the cold evening that is slowly setting in the background combined with the harsh, worried voice at the other end of the sender, sends chills down your spine.

'Guys, guys can you read me?'

'What's going on?' Chris replies.

'No time for the protocol. We just received information that Roberts is dead.'

'Dead?'

'Dead. Koulia castle. Can you head there and confirm?'

'We have wounded.'

'Wounded?'

'Andy and Josh. Ambush.'

'Fucking Saroukians mate!'

'Another car is following. What do you reckon?'

'Hand Andy over to them and then go to Koulia.'

'Roger that.'

The car stops. You feel tension building up. 'What about me?' you ask.

'You are coming with us' Chris replies.

'To the castle?'

'Yeah, to the castle. You have no visible wounds, you'll be fine.' They are trying to

pull the two men out of the car.

‘I . . . Can I go with them? To the hospital?’

‘I said you are coming with us AOS scum. You are under arrest, you are coming with us.’

‘I don’t belong to AOS,’ you say.

‘Shut the fuck up!’

They hurry back in the car and you are soon on the road again, now heading to Koulia. A sinister wind is blowing. You hear the church bells calling people for the big resurrection, you can almost smell the burning candles, you can taste the thick lemon and egg soup. You think of your mother, alone in the empty house, you hope that one of the neighbours would have invited her to share the *happy meal* with them. This urge to run back and give her a hug rises inside you, chokes you and breaks you. You realise you are as lonely as her, maybe more lonely than her.

‘It Easter Sunday,’ you say.

‘We are headed to a castle to check if our lieutenant is dead, we don’t care if it’s Easter Sunday.’

‘Chris I said leave him! Why do you bother? He is filth that’s what he is.’

‘Well some conversation is good. Makes time pass faster mate.’

‘Have your fucking conversation with me, there is no need to talk to him.’

‘What are you, my jealous wife? If I want to talk to him, I’ll talk to him.’

The driver looks at you through the rear mirror. ‘If Andy dies, I’ll hunt you down and chop you up, you hear me? You! Sarouk! I’ll kill you, *katalaveis?*’ You nod. ‘What were you thinking, that we will leave just because you blew up a donkey? That’s what you thought? Sarouikians Chris, as dumb as fucking mules! It’s a shame you know, beautiful island isn’t it? Leave it to them and they will turn it back into the shit hole it was before we got here. Right Sarouk?’

‘My name is Nikos.’

‘My name is Nikos,’ he says to you in a mocking voice, ‘my name is Nikos and I am an innocent Sarouk.’

‘I’m Greek,’ you say, unsure where that came from.

‘So you are Greek? Really? Or you mean Greek-Sarouk?’ he goes on.

‘I’m Greek,’ you insist.

‘You know what the Turks say about the Greeks, Sarouk? They say, listen to this Chris, they say Greeks are Turks who believe they are Italians!’ He lets out a deep laugh, shaking as he is trying to keep control of the steering wheel. ‘And how about the other one, wait, wait, how does it go? Oh, yeah, the Greeks discovered sex, the Italians discovered women. Funny shit! Are you following Sarouk or should I speak slowly?’ He stares at you through the mirror. You say nothing. ‘Who cares if you understand anyway? No one gives a shit!’

‘Stop!’ Chris says.

‘What?’

‘I said stop. What’s your fucking problem? Leave him alone.’

‘What is wrong with you? You’ve been here too long or something? Do you not realise that they want us all dead? You thick-headed bastard. He tried to kill you, a fucking ambush, you are here out of luck. If there were not two of us he would have tried to kill you again. Right Sarouk?’

‘I didn’t try to kill anyone.’

‘Oh is that so? Then what were you doing with those explosives? Explosives cause explosions, explosions kill people.’

‘I did not try to kill anyone.’

‘You almost killed Andy!’

‘Andy will be fine,’ Chris says.

‘Is that so Chris? And what if he dies? What if tomorrow there is another ambush and you die? Or I die?’

‘Just keep your eyes on the road OK? Just get us to the fucking castle.’

‘Now that I think about it what if this whole Koulia thing is a set up? What if it’s misleading information or something of that sort and when we get there we will be greeted by these fucking AOS men or something? I don’t know . . . Have you thought about it Chris?’

‘No . . . ’

He looks at you again through the mirror. ‘Sarouk! Is it a set up? Am I driving towards an ambush?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You don’t know? What if it is and we get killed?’

‘I’ll get killed as well.’

‘You won’t you fucking AOS scum. You are one of them!’

You don’t answer. You remember the oath, the General’s breath, full of worrying and smoke, Loukas whispering to you words of heroism.

‘When do you reckon they planted the mines Chris?’

‘You think it was mines?’

‘What else?’ He looks at you. ‘It was mines right?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘What do you mean you don’t know?’

‘I don’t. They told me I was carrying wine and olives.’

‘Fuck you!’

You turn your gaze to the passing scenery, trying to stay calm.

‘Hear him Chris, he doesn’t know!’

‘Look it’s not our job to interrogate him. Just drive. We’ll get to the castle, see what

happened and then we'll hand him over.'

The rest of the drive continues in absolute silence. You are tired but you are unable to doze off. There is this feeling in your stomach, a feeling of unease, a feeling of anticipation, like the one you get the night before an exam or a test, as if something major is going to happen. Your hands go numb, your eyes twitch, the kind of twitch that old ladies say you get when you are about to meet someone you haven't seen in a long time.

You are driving up the mountain. Your ears clog because of the altitude, you keep yawning in an effort to unplug them. The wind is whispering at you about dead princesses and dragon-slayers, saints and magical birds.

Boy, young boy, there was once a king without children. His people tried to overthrow him as people do with childless kings. He called the magicians and he called the wise and asked and begged for a cure. And the wise men said, 'There are three fountains my king, one is gold, one is crystal and the third silver. Sacrifice the gold and you'll have a daughter, Goldie, sacrifice the crystal, and you'll have a daughter, Crystaleni, sacrifice the silver and you'll have a son, Sylver.' So it happened. And when Goldie came of age, the king took her to the market to buy her dowry. A dragon came and took the girl.

You close your eyes and you lean back. You emerge in the words of the wind; you anticipate the singing of the owls.

Boy, young boy, hear us, the same happened to Crystaleni, at the market the dragon came and took her away. And the king fell ill because of sadness and he was on his deathbed because of sorrow. He called his son, Sylver and said, 'Son our castle has a hundred and one doors, the hundred you can open, the one you cannot.' And the king died upon saying his last words.

You go further up to the mountain. The wind is lashing the castle's rocks. Songbirds and lizards chase the car.

Boy, listen and be cautious. So Sylver did, a hundred doors he opened and one he did

not. But evil whispers reached his ears. 'What if my father hid his gold behind that closed door?' And he opened it and there he saw the picture of the Beauty. 'I will lose myself in the world if necessary but I will find her.' And he set out to the North. On his way nightfall came and he entered an inn. The owners, husband and wife, knew he was a king. And they gave him food and they gave him drink and they asked where he was going. And he said that he was looking for Beauty. 'My son,' the owner's wife said, 'many came this way, looking for her, but they never returned.' Sylver said that he was the son of a king and he would lose his way in the world but he would find her. 'May you do,' the woman said and blessed him as he set out again.

You sense the movement of the trees and the rapid feet of mice.

Boy, young boy, Sylver found another inn and again he was warned. But there the owner's wife said, 'Further down you'll find another inn, it belongs to my sister who is a witch. Go there and she will tell you what to do.' And so he did. And the witch told him that ninety nine men tried and all lost their heads when they tried to steal Beauty. She told him to go by the fountain where the princess's maid goes. The princess's name was Goldie. The prince realised it was his sister and told the witch. Then the witch told him to go there and ask her for the gold pitcher she uses and she will deny. 'Follow her to the castle, pretending you want to ask Goldie for it. And wait for her answer.' So it happened. And the prince went to the castle and Goldie told the maid to bring Sylver to her. And Goldie told Sylver that Beauty's father used the heads of ninety nine men who tried to take her to build a tower and there she sits. 'Now hurry,' she said, 'I'll hide. I am afraid if my husband sees you, he will kill you.'

You pay no attention to the sound of the engine. It is as if the soldiers are no longer there. You are floating, you are amongst old friends.

Boy, Goldie's husband, the dragon returned to the castle and with fear she told him about her brother. And the dragon asked to see him. Sylver told the dragon about Beauty

and the dragon laughed so loudly that the rocks of the castle shook. 'Dragons with wings like me tried and failed and you think you will succeed. The king has built his castle with the heads of those who tried.' But Sylver insisted. And when Sylver went to sleep, a man came in his dream and told him that he knew how to help him. He told him to take a hundred sheep and a hundred oka of honey and a hundred kilos of wheat. The sheep, he told him to slaughter and give to the eagles, the honey to the bees and the wheat to the ants. And so he did. And the eagles, and the bees and the ants all gave him a feather each and told him to burn it if he needs help, in return for his offerings.

You feel lost, as in trance but you don't want to escape.

Oh boy, dear boy and Sylver set out to find the castle where Beauty was kept, hidden by her father. And when we found it a trench full of mud surrounded it and Sylver did not know how to cross. Remembering the eagles, he burnt the feather and soon they came and lifted him up and flew him over the mud. When he entered the castle he asked to see the king and his request was granted. And he told the king that he wanted to take Beauty and marry her. The king laughed a deep laugh and said: 'Ninety nine heads I have used to built this tower and I miss one. I take it you are offering yours? I'll give you three tasks, if you succeed Beauty is yours, if you fail then your head is mine.'

The car suddenly stops. You open your eyes. Up the hill you see Koulia. 'Road ends here,' says Chris, 'the rest of the way we walk.'

LACING ROPES

The three of them get out of the car. The mountain is so silent of human presence that everything can be heard. Crickets, dancing leaves swirling with the wind, the hooves of the mouflons against the rocks. They make their way up towards the castle; their steps are slow and tired. Chris is walking at the front, holding a flashlight, illuminating the pathway for the other two to follow. Around the path overgrown plants block their way here and there. Huge leaves meet across creating an arch. When the light from the torch reaches them, big holes can be seen where they have been eaten voraciously. The munching of caterpillars can be faintly heard; tiny worms unable to make such damage.

‘Scary,’ he says, ‘it’s scary up here at this hour.’

The other two just nod. They continue walking, keeping their eyes fixed on the small patch of earth in front of Chris, that is lit.

‘Don’t you feel it too? A feeling like we are not alone here, like . . . ’ He breaths in deeply. They are half way there. Their foreheads are sweaty despite the coolness of the night. Chris stops and points the flashlight to the other soldier. ‘Paul? Should we turn back? What if it is an ambush?’ Paul gives a long stare.

‘I don’t know. What about the orders? We cannot turn back.’

‘What if it is an ambush?’

‘I . . . What do you want me to say? I don’t know . . . ’

‘Paul?’

‘What?’

‘Let’s go back . . . ’

‘Chris don’t be stupid, we cannot back. What is wrong with you? It’s just a castle.

Nothing else.'

'You said it, you said it might be an ambush . . . What if it is?'

'If it is then it is. We have orders. We'll keep going.'

'What do you think?' Chris asked Nikos. The boy shrugged his shoulders. 'Do you think it's an ambush?'

'No. But . . . '

'But?'

'I am afraid as well.'

'Why?'

'The stories . . . There are stories.'

'What stories?'

'Stories . . . I've heard some stories.'

'Children's tales!' Paul says.

'Shut up Paul! Tell me, what stories?'

'About Rigaina.'

'Regana?'

'Rigaina.'

'And? Who is she?'

'A queen. She is dead. She is a myth, you know, like fairies or ghosts. They say this is one of her castles. Some say that it's here that she died and they believe she haunts the place. They say she tries to take revenge for something that happened to her but nobody is sure what happened. Some say it was an invasion, others that her son was killed and there is the story about her lover who deceived her.'

'Told you Chris, children's stories.'

'They are, I believe they are, but . . . While I was travelling I met a man who claimed he was looking for the queen's treasure. I thought he was mad, a silly old farmer, but

then . . . ’

‘Then what?’ Chris is looking at Nikos anxiously, hanging from his lips.

‘Then he told me about a forest, a forest he said where cypresses weep. I didn’t believe him. Why would I? Weeping trees? But then, as we were travelling he took me inside a forest and I saw them, the crying trees, they were really crying, with my own ears I heard them. And the visions, the man, he saw visions, he tried to kill me . . . ’

‘To kill you? Why?’

‘I am not sure. I think it was the visions, they told him to kill me.’

‘You are crazy Sarouk. Can you not see it Chris? The boy is crazy! Let’s just move on.’

They keep walking. Soon they approach a great arch where once a huge door would have been standing. The wind is howling carrying with it the smells that linger in the depths of the earth. Around it ivy has grown so much that the rocks are no longer visible. The leaves of the plant did not escape the wrath of the appetite of the caterpillars. They make their way inside with unsure steps.

‘Where to now?’ Chris says looking towards the direction where Paul is standing.

‘I don’t know. Should we just walk straight on?’

‘I guess.’

‘Is anyone here? Hello?’ Chris’s voice fills the whole building. ‘Hello?’ Paul storms towards him and puts his hand over the other man’s mouth.

‘Are you insane?’ he whispers to Chris. ‘Have you lost you fucking mind? What if it is an ambush? What if someone is here? Just keep walking, we will find Roberts.’

‘I thought . . . ’

‘You thought it’s a good idea to get us killed, that’s what you thought. Just move.’

Nikos puts his ear on the wall trying hard to pick up any noise.

‘Move towards where? We cannot see a thing Paul, where do you want me to go?’

‘Just keep going straight, is it so hard for you to do that?’

‘Shhh . . . ’ Nikos breaks their argument, ‘shh, I can hear something.’ Both of them rush towards him and place their ears on the wall imitating his action.

‘I can’t hear anything, I say we keep moving.’

‘Shut the fuck up Paul, just shut up! Sarouk! I can hear it, faintly, but I can hear it. It sounds like . . . hm . . . ’ Chris pushes his ear towards the wall as if that would help him hear better.

‘Sounds like a woman crying . . . ’ Nikos whispers, ‘a woman crying.’

‘Do you think is that Regana?’

‘Rigaina you mean?’

‘Yes, yes her . . . ’

‘Seriously Chris, you think a ghost is crying and we can hear it? Seriously?’

‘Stop mocking me! Sarouk, is that her?’

‘I don’t know, no, I don’t think so . . . I mean, those are just stories, you were saying it, both of you, just stories . . . ’

‘I say we walk towards whatever it is that you both are hearing,’ Paul says.

‘I agree,’ says Nikos.

‘I . . . ’

‘What is it? Are you afraid? Hey Sarouk look, the little cunt is scared of an old story.’

‘I am not afraid; I just think you should call out for the woman to come to us.’

‘If there is a woman . . . Maybe it is a ghost . . . Booooo! Hahahahaha!’

‘What is your problem Paul? I have the right to believe whatever I want to believe!’

‘Let’s just go,’ says Nikos and takes the lead, keeping his ear close to the wall. The two soldiers follow him still arguing in whispers behind him.

‘Here, here,’ Nikos says pointing at the wall, ‘listen! It’s more clear here, you can really hear it, it is a woman crying.’ The two men instantaneously follow his suggestion

and press their ears where he is pointing.

‘I can hear it,’ says Chris and now his voice trembles so much he can barely speak. ‘Paul?’ Paul does not respond. He remains with his ear on the wall. ‘Paul? Can you hear it?’

‘Umm . . . y . . . ye . . . yes . . . A woman.’

‘A woman.’

‘We should . . . ’

‘We should . . . ’

‘Reach her . . . ’

‘Yes . . . ’

‘How?’

‘Sarouk! How?’

‘I don’t know. A door, we need to find a door.’

‘Come on Paul, move, we’ll find a door.’

They begin searching hectically, patting the stones and placing their ears on the walls from time to time just to make sure that the woman is still there. With their palms they can sense the mildew and the vines that have grown from the inside of the rocks and are finding their way out through the cracks. Here and there worms and caterpillars sneak between their fingers and ants and bugs crawl on them.

‘There are no doors . . . ’ Nikos sounds defeated.

‘There must be a door. How did she get in if there is no door?’ Paul is annoyed and it shows on his face.

‘We could try climbing in through a window,’ says Chris.

‘Have you gone completely mad? Climb through a window?’

‘What else can we do Paul?’

‘Let’s go through here.’

They both turn and look at Nikos. 'Here, there is light here.'

'Light?'

'Yes, I can see light coming through.' The soldiers approach him and the three of them bend to look at the faint stream of light coming through the wall. They push aside some half eaten leaves to clear the spot.

'Light, there is light,' Nikos repeats.

'Maybe there is some sort of passage,' says Chris, 'should we try and push the wall?'

'Push the wall?' says Paul.

'Yes, push the wall,' says Nikos. They place their hands against the wall and with all their strength they push. Again and again and again.

'It's not moving, maybe it's just a crack, not a passage Paul.'

'Now what Sarouk?'

'I don't know . . . '

The bells sound louder, they take over the empty spaces, they shake their bones and somehow they break the darkness, they shake the sleeping stones and in their awakening they let out a smell of flowers, jasmine and orchids, rainbows are splashing over the walls, light, light is smashing the blackness, blinding him, them. Around them flies, bees and bugs are flying hysterically. The caterpillars and the worms crawl as fast as they can and the ants break their well-formed lines and run to an escape.

'An opening . . . Chris! An opening!'

'The smell, let me put my arms around the smell . . . '

'Chris there is an opening!' Paul pulls him through, inside an empty room. They look around, nothing, nothing but a pool of dried blood, staining the floor. Nikos follows, he knees shaking violently, his eyes twitching, his palms sweating. He leans against the opening, tired and he observes the two men going around the room.

'Hello? Are you here? Lady? Hello?'

He turns his head to the side, there is a window overlooking the sea, stars are twinkling, a breath-taking view, a window unworthy of the beauty it frames. Enormous leaves, the greener of green, fall to the sides as if they were drapes. Through the bitten holes the gleaming blue of the night appears like a coral hue. And there, just below that small opening where she once sat and cried over him, right there he sees it. Translucent, veined, cracked, from its openings a slimy substance is dripping. A cocoon. He walks slowly towards it and kneels. If beauty had a smell she would have to share it with this cocoon. Where, he thinks, have I seen this before? And he bends his head and kisses it softly. Anastasia.



MORTALITAS

TALKING TREES

You touch the cocoon and it shatters, it breaks into dust. Out of it comes a scream so loud it breaks your lungs as you breathe it in. It speaks like a lullaby, you have heard it before, you know it. You could have loved her oğlum. If today was yesterday and tomorrow was not a threat. You could have loved her from now until the end of all that is known. There is a moment in time, another time and not the one you are in, where you could have held her hand, carefully as not to break her skin, gently as not to disrupt the dancing of the blood inside her veins. In that moment, that precious, fragile moment you could have lead her inside the cocoon. Your bodies would have interlocked limb inside limb, heads leaning on shoulders, stomachs pressed against the silky vessel. You would have lightly pulled a single white hair from her head, an everlasting, never-ending hair, in all its purity and chalkiness, and you would have attentively weaved it to heal the cocoon. Inside that moment this scrap of an old life would have been given a second chance and from gratitude it would have clenched on your bodies in an embrace full of death. ‘You know,’ she would have whispered, ‘it is against this world to stay inside. We must escape.’ And you would allow the few tears you have been saving for her to travel from your eyelashes to the cheeks, because you would know that if you didn’t meet death inside this embrace, you would meet him somewhere else.

This is not that moment. This is a different time, alternative. You stand there as light seems to change. Nightly shadows retreat, the walls put on an orange colour, huge skins of mandarins.

‘What is that?’ you hear Paul. You smell the citrus and you don’t reply.

‘Some sort of skin . . . ’

‘Skin? Tell me something Chris, are you an idiot mate?’

‘It looks like skin . . . ’

You look for the word, you know the word. ‘You know,’ you say ‘what happens when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly?’ They turn and look at you. ‘You know?’ They nod. ‘This is what it is. There was a caterpillar in here and now it’s a butterfly.’

‘A cocoon, this is a cocoon,’ says Chris.

‘Yes,’ you say. ‘This is a cocoon,’ you say.

‘Bullshit!’ you hear Paul murmuring.

‘There was in here a caterpillar and now it’s a butterfly and it flew out of the window. And that is all this is.’

‘We have to go,’ says Chris. ‘Roberts is not here.’

‘There was a caterpillar here once, before. Now it’s a butterfly.’

‘Just shut up, will you?’ Paul yells.

‘I cannot go,’ you say, ‘I need to stay in case she comes back.’

‘Who? Who will come back?’

‘The butterfly . . . ’

‘Listen to me you fucking Sarouk, there is no butterfly and we are leaving.’ Paul grabs your arm and pulls you outside the room. You are helpless, weak, tired from thinking about moments that are not this one and will never be. It all happens fast, as these things happen when you have no wish to be part of them. You leave behind the cold stones of the old castle, you leave behind the road between the mountains, you leave behind the car and when you open your eyes again there is only a stiff, scratchy blanket against your skin and the heavy breathing of man so big that armies fight on his chin and ships sail between his eyebrows.



You stare at the man. He does not seem to notice you. His back, massive as it is,

seems to be pushing the wall as if to break it. He seems to be struggling to sit comfortably on the narrow wooden bench. His arms are tied in front him, his lips pushed together, his eyes shut. 'Excuse me,' you say. The man opens his right eye and looks at you from the corner. 'Where am I?' He shuts his eye again. You lean back on the uncomfortable bed and you look at the ceiling. It's enveloped in spider webs so thick that the stones are almost completely covered.

'You!' the man says. You turn to look at him. 'You AOS?'

'AOS? No, no . . . '

'Hmm . . . '

'I . . . '

'We are at Emesoun Kalesi.'

'Emesoun?'

'Evet.'

'Kalesi?'

'The castle. Zindan,' says the man and points downwards with his index finger.

'I'm Nikos,' you say.

'Salih or Mehmeti Ali.'

'Or?'

'I have two names.'

'Why are you here?' The man smiles.

'Why you here?' he says and breaks into a laugh so strong the walls are shaking.

'I don't know,' you say as you watch small stones and soil fall around the room.

'AOS, that's why you here.'

'No . . . I said not.'

'All Yunanlar are here for AOS.'

'Not me!'

‘And all Türkler are here for AOS.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You little, you don’t understand.’

‘Are we prisoners?’

‘Evet.’

You decide to close your eyes and sleep. Maybe this is all a dream, maybe when you wake up things would be normal again. Normal? And what is normal? Sleep will fix it, sleep can fix anything. From the corner of the cell you hear the two-name man, Salih or Mehmet Ali, humming a song. ‘This is how the birds on the rooftops sing,’ he says.

The whistling, a deep, warm lullaby, carries you away. You dream of rooms made out of glass and dusty roads. You hold a spade and you bring it with force on the glass. It cracks. One, two, three. You try again. The cracks shed tears. Again, again, again. And it breaks. In one million pieces, the glass room collapses around you. One, two, three. You take a step. And one more and one more. You are barefoot, dust makes its way between your toes. Birds, so many birds but no rooftops. They sing. The road is empty, full of songs. You look for the rooftops. That’s where the birds are. On the rooftops. The world around you is shaking. You are shaking. This is a dream. One, two, three. You open your eyes. The blond face in front of you smiles crookedly. ‘Rise and shine,’ he says.

CRYSTAL SKIN

A bare room. Two chairs. A table. The man is short and fat. Too short and too fat. The buttons on his shirt are struggling to keep him unexposed.

‘You speak English?’ A friendly voice, soft.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you think you need an interpreter?’

‘Uh . . . I’m not sure.’ He leans towards you. His breath smells of fresh mint and metal.

‘Do you need someone to translate what I say in Greek?’

‘No.’

‘Good, good. Let’s proceed. Name?’

‘Nikos Georgiou.’

‘Nikos . . . ’

‘Nikolaos.’

‘N-i- . . . ’

‘K-o-l-a-o-s.’

‘A-o-s.’

‘Yes.’

‘Age?’

You count. Age . . .

‘Seventeen?’

‘You are not sure?’

‘Nineteen . . . ’

‘Seventeen or nineteen?’

‘Nineteen. I think.’

‘Nineteen.’

‘So Nikolaos, are you a member of AOS?’

‘Nikos. My name is Nikos.’

‘You said, here I wrote it, Nikolaos.’

‘Yes but everybody calls me Niko.’

‘Niko or Nikos?’

‘It depends, it’s . . . ’

‘Nikolaos. That is what I will call you! Nikolaos are you a member of AOS?’

‘No.’

‘You did not take the oath?’

You hesitate. ‘Yes.’

‘Yes, you did not or yes, you did.’

‘I did . . . ’

‘You took the oath.’

‘Yes.’

‘So you are a member of AOS.’

‘No. I only took the oath.’

‘When did you take the oath?’

‘A few days ago.’

‘A new member then.’

‘They made me. I didn’t want to.’

‘Made you?’

‘They forced me. The General.’

‘Hmm . . . ’ The man opens an envelope that was placed on the table. You try to

remain calm. He shuffles through some paper. 'Here I have the testimonies of the soldiers who were present when the explosion happened. The ones who survived.' He stressed the word survive in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable. 'They said that you were intentionally delaying them by not allowing them to look through the baskets you were carrying.'

'Wine and olives.'

'What?'

'Wine and olives. In the baskets I was carrying, wine and olives. From the monastery.'

'There was an explosion.'

'They said the baskets were full of wine and olives.'

'The soldiers said that you wouldn't let them open the baskets.'

'The monks said not to open the baskets.'

'The monks work with AOS.'

The monks. In the black raisons, one behind the other, never-ending lines of monks, like ants, wax faces, curly beards, the sweet taste of communion.

'I don't know.'

'You were at the monastery before the explosion.'

'Yes.'

'The monks gave you the baskets?'

'Yes. With wine and olives.'

'What about the General?'

'He was there.'

'At the monastery?'

'Yes.'

'And what was he doing at the monastery?'

'I don't know.'

‘If you cooperate . . . ’

It takes you back, that small phrase. If you cooperate . . . The night they came looking for your brother. Your brother. Your mother’s face as they turned her house upside down. Your mother. If you cooperate . . .

‘I reassure you no harm will come to you or your family.’

‘I don’t know.’ I can’t say . . . You might not harm me or my family if I tell you but they will. They will not harm me or my family if I don’t but you will.

‘Do you understand? AOS is a criminal organisation, they are terrorists. We need to stop them.’ *We?* ‘We need to work together. Bring this to an end.’

‘And then what?’

‘And then what?’

‘What will happen if this ends? What will happen to us? To this place?’

‘Umm . . . ’

‘You don’t know? Will life go back to how it was before? Will we continue from where we stopped? Will we wake up a morning and be the same? What will happen?’

‘The British administration of the island will ensure that those who cooperated will continue living as before. We will restore law and order.’

‘What will happen to those who fought? Those who joined?’

‘They will be treated accordingly?’

‘Accordingly . . . ’

‘There will be trials.’

‘Sir . . . ’ He looks at you. You see his face changing. You see him realising that you are scared, just a boy. ‘My father . . . ’

‘Your father . . . ’

‘He is a prisoner. My brother . . . ’

‘Your brother . . . ’

‘Is a fighter . . . ’

‘Your father. Your brother.’

‘Do you have a brother sir?’

‘Yes . . . I have a brother.’

‘Do you understand sir?’ He gets up and opens the door. You hear him say something.

‘We’ll give you some time. Think about where your faith lays. Think about who can bring back your father and your brother.’ Two soldiers enter and stand at your sides.

‘Back to the cell.’



The man with the two names is asleep on the floor. His arm is placed on top of his eyes in an effort to keep away the dim light. He is snoring loudly, his enormous chest moving in the rhythm of his breathing. Nikos sits on the bench and observes the man. The man with the two names could be a giant. Maybe that’s why he needs two names. One is not enough to contain him. On the floor there is a tray with some soup and bread. Nikos looks across the room and soon he spots another tray, empty. Reassured that the food belongs to him he starts eating.

While Nikos is soaking the bread in the soup, the cell door opens. A man is pushed in. He looks frightened. He stands there, his eyes going from Salih to Nikos. ‘You can sit here,’ the boy says. ‘My name is Nikos. He is Salih or Mehmet Ali.’

‘Or?’

‘He has two names.’

‘Why are you here?’

‘Why are you here?’

‘They say I killed a man.’

‘AOS?’ The man instantly looks down.

‘Are you AOS?’ Nikos looks down as well. ‘Let’s not talk about it.’ Nikos nods in

agreement.

‘Do you want some food?’

‘No’

‘There is some.’

‘I’m OK.’

‘My name is Marios,’ the man says and makes his way towards one of the beds. ‘Can I?’

‘Yes.’

Soon Marios is asleep. So is the man with the two names. The castle is silent apart from the snoring of the two men, now synchronising. In the distance Nikos can hear some birds singing. *Have you forgotten me?* A distant voice reaches him. *I’m still here, I am waiting for you. Have you forgotten me?* And he knows he has. Her face blurry. Or maybe he can remember, if he tries really hard, if he squeezes on his chest, right where the heart is, maybe some memories have survived. A sunny afternoon, one of those that she would walk around the neighbourhood with her mother. Or a Sunday at church. Or a morning, walking to school, her with her friends, him behind her, his eyes fixed on her hair. Her hair. Yes, he remembers. She had white hair. Rays of light were reflecting on them. And soft skin. She had soft skin, covered in light blond hair. Tiny hair. When a breeze would touch her body, they would stand up. Yes, he does remember. And her eyes . . . No, he does not remember her eyes.

‘AOS boy!’

Nikos is shaken violently out of sleep. ‘Who is him?’ An enormous shadow is standing on top of him.

‘Mehmet Ali?’

‘Or Salih.’

‘He said his name is Marios.’

‘Marios.’

‘Marios. He killed a man.’

‘Hmm . . . ’

Maybe it was instinct or maybe the man heard them. He gets up.

‘I didn’t kill him. I said, they say I killed him.’

‘You didn’t?’ Nikos says.

‘No.’

‘Ama what?’ Mehmet Ali is looking at him suspiciously.

‘He was a general or something. Roberts. I took him to the castle.’

‘Roberts?’ Nikos is trying to remember where he heard the name. ‘Roberts?’ he repeats.

‘Yes, a Brit.’

‘To the castle?’

‘Yes.’

Nikos gets up and moves closer to the man. ‘What happened there? Tell me what happened!’

‘He heard a story about a treasure and he asked me to take him there. When we went in we heard a girl crying.’

‘A girl?’

‘Yes.’

‘There was a passage. It opened up in front of us where before a wall stood.’

‘Yes, a passage on the wall.’

‘And in there was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.’

