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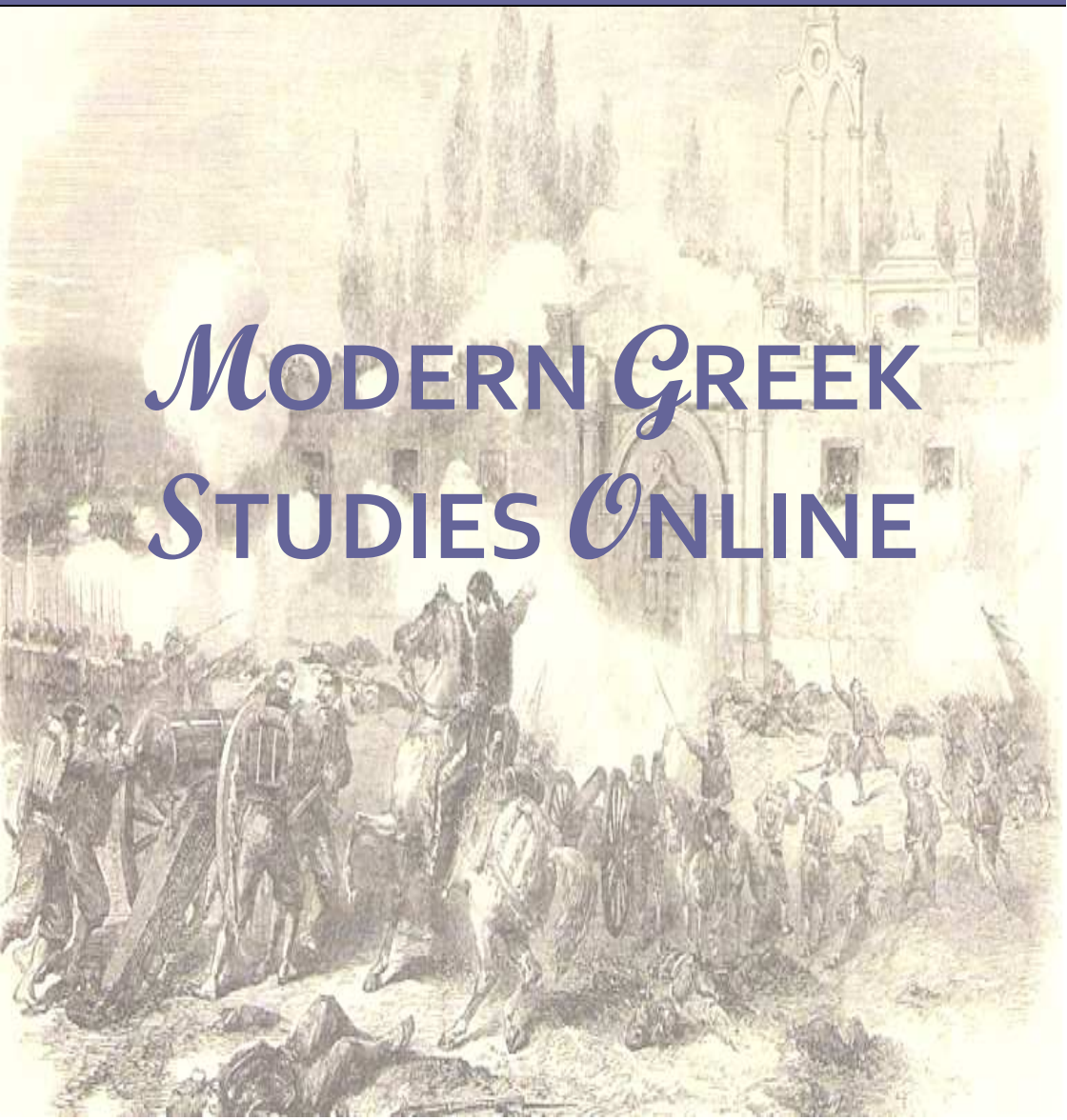

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"AFFORD REFUGE TO CHRISTIANS IN DISTRESS": AN (UNOFFICIAL) BRITISH HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE ARKADI EVENTS OF NOVEMBER 1866

Mick McTiernan

In November 1866, Cretan Christians seeking *enosis*, union with Greece, occupied the monastery at Arkadi, holding it against the forces of Mustapha Pasha. Following a short siege, Ottoman forces stormed the monastery and fought their way in through a breach in the walls. Rather than surrender, the besieged ignited a powder magazine within the monastery. A few weeks later, a British gunboat anchored off south west Crete and embarked some 315 Christian refugees and wounded taking them to Piraeus.[1] This action, carried out at the request of the British Consul in Crete, but without the knowledge or consent of the British government, was considered by the Ottomans to be a breach of their declared blockade of the island, and a breach of declared British neutrality. London, accepting, with reluctance, that the Consul and the ship's Captain had acted for humanitarian reasons, distanced itself from the consequences of the evacuation and took steps to ensure that no such action would be repeated by a British vessel. [2]

On 28 April 1866 Charles Hamner Dickson, the British Consul in Canea, reported to his direct superior Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire based in Constantinople, that "signs of disaffection are beginning to manifest themselves in various parts of this island;" a report copied to the Earl of Clarendon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.[3] On 5 May Dickson reported that a gathering of nearly 1000 "Cretan Greeks" had taken place outside Canea, and that in spite of assurances from the Governor-General that their grievances would be investigated, the gathering had determined not to disperse until they had received a satisfactory reply from Constantinople. In the same

1. House of Commons Command Paper (hereafter HCCP): 1867 [3771] *Correspondence respecting the disturbances in Crete: 1866-67*. Item 143, Enclosure 2. Pym to Vice Admiral Lord C. Paget, 13 December 1866.

2. HCCP 3771: 166/2, Ali Bey to Dickson, 20 December 1866. HCCP 3771: 170, Stanley to Dickson, 8 January 1867.

3. HCCP 3771: 1/1, Dickson to Lyons, 28 April 1866.

report, Dickson suggested that a British warship be sent to Crete "for the protection of British interests and as a measure of general security."[4]

By 14 May, Dickson was reporting that about 4000 "Cretan Greeks" had now gathered and Muslims were beginning to abandon their villages suspecting that the assembly was a precursor to military action against them. By 2 June, Dickson reported that the assembly had produced its petition to the Sultan and furnished copies to the various Christian consuls in Canea.[5] The petition reiterated the previous grievances and made specific reference to the failure of the Ottoman authorities on Crete to implement the provisions of the *Hatt-ı Hümayun*, the Sultan's 1856 proclamation guaranteeing freedom of religion throughout the Empire and lifting many discriminatory restrictions on non-Muslims.[6] Almost simultaneously however, another agenda was revealed by a separate address, in the form of a petition to the Sultan, which was copied to Lyons in Constantinople on 19 June by a representative of the Cretan Christians.[7] This petition, dated 15 May 1866, requested Queen Victoria, and the monarchs of the Protecting Powers of Greece, to unite Crete with Greece or, failing that, to obtain a separate political organisation for Crete; an agenda of which the Porte were well aware.[8] Lyons refused to accept the petition.[9]

The initial Ottoman reaction to the agitation was to send 2,500 troops, plus artillery, to the island (Dontas 1966: 68), followed by a further 5,700 in early June,[10] and to call on the assembly to disperse peacefully. The Ottoman response to the petition to the Sultan and the continued assembly of Cretan Christians was contained in instructions issued by the Porte to the Governor General of Crete on 15 July, ordering him to forcibly dissolve the Christian Cretan Assembly, if it did not immediately disperse.[11] To this end a further 6,000 troops were sent to the island bringing the total of Ottoman forces at this stage to approximately 22,000 (Dontas 1966: 70). The Cretan Christian reaction, as reported by Dickson on 18 August, was for many families to flee their towns and villages and take to the mountains,

4. HCCP 3771: 2/2, Dickson to Lyons. 5 May 1866.

5. Consuls at that time included the British, Austrian, French, Russian, Italian, Greek, Swedish and American. HCCP 3771: 3/1, Dickson to Lyons, 14 May 1866. HCCP 3771: 5/1, Dickson to Lyons, 2 June 1866.

6. *Hatt-ı Hümayun*: Electronic source at: http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/reform.htm

7. HCCP 3771: 8, Lyons to Clarendon, 19 June 1866.

8. HCCP 3771: 7, Lyons to Clarendon, 19 June 1866.

9. HCCP 3771: 8, Lyons to Clarendon, 19 June 1866.

10. HCCP 3771: 5/1, Dickson to Lyons, 2 June 1866.

11. HCCP 3771: 22/1, Porte to Governor of Crete, 15 July 1866.

and to commence the formation of bands of armed men.[12] On 21 August, the Central Committee of Cretans, also referred to as the General Assembly of Cretans, declared to the Christian Powers (the "three protecting and guaranteeing Great Powers") in a communication apparently sent via Greece direct to the governments in question, that: "there was no other alternative left to the Christian population of Crete other than to take up arms to protect their honour, life and property by repulsing violence by violence."[13] By 2 September, when the General Assembly of Cretans declared "Ottoman dominion is abolished forever in the Island of Crete [...] [and] Crete, with all its dependencies is forever and inseparably united to Greece" a virtual state of war existed.[14] With four armed groups on the island, regular Ottoman troops, their Egyptian allies, Cretan Muslim irregulars (*başı bazuk*) and Cretan Christians, fighting continued sporadically throughout the next few months with both Cretan Christians and Ottoman forces claiming to have inflicted significant defeats upon the other and with each accusing the other of committing atrocities against civilians and prisoners.[15] Following an encounter at Vafe on 24 October, after which both sides claimed a victory, Dickson reported that the Ottoman commander had proclaimed an amnesty for all who had taken part in the insurrection on condition that they lay down their arms immediately.[16] This amnesty was ignored by significant numbers of insurrectionists, "malcontents" according to Dickson,[17] several hundred of whom, along with women and children, eventually rallied at the fortified monastery at Arkadi, several kilometres south of Rethymno.

The two-day siege of Arkadi ended on 21 November 1866 when the Ottoman forces stormed the building. Shortly after the Ottoman troops fought their way into the monastery complex, a powder magazine was deliberately exploded, either by the Abbot or by one of the Cretan Christian commanders, depending upon the version of the story. The explosion resulted in the deaths of the many of those inside, both Cretan Christian fighters and civilians, and Ottoman troops. Though frequently stated to-

12. HCCP3771: 35/1, Dickson to Lyons, 18 August 1866.

13. HCCP 3771: Item 40 Central Committee of Cretans to Representatives of the Christian Powers in Crete, 21 August 1866.

14. HCCP 3771: 53/1, Erskine to Stanley, 21 September 1866. HCCP 3771: 49/1, Dickson to Stanley & Lyons, 3 Sept 1866.

15. HCCP 3771: 54, Lloyd to Erskine,18 Sept 1866. N.B. Duplication of item number. HCCP 3771: 57/1, Dickson to Lyons, 11 September1866.

16. HCCP 3771: 108, Dickson to Stanley, 3 November 1866.

17. Ibid.

day that a massacre of Cretan Christians followed the storming of the building, a figure of 114 being commonly quoted,[18] no such event is mentioned in initial reports from, or to, Dickson, although he later refers to the butchery and plunder carried out by *başı bazuks* at Arkadi.[19] However, the fate of the prisoners taken in the siege did cause some concern to observers; Dickson suggests that some were secretly beheaded while *en route* to prison and that at least 45 were eventually incarcerated in Rethymno,[20] while another, near contemporary, report recorded by a writer who travelled with the Greek insurgents, states that "more than one hundred women [were] spared at the time and soon afterwards set at liberty [...] along with a hearty looking priest who escaped from Arkadi just as it was stormed" (Skinner 1868: 76–77).

Following the events at Arkadi, the remnants of insurgent forces in the west of the island retreated over the mountains towards the districts of Selino and Sfakia, taking with them their families and being pursued by the forces of Mustapha Pasha. The potential plight of foreign volunteers fighting alongside the insurgents, if caught by the Ottomans, as well as the conditions of the refugees and the onset of winter, prompted Dickson's request to Commander Pym, Captain of H.M.S. *Assurance*, that he take his ship along the west coast of the island and offer assistance to any Christians in distress.

THE CONSUL AND THE COMMANDER

Charles Hamner Dickson, the British consul in Crete in 1866, was born in Tripoli in 1824 and entered the consular service in 1846, being appointed vice consul in Benghazi. After service as an interpreter in the Crimean War, for which he was awarded an Ottoman Imperial Order, he was appointed consul in Crete on 14 January 1865, leaving the island in 1868 (Herslet 1869: July) and dying in Constantinople in July 1869.

18. http://www.mlahanas.de/Greece/Regions/MoniArkadiou.html Accessed 19 May 2016, states that 114 prisoners were killed. Numerous other websites quote this figure, but none give any reference to the source. Contemporary newspaper reports, quoting Ottoman communiqués, suggest around 42 insurgents and 90 women and children were taken prisoner: The Tablet 22 December 1866: 4. http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/22nd-december-1866/4/the-cretan-insurrection Accessed 12 June 2016.

19. HCCP 3771: 126 & 127/1&2, Dickson to Stanley, 26 November & 3 December 1866. HCCP 3771:132. Dickson to Stanley,10 December 1866.

20. HCCP 3771: 132. Dickson to Stanley, 10 December 1866.

His employment background, apparently solely within the Ottoman Empire or on the disputed border with Russia, opened him to allegations that he was unduly pro-Ottoman in his reporting from Crete. A later critic observed that "Consul C. H. Dickson at Crete, who was soon to embarrass his government with his highly-colored and misleading pro-Turkish reports on the Cretan uprising of 1866-67, had twenty-one years' service in Turkey" (Iseminger 1968: 300); while his fellow (American) consul W. J. Stillman alleged that "Dickson, a man of the most humane character and entire honesty, had an unfortunate weakness before constituted authorities, and the greatest possible respect for the Turks, coupled with an Englishman's innate dislike for a Greek", and later described him as "the honest, if too pro-Turkish, Dickson" (Stillman 1874: 44 and 1901: ch. XXI, 33).

In contrast to much of the later British newspaper reporting of the conditions that led to the insurrection, Dickson, though he had only been on the island for a relatively short time, took the view that all the peasantry were suffering under the burden of Ottoman mismanagement, though not all suffering equally or in the same manner. At the start of his reporting on the insurrection, he noted that "the grievances complained of are not confined to the Greek rural population alone, but affect the Mahometan peasantry as well."[21] A year later, 4 April 1867, after the events at Arkadi and after the voyage of H.M.S. *Assurance*, though sympathetic to the Cretan Christian complaints, he was still unwilling to support the insurrection:

> I shall not recapitulate the several grievances specified in the petition to the Sultan [...] and which I consider to be in a great measure well founded, yet, as I distinctly declared to the Cretans at the time, by no means to such a degree as ought to provoke insurrection.[22]

Concerns were expressed about his apparent over-reliance on the official Ottoman version of events in Crete. His alleged bias in reporting was challenged by Edward Erskine (British Minister Plenipotentiary to Greece) who, as early as 10 November 1866, complained:

> I perceive that [...] Dickson's intelligence is mainly derived from official sources; and although the versions published here of what is taking place in Crete may not be altogether trustworthy it is as well to have both sides of

21. HCCP 3771: 1, Enclosure 1. Dickson to Lyons, 28 April 1866.

22. HCCP Paper No.3854/3994 Part II Volume/Page; LXXV.601–693. *Reports received from Her Majesty's Ambassadors and Consuls Relating to the Condition of Christians in Turkey:* 14/14: 47.

> the story. At all events I do not find that anyone here believes that the insurrection is as nearly at an end as is supposed by [...] Dickson.[23]

Dickson's initial reports on the Arkadi event illustrate his approach to the insurrectionists, describing, on 26 November 1866, the Cretan Christians who fought there as "a band of malcontents [who] had resolved on offering resistance at the noted monastery of Arkadi."[24] A short while later, 10 December, Dickson had a somewhat clearer picture of the events which lead to the explosion at the monastery and its consequences. Though acknowledging the bravery of those who died, he was highly critical of insurgents for allowing so many women and children to be at Arkadi:

> The brave defenders of the monastery have on that occasion evidentially been true to their motto (Liberty or Death!); yet the cruelty if not the wickedness of permitting a number of defenceless women and children to remain on the premises after it was known that a large Turkish force had left Retimo town to attack them remains to be explained.[25]

Whatever his personal preferences may have been, Dickson's instructions from his immediate superior, Lord Lyons, made it clear as early as 12 August 1866 that Dickson was to "promote all endeavours on the part of the Ottoman authorities to restore tranquillity and maintain the legitimate authority of the government without recourse to force", and to "avoid all unnecessary interference in the unhappy dispute."[26] The constraints on Dickson's course of action were confirmed in October 1866 when, whilst accepting that his previous instruction was now outdated by the outbreak of fighting, Lyons reminded Dickson of the need to maintain "a careful neutrality;"[27] Lyons previous posting as Ambassador to Washington during the American Civil War and his involvement in the "Trent Incident", in which a US warship boarded a British merchant vessel and removed two Confederate diplomats,[28] had made him sensitive to the potential consequences of breaches of neutrality. However, at Dickson's instigation, British neutrality was to be put at risk by a relatively junior Royal Navy officer.

23. HCCP 3771: 106 & 119. Erskine to Stanley, 10 & 27 November 1866.
24. HCCP 3771: Item 126. Dickson to Stanley, 26 November 1866.
25. HCCP 3771: 132, Dickson to Stanley, 10 December 1866.
26. HCCP 3771: 22/4, Lyons to Dickson, 12 August 1866.
27. HCCP 3771: 80/1, Lyons to Dickson, 15 October 1866.
28. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Electronic source at: http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17292?docPos=4, Accessed 11.35 hrs 3 Jan 2011.

William Henry Pym was born in 1828, and in 1866, while holding the rank of Commander, was the Captain of the gunboat H.M.S. *Assurance*. Described as having:

> a certain defiance of red-tape and a feverishness to distinguish himself which did not always measure carefully the purport of general orders, and which, perhaps, in battle would have made him turn a blind eye to a signal of recall, and now disposed him to abandon on any pretext the cold blooded neutrality of his government (Stillman 1874: 91),

he was ordered to Canea in order to be on hand to provide protection for British citizens and property, arriving there in late October/early November 1866.[29] According to Dickson in a despatch dated 17 November, i.e. before the events at Arkadi, on arrival in Crete, one of Pym's first actions was to go, with Dickson, "about the beginning of the month" to meet Aali Bey, the Acting Governor General of Crete. At this meeting they discussed with Aali Bey the proposal that:

> as the insurrection might now be happily considered at an end, whether Her Majesty's ship might not be of service in transporting some of the Christian families in distress (along with their men) who might be desirous of quitting the island and proceeding to Greece.[30]

In the same despatch Dickson wrote that "Aali Bey assured us that he would write to Mustapha Pasha on the subject"; a promise that Dickson was later to turn to the claim that "before requesting Captain Pym to proceed to the western end of the island, I obtained the consent of the Imperial Commissioner to that step."[31] According to Dickson, the French Consul agreed with sentiments he and Pym had expressed to Aali Bey, but declined to take action without orders. Subsequently Pym and Dickson also decided to take no further action on the matter, Dickson reporting that "no Christian families [...] signified to us any anxiety to leave the island."[32]

It is unclear from the content of the despatch of 17 November whether this meeting with Aali Bey took place before or after Dickson had received

29. HCCP 3771: 118, Dickson to Stanley, 17 November 1866.

30. *Ibid*. Writing much later, Stillman, the American consul, claimed that it was at his initiative, and on his pleading, that Dickson and Pym acted. However, he claims to have done so on or after the receipt of a despatch from his superiors in America dated 25 December (Stillman 1901: 28). Pym and Dickson had clearly been considering such action from early November and the voyage of H.M.S *Assurance* took place on 10 December.

31. HCCP 3771: 150, Dickson to Stanley, 13 December 1866.

32. HCCP 3771: 118, Dickson to Stanley, 17 November 1866.

orders from Lyons instructing him to "urge the Ottoman authorities to take, and to take himself, every feasible and proper measure to save the women and children not only from insult and injury, but also from hunger and cold."[33] However, this instruction was given in the light of the belief that the insurrection was almost at an end, and following a request from the King of Greece for the Protecting Powers to provide ships to evacuate Cretan Christian refugees to Greece—a request which was turned down.[34] Dickson later acknowledged that on the 10 November he had received orders that he "was in no way to promote or encourage the embarkation of Cretans in foreign ships, as Her Majesty's Ministers had determined to maintain the strictest neutrality on this question."[35] Notwithstanding the issue of neutrality, the matter of using a Royal Navy vessel, or any other foreign vessel, to pick up refugees was further complicated by the Ottoman proclamation, in a circular addressed to the consuls in September 1866, of a partial naval blockade of Crete.[36]

By 8 December 1866, Dickson had reached the conclusion that the potential plight of "foreign insurgent volunteers" facing execution if captured (Stillman 1874: 86) had reached such extremities that direct action was required, even if this action was contrary to the letter and spirit of his instructions.[37] Consequently, conflating the interests of the volunteers with those of the refugees, a step which was subsequently referred to in the House of Lords as "imprudent", he requested Pym to:

> cruize close to the western coast of the island [and] seize every available opportunity for affording refuge to any Christian in distress who may seek protection on board your ship, and [...] convey the same to any port in Greece that you may deem advisable.[38]

On arrival off Selino-Kastelli (modern Paleochora, on the extreme south-west of the island) on the afternoon of 10 December, Pym discovered:

> 25 wounded and sick men, 126 women, and 164 children (Christians) [who] sought refuge on board from the district of Selino; and as they were ex-

33. HCCP 3771: 140, Lyons to Stanley, 7 November 1866.

34. HCCP 3771: 110, Erskine to Stanley, 15 November 1866.

35. HCCP 3771: 118, Dickson to Stanley, 17 November 1866.

36. HCCP 3771: 113/1, Mustapha Pasha to Dickson, 23/24 September 1866.

37. HCCP 3771: 132. Dickson to Stanley, 10 December 1866. See also HCCP 3771:131, H. Elliot, Consul in Florence, to Stanley, 19 December 1866, re the execution of two Italian volunteers captured during fighting at Kissamos.