‘The most beautiful woman . . . ’

‘Yes, white hair, long, full of sun rays, and a skin so fragile you thought it would tear apart. Translucent. She was . . . ’

‘Anastasia . . . ’

‘Mesmerising . . . ’

‘The man, how did he dies?’ Mehmet Ali asked. There was a sadness in his voice, an unexplainable sadness.

‘I think she killed him.’

‘No!’ Nikos cried.

‘No?’ said Mehmet Ali.

‘He shot himself. With his own gun,’ Marios says.

‘My mother used to say that a man can survive hunger amma he will die out of grief if he loves a woman he will not have,’ said Mehmet Ali. Or was it Salih. Or both. A lonely tear escaped his eyelids. Nikos remained silent. She did exist. Others have seen her. He tried harder now to remember her but it was as if she had escaped him and all that was left was a hint of her voice in the singing of the free birds.

REFLECTING

The bruises are pulsing, the scars are bleeding, the eyes are swollen shut. The bodies move slowly, from bed to floor, from floor to chair, from chair to wall, from wall to bed, cold, hot, burning either way, it's burning, the flesh, their flesh, like one, a shared pain, dry lips, mouths full of iron, it smells like the breath of interrogations that lead nowhere, it smells like the echo of truth in ears that no longer hear, they just listen, they listen to the hand that strikes, like the passing of time on the pointers of a clock, that passing of time, slap, slap, slap, and they hear no more, they chew, ears and teeth and the iron breath, chewing on chipped flesh, dry flesh, dirty flesh, full of pulsing bruises, bleeding scars, a set of eyes swollen shut.

She cries, she weeps, she sobs, she howls, she laments, she looks for other words, words enough to contain her actions. She watches, she reaches out but she cannot touch. Some water for the dry lips, ice for the pulsing bruises, bandages for the bleeding scars, kisses for the eyes that are swollen shut. She forgot her name, the wind has no name, the flowers have no name, the eyes that watch without talking have no name. The body she does not possess hurts, twists in pain. Only eyes, eyes that are not there, only those.

In darkness it's bearable, in darkness they might survive, in the shadows they find sleep, only sleep no longer wants to speak with them. They call him, they beg, and he asks how is it that three bodies have four names. A gash appears on their arm and they hold the skin together with fingers full of calluses, thickened from scratching the walls, calluses full of chips of nails and poisoned blood. Another gash appears on their forehead, small and sharp, right above the eyebrow, it stinks of uniforms and khaki orders, it stinks of hunger and cold lentil soup. Wounded bodies biting on time and suffering.

Discussions with the white worms that make their way in and out of the tears, they question them, they want to know if they are dead, if this is what happens after the heartbeat stops. But they are alive, feces piles around them, they are alive, they puke torture, they are alive, they bleed. Hot iron hurts less now, or is it habit that kills the pain, who can tell. There were three bodies, were, where, here, the flesh stretches, wounds heal body to body, an unidentified mass, only capable of crawling, howling and shitting. Suffering has no language, suffering is spoken in those primitive sounds, where only vowels exist, deep, full of what makes us human, that little part that is us, it fills the vowels and they forget that once they stood in tidy lines of grammar and syntax, that there was once a thing called vocabulary.

How do you say enough in Turkish, one mouth asks, and the other drags a sequence of a's. I knew that, the other mouth says, I heard it before, when a mother was burying her child, I heard it as well, says another mouth, when a bullet found the leg of a man, I heard it too, me too, me too the mouths say. They speak, the way people speak when faced with death, in whispers, sounds stuck behind clenched teeth, the way people speak when they can see the end, and they laugh in order to mock the eternal sleep. Their whispers are shouts scaring away the vultures, they say look at us, hear the pulsing bruises, touch the bleeding scars, we are alive shadows of the men we used to be but alive.

They dream of women in cocoons, this moment is not real, this moment belongs to someone else. Dead men don't dream the uniforms say, but we are not dead the mouths reply. We will wake up one morning and we'll find our bodies between linen sheets that smell of mothers and cleanliness, we'll wake up to the call of fresh coffee and low voices in the kitchen, we will wake up away from here, to the place where things are the way they were before, we will live like before, we will eat like before, we will walk like before and we will die like before.

You mock death, how dare you, you mock us, how dare you, we will hit hard and fast

and without mercy, we will print hate on your skin and embellish loathing on your soul, we will break your nose so you can no longer feel the smell of the world, we will punish you for the voice you refuse to give us. You will answer, you will say, you will speak.

Speak of what, what is it for us to say, our mouths do not know the words you seek. We have vowels, those vowels of pain, that is all, we have only the vowels of pain. Take them, hold them in files, stamp them with official ink. The bruises are pulsing, the scars are bleeding, the eyes are swollen shut. There are no words, there are no names, only flesh and what is flesh without a name?

THAT FACE

That morning found you broken. So broken. Unable to bring your hands up to your face. Next to you the two-named man was laying. He was holding your hand. As you turned your gaze to face him you could see his eyes full of tears. ‘Niko,’ you heard him say, ‘Niko.’ But nothing more. Your right leg felt like a tree trunk eaten by ants on the inside. Your lips paused, half-open. You didn’t look for the other man. You knew. Such things we always know without asking. The last scream pierced you with such force that it broke your spine. Zavallı oğlum . . . My poor little boy.

Mehmet Ali, or Salih was on his last breaths. He was cold. He felt cold. Your hand, small inside his could sense death. ‘One last smoke,’ he whispered. He needed one last smoke, to inhale one more time through the long nargile pipe. The coal was almost out. In a small house made out of clay bricks, at the northern part of that patch of land that centuries before, the colourful people named Sarouk or Sarouiki, a brown armchair was losing its shape. ‘I loved her,’ you heard him say, getting lost in a face unknown to you. ‘Wet my lips and I’m gone.’

You asked, not with words, but you asked. ‘Who? Who did you love Mehmet Ali? Or was it Salih who did the loving? Who?’ His hand was pressing your fingers together, hard, with the strength of a spirit almost gone. ‘Who?’

Let me tell you a story my dear oğlum, my poor little boy. Let me pause for a minute at this moment, right before the big goodbyes and the final blinking of the eyes. Because some stories unfold with time, naturally, they spread and allow us to hear them at the specific moment when they should be heard. And there are other stories. Stories of the heart. Those who rarely hear on time. Those, if we hear them, it’s only when time has

run out. So let me tell you this story.

There was once a young boy, younger than you when all this happened. The boy was so big when he was born that he cut his mother in two and was later raised by two mothers, mothers he created at the exact moment of his birth. The first mother called him by the name of an old lover whose kisses she used to steal under the small bridge of the village. She used to say, that first mother, that the boy had hair as black and sleek as the old lover and that his hands, strong as they were, reminded her of the hands that once she placed her kisses in.

The other mother named the boy after her long lost father who perished in the sea. The name also happened to be the name of her husband, and thus the husband, who was undoubtedly the boy's father, called her the faithful wife and was always dismissing the first mother. In such a schism the boy grew. Right in the middle of it, bearing two names, two mothers and two loves. Year after year he grew larger and larger. It is known that children grow big with the love of a mother and this boy, with two mothers and loves grew so big that there was no bed to fit him. And year after year he grew so tall that they had to break down the door of the house for him to be able to get in and out.

When the boy turned into a man and his incredible growth had finally stopped he returned home one day with eyes glimmering. 'What is it Salih'im? Have you seen the fairies?' the first mother asked but received no reply. 'What is it my son? Allah be merciful, what happened to my boy?' asked the second mother but again no reply was given. In the evening, when the plates were set and they were ready to eat, he spoke. 'I found the woman I want to marry.'

Oh the joy oğlum, oh the happiness. 'Is that it?' the mothers exclaimed, 'Love, that is what it is!' They hugged him, one on each side, holding hands in order to be able to embrace him. 'Who? Who do you love Mehmet Ali? Or is it Salih who is doing the loving? Who?' The man smiled a huge smile and said 'Who else if not the most beautiful

woman of all? Who else if not the most gifted? I love Katerina!

Oh the tears, oh the sadness. 'Is that true?' the mothers cry. 'Why are you doing this to us son? A Christian? A pork-eater? Why?' And then came the worrying, talked in whispers. 'They will never allow them to marry. They might hurt him. What if he never loves another woman again?' The second mother, who had devoted herself in faith and tradition told her son that he should forget Katerina but the first mother, still drunk from old love, which like wine, gets valuable with time, stayed up that night thinking. And next morning she told her son, 'Do you love her? Do you truly love her?' And the son said yes. 'Do she love you? Does she truly love you?' And the son said yes. 'So you should, you must, marry her. Because a man can survive hunger but he will die out of grief if he loves a woman he will not have.'

Together they planned their plan. And on Meat Tuesday, the beginning of the carnival celebration, a group of guys dressed in scary masks, their faces covered with old sheets, knocked on the door while Katerina and her family were enjoying a quite coffee. And when the door opened, in they went, pretending that they were following the custom of scaring people and a big shadow, that barely managed to fit through the door, lifted the girl and run away.

You see it now oğlum, don't you? You understand how much he loved. Because he loved like two men, passionately and lustfully but also with devotion and faith. A Christian and a Muslim, oh my boy how the evil tongues spoke, how they lashed on the roof of the small house. Children never came, how could they pass the door that was blocked by curses. But there was happiness, on the table, under the blankets, on the soles of their shoes. So much love watered the soil around their house that flowers grew wildly, enormous roses and jasmine as tall as the cypresses.

You can see now the blood that stains his hands, it's not his own and you know it. Because they came for her, the Christians, years after they decided that she was not loved

enough, how could she be? They said he was keeping her captive, like the dragon in the old tales. And when they came, he killed them. Like the dragon in the old tales.

‘All Yunanlar are here for AOS,’ you hear him say, ‘and all Türkler are here for AOS.’ And he exhales a breath full of tornadoes.

A WOMAN

The black figure standing by the door reminded him nothing of the woman he left behind in Emesoun. The black figure lacked the big breasts that once fed him, the hair on her head grey and scattered. This is what happens in times of great sorrow, when you cry until there are no more tears, when your throat becomes an overused piece of sandpaper and your nails have been bitten until the pain pierces your knuckles at every touch. The black figure is no longer a mother, she is something greater, bigger; something she herself cannot understand. She is a country, she is a continent, she is the whole world. She is looking at the man in front of her, taller than when he left her, his skin tinted with punches and slaps and burns and cuts.

‘Pedi mou, Niko mou . . . ’. She is opening her arms and the whole world lets out a sign. ‘Pedi mou, my life . . . ’ He walks towards her and time is moving slower. ‘What have they done to you? Pedi mou, what have they done to you?’ Mesmerised by the sounds that escape her mouth, Nikos stands there looking at her.

‘Mother?’

‘Yes.’

‘You speak?’

‘Yes.’

‘Mother?’

‘Yes?’

‘Where will you take me?’

‘Home, pedi mou.’

‘And where is home, mother?’

‘Where it was before, Niko mou.’

‘Before mother?’

‘Yes my life, before.’

‘Do you remember before, mother?’

She is looking at him, tears rolling down her cheeks. ‘Before?’

‘Where is my father?’

‘Your father is dead.’

‘My father is dead.’

‘Yes.’

‘Where is my brother?’

‘Your brother?’

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t know, my life.’

‘How can you say that we will go home?’

‘Niko . . . ’

‘You speak mother.’

‘Yes.’

Two figures broken and dark are walking down the street. Curfew is in about an hour. They are not hurrying their steps. There is no curfew for pain. The soldiers are paper thin, the clocks are ticking abnormally, vowels are hanging on the windows, the silence of remembrance is blowing the curtains rhythmically, left and right, right and left, bullets are fired and they open up, flowers smelling of gunpowder and half-finished deaths. This is the country of now, of lost time and moments that could have been but are not. This is the place where the sky vaults over hilltops to conceal the self-inflicted wounds of a confused being. Look at me, the bodies cry, I am hurt, look, they are hurting me!

They don’t hurry, no, because the streets are no longer streets, at the corners you no

longer find people chatting, the shops have stars made out of tape across their windows. Somewhere a baby is crying. How the crying used to merge with the passing cars, the voices of salesmen, the call for prayers, the deep ringing of the church bells. Now, alone, isolated, forsaken, the cry travels. Hear me, it cries, I am tired, hear, I am tired.

They drag their feet; they try to keep their gaze up. She squeezes his shoulder – be careful, don't fall! He puts his hand around her waist- you are so thin, the wind might blow you away! One step after another and they will reach home. Home . . . They will reach a house. It has walls and a door. It has windows and beds and tables and plates. There are vases stored under the sink, there are forks with bended tips at the back of a drawer that someone forgot to throw away. There is a stack of newspapers behind the rack of coats and a mousetrap under the fridge. There is a garden. He remembers it – there is a garden. Full of cigarette butts that have gone brown and wrinkled as time passed. Inside their filters they hold the saliva of a dead man. Why did he die they don't know – nobody knows.

'Stop!' a voice breaks the musings. 'Halt!' And they stop. 'Where are you going?' We are going home. 'You need to hurry.' We will. 'There is a curfew.' We know. Step by step, we will reach.



A cool breeze has set inside the house, alongside the smell of loneliness, between the dust. Nikos runs his fingers across every surface, leaving behind him a track. A room. His room. A bed. His bed. His body, empty as it is, falls on it without a sound. He realises how tall he grew. The bed is too short, or he is too tall. Something doesn't fit. He can hear the tired feet of the woman he knew from before, moving from room to room. The dust keeps returning, it's piling up as if it's trying to bury them alive. Day after day the footsteps sound heavier, the mumbling turns into a voice. The bed doesn't fit but he can't get up. He remains there, the dust covering him, entering his nostrils, turning him

grey. She speaks.

‘Aggele mou, should I cook something for you?’ He can hear her opening the windows then closing them again. ‘I don’t know where your paper is. Look in the living room.’ She is washing dishes. ‘Boys be careful, don’t run inside, you will break something! Boys!’ She walks to the bathroom. He hears water running. ‘Aggele, come have a bath. I didn’t give birth to boys, I gave birth to pigs. Aggele!’

Nikos gets up and walks towards the bathroom. His mother, sleeves rolled up is foaming a soap bar in the tub. ‘Niko, where is your brother? Tell him to come here and have a bath.’

‘Mother . . .’ She turns and looks at him. Her eyes are full of emptiness.

‘Niko!’

‘Mother . . .’ She gets up, soap in hand, water splashed all over her dress.

‘Niko, where is your brother?’

‘My brother is dead.’

‘Niko where is your father?’

‘My father is dead.’

‘You?’

‘I’m here mother.’

‘My boy . . . Niko mou . . .’

On the bathroom floor they embraced each other. They allowed their insides to spill out in small tears. Their soft breathings filled the house; they swirled round and picked up the dust. Outside the quietness of night time and curfew joined their sorrows with the crying of a distant child that could not stop the begging for rest. The world was left standing, for a moment, yes for an alternative moment. Because in reality Eleni had gone mad, her son knew. In reality she wandered the emptiness of the house calling a dead son to dinner, caressing the hair of a dead husband before falling asleep. In reality she

had created another life where nothing has changed, a life stuck in one word, before.

In this alternative moment they embraced each other for long. They sat on a pool of tears. They knew that there was no such thing as before. It was long lost and gone. But this moment, this very moment, Nikos only wanted to inhale his mother's smell, to hold her tight, so tight, so she could believe that he was there, that he was not dead. And the days went by, one by one, like the steps of two figures making their way home just an hour before curfew. She called her husband to come to the table and have lunch, she washed her son's clothes and she sat with them and had coffee –you want more darling?

Nikos never heard her voice again saying his name. She knew he was there, she knew he was with her. He caught her staring at him from across the room and some times she would just hug him without reason and she would hold him for hours. No words. Just before hanging herself from the chandelier in the living room she said: 'All Greeks suffer because of AOS, and all Turks suffer because of AOS.'



NEX

FOREVER

Sarouiki, with your golden sand and you bluest of the blue waters. Your skirts caressed by the Mediterranean, your hills kissed by the burning sun of the Levant. Sarouiki with your big nose sticking up, facing the sky, breathing in the salt, the bitterness. Sarouiki how much they loved you, how much they hurt you. These men you gave birth to and you nourished, oh these men. But I will leave you for now, I leave you to enjoy your last times with the sea, your last breathing through your forests full of crying cypresses.



There were talks around the cities about the great plan proposed by the General. With hands red from blood he participated in negotiations in an effort to achieve with pens and paper what guns and khaki dreams could not; to unite Sarouiki once and for all with the motherland. The proposed agreement turned the faceless General in a beast, pacing up and down offices, screaming in his head what his lips could not say.

SAROUIKI TO BE GRANTED INDEPENDENCE

SELF-DETERMINATION? THE FATE OF SAROUIKI

GREEK PRESIDENT SAYS SAROUIKIANS SHOULD ACCEPT

SAROUIKI --ANOTHER CYPRUS?

AOS TO NEGOTIATE ONCE AGAIN

Scanning the papers lined across the small kiosk, Nikos thought of the hideout where he met Loukas. With the cigarette resting on his ear, the only thing about him that did not change. The red booklet containing the names of those executed was hidden away in Niko's back pocket. Two pictures in sepia colours, two faces he could not recall in flesh. Just ink and paper and the smell of pages touched by humidity.

Name: Aggelos Georgiou

Age: 23

Profession: Dockworker

Guilty for: Participation in the terrorist organisation AOS

Name: Loukas Kritikos

Age: 19

Profession: Unknown

Guilty for: Participation in the terrorist organisation AOS

It did not matter anymore. Everything was done. The voices stopped calling for union. There was a silence, sporadically broken by a whisper calling for the motherland to interfere. But the General wouldn't give up. Nikos knew it. He smelled it on his

breath, his stared back at it, the stubbornness, the spite. The words on the walls were fading, no more red letters found their way on the white paint. But there were other whispers, scarier than those calling for guns and bombs and sacrifices. The whispers of ropes being weaved in secret basements. Ropes so big that they could pull a country.

This came right after Niko's mother decided that this world was over for her. During the forty days of mourning Nikos saw relatives that he didn't know he had and friends who only are friends in death and tragedy. With their plates of food and condolences came an uncle who was missing his right dog tooth and wore stained shirts that smelled of fabric that got wet and was never aired. He put his hand on Niko's shoulder and said 'If you need anything I'll be here for you. A-n-y-t-h-i-n-g.'

The uncle started visiting Nikos daily. They developed a ritual of drinking coffee that was not cooked well and backgammon full of cheating and swearing. He liked this uncle, he was vulgar and dirty and he kept spitting unintentionally while speaking, but he never asked Nikos about his absence, he never talked about AOS and didn't treat his nephew like a hurt animal. It was during one of their conversations that the uncle uttered the word communism for the first time.

'The party is still active,' he said, 'underground.'

'The party?'

'Of course! The Brits don't scare us.'

'But it's illegal.'

'AOS is illegal as well.'

A week later the uncle had a proposition to make.

'Join us!' he said, eyes glittering. Nikos remained silent. But the uncle insisted. He brought him Marx to read. The book was covered in blue paper and was made to look like a school textbook. 'Look, if you are not going back to school, and who can judge you for it, then get your schooling at home. Read the man, read him and you'll see, you will

agree with him. Then you can join us.'

'Join you for what?'

'The revolution!'

'The revolution?'

'Yes! A revolution for all Saroukians. All Greeks and all Turks! Together.'

Nikos read Marx and Lenin and the party continued to work underground. 'Soon, revolution will come soon.' But it never did. Nikos followed his uncle to one of the meetings where he heard all about social evolution, capitalism and the classless, stateless society. And when they started singing Bandiera Rossa he lifted his fist in the air. When he returned home he forgot all about it. It was all in the moment, his vision was blurred by red flags, he understood nothing of it.

Something else was also discussed in this meeting, something disturbing. Nikos did not understand the red speech but this he did understand. About half an hour in the meeting a man with twig legs stood up. His uncle leaned to his ear and told him that the man was a spy who had joined a branch of AOS. They called him the Shadow for he was able to sneak in and out of rooms unnoticed, his steps silent and his breathing merging with the wind.

The Shadow stood in front of the crowd and took a deep breath. Nikos stretched his ears expecting that he wouldn't be able to hear what the man was about to say. Instead a deep, loud voice came out from the cracked lips. 'The General has commanded for a large rope to be made. The plan is to tie this rope North-West of Sarouiki and then using ships and man power pull the island towards Crete. The idea is that since the main issue during negotiations is that we are far away from Greece, when the island is pulled closer, AOS will have a stronger argument.'

'Insanity!'

'Pigs!'

‘This is madness!’ The crowd cried.

The Shadow was followed by the Dog, whose real name was Niyazi, a hard-core communist who gave information for the movements of the TDK.

‘The TDK?’ Nikos asked his uncle.

‘Turkish nationalists,’ the uncle replied and signalled Nikos to be quiet.

‘They have found out the AOS plan of pulling the island closer to Greece and have taken action. They are at the moment weaving their own rope in order to North-East, closer to Cyprus and Turkey. From the information I have gathered, their plan is to unite with the TMT in Cyprus and achieve partition in both islands.’

‘Crazy, they are crazy!’

‘Let them rot!’

‘This is insanity, I’m telling you!’ The crowd cried.

That was how Nikos discovered about the ropes. He kept his worries to himself as talks continued between AOS and the British administration. He kept silent when others would discuss the possibility of Sarouiki becoming independent. The next time he heard about the ropes was that same morning as he was looking through the line of newspapers. Opposite the kiosk there was a small kafeneion. The coffee place where his father used to sit. It seemed the same, untouched by time. The wooden chairs were still there, and the geraniums, a stack of backgammons and piles of playing cards on a table at the side, the sound of beads being counted.

He picked a chair right in the middle. Around him the conversations roamed. Greece, football, AOS, England, TDK. ‘The rope will do what the General could not,’ he heard a toothless man saying.

‘The rope will not work,’ another replied from across.

‘What do you want us to do? Become Turks?’

‘Who said anything about becoming Turks?’

‘Who will protect us?’

‘Do we need protection? We will be bosses of ourselves. Like the Indians and the Cypriots!’

‘See how well they are doing. Eating each other. Hindus fighting Muslims, Muslims fighting Christians. Union is the only hope.’

‘And you think the rope will work?’

‘Of course. A simple plan but it will be proven effective.’

‘And what about the Turks?’

‘What about them? Let them burn in hell, along with their Mohammed and their Qurans!’

‘They say the same for us.’

‘Us? We have been on this land for thousands of years. What right do they have? Sarouiki is Greek and it shall remain Greek.’

That feeling found him again, the piercing pain in his stomach, the dizziness, the foustanelles dancing around him. He felt the ropes on his wrists, he heard the chanting of union, he saw red flags waving, the breath of a General. The end was near. And what an end it was going to be. Full of salt and egg yolks. But let’s not talk of endings just yet. Let us wait a bit longer. For now, Nikos sat on the chair askew, his right shoulder pierced by the wooden stile. He breathed in the exhalings of Emessoun, in his left hand a set of dice was dancing.

‘Anything for the young man?’ the owner asked. Nikos fixed his eyes on the white apron, stained by coffee and full of cigarette holes. The young man... The man. What is man? No mice were left to answer, no wind wanted to respond. A man. He has two arms and two legs but no family to provide for. He has no son but he has drunk countless bottles of raki. He still didn’t make sense, alcohol or not. He has a beard, scarce, young, shy, but a beard. And long pants, he was wearing long pants.

‘Have you ever eaten a raw snake?’ Nikos asked.

‘What?’ said the owner.

‘Have you fucked a chicken?’

‘What?’

‘Are you a man?’

ECHOED

This is my day. The day of the great yes. The day of decision making and leaving. I stand in front of the question, a man sure of his answer. It was ready inside me all along; it was burning, yelling, roaring. It wanted to lead me to the path of expression, of freedom. It is there waiting, in that land that knows of my pains, that land that will understand. We walked hand in hand with this land. She felt our sorrows, she cried our tears. She was a mother that never ceased to be amazed by the persistence of her children to follow her steps. Yes, motherless as I am now, I will go find her, brotherless as I am I will join those who are looking for brothers to take care of, fatherless as I am I will find fathers with advice to follow. No is not the answer, staying is not the answer. I will leave this place that was cursed from the moment of its birth. Is this the way it should be? If this is the right decision then why I am hesitating? It was said before that when the question is put in front of you, the first answer is the correct.



You pack once again as if you were destined to be packing your whole life. Your whole life needs to fit in this small bag that went from just being an ornament on the wall to being your only belonging. The smell of goatskin bothers you, the leather fringe bothers you. One shirt, a couple of underwear and all the money you possess. How many leavings have you packed? Is this the last one? Oğlum how many goings do you still have? Every time you set foot outside this door a season changes, every time you head for the world, a revolution begins. You chase skirts and berets chase you.

Don't look back now my boy; there is nothing here for you anymore. No mother's smell, no hope, no loving hands, no sunny afternoons spend peeling fresh beans. Only

you are left here, remembering. And what are memories if you are the only one who can remember them, only passing time gone unnoticed. It's time to move on now, put one foot in front of the other, step by step, like before, heading for another search, another embrace.

Stand for a minute at the open door. How dry the garden is, how dead those flowers are, this fence needs painting, these walls need to be lime washed and dismembered. Emptiness is buzzing in your ears, abandonment is screaming through the dark rooms. You find it hard to let go. It is hard to let go. Uprooted you will be and alone. A child of the wind, with salt in your hair and pain on your skin. The road is full of boys like you; down at the port they sit and stare at the sea. But you, oh my boy, you have a destination, you always had. You are in no need of maps anymore, you'll take no mountain roads, there will be no fighters. Only the sea.

Step after step, we'll reach there. You'll make one last stop, one more place that needs your goodbyes. A window is open, lifeless but open. You move towards it but you stop halfway, in the middle of the road. A woman is standing there, her head covered in black scarf, her eyes red, pure red, the purest red. She looks at you. You look at her. She asks: have you seen my daughter? Have you seen a girl with white hair, have you heard of a girl with transparent skin, Anastasia, her name is Anastasia. I was looking for her, I tried, you say. From one end to the other, I walked this place; my shoes were eaten by the soil of this land. From village to village I kept asking. And in the end all I found was a cocoon, broken, empty, transparent, all that was left in the end was a scar.

She takes a breath and the smell finds her. A beautiful smell, the smell of beauty. She closes her eyes, extends her hands towards you. She can see it in front of her, the wonder of it, the memory of a skin that was part of her skin, of a body that reminds her of the way things used to be. Boy, she says, you are a man now. What is a man? You ask. You still don't know. You are a cruel man. Why did you have to show me this? Walk away!

But you don't.

From further up the road voices reach you. A parade of men, women and children, in frenzy, a state of madness, a madnenss full of joy, they pull and push and lift and laugh hysterically, words hit their teeth as they rush out of their mouths, words full of heated hate and love for soil and territory and abstracts that they will never understand, it mends their ripped clothes that hate, it straightens their crooked spines, it fixes their rotten teeth and they feel strong and young and invisible.

You take a few steps back, out of their way. As they approach, you can see that they are carrying a huge rope. In pairs they hold it, with their arms around it in a tight embrace. You notice that it's made out of plies, strands and yarns, braided together in a variety of colours, using different techniques, from twisting tightly to plaits in complex structures. Patterns are formed where strands intertwine. Textiles, wire, hair zigzagging. Beads glitter and evil eyes, blue and cold, stare right back at you. Children carry parts of it on their heads with great smiles exposing white teeth and they sing. 'A good Turk is a dead Turk, a good Turk is a dead Turk, a good Turk is a dead Turk . . . '

In groups they go, the workers and the sick men with the bended backs. The women with their dresses full of flowers and the children holding on to their hem. A joyful parade, songs floating over them, they are a big, happy family, they hold hands and they enjoy being with each other. They are marching, they are soldiers without guns. There is so much colour on them. They are grey, a hateful grey. They will rule the world, these flashes of human flesh, these caricatures of being. They will hit the ground with the soles of their shoes, and they will crack it, leashes will emerge and they will take hold of them, they will lead like leaders, they will legislate like legislators, they will destroy every possible version of every possible future.

You see them pass, so many of them, their heartbeats reach you. There is so much passion. There is always passion when there is an enemy. And here there are many

enemies. Numerous, all hidden under one face. 'A good Turk is a dead Turk!' They stop for a moment. An old man, as wrinkled as time, looks at you. 'A good Turk is a dead Turk,' he whispers at you. There is a smell of death and cognac oozing from his gums. 'Are you all dead?' you say. The man smiles. 'A dead Turk . . . ' he says. 'Are you all rotten inside?' He smiles. And they proceed. 'Answer!' you yell. You run alongside them. 'Answer! Are you all dead?'

You grab shoulders and arms, you pull clothes and you tear them off. They are unstoppable; you chase them with all the speed that hides in your knees. Your lungs hurt from screaming but they won't listen. The bag slams against your body and there is that feeling of redness on your skin. Your sweat, you feel it running down your spine, across your eyebrows, on your cheeks. It reaches your mouth, a familiar taste of iron, your tongue meets that taste from a blurry time, blood. Are you sweating blood? The thought scares you. You run your hands all over your face and then you look at them. Red palms.

You look around, their faces are red too. Rain. A red, bloody rain. It soaks you. They don't seem to mind. Their singing does not stop. Their marching does not stop. Their hate does not stop. Such is their rhythm that they don't seem to be moving. Only you are. You and your tired legs, you and your screams, you and the rain full of blood. As you get closer to the port the rain dies out. It only leaves behind the stains, as if the whole world was wounded.

You see the ships and the boats, calm and free on the sea. Around them the rain is being washed out by the blue waters. You stop. Steps away from your leavings. You are not ready, you are not sure. How can one be? When you have tried so hard but did not succeed. A girl with white hair, a girl with translucent skin, a girl with the world in her eyes. She could have saved you all. Because saving is a chain of events. Saving is like walking. One step brings the other, one step leads to the next. You would have saved her

from the veil, from the dirty looks of men, from rape, from cruelty. And she? She would have saved you all. She would have saved this country, these men and their women and their children. There would be no ropes if you had found her, only beautiful evenings of making love and jasmine smells. Mornings full of suns and fresh breads.

Board on a ship and go. You have failed. Now there is red rain and cracked soil. Now there are the reds and the greys and the blues and the blacks of hate. Nikos, oğlum it is time. Time to say your final goodbyes, to forget that there are weeping cypresses, that there are queens haunting the castles, that mermaids swim by the bays. Forget that animals are your friends and trees your companions. Forget about Anastasia. Oğlum, I did not know that this place was carrying such a doom. Evet, I was born with it, like twins we rose from the depths of the sea, but tell me are there brothers or sisters that truly know each other? Their true character, their deepest thoughts?