38. House of Lords Debate 8 March 1867. Vol.185 c.1541. Earl of Kimberly. HCCP 3771: 132/1, Dickson to Pym, 8 December 1866.

> posed to hunger and the inclemency of the weather (the mountains being covered with snow), their villages having been destroyed and as they expected no quarter from the Turks [...] I considered it my duty to receive them on board, and having being requested to take them to Piraeus, I did so accordingly [...][39]

Meanwhile, on 13 December, having received further instructions not to take any action which might be a "manifestation of sympathy with the insurgents," [40] Dickson again wrote to Pym, this time requesting him not to "receive any insurgents on board but [...] return without delay to Suda Bay." By now however, Pym had made the journey, arriving in Piraeus with the refugees on 13 December where he received Dickson's cancellation of the original request.[41]

In the aftermath of the evacuation, H.M.S. *Assurance* returned briefly to Crete on 18 December before departing the following day for Malta, a move in station initially reported in the European press as being at the request of the Porte because of Pym's activity—reports which were later refuted since the orders to replace the *Assurance* could only have been sent before Pym's voyage to Selino-Kastelli.[42] News of H.M.S. *Assurance*'s arrival in Piraeus with the refugees reached Lyons in Constantinople on 17 December and formal notification appears to have reached the Foreign Office in London on 26 December via a dispatch from the British consul in Syra.[43] News of the voyage was broken to the British public in *The Times* on 28 December.[44]

Pym's actions were investigated by the Admiralty and Pym was described as being "justified in his proceedings" on the grounds that he acted out of the best humanitarian motives and at the request of Dickson. This view was accepted by the Foreign Office with some alacrity, both the Foreign Office and the Admiralty stressing the humanitarian aspects of the voyage in order to forestall any accusations of offering aid and support to the insurgents.[45] Though Pym was cleared, the Admiralty criticised Dickson for seeking to use a British vessel of war to "carry away foreign merce-

39. HCCP 3771: 143/2, Pym to Vice Admiral Lord C. Paget , 13 December 1866.
40. HCCP 3771: 150, Dickson to Stanley, 13 December 1866.
41. HCCP 3771: 143/5, Dickson to Pym, 13 December 1866.
42. *Manchester Guardian,* 31 December 1866: 3 and 5 January 1867: 6.
43. HCCP 3771: 133, Lloyd to Stanley, 15 December 1866.
44. *The Times,* 28 December 1866: 7.
45. HCCP 3771: 143, Admiralty to Stanley, 27 December 1866. HCCP 3771: 144, Hammond to Admiralty, 29 December 1866

naries who are aiding and abetting an insurrection to overthrow their [the insurrectionists'] Government, in case of their defeat."[46] Clearly the Admiralty did not appreciate a relatively junior diplomat getting the Royal Navy involved in a potentially serious diplomatic situation.

In spite of his exoneration, Pym was "severely reprimanded" in March 1867 in connection with a court-martial of one of his crew and returned to England on the grounds of "ill health" that July. He never held a seagoing post again and after further reprimands, poor fitness reports and a suspension to avoid his own court-martial for making false journal entries, he retired in 1873, dying in March 1886.[47]

Dickson's superiors in the Foreign Office, in their turn, could do little other than endorse Dickson's actions, particularly since, by early January 1867, British public reaction to events on the island had, in part, manifested itself with the formation of the "Candian Refugees Relief Fund." However, it is clear from the despatch from Foreign Secretary Stanley to Dickson on 8 January 1867 that there were doubts over Dickson's claim that the trip was authorised by the Ottoman authorities and concern that the "proceeding was in strictness open to objection as being not altogether consistent with the neutrality of the British Government in regard to the contest in Crete." In the circumstances, Stanley told Dickson: "I will not disapprove your conduct"; going on in the same communication to remind him to maintain neutrality and declining to sanction Dickson's suggestion of a combined consular approach to the Ottoman authorities on Crete,[48]—clearly a matter of being "damned with faint praise."

Despite the efforts of the Foreign Office to paint the trip of H.M.S. *Assurance* as a humanitarian voyage carried out by a consul without government sanction,[49] other navies were quick to seize the voyage as a precedent. On 26/27 December 1866 the Russian frigate *Grand Amiral*, went from Canea to Tripiti Bay, near Selino-Kastelli, where she embarked some 1,100 people, including fighters and returning "volunteers," taking them to Piraeus. On being challenged by an Ottoman steamer as to why they were breaking the blockade, the Russian Captain responded that he was acting on his own initiative and:

46. HCCP 3771: 143/1, Vice Admiral Paget to Admiralty, 22 December 1866.

47. National Archives (NA), Admiralty Series ADM 196/37 and ADM196/13.

48. HCCP 3771: 170, Stanley to Dickson, 8 January 1867.

49. HCCP 3771: 147, Stanley to Fane (Interview with French Ambassador, 29 December 1866.)

> that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sultan had besides stated [...] that "the fact of a first transport of Cretan refugees by the English gunboat, totally changed the aspects of things" and that the Porte could not henceforth object to ships of other nations following that example.[50]

The Porte however, did object and made clear its objections to the picking up of refugees when, on 17 January 1867, the Ottoman authorities requested the assistance of Dickson and other European consuls in providing naval forces to evacuate foreign volunteers who wished to take no further part in the Cretan fighting. In doing so, Aali Bey specifically stated that "no Cretans, whether men, women or children must be removed,"[51] a distinction made to ensure that the insurgents were not relieved of the burden of feeding and caring for their non-combatant dependents. This time, Dickson, presumably having learned his lesson, declined to request the use of a British warship, in part, he stated, because this would be a "breach of neutrality."[52] By August 1867, the Ottoman policy towards refugees had become unsustainable and the evacuation of Cretan Christians grudgingly tolerated.[53] However, with the French, Russian, Austrian, Italian, and Prussian navies all sending warships, in September the Ottoman authorities again sought to stop the evacuation.[54] Throughout the Porte's changes of policy towards the evacuations, irrespective of Dickson's continuing requests and hints from the Royal Navy, the British Government remained adamant that no British warships would be involved. [55]

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE CRETAN INSURRECTION

Intervention by foreign consuls to prevent massacre was not unknown in the history of Greek-Ottoman relations. In 1823, the French, Austrian and Dutch consuls in Athens, and the captains of two French ships, had been responsible for saving some 550 Ottoman soldiers from Greek soldiers and the citizens of Athens following the surrender of the Turkish garrison of

50. HCCP 3771: 193/2, Extract from *Journal de St. Petersbourg,* January 19/20 1867.

51. HCCP 3771: 201, Dickson to Stanley, 19 January 1867.

52. *Ibid*.

53. HCCP 3965 (*Reports by Consul-General Longworth, respecting Island of Crete, 1858)*: 229, Ellis to Stanley, 3 August 1867.

54. HCCP 3965: 265, Dickson to Stanley, 28 September 1867. HCCP 3965: 267, Musurus Pasha to Stanley, 13 October 1867.

55. HCCP 3965: 230/4, Dickson to Ellis, 21 July 1867. HCCP 3965: 253/1, Paget to Secretary of Admiralty, 1 September 1867. HCCP 3965: 254, Hammond to the Secretary of Admiralty, 21 September 1867.

the Acropolis (Brewer 2003: 171–172). Additionally, Britain's military intervention in the Greek War of Independence was triggered in part by reports of Ottoman atrocities and rumours of a plan to depopulate Greece, selling the inhabitants into slavery (Bass 2008: 124). By 1866, however, the Ottoman Empire was an ally alongside whom Britain had gone to war against Russia in the recent past, and whose territorial integrity was considered vital to British interests in the Mediterranean; while Greece was viewed with exasperation. From its creation, the new-born Greek state had been in a chaotic political and financial situation. In 1858, Greek finances were in such a state that the country was forced to submit to an international commission from the Protecting Powers who took control of a portion of her finances in order to repay debts incurred during, and since, the creation of the state (Woodhouse 1977: 100). That this financial mismanagement influenced British governmental reaction to the Cretan Insurrection was highlighted by Stanley:

> Opinion here is undecided about the Cretan quarrel. Nobody much believes in the Turks, but the old Phil-Hellenism is dead, and cannot be revived. Greece is too much associated in the English mind with unpaid debts and commercial sharp practice to command the sympathy that was felt thirty years ago. And now that questions of more interest, and nearer home are being discussed, Crete will drop out of men's minds.[56]

London's reaction to the prospect of expansion of the Greek state by the incorporation of Crete or by expansion into the Ottoman territories in the north of Greece was conditioned in part by the fear of Russian reaction to any such move. Additionally, British Imperial policy necessitated supporting the authority of the established Ottoman Empire against insurrectionary forces; to do otherwise would have given a claim to legitimacy to those, both within the British Empire and within the United Kingdom, who wished to break away from British rule. In March 1867 Stanley stated:

> We thought that prima facie the Porte had the same right to put down an insurrection in Crete as England had in India, or France in Algeria or Russia in Poland. We could not complain of the government of the Sultan for doing that which every Government in the world [...] had done and would do again when the necessity presented itself.[57]

56. Stanley to Lyons, undated. Quoted in Dontas 1966: 80.

57. HCCP 3965: 56, Stanley to Cowley, 27 March 1867. See also Pottinger Saab 1977: 1383–1407.

Although Britain was one of the Protecting Powers guaranteeing Greek territorial integrity, and although British diplomacy and military power had played a part in the formation of the Greek state, the insurrection in Crete was an Ottoman affair. No matter how sympathetic Britain was towards the sufferings of Christians in Crete, Britain was not going to get involved. Speaking to the House of Commons in February 1867, Stanley hoped:

> the House will believe that our sympathy for the Christian races of the East is not less real or sincere because we have not thought fit to give a semblance of encouragement to a hopeless insurrection or to compromise ourselves or them by a precipitate and premature action.[58]

The lack of British governmental sympathy for the insurgents, as opposed to the civilian victims of the insurrection, was apparent as early as September 1866 when Stanley told the Turkish Ambassador in London that while they believed that there might be some cause for grievance amongst the Christians of Crete, "there was great exaggeration made by the Cretans as to their grievances [and] it was the desire of Her Majesty's Government that the Porte should be able to maintain its authority."[59] This view of the seriousness of the ostensible causes of the insurrection coincided with the reports being sent by Dickson. The suggestion that the Cretan Christians were not wholly innocent parties would be supported to a certain extent by the report made by the previous Consul in Crete, J. A. Longworth, on the causes of the 1858 rebellion on the island.[60] Longworth's report was published in 1867 in an effort to justify the Government's non-interventionist stance.

The news of the Arkadi explosion had no discernible impact on the British government when it reached them.[61] There was no change in London's attitude to the insurrection but, conscious of the potential propaganda effects of the news of the explosion, the Porte was urged to allay the feelings of sympathy towards the insurgents that were developing in Europe "by displaying clemency towards the vanquished and giving them assurances of a mild and equitable administration for the time to come." The urging of such a policy on the Porte was however not pressed beyond

58. Stanley. House of Commons Debate 15 February 1867. Vol. 185 cc. 406-50.
59. HCCP 3771: 36, Stanley to Lyons, 4 September 1866.
60. House of Commons Command Paper No. 3965. I. Volume/page LXXIII.503 *Reports by Consul-General Longworth Respecting the Island of Crete, 1858.*
61. HCCP 3771: 119, Erskine to Stanley, 27 November 1866.

"the limits within which a friendly and allied Government [was] entitled to offer advice."[62]

The report of the voyage of H.M.S. *Assurance* had a greater impact in government circles in London and Constantinople. London's fear was that Pym's actions would be interpreted by Greeks and Cretan Christians as Britain offering support to the insurrection; a fear that was justified by the enthusiastic responses to the evacuation of the refugees reported by British Consuls Ongley in Patras, Lloyd in Syra, and Stuart in Janina.[63] In spite of the enthusiasm with which the evacuation was greeted in Greece, and even in the absence of instructions from London, British diplomats were swift to distance themselves, and British policy, from being seen to support the Cretan insurrectionists. Most painted Pym's voyage as a humanitarian gesture but one that would not necessarily have been supported by the British government had they been aware of its taking place: Lloyd advised those who congratulated him on Pym's actions to refrain from "calculating upon it as a pledge for further intervention."[64] This was a somewhat more robust approach than that taken by Erskine who, after responding favourably to an approach from the Archbishop of Athens concerning his possible role in distributing funds to the refugees, had to be reminded by London that:

> It is clear that every endeavour is made to create an impression that the British legation in Athens countenances and sympathizes with the disturbances in Crete, and that nothing should be said or done by you which is calculated to encourage that impression.[65]

The British Government, having once been caught wrong-footed by the actions of two junior British representatives and fearful of the consequences of even accidental involvement in the Cretan Rebellion, were in no mood to allow even the possibility of the misinterpretation of any humanitarian gestures carried out by their consular staff.

62. HCCP 3771: 120, Lyons to Stanley, 28 November 1866.

63. HCCP 3771: 152/1, Ongley to Erskine and Stanley, 17 December 1866. HCCP 3371: 133, Lloyd to Stanley, 15 December 1866.HCCP 3771: 180, Stuart to Lyons, 3 January 1867.

64. HCCP 3771: 133, Lloyd to Stanley, 15 December 1866.

65. HCCP 3371: 137, Erskine to Stanley, 19 December 1866. HCCP 3771: 140, Stanley to Erskine, 27 December 1866.

CONCLUSIONS

From the political point of view of the British government, the timing of the outbreak of the Cretan insurrection was fortuitous. The Liberal Government fell on 26 June 1866 and though swiftly replaced by a Conservative regime under the Earl of Derby, Parliament was prorogued in August and did not sit again until 5 February 1867. Thus the news of both the fall of Arkadi and the voyage of H.M.S. *Assurance* came when Parliament was not sitting, allowing the Earl of Beauchamp to remark in the opening session of the House of Lords:

> I think it is a matter of some satisfaction that the insurrection took place while Parliament was not sitting. [...] I cannot but rejoice that the insurrection in Crete took place when this House was not in sitting because expressions of sympathy might have been regarded as promises of material assistance which we were unable to afford.[66]

From the start of the insurrection the British government had been resolute in its determination not to do anything which might jeopardise the status quo with respect to the borders of the Ottoman Empire. While there was a degree of sympathy for the plight of Cretan Christian refugees, manifested via diplomatic channels in polite requests that the Ottoman authorities seek to alleviate their suffering and take some measures to remedy the complaints which ostensibly triggered the insurrection, nothing beyond this was done. Stanley went as far as to seek to discourage any display within Parliament that could be considered to be offering support to the insurgents stating:

> it is not the duty of the British Government to lend a hand or precipitate [the fall of the Ottoman Empire] [...] and perhaps the very last thing to be done is to point out in the British parliament the defects of the Turkish Government [...] and to show unbounded sympathy for those who are in open revolt against the constituted authority of the country.[67]

Two further factors undoubtedly influenced British policy towards Crete at this time. The British Government could not but fail to take into account the need not to offend the ever-increasing number of Muslims within the British Empire. Such a concern was of particular import at this time since the establishment of Crown rule in India in 1858, following the Indian Mutiny, was leading to a closer identification by Indian Muslims

66. HL Debate. 5 February 1867. Vol.185 c.10. Earl Beuchamp.
67. HL Debate. 8 March 1867. Vol.185 c.1532. Earl Derby.

with the Ottoman Empire and Caliphate as the strongest Muslim state at the time still uncolonised by a Western power (Pay 2015: 285). Closer to home, the British could not be seen supporting insurgent groups revolting against a foreign ruler of a different religion while Fenian activity was taking place both in Ireland (Campbell, 2012: 6) and in Canada.

Though in practical terms of the Cretan struggle for unification with Greece, the events at Arkadi were irrelevant to the outcome of the insurrection and although in spite of this for some Cretans, Arkadi has "become simplistically symbolised in public memory [as the] single event [...] calculated best to reinforce a special [Cretan] identity" (Hastings 1997: 191),[68] the Cretan Christian self-sacrifice had no influence on the development or application of British policy towards Crete. This policy had already been determined and did not envisage a union of Crete with Greece, whatever the cost to Cretan Christians. The actions of Dickson and Pym in initiating the trip to collect refugees, however, had a greater impact on the British government; the voyage came as an unwelcome surprise and ran the danger of being seen as a change of British policy to date. As well as the voyage impinging on embargoed Ottoman territory, the language used by Dickson in his request to Pym, referring to the plight of "foreign insurgent volunteers" and requesting that Pym "afford refuge to any Christian in distress,"[69] was open to misinterpretation and could have been seen as a request to offer support to Christian fighters as well as to Christian refugees. Fortunately for London, the Ottoman authorities were unaware of the wording, and even when made public, they overlooked, by accident or design, its implications.

Ultimately, while the British government had publicly to accept that the trip had been made for humanitarian reasons, they made it clear in the House of Lords that it was unauthorised, out of line with British policy and was not intended, nor was it to be allowed, to set a precedent for future British activity.[70] That European navies in their turn sent warships to collect foreign volunteers and refugees, and later transported further civilians from Suda Bay to relative safety in Greece, vindicated British fears of foreign power interference in what Britain saw as a purely internal Ottoman

68. An internet search for "Arkadi Crete" in June 2016 gave over 253,000 links to the search title. Furtermore, family memories of those who died in Arkadi in 1866 were still extant in the late 1970s (Herzfeld 1985: 9,10).

69. HCCP 3771: 143/4, Dickson to Pym, 8 December 1866.

70. House of Lords Debate. 8 March 1867 Vol. 185 cc 1537 & 1538. Earl of Derby

affair—however distasteful that affair might be. There is little evidence that either the events at Arkadi or the trip of H.M.S. *Assurance* had any impact on public reaction in Britain. While the launch of the London based Candian Refugee Relief Fund followed shortly after the news of Arkadi reached Britain, there is no mention of it, or Pym's trip, in any of the literature announcing or discussing the fund. British public philanthropic reaction appears to have been directed towards the totality of events in Crete and was displayed by a short lived sympathy for the plight of Christian refugees. The practical aspects of that sympathy, as measured by the existence of and contributions to the Candian Refugee Relief Fund, died down within a year amid growing concerns about the responsibility of the Greek government, the Cretan Central Committee and the insurgents themselves for the continuing misfortune of the refugees. In addition, there was little sympathy for the refugees in some quarters as one correspondent responding to an appeal for funds in the Times wrote:

> [Why should we] put our hands in our pockets and relieve those pestilent revolutionaries from the natural penalty which has fallen upon them for infringing international laws. We might just as wisely and morally unite with Irish servant girls in clubbing our money for the relief of distressed Fenians[71]

a sentiment which, consciously or unconsciously, probably echoed part, the attitudes of the British Government.

In the end, the British government did nothing materially to aid the Cretan refugees while the British public did something, raising at least £13,000 (over £1.34 million in today's terms) from a relatively small donor pool, with the Greek ex-patriot community doing the most.[72]

POST SCRIPT

While History does not repeat itself, speaking in the House of Commons on 8 March 1897, George Curzon, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, reported that on 4 March, H.M.S. *Rodney*, with Sir Alfred Biliotti, the British Consul from Canea, aboard, had gone to Selino-Kastelli to relieve Cretans blockaded by their fellow Cretans in Kandanos: this time it was Cretan Muslims besieged by Cretan Christians.[73]

71. *The Times*, 28 August 1868, letter from John Vickers.

72 1867 figures obtained from *The Times*, 1 February 1867: 6 and the *Manchester Guardian,* 6 April 1867: 1.

73 House of Commons Debate. 8 March 1897. Vol.47. c.199.

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BAD BLOOD: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH NOVELS AND THE CYPRUS EMERGENCY

David Wills

The so-called Cyprus Emergency is largely overlooked during Britain's remembrance of its twentieth-century "small wars". In writing letters and memoirs, British soldiers and administrators of the time were defensive and bitter about a volatile and complex situation. Beginning with these views of participants, this article then focuses upon novelists' recent interest in the dramatic potential of this late-colonial strife, which incongruously took place on a sunny island now best known to readers as a pleasure destination. Five novels published between 2006 and 2014—some celebrated, others comparatively unknown—are discussed for their representation of the levels of violence and its justification by both sides, British squaddies and EOKA fighters. Engaging with academic definitions of "terrorism", this article concludes that at least some contemporary writers are now prepared to engage fully with the moral ambiguities present in late-1950s Cyprus.

The Cyprus Emergency of the late 1950s threatened British power and prestige, and challenged what remained of its imperial respect. It was hardly the first time that Britain had faced insurrection from those it governed overseas. It was not even unique for British soldiers and administrators to encounter Greek-speaking people wielding guns and explosives against them: this had happened on the streets of Athens during the Civil War which followed Greece's release from Axis control. But Cyprus was a particular hurt, in that the British had felt embedded there, rather than invaders or strangers. And it was particularly unfortunate timing for questions about the island's stability to arise: due to Cold War nervousness, the potential loss of an overseas base strategically placed in the eastern Mediterranean seemed damaging. Writing at the time, Patrick Leigh Fermor was disturbed that "the Turks and the Greeks have become implacable enemies in a combustible area of great strategic importance" (Leigh Fermor 1955).