I tried my boy. If I had saved you, you would have saved her. Everything would have been different. I am only but a fragment of this universe, and so are you. Dust that leaves no marks after it's blown away. There are the bones and the flesh and the veins and all that gives us substance. And then there is something more. They call it thinking, or soul, or consciousness, it has many names. That is the thing that makes us believe we are special, that we hold a place of importance in this world. We believe that since we can think and feel then we must be special, we must hold some importance. And we wish to know if our actions have any impact on others around us. For most this is negative. They hold no special place; they have no special effect on the world or others. They are destined to be just another dot in the mass that makes up humanity. Others guide them; they make them believe that they are having a choice. Others though are indeed important. But only as important as they succeed to be.

I have failed you as you have failed her. We are equals in this. You have to listen to me now. For one last time. There is the ship, ready to leave. There is your way out.

Git!

UNTIL

Now it's my time to speak. Soon I'll be gone from the now. The boy boarded on a cargo ship. He asked what they were carrying and they said that the baskets were full of wine and olives. He gave them all the money he had. And they agreed only if he was willing to work for the rest of the fare. Now, don't you forget, this was a very special person, this boy who became a man without realising it. He knew his books and his stories, he knew the fictions that speak of how you pay your fare on a ship. And he waited for the mop and the bucket, he waited to be asked to scrape the deck and chase the rats. Instead they asked him if he could read and write and he said of course and they said to him not to be arrogant, he was not better because he knew his letters. They said that he could help with the records and he could write all that needed writing. They said that they would teach him how to weigh like they weigh in the sea and do the calculations and he would write them down in neat letters like the ones the teacher makes you write, round and equal in size. I think he would have preferred to scrape the deck. But that is of no importance. He asked how long the voyage would take and they said that this depends on the sea and the wind and the stars, and that they are moody so you cannot know. Two days, three days, maybe four. Once it took a month they said and another time it took two years for them to set sail. A tricky port the one in Emesoun. Actually all Sarouikian ports were tricky. Sometimes they would embrace travellers so tightly and they would never let them go. Other times they would spit them out on arrival and no matter the effort, they could not enter. They told him to rest now and wait. So he went to the edge and stood there looking towards the inland. On top of the island the red clouds were hovering. From time to time bloody spells would water the earth. The chatting was audible. He could barely make out

the mixture of voices and languages. For how long he stood there does not matter. What matters is what happened when he sensed the movements on the ship changing and the crew getting ready for departure. He could not move his eyes, his stare was fixated on the highest spot of the island. He was looking at me right in the eyes without knowing it. Oh, oğlum, right in the eyes you were looking at me but you did not know it. And I was looking back at him. For the first time in my thousands of years of sorrows and joys there was this moment which was worthy of my tears; I was crying. For the boy? Maybe. Or maybe I was crying for the ending that I have been waiting for so long and finally felt so near. I knew he would be well. He would travel because no land would be enough to hold him, he would search for affection in the arms that offer paid embarrassments, too scared of the possibilities of fragility and disappearance. Years later he would stand in front of his dream and he would let go of life with a smile on his face, but it is too early for that. The anchor was being lifted and he did not stir, the water was split in two. As they were setting out for the great blue of the Mediterranean I was chanting wishes and goodbyes not meant to be heard. And the further away they moved the more distant those great ropes were becoming. The distance between him and the island made hate and spite and sorrow and violence disappear. From that distance all that could be seen was a peaceful patch of land, surrounded by beautiful waters and clouds, puffy, swirly, majestic clouds full of blood that could not hurt anyone. All those clouds could do was to paint the earth red, paint skins red, and buildings and roads. From that distance he felt the urge to return. This land was not destroyed; from far away it was not bleeding. From far away it was just changing colours. But he knew, and I knew, there were no returns left. We could both just make out the figures of two crowds on opposite ends moving closer and closer to the sea. Then they stopped. Fleets approached both ends. Ships so dark they gleamed when the light hit them. Two great big ropes were lifted higher and higher. We were both guessing that the crowds were tying the ropes to the fleets. And then the great pullings

started. At first the island shook and moved a bit towards the North-West. People cheered. Then it shook again and moved North-East. More cheering. And booing. I looked up and I saw the cargo ship getting further and further. The island moved North, East, West, it's compass broken. Yelling and crying. Like nails pulling on skin the fleets dragged the ropes. Again and again. Dashing and lashing, screeching and splashing. Then came the crackling and the creaking and the cracking. Then I heard the boy cackling. 'It's an egg,' he said, 'stop, you have to stop! It's an egg! An egg! An egg! Stop!' The shape that was in my head for so long but I could not share with anyone, was now becoming visible. Faint lines appeared around the coast line. An eggshell, in such a pale brown tone that it almost looked white, brown stains across it, glossy and slippery. 'It's an egg, it's an egg,' they chanted happily. 'You'll break it, stop!' he screamed angrily. But the ships kept pulling and pulling. 'It's an egg, an egg, it is, yes! Look, it's an egg!' I could see the cracks, I could hear them form on the edges, seawater running across them, they looked like veins full of salt, eating away the exterior only to expose the yolky hollowness that was hiding inside. The cracks were getting bigger and bigger, expanding, branching out. Fast, faster than our vision. And then suddenly it broke. It opened right in the middle. The two sides were floating for a while. As they were drifting further and further apart, a yolk, yellow and burning remained behind. Around it the egg white danced gracefully. The red clouds reflected their anger on the slimy substance. The boy cried a silent cry. The egg was broken. Sitting on my chair I watched the pieces of the shell sink. As they were plunging in the water there was no chanting, no screams of hate, no gods. Only those silent cries when you know nothing and no one can save you, when you know you are part of the ending, when you have accepted your destiny. The red clouds rained no more. They hovered long enough to see the last remaining Sarouikians drown and perish and then they made their way to other lands. The ship did not stop its journey. It did not pause for the boy to lament for his lost land, for all the people he once knew but he

was never to see again. It drifted away speedily as if the port was pushing it away. 'Don't look,' one of the men told Nikos, 'there is no point looking at countries that are dying.' And so the boy turned his gaze away. That's where I left him. He was on a ship and I was on an egg yolk.

DAWN

As we were leaving the sinking country behind us I thought I could see Feriha. A strange thought since we were very far away but still, I could sense her gaze on me. The crew cared very little about the loss of Sarouiki. The crew cared very little about the loss of any country. As long as there were other ports, in other countries, they would just travel there and forget that they had even set foot on the lands that had been destroyed. But it was different for me. I was not only losing the lands that I was born at, the soils that I was raised on. I was losing home. And without a home, there could never be a homecoming. Where does a man whose land has perished returns to? I was leaving with the intention of never coming back. Still, like every traveller, deep down I wished I could one day say that it's time to go home. And when that time would come, I wanted to be able to once again walk the streets of Emesoun, taste the greasy cheese pies, feel my shirt stick to my body from the atmosphere full of humidity and salt. There was a certain consolation in the thought that the faces I was abandoning would still be there while I would travel the four corners of the earth. That they would go on with their lives, that nothing in their everyday routine would change. That upon a return, I would find them unchanged, the same as I had left them, not older, with their hair the same colour, their eyes of the same age, their clothes unaffected. Fixed they would remain and untouched by the circles of time. As every wish I had ever made, this one was not to be granted. There, in front of me, the island was dissolving. And there was nothing I could do to change that. 'Look the other way,' one of the men told me. I looked at him. A contagious smile formed on his face, exposing a set of pearl teeth. 'What's done it's done. It's over now. It was a shithole anyway, full old whores and cheaters.' I nodded in an effort of brushing him off

but he went on. 'I travelled them all, these islands, they look beautiful from far away, but once you are there you can smell the filth, you can see the poverty. Fuck those who talk about the lands of dreams! These islands are nightmares.' I pushed his voice to the background, nothing but a faint rant was reaching me as I was imagining the wonderful valley of Rastia, the casting shadows of Saint Margarita and Koulia, the alluring curves of the three hills of Alona. This man only knew the narrow streets of Emesoun, he only walked the stone roads in front of the whorehouses, he ate nothing but the spoilt fish covered in breadcrumbs in order to disguise the bad smell. This man never saw a girl so majestic, her head full of white hair, her skin translucent and fragile, he never longed for clean sheets as they were marking his skin with burning metal. By now, nothing was left of the lands, the sea had eaten away the soil and all the pieces of the broken shell. Amidst the blue waters the isolated yolk looked like a fluid sun, veiled and moist. As the ships were moving away from it, twirls were formed in the water, which were dragging the yolk in all directions, but it remained unbroken. I was watching it mesmerised, how beautiful this symbol of destruction was. And then, suddenly the thunder came, and it stroke that yellow sun, and in dust it dissolved, only small yellow strips, those last rays left floating. The thunderstorm came quickly and joined the red clouds. Thunder and blood, sun rays spreading across the Mediterranean. I was soon after called by the captain who asked once again if I could read and write. He then brought a weighing scale and he placed it on a table that had been screwed on the wooden flooring. He showed me how to calculate the currencies from one country to another and make sure a profit would be made. 'It shouldn't take too long,' he said to me, 'you just need to check that everything is correct. And make neat letters, I like neat letters.' It was not an easy task. At first the numbers made no sense, like a foreign language that you don't know the alphabet for. But slowly I managed to decode it and I picked up a rhythm. As soon as I had finished, I put the books down and I took a walk. It was already night and the sky was clear of clouds so I decided

to lay down and look at the stars. That vaulted starry sky reminded me of Manolis and I felt a twist on my chest. I woke up hours later. My back was stiff and unbending after my long nap on the deck. A splinter was stuck in my index finger, a sharp pain spreading from the tip to my whole right arm. I stood up and looked around. Spreading, at every side, as far as the eye could see, just the sea. I couldn't make out any country or port. Calm and still was the surrounding. Dolphins in the distance were breaking the velvety waters. Nothing apart from the ship and the dolphins could disturb the calamity of that moment. 'How long?' I asked the first man that passed by me. There was almost no one moving about on the dock and it seemed that there was not much to do. A while after, the captain approached me with a piece of bread and some cheese. 'Eat,' he said. I thanked him. 'Were the calculations right?' I confirmed that everything looked good. 'We should be there by the afternoon. A couple of more hours and you'll be able to just about make out the shape of the coastline.' I asked him where exactly in Cyprus we would make a stop. 'Limassol,' he said. I asked him more about the place. 'Are you from Emesoun?' he said. I replied with a yes. 'Then you will find Limassol very nice. It is very similar to where you come from. A port city, with all the ugliness and the beauty of a port city. There are many bad brothels and a couple of good ones. Restaurants for food and restaurants for sailors. There are castles and huts. There are Greeks and Turks.' And as he had said, after a couple of hours I could make out, in the distance, a coastline. I thought I could see an egg below it but I couldn't be sure, we were too far away. A coastline doesn't say much; I came to know that now, after all these years of travelling. But that coastline was different. It didn't feel like an arriving, it felt like a return. The closer we were getting to the island, the more similar it looked to my lost land. So similar that tears were collecting below my eyelids. 'What is that?' one of the crew members said. My eyes remained fixed on that coastline. There was something strange. Black lines, as if made by smoke were rising from the ground; a faded black, almost invisible. 'Smoke?' one said, 'Fire,' said

another, 'Fires it should be then, there are so many,' a third replied. 'Explosions,' I said. Because I had seen those black lines before, on my way to school, the day it all started, boom, boom, boom. School, a distant memory, all I could think about was the smell of chalk on a blackboard, the dust from it collecting on the desks, on our clothes, note books made out of bad-quality paper, red erasers that smelled of mistakes. Explosions, I came to realise, smell like school. I touched the splinter, played with it, the pain comforting me. I asked if we were going to anchor. 'Of course,' the captain said, 'If some explosions were to stop us from trading, I would be out of business.' I looked at him. He smiled and went on. 'This area is a volcano, it burns from the inside.' And he laughed. 'Did you think that it was only Sarouiki that was trouble?' And he laughed some more. We reached the port and I wanted to run, leave behind me another island full of gunpowder and hate, escape once more from the politics that pollute people. I wanted to leave but it was hard to go. I was worried that if I left, I would once more leave behind me a cracking egg. So I stayed. For a few months I made this island my home. Among these people I found faces that looked somehow similar to those who had perished in Sarouiki, I sat at coffee shops where men were discussing politics, football, Greece and Turkey. And when that wretched morning of July arrived, when the sirens sounded loud and strong, I managed to find a way to escape. Once more I fled and I left behind me people to suffer, cry, die. And I continued travelling from land to land, leaving behind me a trail of destruction and endings alongside the fatherless children of the women that had on their skin the faint smell of comfort. That's how I was given my name. The Storm Petrel.



Years later the Storm Petrel arrived in Egypt with enough money in his pockets to buy a house and live comfortably. He found himself in El-Karnak, the most selected of all places. He had lost some of his teeth and his hair was a patchwork of black, grey and white. His skin was the reddish brown of sea and a pair of glasses was framing his eyes

that had acquired a number of wrinkles. His hands were still soft, as they usually are when one has spent his life writing and reading. When the days were warming up and the sun was not burning, Storm Petrel took a walk. It was the first time he was exploring the narrow streets of the village. Doors of houses were standing ajar, women were yelling to each other in the deep consonances of Arabic. He noticed the small mouse following him and he stopped to look at it. He thought he could recognise it from somewhere but he couldn't exactly remember. In the low voice of small creatures the mouse said 'are you a man?' And the Storm Petrel asked 'what is a man?' And the mouse said 'follow me' and the Storm Petrel did. Together they reached the backdoor of a house which was opening up to a small garden. In the Storm Petrel went, and saw an old woman sitting under an olive tree. She was wearing a long skirt, the hem brown from touching the soil. Her torso was naked and her breasts were covered by her hair which she had tucked inside the belt of her skirt. Her arms were full of dangling bracelets and her feet were shoeless. She was separating the bad lentils from the good lentils in a shallow tin plate. She looked up and met his eyes. 'Taal,' she said, 'taal,' and she signaled with her hand for him to enter. When he did, she returned to her lentils. The Storm Petrel looked down at the soil, full of pebbles and small pieces of cracked eggshells, where all kinds of bugs and ants and worms were walking in a line. With his eyes he followed them, reaching the bare feet of a young girl who was hanging clothes to dry. The bugs and the ants and the worms were making their way up her thin translucent ankles. Bees were flying around her. She felt the gaze of the man burn at the place of some hidden wounds where once in a dream she was impaled. She turned and looked over her shoulder, her white hair falling gracefully around her face.

'Anastasia . . . ' the Storm Petrel said.

'Who are you?' she said.

'Nikos, I am Nikos.'

The bugs and the ants and the worms were walking across her shoulders, the bees were buzzing so loudly that they were erasing all other sounds. The garden smelled like beauty, if beauty had a smell.

‘Anastasia . . . ’ he said, ‘every journey is a return.’

Magic, Nationhood, and the Writer-out-of-Country

Chapter 1 | Politics and Origins

The quest for national authenticity

I can vividly recall the first time I wrote; the first time I put one word after another in an effort to convey a message to others, the first time I tried to use symbols and metaphors to express my thoughts and feelings. I was nine years old and my simple poem was deeply political. The teacher, as many teachers before her and many after her in South Cyprus, was trying to inspire in the hearts of her students a love for Greece and a passion to fight for the preservation of the Hellenic ethnos. It was twenty four years after the Turkish invasion and the separation of the island. The teacher asked every one of us to write a poem or a paragraph about our feelings concerning the situation. She wanted us to express how we felt about the brutal invasion, how we feared the Turkish soldiers, how those lands are ours and what we were prepared to do in order to take them back and achieve peace. I went home and sat on my desk with a blank notebook page staring back at me. I didn't know back then how many more times in my life I would sit in front of a blank page. I was unaware that that was the point when I became a writer.

I was raised in a family where hate for the *other side*, the north side, was not preached. We often paid visits to the neighbourhood where my grandfather was born and raised. His childhood house is located in a narrow passage of Augoustas and Theodoras, close to the tiny church of Ayia Marina. Houses now stand abandoned, empty; their windows are crashed and their doors remain half open. My grandfather often speaks about his neighbourhood with longing. He tells us of all the families that lived there; he remembers their names, their faces, and he recalls their habits clearly.

People started leaving around 1963, during the period that is now referred to as the ‘bi-communal’ clashes. The majority of the people who lived there were Turkish-speaking Muslims who resorted to ghettos that were created at the time due to the situation. In most cases that was their way of protecting themselves and their families from the Greek nationalists. That was before the Turkish intervention, before the invasion. My grandfather’s memories were my only source of knowledge about the other, the people beyond the Green Line. Memories of happy faces, of fishermen who spoke in a dialect of their own, a mixture of Greek and Turkish, foods that were fused together to create smells and tastes unique to that street, to that small patch of earth.

School taught me differently. Posters on the walls aimed at reminding me that there is half a country waiting for me to grow up and fight for it. I remember the two schoolchildren, a boy and a girl, pointing to a picture of the port of Keryneia — a slogan below them explaining how the Keryneia port has been under occupation since 1974. Both were wearing their school uniforms and were holding their heads high, showing pride and determination. On top there was the slogan that left a scar on every student post ‘74: *I do not forget, I am fighting*. I should better say that they are still wearing that uniform and that the slogan still marks the students, since those posters can still be found in every public school in South Cyprus.

Because of my family environment it was no surprise that my poem made no references to an invasion or an occupation, but it was filled with words of hope and an urge to communicate with the other side, a longing for peace. ‘Imagine that I give you a book,’ my grandfather said to me when I asked him to explain why Cyprus is divided, ‘but I tear the book in the middle and you only get the first few pages. Then I give this book to a girl in Famagusta. You speak Greek, she speaks Turkish. You are not allowed to travel there and she is not allowed to travel here. There are no phone lines. How are you going to read the story? She will not know how the story begins and you will not know how it

ends.’ I thought hard and I told him that this is unfair. ‘If we want,’ he said ‘a future in this country, then we need the whole book. We should all come together.’ This was back when the borders between North and South were closed.

My grandfather only went to school until the fourth grade, but he lived through the events that shaped Cyprus. The anti-colonial struggle for union with Greece, the so-called inter-communal fighting, the coup and the invasion. He lost good friends and many times he lost hope. Through his experiences he taught the most important lesson about politics: if you want to change a situation, then you should first try your best to understand how this situation was first created.

Unable at that age to fully comprehend the political situation that my country was in, I wrote purely out of sentiment. I was raised in a left-wing family with progressive views and from a young age I was exposed to what remains a rather unconventional idea; that all Cypriots, whether ‘Greek’ or ‘Turkish’, are first and foremost Cypriots and should be free to travel, live and work wherever they want within the borders of their own country. Political conversations amongst family members were often based on the effects of the British colonisation and there was no fear in being judgemental and analytical of the national heroes and historical figures.

The title of the poem I wrote was *Little Swallow*, and I was urging the small bird to fly to the north of the island, where I couldn’t go, holding an olive branch, and let the people there know that we are brothers and we want peace. Despite the innocence of those words, I have stayed true to those beliefs for the last sixteen years. As I was growing up, these beliefs were often challenged. History classes and books at school, classmates, friends, and the media to only name a few. Having to argue the validity of my beliefs led to my ongoing struggle to understand the Cypriot issue and a need to research the past in depth.

Cypriots have been struggling with their identity for a long time, mainly because of the

island's geographical location and the subsequent change of rule. There are evidence that the island was inhabited since the 10th Millennium B.C. and it was later settled in two waves by the Mycenaean Greeks in the 2nd Millennium B.C. Despite being consequently occupied by Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Lusignas and Venetians, the population managed to preserve a peripheral Greek character up until the invasion of the Ottoman Empire in 1570, when a large Turkish population settled in the island and challenged the fairly homogenous nature of the population.

Encouraged by the Ottoman policies, a division between the cultures of the Greeks and the Turks living in the island became evident. With the passage of time, Cypriots began questioning their selfhood. They could no longer be 'Cypriots'; they had to either belong to the Greek-Cypriot community or to the Turkish-Cypriot minority. For the population of the small island in the Mediterranean, self-determination was not about their right to rule themselves, but about their right to unify their territory with their mother lands. And this is something that both Greek and Turkish education has fed through the passage of time. The British period which lasted eighty two years, from 1878 until 1960, influenced the national identity of Cypriots, especially the years of the EOKA [*Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών*, *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* (Greek for National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters)] struggle for Enosis-Union with Greece.

To start with, it is important to look at the use of the term Greek-Cypriots and the effect it had later on. One of the first arrangements to be made by Sir Wolseley was to divide the Cypriots into ethnic groups. It is worth mentioning that the terms Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot did not exist up until that time. As P. Panayi writes in the paper *Ethnic Minority Creation in Europe: Cyprus in Context*, 'before Greek and Turkish nationalism politicized the island, the two communities lived in relative harmony'. Despite the mutual tolerance, the two communities spoke different languages, practised different religions and rarely intermarried. Arguably, it was this dualism that allowed the

nationalism of the two motherlands to utilize.¹

The division of Cypriots into ethnic groups during Wolseley's administration made the separation between the communities more apparent. The population was divided into Greek-Cypriots — those who were Christians and spoke Greek, Turkish-Cypriots — Muslims who spoke Turkish, and other non-Muslim minorities which included Maronites, Armenians and those of Latin origin. Wolseley's policies had a great impact on the progression of events from 1939 to the beginning of the EOKA struggle. Even though Cypriots were fighting for liberation, the struggle belonged to the Greek-Cypriots; a struggle for union with the motherland that excluded the rest of the island's population. This is demonstrated craftily in Ierodionou's book, *Margarita's Husband* (2007). The conversation takes place between Homer Kyroleon, a Greek-Cypriot landowner and his childhood friend, Vularbey, a Turkish Cypriot lawyer.

‘Well, that may be so. Don't forget my own father signed the Christian reform petitions of '72.’ Vularbey's voice grew suddenly sharp. ‘Even today our people are misled by poverty into believing that the Christian's revolution is their revolution too. A revolution led by priests and bishops. The lawyer checked himself. His tone grew warm and smooth again. ‘But times are changing. We'll see how your villagers feel in ten-in twenty years' time. Your Christian and Moslem labourers might not be such good friends then [. . .].’²

In the passage, the tensions created between the two communities are represented skilfully through the dialogue. The reference Vularbey makes to the priests and the bishops stresses the religious and ethnic character of the liberation fight. There is also the premonition that there will be a separation of the communities in the future.

As a creative writer I find this particular period intriguing since it is arguably the point in time when Greco-Turkish politics and the history of Cyprus changed drastically.

1. Panikos Panayi, “Ethnic Minority Creation in Modern Europe: Cyprus in Context,” in *The minorities of Cyprus development patterns and the identity of the internal-exclusion*, ed. Andrekos Varnava (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009).

2. Andriana Ierodionou, *Margarita's Husband: A Fable of the Levant* (Nicosia: Armida Publications Ltd, 2007), p. 84.

It is with the beginning of the liberation fight in 1955 that an urge to define a Cypriot identity was manifested. To demonstrate the gravity of that period it is necessary to understand the importance of the Cypriot identity for Greco-Turkish politics.

In December 1922, the Treaty of Lausanne was announced. It proposed the mass expulsion and exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. As Bruce Clark argues in his book *Twice a Stranger* (2006) the agreement had an ‘undeniably [. . .] cold dead logic about it.’ The agreement drew new borders, shifted economic assets and ‘as a natural consequence, people were being divided up.’ The result of the agreement was the determination that Greece would be almost completely a Greek Orthodox Christian country and Turkey would be almost entirely Muslim.³

Even though the Treaty of Lausanne was supposed to resolve all the potential territorial and domain issues between the two countries and be a solution to the Greek-Turkish dispute, it failed due to the fact that a very significant piece of territory – Cyprus – was not included in the order, since at the time of the signing the island was a British colony. From the mid- 1950s onwards, Cyprus proved enough to recharge Greco-Turkish disputes. The two countries entered a war by proxy in 1974, when Greek and Greek-Cypriot ultra-rightists performed a coup that triggered a Turkish invasion. This led to a de facto population exchange between the North part of the island that fell under Turkish control and the Greek-administered South.

The main difference between the two cases is perhaps the fact that the 1923 exchange of populations was not only of a bigger scale but it was seen as legitimate by both sides, whilst the expulsion of Greek-Cypriots from the north part of Cyprus is not only an open wound but an unresolved issue as well, both legally and diplomatically. ‘In part because the Cyprus problem remains open, the broader Greek-Turkish conflict has proved

3. Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger : How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey* (London: Granta, 2007), p. 11.

maddeningly intractable.⁴

The current situation in Cyprus played an important role in my creative decisions. 36% of the island is still under illegal occupation. In general, Turkey was found guilty by the European Commission of Human Rights for displacement of persons, deprivation of liberty, ill treatment, deprivation of life and deprivation of possessions. The Turkish policy of forcing a third of the island's ethnically Greek population from their homes in the occupied North, preventing their return and settling Turks from the mainland there, is considered an example of ethnic cleansing — one that aims to permanently alter the peripheral Greek character of the island.

At the moment Cyprus is going through one of the most significant periods of its modern history. The last time a step forward was taken in order to attempt and reunify the island was the period between 2003 and 2004. In April 2003 the borders, guarded by the UN and commonly known as the Green Line that is separating the capital Nicosia in two, were opened with limitations. People could now, after twenty-nine years of complete separation, cross to the other side. This was later followed by the Annan plan which was accepted by the Turkish-Cypriot community but was denied by the Greek-Cypriot community via referendum. Peace talks between the Republic of Cyprus and internationally unrecognised 'Turkish Republic of North Cyprus' have now resumed after a gap of about ten years. Once again the international community is warning Cypriots, giving them ultimatums and stressing that the Cypriot problem needs to and has to be solved as soon as possible.⁵

The situation is now very different compared to 2003. What Cypriots did not achieve

4. Ibid., p. 241.

5. Update: While composing this commentary, Mustafa Akinci was elected as the 'president' of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'. Akinci supports the efforts for a new federal Cyprus, which is why he is regarded as a *moderate* on the Cyprus problem. Unlike many Turkish Cypriot politicians, such as his predecessor Eroğlu, Akinci's loyalties lie more with Cyprus than Turkey. The outcome of the election can be seen as a Turkish Cypriot message of reconciliation, but also as a reflection of unease with the involvement of Turkey in North Cyprus. Overall, there is a positive feeling both in North and South Cyprus.

before was dialogue with each other. Both communities had become through the years, dependable on their motherlands, Greece and Turkey, to construct their identities. A vision of a common Cypriot identity seemed not only impossible but almost ridiculous. On one hand the Greek-Cypriots identified as Greeks by means of language, religion and history and on the other hand Turkish-Cypriots identified as Turks under the same conditions.

I came to realise that I am the perfect example of a fabricated identity. When I was born, I was given one, like everyone in the world. An identity that was based merely on coincidences like the geographical location, the language and the religion of my parents. I inherited one; through the myths and traditions of the space I found myself growing up in. And later on in life I created one — or rather, I re-created the identity I already had based on my conclusions on history. A proof one might argue, that nationality, ethnicity, identity, are nothing more than fictionalised versions of who we are, dictated by those in control, them being the church, the political leaders, the historians. Coming to the conclusion that the idea of who you are in terms of nation is not only fabricated but is also fluid, opens up routes unimaginable to those who choose to believe that borders define them.

There is no doubt that the EOKA struggle was a product of decades of suppression, it was a scream for justice. It is hard, if not even impossible to argue against the Greekness of Cyprus. At the same time one should not, and must not, justify acts of hate, aggression and hostility committed by EOKA. The balance is hard to find. Dialogue is what the communities of Cyprus need. It has, since the opening of the borders between North and South, been achieved to an extent. The most difficult aspect of this dialogue is language. Language is accurate not only to the extent we use it but also to the extent to which we understand it. And because Cypriots do not share a common ‘mother’ language they resort to an acquired one, English. Bi-communal initiatives like the *Home for Cooperation*

in the UN buffer zone in Nicosia, as well as on-line groups on the social media, use English widely in order to enable both the Greek-speaking and the Turkish-speaking participants to take part in the discussion. This is one of the main reasons why I chose to write in English, a decision that I will be discussing in depth further on.

It is the identity that exists below the surface that I was trying to explore. In a way I was searching for a Cypriot identity. I was aiming at challenging the historical reality by means of the magic and by doing so to decode the magical elements found in Cypriot traditions through the reality of actual events. 'Magical realism,' Hart says, 'is born [. . .] in the gap between the belief systems of two very different groups of people,' it is a dialogue of understanding, believing and perceiving.⁶ By choosing the 1950s as the set to write a novel, not only I was consciously following a tradition in magical realism, that of revolutions, but I was also aiming at bridging the gap between three different set of beliefs, these of Greek-Cypriots, Turkish-Cypriots and the British. By doing so, I was hoping to discover the space where the Cypriot identity can be found. I was hoping that by placing Cypriots, as one group with a shared view of the world, opposite another group, the British colonisers I would have been able to demonstrate that a shared identity does not only exist but can also prevail.

History and issues of nationality are evident in major magical realist works, like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and *Men of Maize* (1949). Both Gabriel García Márquez and Miguel Ángel Asturias deal with nationality and try to decode or understand it, each in a different way:

García Márquez approaches history with an anguished awareness that positivistic and official historiography is woefully inadequate to understanding the bloody history of Colombia. But, crucially, he does not reject nationality in the way that Asturias does in *Men of Maize*. Rather, he develops the notion suggested in the caesura between the perspective of master and slave in *The*

6. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang, eds., *A Companion to Magical Realism* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2010), p. 3.

Kingdom of This World that magical realism can exhibit a commitment to the political here and now.⁷

Similarly to Márquez, I find official historiography deficient in describing and understanding Cypriot history, mainly due to the fact that Greek and Turkish politics force the official history books to follow a certain biased view, while on the other hand works like *Footprints in Cyprus: an illustrated history* (1990) edited by Sir. David Hunt and *Imagining the Modern: The cultures of nationalism in Cyprus* (2004) by Rebecca Bryant, demonstrate both the ability to handle the history in a non-biased way but also the inability to understand the psyche of the island and the mentality of its people. This commitment to the political here and now, visible in works like *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, is what drew me towards magical realism.

Every journey is a return — the last sentence of the novel. It sums up a lot of my thoughts, from the beginning of the writing process up until now. The journey ended up being nothing more than a return for me. A return back to where my writing first started; a return to the childhood poetry, a place where the only thing that made sense was peace. I still question the notion of peace. How does one define peace? What state is it exactly? During my first endeavours in academia as a first year undergraduate student, I remember a lecturer telling us: when you don't know where to start, start at the dictionary. What he meant was that, if you did not know how to answer a question, looking up key terms in a dictionary could help you clear your thoughts or direct you to where you could go.

So much can be lost if you don't pay attention to the question, if you don't aim at understanding exactly what it means. This whole process was a question on peace, a question about peace. One could say that it was an anti-war, or an anti-conflict effort. I find that not to be true. I was not searching for what conflict is – that I knew. I was not looking for the reasons why conflict occurs – those I knew. I was looking for peace, what

7. Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel : Between Faith and Irreverence* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 90–91.

it really is and why in many cases like that of Cyprus, it does not occur.

I will take the advice of that lecturer and I will start at the Oxford Dictionary.

peace

noun

[MASS NOUN]

1. Freedom from disturbance; tranquillity:

'he just wanted to drink a few beers in peace'

1.1. Mental or emotional calm:

'the peace of mind this insurance gives you'

2. A state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended:

'the Straits were to be open to warships in time of peace'

[IN SINGULAR]: *'the peace didn't last'*

2.1. [IN SINGULAR] A treaty agreeing peace between warring states:

'support for a negotiated peace'

2.2. The state of being free from civil disorder:

'police action to restore peace'

2.3. The state of being free from dissension:

'the 8.8 per cent offer promises peace with the union'

Origin

Middle English: from Old French *pais*, from Latin *pax*, *pac-* 'peace'.

Point 2: 'A state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended.' This seems to be an accurate way of defining peace but it feels narrow. Does it mean that peace is

just that — the absence of war? And what does the absence of war mean? There are different kinds of war — there is ‘physical’ war, invasions where tanks, guns and bombs are used. There are economic wars, about money and stock markets that can bring whole countries down. And of course there are those wars that are fought by proxy — major powers controlling smaller groups in foreign lands.

Let’s assume that all of the above are eliminated. Will we then be living in a world of peace? And what will that world be like? Can we imagine it? In the first stages of the writing process I was preoccupied with these questions. I couldn’t imagine that world because I could see the aspects in our subjectivity that makes us prone to conflict. The *I* is socially constructed; our consciousness and personhood is moulded by our social environment, and can become intolerant towards what or who we define as the ‘other’ especially when our subjectivity is exposed to nationalism.

To understand the links between subjectivity and nationalism, we need to look at identity formation, with a focus on national identity. Richard Mole writes in reference to Hill & Wallace:

The international relations of states are thus now understood by analysts to rest on “shared sense of national identity, of nation state’s ‘place in the world’, its friends and enemies, its interests and aspirations. These underlying assumptions are embedded in national history and myth, changing slowly over time” as they are challenged, reinterpreted and re-presented, *inter alia*, in political speeches, media, culture, literature, history books and various forms of popular culture.⁸

The shared sense of identity is thus created through challenge and reinterpretation and is subject to change by the passage of time. Identity is used to emphasise a ‘sameness’ that can be both subjective and objective and leads to solidarity as well as a collective consciousness amongst a group that shares this identity. The fields of psychology and

8. Richard Mole, “Discursive Identities/Identity Discourses and Political Power,” in *Discursive constructions of identity in European politics*, ed. Richard Mole (Basingstoke England New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-2.

nationalism studies, treat the term as a core aspect of self-hood which, as Brubaker argues 'is invoked to point to something allegedly *deep, basic, abiding or foundational*.'⁹

I wanted to explore the environments that nourish conflicts, the conditions under which hate and violence grow. Was it religion that separated Cypriots? Was it nationalism? Politics? Or just different conditions. These aspects are ways in which we categorise ourselves as well as others 'as distinct races, nations, ethnicities [. . .] to create order out of chaos.' Mole points out the example of a gay Welshman to demonstrate how the categorisation helps us behave accordingly in relation to ourselves and other. He says:

[. . .] it is easier for [us] to treat [people] as a single group with a single identity and set of group norms and align [our] behaviour accordingly.¹⁰

From a constructivism perspective, since national identity is seen as constructed then it must not be considered as something fixed. Instead it must be viewed as fluid. Something that is constantly and regularly negotiated. A constructivist view could be that national identities are defined by the elites with the aim of using nationhood for socio-political as well as economic purposes. Ernest Geller, in his book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), tried to define the elusive concept that emerges from a discussion on the relationship between nation and state. He writes:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-

9. Rogers Brubaker in *ibid.*, p. 2.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

members.¹¹

I wanted to imagine a person with no affiliations to religion, nationality or politics but I couldn't, arguably due to the fact that such a person would be nationless. It appears that the obstacle I was facing in imagining an individual free from the rhetoric of nationalism is rooted to my conditioning with myths, memories, values and symbols that I use to construct my own identity and selfhood. Constructivism does not claim that individuals' emotional attachments to the above are fake or non-existent – on the contrary they are very real – but simply that the national group itself is a constructed notion. In an effort to resolve this problem I decided to create a character whose emotional attachments would be diverted from the conditions that cause conflict.

We say love makes you mad; it consumes you. Based on that I decided that the best way to rid my character of religion and politics was by having him fall in love. There are parallels to be drawn between this idea and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The basis of the famous play is that a boy and a girl from two families that are in a long-term dispute fall in love.

Two households, both alike in dignity
 In fair Verona, where we lay our scene
 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny
 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
 Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
 Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.¹²

Juliet, in the well-known passage of the balcony scene contemplates on why Romeo must be a Montague. She wants Romeo to deny his family in order to be with her and if he is unable to do so, then she will deny hers. The theme of social and family identity,

11. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 6-7.

12. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (1597; Project Gutenberg, 1997), accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1112>.

which manifests in the names, is challenged by love which is part of the inner identity. Thus the dispute of the two families, the Montagues and the Capulets, is in the realm of the outer identity, or better the social identity, thus love can overcome it.

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name!
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.¹³

She asks *what is in a name?*, because the name, and in extension the social identity is not the person. By denying his name, or by Juliet denying hers, the issue of social identity which causes the conflict, falls apart and the two young lovers can be together, by creating their selfhood based on their love for each other. In the same light, by denying or ignoring his Greek ethnicity and religion, Nikos the protagonist I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs no longer forms his identity based on his affiliations to the elements that construct a national identity. Instead he shapes his inner self which is dictated by his maddening love for Anastasia.

By contrasting the conflict between the British colonisers and with the sweetness of the first love I created the basis for the plot. The main character is blinded by his feeling and is unable to understand the reasoning behind the fighting. Later, I also discovered the parallel between the fight/search for union with the motherland and the search for that first love that has somehow disappeared.

I am quite fond of Umberto Eco's point of seminal ideas in terms of creative writing, as he develops it both in *Postscript to the Name of the Rose* (1984) and *Confessions of a Young Novelist* (2011). Eco discusses how longer stories, such as *The Name of the Rose* (1980), begin with a seminal idea and jokingly recounts how he wrote the book because he 'felt like poisoning a monk'¹⁴. He then goes on to explain how he combined his in depth

13. Ibid.

14. Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, trans. from the Italian by William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p. 13.

knowledge of the Middle Ages with that seminal idea and by adding research (he explains the process of coming up with the kind of poison that was to kill the monk), he produced his best seller. I definitely found similarities between the process I went through and the one described by Eco.

The seminal idea was the image of a girl with translucent skin, through which her veins and blood circulating can be seen. As I was discussing above, one of my ongoing struggles was to try and understand the history and politics of Cyprus, a subject that I researched a lot, which became the impetus for the formation of the novel. What remained was to research and put together the details. This is what I would call the origins of the story.

The initial idea for this project was to write a collection of short stories based on the participation of women in the liberation-union fight of the 50s. I reached the decision to work on that era after extended research on the history of Cyprus. One could go all the way back to antiquity and the first Greek settlement in Cyprus in order to understand the politics and nature of the country, but I was more interested in how the division happened. So taking into consideration the years of the Ottoman rule and the change of hands to the Crown, I reached the conclusion that the 50s are the years when the major decisions concerning Cypriots were taken. The root of the communal conflict and the later division can be found in those years and the struggle of the Greek-Cypriots to be united with Greece.

The first story I wrote was based on the seminal idea I mentioned above with the protagonist being Anastasia, the girl with the translucent skin. The concept originates in a popular belief in Cyprus that fair skin is equivalent to beauty. Thus the fairest skin possible, translucent skin, would make a woman the most beautiful of all. The story was progressively becoming longer and soon I felt the need to expand it in a different form, that of a novel. I opted for a novella which is of a length I felt more comfortable using.

The very first chapter bears the clear signs of the origins of the story. It might be

that I can see them clearly because it is my creation. Still I feel that there are clear indications of where the story originates. There are many cultural references, native to Cyprus, such as the idea of the old woman healer who uses herbs to heal and the eating of snakes or engaging in sexual acts with farm animals, such as chickens, as a rite of passage to manhood. The political impetus is not as visible here but the historical background can be. Especially in the first drafts, when the fiction was still set in Cyprus during the 50s one can clearly identify the historical research that took place outside the novel.

Rushdie in his Günter Grass essay says that ‘a writer who understands the artificial nature of reality is more or less obliged to enter the process of making it, and it’s not only reality that is artificial but identity as well.

And since to argue about reality is to be at once creative and political, it is not surprising that when Grass writes about literature he finds himself writing about politics, and when he discuss political issues, the quirky perspectives of literature have a habit of creeping in.¹⁵

To argue about reality, to try and describe it is a political act. Writing and literature not only aid in the construction of national identities, but re-make them, re-imagine them and challenge them. In the world of fiction, an enquiry on the realities that reinforce conflict and hatred takes place, through which the understanding of our subjectivity is visualised.

15. Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (1991; London: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 281.

Chapter 2 | Imaginary Homelands

Writing, Homecoming, and Nostalgia

In one of my talks with Marina Warner, we were discussing how one names a country that does not really exist, a country that was imagined in the space of a story and stops existing at the end of it. The main topic of our talk was my choice to name my fictional island Sarouiki and Professor Warner was explaining to me that it would be a great idea to add a meaning to that word, whether that would be a smell characteristic of that place or a product. She brought Cyprus as an example, as it was the initial geographical place where my story was set, and talked about how Cyprus is named after copper but there are also other connotations to the name such as the cypress trees. And then she told me to go away and think about the name Sarouiki.

Instead I kept thinking about the name Cyprus (Greek: Κύπρος ['cipros]; Turkish: Kıbrıs ['kubruɯs]). The name has remained the same since the 15th century BC, when it was first written down in Linear B syllabic script. The name is linked as mentioned above to the Mediterranean cypress tree (*Cupressus sempervirens*) but also to the Sumerian word for copper (*zubar*) or for bronze (*kubar*). In its classical Latin form it appears in the phrase *aes Cyprium*. It appeared that there was a connection between the name of the country, which originates in the name a product, and the fact that Cyprus has a long history of being treated thusly. Is that why, I thought, this small patch of land, has been treated as a commodity all these centuries? Is its name nothing more than a symbol of its suffering?

When visiting Cyprus for the first time, a person will encounter a riddle. Golden

beaches, clean blue waters, mountains full of cypresses, jasmine, coffee and mint all mixed together with barracks, barbed wires, army men facing each other with guns in hand and borders. There is a layer of fear and uneasiness underneath the coat of peace and the light-hearted feel of the island. Where hotels stand, blood was spilt over and over again, where clubs have been opened the soil was watered with tears and mourning. The same men and women that will offer you food and smiles will turn into angry people, full of bitterness when you ask about the Green Line that runs across the capital. And the visitor won't be the only one who does not understand what happened. Nobody does, not even those to whom Cypriots turn for answers. Such a complicated riddle it is that all you can do is accept that there is no way of figuring out the answer.

Then why this story? Why, I asked myself, did I want to write about this land? As a Cypriot myself, I feel somewhat obliged to do so. It is very common amongst young Cypriot researchers to deal primarily with the topic of Cyprus in different disciplines. It is also a leftover from our schooling where students are often told that it is important to educate those who don't know about our issue and keep reminding those who do. Keep the attention of the international community; this they say is the only way to reach a solution. There was something more though. I was always fascinated by magical realism and I knew that I wanted to write within this genre. Homi Bhabha, when discussing magical realism said that it is 'the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world' and Helene Price when talking about *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), touches upon the 'revolutionary ethos' of the genre.

Early on, I made the decision not to write about the 1974 invasion of the island by Turkey. As a subject it feels to me to be bridging the borders of kitsch. From the 'I Don't Forget' (Δεν ξεχνώ) campaign to the concerts next to the Green Line, such a tragic page of history became a mass-produced consciousness. Women covered in black with pictures of relatives at hand are exploited in the name of bad politics; crying children outside tents

provided by the Red Cross overused to the extent where their impact is minimal. I see the invasion as not the beginning of the problem, but as the result. The result of years of insufficient ruling and extreme nationalism. I was in search of that beginning. When, I was wondering, did it all start?

I could go as far back as the time when the Mycenaean Greeks arrived but that would be impossible. So I opted for the year when the yearning for Enosis-Union with Greece first came to the table. In 1828 Ioannis Kapodistrias, called for the union of Cyprus with Greece for the first time. After that various enotic movements emerged, especially post-1878, when the island came under British administration. Again, this is a long period span, so I decided to concentrate on the most 'successful' movement, or at least the only one with actual results, that of EOKA. I wanted to tell a story about those five years that changed not only the reality of Cyprus but also the Greek and Turkish politics of the following decades.

In the very first stages, I was unsure as to what exactly the story would be about. It had started, as I mention in Chapter 1, as a short story about Anastasia, the girl with the translucent skin. I knew that I wanted the protagonist to be a teenage boy. The main reason for this was the sadness I always felt for the young men who lost their lives during those years. Not the ones on the posters or the ones in the poems and the songs, but the ones who joined to do what they believed was their duty as men. Cyprus was and still is a patriarchal society where boys from an early age are being dictated on how to be 'good' men. The thought of young boys abandoning school and replacing pens with guns is heartbreaking for me. Especially when one thinks about how those boys were named terrorists, and in cases I will agree acted as terrorists, by not only the international community or the colonial power but also their co-patriots.

How would life be for a young man, during that time in Cyprus, if he not only refused to be in any way associated with EOKA but if he also openly spoke against it? Nikos,

the protagonist of this story, is not only the answer to that question. He is also the extension of my thoughts. At points I feel that his questions are my questions too. As I was reading the history of that period, Nikos became the route for me to express thoughts and concerns. Instead of developing the character from the outside to the inside, I did the opposite. I first knew his way of thinking and I then started seeing the expression on his face as he was talking about these matters, the movements of his body when he was facing these issues.

By that point I knew the time period I was writing about and I had a protagonist but not a concrete story. The short story of the exceptionally beautiful girl named Anastasia, was very much inspired by the story of Remedios the Beauty in *A Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Remedios, the most beautiful girl in Macondo, is a woman not of this world who one day floats to heaven in front of her family. Her character fascinated me since the first time I read the book because her existence in the plot is indeed very puzzling. At first I understood her as a commentary on beauty, physical beauty, and how that clashes with the fact that Remedios is almost unable to function in the world around her and she finds it difficult to respond to the simple aspects of daily life. Following that, I began looking at the character of Remedios as the bridge between two worlds, the real and the world of magic.

I was looking for a way to connect the story of Nikos to that of Anastasia, and I started thinking of the possible similarities between a beautiful girl who magically disappears and the search for freedom. This thought emerged from my reading of the poetry of Evagoras Pallikarides, a young Cypriot poet and EOKA fighter who was executed by the British colonial authorities on 14 March 1957, aged 19. When Pallikarides decided to join the guerrillas, he broke into his school and left a note for his classmates, accompanied by the following poem:

I'll take an uphill road
I'll take the paths
To find the stairs
That lead to freedom

I'll leave brothers, sisters
My mother, my father
In the valleys beyond
And the mountainsides

Searching for freedom
I'll have as company
The white snow
Mountains and torrents

Even if it's winter now
The summer will come
Bringing Freedom
To cities and villages

I'll take an uphill road
I'll take the paths
To find the stairs
That lead to freedom

I'll climb the stairs
I'll enter a palace
I know it will be an illusion
I know it won't be real

I'll wonder in the palace
Until I find the throne
Only a queen
Sitting on it

Beautiful daughter, I will say,
Open your wings
And take me in your embrace
That's all I ask¹

1. Wikipedia, "Evagoras Pallikarides — Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia," 2015, accessed October 30, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Evagoras_Pallikarides&oldid=688291376.

This poem is usually taught in Greek-Cypriot schools at all levels, alongside the history of the ‘liberation²’ fight of the 50s. Even though I was always sceptical about EOKA, mostly due to the views of my family and my upbringing, there is something very genuine about Pallikarides and his poetry. A lot of students find it easy to identify with him, mainly because of his age. From his writings one can observe that he was a true believer of concepts like freedom, an idealist. Young, fairly good-looking, intelligent and sentenced to death; Euagoras Pallikaridis is the perfect example of a martyr.

The way he spoke about freedom in the above poem, and the fact that he was of an age where you would expect a boy to be experiencing his first great love, led me to make the connection between the search for freedom and the search for a lost lover. Since my character Nikos did not believe in the EOKA cause, I decided that his search for Anastasia will be parallel to the fight against the colonial power. In a way both Anastasia and Freedom are notional instead of actual and both of them are difficult to understand. With that in mind I began sketching a plot.

As I was developing the plot, I became even more interested in the idea of the physical window through which I was looking at Cyprus. Salman Rushdie explores this idea in his essay *Imaginary Homelands*. Rushdie writes:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge - which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.³

2. Liberation fight: This is what the official curriculum names the EOKA Union-Enosis fight, post-1974. Arguably, this approach was taken as part of a general political agenda post-invasion, which aimed at demonstrating that the Greek-Cypriots did not fight alone and just for union but all Cypriots fought together against the colonial power. As part of this campaign it was also the argument that all Cypriots, especially Turkish and Greek, lived in complete harmony before the coup and the invasion.

3. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, p. 10.

The homeland of the mind, the fiction of a country created through the physical alienation from the actual place, can and does affect the process of writing. The locations, the colours, the smells of the space which one is writing about appear in the text as the writer remembers them. In my case this alienation was manifested in three ways. On one hand I was, like Rushdie, looking at the homeland from far away, trying to re-create it in another physical space. I was re-creating and re-imagining Cyprus through memory.

On the other hand, I was further alienated from the space notionally, through the language that I was using. And thirdly, there was the space created by time. I was writing in the present about events of the past. Rushdie goes on to talk about what he was doing while writing *Midnight's Children* (1981). He says that he was writing 'a novel of memory and about memory, so that [his] India was just that: ['his'] India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of versions.'⁴ The idea of versions intrigued me a lot. At this point I had already finished writing a first draft of the novel and I was not very happy with the final result. I believed that the version of Cyprus I was presenting was, at an extent, a representation of my anxieties and my search for a truth but at the same time I had not managed to break free from the rhetoric of the 'official' history and education that I received at an earlier age. I felt obliged to treat certain historical figures with respect; I was playing the blame game with the Greek-Cypriots being the innocent.

The urge to escape this rhetoric became stronger. I started thinking of ways to escape the historical context. I was looking for 'the novel that is the illustration of a historical situation, the description of a society at a given moment, a novelized historiography.'⁵ To see Cyprus through my own eyes, to create my own imaginary land, where I could novelise history instead of trying to follow the scraps of history in order to re-create the

4. Ibid.

5. Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 36.

past. That is how the idea of creating an actual imaginary land, a parallel place, one that would mirror Cyprus came to be. Within the space of the novel I wanted to create a version of history, a possibility of history, where an island almost identical to Cyprus exists, a place where the struggle of its people are almost identical to those of Cypriots. In short, I was creating a possible Cyprus, named Sarouiki. An island where history was novelised in order to explore the historical dimension of humans.

I was creating a home away from home. And this process made me nostalgic of a place that was not tangible. There is a beautiful passage in Milan Kundera's *Ignorance* (2003) on the concept of nostalgia. Kundera begins with the root of the word which is the Greek *nostos* for return and *algos* for suffering. He writes:

So nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return.⁶

He compares nostalgia with the Spanish *añoranza* and the Portuguese *saudade*, as well as other European languages that use words deriving from nostalgia. He then proceeds to say:

Often they mean only the sadness caused by the impossibility of returning to one's country: a longing for country, for home. What in English is called 'homesickness'. Or in German: *Heimweh*. In Dutch: *heimwee*. But this reduces that great notion to just its spatial element. One of the oldest European languages, Icelandic (like English) makes a distinction between two terms: *söknuður*: nostalgia in its general sense; and *heimþrá*: longing for the homeland.⁷

What I find even more interesting is how, as said by Kundera, the Czechs use the word *nostalgie* but they also use the verb *stesk* and the love expression *styska se mi po tobe*, which means 'I yearn for you'; 'I am nostalgic of you'; 'I cannot bear the pain of your absence', thus introducing the theme of absence. Also how the Spanish *añoranza* can be traced back to the Catalan *enyorar*, which derives from the Latin word *ignorance*. Thus

6. Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, trans. from the French by Linda Asher (London: Faber / Faber, 2003), p. 5.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

nostalgia ‘seems something like the pain of ignorance [. . .] My country is far away, and I don’t know what is happening there.’⁸

Following that, Milan Kundera goes on to explore the story of Odysseus from Homer’s epic of nostalgia. ‘Odysseus, the greatest adventurer of all time, is also the greatest nostalgic.’⁹ The Odyssey might be the ‘founding epic of nostalgia,’ but it is not limited as a theme to the great epics. Magical realists have also used nostalgia in their writing. Christopher Warnes in *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial novel* (2009), compares the treatment of nostalgia in the works of both Miguel Ángel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez. Warnes argues that *Men of Maize* (1949) is charged with ‘a longing to find ways of reclaiming something of what has been lost by taking seriously myth as a conduit of truth,’ and similarly Márquez is inspired by myths of origins.¹⁰

In *Living to Tell the Tale* (2002), Márquez says: ‘Nostalgia, as always, had wiped away the bad memories and magnified the good ones. No one was safe from its onslaught.’¹¹ Nostalgia is described by Márquez as aggressive. Its negativity lies in the fact that it makes you forgetful of the sad and dreadful memories and only allows you to remember and miss what was good. Thus being nostalgic of a place, a homeland makes you unable to recollect the negatives of a place and forces you to re-imagine it in positive terms. We remember – recollect– a homeland in a positive way by involuntarily choosing to dismiss bad memories.

Rushdie suggests that ‘the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience [the loss of a country] in an intensified form,’¹² in the sense that the nostalgia experienced is doubled not only by the physical alienation but also the notional. This experience may ‘enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal

8. Ibid., p. 6.

9. Ibid., p. 7.

10. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel : Between Faith and Irreverence*, p. 80.

11. Gabriel García Márquez, *Living to Tell the Tale* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 17.

12. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 12.

significance and appeal.¹³ Melancholy and place are interconnected. To be nostalgic is to yearn for a return. The wise Catalonian in *A Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), experiences nostalgia for Europe when he is in Macondo and the same happens when he returns to Europe.

Upset by two nostalgias facing each other like two mirrors, he lost his marvellous sense of unreality and he ended up recommending to all of them that they leave Macondo, that they forget everything he had taught them about the world and the human heart, that they shit on Horace, and that wherever they might be they always remember that the past was a lie, that memory has no return, that every spring gone by could never be recovered, and that the wildest and most tenacious love was an ephemeral truth in the end.¹⁴

The above passage shares many similarities in its treatment of nostalgia, to the *Odyssey*. Odysseus wants to return to Ithaka, he does all he can in order to fulfil his homecoming dreams but when he does return he is still nostalgic for his adventures, his travels and his achievements; he is nostalgic for his treasure which he could only retrieve by narrating his wanderings as Kundera points out in *Ignorance* (2000). Nostalgia brings light to the connections between ‘memory, narrative time and, inevitably death.’¹⁵ Retelling memories, sharing them, spreading them does not cure nostalgia but helps preserve memory. As Kundera says, ‘nostalgia does not heighten memory’s activity, it does not awaken recollections; it suffices unto itself, unto its own feelings, so fully absorbed is it by its suffering and nothing else.’¹⁶

Nostalgia is not remembering by forgetting, the stronger it is ‘the emptier [the] recollections’.¹⁷ The writer out-of-country and out-of-language who experiences this nostalgia does not wish to recreate the homeland by memory accurately, but to remake it,

13. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 12.

14. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. from the Spanish by Gregory Rabassa (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 408.

15. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel : Between Faith and Irreverence*, p. 81.

16. Kundera, *Ignorance*, p. 33.

17. *Ibid.*

re-imagine it. In the same way Márquez creates Macondo based on his childhood recollections and thus this imaginary place becomes the heart for both the narration and the treatment of nostalgia in the book, I created Sarouiki based on my recollections of Cyprus. This imaginary homeland is a mixture of childhood memories, oral stories and myths that have remained vivid in my memory, and an active effort to remember a history that I had not experienced.

Describing this place, starting firstly by the name, assisted me in the effort of handling my nostalgia. This imaginary, possible, Cyprus became my way of describing the world. And this effort of describing both the land and the history is, as Rushdie argues, 'a political act'. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie gives the account of a conversation that took place in a conference at New College, Oxford, where a number of writers including Rushdie were discussing the topic of the new ways of describing the world. Howard Brenton posed the question on whether or not literature seeks only to describe the world which led to a discussion on politics. Rushdie, following this idea, examines how 're-describing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it.'¹⁸

When the past is altered to fit the needs of present times and these alternative realities emerge, memory and the fiction of memory becomes political. 'And the novel is one way of denying the official, politician's version of truth,' Rushdie writes¹⁹. This is exactly what I was trying to do. Having studied the 'official histories' of Cyprus, those that were written by Greeks, Greek-Cypriots, Turks, Turkish-Cypriots and English historians, politicians and educators, I was aiming at telling a history that was mine, describing a possible history, a possible reality. The country I had lost, the possible homeland that I could have had, emerged in the form of Sarouiki, but Sarouiki being a place created through nostalgia had the inevitability of memory and death. It remained out of time

18. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 13.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and existed only in its own narrative space.

Sarouiki is not only just a place of nostalgia but a place of hiraeth. Hiraeth (pronounced [hiraɪθ]), is a Welsh word that literally translates into English as ‘longing’ but in translation is as tricky as nostalgia. It is a word that carries the meaning of homesickness. Not just any kind of homesickness but rather the homesickness for a home that you can’t return to, or a home that never was. This idea of a home that never was is very intriguing in the conversation of imaginary homelands. If it never was, how can one long to return to it? What is one nostalgic of if the place never existed?

The answer seems straightforward in the case of my writing. It is hiraeth that is caused by a homeland you know you are supposed to have but don’t. You wish to return to a place created in your memory rather than a physical land. Hiraeth is the concept of yearning for a place removed in space or time, just like Sarouiki. Time, in the sense of history or as way to place events in order from the past through the present into the future, is irrelevant. What is important in the narrative time of the fiction. Time for this land begins with the first word of the novel and ends with the last.

There is a sense of creation and origins. In the first chapter of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* a pre-history and a history of Sarouiki are presented. This history of the fictional place appears parallel and almost identical to that of Cyprus. I decided to take a humorous approach to narrate this part; a kind of game with the reader. We both know this story is about Cyprus but we will pretend that it is not. ‘On this island, that I have already assured you that is definitely not Cyprus, he lived amongst those who called themselves Greeks and those who called themselves Turks.’ I actively take the role of the storyteller and in a way I accept my role as the creator of this alternative homeland.

Pamela Petro, in her Paris Review article entitled *Dreaming in Welsh* writes:

So hiraeth is a protest. If it must be called homesickness, it’s a sickness come on—in Welsh ailments come onto you, as if hopping aboard ship—because

home isn't the place it should have been. It's an unattainable longing for a place, a person, a figure, even a national history that may never have actually existed. To feel hiraeth is to feel a deep incompleteness and recognize it as familiar.²⁰

I identify with the definition of hiraeth Petro gives and I also see Nikos, the protagonist of my story, as a character of hiraeth. He hops aboard a ship because indeed home isn't the place it should have been. It's alien and hostile to him; it forces him to be a person he does not wish to be. Home is not reinforcing his sense of self, instead it challenges it. The people who made the country a home are dead or lost. And there is of course his unattainable longing for a person, Anastasia, whose image merges with the image of that lost home, that lost place. For me, hiraeth is manifested as a longing for a national history, both a history that is unattainable but might never have existed. The possibility of feeling this longing/nostalgia for a place, a person, a figure or a national history that may never have really existed is what ties this idea with my creative work.

The reason for the nostalgia is not the actual place or the actual history, but the instinct that they should have existed. 'To feel a deep incompleteness,'²¹ is what forces you to go in search for what you believe has been lost. Nikos believes he lost Anastasia and in a way thinks of his loss as greater than the loss felt by her family. He does not set out to find his brother or his father because they represent the reasons why he cannot be with Anastasia. He loves them but he is not nostalgic of them. Even when in chapters 26 and 27 he expresses a nostalgia for the home and the family he once had, that nostalgia is deeply rooted in his longing for a time of innocence, when without conflict.

Nikos, like Odysseus, becomes both an adventurer and a nostalgic. His travels are not as great as Odysseus's and for Nikos there is no physical return to an 'Ithaca'. But he does return. He returns to an internal destination. By the end of the story, by believing

20. Pamela Petro, "The Paris Review – Dreaming in Welsh," 2012, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/09/18/dreaming-in-welsh/>.

21. Ibid.

or one might say finding Anastasia, he realises that he could never return if he had not left. In that final chapter, grey and old, Nikos is no longer Nikos. He is the Storm Petrel. Only upon his own return to a home of a sort, he is able to feel comfortable with his self. At that instance he can return to saying his name.

‘Anastasia . . . ’ the Storm Petrel said.

‘Who are you?’ she said.

‘Nikos, I am Nikos.’

The bugs and the ants and the worms were walking across her shoulders, the bees were buzzing so loudly that they were erasing all other sounds. The garden smelled like beauty, if beauty had a smell.

‘Anastasia . . . ’ he said, ‘every journey is a return.’²²

Alongside Nikos, I created a destination, lost it and found it by realising that it only existed because I was journeying in search for it. The nostalgia was manifested in layers. From the homesickness one feels when far away from the physical place he calls homeland I moved to the nostalgia for a homeland that would feel like it should. I re-created Cyprus by memory and sentiment and this effort gave birth to a possible Cyprus, a version of my homeland. And within the space of that fictional Cyprus I experience the nostalgia, or hiraeth for a national history. This was not the only occurrence in the creative process where I experienced different layers. A similar process took place in terms of creating structures and loosening them. Structures that at the beginning I considered set but discovered their fluidity as I let myself merge in the story.

22. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 201

Chapter 3 | Creating Structures

The articulation of the story

*There's the story, then there's the real story,
then there's the story of how the story came to
be told. Then there's what you leave out of the
story. Which is part of the story too.*

— Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam*, p. 70

An important area in the examination of the ways we, as societies, tell stories, is the morphology of those stories, the shapes they take and the ways in which these forms help us identify them, examine them and compare them. From archetypal plots to experimental narration, narrative forms and structures are themselves parts of the story. It is how the story came to be told. It is the articulation and morphology, which are parts of the story too. The study of the form of plots allows us to look at a variety of stories that might seem unrelated at first and draw conclusions on the ways we choose to narrate. Christopher Booker in the *Seven Basic Plots* (2004), explores this idea by comparing a diverse selection of folktales, myths, novels and movies in order to establish whether or not there is such a thing as basic, or archetypal, plots. Whether we choose to agree or disagree with Booker, his study remains an important contribution in the examination of narratives.