In the first part of this paper, I give a very brief history of the British presence in and attitudes towards Cyprus in the 1950s. To do so, I utilise recent histories of the conflict, memoirs produced by British servicemen and administrators, and travel narratives. Most notable amongst the latter

are works by Lawrence Durrell and Colin Thubron, described by Jim Bowman as the most important, widely-read and cited of their kind in the period since 1950 (Bowman 2015: 87). Such travel narratives about Cyprus are few in number compared to those about Greece. In contrast, however, Cyprus has proved fertile ground for fiction, offering plentiful opportunities for tension and violence. Andrekos Varnava's comment about the utility of contemporaneous novels for analysing attitudes towards Cyprus under British rule might equally apply to works set at that time which are being published now: "Fictional references also have an important role to play, hiding messages that the author might otherwise not wish to overtly disclose – or more overtly disclosing messages, thus giving importance to them." (Varnava 2009: 6-7) As Jim Bowman has commented in relation to travel writing, texts have *influence*, "significant in moving audiences and constructing a credible vision of Cyprus" (Bowman 2015: 10). Novelists and travel writers of the time usually portrayed the Cypriots who took up arms against the British as terrorists. However, as I shall show in the main body of this article, more recent novelistic portraits of Cyprus have become more nuanced. With the benefit of a more critical understanding of British engagement in foreign regions, alongside more sympathetic interpretations of colonial calls for independence, novelists are now reflecting upon whether the British were wholly blameless in a situation which left few with any credit.[1]

CYPRUS IN THE 1950S: HISTORIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

British interest, intervention and occupation in the Greek-speaking world has had a long history, not all of it viewed positively by popular opinion on either side. However, in the case of Cyprus, the colonial administrator John Reddaway postulated the existence of a "special relationship" (Reddaway 1986: 172). Today, as Robert Holland has argued, "to a degree inconceivable in the vast swathe of the former British Empire, there is a distinctive Anglo-Cypriot current present in Cyprus" (Holland 2012: postscript). In part, this is because the British officially did not leave Cyprus entirely. The two military Sovereign Base Areas occupy three percent of the island, and nine percent of the coastline (Clogg 2015: 140). There is a

1. This article is emphatically not intended as a justification for terrorism. In a complex political situation, emotions understandably still run high. I would like to acknowledge here the kindness of John Burke in supplying me with a copy of his recent conference paper (Burke 2015).

growing expatriate community and, of course, a most attractive holiday destination is offered by "one of the most fascinating islands in the world" (Thubron 1986: 5). The subsequent friendly atmosphere makes 1950s hostilities seem inexplicable. In 1972, Colin Thubron received a welcome from remote villages – both ethnically Greek and Turkish – where the children had never seen a foreigner before: "I realized that they had been dispersed through the village to assemble my dinner". (Thubron 1986: 84)

As news had emerged in the 1950s of the escalation of violence, even those who knew and loved the Greek people struggled to reach a judgment. Patrick Leigh Fermor, knighted decades later for his immense contribution to Anglo-Hellenic relations, had worked alongside Greeks in the apparently less complicated conflict of the Second World War. Now, as the British hung grimly onto their colony and Greece supported attempts to evict them with guns and explosives, Leigh Fermor was anguished that, in the words of his biographer, "he was forced to watch these two countries throwing away two centuries of goodwill" (Cooper 2012: 286). Visiting in 1955, joining Lawrence Durrell in Paphos, Leigh Fermor gradually realised the seriousness of the situation:

> Anti-British demonstrations, which were at first little more than students' rags designed to ram home the seriousness of Greek feeling on British indifference, became more frequent and heavily charged with danger. Disturbances grew in Cyprus, repressive measures were applied, bombs exploded and shots were fired. Bad blood was made. (Leigh Fermor 1955)

To his notebook, he confided a blunter assessment: "Greeks right and we are wrong. Up to us to make step." (Cooper 2012: 286) Leigh Fermor might regard the British policy as reprehensible, but he was equally disturbed to find that the Greek press were comparing the British to the Nazis. He denied that this was the case, arguing that British troops "have so far displayed great forbearance under provocation". But he did concede that "Circumstances will lead us to ruthlessness – not, this time, in faraway Asian islands or the muffling jungles of Africa, but in the full blaze of the Mediterranean with all the civilised world (including our friends the Greeks) looking on. It can only end in shame and disaster". (Leigh Fermor 1955) Leigh Fermor should know: as a former SOE officer, he was intimately familiar with the rules (or lack of them) of guerrilla warfare. "After all, in Crete there were only about five of us, each with a very small band of chaps, and we kept a number of German divisions sprawling and pinned down for years". (Durrell 1957: 190)

Stephen Xydis has described the antecedents of the 1950s Cypriot fighters as those who had resisted the Ottoman occupation of Greece in the nineteenth century (Xydis 1967: 69). Others found a ready comparison closer in time – the Greek *andartes* who had waged war on the Nazis. Leigh Fermor was ambivalent about the increasing levels of violence shown in the Cypriot campaign: "EOKA is guilty of acts which one can make no pretence of excusing. (But can one condemn so easily the principle of armed revolt when all peaceful means have failed?)" (Leigh Fermor 1955). Long-term Cypriot resident Penelope Tremayne recognised a "gnawing sense of subjugation to people not better than themselves" (Tremayne 1958: 175). Those who had been part of the island's civil or military administration were inevitably less forgiving of EOKA. John Reddaway had served as Administrative Secretary and later wrote a memoir infused with bitterness.[2] "The proposition that the Greek Cypriots had no choice but to resort to violence implies, first, that they had already exhausted all peaceful means of settling the dispute and, second, that the injustice and suffering inflicted on them was so extreme as to render their lives intolerable. Neither condition was satisfied in the case of EOKA" (Reddaway 1986: 56-7). Reddaway was responding to the kind of justification offered by a former EOKA detainee encountered by Colin Thubron in 1972: "Talking had failed, so what were we meant to do? Every people has a right to be free ...." (Thubron 1986: 39).

Sir Harry Luke, an administrator with extensive experience of the island, sought to separate the terrorists from the vast majority of law-abiding Cypriots: "the shrill, irresponsible yapping of indoctrinated bomb-throwing urban adolescents was not the authentic voice of a race of God-fearing farmers and shepherds" (Luke 1964: 173). Lawrence Durrell wrote his travel narrative about Cyprus from the similarly partisan position of having been head of the Public Information Office on Cyprus from 1954-56. Durrell's became a key text: in *The Aphrodite Inheritance* (1979), the popular British television serial by Michael J. Bird, *Bitter Lemons* is shown as the main character's choice of bedtime reading (episode 5). As David Roessel has shown, although Durrell claimed to represent Cypriot opinions objectively, he ended up merely reproducing his own standpoint, which was "pretty much the standard Tory view of the situation on Cyprus" (Roessel 2000: 241). The most prominent advocate of Enosis within Durrell's account is Frangos, who is encountered inebriated in a tavern: "Dur-

2. He has now been fictionalised by Peter Cullis (2006: loc 780, 1088, 2120).

rell characteristically puts pro-*Enosis* sentiments in the mouth of a drunk" (Roessel 2000: 237). Elsewhere, Durrell emphasises that the young are being led astray through "the heady rhetoric of demagogues and priests" (Durrell 1957: 133). The Cypriots only support terrorism, then, because they are alcoholics, children, or child-like: "decent, simple folk whose resistance is read more as petulance or immaturity than as political will" (Bowman 2015: 119). Colonial adolescents in dire need of imperial guidance and restraint, the Cypriots were thought to lack the maturity and judgment to deal with their present predicament. Durrell's villagers gather around the radio to listen to the news, "as uncomprehending children might listen to the roll of distant drums" (Durrell 1957: 140).

Penelope Tremayne spent a year in Cyprus working for the Red Cross, some of that time living in Durrell's former house. She explained what she regarded as the limited nature and extent of support for the struggle through using the imagery of the forest fires which had taken hold in Cyprus: "EOKA had been no flame running through the stubble, but a succession of laboriously built and tended fires of green wood, smoky and fitful at the best of times, and choking to those near them" (Tremayne 1958: 167). Tabitha Morgan, in her magisterial study of the British in Cyprus, has shown that the writings of Durrell and Tremayne are indicative of "the persistent and unshakable belief expressed by generations of colonial administrators on the island that most Cypriots remained basically content under British rule and were merely led astray by the political posturing of irresponsible and self-interested leaders" (Morgan 2011: chap. 13). This incomprehension was born of narrow-mindedness and arrogance: why would the Cypriots want to join Greece when they had Britain? From his perspective of the 1970s, Colin Thubron argued that "The pitilessness of EOKA, both against others and within itself, was extraordinary for Cypriots, whose peaceable-ness has made them the natural subjects of empire" (Thubron 1986: 127). This contrasts sharply with the memories of Elenitza Seraphim-Loizou, who enthusiastically joined the EOKA movement, beginning as a mere runner but promoted through the ranks to become an Area Commander involved with bombings and murders. "We viewed our struggle as something sacred" (Seraphim-Loizou n.d.: 53), she wrote in her memoirs, in which she includes an incident in which another woman used her own children as human shields between British bullets and a fleeing terrorist suspect (Seraphim-Loizou n.d.: 45).

Members of British patrols often received a fair welcome in remote locations, reinforcing the view that extremism was the creed of merely a

minority. The future prominent television journalist Martin Bell, then carrying out his compulsory military service in the midst of conflict, was perplexed: "I can't fathom these Greeks. We spend all our time deporting their nearest and dearest to detention camps and prisons, and all they do in return is offer us the fruits of their hospitality" (Bell 2015: chap. 5). Although Penelope Tremayne was threatened on occasion, listening in fear from her bed as the door to her village house was tried at night, she was also met with spontaneous kindness such as when her neighbours "produced from nowhere an immense quantity of cherries wrapped in newspaper, which they insisted upon giving me" (Tremayne 1958: 128, 62).

His tour of duty ending with a whimper – the shredding of now-pointless military intelligence documents, maps and photographs of wanted men – Martin Bell reflected on the futility of the British clinging on for so long: "The decolonisation of Cyprus was a catalogue of failed initiatives and missed opportunities" (Bell 2015: chap. 20). At its acquisition in the nineteenth century, Cyprus had been regarded by the British as a bookend to their possession of Gibraltar at the other end of the Mediterranean. But it had swiftly been overtaken in that role by Egypt, which was annexed in the 1880s. Cyprus had thereby become a political backwater, merely exploited for taxes (Holland 2012: chap. 3). During the First World War, Britain had shown that it was prepared to part with Cyprus, offering it to Greece in 1915 as an incentive to join the fighting against Bulgaria, which had recently declared for Germany. In 1925, however, Cyprus was formally made a British colony, finally separating it from nominal Turkish oversight. After the Second World War, the Cypriot aspiration for *Enosis* (union) received a boost from the precedent of the handover of the Dodecanese to Greece. But the British were determined to remain, especially when the Suez Crisis further limited their options for stationing troops on friendly soil, and their Middle East Headquarters was consequently moved to Cyprus (Holland 2012: chap. 8). However, Andrekos Varnava has shown convincingly that "Cyprus' strategic, political and economic importance was always more imagined than real" (Varnava 2009: 3). Even the colonial administrator John Reddaway conceded that the value of the island "rested more on the negative argument for denying it to a hostile power than on the positive argument of its operational value" (Reddaway 1986: 11). Further, at a time of relinquishing India and Palestine, withdrawal from Cyprus could be construed as yet another sign of British weakness, as Durrell discovered: "If Cyprus were to be frivolously wished away then

what of Hong Kong, Malta, Gibraltar, the Falklands, Aden – all troubled but stable islands in the great pattern?" (Durrell 1957: 194)

When the British took possession of Cyprus in the later nineteenth century, some voices had suggested that the inhabitants were "not really Greek at all" (Holland 2012: chap. 3). For many involved, as Tabitha Morgan has shown, the Greek Cypriots were "a constant source of disappointment. They were neither exotically Oriental nor did they correspond to western ideas about classical nobility and as such always fell slightly short of the mark" (Morgan 2011: chap. 3). Durrell met some of the same ignorance: one official opined that "the Cypriots could claim no Greek heritage, since they didn't speak Greek, that they were Anatolian hybrids" (Durrell 1957: 120-1). However, Sir Harry Luke, although himself a former colonial administrator, was in emphatic disagreement: "There is no doubt that the Greek of Cyprus passionately feels himself to be a Greek in speech, thought, faith and way of life" (Luke 1964: 175). Penelope Tremayne was likewise convinced that they "have always had, and rightly always will have, an unshakable conviction that they are Greeks and belong unalienably to the Greek world" (Tremayne 1958: 175). But some travellers have continued to find the lack of "pure" Greekness in Cyprus disturbing. In his visit of 1972, Colin Thubron found that they were "midway between the classical and the oriental" (Thubron 1986: 102).

This supposed ambiguity in identity also manifested itself in views about the "maturity" of the Cypriots as a people. Lord Radcliffe, in his proposals regarding Cyprus in 1956, spoke of the Cypriots as an "adult" people (Clogg 2015: 143). His flattery was rather the exception. Laurie Lee's first view of the Cypriot people, as he arrived in 1945 to make a documentary film, was disparagingly of "half-naked children" springing from the path of his car (Lee and Keene 1947: 5). The harvest seemed almost medieval, done wholly by hand: "Men with long, curved sickles were reaping, and girls, with kerchiefs on their heads gathered the sheaves and bound them to the backs of asses" (Lee and Keene 1947: 26). British soldier Albert Balmer, on his national service, was prepared to consider them a people in transition: with both tractors and oxen pulling ploughs in adjacent fields, "You could stand and watch ancient and modern technology working side by side" (Balmer 2008: 132-3).

Resistance to such change was regarded as symptomatic of a perverse backwardness and obstinacy. But Tabitha Morgan has noted that British attempts to modernise farming were in reality misguided and counterproductive: the light wooden plough of ancient design was actually perfectly

suited to island conditions and peasant lifestyles, and was thus still in use in the 1950s (Morgan 2011: chap. 4 and n. 30). In the 1979 British television serial *The Aphrodite Inheritance*, designed in collaboration with local tourism authorities to boost business, Cyprus was still shown as an overwhelmingly pastoral island. When the god Dionysus, in disguise as the poacher and shepherd Basileos, wants to block a car's passage, he employs a flock of sheep (episode 5). The photographer Reno Wideson, in origin a Greek Cypriot and by profession a British colonial official, explained why rural scenes predominated in his collection published in the early 1950s: "I have always believed that there lies the true flavour of this enchanting land" (Wideson 1953: 7).

The colonisers wanted to believe that Cyprus was close to, and capable of, civilisation and (re)development, a return to its ancient roots which the British had themselves inherited. They clung to "the vague and persistent idea that vestigial traces of the classical roots of European civilisation still lingered on the island itself" (Morgan 2011: chap. 2). British administrators deluded themselves that the British had done a good job. Most Cypriots wished "to continue to live under British rule and its security, its incorruptibility, its even-handed justice, its low taxation, its emancipation of the villager from bondage to the money-lender, its concern with public health, its scrupulous regard for human rights" (Luke 1964: 176). The *Enosis* movement was thought not to be anti-British. Durrell has a taxi driver sigh: "We don't want the British to go; we want them to stay; but as friends, not as masters" (Durrell 1957: 26). In reality, British rule was always marked by cautiousness and frugality, rather than enthusiasm (Morgan 2011: chap. 2). Reddaway conceded that "It is indisputable that Britain should and could have done more than it did to promote the material prosperity of Cyprus while it was under British rule" (Reddaway 1986: 30). Durrell himself acknowledged the regime's "folly and neglect", but argued that this was down to tactlessness rather than malice or lack of ability: a "wooden administration and bad manners" (Durrell 1957: 136, 26).

The British soldier Albert Balmer's welcome to Cyprus in October 1958 was witnessing the aftermath of an attack outside a police station: two vehicles containing service personnel on their way to a swimming expedition blown up, one dead and eighteen wounded (Balmer 2008: 121). The urgent need to defecate led one member of a foot patrol to discover a pipe bomb concealed behind a wall (Balmer 2008: 131). Even the landscape was turned against the occupiers. British soldiers died in the forest fires of 1956, as Martin Bell recalled with an objectivity born of hindsight: "EOKA

was blamed for starting the fire, but it could as well have been natural causes, a misdirected mortar round or the result of an attempt to burn the enemy out of his hide-outs" (Bell 2015: chap. 3).

The British response was hardly likely to win local hearts and minds. Balmer recalls the everyday petty acts of revenge: orange juice swiped from outside local stores, and the water in communal wells deliberately muddied to irritate users (Balmer 2008: 125-6). Theories even circulated that the forest fires had been started deliberately by the British army through airdrops ostensibly containing food supplies (Tremayne 1958: 51). A visiting general refers to suspects as "bastards", and the rank-and-file soldiers determine to "trust nobody" (Balmer 2008: 128, 133). Stopping a burly manual worker for a routine ID check, one of Balmer's patrolmen feels the genitals in order to confirm their gender (Balmer 2008: 145). Writing in a letter of the time, Bell's fear was "that all these searches, arrests and road blocks generated a great deal of ill-will" (Bell 2015: chap. 9). In 2012, previously suppressed documents were released which revealed British soldiers out of control, including an incident in which an officer observed the kicking and beating of Cypriots as they lay on the ground (Bell 2015: chap. 25). Ian Martin, like Bell and Balmer a national serviceman, spent his time in Cyprus as an interpreter, and a letter home from the summer of 1958 reveals his disillusionment after witnessing the damage to property and people caused by soldiers of the Royal Ulster Rifles: "To keep up the farcical pretence of no ill-treatment, etc., everyone in authority has perjured themselves again and again: and any attempt by me or anyone else to tell the truth could never succeed, short of taking it to the United Nations" (Martin 1993: 77). Later, in October of the same year, Martin received a letter from a friend still serving in Cyprus, revealing the British reaction to the shooting of soldier's wife Catherine Cutliffe whilst out shopping: "there was wholesale rape and looting and murder" (Martin 1993: 78). But later commentators were conscious of a collective British amnesia towards their countrymen's misdeeds: confronted by eyewitness testimony of prison conditions, "It seemed now that I was naïve not to have believed it before. In every people, when angry or afraid, there is a quality which can be distorted into brutality" (Thubron 1986: 39). John Reddaway, who as a former civil servant in Cyprus had strong reasons for justifying the British record, contended that "in the stress of doing battle with terrorism, it is extremely difficult to get the balance right between what is necessary in order to contain violence and restore order and what

is counter-productive because of the effect it may have in alienating the population as a whole" (Reddaway 1986: 58).

A suppressed history of the conflict by British officer Arthur Campbell, accused the local press of complicity against the British: "Every apparently successful action of the EOKA terrorists against the security forces or against civilian targets was reported in depth and often in heroic terms, eliciting sympathy for the terrorist as underdog" (Bell 2015: chap. 23). Back home in Britain, the issue of Cyprus was used as a party political weapon. The Labour Party, in Opposition, heaped pressure for self-determination for Cyprus on the Conservative government (O'Malley and Craig 1999: 63). James Callaghan, an MP and later Prime Minister for Labour, spoke in July 1957 of the British government's insistence on holding Cyprus as "the height of folly and madness" (Panteli 2000: 254).

Imperial rule was always a challenge in practical and reputational terms for Britain. Robert Holland remarks that, as well as much that was positive in terms of prosperity and social change, "Over the decades after 1800 the British brought to the forefront of the Mediterranean stage their ambition, instinct for domination, penny-pinching ways, grating superiority and many other such traits" (Holland 2012: intro.). John Reddaway, in his particularly bitter history, remarks that "Britain found withdrawal from an empire a more painful process than acquiring it" (Reddaway 1986: 78). Perhaps this helps to explain why, as army veteran Balmer notes, "On many Remembrance Day services, Cyprus seems to be the one conflict that is omitted, although all other small wars are mentioned where losses are incurred" (Balmer 2008: 258). However, Martin Bell, who created his own history around the frame provided by one hundred letters he sent home between October 1957 and May 1959, argues that "We have finally reached a point where the truth really can be told about this distant conflict" (Bell 2015: chap. 1). His fellow writers in the field of fiction would seem to agree with him.

THE CYPRUS CONFLICT IN RECENT NOVELS

For novelists, the questionable legitimacy of British troop involvement in a foreign land provides tempting dramatic possibilities involving division and dilemma. As Jim Bowman has noted of travel writing, "Cyprus has long been characterised as a nexus of darkness, sadness and fatalism" (Bowman 2015: 135). The contemporary Greek novelist Thanasis Valtinos has recently explained the attractions of setting his narratives in the past:

"From a writer's point of view, History is a highly stimulating area of interest. It is a particularly dramatic area that even in its crudest form is made up of enmeshed individual destinies" (Valtinos 2016). A complex past and intractable present have been turned into a readily consumable product: Cyprus-as-conflict.

Victor Price's *The Death of Achilles* (1963) set an early pattern for a pacey novel steeped in Cypriot violence. Despite being published close to events, Price has his British protagonists sapped by moral ambiguities. Three years into the conflict, Hugh Barbour, working as a civilian interpreter with British forces, professes to see the British as lacking in honour (Price 1963: 168-9). But Barbour, despite his cynicism, condemns his own side only to a degree: crucially, he is prepared to voice his worries and concerns about the British when in the company of friends, allies and lovers, but not when confronted by a terrorist suspect. This is because these were "criticisms which he had made often enough in the past and believed in, but were hedged around with all sorts of qualifications" (Price 1963: 194). Prisoners were not exactly ill-treated – "they are more thorough in other countries" – just starved, sleep-deprived, and then frightened (Price 1963: 81). Barbour's concerns about interviewing a key suspect – "what happened when both victim and executioner had lost contact with the objective world, when both felt that terrible alienation, when both were emotionally disturbed?" (Price 1963: 180) – serves as a metaphor for the wider situation of Cyprus, in which both sides have lost their moral compass.