Many questions arise from the discussion on forms and structures, especially when the structures examined make use of multiple narrators and techniques. Storytelling

works in layers. A story starts in the writer's head and it develops as it is written down. The distinction between the story and the real story is usually blurry, especially when considering point of view and voice. When a story is told in the first person it is likely that it will be biased; it will be the version of the story as seen from the perspective of a specific character. It reflects not only the character's feelings but also his or her judgement on other characters. This is very prominent in Atwood's *MaddAddam* where the main characters Jimmy, Toby, Zeb and later Blackbeard become active storytellers.

Initially Jimmy narrates the events that took place prior to the biological catastrophe described in the two previous books of the trilogy, to the Crakers. Jimmy's stories are a story but not the real story. He alters the events and the facts to fit a biblical narrative of sorts, starting from a creation story. The importance of this is that it plays out on a basic human need; to explain how the world was created. Creation myths are narratives that are shared by every culture around the world and as Booker argues, can be placed in three categories: creation by God -or a mastermind, creation from a world egg - an object appearing the the primeval void, and the more modern creation of the Big Bang. Interestingly, even in a post-apocalyptic narrative, the need for stories that tell us where we came from appears to be prominent. The reader sees in Zeb's words the possible adaption of his stories to a cult or religion created later in the future by the Crakers. Atwood creates this cyclical view of the world – we have always shared creation myths and we will continue sharing them in the future.

It is no wonder then that many novels make use of the form of creation myths to structure that story. One can even argue that there is a creation myth in every novel. It might not appear in the story itself but it is definitely part of it. If we take as an example a contemporary realist novel like the popular *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) by John Green we can note that the characters seem to agree on a general view of how the world was created. We might not hear them narrate the creation myth but it is taken for

granted. In novels such as this the reader has a clear idea of the beliefs of the characters about how their world was created. In a John Green novel set in the United States of America in the 21st century, we can safely assume that there are two views; Creationism and Darwinism. But how do we establish these ‘truths’ in a story that take place in fictional places such as the one in my novel, Sarouiki, or in Atwood’s post-apocalyptic earth?

I wanted the structure of the novel to be representative of the creation and destruction of Sarouiki. A structure is a way to tell a story. It functions as a guide to where a story will begin and where it will end, and I wanted for the beginning of the story to mark the beginning of the country as well, in order to create a sense of completeness and to make direct references to creation narratives. Aristotle writes on the subject of completeness:

A *whole* is that which has a beginning, a middle and an end. A *beginning* is that which itself does not follow necessarily from anything else, but some second thing naturally exists or occurs after it. Conversely, an *end* is that which does itself naturally follow from something else, either necessarily or in general, but there is nothing else after it. A *middle* is that which itself comes after something, and some other thing comes after it. Well-constructed plots should therefore not begin or end at any arbitrary point, but should employ the stated forms.¹

Aristotle tells that the writer should not choose the beginning of the story randomly but instead it should be a beginning that sets the foundations of the story. Initially I started writing the story beginning from the point of Niko’s birth, what is now I AM (Ch.2), and used that space to go through his early childhood in relation to the historical events prior to the 1955 struggle which seemed logical since by placing the story in Cyprus – a realistic setting– the creation of the land was taken for granted. Later on, when I decided to change the placement of the novel to Sarouiki instead of Cyprus, I felt it was necessary to introduce the novel with a different chapter which would set the background,

1. Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 13.

thus I took inspiration from creation myth stories, and begun with the birth of the island.

I was influenced by creation myths of how the world came to be, but I applied them only to Sarouiki. A prominent element in creation myths is central characters, deities, who are able to transform easily. In the case of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* this character is Feriha, who transforms in terms of speech and adopts beliefs imported to the island by the various colonisers while, at the same time she preserves her deep primal knowledge. A Feriha-like character can be found in the first chapter of *Two years, eight months & twenty eight nights* (2015) by Salman Rushdie. In his latest novel, Rushdie begins with the story of the children of Ibn Rushd with Dunia the Lightning Princess, a jinn. The ancestors of those children become the main characters of the novel. Rushdie makes use of folktales of jinns and builds around it the world of his novel, but there is a central character, Dunia, who through her children creates this ‘new’ world where magic and reality interact.

Elements of creation stories can also be found in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The opening paragraph presents a heaven like, idyllic scenery. There is something mythical about the intact natural beauty of Macondo. The clear water runs ‘along a bed of polished stones, which [are] white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs.’² The egg being a symbol for fertility, of the new and the old, makes links between Macondo and a lost paradise. The world of Macondo is a world of newness, one that yet needs to be named:

The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.³

Lorna Robinson, in her examination of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in relation to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, notes on the subject of newness and naming:

The most obvious link to a mythic beginning is the narrator’s observation that the newness of things meant that words had not yet been invented for

2. Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 1.

3. Ibid.

them, a remark that inevitably invokes the biblical topos of God naming the world, and granting man the gift of naming each living creature. Fusion of art and nature, which runs as a theme throughout the first paragraphs of the novel, expands upon these implied parallels: the stones are described as ‘polished’, a word that suggests the conscious effort of an artistic demiurge as much as the natural and incidental actions of the environment upon the stones. This fusion foregrounds the concept of a ‘freshly minted’ world forged perhaps by a creating divinity, with a nod towards the creative powers of the author himself. It is a world, so far, steeped in mythical themes, giving a universal and momentous tone to the opening descriptions.⁴

In the case of my first chapter, Feriha tells of how prior to the arrival of the colonisers she had no language because she didn’t need one. On one hand this demonstrates the newness of Sarouiki – the island has been born with her as the only inhabitant and nothing holds a name yet. On the other hand her being the only person and with no need to communicate, everything remained unnamed. In this country of no civilisation, the colonisation is almost double in nature: when the first people arrive they need to name the country and everything in it before they can claim it.

I had no language before that, I never needed one. You might think that I wouldn’t be able to talk to them but you are mistaken. You see, when you possess a language it is very hard to understand another because you think you already know the meaning of words. But for me words had no meanings because they did not exist, so when I first heard them I accepted them and used them as my own without any problems. After we talked for a while and I grew accustomed of their language and their way of communicating, the men asked me what this land was called. I explained as best as I could that this land had no name. ‘But how?’ said this one man. And I said, ‘let’s call this land Sarouk.’ You see, this word contained sounds that I liked the most from all the other sounds of this language.⁵

Mircea Eliade discusses how creation myths begin from a *Center* which holds the concept of an absolute reality. He says that creation ‘becomes the archetype of every

4. Lorna Robinson, “The Golden Age Myth in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” in *A companion to magical realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang (Rochester, N.Y: Tamesis, 2005), pp. 80–81.

5. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 12

creative human gesture'⁶. The *Center*, or the *navel*, is the beginning point from which the universe unfolds and stretches out. Charles Long in *Alpha: The Myths of Creation* classifies creation myths based on their *centres* and the motives that appear in them around the world. The first category according to Long is creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) where for example, the world comes to be through the thought or words of a divine being. The second category is creation from chaos where formation emerges from a pre-existing, chaotic state which is symbolised by primal elements or a primal object such as a cosmic egg. The third category is that of *World Parents*, where creation comes with the union, the division or the sacrifice of a primordial being. The following category is that of *emergence*: a hole in the earth generates creation. Lastly there are the creation myths of *earth-divers*, in which the world is created by diving into primordial waters.

Both my first chapter as well as my last are inspired by these different types of creation myths. The first chapter which describes the birth of Sarouiki, shares similarities with two of the above categories: creation from *emergence* as well as creation from *earth-divers*. On one hand the island emerges from the sea, where an empty spot existed before but at the same time it comes out of primordial waters. Towards the end of the story, Nikos discovers that Sarouiki exists on top of an egg which cracks, drowning the island back into the sea which gave birth to it, an incident that bears fundamental similarities with myths of creation from chaos. Yet, the cracking of the egg does not bring order or harmony to the world. Instead the idea of a cyclical view on the topic of time is presented.

As Marques writes in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, ' . . . time was not passing . . . it was turning in a circle . . . ' In the same light, I tried to explore this concept. Nikos abandons Sarouiki, which is being destroyed, and approaches Cyprus which is just entering the period of the bi-communal fighting.

6. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. from the French by Willard R. Trask, Harvest book (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc, 1959), p. 45.

And I continued travelling from land to land, leaving behind me a trail of destruction and endings alongside the fatherless children of the women that had on their skin the faint smell of comfort. That's how I was given my name. The Storm Petrel.⁷

In this circle of destruction that Nikos, or the Storm Petrel describes, there are the births of new lands and their deaths; it is an eternal return. The eternal return as a concept describes a universe, or in this case a world that across infinite time and space, reoccurs infinitely. It is a very old philosophical idea that can be traced back to Indian and Ancient Egyptian thinking, as well as the Pythagoreans and the Stoics. It is also a concept that both Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer dealt with.

While originally I had no intention of basing the novel on the idea of the eternal return, the decision to switch from Cyprus to Sarouiki, brought this concept forward. It emerged naturally from the structure of the novel itself as it was adapted. As explored earlier, the beginning of a story should set the foundations of the plot. The second part of Aristotle's remark on completeness concerns the middle which 'itself comes after something, and some other thing comes after it.'⁸ Following this idea, the middle of my plot extended from the creation of the country to the time of Nikos' birth and the beginning of the anti-colonial struggle which would later be followed by the destruction of the island.

The main issue I faced was very practical. I was searching for a way to structure my story with the following in mind: a historical context and a structure that would enable me to tackle the task of writing a longer piece for the first time. In the past I had only written short stories, especially micro-fictions and flash-fictions, but after trying to write about the theme of the colonial struggle in Cyprus I soon realised that the length I was using was not appropriate. Still, shorter fiction was the space I felt more comfortable in and that led me to the conclusion that using a strict structure, with smaller sections,

7. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 200

8. Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 13.

would help.

The structure I first created was loosely based on Oulipian practises. Oulipo, or *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, is a body of literature that uses constrained writing techniques. It began as a workshop of potential literature as the name suggests, by mainly French speaking writers and poets, in the 1960's. The founders are Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais and some prominent members are novelists Georges Perec and Italo Calvino, poets Oskar Pastior, Jean Lescure and poet/mathematician Jacques Roubaud.

In the 2013 article⁹ *Oulipo: freeing literature by tightening its rules*, Andrew Gallix says that 'Oulipians are into literary bondage. Their fetish is predicated on the notion that writing is always constrained by something, be it simply time or language itself.' When a writer sets out to write a story, there are these constrains that are already there which affect the creative process in various ways. In my experience, this story was already constrained before the creation of my loosely constrained structure.

The first constraint was, as mentioned above, the theme itself along with the historical context. Choosing a specific historical period diverts the writer from descriptions of contemporary realities. One cannot say that a character heard news on the radio if the radio was not invented then. To add an extra layer of constraint, a historical period will also affect the characters, and the main plot will be formed around the events of that time. A story placed during the EOKA years in Cyprus will, in one way or another, be a story about EOKA. This means that the writer is restricted by history itself.

Inspired by Oulipian practises, I structured the middle of the plot on the platform of the events that took place from 1955-1959 in Cyprus.

9. Andrew Gallix, "Oulipo: Freeing Literature By Tightening Its Rules – The Guardian," 2013, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/jul/12/oulipo-freeing-literature-tightening-rules>.

Embryo – 1955	2 nd person	3 rd person	Internal Monologue	2 nd person	3 rd person
Larva – 1956	Internal Monologue	3 rd person	2 nd person	3 rd person	Internal Monologue
Pupa – 1957	2 nd person	3 rd person	Internal Monologue	3 rd person	Internal Monologue
Imago – 1958	Internal Monologue	3 rd person	3 rd person	Internal Monologue	2 nd person
Mortalitas – 1959	3 rd person	3 rd person	Internal Monologue	Internal Monologue	2 nd person
Nex – 1960	3 rd person	Internal monologue	2 nd person	Internal Monologue	3 rd person

Table 3.1: Chapter Breakdown

I created a plan which I followed in order to achieve the structure. It consisted of thirty chapters representing the thirty years of political transition in Cyprus, from 1930 when the ‘National Radicalistic Union’ was formed up until the 16th of August 1960 when Cyprus attained its independence under the Zürich-London agreement. The main focus was the five years of the EOKA fight for Union (Enosis) with Greece.

There were six parts in the novella and in each one, five chapters were included, which I kept as a structure even after the change of country. In these chapters different narration techniques were used, such as second person narration, third person narration and internal monologue, as demonstrated in the table above. Each chapter was to be about 2,000 words. The structure aimed at allowing me to keep track of the plot and helped me maintain the connection between the story I was telling and the historical events of the time.

The first four parts are named after the life stages that some insects undergo during their transformation. The pupal stage is found only in homometabolous insects, those that undergo a complete metamorphosis, which includes four life stages; embryo, larva, pupa and imago. The last two parts are named after the Latin words *mortalitas* and *nex*. The reason for that was to connect the structure to one of the themes of the piece, that of transformations. Transformations is a theme that also links to the idea of the eternal return — something is created, it grows and expands and then through its destruction it is reborn again.

After a while, when I got comfortable with the length, the plot and the story, the chapters were slowly deviating from the original structure. I realised that this was necessary when I had to force some chapters to reach the 2,000 word mark. I found that the best way to deal with this was to allow each chapter to develop to the length that felt right instead of trying to follow the structure.

The structure is the skeleton of my novel, the body is the plot – the form of the plot. A boy sets out on an adventure to save a girl he is in love with; one of the most recognisable types of story, the Quest. Christopher Booker draws similarities between some of the oldest written stories like Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* and compares the quest structure to that of the more recent *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* by J.R.R. Tolkien and Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Applying Booker's theory to my work I can see how it shares similarities with other quest stories.

Booker states that quests begin with The Call, which gives a reason for the hero to set out on his journey. 'For the hero to remain quietly 'at home' [. . .] has become impossible.' In the case of Nikos the call comes from Anastasia's disappearance, even though Feriha convinces him not to leave straight away. It is after he runs into his classmate Loukas who read him a revolutionary poem, that he realises that it is time to set out on his journey.

Nikos said nothing back. Still holding on the piece of paper, he started walking away from Loukas, walking back home fast. He could hear Loukas calling ‘Re Niko, re Niko, where are you going?’ but he didn’t look back, he had to leave, he had to go up the hilltops and walk through tracks, he had to find the stairs that lead to her.

‘Fuck freedom,’ he thought. In his head the image of Anastasia projected clear. ‘I will find *her*.’ As if finding her would ensure him that the future would be as he imagined it.¹⁰

The second element Booker identifies is that of the hero’s companions which appears to be problematic in the light of my work and brings forth an issue with the *Seven Basic Plots*. In many cases in order for a variety of texts to be examined under a strict seven plots pattern one needs to overlook certain elements that don’t seem to be an exact fit or to tweak elements around to make them compile to the theory. Booker says that in a quest story the hero is never alone in his adventure – he has companions. In the *Lord of the Rings* (1954) Frodo has Sam, Don Quixote has Sancho Panza. But, Booker states that companion can also be ‘a large number of undifferentiate appendages’ like Odysseus’ companions. None of the two directly links to *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*. Nikos doesn’t have a trusted companion or a group of companions. Nonetheless he encounters various characters who serve one way or another as companions. In the beginning it’s the wind and the animals which serve as a link to the animal helpers in folktales. Later he meets Manolis and after that he is reunited with Loukas. But even if we take these characters into consideration none of them is an actual companion, Nikos is most of the time alone.

The most important aspect of quest stories is of course the journey.

The essential pattern of the journey in a Quest is always the same. The hero and his companions go through a succession of terrible, often near-fatal ordeals, followed by periods of respite when they recoup their strength, receiving succour and guidance from friendly helpers to send them in their way.

I find the similarities between *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* and the *Odyssey* fun-

10. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 62

damental in this discussion since there are more things that connect Odysseus and Nikos apart from the fact that they are both on a quest; nostalgia and homecoming which I discussed in the previous chapter. It appears that in quest stories it is not unusual to have issues of nostalgia since to travel essentially means to be homesick. By the end of their stories both characters realise that a physical return is not the cure for nostalgia. Odysseus back in Ithaca craves his old adventures and Nikos discovers that every journey is a return – there is a cycle he cannot escape, he will never find home. Their travels are not in vain though; they had to set out for their journeys and it was only by completing them that they could understand the meaning of home.

Booker identifies four elements in the journey with the first one being *Monsters*. In some stories the monsters are easy to identify. Scylla and Charybdis in the *Odyssey*, Shelob in the *Lord of the Rings*, and the Wicked Witch of the West in *the Wizard of Oz*. These are monsters that are defined as such by their appearances and qualities. Nikos never encounters monsters in the traditional sense, but he encounters humans who scare him, attack him and hurt him like monsters. The general and the interrogator both seem monstrous in his eyes due to their actions.

The second element is that of *Temptations* which is more straightforward in the light of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*. *Temptations* which according to Booker '[hold] out the promise of some physical gratification. [They] might be sexually arousing. [They] may offer rich food and intoxicating wines.' He goes on to explain how temptations offer a safe place, they put the character at ease, unlike the cruel world he is facing and the hard task he has been set. In *WAITING FOR STONE* (Ch.12) Nikos encounters a Circe-like character. He finds himself in a cave which appears safe in comparison to the outside world. In there he finds the 'rich foods and intoxicating wines' Booker talks about.

Around you, there is scattered food. Bread baked with sunflower seeds, fresh tomatoes, plum and full. Smoked meet, enough to feed three; and olives, black

olives, green olives, olives dipped in olive oil, dry coriander and garlic. You scan the place. Nobody is around. Should you eat? Go ahead, try the food. You haven't eaten in four days. There is wine as well. Pure red wine from Telia. And water, from the river, cool and refreshing. Drink. But you don't move. You sit there staring at all the blessings that are laid around you. ¹¹

Even though Nikos is able to resist the temptation for a while he soon gives in. The simple food seems extraordinary and he finds himself unable to stop.

An hour passes, maybe two. Everything is still, motionless, a great silence is stretching around the cave. Nobody came. Maybe nobody will come. You take some bread and dip it into the wine. Yeast, flour, oil, water, salt. So simple yet so powerful. You can't stop. Your fingers are dripping oil and wine, dry coriander hides under your fingernails. Your shirt, filthy as it is from travelling, sticks on your skin. You are hot, the wine makes you feel hot, but you can't stop drinking. Drops of sweat fall from your forehead and mix with every bite you take. ¹²

The food and wine cause a involuntary sleep. They have a spell effect on Nikos who enters a deep sleep. During his awake moments he realises that there is a woman in the cave with him.

A rustling sound grabs your attention, low as a whisper, silent as the wind. You turn on you left to face the source of your disturbance. A lady is sitting there, by your side, rubbing dry mint leaves in her palms. The tiny flakes fall in a small bowl which is resting between her crossed legs. You can't see her face; it's dark and your vision is blurry. ¹³

The woman takes the role of the carer. She brushes his hair, she washes his face and she knits clothes to keep him warm. The cave becomes the symbol of a womb; like a foetus Nikos sleeps and eats but has no say in what is happening to him. There are sinister vibes in the words of the fairy and it takes a while before Nikos realises that he is a prisoner.

‘[. . .] But you are not silly my dear, right?’ She leans towards you, running her fingers through your hair. ‘You know that you are not ready to leave me

11. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 85

12. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 85

13. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 86

yet.’¹⁴

It is logical to argue that temptations such as the fairy or Circe share many similarities with the monsters but there is a fundamental difference. The monsters seek to physically harm or kill the hero, while the temptations seduce the hero in order to keep him from full-filling his tasks. Overcoming the temptations gives the protagonist strength; if they can escape the luring presence of these women, if they can stop drinking their wines and eating their food then they are able to finish their task.

The next element is that of *The Deadly Opposites* which I will examine briefly alongside the last element, *The Journey to the Underworld*. With both of these the issues of having to stretch their meaning in order to fit them to my work becomes prominent once again. In WAITING FOR STONES (Ch.12), after Nikos leaves the cave he finds himself in the middle of two opposites. On one hand the British soldiers, on the other the AOS fighters. This is a Scylla and Charybdis situation. If caught by the British soldiers he might be questioned and held captive and if caught by AOS he might be interrogated and executed.

Gunshots! You cover your ears and you fall to the ground. Voices. Greek. AOS. You crawl. You try to hide. More voices. English. The army. You look for a hiding place. Gunshots. Boom! Grenade? Boom! You can't think clearly. You look over your shoulder. A harsh voice. *GO, GO, GO!* You hide behind a tree trunk. Heavy boots. Your heard is pounding. The bullets hurt your ears. Orders. 'Kosta! Kosta! Come on re, no, don't give up.' You close your eyes. You cross yourself, once, twice, as many times as you can.¹⁵

After Nikos is caught by AOS a series of events occurs that leads to his eventual journey to the underworld. In the context of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, the underworld is not a physical place where the hero descends but a physiological place. Nikos' descent takes place in the castle of Emesoun where he is held captive after he was caught carrying AOS explosives. With Mehment Ali and Marios they enter a hell like state caused by

14. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 88

15. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 88

torture and extreme interrogations. It is through this descent that Nikos can return back home, to his mother and to the reality of Sarouiki.

Discussions with the white worms that make their way in and out of the tears, they question them, they want to know if they are dead, if this is what happens after the heartbeat stops. But they are alive, feces piles around them, they are alive, they puke torture, they are alive, they bleed. Hot iron hurts less now, or is it habit that kills the pain, who can tell. There were three bodies, were, where, here, the flesh stretches, wounds heal body to body, an unidentified mass, only capable of crawling, howling and shitting. Suffering has no language, suffering is spoken in those primitive sounds, where only vowels exists, deep, full of what makes us human, that little part that is us, it fills the vowels and they forget that once they stood in tidy lines of grammar and syntax, that there was once a thing called vocabulary.¹⁶

In the final part the Quest is full-filled. The hero, Nikos, finds Anastasia. But unlike other quests there is no sense of completion because we cannot be sure if he has indeed found her. In the final chapter Anastasia is not described and we are left to assume that the woman described is young, possibly the same age as when she disappeared while Nikos grew old. She never acknowledges him or shows that she recognises him so there is no sign that she is indeed Anastasia. But the fact that there is this woman with white hair and translucent skin might hint to the fact that the story that has just been told can be repeated which adds to the idea of the cyclical view.

In terms of structure there was another constraint that I faced; that of language. To begin with, when I started writing in English, one of the first problems I faced was that of tuning into the language. I had to try in order to think in English instead of just translating from Greek. In *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* though, more than one language is present. On the first layer I had to think and write in English as the writer. On a second layer, I wanted my dialogues to be representative of the nationality of each character. This led to one great issue especially with the characters that were Greek speakers.

16. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 163

The question was how would I distinguish the moments when the Greek speakers spoke in Greek and when they spoke in English? At first I tried to translate from Greek to English when Greek speakers were talking, which made it hard to write dialogues where they would speak in English. During later drafts I decided to try another technique. When Greek speakers spoke amongst themselves they used sentences that are grammatically correct, with the addition of Greek words or phrases in order for the dialogues to feel more genuine. On the other hand, when they speak English they make grammatical as well as syntactical mistakes. In order for this to work, I tried to make sure that when English speakers appear their dialogues would sound as English as possible.

When dealing with the two languages, English and Greek, which I am fluent in I found it easier to experiment and try different things in order to achieve the effect I wanted. The main issue arose when I introduced the Turkish speakers. Once again, I wanted them to sound genuine but I was restricted since I do not speak Turkish. As I explain in the following chapter, I created a glossary of Turkish words which I would use. With the Turkish speakers there were three layers, the Turkish language, speaking Greek with Turkish elements and speaking English with Turkish influences. I found that the more I was writing, the easier it became to deal with these layers in the dialogues.

The main function of the language constrains I had set, was to give each character a distinctive voice. The glossaries as well as the switch in grammar and syntax helped me in doing so, especially since I had different narration styles and points of view for each chapter. Predominately with the chapters written in interior monologue, it was clear that I needed to establish the voice of the character who was speaking.

The decision to write the chapters in a variety of narration styles originated in my fascination with the effect they can have on the storytelling. First person narration can often narrow the insight that is given to the story. Even though I do gravitate towards first person narration in my writing I wanted to experiment with interior monologue as

well as the second person narration.

The final chapter of *Ulysses* (1922), by James Joyce, which is also known as Molly Bloom's Soliloquy, was what first inspired me to write stream of consciousness. The way Joyce contrasts Molly Bloom's thoughts to those of the other narrators as well as the incredible writing with the almost complete absence of punctuation inspired me to explore the boundaries of storytelling and language. Alongside my readings of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, *Ulysses* was the foundation of my fascination with interior monologue.

During the early stages of the writing process I read Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012). In her novella, Morrison tells the story of Frank Money, a veteran who returns back to America after the Korean War. The story follows Frank as he tries to rescue his sister from medical abuse and take her back to Georgia. It is a story about memory and the sense of self. As Frank manages to find his manhood, he also succeeds in finding home. The narration goes back and forth between first person, told by Frank, and a third person, an omniscient narrator. I was very intrigued by the use of the different points of view in the story and how it can affect the way it is developed, especially since the themes of memory and sense of self appear in my own work as well.

Inspired by *Home*, I decided to experiment with point of view as well as different narrative styles. For example IN A ROAD (Ch.4) is interior monologue from the point of view of Nikos while REFUSE TO REPLY (Ch.7) is interior monologue from the point of view of Anastasia. I was aiming at creating a multi-layered narrative where character would be both active and passive. The chapters written in the third person are presenting a character's action in an unbiased way in order to drive the action forward. Using the third person allowed me to also present the characters in context since I could describe the surrounding and what was happening outside the character's lives. On the other hand, the interior monologue gave me space to explore the thoughts and feelings of the

character.

The most interesting narrative style to write in was the second person narration. On one level I wanted to use second person for experimentation. I wanted to explore how it would affect the writing and the presentation of the story. Additionally the second person narration was also used to show how the characters were leading lives that were dictated by fate. Feriha, who is a fortune-teller, has knowledge of what is going to happen and she is the narrator of the chapters that are written in the second person.

In order to hint to the fact that Feriha is the narrator I used Turkish words in those chapters as well as direct dialogue towards the characters. In *WAITING FOR STONES* (Ch.12), where Nikos is close to the monastery and is captivated by a mountain fairy, there is this line:

‘Go oğlum, knock on the monastery’s door and there you will find the help you need.’¹⁷

By establishing the word ‘oğlum’ as one of Feriha’s characteristic words in earlier chapters, this line works as a hint to the reader about who the narrator is.

The second person narration is an unconventional style to tell a story. For reference I looked at different texts that make use of it. One of the first texts I came across was *If on a winter’s night a traveler* (1979) by Italo Calvino. The narration develops in the frame of a reader who is reading *If on a winter’s night a traveler*. It starts with the writer directly addressing the reader.

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a winter’s night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, No, I don’t want to watch TV! Raise your voice – they won’t hear you otherwise – “I’m reading! I don’t want to be disturbed!” Maybe they haven’t heard you, with all that racket; speak louder, yell: “I’m beginning to read Italo Calvino’s new novel!” Or if you prefer, don’t

17. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 88

say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone.¹⁸

The very first word of the novel is *you*. This gives the text a sense of dictation; as if the writer/narrator is ordering the character, instead of only describing the character's actions.

Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat. Flat on your back, on your side, on your stomach. In an easy chair, on the sofa, in the rocker, the deck chair, on the hassock. In the hammock, if you have a hammock. On top of your bed, of course, or in the bed. You can even stand on your hands, head down, in the yoga position. With the book upside down, naturally.¹⁹

The use of the second person is very effective in the opening sentences. As the reader of the book tries to find the most comfortable position and is about to begin *If on a winter's night a traveler*, he finds himself in the same position as the character. It's witty and entertaining. It also gives the sense of a game that is being played between the writer and the reader in a very direct way; this is Calvino talking to me, the reader. This tone is preserved throughout by the structure.

For each chapter there are two sections with the first being in the second person. This first section follows the reader as he attempts to succeed in finding the next chapter of the book he is reading. The second part is the first part of a new book each time that the reader, the *you* of the first part, finds. Since each second half is always from a different book with a different topic from the previous ones, the ending is never explained. While Calvino uses the second person narration very effectively, his style is very different from the one I adopted. I gravitate more towards the way the second person is used in *Aura* by Carlos Fuentes, first published in 1962 in Mexico.

You're reading the advertisement: an offer like this isn't made every day. You

18. Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, trans. from the Italian by William Weaver (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 3.

19. *Ibid.*

read and reread it. It seems to be addressed to you and nobody else [. . .]²⁰

I find Fuentes' style in the second person more similar to mine than Calvino's, which I attribute to the use of magical realism. The *you* in *Aura* contributes to the impression of a dream-state, where the character or the *you* is unsure whether what he is experiencing is reality or not. Fuentes invites us to consider the importance of the point of view by addressing us directly. We, as readers, become Felipe Montero, and 'for the first time in years [we] dream.'²¹ *Aura* shares other similarities with *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*. The use of *you* hints towards the idea of the character's lives being dictated by someone else. In *Aura*, Consuelo seems to be somehow in charge of the plot. It appears that she has brought Felipe in, in order to relive her love with the General though Felipe and Aura. The use of the second person creates a feeling of fate or destiny – the narrator commands the character to do what they should be doing. Similarly in *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, Feriha seems to possess comparable qualities to Consuelo. She knows what should happen and she guides the characters accordingly. By the final scene of *Aura* we understand that Felipe has found himself in a never ending cycle of death and re-birth in the same way that Nikos discovers that his story will be repeated endlessly. So, the use of the second person to convey an all knowing character that guides the actions of the rest adds to the cyclical structure.

Another example of second-person narration is *Cat and Mouse* (1961), published in Germany in 1961 by Günter Grass. Set in Danzig around the time of the Second World War and the Nazi rule, the story follows Joachim Mahlke, an only child without a father. The narrator is Pilenz, who is Mahlke's only 'friend, if it were possible to be friends with Mahlke'²². Pilenz narrates the story by addressing Mahlke directly in the second-

20. Carlos Fuentes, *Aura*, trans. from the Spanish by Lysander Kemp (New York: Farrar, Straus / Giroux, 1975), p. 3.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

22. Günter Grass, *Cat and Mouse*, trans. from the German by Ralph Manheim (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 78.

person, a technique that is used to express Pilez's guilt for the death of his friend. This dislocation created in the text by the use of the second person appears very effective in *Cat and Mouse*. I decided to make use of it in a different way. The *you* dictates actions that the characters are not willing to take responsibility for or in situations where they too scared to act. For example when Nikos discovers that Anastasia was shot he is forced out of his bed by the second person narration. The boy who until then has remained fairly passive is rushed into becoming active. The chapters that are written in the second person all move the plot forward by forcing the hero to take action even when he is too scared. In *THE DAUGHTERS* (Ch.9) he buys the map and sets out, in *WAITING FOR STONE* (Ch.12) he enters the cave of the fairy and later runs away, in *FACES BORN HATING* (Ch.15) he faces the General, in *ECHOED* (Ch.28) he finally leaves Sarouki. Georges Perec also experimented with the second person narration in his 1967 novella *A Man Asleep*, which follows a 25-year-old student who decided to rid himself of any ambitions as well as material desires. All he wants to do is "to want nothing. Just to wait, until there is nothing left to wait for. Just to wander, and to sleep."²³ But the second person dictates for him his actions, thus a passive character who is unwilling to take his life in his hands is forced into some kind of action.

Another novel I read which is written in the second person is *Maps* (1986) by Somalian writer Nuruddin Farah. The story is set during the Ogaden conflict of 1977 and explores the theme of cultural identity in a post-independence world. The book is about national and ethnic identity, an issue that arose in my research and work as well. The character Askar, addresses his younger self as *you*. By enquiring with his younger self he is asking who he is, who Askar is. Askar is faced with the same questions as Nikos – they both struggle with their individual identities as well as their ethnic and national identities.

23. Georges Perec, *Things : A Story of the Sixties With A Man Asleep*, trans. from the French by David Bellos and Andrew Leak (1990; London: Vintage, 2011), p. 161.

Taking into consideration this cyclical view of the world, it could be that Nikos himself is addressing his younger self at some points, though not in the intentional way Askar does, but in an unintentional way; from the future his voice echoes in order to guide his younger self. Farah also makes use of first-person narration. The combination of the two is extremely interesting since while the second person voice is sceptical, the first person seems more aware of the issues with narrating events. There is a power-play that takes place with the second person undermining the first and this struggle is representative of Askar's contradictory sense of identity. The example of *Maps* shows that the use of multiple narration styles can add to not only the narrative itself- how the story is told- but also to the interpretation of the themes and questions of the story.

There's the story, then there's the real story. In the case of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, the real story is history itself. A recorded history, that claims to be the truth. The story is the history as I, a Blackbeard of sorts, created in the search for the truth. Then there's the story of how the story came to be told. The choices I made, which are partly out of sheer egoism to preserve my existence through time but also partly out of aesthetic enthusiasm for good prose and good stories, are the driving forces behind the articulation of the narrative. Then there's what you leave out of the story. And of course what is left out is part of the story too.

Going back to Atwood's *Maddaddam* and the ways we write, an interesting part of the novel is how Toby takes the stories narrated to her and re-makes them, re-tells them, to the Crackers. Just like post-colonial writers, she makes use of the 'official' story in order to create a narrative. Toby not only writes for the future but she is also creating new writers and new storytellers – Blackbeard being the first one. She is not only hoping that writing and storytelling will be part of a future society but also that there will be a future society to read and write. This idea ties with Atwood's choice to participate in Katie Paterson's 100-year artwork - Future Library- which means that her name will

re-emerge in literature decades after her death.

In Nordmarka, a forest just outside Oslo, a thousand trees have been planted. They will be used to supply the paper needed for an anthology of books that are scheduled to be printed in one hundred years time. Every year during these one hundred years, one writer will contribute a text that will remain unpublished, until 2114. The writers are not allowed to expose the subject of their books. Atwood comments on the concept of the Future Library:

‘I am very honoured, and also happy to be part of this endeavour. This project, at least, believes the human race will still be around in a hundred years! Future Library is bound to attract a lot of attention over the decades, as people follow the progress of the trees, note what takes up residence in and around them, and try to guess what the writers have put into their sealed boxes.’²⁴

Both artist and writer imagine physical books being made in a century from today, despite the rise of alternative reading methods. *MaddAddam* goes beyond the era of digitalization to a time when returning back to ink and paper would be necessary and imagines a possible world were writers and stories exist alongside physical books. As Paterson and Atwood discuss in the short film made for the purposes of the promotion of the Future Library, this is a very hopeful project because it assumes that there will be people reading in the distant future. It is a combination of the aspiration of the writer to be remembered and the hope that fiction and books will remain a part of the future humanity. George Orwell in his famous 1946 essay – *Why I Write*– touches upon this subject and names sheer egoism as one of the four motives for writing, alongside aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose.

Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death [. . .]. Writers share this characteristic with scientists, artists, politicians, lawyers, soldiers, successful businessmen –in short, with the whole top crust

24. “Future Library – Framtidsbiblioteket – Katie Paterson,” 2015, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.futurelibrary.no>.

of humanity. The great mass of human beings are not acutely selfish. [. . .] Serious writers, I should say are on the whole more vain and self-centred than journalists, though less interested in money.²⁵

The above gives birth to three questions? If a person is in a group of survivors of an apocalypse, like Toby, will he or she write out of egoism? Or does the fact that there is a big possibility than no one will ever read that story when the writer is gone means that the motives will change? And the main question which links to my overall argument here: how will that writer tell the story when there are no other writers in the world, no one to write a better, more creative, more experimental story?

To what extent is the structure of the story Toby writes down dictated by the conditions in which she found herself? She wonders what to write apart from ‘the bare-facts daily chronicle she’s begun’. As the only person writing in this post-apocalyptic world, she still finds herself facing the same questions and dilemmas of any writer.

What kind of story – what kind of history will be of any use at all to people she can’t know will exist, in the future she can’t foresee?²⁶

Later Blackbeard teaches other Crackers to write, those who were born from a human mother and Cracker fathers, in order for the story to be preserved. One can only assume that as time passes and extends outside what Atwood wrote, the writers will start not only copying those stories but changing them, adapting them and making them their own. We cannot help but wonder if amongst those hybrid human-Crackers, those with a talent towards words and storytelling will shine through as the writers of the post-apocalyptic new world; if in a way the aesthetic enthusiasm that Orwell describes, will emerge in the Cracker-writers. Will the writers of this new world develop a ‘pleasure in the impact of one sound on another, in the firmness of good prose or the rhythm of a good story’?²⁷

25. George Orwell, “Why I Write,” in *Fifty Orwell Essays* (Project Gutenberg, 2004), accessed October 30, 2015, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300011h.html#part47>.

26. Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (London: Virago, 2014), p. 249.

27. Orwell, “Why I Write.”

MaddAddam is a beautiful narrative on writing. It offers a hypothetical scenario which can be used to examine not only why we write but also how we do it. It raises fundamental questions about writing as a social activity and also as an artistic expression. While reading the book I started thinking about the conscious and unconscious choices I make when writing, as well as those linked to *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*. Length, tone, voice, all of these are as important as the story itself. I would even argue that they are the story, or at least part of it. Through exploring the origins of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* and by realising the motives and aims behind it, I was able to see clearly how the structures I adopted and the techniques I chose affected the way the story came to be told. Having explored all this I can now move on and place my novel in a literary context based on the genre I believe it belongs to as well as its place in the literary feast.

Chapter 4 | Lo Real Maravilloso

Magical Realism beyond Latin America

My first ever encounter with the world of magical realism was when as a teenager I read Kafka's *Metamorphosis* for the first time. 'One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin.' The thrill of reading this opening line for the first time is what made me pursue magical realism as a reader. Kafka, with this simple sequence of words, changed the way I thought about literature. In *Metamorphosis*, the world as we know is described, yet it is different. Kafka places the story in the reality of this world, yet there is something strange about it.

Metamorphosis is not a straight forward magical realism story. There are no flying carpets, people do not evaporate and women are not impregnated by bees. What is very prominent in the story though, is the element of uncanny, almost magical ugliness.

He lay on his armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little he could see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff sections. The bedding was hardly able to cover it and seemed ready to slide off any moment. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, waved about helplessly as he looked.¹

Kafka uses his words very creatively. He does not say that Gregor woke up as a monster but that his belly was 'divided by arches into stiff sections'. His legs are 'pitifully thin', the rest of his body bulky in comparison. The description is not that of an insect, but that of a human who woke up suddenly and now resembles an insect. It tackles the theme of ugliness gracefully and through it, enters the uncanny. Umberto Eco, in his book *On*

1. Franz Kafka, "Metamorphosis," trans. from the German by David Wyllie (1915; Project Gutenberg, 2005), accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5200>.

Ugliness (2007), goes in depth into the study of the uncanny, starting with the idea that the uncanny is ‘situational’ ugliness.

There are similarities to be drawn between the opening of *Metamorphosis* and Eco’s analysis of the uncanny. He says:

Let’s imagine we find ourselves in a familiar room, with a nice lamp sitting on the table: suddenly, the lamp floats upwards into mid-air. The lamp, the table and the room are still the same, none of them has become ugly, but the situation has become disturbing and, being unable to explain it, we find it distressing or, depending on our nervous disposition, terrifying.²

In that sense, Gregor’s transformation is not terrifying on its own – it is terrifying in relation to the rest of the world that has remained the same. A cockroach is not necessarily a distressing spectacle; it is part of the world as we know and experience it. But a person turning into a cockroach when the rest of the world remains unchanged, is uncanny.

In his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud defines the uncanny as ‘that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.’ This idea derives from Freud’s reading of Ernst Jensch. Both make the connection between, unheimlich –the unhomely– and the unfamiliar. Unlike Jensch, Freud does not support the idea that whatever is unusual or unfamiliar is in extension uncanny. Instead ‘he [observes] that what strikes us as uncanny constitutes a return of the repressed, [. . .] something that has troubled both our individual childhood and the childhood of humanity.’ He then proceeds to apply this idea to the tale of *The Sandman* by Hoffmann.

In *The Sandman* a central part of the story is that of the wizard from the stories a young boy’s mother tells him. The character originates in central and northern European folklore, and as it happens in magical realist texts, the folk story is interlinked with reality. When discussing the presence of the uncanny in magical realist texts, it is interesting to

2. Umberto Eco, *On Ugliness* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), p. 311.

look at its connection to the colonial trauma. Not only the colonial trauma of Latin America, as that is expressed by Márquez in his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) but the colonial trauma that is the link between magical realist texts from around the world. We need to look at how this trauma has shaped both the national literatures of the ex-colonies but also the group of literature, or the genre, that came to be known as magical realism.

In *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, which I myself consider a magical realist text, I made use of elements of the uncanny to express the post-colonial trauma. Towards the end of the story, in UNTIL (Ch.29) when Nikos is leaving Sarouiki, there is a scene where rain falls down and Nikos realises that it is blood and not water.

Your lungs hurt from screaming but they won't listen. The bag slams against your body and there is that feeling of redness on your skin. Your sweat, you feel it running down your spine, across your eyebrows, on your cheeks. It reaches your mouth, a familiar taste of iron, your tongue meets that taste from a blurry time, blood. Are you sweating blood? The thought scares you. You run your hands all over your face and then you look at them. Red palms.³

At first Nikos realises the familiar in the situation; the iron taste of blood. But the combination of the familiar taste and the familiar action of sweating while running makes the situation uncanny. It raises the question of whether or not this is really happening and if it does then why is it happening? As in the example Eco gives with the lamp – the land, the people, Nikos himself has remained the same but the situation has changed. As Nikos observes, the parade of people carrying the ropes do not seem to realise that blood is being rained above them even though he can see them being soaked and red from it which plays out with another element of magical realism; uncertainty. The effect I wanted to create was the questioning of the situation. I wanted the reader, like Nikos, to be unsure on whether or not the rain is really blood. As the rain dies out 'it only leaves behind the stains, as if the whole world was wounded'. In a way what I wanted to

3. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 190

evoke here is how the effects of colonialism and the trauma caused by it, are not unique to this fictional country, this small island but it is a global trauma, thus connecting my work to other magical realism fiction.

Magical realism has branched away from the territory of Latin America because it translates into so many cultures and histories. The Cypriot post-colonial trauma, the Indian and the Colombian can all be expressed through magical realism. Hart and Ouyang ask in *A Companion to Magical Realism*:

How is it that magical realism has been so successful in migrating to various cultural shores? Why has it seemed able to offer a vehicle for the expression of tensions within different societal frameworks? Is it really the language par excellence (Bhabha's idea) of the emergent postcolonial world?⁴

Hart and Ouyang refer to a migration, which bears the connotation that writers who produce magical realist fiction are doing so by adopting the style of the Latin Americans. In a sense it means that magical realism is a style or a narrative mode that can be adopted and adapted to fit different cultures. On the other hand, there seems to be the need for fiction that can both challenge and construct national histories and identities in ex-colonies, thus it could be argued that magical realism, with its use of native folktales and its commentary on the effects of colonisation, serves this specific purposes and is in extension, not an adopted style but a organic occurrence.

To begin answering the questions proposed by Hart and Ouyang, there needs to be a definition of magical realism and a conversation on whether we are talking about a genre or a style. The term itself is an oxymoron, which appropriately describes the qualities of the genre. Magic realist fiction stretches the boundaries of reality by incorporating folktales, mythology and native beliefs. Chistopher Warnes identifies the issues with the categorisation of magical realism by asking fundamental questions about the genre. He writes:

4. Hart and Ouyang, *A Companion to Magical Realism*, p. 6.

Is magical realism simply a mode of narration that may be sporadically engaged by an author; is it a literary movement with a specific agenda and defined geographical and cultural boundaries; or is it a genre of fiction that can be compared across continents and languages?⁵

Two examples of magical realist fiction that deal with the argument on whether or not it is a mode of narration are *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) by Laura Esquivel and *Chocolat* (1999) by Joanne Harris. Both of them have become commercial successes and were later adapted for the screen. Helen Price notes that it was the ‘touch of magic’ in *Like Water for Chocolate* that led to critics identifying it as magical realism but criticises this by referring to the ‘revolutionary ethos associated with magical realism,’ which the novel lacks.⁶

The elements of both of the above books are very similar. The central plot points are a love story and cooking/baking. The protagonists are women who appear to be able to make things happen or change people’s lives through their skills in the kitchen. Charles de Lint compared *Chocolat* as similar to *Like Water for Chocolate*, ‘but with a European rather than a Latin flavor’⁷. Both of the female protagonists are introduced to the story through events that could be perceived as magical. Tita is born on the kitchen table ‘on a great tide of tears’ and Vianne Rocher is brought to Lansquenet-sous-Tannes by ‘the wind’.

Even though both stories treat magical occurrences as normal – which is a characteristic of magical realism– there is a missing element in the way they are presented. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the magic is part of the world, as it is created in the space of the novel. The reader, similarly to the characters, reacts to the magic without uneasiness.

5. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel : Between Faith and Irreverence*, p. 2.

6. Helen Price, “Unsavory Representations in Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate*,” in *A companion to magical realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang (Rochester, N.Y: Tamesis, 2005), p. 181.

7. Charles de Line, “Books To Look For,” October 1999, accessed October 30, 2015, <https://www.fsfsite.com/fsf/1999/cd19910.htm>.

On the other hand in *Chocolat* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, the magic does not flow as naturally in the storytelling, instead it remains on the surface – a decorative addition to the story.

Early on, having read a variety of magical realist texts, I knew I wanted to avoid an ‘adoption’ of the genre. I didn’t want to use magic as a decorative element. I had worked on re-tellings of Cypriot folktales and fairytales in the past and I wanted to make use of them in order to write magical realism with a purpose. The core of the story, that first seminal ideal of a girl with white hair and translucent skin originated in my readings of Cypriot tales and it is based on Cypriot views on beauty. Thus I felt that to avoid writing a story in the style of magical realism, and to achieve in writing *a magical realist story*, this was the way to go; make use of cultural beliefs, folktales, fairytales, and historical events to create my plot. I believe that a successful translation of the genre in non-Latin American cultures comes from the cultural authenticity of the text examined.

By representing not only the prominent culture of the country but the cultures of the country, including that of the colonisers, and by making use of the beliefs and ways of seeing the world which are specific to the country in question, the magical fiction that arises has depth and purpose in its use of magic. For this reason I tried to incorporate a variety of cultures that originate in Cyprus and were adapted to Sarouiki, with Greek and Turkish being the most prominent. In the extract below, Anastasia refers to her diet while being held captive at the castle:

There are the snails of course but they don’t taste as good without the tomatoes, which I cannot find. I seem to be craving yiaxni food a lot, making a stew out of the snails, the sparrows and mouloukhie but I gave up any hope I had about finding tomatoes.⁸

Of course snails are not particular to the Mediterranean diet, but they are referred to as a dish that would taste better if cooked with tomatoes as yiaxni, which narrows

8. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 53

it down to the Eastern Mediterranean. The reference to mouloukhie is meant as a hint towards the Arab minority in Cyprus. Instead of referring to the plant as Jews mallow, the way it is usually translated, I use a form of the Arabic name as that is pronounced mainly by Turkish Cypriots, which bridges the two communities and brings forth cultural elements. Through the use of this small word a big truth about Cyprus is presented: this is not a place that is entirely Greek, or partially Turkish. This is a place where the cultures of the Levant meet. For many, especially nationalists, this is a painful truth, and it is one that is more easily presented in a hypothetical scenario of a girl being kept in a castle located in a fictional country.

A comparison between Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982), Asturias's *Men of Maize* (1949) and Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* (1949) — to only name a few examples- could reinforce the idea that magical realism is 'a literary movement with a specific agenda' which exists only in the geographical and cultural boundaries of Latin America. Even though this might legitimise magical realism and place it within the literary circles instead of treating it as a mode of narration, it is also limiting the growing impact of magical realism in other continents.

Prominent examples of magical realism outside Latin America are Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (1978) and Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). Even though they all come from different continents and cultural backgrounds, they share one common element, that 'each treats the supernatural as if it were a perfectly acceptable and understandable aspect of everyday life'.⁹ To say though that this is a complete and all-inclusive definition of magical realism would mean that books like *My Name is Red* (1998) by Orhan Pamuk, in which elements of magical realism can be found, have to

9. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel : Between Faith and Irreverence*, p. 3.

be left out of the conversation on the genre. To tie in the concept of cultural authenticity, we can observe how these prominent examples of non-Latin American magical realism, base their fictions on the elements that shape the culture of their home countries.

In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* for example, a spittoon becomes a central object in the plot. The significance of the spittoon is its cultural connotations. They are not used by the upper class, in which Saleem's family belongs, but are instead an object for everyday, lower-class people. In a country obsessed with class like India, the spittoon can hold major meanings. But *the spittoon*, the one given to Saleem, is special; it is 'a superb silver spittoon, inlaid with lapis lazuli [. . .].'¹⁰ It is expensive and exquisite, yet it is of the lower class which plays out as a symbolism for Saleem himself, born poor but raised rich. Rushdie expands the importance of the spittoon by giving it magical qualities. Not in the straight forward sense of magic, but in the sense of magical realism. *The spittoon* has the power to manipulate Saleem's memory. On one occasion it hits him on the head causing memory loss and later it becomes the bearer of memories and what keeps Saleem alive. Saleem clutches onto it while travelling inside a basket from Pakistan to India and the spittoon becomes the only reference point to his past.

Looking at how Rushdie makes use of Indian cultural elements to form his magical realism, one could argue that the magical realism of a text is determined as such differently locally than globally. What links these texts is their treatment of 'magical' or 'supernatural' occurrences, rather than the nature of those occurrences. For the reader who is unaware of Nigerian mythology and *abiku* children, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* seems absolutely magical, limiting the reading of the text to the colonial view that sees African art as incapable of representing reality. Yet, *The Famished Road* can be categorised as African traditional religious realism; reality represented through African aesthetics. Okri's magical realism is in its essence a Nigerian way of looking at the world

10. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 2013), p. 54.

and the coexistence of the spiritual and material world. The well-established magical realism of Latin America is so distinguishable because of how it is viewed globally, by readers and critics outside its geographical borders. From the local point of view, it is a body of literature that incorporates traditions and inherited beliefs. The same can be argued for non-Latin American texts.

If we go back to Alejo Carpentier's prologue to *The Kingdom of this World*, we can make the connection between the Latin American magical realism and other texts. He writes:

[. . .] the marvelous begins to be marvelous in an unequivocal way when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (a miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, from an unusual insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality [. . .]¹¹

There are similarities to be drawn between Eco's explanation of the uncanny and Carpentier's definition of the marvellous real. This unexpected alteration of reality defamiliarises the familiar and allows hidden truths or suppressed memories to manifest. This emergence of truth seems to be a connecting element in magical realism across the continents. It is an effort to see history from a different perspective and reach a form of truth in the process. The uncanny has a Gothic or darker connotation, which can also be identified in texts that are often discussed in relation to magical realism, like Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955).

Pedro Páramo is an interesting example since it is a predecessor to the magical realism which was later popularised by writers like Márquez. Rubén Pelayo discusses the effect of writers like Rulfo on Márquez's writing, while at the same time stressing the fact that Márquez follows the traditions set by Asturias and Carpentier of treating reality through the lens of myths and Afro-Indian traditions, thus challenging the boundaries between

11. Alejo Carpentier, "The Kingdom of This World : Prologue," 1989, accessed October 30, 2015, <https://instruct.uwo.ca/english/785a/Prologue.html>.

what is real and what is magic. ‘The *magic*, however should not be so emphasised as to diminish the book’s faithful representations of Latin American reality and culture. Magic does not mean the pure fantasy of a fairytale, where everything is imaginary.’ And it is this blend of cultural representation with magic that distinguishes magical realism from other genres in which magic is prominent.

Salman Rushdie in his *Big Think* interview takes a similar approach. He says:

[. . .] the thing that is interesting about the phrase magic realism is if when it’s used, people tend only to hear the word magic. So they think it’s just about fantasy. But the word realism is as important and what this kind of writing tries to do is to be grounded in the real, to be grounded in an actual, quite strong vision of the real and then use techniques to express that vision which don’t necessarily have to be realistic.¹²

As discussed above, the term magical realism is subject to an argument of whether it is a mode of narration, a literary movement or a genre. Pelayo sees the issue of the loose application of the term in the ‘effort [. . .], to associate and identify the works of writers as varied as Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Italo Calvino, Günter Grass, Franz Kafka and Salman Rushdie, along with García Márquez, Cortázar and Asturias (among many others).’

Of course Márquez has been established as the quintessential writer of magical realism and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is considered the book par excellence of the genre, and became the point of reference in the discussion of magical realist fiction. But published in 1967, *One Hundred Years*, comes after *The Tin Drum*. Two writers, Márquez and Grass, from two different continents, with different languages and different cultures, one carrying the trauma of colonisation and the other of World War II, both write using allegory, myth and legend. They both use magical realism, the ‘unexpected alteration of reality’, to express the worries of their times.

12. Salman Rushdie, “Salman Rushdie: True Stories Don’t Tell the Whole Truth – Big Think,” Big Think, 2015, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://bigthink.com/videos/salman-rushdie-on-magical-realism>.

The fact that these two books were written a decade apart in countries with very different experiences and history shows that there is another aspect about magical realism that is not necessarily rooted in post-colonial discourses. It is a connection to a historical enquiry; the writers try to make sense of the world by re-visiting the past under the lens of magic and trying to unveil hidden truths. The narrow definitions that have been applied to these texts, while they do make references to the connections between magical realism and the search for historical truths, they tend to concentrate on the use of magic alone and not on the cultural representation and historical enquiries.

Magical realist writers, like Rushdie, face the problem of definition themselves.

The thing about magical realism — so called — is that it's a newish name for a very old thing. And this particular name came into being in Latin America in the late 1950s and was used to describe a group of writers — [Jorges] Borges, [Gabriel] García Márquez, [Mario] Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, Alejo Carpentier and several others who used techniques which diverged from straightforward, naturalistic writing or they used elements of fantasy and dream and included those in the text of the story as if they had the same status as observable facts.¹³

The closest form of the term was coined by Alejo Carpentier in his essay first published in the Caracas newspaper *El Nacional* and later appeared as a prologue to his 1949 novel *The Kingdom of this World*. As Anne C. Hegerfeldt states in *Lies that tell the Truth* (2005), Carpentier contrasts European artists' and writers' 'tiresome pretensions of creating the marvelous' with the 'experienced marvelous reality' of Latin America.¹⁴ According to Carpentier, the reason why European artists and writers are inadequate in their treatment of the marvellous is due to the fact that they lack the privilege of their Latin American counterparts to be part of a sphere in which 'reality itself is marvellous, they need only [to] reveal or amplify it.'¹⁵

13. Ibid.

14. Anne Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth : Magic Realism Seen Through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam New York: Rodopi, 2005), p. 17.

15. Carpentier, "The Kingdom of This World : Prologue."

Carpentier sees *lo real maravilloso* as not only native to Haiti, but the Americas in general. He writes:

But I also realized that the presence and vitality of the marvelous real was not a privilege unique to Haiti but the patrimony of all the Americas, where we have not yet established an inventory of our cosmogonies. The marvelous real is found at each step in the lives of the men who inscribed dates on the history of the Continent and who left behind names still borne by the living: from the seekers after the Fountain of Youth or the Golden City of Manoa to certain early rebels or modern heroes of our wars of independence, those of such mythological stature as Colonel Juana Azurduy.¹⁶

The issue with Carpentier's division between the European and Latin American marvellous is his branding of the European as non-authentic; as the product of commonplace magic. In cases like Grass's *The Tin Drum*, we can observe how European magical realism is indeed authentic. The genre is discussed on a global level under Bhabha's idea of magical realism being the literary language of the post-colonial world but it is in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995), that magical realism is treated 'for the first time as an international phenomenon, bringing together literary contexts as diverse as Europe, Asia, North and South America, the Caribbean, Africa and Australia.' Rushdie, in *Commonwealth Literature does not exist*, says:

[. . .] if we were to forget about 'Commonwealth literature', we might see that there is a kind of commonality emerging from those parts of the world which one could loosely term the less powerful, or the powerless. The magical realism of the Latin Americas influences Indian language writers in India today. The rich, folktale quality of a novel like *Sandro of Chegem*, by the Muslim Russian Fazil Iskander, finds its parallels in the work - for instance- of the Nigerian, Amos Tutuola, or even Cervantes. It is possible, I think, to begin to theorise the common factors between writers from these societies - poor countries, or deprived minorities in powerful countries - and to say that much of what is new in world literature comes from this group. This seems [. . .] to be a 'real' theory, bounded by frontiers which are neither political nor linguistic but imaginative.¹⁷

16. Carpentier, "The Kingdom of This World : Prologue."

17. Salman Rushdie, "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist," in *Imaginary homelands: essays and*

Even though Carpentier's vision of magical realism as a Latin American mode is limiting and problematic, later efforts like *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* also pose issues in the way magical realism is examined. In her book, Faris offers a history of the term but seems unable to sustain a consistency in her definition across the body of essays included in the anthology, thus the approach is vague in order to accommodate to the nature of the different texts.

According to Faris, magical realism has five characteristics:

First, the text contains an "irreducible element" of magic; second the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understanding of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity.¹⁸

Neil Lazarus points out the issue of the readings of the popular magical realism writers.

Warnes writes on Lazarus' criticism:

The endlessly repeated potted histories of the term; the vague and indeterminate ways questions of definition have been treated; the assumption that there is a single kind of magical realism – usually that of García Márquez or Rushdie; the distorting comparisons that result from this normative approach; the ways magical realism is so often automatically seen to deconstruct notions of subjectivity, history, nationhood, reality, without any sense of how it can also construct these notions; a general inability to relate magical realism to its specific cultural contexts.¹⁹

The main point is that the theory of magical realism needs to emerge from the reading of the novels, instead of the effort to fit the novels in a theory. The understanding of this lead me to a vital question concerning my work: did I write a story to fit the existing theory, a story that shares elements which other stories that are considered magical realism or did they story I wrote emerge organically in this genre due to the conditions I found

criticism 1981–1991 (London: Vintage Books, 2010), pp. 68–69.

18. Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 7.

19. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel : Between Faith and Irreverence*, p. 7.

myself in? To answer that I have to look further than the beginning of the creative process.

As mentioned above, one of my first readings in magical realism was that of the *Metamorphosis*. Later in school we read *The Murderess* (1903) by Alexandros Papadiamantis, while I started discovering the works of Gabriel García Márquez. Back then I could not make the connections between the two writers, but as my reading of magical realism became more varied I was able to identify the Greek magical realism, as that was explored by Papadiamantis.

Of course to talk of Papadiamantis as a magical realist is problematic, since as I have explored above the treatment of the term has led to a limited and limiting view on the genre, but there are parallels to be drawn between his work and that of Márquez in terms of magic, superstition and traditions. Classee writes about Papadiamantis:

Papadiamantis's talent for precise expression and the explicitly mythifying contours of starkly realistic descriptions are indeed an unusual interweaving of literary elements. This lends him characteristics that enable critics to associate him with a range of sensibilities in world literature, with references as unlike as Thomas Hardy or James Joyce, Dostoevskian mysticism or Latin American magical realism.²⁰

While reading Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, I felt that the magic presented in the story was, as Carpentier puts it, a privilege unique to Latin America. The folk reality of Colombia seemed distant and detached from the Cypriot environment. Even though Papadiamantis does offer a Hellenic version of the genre, the similarities seem far off. What is missing in the work of Papadiamantis is those qualities that make magical realism generally identifiable; the revolutionary ethos, the treatment of magic as an everyday occurrence and the concerns with time and space.

Papadiamantis' magical realism is on the periphery of the genre, in a grey zone, where

20. Olive Classe, ed., *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation Into English* (London Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 1037.

writers like Orhan Pamuk reside as well. In fact these two writers are more similar in the connection to magical realism than what can be observed at first. They both deal deeply with the issue of identity and their treatment of the duality of Greek and Turkish identities at different times. Papadiamantis refuses to filter Byzantine beliefs and classical Greek ideas through the Philhellenic spectrum of his time, instead he revisits them and moulds them into his contemporary landscape. Similarly, Pamuk explores the clash between the Ottoman past and the contemporary Turkish identities. He places his narrative in the centre of the clash of East and West and challenges time through the layering of past and present in modern Turkey.

It took me time and many re-readings of Márquez in particular, to begin seeing the connections between the established magical realism and Greek and Cypriot literature. Interestingly it was when I read *A very Old Man with Enormous Wings* that the connections became apparent. The story seemed familiar – I felt like I could sing it. Five pages in and I was expecting the tarantula woman to appear. I somehow knew she would be in the story. I had to stop and put the book down in order to search my head for why this tale seemed so familiar.

I soon discovered that the short story was the inspiration behind a popular song in Greek, *Kathreftis (Mirror)* by Cypriot singer-songwriter Alkinoos Ioannidis. On close examination I understood that the songwriter had probably interpreted the story the ‘wrong’ way, if there is a wrong way of interpreting fiction, but this coincidence empowered my desire to write magical realism. The fact that I had originally heard the story through Ioannidis’s lyrics gave me a different perspective. Initially I saw the story as a fairytale inspired by Greek and Cypriot tales. Discovering that the original was written by Márquez, enabled me to see the similarities between the folktales of the Greek world and those of the Latin American. It was also a confirmation that magical realism can be ‘translated’ into other cultures.