The past decade has seen a renewed interest by novelists in utilising historic Cyprus as a backdrop for intrigue, violence and, increasingly, the uncertain legacy of British involvement abroad. The notably cardboard protagonist of Richard and Barbara Osborn's *On Her Majesty's Cyprus Mission* (2014) is an Intelligence Corps officer of public school upbringing and straightforward black-and-white values. An excellent scholar of languages, Ian Black is said to have acquired his Greek skills at Harrow School, under the unlikely scenario that "we had a Greek national teaching up-to-date Greek, rather than classical Greek" (Osborn 2014: 316). Arriving in Cyprus on 27 March 1958, he is on the spot an unfeasible number of times when violent and other significant events take place.[3] Overhearing a

3. This is rather in the mode of George MacDonald Fraser's *Flashman* series of novels (published from 1969 onwards), in which a cowardly nineteenth-century cavalryman strays by accident into such terrors as the Battle of the Little Big Horn and the Charge of the Light Brigade. The Osborns seem to miss the point that such piled-up coincidences work only as comedy.

conversation between two local domestic employees, Black foils the notorious conspiracy in which a bomb was placed under the bed of the Governor, Sir Hugh Foot (Osborn 2014: 93). He saves Foot's life a second time by spotting a terrorist who attempts to shoot at his passing convoy on 2 November 1958 (Osborn 2014: 266). Black's plan to surround an EOKA meeting in the Troodos Mountains results in some captured papers which underline their commander's ruthlessness: Colonel Grivas "writes about the need for indiscriminate killings of civilians", a policy which bears fruit in the murder of Catherine Cutliffe (Osborn 2014: 215).

The terrorists are made to look naïve and simple, consistently underestimating the British. This is exemplified by the many occasions on which locals reveal details of future arms drops and plots in front of British officers, who they think do not understand their language: "None of the English know how to speak Greek. I served with them during the war, and all they know is English and how to drink tea" (Osborn 2014: 41). The British gaze is thoroughly unswerving and uncomplicated: "Ian Black believed that they were all murderers and terrorists" (Osborn 2014: 321). Here, Black lumps all Greeks together as conspirators, whereas the events of the narrative would seem to have shown otherwise. A local mayor is cautiously scornful of the movement's levels of popularity. "I hear that Colonel Grivas plays on the youthfulness and inexperience, to get them to join" (Osborn 2014: 42). Businessmen are against armed struggle, as the threat of terrorist acts has driven away tourist revenue (Osborn 2014: 39).

The British retaliation for the murder of Catherine Cutliffe is rather underplayed in this fictionalised account. Certainly, it is conceded that British troops "went on a rampage beating up Greek locals and looting stores" (Osborn 2014: 216). Non-British NAAFI employees are rounded up after a bombing and "severely beaten" (Osborn 2014: 217). But it is clearly shown that such actions take place after extreme provocation. "The British troops were so incensed by the shootings and the murder that they started a campaign of intimidation against the Greek Cypriots" (Osborn 2014: 216). This rather absolves the occupiers from blame, placing the cause on Grivas's actions, with the word "intimidation" serving to conceal the full severity of the response. The NAAFI bomb, it is emphasised, is deliberately savage: "hand built and contained nails that did a lot of damage to the victims" (Osborn 2014: 216). In contrast, the British are overtly concerned about the welfare of innocent civilians: Black is warned that "Killing or wounding innocent bystanders will not be looked upon lightly, by the authorities" (Osborn 2014: 264).

The Prologue, seemingly representing the voice of the authors, one of whom is a former member of the British army and the US Air Force, seeks to absolve the British of blame. This is a war against "terrorists", at a time when the British forces were overstretched by other conflicts in Kenya and Malaya (Osborn 2014: 5, 6). The acknowledgements page notes "honour and respect to all the British servicemen who served and, in some cases died, on Her Majesty's Service in Cyprus" (Osborn 2014: 2).

Brian Callison's *Redcap* (2006) is an altogether more sophisticated novel, based around detailed descriptions of a few violent incidents, moving from Cyprus 1957 to Germany ten years on. The novel opens with Bill Walker, a Royal Military Police staff sergeant, caught in an ambush during a night patrol on a mountain road. The full horror of the vicious submachine attack on his Land Rover convoy is described, his colleague left eviscerated in a tree to die. Walker is appalled by these tactics which form a trend against the colonisers:

> terrorists are shadowy men. They didn't come out and fight: especially when taking on the British Army. Cyprus, Palestine, Aden, Malaya: terrorists, nationalists, partitionists … they were all the bloody same. Bombs in married quarters targeting squaddies' wives and kids: the odd sniper from long range (Callison 2006: chap. 2).

But, and in contrast to the Osborns, it transpires that the author is more even-handed in his apportion of brutality than this initial bald statement might suggest. Walker's commander, Major Eric K. Steadman, a supposed hero having received the Military Medal during the Second World War, takes sadistic revenge in the present conflict: he executes a boy aged nine or ten with a shot to the head (Callison 2006: chap. 2). His victim is armed with an ancient rifle, regarded by Walker more as a symbol of manhood than an effective anti-British weapon (Callison 2006: chap. 3). Rather than a terrorist, Walker contends that "He was a wee laddie playing soldiers with a home-made gun. You shoulda spanked his backside – not slaughtered him!" (Callison 2006: chap. 3). But Walker stays silent about his superior's act: he realises that the establishment will close ranks to preserve the illusion of "officers and gentlemen" (Callison 2006: chap. 3). The second major event of the narrative is a full-scale attack on a British military base. At night, the throat of an eighteen-year-old sentry is slit; his Cypriot assailant is stripped, severely beaten and mutilated by Steadman and another officer (Callison 2006: chap. 6).

Walker makes growled, sardonic pronouncements to those under his command about the reasons for the British presence: "Tonight is the night you take your section out to keep the Zorbas on the path of British righteousness" (Callison 2006: chap. 1). In private, he goes further, showing at least some understanding of differing perspectives: the EOKA infiltrator at his base "had only been a patriot fighting for what he believed in" (Callison 2006: chap. 9).

In her 2010 novel, Sadie Jones's purpose is to remind the reader of conflicts often overlooked during official remembrance of the apparently more straightforward World Wars. These *Small Wars* (2010) are here shown as tainted by violence, lies and cover-ups, in which the central character, Major Hal Treherne, becomes both estranged from his wife, Clara, and disillusioned with the army he serves. Jones's reading list, found in her acknowledgements (Jones 2010: 470-1), includes both ends of the political spectrum: Lawrence Durrell's government-supporting *Bitter Lemons*, as well as the much more ambiguous novel by Peter R. Cullis, which I discuss below. At first, beginning in January 1956, the British downplay the nature and extent of their problems – "It's hardly the Blitz, is it?" reflects Clara (Jones 2010: 20) – and the Major makes sure that soldiers conduct themselves appropriately: "Most of the lads showed an instinctive tact in the dealings they were required to have with the locals" (Jones 2010: 39). It is the British interpreter, Lieutenant Davis, who better understands the much harsher reality. The water-torture of prisoners (Jones 2010: 79), is followed by the military response to the bombs which destroy soldiers and horses exercising on a beach: mass round-ups of the Limassol population, beatings, then rapes and murder in local homes (Jones 2010: 172-80). In a no doubt deliberate echo of the Cutliffe case, Clara is shot whilst shopping in the street, a fellow army wife killed beside her (Jones 2010: 334). This descent into attacking the defenceless comes after the author's apparent thoughts, reflective of the ambiguities shared by Callison's Staff Sergeant Walker, that "There was no truth … The British were torturers; the British were decent and honourable. EOKA were terrorists; EOKA were heroes." (Jones 2010: 103)

Published in the same year as Jones's novel, Andrea Busfield's *Aphrodite's War*, follows events from 1955 until the 1970s. Told from a Greek family's perspective, the British appear remote and brutal. Drunk on warm beer (Busfield 2010: 21), the soldiers are monsters who enter a village "with boots that kicked at doors. Wood splintered. Women screamed. The people were terrified, but the hate, there was so much hate" (Busfield

2010: 58). Forest fires are started by weapons that are being used to hunt Grivas (Busfield 2010: 91). It is the British who provoke the Greeks, through the imposition of draconian laws bringing "detention without trial, stop-and-search insults and six months in jail for possession of fire-arms" (Busfield 2010: 26). The plot to place a bomb under the governor's bed was merely a reaction to the British exiling of Archbishop Makarios (Busfield 2010: 39). However, the Cypriots are undeniably brutal too. The shooting of Catherine Cutliffe "had caused national revulsion, and there was a growing reluctance to embrace the cause" (Busfield 2010: 168). A local journalist has sympathy for individual occupiers:

> English mothers were losing their sons, and Michalakis couldn't help but pity them as he wrote endless reports of young men crippled and killed, their limbs shredded by bullets, their intestines mashed by shrapnel, their blood spilt and seeping into Cypriot soil. He had no time for politicians and their posturing and games, but the soldiers – he didn't hold any special grudge against them. (Busfield 2010: 47)

The central character, Loukis, is conflicted about his involvement in EOKA. He takes to the mountains for pragmatic reasons: apparently determined to avenge the beating to death of his elder brother, he is also escaping from personal romantic complications. His heart therefore lies at home, not in the political cause. This is articulated by his fellow EOKA recruit, Toulla: "I'm so utterly fed up. There's no finish in sight for our fight, and in the process I'm becoming an old maid" (Busfield 2010: 176).

Of all these novelists, however, Peter Cullis appears most forgiving. The struggle over an island is reduced to a personal combat. Christopher and Zavvas met by chance on a Cyprus beach aged eleven, and grew up as close as brothers. Zavvas begins his terrorist career in May 1956 by stalking an Inspector in charge of a Nicosia police station, targeted for his outspoken opposition to EOKA (Cullis 2006: loc 493). Tracked down to a café, the policeman is gunned down before he can draw his own weapon (Cullis 2006: loc 530). Zavvas ends his EOKA activities by killing both of Christopher's parents, the father a military man, as they travel an isolated road in their Landrover (Cullis 2006: loc 2166). Zavvas's murderous campaign is zealously pursued in line with Grivas's religious rhetoric: "These people were invaders and had no right to be in his country; he was carrying out God's will in destroying them" (Cullis 2006: loc 937). There is also an appeal to mythology, as Zavvas, adopting the codename Jason, "saw himself as an Hellenic Warrior in the mould of the Homeric Greek Heroes, whom he had admired so much as a child" (Cullis 2006: loc 944).

But Zavvas ultimately turns his back on violence. Whilst the dream of *Enosis* was for him still sound, the methods he employed had belonged only to Grivas, carried out not for the cause but "for the personal glory of their leader" (Cullis 2006: loc 2339). The British are shown as reasonable, with the new governor, Foot, favouring conciliation in order to reach a settlement (Cullis 2006: loc 1095), and personally intervening to stay Zavvas's execution. Christopher O'Neill, returning to the island as a Lieutenant in the Parachute Regiment, views British tactics as more incompetent than brutal: "lashing out at all and sundry, unsure of exactly who was the enemy, inadvertently alienating even those who tacitly supported it" (Cullis 2006: loc 1422). O'Neill, remarkably, goes on to forgive his parents' killer: "he hadn't meant to do it, it was just one of those crazy things that happen in a war" (Cullis 2006: loc 2569). He visits the grave of his now dead childhood friend and offers a salute, "from one soldier to another" (Cullis 2006: loc 2617).

At the time of the events which are central to these five recent novels, the divergence in the representation of those who fought in Cyprus was clear and straightforward. "To the Cypriots the men were patriots and martyrs; to the British they were terrorists" (Thubron 1986: 52). In a recent article, three academics have remarked wryly that "Few terms or concepts in contemporary political discourse have proved as hard to define as terrorism" (Weinberg *et al.* 2004: 777). In a separate scholarly study, Boaz Ganor begins by noting that the term terrorism "has a far more negative connotation, seemingly requiring one to take a stand, whereas the term 'guerrilla warfare' is perceived as neutral and carries a more positive connotation" (Ganor 2002: 296). Ganor goes on to produce a definition for a terrorist based upon international legal conventions that "the deliberate harming of soldiers during wartime is a necessary evil, and thus permissible, whereas the deliberate targeting of civilians is absolutely forbidden" (Ganor 2002: 288). Thus, by this measure, EOKA can be said to have engaged in terrorist acts, since they not merely attacked military personnel but, as the Catherine Cutliffe tragedy notoriously exemplifies, also deliberately targeted British civilians. Weinberg and his colleagues also considered fifty-five other scholarly articles and concluded that "country of origin does play a role in the way scholars in the professional journals define the term terrorism. For example, scholars from the Middle East never mentioned (0%) the element 'civilians', while scholars from western Europe and north America mentioned this element more frequently (40% and 21%, respectively)". (Weinberg *et al.* 2004: 784) The western European

origins of the novelists whose work I have discussed in this article would similarly make it more likely that they view attacks on civilians as a characteristic defining EOKA as terrorists.

However, as I have shown, in fact modern novels exhibit a full range of reactions to the violence of the Cyprus Emergency: from incomprehension and outrage, to understanding and forgiveness. The former soldier Ian Martin reflects the even-handed frustration that these events now provoke: "everyone concerned in this miserable conflict comes out of it badly, and every side told lies" (Martin 1993: 65). The ambiguities and perhaps embarrassment occasioned by the Cyprus Emergency has meant that, as John Burke has recently said, "within Britain a form of collective amnesia is perhaps preferable than having to reconcile with a particularly troublesome imperial past" (Burke 2015: 2).

By revealing the complexities of the Cyprus Emergency, contemporary British novelists are at least engaging with this controversial period of recent history, even if merely for their own dramatic ends. We might view this as assuaging the national conscience, a form of collective apology for past excesses in military behaviour and previous inaccurate representations of the other side. However, I would argue that by focusing on the dramatic potential of this particular period, today's writing continues to define twentieth-century Cypriot history as backward and dark. Despite the more nuanced view of terrorism and of British actions, then, fiction is still commodifying the island as Conflict Cyprus.

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Emerging from the Oppressive Shadow of Myth: Orestes in Sartre, Ritsos, and Aeschylus*

Maria Vamvouri Ruffy

In this article I compare *Orestes* by Yannis Ritsos and *The Flies* by Jean-Paul Sartre with Aeschylus's *Choephori*. In Ritsos's and Sartre's works, written in a context of censorship and political oppression, a problematic relationship with the past weighs on the protagonist to the extent that he desires to free himself from it. The contemporary Orestes detaches himself from the path set out by a usurping power belonging to the past, a path used to manipulate individuals and to block the way to freedom. In Ritsos's *Orestes* the speaker breaks from the ideal of antiquity, while in *The Flies,* it is not the past but rather the present circumstances that motivate Orestes to act freely. I read the protagonist's problematic relationship with the past as a *mise en abîme* of the critical distance of one (re)writing in relation to another and I compare all three texts from the point of view of the singular relationship maintained by the protagonist with his past.

Any (re)writing of a myth involves a critical engagement with intertexts on which it casts a new light and from which it sometimes seeks to detach or free itself.[1] At the same time, a (re)writing often says something about the pragmatic context of its production. It is through this critical engagement with its intertexts, and through the anachronisms and metaphors juxtaposing the past and the present, that the (re)writing enhances or questions its own context of production. This is especially common when the (re)writing of myths occurs under totalitarian regimes, in which case the new version is used to keep the censored voice hidden and sometimes to signal implicitly the dangers of abusive policies. The (re)writing of a myth thus places itself before the dominant ideology and the historical and political context in

[1]* This article is an expanded version of a chapter published in French in 2013 in the collective volume Heidmann, Vamvouri Ruffy and Coutaz. I would like to thank Valentine Abbet Riley and Philip Rance for having helped me to translate this text into English.

. On the intertextual dialogue between various (re)writings of myths, see Detienne 1980; Calame 1988; 2000; 2004; Heidmann 2003; 2008; Gély 2004.

which it came to be. From this perspective, the comparatist should favour a specific axis of comparison, i.e. the relationship within the plot and the discourse between the past and the present, whether it is familial, historical, political or literary. I propose to use this axis of comparison in order to analyse two contemporary (re)writings of Orestes's matricide as it is presented in Aeschylus's *Choephori*, namely *The Flies* by Jean-Paul Sartre and *Orestes* by Yannis Ritsos. In both these plays, written in a context of censorship and political oppression, a problematic relationship with the past weighs upon the protagonist to the extent of wanting to free himself as well as others from it.[2] At the same time, this problematic relationship can be read as a *mise en abîme* of the critical distance a (re)writing keeps from its intertexts. In totalitarian and oppressive regimes, where democracy is undermined, the emancipation from a literary fate comes to represent the ideological and political emancipation to which someone may aspire.

I will compare all three of these texts from the perspective of the singular relationship maintained by the protagonist with his past, first by looking into his anchoring in space and the way he has to disclose his identity in the discourse. Thereafter, I will compare the scenes of recognition where the encounter between the brother and sister allows them to be put back into a family context from bygone years and also determines their future action. Finally, I will compare the role of memory in all three texts. This *differential comparison* and textual discursive analysis will explore the differences between the three texts, which will help us grasp the unique relationship existing between each contemporary (re)writing and its own context of production.[3] My aim is not to study the ways in which the contemporary texts that tell the story of the Atreides, and of Orestes more specifically, exploit and integrate the literary tradition, but rather to put them into dialogue, through a specific axis of comparison, with the ancient play.[4]

The history of the House of Atreus was told and retold in different plays over the course of the 5th century and nobody would deny that Sophocles's *Electra* and Euripides's *Electra*, to name but the two most

[2]. I have used for Aeschylus's play the edition of Page 1972 and Sommerstein's 2008 translation; for *The Flies*, Sartre 1947 and Sartre 1955 (Gilbert's translation); for Ritsos's *Orestes*, Ritsos 1972 and Ritsos 1993 (Green's & Bardsley's translation).

[3]. On this method of analysis, see Heidmann 2005; 2015.

[4]. On the influence of Sophocles's and Euripides's plays on Sartre's *The Flies*, see Gasti 2005. On this influence on Ritsos's *Orestes* cf. Liapis 2014.

obvious examples, have had a profound influence on both Ritsos's and Sartre's work and inform their treatments of Orestes.[5] I will refer to these plays when necessary, but I have chosen to focus on Aeschylus's *Choephori* for the following reason: more than in the other two plays, in Aeschylus's tragedy, it is mainly through the verbal confrontations of Orestes with the other characters of the play that we witness events. In Sophocles's *Electra*, it is Electra who dominates the dramatic action. Orestes appears on stage in the prologue and then in the third episode (v. 1098). Before that, it is Electra who confronts Chrysothemis and Clytemnestra. In Euripides, many other characters take part in the action, talk among themselves and stand in a particular relationship with Orestes and Electra. In *Choephori*, on the contrary, a consistent focus is given to Orestes.

The Flies, a play written between 1943 and 1944 and performed for the first time in 1944, (re)configures Orestes's journey in existentialist terms, with respect to the hero's freedom. The play depicts a rootless Orestes who gradually accedes to property and liberty. Aegisthus, an authoritarian tyrant and usurper who rules over the people by inspiring fear, is in control of Argos. In the name of the moral order supported by Jupiter and the King Aegisthus, a justification is found for every instance of immorality. The residents of Argos are made to believe in the return of the dead seeking revenge and, in order to face them, they must repent of all their sins. They are subdued and made to feel guilty, whereas Orestes, the exile, comes to the city and demystifies these distorted values, rituals and beliefs. This context of subjection will play a major role in the accomplishment of Orestes's action.[6] His fate takes shape little by little and is brought about by his successive acts. The matricide for which he is responsible is neither premeditated nor caused by a desire for revenge and, in this way, escapes the law of cause and effect as well as the talionic law that motivates Orestes's act in Aeschylus. His revolt is achieved instantaneously and Orestes thus becomes the master of his own destiny (cf. Laraque 1976). At the end of the play, Orestes, who nevertheless accepts full responsibility for his act of matricide, decides to take the

[5]. On the myth of Orestes in Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, see March 2001: 4-8.

[6]. Conacher 1954: 413. Conacher hightlights the differences between Aeschylus's and Sartre's plays and the ways in which Sartre depicts Orestes in existential terms. The matricide follows his revolt against the reign of terror created by King Aegisthus and Jupiter. For Slochower 1948: 47, on the contrary, Orestes kills his mother for no reason at all. Regarding the influence of Sartre's philosophical principles on the plots of his plays, cf. Wreszin 1961.

blame for the sins of the Argives, to leave the city and to continue his journey, hunted hereafter by malevolent creatures.

Orestes (*Ὀρέστης*) is a long poem by the Greek poet Yannis Ritsos, also known for his social commitment, revolutionary ideals, and his deportations and exiles. Ritsos is a poet deeply affected by his family's tragic fate and, in addition to recurrent ill health, by his detention in prison, in concentration camps or under house arrest on different Greek islands (Makronissos, Limnos, Agios Efstratios, Samos).[7] In his poetry, and more specifically in his poetic collection *Pierres Répétitions Barreaux (Stones Repetitions Bars),* first published in a bilingual edition by Gallimard in 1971, and in the antique cycle entitled *The Fourth Dimension* (*Τέταρτη Διάσταση*), he revisited several Greek myths reflecting on the fate of the characters from both the Trojan war and Greek tragedy. In the dramatic monologues forming this cycle, the poet expresses the diachronic and existential questions faced by man (cf. Meraklis 1981; Métoudi 1989: 107-122). At the same time, and by overlapping eras and playing with anachronisms, he subjectivises the past and links it to his personal experience.[8] As Tziovas has argued "through the use of myth, Ritsos creates a divergence between content and form, story and discourse, action and art".[9] Ancient Greeks are not ideals of greatness; they are much like ourselves, torn beings on a quest to find liberty.[10] In Ritsos's poetry, one can indeed observe a tendency to demystify the extraordinary power of the antique heroes as well as the admiration they aroused. The time in the past in which the myth takes place crosses paths with the present and cosmic time.[11]

Orestes, as the other monologues of *The Fourth Dimension,* is a long poem organised according to a three-part structure. In the first part, the setting, place, time, and characters are introduced. The second part is a

[7]. On the influence of biographical events on Ritsos's poetry, cf. Prevelakis 1981: 17-47; Prokopaki 1973; Métoudi 1989: 203-212. See Grandmont's biography of the poet in Ritsos 2001: 7-23, 371-380. On the poet's relationship to Greek history and politics cf. Métoudi 1989: 61-106. Cf. also Bien 1983, and Vitti 1979: 174-193, concerning his place in the «Generation of the Thirties".