Carpentier writes about the inspiration and writing of *The Kingdom of this World*:

And yet, because of the dramatic singularity of the events, because of the fantastic bearing of the characters who met, at a given moment, at the magical crossroads of Cap-Haitien, everything seems marvelous in a story it would have been impossible to set in Europe and which is as real, in any case, as any exemplary event yet set down for the edification of students in school texts. What, after all, is the history of all the Americas but a chronicle of the marvelous real?²¹

Yet it seems to me that it is not only the history of all the Americas that is a chronicle of the marvellous real, but that the same can be applied to a variety of cultures and histories, especially those cultures and histories that fall under the category of post-colonial writing.

There is perhaps no need to reiterate that magical realism is inherently political concerned not only with the continuing influence of empire in the post-colonial world but also with the corruption of political authority set up post-independence nation-states, not to mention the attendant cultural politics that partake in the formulation of a plausible postcolonial national identity.²²

One must be careful though with the categorisation of literatures under certain categories. Above I stated how important it is for the theory of magical realism to emerge from the readings of texts, instead of trying to fit the novels in a theory. Salman Rushdie in *Commonwealth literature does not exist* talks about the problems with the creation of a false category by pointing out the fact that such categories can ‘lead to excessively narrow, and sometimes misleading reading of some of the artists [they are] held to include.’²³ It is thus important to reach conclusions about the magical realism of the post-colonial world through the literature it is producing.

In Rushdie’s discussion of the issues linked to the study of Commonwealth fiction, the idea of a creative ghetto is presented. Rushdie says that one of the ‘rules of the Commonwealth ghetto’ is ‘that literature is an expression of nationality.’ Nationality is

21. Carpentier, “The Kingdom of This World : Prologue.”

22. Hart and Ouyang, *A Companion to Magical Realism*, p. 153.

23. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, pp. 63–64.

a central theme in magical realism, which is a prominent genre often linked to commonwealth fictions. The narrow criticism of magical realism has failed in looking at both sides of this central theme. It dictates that magical realism is the literature that ‘deconstructs notions of subjectivity, history, nationhood, reality, without any sense of how it can also construct these notions’.²⁴

Books are almost always praised for using motifs and symbols out of the author’s own national tradition - books which mix traditions, or which seek consciously to break with tradition, are often treated as highly suspect.²⁵

Marios Vasiliou in *Cypriot English Literature* explores the connection between nationality, magical realism and the book *Margarita’s Husband* (2007) by Andriana Ierodiakonou. The book is set in the early twentieth century, during the British colonisation, in Cyprus. In the background is the unrest among the mixed Christian and Muslim population; the ethnic tensions and rivalries between the two communities. The protagonist, Homer Kyroleon, is a wealthy Christian landowner, a womaniser and local political figure who considers revolt misguided and futile. He is married to the docile Margarita, who is gifted with second sight and a magical ability to communicate with animals; she is passionately devoted to Kyroleon despite his infidelities.

The magical realism elements in the book are very interesting. As in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Okri’s *The Famished Road*, the elements of magic are highly inspired by the local cultural elements. The magical occurrences mainly take place around Margarita who has the ability to communicate with pigeons. As Vasiliou writes, ‘it is a novel informed by various global discourses and practises woven together and suffused in a Cypriot setting that oscillates between tradition and modernity during the colonial times.’

Another Cypriot writer, and the one who popularised the genre in Cyprus is Andri

24. Rushdie, “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist,” pp. 66.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Polydorou. Her book *Oi Genies tis Siopis (The Generations of Silence)* (2008), became a best-seller and was later made into a wonderfully produced television series by CyBC (Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation). *The Generations of Silence* is a family saga set in rural 20th century Cyprus. As Polydorou writes in the introduction of her book:

None of the unsung heroes of these pages ever imagined that they would ever be the protagonist of a book. If you had asked them, they might have nothing extraordinary to narrate to you. The purity of love was part of their lives, fairies and wizards real experiences, rape and murder, terrible personal secrets. Pious souls, and others who along the way lost their sense, and project the anger of injustice on defenceless souls, inhumanely.²⁶

Indeed, the book treats fairies and wizards as part of everyday life, but does so in an unforced way. The magical elements in the story feel very natural because Polydorou is drawing inspiration from well-known Cypriot beliefs. This is the main difference between her and Ierodionou. In *Margarita's Husband*, the magical elements are exquisite, magical realism is done beautifully, but at points it feels a bit forced.

A reason for this could be language. Polydorou not only writes in Greek, but she writes in the Cypriot dialect, thus creating a very authentic environment. The magic becomes a genuine part of the Cypriot culture because she does not write 'fairies' or the Greek word *neraides* but instead uses words like *anerades* and *aerika*. The effect this has on a native speaker is that the elements are not alienating, but instead this is a recognisable vocabulary with the familiarity of the local folktales.

Back in 2010, I had the pleasure of interviewing Andri Polydorou in her house in Nicosia. We talked extensively about *The Generations of Silence*. I asked her why she had chosen to write in the dialect, limiting in that way her readership and she explained to me that the story could not be written in any other form, that she was very inspired by the musicality of the dialect. For Polydorou, writing in the Greek Cypriot dialect is

26. Antri Polydorou, *Oi Genies Tis Siopis [the Generations of Silence]* [in Greek] (Nicosia: Epiphaniou Publications, 2008), p. 10.

a duty, not only for her but for ‘all of us’. During our discussion, I asked her how she feels about the possibility of the dialect being introduced in schools, an idea she was very sympathetic towards, because she believes that language is part of our identity, a part that needs to be preserved.

It is a part of our civilization, and that means that is a part of our personality as well, our international identity and with Cyprus now in Europe we could easily lose that. There might be a time in the future that you will say Cypriot and not know what it means, Greek-Cypriots, because Turkish-Cypriots have a slightly different identity which is their duty and right to preserve, everybody has that right but we must use that right, not neglect it. The dialect is alive; we are using it even though a lot of words were added, we are using it.²⁷

Interestingly she problematizes the Cypriot identity in relation to the two prominent communities, the Greek and the Turkish, an issue that often arises from the discussion of the Cypriot dialects. Polydorou takes a strange stand on the matter – she seems worried about the time when the Cypriot identity won’t be ‘clear’, thus failing to realise that this has always been the case, but at the same time she stresses that the Turkish-Cypriots have a duty and a right to preserve their identity. This statement goes in accordance with her writing which does explore Cypriotness but only that of the Greek community.

Polydorou is very open about her inspiration. She makes use of folktales and fairytales, historical events and urban myths. Her later novel *0* is completely based on urban myths from the island. Yet her vision of Cyprus is narrow, it only includes what she feels comfortable with and she avoids challenging the established perception of what being Cypriot means. On the other hand Andriana Ierodiaconou seems to be more concerned with the colonial and post-colonial truths of Cyprus and she explores the different communities and their relationships. *Margarita’s Husband* makes close references to the historical period before EOKA.

Being the colonial Government’s answer to the independence movement which

27. Antri Polydorou, Interview By Stefanie Savva, Personal Interview, Nicosia, March 18, 2010.

was beginning to gain serious ground among the population, the Council was devoid of real political power; still, it's members had the Governor's condescending ear on secondary administrative matters which, while of little importance to the colonial authorities, were of looming concern to the villagers, a privilege which Kyroleon had often in the past turned to good account.²⁸

This is one of the many examples in *Margarita's Husband*, where Ierodionou makes use of historical facts to construct her story. The body of her work is based on the colonial and post-colonial history of Cyprus. Her second book *The Women's Coffee Shop* (2012) is a thriller about a coffee shop for women, owned by Angelou, where women can drink and gossip like men. Angelou has discovered that his close friend Avraam Salih has been stabbed outside his house. While tensions between Christians and Muslims are on the rise, this could have been a political murder. What I tried to do in *I Dream of Saltwater and Eggs*, was to combine the two elements found in Ierodionou's and Polydorou's work – make use of Cypriot folktales and cultural elements while writing a politically informed piece.

It is worth exploring why Polydorou is a lot more popular in Cyprus in comparison to Ierodionou, even though both writers write in the same genre. The main reason for this could be language. As it is further explored in chapter five, Cypriot writers who write in English are marginalised both globally and locally. Locally they are a minority due to the use of English, instead of the two major languages of the country, Greek and Turkish. On the other hand globally, the post-colonial trauma of Cyprus is not deemed significant enough to attract the attention that writers like Rushdie or Márquez enjoy.

Polydorou identifies a number of issues with literature and writing in Cyprus, with the first being the perception of books written in the Greek Cypriot dialect and the possible translations of such fiction.

Translating has nothing to do with it, if you want to translate something you can, in any language. As far as other Greek readers are concerned, that is a

28. Ierodionou, *Margarita's Husband: A Fable of the Levant*, p. 29.

problem because most of those readers will feel tired and bored; I would feel that way if I was reading a book written in a language that I don't understand perfectly. There have been people, in fact a lot of them, well respected people from Greece who have read it, and we discussed it but they knew very well Ancient Greek and were able to make the links and understand most of the words. That kind of people doesn't have any problems in reading books like that.²⁹

What is brought forward from this statement is that a writer who writes in the dialect and a writer who writes in English, in Cyprus, will both be marginalised for the same reasons.

Polydorou speaks from the point of view of a commercial writer who enjoys great success locally. Following *The Generations of Silence*, the majority of her later books reflect that. The originality of her first book is not evident in the rest of her fiction. It appears that the more popular she becomes the further away from politics she withdraws. At the same time her fiction is also moving further away from magical realism, with the rest of her books being strictly realistic. On the other hand, writers like Ierodionou, remain true to their political sensitivities while at the same time are generally unknown both locally and globally.

Ierodionou's short story *Truth*, while being about a girl's effort to come in terms with the truth about her brother's death and face her guilt, still makes references to the British colonialism. She writes:

The truth is, I am not English, but I am twelve years of age and go to an English school and I speak English in perfect imitation of the English teachers who teach me how to speak it. I went to an English school. When I speak English I sound English but it is not true. When I went to study at university in England, people asked, was I English, but I told them, no. My parents are not English. The island I come from is not England. It was owned by England and so was English for a time, but it is not England, even though some parts of the island were kept by England to use, after it stopped owning the whole island. There are English soldiers there, and streets with neat English houses and English names, as if it is England. It isn't the truth, but it is made to

29. Polydorou, Interview By Stefanie Savva.

look like the truth.³⁰

While both of the above writers can be considered magical realists, they are very different in their treatment of fundamental topics such as identity and history. As Pelayo argues, the term magical realism is used as broadly as possible in order to accommodate a vast variety of texts and this is clearly demonstrated in the comparison between *The Generations of Silence* and *Margarita's Husband*.

Ierodionou's conversation on truth is shared by Rushdie. While through fiction she discovers the difference between what is presented as the truth and what the truth is, Rushdie stresses that fiction does not have to be truthful. He says:

Stories don't have to be true, you know. That by including elements of the fantastic or elements of fable or mythological elements or fairy tale or just pure make believe, you can actually start getting at the truth in a different way. It's another door into the truth.³¹

One can argue that history itself is fiction, that identity is fiction, and that nationhood is fiction. These are all narratives that we are taught to believe as established truths. Yet, as Rushdie points out, we can challenge them through fiction. In *Big Think* the interviewer asks how one reaches reality through magic and fantasy. Salman Rushdie says that the real question is what does truth mean in fiction, because 'the first premise of fiction is that it's not true,' something we tend to forget or overlook.

[. . .] the story does not record events that took place. These people didn't exist. These things did not happen. And that's the going in point of a novel. So the novel tells you flat out at the beginning that it's untruthful.³²

The 'truth' of the novel exists only within its boundaries. From the first word to the last, everything in between are truthful for the world of the novel, yet untruthful in

30. Andriana Ierodionou, "Truth," *Kunapipi* 33 (1 2011): p. 34, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol33/iss1/6>.

31. Rushdie, "Salman Rushdie: True Stories Don't Tell the Whole Truth – Big Think."

32. Salman Rushdie, "Salman Rushdie: Magical Realism Is Still Realism – Big Think," Big Think, 2010, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://bigthink.com/videos/magical-realism-is-still-realism>.

relation to the world. Following that, the logical question is what we mean by truth in literature.

And clearly what we mean is human truth, not photographic, journalistic, recorded truth, but the truth we recognize as human beings. About how we are with each other, how we deal with each other, what are our strengths and our weaknesses, how we interact and what is the meaning of our lives? I mean this is what we look at. We don't need to know that Anna Karenina really existed. We need to know who she is, and what moves her, and what her story tells us about our own lives and about ourselves and that is the kind of truth that as readers we look for in literature.³³

It is the safe space in which we can reach possible scenarios through which we can examine ourselves, our societies, our histories and our identities. While *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* is a story set in a fictional land that does not exist outside the novel, it is a possible history of any country which has been through colonialism, struggles for independency or civil wars. The characters reflect us if we had to face similar situations, they embody our what ifs. Magical realism gives the space for enquiry; it helped me ask 'what is then the truth?'

And now once you accept that stories are not true, once you start from that position, then you understand that a flying carpet and 'Madam Bovary' are untrue in the same way, and as a result both of them are ways of arriving at the truth by the road of untruth, and so then they can both do it the same way.³⁴

What Rushdie is telling us is that no matter how fantastical or untruthful a novel or a story might be, it won't be more untruthful than a piece of fiction that is perceived as realism. As he says, when you start thinking of the practicalities and functions of a magical object, such as a flying carpet, then that object becomes real – it is an object that might have existed, and if it did that's how it would function. What magical realism is as a genre is another way for us to reach the truth – the human truth, through myths,

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

magic, and tales.

Antri Polydorou says about *The Generations of Silence*: ‘There is a strong presence of myths [in this book], which are used in such a way that one can wonder if this is really a fairytale.’

The interesting part in this statement is the word *fairytale*. The Greek equivalent of the word fairytale is *paramythi*; a word depriving from *para*, which means from or on the side of, and the word *mythos*, meaning myth. In contemporary Greek texts using the word *paramythi* is usually in the context of fairytales as they were written by Charles Perrault or the Grimm brothers. But if we take a close look at the core meaning of the word we can see that it can be used to describe something that either deprives from myths or is similar to a myth, for example another version.

Maria Tatar argues that the fairytale does not share the earthly realism characteristics of the folktale but it is ‘set in a fictional world where the preternatural events and supernatural inventions are taken wholly for granted,’³⁵ a close description of what Tolkien calls the Faërie. For Tolkien, the Faërie is ‘the realm or state in which fairies have their being’³⁶, thus meaning that this is not in a realistic setting. He also excludes from the fairytale genre traveler’s tales, dream visions and beast-fables. If we look at Tatar’s definition more closely we will observe similarities between what she identifies as fairytales and magical realist texts.

Tatar talks about a fictional world where ‘preternatural events and supernatural inventions are taken wholly for granted’. Macondo –Garcías’s made up place in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*- definitely fits the description. Yet, in fairytales this land will almost always remain unnamed – a land far far away. On the other hand according to Tatar,

35. Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 33.

36. J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C.S. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 15.

folktales are set in a realistic world or in a realistic setting. Again, many magical realist works, like *Midnight's Children* are set in realistic settings, like India.

Jarlath Killen in the book *The Fairytales of Oscar Wilde*, quotes Richard Pine and his argument on why Wilde's stories are not fairytales but folktales. He says:

A fairy-story is an allegory designed to give children a picture of the real, adult, world, and to enable them, by understanding its constituent parts, to negotiate a satisfactory path in the real world. A folk-tale is more vicious, a parable: it is a tale for adults who have lost their way among the signposts and have experienced some of the disruption related in the tale [. . .]³⁷

It appears that magical realism, if it's examined as a genre, shares similarities with the elements that define folktales and fairytales. Yet, I believe that more suitably we can use the term *paramythi* to describe the place of magical realist texts in relation to the fairy and folk tales, since these stories usually exist *para to mytho*, in accordance to a myth. For example, in *The Kingdom of this World*, many of the events and characters are based on historical facts from the Haitian revolution. Carpentier mythicizes them, national heroes are elevated to legendary warriors, which the writer himself calls *lo real maravilloso*. *Lo real maravilloso* can be translated as *paramythi* – stories that come from the myth, or in hand with myth.

In search for historical truth I did the same with Cypriot history. I stretched the historical events so much that they became 'unreal', that Cyprus was no longer Cyprus but a fictional place full of the magic of folktales and fairytales.

Whether we accept magical realism as a genre, a mode of narration or a style; whether we want to refer to it as *lo real maravilloso* or *paramythi*, what it is clear about it, is that is a way to explore and reach fundamental truths. This is what makes magical realism an appropriate means of expression for writers like myself, who question establish realities in search for the truth. In reading fiction, as well as in producing it, what we are searching

37. Richard Pine in Jarlath Killeen, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde* (Aldershot, England Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), p. 2.

for is human truths.

You're looking for people that you can believe in behaving in ways that you can recognize, and which tell you something. Those behaviors tell you something about your own behavior and your own nature and about the life of the person next door to you as well, so human truth is what you're looking for and you can get to that by many different roads.³⁸

38. Rushdie, "Salman Rushdie: Magical Realism Is Still Realism – Big Think."

Chapter 5 | Step-mothertongues

The native and the foreign in the creative process

Commonwealth Literature, Post-Colonial Literature in English, New Literature in English, World Writing in English – these are just some of the terms being used to describe the writings of members of the former British Empire. Mehmet Yashin, in his introduction to *Step-Mothertongue* (2000) engages with the relationship between location and language. He says:

Language is a step-mother by its very nature. Individuals are born into languages they have not themselves created and which cannot express human beings totally. Particularly writing-language as the basis element of literature, does not come to life from a natural mother, but is precisely geared to create the sense of a ‘mother’ in the context of fictionalized national histories. The ‘step-tongues’, which have enforced themselves as so-called ‘*mothertongues*’, partly through literary works, on particular communities are the primary farces that attach individuals to a modern sense of national belonging, re-creating an imaginary notion of ‘us’.¹

I see the question of language intertwined with the question of location. Writers inherit as well as adopt languages and both take place in connection with physical location. Where a writer is born will give him/her a mother tongue, or in some cases, tongues. Education, or the educational system of the country, might teach him/her one or more additional languages. If the writer decides to leave, abandon or flee the place of birth a new language might be adopted for everyday use and the writer might choose to engage with it creatively. If we decide to discuss language in writing, location cannot be ignored.

1. Mehmet Yaşın, *Step-mothertongue : from Nationalism to Multiculturalism: Literatures of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2000), pp. 1–2.

To take Joseph Conrad as an example, he was fluent both in Polish and in French but only learnt English in his twenties. Yet, his major works, like *Heart of Darkness* (1899), were written in English; a language he felt came ‘natural’ to him. He referred to English as ‘plastic’, a language in which one can make up a word if it doesn’t exist.² Conrad’s choice to adopt English as his creative language can be seen as a choice based on place and location. If he had, instead of the British nationality, received the Austrian, his work would have had a completely different development. I want to begin with this idea of language and location to define where my work belongs and then proceed to explain why I choose to write creatively in English.

Literature produced in the independent countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbeans and North America, which were once colonised by the United Kingdom, is generally referred to as Commonwealth literature. The term itself poses significant problems of definition. If we assume that writing from every country that was once a British colony falls under the umbrella of ‘Commonwealth Literature’ then we will be failing to move deeper from the surface of the ‘historical, geographic, political and linguistic connotations that [. . .] affirm and revise its status as a distinct body of literary work.’ Countries such as the United States of America stress the fact that colonisation by the United Kingdom and the establishment of English as a mother/official language do not ‘automatically imply membership of either the Commonwealth as a political organisation or the body of literary works known as Commonwealth literature.’³

The term is so problematic in its nature that even the writers who are supposed to be serving this school of literature deny that they belong to it. One of these writers is Salman Rushdie, whose essay *Commonwealth Literature does not exist*, is often quoted

2. J. Davidson, *Between Sitzings: An informal autobiography of Jo Davidson* (New York: Dial Press, 1951), p. 118.

3. Harry Olufunwa, “An Introduction to Commonwealth Literature,” ed. A. A. Fakoya and S. A. Ogunpitan, vol. 3, 4 (Lagos: Lagos State University, 2001), 409–417.

and referred to in the discussion concerning this body of literary work. It was when I read this essay, soon after finishing my first draft that I began considering these issues. Rushdie's discussion made me aware of the problems that may arise from the creation of a 'false category' and how I connected with other writers facing the same issues.

To tackle the issue of where I place my work I will concentrate on language, beginning with 'Commonwealth' writers writing in English and the English language literatures as that is discussed by Rushdie and then I will attempt to look into the issue of Cypriot writers writing in English and their place in the literary feast. I will also explore the links between language and identity as I consider this to be one of the main issues concerning Cypriot politics and conflict resolution. Lastly I will be concluding with the idea that language adoption for creative purposes creates a space from nationalism thus allowing the exploration of historical and political themes.

Let's first try and define 'Commonwealth literature'. On one hand we can, as mentioned above, take a shallow route and say that it is the literature produced by countries that were once colonised by Britain, but we have explored how this definition is problematic. On the other hand we could take Rushdie's approach, which he himself calls patronising, and say that it is the 'body of writing created [...], in the English language, by persons who are not themselves white Britons, or Irish, or citizens of the United States of America.' He goes on to ask whether or not literature produced by citizens of the Commonwealth countries in other languages apart from English, would still fall under the umbrella of Commonwealth literature. Logically, Rushdie reaches the conclusion that as a term it creates an 'exclusive ghetto', a ghetto that alters the meaning of English literature into something 'topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist.'⁴

Mittapalli and Monti pose similar questions concerning the tricky term 'Common-

4. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 63.

wealth Literature’.

Do the literatures produced in the former British colonies still have anything in common? Is it academia that has kept the idea of Commonwealth literature alive by offering special courses and by being publishing journals, while writers themselves have been trying to erase their Commonwealth identity, sometimes for practical reasons and sometimes for ideological reasons?⁵

And they continue by tackling the theme of language:

We cannot choose our past, and the Commonwealth countries have a common history: varying periods of British colonial rule and the development of similar political and cultural institutions, but, above everything else, the widespread use of the English language.⁶

English is arguably the world language, a result of both the physical colonisation by Britain of one-fifth of the world’s population at the time, the important role that United States plays in world politics and also the ‘linguistic neo-colonialism’ reinforced by governments and educationists. In that sense English is a language that seems to belong to the global; a way for the multilingual world to communicate more directly. As Rushdie argues, the ‘peoples who were once colonised by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it.’ The flexibility and the size of English allows them to ‘[carve] out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.’⁷ And the fact that English is being domesticated by writers of non-native English speaking countries leads me to the conclusion that when we talk about English literature we can no longer refer exclusively to literature produced by native English writers but the body of work produced in the English language in general, an idea that follows the same stream of thought that Rushdie explores in his essay. Based on that, I choose to place my work in the realm of English literature.

When talking about Indian writers writing in English, Rushdie makes sure to explain

5. Rajeshwar Mittapalli, ed., *Commonwealth Fiction : Twenty-first Century Readings* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers / Distributors, 2002), p. iii.

6. *Ibid.*, p. iv.

7. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 64.

how their writing is the ‘Indian branch’ of English literature but it is also Indian literature and says that ‘if history creates complexities, let us not try to simplify them.’⁸ This point takes me to the next issue I am facing when I explore the location my work holds in the literary feast. Here I am borrowing the term ‘literary feast’ from Gregory Jusdanis, who examines Greek Literature and its position in world literature, as well as Marios Vasiliou who makes use of the term in his article *Cypriot English Literature: A Stranger at the Feast Locally and Globally*. Vasiliou discusses the ‘paradoxical position of Cypriot English writers who remain outside the literary feast both at home and abroad.’⁹

Cypriot literature, or better Greek-Cypriot literature, is often examined as part of Greek literature, which in itself has been in the periphery of the global literature, with probably only the exception of the period post WWII when as Gregory Jusdanis argues an interest was ‘taken in Greece as an exotic country, one struggling to modernise yet in possession of its pre-modern, eastern, and peasant culture.’¹⁰ In a world where, as Jusdanis puts it, there is a split between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, those who speak English and those who don’t, national literatures including Greek and in extension Greek Cypriot as well as Turkish Cypriot, are left in the periphery. Vasiliou, rightly wonders where those Cypriot writers who write in English are to be placed. As he points out, the Cypriot writers who write in English find themselves in a double dissociation by remaining unrecognised both internationally and locally.

These literatures are defined by Vasiliou as ‘minor literature’ a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari who used the example of Franz Kafka, by arguing that ‘a minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within

8. Ibid., p. 65.

9. Marios Vasiliou, “Cypriot English Literature : A Stranger At the Feast Locally and Globally,” *Kunapipi* 33 (1 2011): p. 83, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol133/iss1/9>.

10. Gregory Jusdanis, “Greek Literature Abroad: A Stranger At the Feast?,” in *Step-Mothertongue*, ed. Mehmet Yashin (London: Middlesex University Press, 2000), p. 25.

a major language.’¹¹ In that light, Cypriot writers writing in English remove themselves from the Greek and Turkish of the establishments but remain in ‘an ambivalent position in relation to global English and its attendant colonial and imperial connotations.’¹² Thus the ‘English Cypriot literature’ would presumably be considered part of the majority in comparison to Cypriot literature written in Greek or Turkish by being affiliated to a major language and as a result is excluded or marginalised locally. At the same time ‘English Cypriot literature’ is ignored internationally due to the fact that, as Vasiliou argues, ‘its own postcoloniality does not seem to bestow it with enough marginality to elicit the literary world’s attention.’¹³

Questions of identity arise from such a discussion. As I have mentioned in the first chapter, language, alongside religion, has played a major role in the way the two communities, Greek and Turkish, identify themselves. The way we conceive ourselves, both as individuals and as members of a group, alongside the way others categorise us, is the basis of the construction of our identity. Language, being according to Edward Sapir ‘a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols’¹⁴ plays an important role in the construction of an identity on a personal and national level. It is through language that we communicate national ideas, feelings of pride and it is through this communication that history is being passed on, both orally and in writing. Following this idea of language being the unifying bond amongst a group for the construction of a national identity, it is only logical to argue that different languages may cause a chasm or even a disconnection and a partition between groups of people that may remain notional or in other cases extend to a physical division, as the case of Cyprus.

11. Vasiliou, “Cypriot English Literature : A Stranger At the Feast Locally and Globally,” p. 84.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. John Edwards, *Language and Identity: Key Topics in Sociolinguistics*, Kindle Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), loc. 1239-1241.

Discussing the languages of Cyprus, Yashin argues that ‘spoken-languages and written-literatures can only be understood in the context of their complicated relation to political powers and cultural institutions.’¹⁵ The political and historical impetus begins to inhabit a person’s language in a way that gives it a particular texture. Words and meanings become heavier, holy, significant. From the writer’s point of view this can be both a driving force and an unbreakable boundary. Afghan writer, Atiq Rahimi, describes this texture and this connection between the language we use and creativity. He says when talking about his book *The Patience Stone* (2012), which was written in French instead of his native Dari: ‘I realize now that one’s mother tongue is not suitable for writing something of this kind. Just think of the term itself: *mother tongue*. There is something about it that makes it unsuitable for this subject matter. There is some kind of modesty, some reserve.’¹⁶ For Rahimi his native language is very important, it is as he said ‘the language you use to understand the world’ and he treats it likewise.

In chapter one I discussed the events that took place in Cyprus during the 1950s, a period during which the ‘imported’ English language and its literature was counteracting with the established Greek and Turkish of the island, on the nationalistic stage that was blooming at the time. The events of those years established Greek and Turkish cultures as the denominators by which the Cypriot identity could be defined, which left English culture and subsequently English literature, in the margins. Due to that, Cypriots writing in English do not fit in the categories of Cypriot literature, Greek or Turkish, while at the same time they fail to take a spot as post-colonial English. In a way, such works are anomalies, which are difficult to examine under established categories. If we add to the picture the size of Cyprus, and the fact that it was ‘insufficiently victimised to warrant postcolonial attention,’ then it’s not difficult to understand how they missed in being

15. Yaşın, *Step-mothertongue : from Nationalism to Multiculturalism: Literatures of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey*, p. 2.

16. “Lovers,” *PEN America: A Journal for Writers and Readers* (New York), 13 2010, p. 65.

established as ‘part of English literature or as branches of their national literatures.’¹⁷

Then why, one will wonder, a Cypriot writer will choose to write in English? In the beginning of this discussion I explained how I see the question of language as a question of location. I have written political pieces concerning Cyprus in the past, but have always done so in Greek. When I started writing *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, English was the first choice due to the location, the country in which I was. I had by then, lived and studied in England for four years so it was not a question of ‘which language am I going to write in’, but rather ‘what topic will I write about’. The location defined the choice of language. As I was writing I started realising the deeper reasons why I decided to write a ‘political’ novel about Cyprus in English, the reasons why this marriage between the two occurred.

Cypriot poet Costas Montis wrote: ‘Very few read us/ very few know our language/ we are left here without recognition/ without applause/in this distant corner/ but it compensates that we write Greek.’¹⁸ I understand his feelings, I can apprehend the reasons why he felt so blessed to be a Greek speaker but at the same time as a writer I can see the benefits of choosing and adopting a certain language to tell a story. Greek is a beautiful fluid language, highly descriptive and rhythmical. But it is not a language that I chose. Elytis, the great romantic modernist of Greek poetry wrote:

GREEK was the language they gave me;
poor the house on Homer’s shores.

My only care my language on Homer’s shores.[. . .]¹⁹

The key here is the word *given*. Elytis expresses not only how blessed he feels to be using the language of Homer, but also the obligation that is connected to a language such

17. Vasiliou, “Cypriot English Literature : A Stranger At the Feast Locally and Globally,” p. 85.

18. Stefanie Savva, “The Greek Cypriot Writer,” accessed October 30, 2015, <http://kypriaki.com/cyprusdialect/study1.pdf>.

19. Odysseas Elytis, *The Axion Esti*, trans. from the Greek by Edmund Keeley and George Savidis (London: Anvil, 2008), p. 32.

as Greek. He recognises the fact that he is part of this tradition that requests writing to be great, even though it is limited to the 'poor house'. The double stress of the connection between the language he was given and Homer show his worry as a poet to live up to the greatness of the epics but acknowledges the territorial limitations of the Greek language. 'The limits of my language are the limits of my world,' said Ludwig Wittgenstein and I wished for my world to be more than just 35 degrees north and 33 degrees east. Of course, the more I engage with the writing categories under which my work fits, I understand how the adoption of a major language does not necessarily mean that the work will escape marginalisation.

The practical side of the choice to adopt another language to reach a bigger audience seems logical, especially when your mother tongue is spoken by very small numbers. Using English to write meant that not only I would have the linguistic space to deal with the political and nationalistic issues but it also made the story available to a wider audience. The Cypriot market is fairly small, let's not forget that the population of the island is 800,000, and books by Cypriot authors rarely reach the Greek bookshops. To go back to Rahimi, if he had written *The Patience Stone* in Dari he would have to self-censor his work and it would have been almost impossible to make sure that the book reaches readers outside Afghanistan. Writing the novella in French he managed to reach out to a wider market. Greek is spoken by approximately eleven million people. This is not a big number at all if you compare it with languages like English, Chinese, Arabic or Russian.

In theory I believed that the local, that which concerns only a small portion of the world's population through the medium of a widely spoken language, like English, would turn into global. The strive for straight-forward de-colonisation, self-determination and peace of the Cypriot nation would break out of the boundaries of the Greek-speaking world and become a story that could have taken place in any colony, like India or the Caribbean. I could see this trend, in post-colonial writing for writers to consciously make

the choice to write in English, or another language apart from their native and I felt that based on that, the reason why I wanted to tell the story in English was to follow this movement.

Now, after having written the novel and through researching these issues, I came to understand that adopting English to tell this story changed the way I, as a person, handled the events that have defined Cypriot history. As Rahimi says your native tongue is the one you use when ‘you cry, when you laugh.’²⁰ Switching from Greek to English, my writing became less emotionally charged, in the sense that words associated with national pride and the history of a place became detached from personal emotions and experiences. I discovered that by switching to an acquired language I was focusing more on the characters and the plot instead of the politics and the history of the period. I was no longer a spectator to history, a recycler of old rhetoric, but a storyteller able and free to blur concepts of the personal with the political, to play around with the historical and the fictional.

In the beginning my novel was placed in Cyprus and the characters were Cypriot. After producing the first draft which was the main plot, I started trying to find ways to show, through the language I was using, where my characters were coming from, meaning their ethnicity. Paradoxically, I was trying to make English sound a little bit more Greek, and in cases a little bit more Turkish. This did not change when I decided to relocate the novel in a fictional country, Sarouiki, since the ethnicities of the characters remained the same.

A good example to demonstrate this is a piece of dialogue between the main character of my novel, Nikos and his friend:

‘Op! My good friend. How are you re Niko?’ he said tapping repeatedly on Niko’s shoulder.

20. *PEN America*, p. 65.

‘Good, good. You my friend?’

‘Eh, I’m alright. Been busy working at my father’s shop. Now that school’s closed he says I have to go down there and help.’

‘It’s good my friend. Be a shoe maker, it’s a decent job.’

‘A decent job uh? Why don’t you do it? Or are you too good for it? Too smart ah?’

‘E re Louka, I didn’t say that.’

‘Then what did you say?’²¹

Here I used the characteristic *re*, which is an exclamation in Greek. It is not considered very polite but is nevertheless quite common in conversations between friends. I also used *op*, *uh*, *eh*, and *e*. For another character in the book, Feriha, who is Turkish-Cypriot I used phrases like *yavaş yavaş*. For the British soldiers I had to try and make them sound as British as possible. An example of their conversation would be:

‘I don’t know Andy . . . Got a bad feeling mate . . . ’

‘Oh shut up you little cunt! Just search the fucking baskets!’²²

An issue I found with using the dialogues and speech to suggest a character’s background is that it is easy to fall in the trap of stereotyping. Especially in languages that you don’t speak, as was the case with me and Turkish. Developing your characters can take longer since in my experience when developing my protagonist, Nikos, I was constantly caught between the two languages. My character is a Greek speaker, I am writing him in English and I am trying to make him sound Greek. These problems of stereotypes and identity as it is presented through the dialogue, made the writing more challenging. It was a game of questions, an exploration of identity and it reflected my own personal struggle with the entangling problem of being Cypriot.

Adding Greek characteristics to English was probably the easiest language-related problem that I faced. I was very much inspired by the way Greek-speaking people, especially students abroad, use the English language. Instead of relying on myself to

21. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 61

22. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 121

choose how I would give a Greek edge to my dialogues, I observed what non-Greek speakers notice about the way Greeks and Cypriots speak English. *Re* is often adopted by non-Greek speakers who are regularly engaging with Greek speakers socially so it seemed logical to introduce it as a way of developing the dialogues in terms of character identity. As I mentioned though, even the use of *re*, which I too use in English conversations, makes a stereotype of Greek speakers since not all of them will speak English in the same way. The issue was solved when I worked on the dialogues so that the Greek characteristics I used were not employed when Greek speakers were communicating in English in the novel but were only used when the characters were supposing speaking in Greek.

Concerning the Turkish words, I did not want to limit myself to the ones I knew, such as *mashalla* or *evet* because I was worried that I would be unable to create an authentic voice. For this reason I asked a Turkish-Cypriot friend to help. I did not want Turkish words. I was looking for Cypriot expressions in Turkish that I could mould into the English language, like I did with Greek. The way we worked was by reading the passages and chapters where Turkish speakers appeared. Following that we extensively discussed the characters, their ages, their background stories and their role in the plot and we created a list of possible phrases and words I could use. I then proceeded to use this small glossary and read out the dialogues with the addition of Turkish expression until I felt that I had found the ones I wanted. This technique made it easier to avoid the stereotypes since I did not rely on the common conceptions of how Turkish people speak, instead I created a 'language', or rather a 'voice' for each one.

English was the most difficult of the three languages to tackle. How does one make English sound more English? The solution I found was by contrast. I tried to ensure that there are no errors in the dialogues of native English speakers, errors that non-native speakers are more likely to make. Then I used those errors in the dialogues of the non-native speakers. A good example is when 'builded' is used instead of 'built'.

‘Bullshit boy! Rigaina was the one who builded them, I’m telling you, I know, the stories are real, there is no smoke with no fire, you know? The stories are there for a reason, and the reason is that they are true.’²³

This technique created various voices in my head that I was then able to use accordingly. In the above passage for example, the character Manolis an uneducated farmer is speaking in Greek to Nikos. Yet the mistakes he makes do not translate into mistakes in Greek. The aim here was to present recognisable ‘errors’ to readers who cannot speak Greek which would add characterisation to the character. An English reader would be able to recognise that this character is uneducated and often makes mistakes when he speaks in his native tongue, even though the native tongue is not present.

These layers that were created by the use of multiple languages added a lot of characterisation to the text. I was very much inspired by Grandmother Naseem Ghani in *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie uses the catchphrase ‘whatsitname’ throughout the novel when grandmother speaks and thus creates a distinct voice for her which is easily recognisable and memorable. It is a great example of characterisation through dialogue.

Aadam Aziz frowned. ‘What is this, wife?’ To which my grandmother answered, ‘This, whatsitname, is a very heavy pot; and if just once I catch you in here, whatsitname, I’ll push your head into it, add some dahi and make, whatsitname, a korma.’²⁴

Similarly I made use of the word oğlum when Feriha refers to Nikos thus establishing that when this word appears we know who speaks and to whom.

The notional window created by language, through which I was looking at Cyprus, had another effect on the writing. It created a distance that I consider very important, when one decides to deal with matters of nationality and ethnicity. The over-used phrases that speak of the heroism and courage of the EOKA fighters lost some of their glory when I was thinking of them in English. A simple switch from the word *Ελλάδα* (Ellada), to

23. *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, p. 74

24. Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, p. 49.

Greece gave me a distance which allowed me to explore the reality of those years without prejudice. The best way to understand this would probably be by thinking of the phrase ‘I love you’. It feels different when we use a foreign language, even if we are fluent in it, when we say to someone that we love them. Somehow, our native language, the language that nourished us, and the one in which we first heard those words, will feel more real and more powerful when we try to express love.

This opens an interesting discussion on which we as Cypriots consider our ‘mother language’ and the one that I personally believe, is. It seems that Greek, that being Ancient, Byzantine, *katharevousa* or demotic is not a mother tongue for Cypriots. It is one can say a ‘father tongue’, a term I use here to imply masculinity. It is the language of leaders and politicians, the language of military men and pamphlets. On the surface it presents itself as the language of the people of Cyprus, in its core is a way of manipulating and altering the reality of these people. Yashin tries to explain the marginalisation of the Greek Cypriot dialect. He writes:

If we are to analyse the Greek literature of Cyprus –viewed in Greece as a ‘Greek diaspora’ rather than an independent nation-state – we can observe a ritual of self-annihilation in Greek-Cypriots’ attempts to marginalize their own ‘mothertongue’ (*Kypriaka*: Greek dialect of Cyprus) in an effort to associate themselves with the ‘motherland’ (Greece).²⁵

I agree with Yashin that there is a mother tongue of Cyprus, or better mother tongues of Cyprus: the Greek-Cypriot dialect, the Turkish-Cypriot dialect and of course the Maronite and Armenian dialects of the island. I am not saying that dialects are languages, but that if language is one of the ways we use to construct our identity, then a dialect can be ‘our’ language. Centuries of isolation have nourished these languages/dialects into a development very different from their original form. Their uniqueness is manifested in the oral tradition, they borrow from each other and they coexist with each other across roads,

²⁵. Yaşın, *Step-mothertongue : from Nationalism to Multiculturalism: Literatures of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey*, p. 4.

mountains and green lines. The fact that Cyprus has been seen as a literary province of Greece aided the exclusion of literatures written in any other languages in Cyprus from Cypriot literature, which is generally viewed as Modern Greek literature of Cyprus. 'Behind this attitude there is usually a nationalistic ideology', which is reinforced by the educational system of the majority (Greek Cypriots).²⁶

School taught me that. On the 25th of March we would celebrate the beginning of the Greek Liberation fight of 1821 against the Ottomans, every Friday we would raise a Greek flag next to the flag of Cyprus, we had two history books, a big chunky one about Greece, and a small, slim, sad book about Cyprus. I can still recite until today the names of the Greek heroes from antiquity to World War II. All these were taught in Greek, our mother language, in its many forms. A few hours a week we were learning Ancient Greek and we were reading the Epics of Homer as if they were true history. For religious studies we would learn by heart prayers in Byzantine Greek. During our literature classes we would read poetry and prose in *katharevousa*, a conservative form of Modern Greek used in the early 19th century and then we would move on to literature written in *demotic* Greek which is the modern vernacular. During our breaks, at home, amongst friends and family we would speak in the Greek-Cypriot dialect. Our main form of expression, a pillar of our identity was and is so alien to us that one can hardly define it as a mother language.

Even though both Greek and Turkish are the official languages of Cyprus, it is rare post- '74 to find bilingual Cypriots. A new wave of Cypriots, those who have acquired higher education, having the ability to communicate with the other side, in a neutral language, have slowly begun establishing friendships that are important towards the reunification of the island. Research by both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots studying abroad, especially in the UK, is published in English, and is thus available to the whole population to read, discuss and understand. This has become the main reason why I

26. Ibid.

decided to write in English. Adopting English to tell this story not only changed the way I, as a person, handled the historical events but it also opened up the way for me to interact with this new wave of Cypriots who are gradually but steadily achieving what we lacked for decades – dialogue.

As a writer interested in folktales and myths I am also intrigued by the language of Cypriots as it appears in the oral tradition. It is there that the psyche of the island can be found. Of course one cannot ignore the fact that there is a body which this psyche inhabits. Thus we could talk about the duality of Cyprus in terms of language but also the duality of the country in terms of vision. In the introduction of *A Companion to Magical Realism*, Stephen M. Hart engages in this discourse by referring to key texts such as *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), *Men of Maize* (1949) and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). He discusses the ‘split-vision’ evident in the above novels and goes on to say that ‘the realism of the real is permeated by magic just as the world of the magical is underpinned by the real.’ I have explored the idea of ‘split-visions’ in Chapter 1. Here I would like to make a point about the connection between language and vision.²⁷

Writing in English made me aware of this duality. To begin with, by adopting English I was viewing Cyprus through a window. A window that was both notional and physical. The shift from thinking about Cyprus in Greek, to thinking about it in English, meant that Greek and Turkish speaking characters would be imagined in one common, shared language, that of the novel. The distinction between the two communities was blurring in front of my eyes. By trying to interpret a Cypriot accent in the dialogues and by studying the elements of the two dialects, I reached the conclusion that the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish- Cypriot dialects were more similar than I had imagined. With this development which eliminated the schism between Greek and Turkish, a sense of ‘nativeness’ emerged in the text, which made it easier to apply the ‘rules’ of magical realism to the story. The

27. Hart and Ouyang, *A Companion to Magical Realism*, p. 4.

belief systems of two groups of people who are in general thought to be different, were re-imagined in one language and were being placed opposite the beliefs of another group of people, the English colonisers.

Wen-chin Ouyang makes an interesting point in her discussion on the ideology of fantasy. She poses the question of language in terms of resistance and decolonisation. She argues that 'English, French and Spanish [. . .] are the languages of the colonisers and, more importantly, they simultaneously open up and limit creative vistas to a world constructed by these languages in the form of a tradition.' For Ouyang, the choice to write creatively in these languages when trying to engage with colonisation, means that the writer both takes on, but is also limited to their literary tradition, 'including its internalisation of the broader 'Western' literary canon.'²⁸

A fair argument that deals with the issue of choice in terms of language for writers and makes connections between language and magical realism. I find myself partially agreeing with Ouyang that 'to write in a language that does not belong to the coloniser [. . .] affords the writer to map his texts in completely different ways,'²⁹ especially when writing in a language with a long literary tradition. But the same can be said for the choice to write in English. Taking this into consideration, we can reach the conclusion that the choice of language when looking at a text which might be categorised as 'post-colonial' or 'commonwealth' is vital in our interpretation of the text. It's a creative choice, and in both cases, whether the writer adopts the 'language of the colonisers' or not, affects the creative process, as well as the reception and interpretation of the work.

Rushdie warns us against the 'folly of trying to contain writers inside passports'³⁰ and reminds us that English language is no longer the possession of the English. He proposes the notion that 'if all English literatures could be studied together, a shape would emerge

28. Ibid., p. 17.

29. Ibid.

30. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 67.

which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world, and we could see that Eng. Lit. has never been in better shape, because the world language now also possesses a world literature, which is proliferating in every conceivable direction.³¹ I find myself agreeing with this statement on many levels. If the language I choose to adopt in order to write a 'national' piece places me in the centre of the argument concerning writers from Commonwealth countries and their languages, then I wish for this novel to be perceived as a piece of this new world literature that does not request the writer to show his passport.

31. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, p. 70.

Conclusion

This is the end of the Story of Toby. I have written it in this Book. And I have put my name here – Blackbeard – the way Toby first showed me when I was a child. It says that I was the one who set down these words.

Thank you.

Now we will sing.

— Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam*, p. 274

In the beginning of this project my aim was to find belonging by answering questions that have been troubling me for years. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, writing *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* was a question about peace. National peace on one level and personal peace on another. I wanted to fulfil my obligation as a Cypriot as well as citizen of the world in the effort for tranquillity and peace. To be a responsible human, I felt that I first had to find where I belonged, I had to discover who I was, discover the self in a collective context. Not writing in general, but storytelling in particular, has the power to bring forward important points in the conversation of conflict resolution and the achievement of peace.

Fiction, with a special focus on post-colonial writing, deals with matters of nationality and its formulation. As Wen-chin Ouyang argues, magical realism as a genre is not only concerned with the influence of the empire in the post-colonial world but also with the conditions and politics that shape the national identities of the ex-colonies. The sense of belonging is interlinked with a person's national identity – the place where the person

comes from and the place his country holds on the global stage. It was in the genre of magical realism that I found the space I needed to explore my questions concerning 'Cypriotness'.

I have discovered that Cyprus is an anomaly in terms of both post-colonial studies and the literatures of the colonies. And it is the fact that it is an anomaly that makes it interesting in the context of post-colonial literature. In a body of writing as varied as the 'commonwealth literature', these anomalies challenge the rules and their study. Examining Cyprus in this context expands our established ideas on what post-colonial literature is.

Writers who fall in the category of 'commonwealth literature' or 'post-colonial literature', help us through not only their fiction but their critical work as well, to gain a deep understanding of the motives and reasons behind their writing. With the effect of colonialism still strong in the ex-colonies, their input can shape our understanding of contemporary literature. The issue of the identities that arise during the post-colonial period can be explored through fiction, especially with the use of primal or native mythology. Often the writers who deal with such issues do not only occupy themselves with their national identity but also with their personal identity – their struggle is an internal one which through fiction is externalised and globalised. By looking for answers within themselves these writers provide us with routes to explore great contemporary issues.

When Ierodionou states that even though she speaks 'English in perfect imitation of the English teachers who teach [her] how to speak it. [She] went to an English school. When [she speaks] English [she sounds] English but it is not true', she touches upon the sensitive subject of the relationship between colonizer and subject. She points at the falsehood of colonization.

The island I come from is not England. It was owned by England and so was English for a time, but it is not England, even though some parts of the island

were kept by England to use, after it stopped owning the whole island. There are English soldiers there, and streets with neat English houses and English names, as if it is England. It isn't the truth, but it is made to look like the truth.³²

Many of the writers I read and explored in relation to my topic write out of the realisation that what is made to look like the truth is not. One might argue that this kind of research does not offer much in terms of knowledge yet it is fundamental for societies to have an understanding of the ways in which they identify themselves, the ways in which they express themselves and the ways in which they choose to differentiate themselves from others.

In the world of fiction we can set hypothetical scenarios and explore various possibilities. We can re-visit the past, re-imagine it and to a certain extent make rights out of wrongs. In the case of Cyprus, of the possible Cyprus, Sarouiki, the Cypriot identity is challenged, the motives behind the enotic struggle are questioned and the acts of the different ethnic groups examined. Through *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*, a long awaited apology is given – to the young people who were forced into fighting, to the non-Greek communities who were marginalised, to the Greek community that was made to believe that the enemy was always the other. It is an apology of the present to the past, for taking so long to realise that what appears to be the truth is not always so.

Writing a novel is a long process, during which many creative decisions are made. This commentary is not a diary of that process but a study on the topics that arouse during the writing, with politics and history being the most prominent. Many of the ideas discussed emerged from the study of the novel after it was written and gave me an insight on the influences that I was not aware of. A good example of this is the idea of re-creating the homeland as that is explored in Chapter 2.

Fiction has always been my greatest love and writing my way for expressing this

32. Ierodionou, "Truth," p. 34.

love. It has been my way of making sense of the world, my way of reaching the truth as Rushdie puts it. I set out to find the truth about peace and in that I believe I have been successfully unsuccessful because I realised that there is never one answer but many. The one thing I know that I learnt is that through fiction we can explore those possible answers and in the process discover small but important truths.

Appendices

A | Map of Sarouiki

This is the main design for the map of Sarouiki which includes the towns and villages mentioned in *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs*. It was designed by me after the decision to change the location of the story and it served as a guide during the re-writing process.

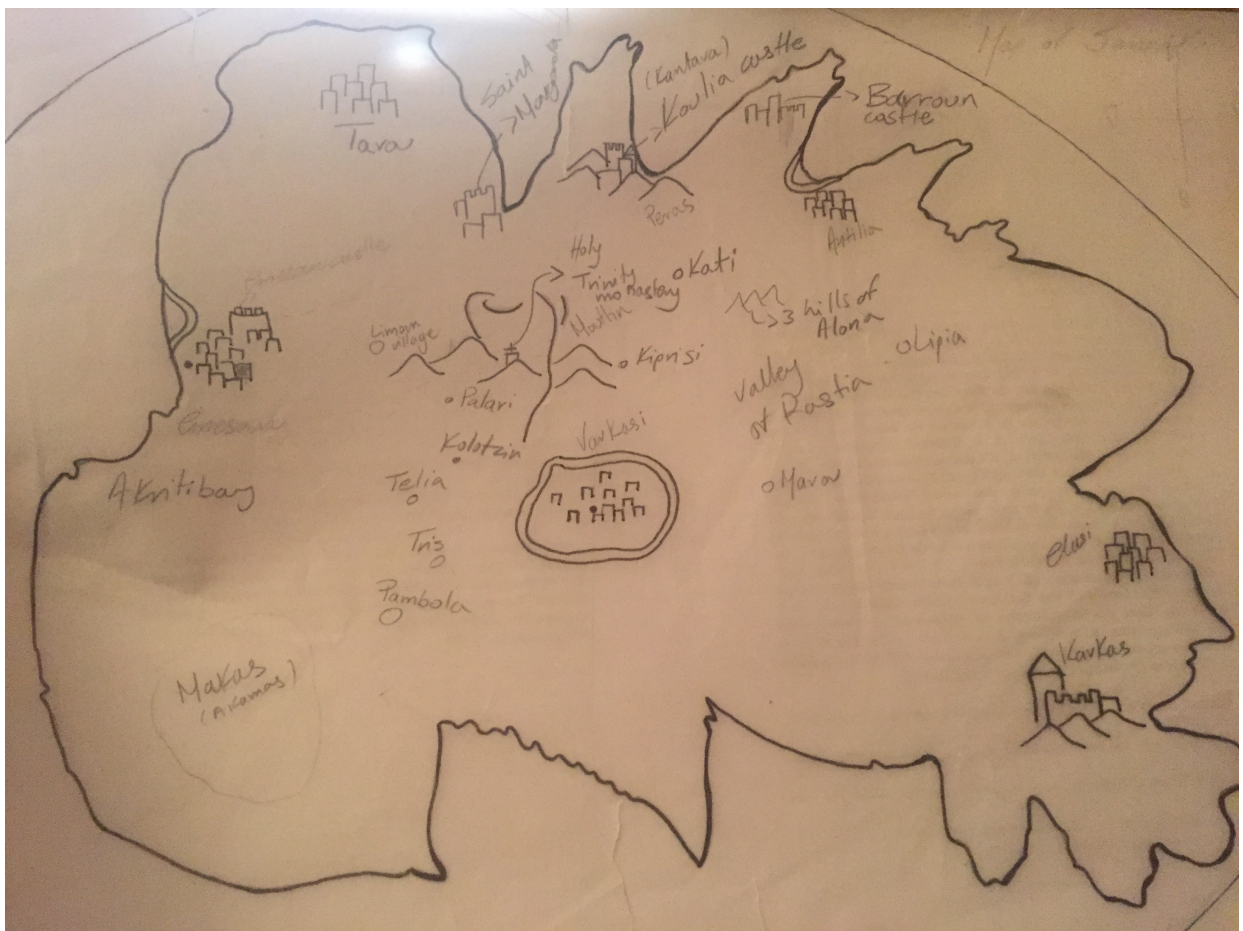


Figure A.1: Original hand-drawn map of Sarouiki. The shape was created by tracing an arrangement of leaves.

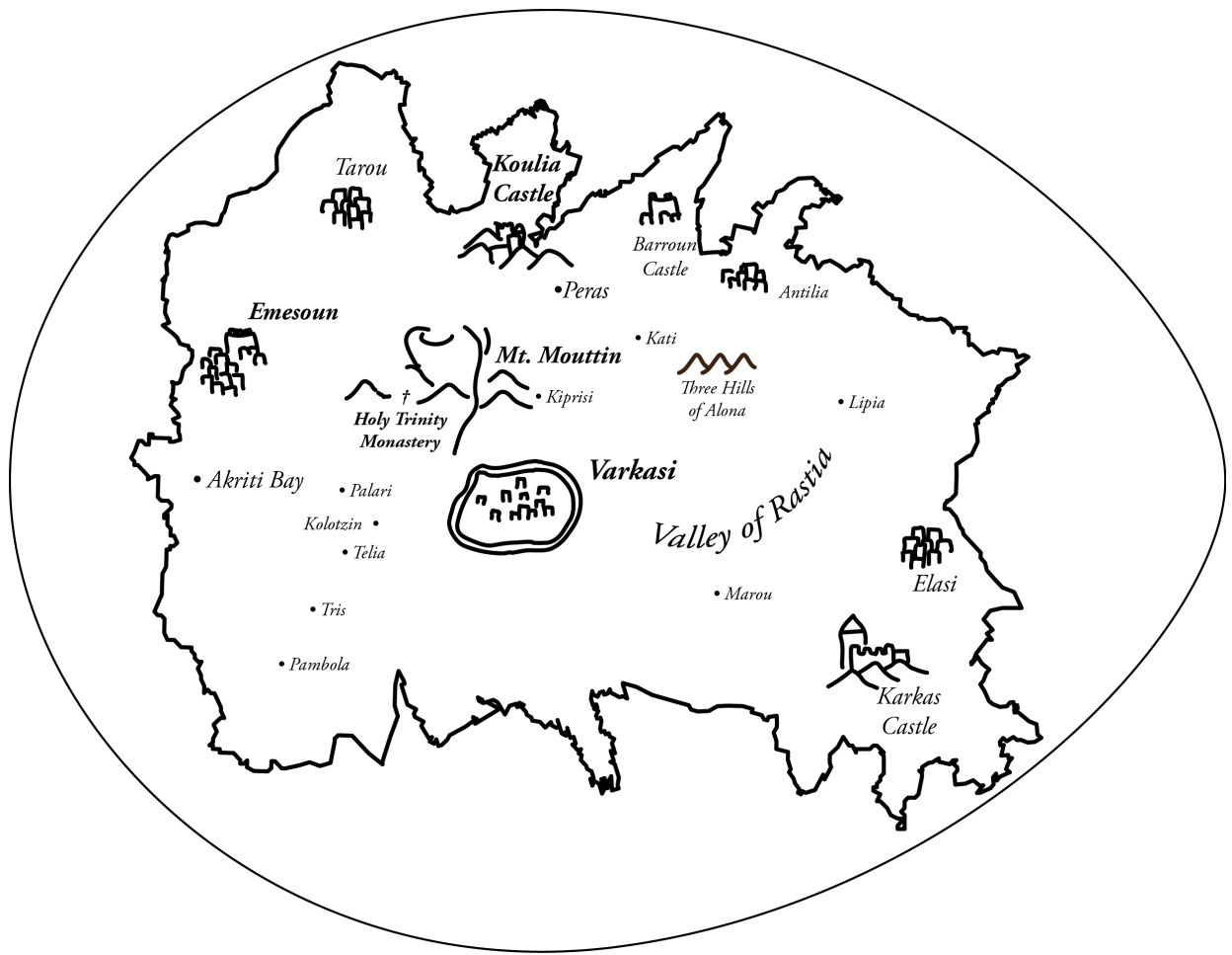


Figure A.2: Updated version of the original.

B | List of Characters

A list which includes the main characters. This was updated during the writing process and was used to keep track of names and relationships.

Nikos Georgiou

Main character. He is fifteen when the story begins.

Angelos Georgiou

Nikos' older brother. He is two years older than Nikos. He joins AOS from the beginning of the events and by the end of the story we learn that he was executed.

Iroula Georgiou

Nikos' mother. After her husband is arrested and her older son joins the guerrillas, she refuses to speak or eat.

Anastasia

Nikos' neighbour. She is famous for her white hair and she is known as the most beautiful girl in Sarouiki. She disappears and through her monologues we learn that she is held captive in the one of the castles. Nikos sets out to find her.

Maria

The mother of Anastasia. She appears sporadically.

Loukas

One of Nikos' classmates. He decided to join AOS due to his father admiration towards the guerrillas of EOKA in Cyprus. He comes across Nikos on the mountains and leads him to the General. He is later executed.

Feriha

Turkish-Sarouikian fortune-teller and the assumed narrator of the story. She was born with Sarouiki and she appears as an all-knowing spirit who advises Nikos and helps me set out on his journey.

Manolis

Farmer and grape seller. Nikos while heading for Mouttin and travels with him for a while. Through his narration we find out about his wife, Anna who died during child birth.

The General

Based on the historical figure of General Georgios Grivas who lead the EOKA fight in Cyprus. Nikos meets him at the monastery where he becomes a member of AOS.

Rigaina

Based on the medieval mythical figure from Cyprus. She haunts Anastasia during her captivity.

c | Design of Oulipian poem

The contents page of *I Dreamt of Saltwater and Eggs* is an Oulipian concrete poem in the shape of a cocoon. The first attempt was to generate a version of the shape compiled by boxes. Each box corresponded to a letter/whitespace. After various alterations of this idea, a more abstract shape was chosen and the poem was written to fit the length of each line in order to create the design. Each poem line was written with the content of the corresponding chapter in mind.

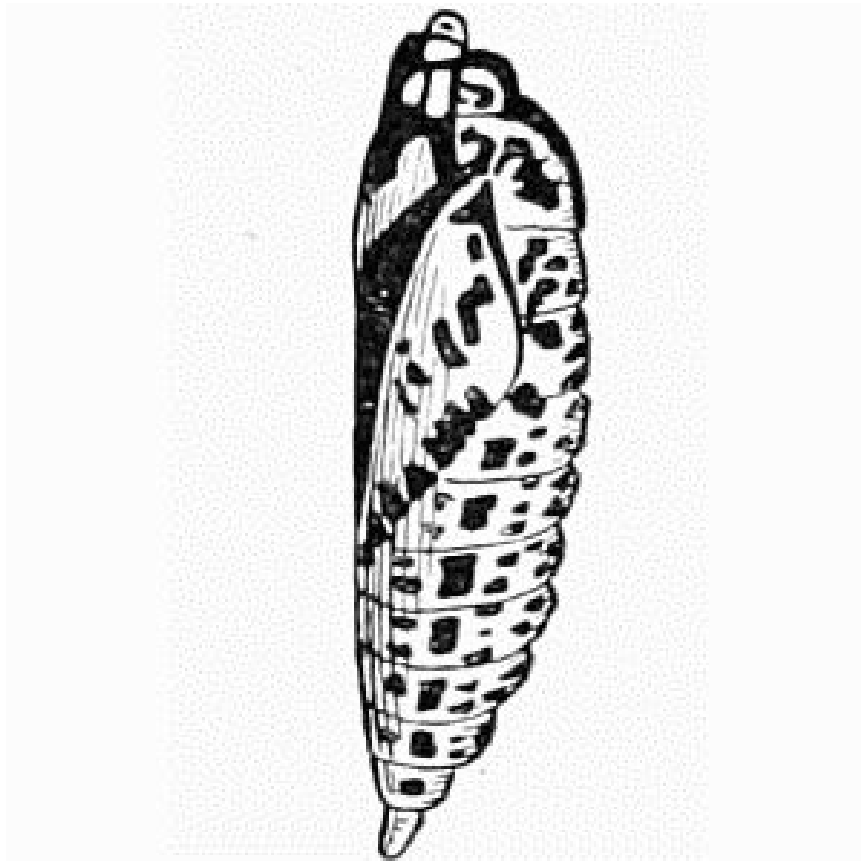


Figure C.1: Original sketch of the cocoon used.
From *Butterflies and Moths*, by William S. Furneaux, fig. 33

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