[8]. On this topic, cf. Prevelakis 1981: 358-367.

[9]. Tziovas 1996: 74. On the dialogic interactions between antiquity and modernity in Ritsos and Seferis, see Tziovas 2017: 353-356.

[10]. Regarding the use of myth in Ritsos's works, cf. Métoudi 1989: 115-122; Sangiglio 1978 ; Bollas 1979 and Sokoljouk 1981. On the connections between autobiographical speech and the myth, see Veloudis 1979. Cf. also Olah 2013.

[11]. For Dallas 2008: 56-57, it is a temporal simultaneity, an "ομοχρονία".

lengthy monologue in the presence of a silent character, which could also be a long meditation. The third and last part is the epilogue providing the *denouement* and shedding retrospective light on the plot.[12] Written between 1962 and 1966 in free verse,[13] *Orestes* portrays a character who is not tempted by belligerent actions. He attempts to abolish the process of revenge brought about by a society obeying the talionic law.[14] This refusal to take any tragic action takes the form of the recurrence of memories of harmless, trivial and everyday deeds. Nevertheless, he ends up committing matricide, dies symbolically and, just like Christ, sacrifices himself in order to relieve the world by freeing it from its need for revenge: "to give this place, if possible, a breathing space" (γιὰ ν᾽ ἀνασάνει (ἂν γίνεται) τοῦτος ὁ τόπος).[15] Orestes represents the refusal to be part of a continued past, while at the same time finding it difficult to free himself from it so as to make his own way. The poem is devoid of action. It is like a freeze-frame, a contemplation, a meditation on the tragic action in the moments preceding the act of matricide.[16] The speaker expresses his effort to distance himself from the action that is likely to decrease his freedom. In the poem, the Chorus disappears completely. This decision to put aside one of the main distinctive features of the antique tragic genre could be the explanation for the choice of a poetic monologue, which serves the purpose of emphasising the protagonist's loneliness and is also a reminder of the biographical poet. The removal of the Chorus also underlines, in a way, the refusal of revenge that might have been expressed by a collective subject.

Sartre's play and Ritsos's poem recount Orestes's return in a very different manner than in Aeschylus's *Choephori.*[17] This tragedy is the second play of the *Oresteia*, a trilogy that was staged for the first time in

[12]. Regarding the structure of these long monologues, cf. Prokopaki 1973: 30-33; Métoudi 1989: 109-110.

[13]. On the use of free verse by Ritsos that goes back to 1937, see Kokoris 1991. On the different stages of his poetical path in general, cf. Kouloufakos 1975 as well as Veloudis 1977: 12-22.

[14]. Ritsos's treatment of the matricide has some similarities with Euripides's version since in Euripides, Orestes is indecisive, whereas Electra insists on the matricide. Cf. Eur. *El.* 967, 969, 973.

[15]. Ritsos 1972: 89; Ritsos 1993: 80. Ritsos hesitated for a long time before arriving at the conclusion that Orestes should "die" in the poem. On the conversations about this matter between Ritsos, Kaiti Drosou and Aris Alexandrou, see Ritsos 2008: 20-31.

[16]. The sixties mark a turning point toward narrative and meditation in Ritsos's poetry. Cf. Dallas 2008.

458 in Athens during the Great Dionysia. The play opens with Orestes, who is guided back to Argos by Apollo with the aim of avenging his father's murder. The matricide that he commits obeys the talionic law, a primitive logic. Orestes is free to disobey (v. 269-277), but he enforces the revenge demanded by the late Agamemnon (v. 306-314; 925), by Electra (v. 143-144) and by the gods (v. 641; 949) because he is too emotionally attached to his family's history, his homeland and to justice in its ancient form. This archaic form of justice is nonetheless perceived as out-dated in the *Eumenides*, the last play of the trilogy, and is replaced by the justice of the city-state of which Athena is the benefactress. Indeed, the goddess and the citizens exonerate Orestes at the end of the *Eumenides*.[18]

1. ORESTES'S IDENTITY AND ITS ANCHORING IN SPACE

Orestes embodies the character of the exile who comes back home and is urged to face his past. In the *Choephori*, in the prayer addressing Zeus and Chthonian Hermes (v. 1-19), Orestes seems determined to anchor himself in Argos and to repossess this space, which legitimately belongs to him. He claims his family heritage through the assertion of his origins, his identity and his attributes. The possessive pronouns (v. 14 : πατρὶ τώμῶι, "my father"; v. 17: ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμὴν, "my sister") and deictic expressions (v. 4: τύμβου δ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ὄχθῳ τῷδε, "at the base of this tombstone"; v. 7 : τόνδε, "this one") underline the ties of blood and homeland (3: ἐς γῆν τήνδε "in this land"). In fact, throughout the play the land represents the authority of the deceased Agamemnon and embodies his identity as well as his past political authority.[19] The relationship with the land brings Orestes physically closer to his father, whom he addresses using the vocative form (v. 8: σόν, πάτερ, μόρον, "your fate, my father").

In Yannis Ritsos's *Orestes*, things are very different. The speaker claims no link with the house belonging to his family or with his mother, father or

[17]. On the story of Orestes before Aeschylus, see Garvie 1986: ix-xxvi. The matricide and the murder of Agamemnon are not mentioned in the Iliad but in the Odyssey. Hom. *Il.* 9, 142-145; 1, 113-115, and Hom. *Od.* 1, 26-54; 11, 385-464; 24, 192-202. The matricide is also mentioned in the *Catalogue of Women*, fr. 23 (a) M-W.

[18]. On the connection between human and cosmic justice, see Tzitzis 1982. Concerning the reversal occurring between the *Choephori* and the *Eumenides*, see Saïd 1983. See also the observations made by Parker 2009, regarding civic conciliation, in the *Eumenides*, of the tensions existing in the first two plays of the trilogy.

[19]. Concerning the metaphor of the land in the *Choephori*, cf. Nenci, Arata 1999. On Orestes's prayer, see Garvie 1970; Conacher 1987.

sister. He only aspires to a detachment from the space occupied by his ancestors, a place to which he came back reluctantly. In fact, he dreams of emancipating himself from his destiny, putting a distance between himself and the family seat, along with the heroic world brought about by this place. His desire to leave the land of Mycenae, the smells of "bronze-rust" (σκουριὰ χαλκοῦ) and of "black blood" (μαῦρο αἷμα) that are released there, clearly reveals his hatred for the world of heroic battles and of revenge portrayed in Homer's epic poem or in tragedy (Ritsos 1972: 80; Ritsos 1993: 72). Accordingly, the proper nouns referring to locations and the spatio-temporal deictic expressions he uses are not meant to indicate the place where he seeks to settle but the one he wishes to leave behind (Ritsos 1972: 74; Ritsos 1993: 66).

> Ἂς μακρύνουμε λίγο ἀπὸ δῶ, νὰ μὴ μᾶς φτάνει ἡ φωνὴ τῆς γυναίκας·
>
> Let's move a little away from here, so the woman's voice won't reach us;
>
> μπροστὰ στὴν πύλη αὐτή, νιώθω ὀλότελα ἀνέτοιμος· –
>
> before this gate, I feel completely unprepared –

Moreover, his quest for liberty is conveyed by an emphasis on the versatility of the world around him. Indeed, the multiple questions, the uncertainties, the repetitive use of the words "perhaps", "almost", "do I", frequently used in Ritsos's poetry, indicate that the protagonist does not possess an absolute and inflexible truth. He is, however, in search of a meaning he is willing to recreate freely; he finds himself in a world that purports to be open to numerous possibilities. Not only does the speaker claim no connection with his homeland, but he also never clearly asserts his identity. He is never named in the poem, as is the case with the protagonists in the other monologues of *The Fourth Dimension*. Furthermore, he manages to remain undefined: he introduces himself throughout the poem using both the plural form (How did it happen that we, too, remained independent, "Πῶς νὰ γινότανε νὰ μέναμε ἀνεξάρτητοι κ᾽ ἐμεῖς") (Ritsos 1972: 73; Ritsos 1993: 65) and the singular form (I don't want to hear any more. I cannot stand it anymore, "Δὲ θέλω πιὰ νὰ τὴν ἀκούω. Δὲν τὸ ἀνέχομαι") (Ritsos 1972: 80; Ritsos 1993: 72). One may argue that the alternations of *I/we* mean I/Orestes and you/Pylades who is named in the opening paragraph of the monologue. Nevertheless, these alternations between *I* and *we*, which are common in Ritsos's poetry and even more so in poems dealing with mythological

topics,[20] reveal the search for identity but nevertheless imply that the fate of an individual is connected to everyone else's. In *Orestes*, this potentially common destiny becomes distinctly apparent at the beginning of the poem and in the rhetorical question that highlights the powerlessness of men before a fate mapped out in advance (Ritsos 1972: 73; Ritsos 1993: 65):

> Πῶς νὰ γινότανε νὰ μέναμε ἀνεξάρτητοι κ' ἐμεῖς, μὲ τὴν ὡραῖα
> χαρὰ τῆς ἀδιαφορίας, τῆς ἀνεξιθρησκείας, πέρα ἀπ' τὰ πάντα,
> μέσα στὰ πάντα, μέσα μας – μόνοι, ἐνωμένοι, ἀδέσμευτοι,
> δίχως συγκρίσεις, ἀνταγωνισμούς, ἐλέγχους, δίχως
> νὰ μᾶς μετράει ἡ ὅποια ἀναμονὴ κι ἀπαίτηση τῶν ἄλλων.
>
> How did it happen that we, too, remained independent, with the delightful
> pleasure of indifference, of tolerance, beyond everything,
> in the midst of everything, in the midst of ourselves – alone, together,
> under no obligation,
> without competition, rivalry, censure, without
> any expectations or demands placed on us by others?

The speaker appears in the discourse to be torn between two realities, two expectations, and two temporalities. He is both the one he truly wishes to be and the one that others wish him to be. This lacerated identity is illustrated by the metaphor of dismemberment (Ritsos 1972: 75; Ritsos 1993: 67):

> Δυὸ ἕλξεις ἀντίρροπες μοῦ φαίνεται ν' ἀντιστοιχοῦν στὰ δυό μας πόδια,
> κ' ἡ μιὰ ἕλξη ἀπομακρύνεται ὅλο πιὸ πολὺ ἀπ' τὴν ἄλλη
> φαρδαίνοντας τὸ διασκελισμό μας ὡς τὸν διαμελισμὸ·
>
> Two opposing forces seem to pull equally on our legs
> and one force moves far further away that the other,
> stretching the stride of our legs to the point of dismemberment;

The speaker is in fact torn between, on the one hand, those who focus on the past and yearn for revenge and, on the other, his own ambition to untie himself from the past so as to be immersed in the present and contemplate the world in front of him.

In fact, he is attentive to things that awaken his senses in the present. Throughout the poem, he is attracted by colours, sounds and scents. At the beginning of the monologue, his attention is diverted from his sister's

[20]. See also the second part of the collection *Stones Repetitions Bars*, in which the speaker in the poems expresses himself both in the I and we forms.

voice in order to contemplate the warm and peaceful night. In the course of the text, his gaze settles on the images that his sister is not able to see: the ladder "propped without reason" (τὴν ἀνεμόσκαλα, τὴ δίχως λόγο ἀκουμπισμένη), the "tassel of a corn-ear grazing the sole of a tiny cloud" (τὴ φούντα ἐνὸς καλαμποκιοῦ νὰ ξύνει τὸ πέλμα ἐνὸς μικρότατου σύννεφου) (Ritsos 1972: 80; Ritsos 1993: 71-72). He refers to the smell of "oregano, thyme, capers» (μυρωδιὰ ἀπὸ ρίγανη, θυμάρι, κάπαρη), to the "sperm of the forest" (τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ δάσους) (Ritsos 1972: 81-82; Ritsos 1993: 73), an insect that "hums politely in the ear of tranquillity" (ἕνα ἔντομο βομβίζει εύγενικὰ στ᾽ αὐτὶ τῆς ἠσυχίας) (Ritsos 1972: 80; Ritsos 1993: 72), the "small drop of sound, charged with meaning, from her (the mother's) long earring" (στάζοντας ἕναν ἦχο πολυσήμαντο ἀπ᾽ τὸ μακρὺ σκουλαρίκι της στὸν ὦμο της) (Ritsos 1972: 79; Ritsos 1993: 71).

In Sartre's *The Flies*, Orestes initially remains at the surface. He says that he has been left "free as the strands torn by the wind from spiders' webs that one sees floating ten feet above the ground" (tu m'a laissé la liberté de ces fils que le vent arrache aux toiles d'araignée et qui flottent à dix pieds du sol) and that he is "light as gossamer and walks on air" (je ne pèse pas plus qu'un fil et je vis en l'air) (Sartre 1947, acte i, acène ii: 123; Sartre 1955: 61). He could be described as spectral, even though he had initially wished for the opposite: "I'm a mere shadow of a man; of all the ghosts haunting this town today, none is ghostlier than I" (J'existe à peine: de tous les fantômes qui rôdent aujourd'hui par la ville, aucun n'est plus fantôme que moi) (Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène iv : 176; Sartre 1955: 90). His difficulty in anchoring himself in his family sphere coincides with an incapacity to have attributes or to own property. This is shown by the use of possessive pronouns and adjectives in italics, initially introduced by negative verbal forms. It should be noted that the words in italics, frequently encountered in Sartre's philosophical works, reflect in the first part of *The Flies* the belongings and property that Orestes does not yet own.[21] His uprooting and the distance he keeps with the things surrounding him are thus verbally emphasised. At the beginning, Orestes appears to be depersonalised and deracinated. It is only after the decision to commit matricide and after its enactment that the possessive pronouns in italics refer to the things that truly belong to him and give evidence of his anchoring in space: "You are *my* sister, Electra, and that city is *my* city. *My* sister!" (Tu es *ma* sœur, Electre, et cette ville est *ma* ville. *Ma* sœur)

[21]. On the function of italics in *The Flies*, see Hollier 1990.

(Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène iv: 180; Sartre 1955: 93); "I have done *my* deed, Electra, and that deed was good … this is *my* path" (J'ai fait *mon* acte, Electre, et cet acte était bon … c'est *mon* chemin).[22] As it happens, the play illustrates the end of Orestes's uprooting and the accession to his attributes.

In short, if in Aeschylus's play the protagonist asserts himself in his speech by the use of possessive pronouns and a vocabulary anchoring him to the land of his family and father, in Ritsos's poem the speaker's connection with the past and the space in which it is reflected is simply pushed away. Through the use of the plural form, the speaker is depersonalised and makes of his fate anyone's and everyone's fate. Instead of a vertical relation to the world, which would take him back to his roots in the world of the deceased and the Mycenaean land, he prefers to be anchored in the present, he chooses the horizontality of a river flowing away and of a contemplative gaze. In Sartre's play, Orestes manages to anchor himself in space and gain access to his own identity only when he freely decides to take action. His act does not aim to repair the past but to distance himself from it.

2. ORESTES'S AND ELECTRA'S RECOGNITION: REMEMBRANCE OF OR UPROOTING FROM THE PAST

The scene of recognition is crucial to our discussion. It allows us to understand the role assigned to Orestes's family's past. The comparison will show to what extent this recognition, in the contemporary texts studied here, is made particularly difficult insofar as it is deferred and even erased. The reason for this is the absence of ties linking the character to his past and his desire for emancipation from it. More specifically, if we observe a claim of family ties in Aeschylus's play, the recognition and the revenge it conveys are abandoned in Ritsos's monologue. In Sartre's play, the recognition does not occur immediately, precisely because there are no objects or physical attributes of the brother and sister that might make a connection between the past and the present.

In Aeschylus's *Choephori*, Orestes's family is brought together around Agamemnon's tomb. It is in the same location that the plan for revenge is

[22]. Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau ii, scène viii: 210; Sartre 1955: 108. Regarding this topic, cf. Burdick 1959, who focuses on the images materializing Orestes's situation, his uprooting and his strangeness in relation to the world around him. Cf. also Noudelmann 1993: 66-67.

devised.[23] In a way, gods, men and the deceased are all present in this scene and take part in the recognition.[24] Orestes begs Zeus and Hermes to hear his plea (v. 1-19), whereas Electra implores Hermes and the Chthonian gods to make her brother come back (v. 123-151). Brother and sister are reunited shortly after the completion of the prayers, as though their wishes had been granted by the gods themselves.[25] Later in the play, the Chorus, in its encouragement of Orestes, stresses the active presence of the deceased by claiming that the dead are growing irritated and complaining fiercely about their killers.[26] Here we are immersed in a world where men, the gods and the dead are communicating through ritual acts. It is a world where the deceased can hear and remember, in which the gods grant the wishes made by the mortals provided that they obey the divine laws and respect the borders that separate them from the gods.

Furthermore, the recognition, which is fuelled by a desire for revenge, is made possible by a series of hints that evoke memories, allude to the past and thereby bring Electra and Orestes closer together. Essentially, it is a matter of physical appearance and objects (v. 230: βόστρυχον τριχὸς, "the lock of hair"), his footprints leading to Agamemnon's grave (v. 228: ἐν στίβοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς, "the tracks of my feet"),[27] and a woven piece of fabric offered to Orestes by Electra in the past (v. 230-231: ἰδοῦ δ' ὕφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χερὸς,/ σπάθης τε πληγὰς ἠδὲ θήρειον γραφήν, "look at thus piece of weaving, the work of my your hands, the strokes of the batten and the picture of a beast"). At the same time and by a subtle play on words, these hints indirectly point to the future murder. When Orestes tells Electra to contemplate the hunting scenes depicted on the piece of clothing, he uses the words "σπάθης τε πληγὰς". The term "σπάθη", meaning "broad blade", refers both to a loom and to a knife (see Sommerstein 1980: 64-65; Garvie 1986: 102). In this way, allusions are

[23]. As suggested by the Chorus (v. 265) and Orestes (v. 233), Agamemnon's tomb was located close to the palace. See Taplin 1977: 338-340. This tomb is the place where the philia of the family is brought together again. Cf. Fartzoff 1997: 48.

[24]. Concerning the singularity of the scene of recognition in Aeschylus's work, see Solmsen 1967.

[25]. Regarding the agency of the gods following Electra's prayer, cf. Fartzoff 1997: 50-52.

[26]. Cassandra in Agamemnon had also announced the performative aspect of Orestes's invocation of the father: "the pleading appeal of his slaughtered father will lead him to his goal", (v. 1279-1285). See on this subject the interesting remarks made by Roberts 1985.

[27]. Concerning this interpretation as well as the hunting metaphors in the scene of recognition, cf. Jouanna 1997. On the hints in the scene of recognition, see also Solmsen 1967.

made both to this past gift and to Clytemnestra's future murder. Accordingly, present, past and future are intertwined in this scene of recognition, made possible by physical hints and facilitated by the prayer to the gods and the late Agamemnon.

If in Aeschylus's tragedy men, gods and the deceased play a major role in the recognition, this is not the case in *The Flies*, where the gods play no part. On the contrary, it is a parody, the ridiculing of the offerings made to the gods, that is the cause of the first encounter between Orestes and Electra. This encounter occurs at the foot of Jupiter's statue, where Electra has just thrown rubbish and insulted the god: "Yes, you old swine, scowl away at me with your goggle eyes and your fat face all smeared with raspberry juice—scowl away, but you won't scare me, not you !" (Ordure! Tu peux me regarder, va! avec tes yeux ronds dans ta face barbouillée de jus de framboise, tu ne me fais pas peur).[28] It is at that moment that Orestes introduces himself to his sister under a false identity. He claims to be a young man from Corinth named Philebus and invites her to flee with him.[29] Electra, who is unaware of the ruse and does not recognise Orestes, refuses to leave as she is awaiting the arrival of her brother, whom she believes to be enraged.

This scene of the first encounter between brother and sister is the exact opposite of the libations offered by the pious Electra in Aeschylus's play. Furthermore, while in the *Choephori* the meeting and recognition of the brother and sister are portrayed as the consequences of their prayers, in *The Flies* no prayer that might lead to a reunion is addressed to the gods. The world in which the characters evolve in *The Flies* is far from transcendent, quite the contrary: from the first scene on, the gods seem to be responsible for the lie and for the false values terrorising the citizens of Argos.[30] For example, when Orestes is surprised to learn that Agamemnon's killer has been reigning happily over Argos for fifteen years, Jupiter replies: "Wouldn't it be better to use such breaches of the

[28]. Sartre 1947, acte i, scène iii, p. 126-127; Sartre 1955: 64. Regarding this topic, cf. Burdick 1959, who focuses on the images that materialise Orestes's situation, his uprooting, his strangeness in relation to the world around him, by which he is imprisoned. Cf. also Noudelmann 1993: 66-67.

[29]. As suggested by Noudelmann 1993: 66-67, we can see here an allusion to Plato's *Philebus*. The subject of this Platonic work, concerning the definition of pleasure, alludes to the false identity of the young Philebus in *The Flies*, that of a young man from Corinth, a city where young people lead a pleasant, carefree and happy life.

[30]. On the new role assumed by the pagan gods and more specifically Jupiter in Sartre's *The Flies* and Giraudoux's *Amphitryon*, cf. De Mourgues 1988.

law to point a moral" (Valait-il mieux tourner ce tumulte au profit de l'ordre moral) (Sartre 1947, acte i, scène i: 112; Sartre 1955: 55). His reign of terror over the city is based on feelings of guilt, fear, and remorse. This becomes apparent in his words as he dismisses an old lady who is continuously repenting: "we have there the real thing, the good old piety of yore, rooted in terror" (Ou je me trompe fort, mes maîtres, ou voilà de la bonne piété, à l'ancienne, solidement assise sur la terreur) (Sartre 1947, acte i, scène i: 115; Sartre 1955: 57). The moral advocated by the god is far from justice, and even farther from the justice in the *Choephori*.

In *The Flies*, Orestes is so repulsed by the gods that he decides to take action to oppose their will. When Jupiter pours forth light around the stone before Agamemnon's grave, Orestes wonders if "that is the Right Thing" (Alors… c'est *ça* le Bien?), and announces in a tone he has not used up to this point that "there is another way" (il y a un autre chemin) (Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène iii: 179; Sartre 1955: 92). It is precisely at this instant that he decides to act. Disgusted by the fact that the meaning of good according to the gods is closely linked to obedience, resignation, cowardice and human injustice, he kills his mother and Aegithus.

The gods do not therefore contribute to the recognition. In addition, no importance is accorded to the physical appearance of the brother and sister, or to their attributes, either the piece of clothing or the lock of hair. Electra is incapable of recognising Orestes because she is deceived by her dream, in which she saw him as a revengeful soldier. When Orestes claims to be, in fact, her brother, she thinks that he is lying. Electra mentions Orestes by name for the first time in the second act, once he has decided to commit matricide (Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène iv: 183; Sartre 1955: 94). If Sartre does not exactly insist on Orestes's and Electra's outward appearances, it is because he gives priority to their actions. Significance does not lie in the world's materiality but in the relationship that man has with it, and more specifically the free action he exerts in order to change that world.

In this instance, and contrary to Aeschylus's play, the matricide does not stem from the scene of recognition. In Sartre's work, it is neither the past nor the gods, nor the reunion with his sister that incites Orestes to act. Moreover, brother and sister are constantly at odds with each other. When Electra is awaiting the return of her vengeful brother, he introduces himself under a false identity. When Orestes is ready to take action, she starts to doubt and appears to be frightened.

In *Orestes* by Yannis Ritsos, the scene of recognition is continuously postponed. The speaker starts by avoiding the encounter with his sister even though he is able to recognise her distressing voice. He does everything in his power to avoid a physical meeting or to hear to her voice. He also refuses to visit the grave that could physically or symbolically link him to his father and to the past of his family. Furthermore, he opposes the libations or any ritual gesture that might cause him to be recognised, as is the case in Aeschylus's play (Ritsos 1972: 74; Ritsos 1993: 66):

> ἂς σταθοῦμε πιὸ κάτου· – ὄχι στοὺς τάφους τῶν προγόνων·
> ὄχι σπονδὲς ἀπόψε. Τὰ μαλλιὰ μου
> δὲ θέλω νὰ τὰ κόψω,
>
> let's stand further down ; no, not at the ancestral tombs;
> no libations tonight. I don't want
> to cut my hair –

The perception he has of his sister reveals her stubbornness (Ritsos 1972: 77; Ritsos 1993: 69):

> Κι αὐτὴ ἐπιμένει νὰ ἑτοιμάζει ὑδρομέλι καὶ τροφὲς γιὰ πεθαμένους
> ποὺ πιὰ δὲ διψοῦν καὶ δὲν πεινοῦν κι οὔτε ἔχουν στόμα
> κι οὔτε ὀνειρεύονται ἀποκαταστάσεις ἢ ἐκδικήσεις.
>
> And she persists in preparing hydromel and food for the dead
> who no longer thirst or drink, no longer have mouths
> or dream of restoration or revenge.

His refusal to be recognised can be explained by the fact that his sister is stuck in the past, whereas he looks to the present and aspires to that which is only momentary and which he perceives thanks to his own senses. He seeks frivolity and lightness, whereas she values and becomes attached to anything voluminous, pompous and weighty (Ritsos 1972: 77; Ritsos 1993: 69):

> ...Φοβοῦμαι· δὲ δύναμαι
> ν' ἀποκριθῶ στὸ κάλεσμά της – τόσο ὑπέρογκο καὶ τόσο ἀστεῖο
> συνάμα –
> σ' αὐτὰ τὰ στομφώδη της λόγια, παλιωμένα, σάμπως ξεθαμμένα
> ἀπὸ σεντούκια "καλῶν ἐποχῶν" (ἔτσι ποὺ λένε οἱ γέροντες),
> σὰν μεγάλες σημαῖες, ἀσιδέρωτες, ποὺ μέσα στὶς ραφές τους
> ἔχει εἰσδύσει ἡ ναφθαλίνη, ἡ διάψευση, ἡ σιωπή, - τόσο πιὸ γερασμένες
> ὅσο καθόλου δὲν ὑποψιάζονται τὰ γηρατειά τους, κ' ἐπιμένουν
> νὰ πλαταγίζουν μ' ἀρχαιόπρεπες χειρονομίες πάνω ἀπὸ ἀνύποπτους
> διαβάτες

> ...I'm afraid ; I'm powerless
> to respond to her challenge – so exorbitant and at the same time so
> comic –
> to these pompous words of hers, old-fashioned, as if unearthed
> in a linen chest "from the good old days" (as the old fools say),
> like great flags, unironed, the seams of which have absorbed
> naphthalene, denial, silence – so very old
> that no one doubts their age, and they persist
> in flapping with archaic gestures above the unsuspecting passers-by-

Surprisingly, it is only once he has accepted his fate, at the end of the poetic monologue, that the speaker proclaims the beginning of the recognition scene. He asks his friend to take the urn containing his "supposed ashes" with him, to which he adds (Ritsos 1972: 77; Ritsos 1993: 79):

> καὶ μόνο ἐσὺ κ' ἐγὼ θὰ ξέρουμε πὼς μὲς σ' αὐτὴ τὴ λήκυθο
> κρατάω, στ' ἀλήθεια, τὴν ἀληθινή μου τέφρα· – μόνο οἱ δυό μας.
>
> and only you and I, only the two of us, will know that in this urn
> I am holding my own real ashes.

Undoubtedly, here Ritsos plays with the Sophoclean scene in which Orestes carries an urn of his ashes in order to lead his opponents into thinking that he is dead (Soph. *El.* 54-58, 757-760, 1113-1125, 1142). What is particularly interesting is that in Ritsos, the speaker presents himself as the hero and the reader of an old myth of which he knows the plot and modifies it. This being said, the so-called recognition is not a true one, as the real Orestes has already died. From these circumstances one comes to the conclusion that Orestes refuses any possibility of true recognition and detaches himself from the old tale. If he decides to commit the act of matricide and thus to comply with the world that constrains him, he does so with the goal of freeing the world from its thirst for revenge. He wants "to give this place, if possible, a breathing space", in other words to put an end to the old and bloody tales and to the diabolical logic of revenge. This fundamental refusal of recognition conveys his wish to break with the past and with a bloodthirsty society.

3. REMEMBRANCE: THE DRIVING FORCE OF ACTION?

Orestes's journey is determined by a past with which he must come to terms. The connection with this past becomes clear through the

importance given to the memory of Orestes's father and to his murder. It is crucial that this remembrance of the past is dealt with in different ways in each of the three versions: it either constitutes a driving force for action or promotes inaction. The strong connection that Agamemnon's children, in the *Choephori*, form with the memory of their father, as well as with the crime to which he fell victim, disappears or diminishes in *The Flies* and in Ritsos's *Orestes*, together with whatever may refer to determinism and to blind necessity.

The *kommos* in the *Choephori*, a lyric song of lamentation sung by the Chorus, Electra and Orestes, highlights the importance of remembrance and the hero's reputation for his achievements in war, a reputation that the children must now re-establish.[31] We are in fact immersed in a heroic universe similar to the one of Homeric heroes, namely a universe where forgetfulness is challenged, where the living must remember and praise the feats accomplished by heroes of the past, thus contributing to the immortalisation of their memory.[32] This is the reason why Orestes, Electra and the Chorus lament the dishonourable death of the king, who could have died gloriously at Troy and thus achieved his "glory" (v. 348: εὔκλειαν) in the eyes of the living and of the deceased among whom he would have reigned (v. 356-358).

In this universe, obsessed with the past, the lamentation song of the brother, the Chorus and the sister, as well as the libations offered to Agamemnon, all serve to compensate for the forgetfulness of which the king will likely be a victim. In fact, it amounts to the ritual lamentation owed to Agamemnon during his funeral but which had not taken place at the time. As pointed out by the Chorus, the due ritual enacted beside the grave of the deceased consists in a ritual song (v. 511: τίμημα τύμβου τῆς ἀνοιμώκτου τύχης, "paying recompense to his tomb for the time it lay unmourned") that suppresses the temporal distance of the murder, which belongs to the past, and the present, turning the past momentarily into the present and thus spurring Orestes to make the choice of matricide.[33] It must be emphasised that, at first, the young Atrides had not yet made up

[31]. On the impact of the *kommos*, cf. Fartzoff 1997.

[32]. On the transformation of the warrior's death into lasting glory and fame, see Vernant 1980, who demonstrates that the hero's memory in the epic poem is the equivalent of an extended funeral ritual. Cf. also Floyd 1980; Nagy 1994.

[33]. In the song Electra and the Chorus explicitly address Orestes. Cf. vv. 324, 372, 374, 439, 450. Their influence on his stance is clear. Cf. Fartzoff 1997: 60-63. On the way the Chorus of foreign slave women urge and drive those around him, see McCall 1990.

his mind about the type of vengeance he wished to carry out. He only had the absolute certainty that he would return to seek revenge (v. 18). The murder's outrageous details given in the *kommos* by the Chorus and Electra strike Orestes's ear (v. 380-381) and cause him to feel anger towards his mother. He is told by Electra that his mother treated her husband as an enemy and that she did not give him the funerary honours to which he was entitled (v. 429-433). The Chorus, for its part, points out that Clytemnestra mutilated Agamemnon before burying him in such a state (v. 439-443).

Moreover, the desire expressed by Orestes and Electra to have their father remember the bath in which he was slaughtered, the net and chains by which he was held prisoner (v. 491-495), underline to what extent dwelling on past deeds can fuel decisions made in the present, as well as future actions. The memory of the murder explains the devising of a plan for revenge, a plan based on the logic of an ancient form of justice. The heroic world in which the characters evolve is one where the past is wished to be remembered, where oblivion is contended against, and where defamatory actions are reciprocated with other defamatory actions. The remedy for oblivion is precisely action.

Comparing these passages with excerpts from *The Flies* relating to the theme of memory allows us to observe fairly quickly that the tradition of the "belle mort" has become corrupted in Sartre's play. In *The Flies*, the living do not remember the deceased who perished gloriously, but instead devote themselves to the memory of those whose lives and deaths were atrocious. They are soldiers who died while blaspheming (les soldats qui moururent en blasphémant), the "downtrodden victims" (les malchanceux), those who were "children of disgrace" (les humiliés), and those "who died of hunger, whose last sigh was a curse" (les mors de faim dont le cri d'agonie fut une malédiction) (Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène ii: 156-157; Sartre 1955: 78-79).

Yet the most surprising turnaround in this play resides in the fact that the dead must remember and despise the living. King Aegisthus and the Church strive to instil in the residents of Argos the conviction that the dead are able to remember and can take revenge on them at any given time. On the day of the celebration of the dead, the high priest addresses them: "You, the forgotten and forsaken, all you whose hopes were dupes…you, the dead, arise; this is your day of days… I summon you to wreak your hatred on the living" (Vous, les oubliés, les abandonnés, les désenchantés, … vous les morts, débout, c'est votre fête!…venez assouvir

votre haine sur le vivants!) (Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène ii : 156; Sartre 1955: 78-79). The deceased await this day and are delighted at the thought of the pain that they will inflict on the living. As for the latter, they live in constant fear and must remember the dead in search of revenge. Aegisthus's words addressing the crowd after the start of the celebration are eloquent in this respect "Dogs! How dare you bewail your lot? Have you forgotten your disgrace? Then, by Zeus, I shall refresh your memories" (Chiens! Osez-vous bien vous plaindre? Avez-vous perdu la mémoire de votre abjection? Par Jupiter, je rafraîchirai vos souvenirs) (Sartre 1947, acte ii, tableau i, scène II : 155; Sartre 1955: 78). This is how they are overwhelmed on a daily basis by their fear of the dead and are consequently driven to inaction and seclusion. Indeed, Argos is a city closed to the world, the windows "open on closed courtyards and turn their backsides to the street" (Elles les ouvrent sur des cours bien closes et bien sombres, j'imagine, et tournent vers la rue leurs culs) (Sartre 1947, acte i, scène i: 106; Sartre 1955: 52). Unlike the inhabitants of Argos, Orestes does not have the slightest memory either of his family's past or of the deceased. This explains why he is weightless and unable to anchor himself in the civic space. He himself admits that "memories are luxuries reserved for people who own houses, cattle, fields and servants" (les souvenirs sont de grasses nourritures pour ceux qui possèdent les maisons, les bêtes, les domestiques et les champs) (Sartre 1947, acte i, scène i: 123; Sartre 1955: 62). Unlike Aeschylus's Orestes, he is not driven to action by the memory of a father and his murder. The protagonist's action is not premeditated and does not conform to the logic of cause-and-effect ensuing from a remembered past.

As previously mentioned, in *The Flies,* it is not the past but rather present circumstances that motivate Orestes to act freely[34]. His move is one of rebellion against an abusive and usurping power, which keeps alive the memory of the dead and the recollection of a terrifying past. The Sartrean hero appears to be emancipated and free from the past once and for all. Orestes is the only one amongst the citizens of Argos who has no memories and who takes action. *The Flies* takes a completely different approach from that of the *Choephori*, as remembrance leads to inaction, whereas, in the end, a lack of recollection results in an act freely consented to.

[34]. Cf. Royle 1972 and Liapis 2014, who focuse on the ontological scope of the play.

In *Orestes* by Yannis Ritsos, the protagonist rejects his sister's voice because he refuses to remember (Ritsos 1972: 81; Ritsos 1993: 73):

> Ἔχω κ᾽ ἐγὼ μιὰ δική μου ζωὴ καὶ πρέπει νὰ τὴ ζήσω, Ὄχι ἐκδίκηση˙ –
> τί θὰ μποροῦσε ν᾽ ἀφαιρέσει ἀπ᾽ τὸ θάνατο, ἕνας θάνατος ἀκόμη
> καὶ μάλιστα βίαιος; – στὴ ζωὴ τί νὰ προσθέσει; Πέρασαν τὰ χρόνια.
> Δὲ νιώθω μίσος πιά· – ξέχασα μήπως; κουράστηκα; Δὲν ξέρω.

> I too have a life of my own and I must live it. Not vengeance –
> what could it bring back from the dead, one death more,
> and that a violent one? – what could it add to life? Years have gone by.
> I don't feel hatred any more; perhaps I've forgotten? grown weary?
> I don't know.

The speaker even wishes to forget his father's murder (Ritsos 1972: 81; Ritsos 1993: 73):

> Θέλω κ᾽ ἐγὼ νὰ δῶ τοῦ πατέρα τὸ φόνο μὲς στὴν κατευναστικὴ τοῦ θα-
> νάτου γενικότητα,
> νὰ τὸν ξεχάσω μὲς σ᾽ ὀλόκληρο τὸ θάνατο
> ποὺ περιμένει κ᾽ ἐμᾶς.

> I too want to see Father's murder in death's palliative generality,
> to forget it in that totality of death
> which awaits us too.

In fact, the vindictive and punitive memory represents a hindrance to freedom, as he highlights it (Ritsos 1972: 81; Ritsos 1993: 73):

> ... πάρ᾽ το· σφίξε το· τὸ περιμένεις
> ἐλεύθερο ἀπὸ τιμωρίες, ἀντεκδικήσεις, ἀναμνήσεις...

> ...take it, clasp it ; you expect it to be
> free from retributions, reprisals, recollections,

As stated above, the speaker prefers the recollection of whatever strikes his sense of hearing, smell and vision to the memories of the dead, the murders and the acts of revenge. Accordingly, his sister's speech is repugnant to him, whereas his mother's pictorial vision of events is very close to him. She seems to honour all that may be perceived by the senses: "A butterfly came in through the window" ("μιὰ πεταλούδα μπῆκε ἀπ᾽ τὸ παράθυρο"), "They should use more indigo on the linen napkins" (θὰ χρειαζόταν πιότερο λουλάκι στὶς λινὲς πετσέτες), "One note of this nocturnal fragrance escapes me" (μοῦ διαφεύγει μιὰ νότα ἀπ᾽ αὐτὴν τὴν εὐωδιὰ τῆς νύχτας) (Ritsos 1972: 78; Ritsos 1993: 70). The mother does not come across as the murderer of Agamemnon but as an inspirational

authority to the persuasive and mysterious words (Ritsos 1972: 79; Ritsos 1993: 73):

> ... Τόσο ἁπλή και πειστικὴ εἶταν ἡ μητέρα
> καὶ δυνατὴ μαζὶ, ἐπιβλητικὴ κι ἀνεξερεύνητη.
>
> ...Mother was so simple and persuasive
> and at the same time strong, commanding, and unfathomable.

The mother, whose voice is coercive and sweet, personifies poetic power, namely the power of words and expression. Indeed, as the speaker who remembers her says, she "can make the biggest words seem natural,/or the smallest, in their deepest significance" (μπορεί νὰ προφέρει φυσικά τὰ πιὸ μεγάλα λόγια/ἢ τὰ πιὸ μικρά, στὴν πιὸ μεγάλη σημασία τους) (Ritsos 1972: 78; Ritsos 1993: 70). When she was fixing her hair before the mirror using the palm of her hand with a movement so graceful and light, "she might have been rearranging three or four stars on the world's forehead" (σὰν νὰ μετακινούσε τρία-τέσσερα ἀστέρια στὸ μέτωπο τοῦ κόσμου) (Ritsos 1972: 79; Ritsos 1993: 70-71). The terms "artful" (πολυδιάστατο) (Ritsos 1972: 78; Ritsos 1993: 70) and "charged with meaning" (πολυσήμαντο) (Ritsos 1972: 79; Ritsos 1993: 71) respectively referring to her laughter and to the sound made by her earring, lead us to envision the character of the mother as a metaphor for poetry. Consequently, one understands even better Orestes's desire to escape his destiny as a matricidal character: by killing his mother, he would kill his own inspiration and smother his own poetic voice. The poetic power through which the speaker describes his recollections shares the same expressiveness as the mother. Both the speaker and his mother speak the language of a poet, of Ritsos himself, one could argue.

In Sartre's and Ritsos's plays, the protagonist's desire for emancipation from his past becomes apparent also in the use of the same imagery in both the discourse and the plot. In both *The Flies* and *Orestes*, the same image conveys the weight of the past: that of a shadow suffocating the character. In *The Flies*, the need to mark a distance from this shadow is clearly expressed following Orestes's liberating act of matricide (Sartre 1947: acte iii, scène ii: 236; Sartre 1955: 121-122).

> Mais, tout à coup, la liberté a fondu sur moi et m'a transi, la nature a sauté en arrière, et je n'ai plus eu d'âge, et je me suis senti tout seul, au milieu de mon petit monde bénin, comme quelqu'un qui a perdu son ombre! et il n'y a plus rien eu au ciel, ni Bien ni Mal, ni personne pour me donner des ordres."

> Suddenly, out of the blue, freedom crashed down on me and swept me off my feet. Nature sprang back, my youth went with the wind, and I knew myself alone, utterly alone in the midst of this well-meaning little universe of yours. I was like a man who's lost his shadow.

In Ritsos's play, this shadow from the past, a true deadlock, a burden, also appears clearly (Ritsos 1972: 84-85; Ritsos 1993: 76):

> Ἀπέραντος ἴσκιος ἀπλώνεται πάνω ἀπ᾽ τὶς ἀψίδες·
> μιὰ πέτρα ξεκολλάει καὶ πέφτει στὴ χαράδρα - ὅμως κανένας
> δὲν περπάτησε –
> ὕστερα τίποτε·
>
> An immense shadow spreads out over the arches;
> a stone works loose and falls into the ravine - and yet no one passed
> by –
> then nothing;

It is the shadow of antiquity, represented by the arcades, the stone and, later, the cups and jugs from banquets, the lyres and the sensible dialogues which are, along with objects of everyday life, thrown into bottomless wells. This shadow seems to weigh heavily, since the stone is detaching itself and falls down. On the contrary, the speaker's own shadow is light and pliant, as he asserts when he reminisces of a cow he once saw in Attica (Ritsos 1972: 87; Ritsos 1993: 78):

> ...Μιὰ τέτοια ἀγελάδα
> σέρνω μαζί μου, μὲς στὸν ἴσκιο μου – ὄχι δεμένη
> μονάχη της μὲ ἀκολουθεῖ· – εἶναι ὁ ἴσκιος μου πάνω στὸ δρόμο
> ὅταν ἔχει φεγγάρι· εἶναι ὁ ἴσκιος μου
> πάνω σὲ μιὰ κλεισμένη πόρτα· καί, πάντα, τὸ ξέρεις:
> ὁ ἴσκιος εἶναι μαλακός, ἀσώματος· κ᾽ οἱ σκιὲς τῶν δυὸ κεράτων
> μπορεῖ καὶ νᾶναι δυὸ αἰχμηρὲς φτεροῦγες καὶ μπορεῖ νὰ πετάξεις
> κ᾽ ἴσως μπορεῖς νὰ περάσεις ἀλλιῶς τὴν κατάκλειστη πόρτα.
>
> ...Just such a cow
> I drag with me, in my shadow-not tied:
> she follows me of her own accord-she is my shadow on the road
> when there's a moon; she is my shadow
> on a closed door; and you're always aware of this:
> the shadow is pliant, bodiless; the shadow of her horns
> may just be two pointed wings and maybe you can fly
> and perhaps you can get past the locked door some other way.

Within this cow and, by the way, within the speaker who identifies himself with her, opposing forces are conjoined[35]. On the one hand, the cow symbolises abdication, since she is "familiar perhaps to resignation and obedience, implacability and hatred in her acquiescence" (ἴσως γνωρίζοντας τὴν ἄρνηση καὶ τὴν ὑποταγή,/τὴν ἀδιαλλαξία καὶ τὴν ἐχθρότητα μέσα στὴ συμφωνία) (Ritsos 1972: 86; Ritsos 1993: 78). She also bears a heavy weight since she holds between her two horns "the heaviest piece of the sky like a crown" (τὸ πιὸ βαρὺ κομμάτι τ᾽ οὐρανοῦ σὰν ἕνα στέμμα) (Ritsos 1972: 86; Ritsos 1993: 78). On the other hand, she becomes the symbol of lightness, of freedom, of the desire to fly and break through closed doors and confined spaces. She is, in effect, "unyocked" (ξεζεμένη) (Ritsos 1972: 86; Ritsos 1993: 77), moves freely and raises "her head from the water not touching anything,/herself untouched and calm, like a saint" (τὸ κεφάλι της, μὴν ἀγγίζοντας τίποτα,/ἀνέγγιχτη ἡ ἴδια καὶ ἥρεμη σὰν ἕνας ἅγιος) (Ritsos 1972: 86; Ritsos 1993: 78). She probably "ascended" (ὥσπου ἡ γελάδα ἀναλήφθηκε) (Ritsos 1972: 88; Ritsos 1993: 79), the speaker remarks. This intriguing image of the cow gives us a fair idea of what the speaker bears within himself: a past that weighs heavily and leads to revenge, on the one hand, the desire for lightness, carefreeness and peace, on the other.

4. CONTEXTUAL ECHOES

Both *The Flies* and Ritsos's *Orestes* keep a certain distance from heroic values and the thirst for revenge found in the *Choephori*. The plot of the ancient play is demystified by both contemporary (re)writings. In Aeschylus's play, Orestes complies with the ancient form of justice and respects the traditions protecting the hero's renown, while, conversely, the two contemporary plays witness his detachment and adoption of a critical perspective. This being said, the respect for the ancient form of justice based on the talionic law in the *Choephori* does not reflect the reality of the Athenian audience at the time of the play's performance. Athenian citizens in fact witnessed the royal intrigues of the play from the distance of one who is immersed in a democratic context and therefore imbued with civic values. Contrary to the two contemporary (re)configurations, Aeschylus's version was staged at a time when the

[35] 76. On the conjunction of opposites in Orestes's attitude, which informs also the image of the cow, see Liapis 2014: 143-146. Such a conjunction, Liapis remarks, is a fundamental tenet of existentialism.

democratic system in Athens was asserting itself and becoming stronger through major political and institutional transformations. The justice of men was henceforth based on written laws and applied in popular courts, and contrasted starkly with the old form of justice, which favoured punishing murder with murder[36]. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Aeschylus chose to represent matricide as a perverted and corrupt ritual sacrifice, an act of blind revenge that keeps the city from peacefully continuing its existence[37]. Only in the *Eumenides*, the last play of the trilogy, do the court of the Areopagus and the citizens of Athens put an end to a family matter that had remained unresolved up to that point. In this way, the tragic poet challenges the notion of justice as it was performed in a remote past through a display of institutional practices, strongly inspired by those current in Athens during the 5th century, and in which the citizens played a crucial part.[38]

As for *The Flies*, it presents a close interaction between the character's path, his emergence in the discourse and the historical context of the play. The play was written and performed as France was shaken by the German occupation and Vichyist collaboration. In this divided France, the values of national revolution were glorified, and such principles as discipline, hard work, family and traditions were promoted. It is precisely these values, as well as the "meaculpism" favoured and upheld by the regime, that Sartre intends to oppose by writing *The Flies*.[39] It should be noted that the governing authorities at the time sought to maintain a form of guilt by constantly repeating the charge that France's defeat was caused by the previous administrations.[40]

Sartre's response entails resorting to the myth by depicting Orestes as one who frustrates the values and principles of such a regime, along with

[36]. Cf. Jones 1987. See also Souzeau 1997, who focuses on the many meanings of the representation of Argos in Athens during a period when the city-state was undergoing political and institutional transformation.

[37]. On the theme of corrupt sacrifice in the Oresteia, cf. Zeitlin 1965.

[38]. Regarding the connections of the trilogy with the Athenian political system and institutions, see Rosenbloom's study 1995, for whom the trilogy challenges Agamemnon's conquest and indirectly warns the Athenians about the dangers of an imperialistic policy based upon naval power. Cf. also Dover 1957; Podlecki 1966; Dodds 1973 and Macleod 1982, who studies the connections between Athens and Argos in the 5th century, similarly echoed in the trilogy.

[39]. On this political reading of the play, see McCall 1969 and Royle 1972. Cf. also Noudelmann 1993: 20-22.

[40]. See Sartre's own remarks on the subject, in Sartre 1949: 35-36.

the religious and political powers. Sartre's vision of theatre aims to spur the French people to take action and challenge the existing power, as well as some of the moral and political values it supported (Conacher 1954: 405). In addition, the action of Sartre's hero might encourage the French people not to be solely paralysed by remorse but to move forward by taking responsibility for their actions.

In *Orestes*, Yannis Ritsos also attempts to break from the ideal of antiquity. The mindsets of reconciliation and sacrifice take the place of the mentality of blind vengeance. Much like in the other works found in *The Fourth Dimension*, this monologue includes the assertion of a free will through which one can make his voice heard beyond the struggles for power and bloody revenge. This libertarian aspiration is particularly significant for the poet whose works had been censored and whose voice was nearly silenced during his several incarcerations, house confinement and exiles. Its importance is also fundamental in the context of the royal family preventing democracy from asserting its true value. In Greece, the intrigues and power plays precipitated by the King and Queen were actual impediments to democratic renewal. An allusion is perhaps made to this conservative and nationalistic form of power in "these pompous words of hers, old-fashioned" (αὐτὰ τὰ στομφώδη της λόγια, παλιωμένα) and in "great flags, unironed flags" (μεγάλες σημαῖες, ἀσιδέρωτες) (Ritsos 1972: 77; Ritsos 1993: 69).

From this perspective, we can observe that the expression "these pompous words of hers, old-fashioned" may allude to the purified language used by the Church, monarchy and governments in this period. Furthemore, in Makronisos the official language of propaganda in the local magazines as well as the official speeches heard by the prisoners through loudspeakers used some forms of kathareuousa (the puristic language), whereas the prisoners used demotic in their everyday lives as well as in the poems they were writing and plays they were staging[41]. This linguistic register is linked to antiquity insofar as it is closer to ancient Greek than to demotic Greek (see Mackridge 2009). Ritsos's references to that which is "aged" and "pompous", as well as to the arcades, cups, banquets and lyres all shrouded in shadow, could be read as allusions to antiquity and to the

[41]. On the magazines published by the Makronisos operation and on the ideological use of Classical Greece and the national rhetoric on antiquity in the concentration camp of Makronisos, see Hamilakis 2007. On the *kathareuousa* during the fifties and sixties, see Fragoudaki 2001: 73-93.

perception of it as glorious from the viewpoint of the oppressive power against free speech and dissenting voices.

It should also be noted that Ritsos fell prey to the division of Greece between 1945 and 1949, a time during which the communists were fighting for power against the royalists and the right-wing movement. As a matter of fact, his devotion to the communist ideal caused him to be sentenced to the many deprivations of liberty detailed earlier. The divide referred to by the protagonist in the poem could therefore be that of a country which perpetuates the hate of its people against one another. But on the other hand, as Prevelakis has argued, Orestes's fate in the poem could be seen as a projection of the tensions between the political commitments of Ritsos and his willingness to be free of any ideological constraints.[42]

Does the poem celebrate the futility of all human struggle and a meaningless universe through a subversive and pessimist reading of myth, as Liapis (2014) argues in his rich and interesting article on the existentialist underpinnings of Ritsos's *The Fourth Dimension* and *Orestes* in particular? I would put into question this interpretation. By initially stepping backwards, Orestes emerges from the shadow of myth, embraces lightness, remembers and creates poetic images, even though he finally commits the matricidal revenge. The decision to accomplish an act that, in the end, is well considered and for which he assumes complete responsibility, undoubtedly reveals how powerful the past is. Nevertheless, the process that leads to this decision makes possible the emergence of a poetic voice and the accomplishment of the poem. It is in this sense that we should understand the meaning of the oxymoronic statement the speaker makes in the penultimate stanza of the monologue[43]:

> ... Διαλέγω
> τὴ γνώση καὶ τὴν πράξη τοῦ θανάτου ποὺ τὴ ζωὴ ἀνεβάζει.
>
> ...I choose
> the knowledge and the action of death that enhances life.

[42] 91. Prevelakis 35-366. Cf. Green 1996: 105–107. Prokopaki 1973: 55, and Colakis 1984: 126 argue that the autobiographical interpretation may lead to oversimplification. See also Green 1996 and Liapis 2014: 154.

[43] 93. On the use of oxymoron in *Orestes* and in the *The Fourth Dimension*, cf. Tziovas 1996: 73-75. According to Tziovas 1996: 77, myth in The Fourth Dimension foregrounds "the complexities of existence and poetry".

The 20th-century *Orestes* are to some extent a reflection of the artists/philosophers who created them: they are at odds with the political, ideological, cultural and artistic norms disseminated by the powers that be. From this viewpoint, the two contemporary (re)writings are exemplary inasmuch as they thematise, through a process of *mise en abîme*, the critical distance of one (re)configuration in relation to another. Such a critical distance from a literary fate leads to an artistic creativity and reveals the desire for an ideological emancipation. Consequently, and given the possibilities that it offers for concealment, detachment and identification, nothing is more effective than a myth that a literary work challenges and questions.

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DER SINN

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NOTIZ ZUR ÜBERSETZUNG

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Erster Teil

ALICE IM SpLItTERLAND

Alice: Self-Portrait II, 2011
Mixed media drawing on paper,
200 x 100 cm
Photo: ANT STRACK

Ich versuche schon eine Weile, das Ende zu finden, es zu erwischen und durch das Nadelöhr zu fädeln. Anscheinend geht ein Kamel eher durchs Nadelöhr als ein Mädchen durch ein Kaninchenloch. Oder —verzieht das Gesicht nicht—ein Kaninchen durch das Loch eines Mädchens. Aus dem Loch eines Mädchens kann jedoch ein Baby von der Größe eines Kaninchens herauskommen, zuweilen mit hellblauen Augen und rotem Zünglein. Ach mein Häschen, du mein Häschen, / kriegst was auf die Pfoten! / Denn Löcher in des Nachbars Garten / zu graben, das ist verboten! Ich nuckle an alten Liedern wie Tante Smáro am Ende des Fadens nuckelte, um es durch die Nadel zu fädeln und voilà die hinreißenden Resultate:

Es war einmal—ich.

Hinunter in den Kaninchenbau

Entweder musste der Brunnen sehr tief sein, oder sie fiel sehr langsam…

Es war Juli, ein schöner Sommermorgen, schön für die anderen, denn ich irrte wie ein Geist, der von seinem Rückweg ins Reich der Schatten abgekommen war, in Kifisiá umher. Meine Augen waren geschwollen, meine Haare zerzaust, meine Kleidung—Gott bewahre. Ich hatte seit drei Tagen nicht mehr geschlafen.

Um die Wahrheit zu sagen, die weißen Nächte waren mir nicht unbekannt. Von Zeit zu Zeit passierte es, dass ich nicht vor Morgengrauen einschlief, oder im Gegenteil, dass ich aufwachte, bevor Gott den Tag anbrechen ließ. Gewöhnlich konnte ich mich die nächsten vierundzwanzig Stunden kaum auf den Beinen halten. Ich war ein ziemlich kränkliches und überempfindliches Mädchen, das auch unter normalen Umständen nicht

vor Tatkraft sprühte, aber an den Tagen, an denen ich nicht gut schlief, kam meine Lebensenergie der Leiche eines Ertrunkenen gleich.

An jenem Sonntag, an dem ich zum ersten Mal volle sechsunddreißig Stunden ohne Schlaf geblieben war, war meine Erschöpfung etwas viel Tückischerem und Beunruhigenderem gewichen: einem leicht erschreckenden Gefühl des Unwirklichen. Um mich deutlicher auszudrücken: ich könnte meinen Zustand mit dem vergleichen, der die Schwelle zwischen Schlaf und Erwachen kennzeichnet, und besonders dann, wenn man zwar schon wach ist, jedoch Schwierigkeiten hat sich bewusst zu werden, wo man ist, welche Tageszeit gerade ist, wie lang man geschlafen hat, als hätte der Schlaf den Menschen wie eine Lawine mitgerissen, sodass er, zusammengerollt wie ein Embryo, blind mitten im Herzen des Weißen, nicht weiß, in welche Richtung er graben soll, um herauszukommen.

Normalerweise dauert dieses Gefühl nicht mehr als wenige Sekunden, an jenem Sonntag jedoch bemerkte ich, dass das Eis des Unwirklichen meine ganze Existenz durchtränkt hatte, und sie dabei verdünnte und ihr spezifisches Gewicht verringerte. Es wäre nicht übertrieben zu sagen, dass ich umherging wie die Astronauten auf dem Mond. Anstelle eines Raumanzuges hatte ich das Gefühl, ich trüge so was wie eine Luftpolsterfolie, wie die, in die man Glasgegenstände einwickelt, damit sie beim Transport nicht zerbrechen. In dieser durchsichtigen Rüstung eingepackt, verließ ich mein Haus in Maroúsi und begann die Kifisías hinaufzugehen, nicht auf dem Bürgersteig, sondern ganz am Rand des Boulevards, während die Autos die Geschwindigkeit drosselten und, ohne zu hupen, auswichen, mit der gleichen Mischung aus Ratlosigkeit und Gehorsam, die einem eine Erscheinung einflößt.

Ich ging also weiter und dachte an meinen Freund Íkaros, der vor wenigen Tagen in die Alpen gereist war. Er arbeitete als Fotograf für eine Zeitschrift und gerade war er auf irgendwelche Gipfel geschickt worden, um eine Bergsteigerexpedition zu fotografieren. Íkaros war selbst Bergsteiger und Kletterer. Er liebte alles, was mit den Bergen zu tun hatte und war richtig verrückt nach Schnee. Mir gefroren die Füße in der Kälte und wurden weiß, meine Hände wurden wund und bluteten, und nach einer Stunde Marsch war ich endgültig bereit, alles hinzuschmeißen. Nach einigen fruchtlosen Bemühungen, mich in den Bergkult einzuweihen, unternahm er letztendlich alleine seine Ausflüge, was ohnehin besser zu ihm passte, zumal man ihn im Großen und Ganzen in die Kategorie des einsamen Reisenden einordnen könnte.

Es ist wahr, dass er jedes Mal, wenn er von einer Reise zurückkehrte, sei es, dass er fotografiert hatte oder auf einer Klettertour gewesen war, Freude und Gesundheit ausstrahlte, und das ermunterte ihn oft dazu, mich voller Begeisterung mit einer Menge von Informationen zu überhäufen, die für mich ganz und gar nutzlos waren. So sagte er mir zum Beispiel, wenn ich mich jemals im Wald verirren sollte, sollte ich darauf achten, auf welcher Seite der Baumstämme das Moos wachse, denn so könnte ich den Osten ausfindig machen. Oder: wenn ich durch einen unglücklichen Zufall unter einer Lawine begraben werden würde, sollte ich Folgendes machen: pinkeln. Einfach nur um des Gesprächs willen, wollte ich damals wissen warum. „Weil du aus dem Verlauf, den die Pisse aufgrund der Schwerkraft nimmt, ablesen kannst, wo der feste Boden ist. Dann kannst du beginnen, in die entgegengesetzte Richtung zu graben."

Hauptsache, in die entgegengesetzte Richtung graben, murmelte ich an jenem Morgen, während ich, im Schleier meiner Schlaflosigkeit eingehüllt, weiterging. Dieser Gedanke verursachte eine seltsame Verstimmung in mir. Darüber hinaus: Während der vergangenen Nacht hatte ich eine ganze Flasche Milch geext—irgendwo hatte ich gelesen, dass das müde macht—und jetzt musste ich dringend pinkeln. Ich beendete für den Moment mein zielloses Umherirren und versuchte zu begreifen, wo in aller Welt ich mich befand. Ich hatte offensichtlich die Kifisías verlassen und, nachdem ich den Wald von Syngroú durchgequert hatte—wie habe ich denn diese ganze Entfernung zurückgelegt?—war ich in der Gegend des Friedhofs angelangt, dem Arbeiterviertel von Kifisiá, auch als Alónia bekannt.

An die Gegend konnte ich mich ziemlich gut erinnern, weil ein Onkel meines Vaters, den wir zuhause „den Kommunisten" nannten, hier wohnte. Der „Kommunist" wohnte zwei Straßen weg vom Friedhof, in einem alten Haus, einem von denen, deren gläserne Eingangstüren außen ein kunstvolles Gitter hatten. Immer wenn wir zu Besuch kamen, sagte er uns, dass in diesem Viertel Kutscher, Schuster, Wirtsleute und andere Tagelöhner lebten. Er selbst hatte genug Geld, aber nachts in seinen Träumen sah er sich als armen Kutscher mit Säufernase, wobei letzteres nicht allzu weit von der Wirklichkeit entfernt war, weswegen meine Mutter ihn neben „Kommunist" auch „Schnapsdrossel" nannte.

Auf meinem Streifzug war ich jedenfalls noch keinem in der Kneipe hockenden Kutscher oder anderen Tagelöhnern begegnet, es war überhaupt fraglich, ob zu dieser Zeit irgendeine Menschenseele auf der Straße verkehrte, was mir Mut machte, und ich ließ meinen Blick um die Gegend

herum schweifen, ob ich nicht eine abgelegene Ecke fände, um zu pinkeln. Etwas weiter unten gab es ein Grundstück mit einem davor geparkten Bulldozer. Sie werden wohl irgendein Häuschen abgerissen haben, um einen Wohnblock zu bauen, dachte ich. Wenn mein Onkel, der Säuferkommunist, noch leben würde, hätte er ihnen bestimmt die Hölle heiß gemacht, für mich jedoch war es eine gute Gelegenheit mich in eine Ecke zu hocken und versteckt hinter dem Bulldozer mich zu erleichtern. Ich ging also ganz nach hinten, wo das Grundstück an den Zaun eines Hofes grenzte. Dichter Efeu kletterte an dem Zaun empor und so war ich wohl nicht in Gefahr, entdeckt zu werden.

Ich hoffe nur, dass kein Gärtner im Nachbarsgarten ist, der anfängt, mich mit dem Schlauch nasszuspritzen, dachte ich, und bevor ich mir die Unterhose herunterzog, ging ich zum Hoftor, um zu sehen, ob vielleicht Menschen im Garten waren. Ich schaute hinein. Am hinteren Ende des Gartens stand eines dieser alten Herrenhäuser, deren Verlassenheit sie noch imposanter und mysteriöser erscheinen lässt. Nichts war zu hören. Ob hier wohl jemand wohnt, fragte ich mich und betrachtete das Gartentor auf der Suche nach einem von diesen Metallschildern mit dem Namen des Besitzers. Es gab keines. Stattdessen hatte jemand mit einer Schnur ein Stück Karton an den Gitterstäben festgemacht, auf dem mit rotem Filzstift geschrieben stand „DEN GAUL NICHT FÜTTERN".

The Bird, 2012
Ceramic and steel on steel base
105×101×50 cm
Photo: ANT STRACK

Ich begann das Schild mit dem Ausdruck eines Archäologen, der sich mit der Entschlüsselung von Linear A befasst, zu betrachten. Ich versuchte, hinter den Gitterstäben die Spuren irgendeines möglichen Pferdes zu erkennen, während mir, ich weiß nicht warum, plötzlich auch das Bild eines Nilpferdes in den Sinn kam. Dabei hatte ich wohl das körperliche Bedürfnis vergessen, das mich an diesen Ort geführt hatte, als ich eine männliche Stimme neben mir hörte.

„Am Anfang hatte mein Töchter-chen den Gaul mit K geschrieben, aber da glaubten manche, es ginge um das Kultusministerium."[1]

Es handelte sich um einen Mann um die Fünfundfünfzig. Er trug eine dieser Brillen, die ein durchsichtiges und biegsames Gestell haben, eine Beschreibung, die auch auf ihn selbst zutreffen könnte, da er in seiner Kleidung zu schwimmen schien. Ein Lüftchen würde ihn wie einen Vorhang wehen lassen. Er erinnerte mich an einen Mathematiklehrer am Gymnasium, der im Gehen leichte Kurven im Klassenzimmer schlug, als hätte er keine Knochen, Gelenke, Kanten, als bestünde sein Körper hauptsächlich aus Gummi und Gelee. In meinem Alter, dachte ich, ist vielleicht alles dazu bestimmt, an etwas anderes zu erinnern, als wäre jede Person, jeder Gegenstand, jede Situation mit einem Faden an ihr getreues Abbild in der Vergangenheit gebunden.

Während mir diese Dinge durch den Kopf gingen, sagte ich nichts, und so sahen wir uns gegenseitig schweigend und in Gedanken versunken an. In Gedanken versunken war eher ich. Der Mann hingegen schien sich auf mein Gesicht zu konzentrieren, als würde jetzt auch er versuchen, irgendeine seltsame Tafel zu entziffern. Wenn es an mir läge, würde ich mir wünschen, dass auf meiner Tafel steht: BETRETEN AUF EIGENE GEFAHR. Ich bin nicht sicher, ob mir das gelungen war. Vielleicht stand da auch geschrieben: ZUR FREIEN VERFÜGUNG. Wer weiß.

„Ich kenne Sie", beschloss der Mann mit zurückgehaltenem Jubel.

Dieser Satz enthielt keine Frage oder Zweifel und so blieb mir nur zu fragen: „Woher?"

„Ich habe ein Foto von Ihnen zu Hause. Im Wohnzimmer, rechts wenn man hineinkommt, auf der Etagère, neben der chinesischen Vase", führte er mich in einem Raum herum, den ich mir leer und kalt vorstellte. Würde die Vase von der Etagère fallen, gäbe es einen ohrenbetäubenden Lärm. Von meinem Foto aus würde ich tief betrübt den Blick auf die Scherben hinabsenken.

In diesem Moment tauchte aus dem Garten ein kleines Mädchen auf, noch nicht fünf Jahre alt, und lief in unsere Richtung.

„Pass auf, du wirst stolpern!" rief ihr der Mann zu, der in diesem Augenblick das Hoftor aufschloss, und breitete seine Arme aus. Das Mädchen fiel ihm um den Hals.

1. Das Wortspiel im Griechischen, das auf dem Gleichklang der Abkürzung für das Kultusministerium (ΥΠΠΟ) mit dem Wort für Pferd (ίππος) basiert, lässt sich schwer ins Deutsche übertragen. (A.d.Ü.)

„Das ist Eleánna", stellte er sie mir vor.

„Élena", sagte ich.

„Nicht Élena, Eleánna", korrigierte mich der Mann.

„Élena heiße ich", stellte ich die Dinge richtig. Mehr oder weniger.

Der Mann überlegte kurz.

„Euch trennt ein an", schloss er.

„Richtig: an[2]..." phantasierte auch ich, als würde ich mit einem imaginären Zauberstab ein inexistentes Glöckchen anschlagen.

„Kommen Sie doch rein", ermunterte mich der Mann. „Ich hätte gerne, dass auch Sie dieses Foto sehen. Keine Angst, es beißt nicht."

„Was? Das Foto?"

„Das Pferd", sagt er mir, „beißt nicht. Es ist sehr freundlich. Ich mache mir nur Sorgen, man könnte ihm Gift hinwerfen", versuchte er, die Existenz der Tafel zu rechtfertigen.

In Wirklichkeit wusste ich nicht, dass Pferde beißen. Auch nicht, dass man ihnen Gift hinwirft. Übrigens, jetzt, dass er das Tor geöffnet hatte und ich fast den ganzen Garten überblicken konnte, sah ich überhaupt kein Pferd. Ich war im Begriff zu gehen, als das Mädchen kam und begann, mich am Kleid zu zupfen. Als ich sie mir genauer ansah, erkannte ich, dass sie ein kleiner Albino war. Ihre Haare waren weiß, wie ihre Augenbrauen und Wimpern. Ihre Zähne standen ein wenig vor, was sie einem Kaninchen ähneln ließ. Ein weißes Kaninchen mit hellblauen Augen. Sie schloss sie halb, als würde sie das Licht stören.

„Komm, Élena" sagte das Mädchen zu mir, „drinnen ist auch das Baby."

„Wir haben ein Neuankömmling in unserem Zuhause", bestätigte der Mann die Worte des Mädchens und deutete mir einzutreten.

„Kommen Sie... Zögern Sie nicht. Entschuldigen Sie übrigens, dass ich mich Ihnen nicht vorgestellt habe: Timoléon Hippokrátous."

Ich erwog kurz die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass sein Name genauso imaginär sei wie das Pferd. Und trat ein.

„Hier entlang, hier entlang" zog mich das Mädchen am Kleid, als würde es eine Blinde führen. Der Garten war völlig runtergekommen. Er sah aus, als hätte ihn jemand sorgfältig gestaltet und bepflanzt, aber es musste sicherlich einige Zeit vergangen sein, seitdem ein Gärtner das letzte Mal betreten hatte. Es gab vereinzelt Bäume, vor allem Maulbeerbäume und ein paar Orangenbäume. Einige Früchte waren zu Boden gefallen und verfaul-

2. Das griechische αν [an] = „wenn", „ob". [A.d.Ü.]

ten. Hier und da gab es kreisförmig arrangierte Steine, vielleicht dazu bestimmt, Blumenbeete abzugrenzen, jetzt aber wuchsen innerhalb und außerhalb der Steinkreise Gräser und irgendwelche Sträucher mit spitzen Stacheln. Als ich vorbeiging, verfing sich ja mein Kleid in einem und es kam mir vor, als würde von der einen Seite das kleine Mädchen und von der anderen ein Kaktus an mir ziehen. Herr Hippokrátous nahm den Stoff vorsichtig und entfernte ihn von dem Stachel.

„Sie sind frei, aber das kleine Loch wird wohl bleiben", sagte er und tadelte dann auch Eleánna für das Gezerre.

„Benehmen wir uns so Fremden gegenüber?", erhob er den Zeigefinger vor ihr Gesicht.

„Aber sie ist doch keine Fremde", sagte das Mädchen.

„Ach so? Und was ist sie denn?"

„Das ist Élena, Papa", sagte sie mit zärtlicher Nachsicht, als wäre er ein Dummerchen.

Wir waren vor der Tür angekommen. Das Haus war aus Stein und riesig, mit zwei Stockwerken und einer Mansarde. Im ersten Stock gab es eine große Veranda, die von Säulen getragen wurde. Unter dieser befanden wir uns jetzt. Herr Hippokrátous schloss die Tür auf und Eleanna stürmte hinein. Kommen Sie rein, deutete er mir. Bevor ich eintrat, bemerkte ich Spuren von einst dagewesenem Efeu an der Steinwand. Es war, als hätte die Wand einmal Haare gehabt.

Durch mehrere Fenster drang das Licht in sich überschneidenden Bündeln in die Eingangshalle. Ich musste an einen Film denken, in dem der Dieb, um ein Gemälde zu stehlen, zwischen Strahlen durchsteigen musste, die das Zimmer wie miteinander verwobene Fäden kreuzten. Ich stellte mir vor, ich würde mich in das Haus einschleichen, um das Foto zu stehlen, und wie ein Baby in den Baumwollfäden dieses Gewebes verwickelt enden. Dann schaltete der Mann das Licht an und die Lichtbündel verschwanden zusammen mit meiner flüchtigen Vorstellung. Aus dem ersten Stock waren Trippelschritte zu hören und kurz darauf erschien vor uns eine junge und rundliche Frau.

„Aristéa kümmert sich um uns, natürlich nur, wenn ihr das Baby Zeit lässt", erklärte mir Herr Hippokrátous, während die junge Frau mit gesenktem Blick da stand wie ein Dienstmädchen aus alten Zeiten. Zudem hielt sie ihre Arme so, als trüge sie ein Baby. Es wäre doch lustig, wenn auch das Baby imaginär wäre, dachte ich, als der Mann sein Sakko auszog und es ihr in die Hände legte.

„Élena", stellte ich mich der Frau vor und sie lächelte mich an.

„Aristéa kommt aus Albanien und hat noch nicht gut Griechisch gelernt. In Wahrheit ist sie oft angestrengt, besonders jetzt, dass sie auch Mutter geworden ist", entschuldigte sie Herr Hippokrátous und deutete mir, in das Wohnzimmer zu gehen. Die junge Frau folgte uns. Eleánna war bereits irgendwo im Haus verschwunden.

„Dürfte ich erst mal die Toilette benutzen?", erinnerte ich mich plötzlich an mein Bedürfnis.

„Selbstverständlich. Aristéa, zeig Élena doch das Badezimmer."

Während ich mich in die fremde Kloschüssel erleichterte, dachte ich, was für ein Unglück es wäre, wenn ein Bergsteiger von einer Lawine mitgerissen würde, nachdem er zuvor seine Blase geleert hätte. Dann aber beruhigte ich mich mit dem Gedanken, dass er ein wenig Schnee essen und wieder pinkeln könnte. Puh. Was wohl Íkaros gerade machte? Vermutlich war er schon in Chamonix angekommen. Er war mit einem Abendflug nach Paris gereist und würde von dort mit dem Zug weiterfahren. Gleich nach seiner Ankunft wollte er mich von der Pension aus anrufen. So hatte er es genannt: Pension. Ich stellte mir ein großes Zimmer voller Pensionierten vor. Ich wusch mir die Hände und ging hinaus.

Im Wohnzimmer stand Herr Hippokrátous mit einem kleinen Bilderrahmen in der Hand und wartete auf mich.

„Komm dir das Foto ansehen, von dem ich dir erzählt habe", sagte er zu mir.

Das war ich. Ich trug eine grüne Cordhose und dazu einen roten Pulli mit zwei senkrechten Zöpfen, handgestrickt. Die Haare trug ich bis zu den Schultern, etwas kürzer und ein wenig heller als jetzt, aber es konnte auch am Licht liegen, das von hinten hineinschien und meinen Kopf so aussehen ließ, als trüge ich einen selbstleuchtenden Strohhut. Ich stand bis zu den Knien im Meer, ein geöffnetes Buch so in den Händen, dass der Umschlag zu sehen war. Was darauf abgebildet war, konnte ich nicht klar erkennen. Vielleicht so etwas wie eine Maske. Ich hielt mir das Foto direkt unter die Nase. Den Titel konnte ich nicht lesen. Neben mir stand ein Mann in einem weißen Arztkittel und betrachtete mich, während er sich nachdenklich am Kinn kratzte.

„Wer hat Ihnen denn dieses Foto gegeben?", fragte ich Herrn Hippokrátous überrascht.

„Das sind Sie, oder?"

„Schon, aber ich erkenne weder die Szene noch den Menschen neben mir."

Das stimmte. Die mit der grünen Hose und dem roten Pulli war ich. Das Gesicht aber, wenn ich es genauer betrachtete, hatte etwas Befremdliches an sich. Als wäre ich es und wäre es doch nicht. Aber die Kleidung! Die erkannte ich sehr gut! Als ich ungefähr zwanzig Jahre alt war, trug ich sie die ganze Zeit. Ich trug sie auch danach ziemlich oft bis ich dreißig wurde. Und das Buch? Ich hatte keine Ahnung, welches Buch das war, das ich angeblich las, ganz zu schweigen von der Identität des Mannes neben mir.

„Das ist Lámbros", sagte mir Herr Hippokrátous.

„Ich kenne keinen Lámbros."

„Lámbros Doúkas", insistierte er.

„Tut mir leid. Ich kenne niemanden mit diesem Namen."

„Das kann doch nicht sein. Er war es, der mir letztes Jahr das Foto geschickt hat. Es war Sommer, daran erinnere ich mich, August, und ich hatte Geburtstag. Lámbros schenkte mir sein Buch, das gerade erschienen war."

„Ist es das, was ich auf dem Foto halte?"

„Ja. Das. Es heißt: *Der Verlust des Gesichts*. Obwohl das eigentlich nicht der vollständige Titel ist. Lass mich nachdenken... Ich glaube in kleinerer Schrift steht darunter: *Die Psychose als Schutzschild gegen den Übergriff des Anderen*."

„Ausgeschlossen, dass ich so etwas je gelesen habe. Daran würde ich mich erinnern, nicht wahr?"

„Was soll ich sagen? Es hat wohl niemand außer mir gelesen. Als er es mir schenkte, habe ich mit ihm gescherzt, dass ich höchstwahrscheinlich der einzige auf der ganzen Welt sei, der es im Urlaub lesen würde. Als ich zurückkam, fand ich vor der Tür dieses Foto zusammen mit einem Zettel, auf dem er geschrieben hatte: *Du bist nicht der einzige auf dieser Welt*."

„Ich verstehe nicht", wiederholte ich.

Der Mann nahm mir den Rahmen aus der Hand und stellte sich neben eine Stehlampe mit großem Schirm. Ich folgte ihm. So beugten wir uns beide über das Foto und begannen es unter dem künstlichen Licht beharrlich und misstrauisch zu betrachten, wie ein Untersuchungsrichter einen Angeklagten.

„Ist dieser Lámbros, von dem Sie erzählen, ein Freund von Ihnen?", fragte ich nach einer Weile.

Herr Hippokrátous hatte Aristéa gebeten, mir einen Lindenblütentee zu machen und jetzt saß ich auf dem Sofa, trank ihn und verbrannte mir dabei Lippen und Zunge.

„Nicht wirklich. Er war einmal mein Student an der Medizinischen Hochschule. Damals unterrichtete ich die Erstsemester in Allgemeiner Pathologie. Er hat sich später auf Psychiatrie spezialisiert. Wenn ich mich nicht irre, hat er sein Studium in Paris fortgesetzt."

„Und Sie sind in Kontakt geblieben?"

„Ja. Wir sehen uns dann und wann. Vor kurzem hat er mir sogar eine E-Mail aus Belgien geschickt. Wenn ich richtig verstanden habe, arbeitet er in einem Lager für Menschen in einem Deinstitutionalisierungsprogramm. Sie wissen schon, Menschen, die aufgrund mentaler oder psychischer Erkrankungen in Einrichtungen waren."

Ich verbrannte noch ein wenig die Lippen an meinem Lindenblütentee. Alle diese Details ließen, anstatt das Rätsel des Fotos aufzuklären, es noch dunkler erscheinen. Ich blies in meinen Tee. Er wehte sanft.

„Aber warum trinken Sie Lindenblütentee? Sind Sie krank?"

Die Vorstellung eines kalten Stethoskops an meiner Haut ließ mich erschauern.

„Nein, es geht mir gut. Nur schlafe ich in letzter Zeit nicht gut."

„Ach so? Haben Sie Familie?"

„Mama, Papa—lebt nicht mehr, Bruder."

„Ich meine eine eigene Familie."

„Das ist doch meine eigene."

„Ich meine, sind Sie nicht verheiratet? Haben Sie keine Kinder?"

Beides verneinte ich.

„Und was machen Sie beruflich?"

„Ich bin stundenweise als Lektorin angestellt. Philologie. Jetzt im Sommer, arbeitslos."

„Fassen wir zusammen: Sie haben keine feste Anstellung, keinen Ehemann, keine Kinder, keinen Schlaf."

Das fehlte gerade noch, dass er begann, zwischen all dem einen Zusammenhang zu sehen. Um eine solche Eventualität zu vermeiden, stand ich ruckartig auf.

„Ich fürchte, ich muss gehen", sagte ich.

Das hat Herr Hippokrátous überrumpelt. Ich hatte bemerkt, dass meine Angewohnheit, ohne jegliche Vorwarnung der Anwesenden aufzustehen und zu gehen, sogar Leute, die nicht besonders darauf brannten, dass ich bleibe, erschüttern konnte. Nur wenige Freunde, und diese erst nach

langer Freundschaft, hatten es geschafft, meinen Tick zu akzeptieren, aus heiterem Himmel—mitten in einer Diskussion oder auf dem Höhepunkt einer Party, wenn sich alle gerade amüsierten oder entspannten—aufzustehen und meinen Abschied zu verkünden. Einige, muss ich zugeben, hatten wegen dieser Sache wiederholt mit mir gestritten. Sie verstanden vielleicht nicht, dass das, was sie als abrupt empfanden, für mich gar nicht abrupt war. Im Gegenteil, es handelte sich um einen Wunsch, der seit Stunden tropfte, ein Bedürfnis zu mir selbst zurückzukehren, dessen Pegelstand kontinuierlich anstieg, aber—durch die dunkle Flasche meines Affekts—erst im Moment des Überlaufens sichtbar wurde.

Nur ein Mensch hatte sich von dieser Eigenart angezogen gefühlt, und das war Íkaros. Er hatte mein Fluchtbedürfnis als Ausdruck tiefer Unabhängigkeit gedeutet, was er auch in seinem eigenen Charakter wiedererkannte und was ihn oft zu Konflikten mit anderen geführt hatte. Er nahm sich als einen Kämpfer wahr, der nur von Menschen umgeben sein konnte, die sein Einzelgängertum respektierten. Dieses Einzelgängertum trieb ihn häufig dazu, Menschen, Orte und Gewohnheiten zu verlassen, um sich in ein neues Abenteuer der Selbsterkenntnis zu stürzen. Sein revolutionärer Charakter unterschied sich natürlich sehr von meinem, dem des panischen Aschenputtels, das nach allmählicher Ausschöpfung seiner hart erworbenen Geselligkeit Gefahr lief, sich unter den Augen aller in sein wenig attraktives alltägliches Ich zurückzuverwandeln. Fassen wir zusammen: die Anziehungskraft, die ich auf Íkaros ausübte und die Beziehung, die sich daraus ergab, war—wie gewöhnlich—die Folge eines Missverständnisses.

„Sie gehen schon?", Herr Hippokrátous stand seinerseits auf und nahm mir noch einmal den Rahmen mit dem Foto aus der Hand, als versuche er, mich auf diese simple Art dort festzuhalten.

In diesem Moment war irgendwo am hinteren Ende des Hauses ein Weinen zu hören. Als würde sich sogar das unsichtbare Baby gegen meinen plötzlichen Aufbruch auflehnen.

„Ich bin sehr müde. Ich habe das Gefühl, ich sollte nach Hause gehen, um mich auszuruhen. Darf ich mich von Eleánna verabschieden?"

„Ja, natürlich", sagte dieser etwas verlegen. „Sie ist wahrscheinlich oben in ihrem Zimmer. Aristéa wird es Ihnen zeigen. Aristéa!", rief er die rundliche junge Frau.

Als wir die Stufen hinaufstiegen, Aristéa voraus und ich dahinter, sah ich wie ihre runden Pobacken sich nach rechts und links bewegten. Wenn

sie Namen hätten, dachte ich, würde die eine Áris und die andere Téa heißen.

Auch die Kleine schien sich nicht damit abfinden zu können, dass ich gehen würde. Jetzt, da wir im Zimmer waren, kniff sie ihre Augen nicht mehr so sehr zusammen. Sie waren von einem sehr hellen, fast durchsichtigen Blau. Es war mir nicht ganz klar, mit welchem Ausdruck sie mich ansahen. Vielleicht ein bisschen traurig, aber es konnte auch daran liegen, dass ihre Augen Spiegeln ähnelten.

„Wirst du für immer weggehen?", fragte sie mich.

„Aber nein, nicht für immer! Das ist doch ein sehr hartes Wort."

„Schneeweißchen ist für immer weggegangen."

„Wer ist Schneeweißchen?"

„Das Pferd, das wir im Garten hatten."

Den Gaul im Garten hatte ich ganz vergessen. Es hörte sich an wie ein schöner Titel für ein Märchen. Ein Gaul im Garten.

„Und wie ist es weggegangen? Hat es sich losgerissen?"

„Nein. Es ist gestorben, aber sie sagen es mir nicht, um mich nicht traurig zu machen. Weil ich nicht gut sehe, denken sie, dass ich es nicht bemerke. Es erscheint mir aber im Schlaf und spricht mit mir."

„Wirklich? Und was sagt es dir?"

„Es erzählt mir Gute-Nacht-Geschichten. Erzählst du mir auch eine?", sie blinzelte mit ihren flehenden Augen. Wenn sie eine Puppe wäre, würden ihre Lider Klick machen.

„Habe ich nicht gerade gesagt, dass ich gehe?"

Wenn ich so etwas beschlossen habe, kann mich niemand davon abhalten. Auch wenn ich mich eines anderen besinne, schleifen mich meine Füße zum Ausgang, unwillige, aber gehorsame Befehlsempfänger meines Ichs.

„Geh, aber zuerst setz dich", sagte das Mädchen und ergriff meine Hand.

Ihre mikroskopisch kleine Hand-fläche neben der meinen war ein ungleicher Gegner und so ließ ich mich neben ihr auf dem Bett nieder.

„Nicht im Sitzen. Im Liegen", sagte sie und legte sich neben mich. Ohne meine Hand loszulassen, fisch-te sie blind mit der anderen ein Buch vom Boden. Es war *Alice im Wunderland*.

„Von Anfang an", bat sie mich, und ich begann zu lesen. Das Buch begann mit einem Gedicht. Es ging um drei kleine Mädchen, die mit einem älteren Freund zu einer Bootsfahrt aufgebrochen waren. Ihr Freund ist der

Erzähler. Sie bitten ihn, ihnen eine Geschichte zu erzählen. Ich lese Eleánna vor:

She drowned swimming in her own tears, 2012
Oil on canvas 200×200 cm
Photo: ANT STRACK

Die erste gab's Commandowort;
O schnell, o fange an!
Und mach' es so, die Zweite bat,
Daß man recht lachen kann!
Die Dritte ließ ihm keine Ruh
Mit wie? und wo? und wann?

Jetzt lauschen sie vom Zauberland
Der wunderbaren Mähr';
Mit Thier und Vogel sind sie bald
In freundlichem Verkehr,
Und fühlen sich so heimisch dort
Als ob es Wahrheit wär'.[3]

Das Gedicht hatte sieben Strophen und ich schritt von der einen zur nächsten fort, wie jemand in einen Brunnen versinkt.

Der Thränenpfuhl

Doch merkte sie bald, dass sie sich in einem Thränenpfuhl befand, den sie geweint hatte.

Als ich meine Augen öffnete, fiel ein weiches rosafarbenes Licht durch das Fenster. Wie spät war es? Ich streckte meinen Arm aus, um nach der Uhr auf dem Nachttisch zu greifen, jedoch war da keine Uhr und auch kein Nachttisch. Ich setzte mich im Bett auf und sah mich um. Ich war von einem Plüschhasen und einigen zerzausten Puppen umgeben, und auf meiner einen Seite, immer noch aufgeschlagen, lag das Märchen, das ich vor wie vielen Stunden vorgelesen hatte? War es möglich, dass ich in dem fremden Haus geschlafen hatte? Und: War es möglich, dass ich in dem fremden Haus so lange geschlafen hatte? Das Licht wurde mit der Zeit

3. Aus der deutschen Ausgabe von Lewis Carroll, *Alice im Wunderland,* Übersetzung aus dem Englischen von Antonie Zimmermann. (A.d.Ü.)

immer stärker, was bedeuten musste, dass es Tag und nicht Nacht wurde. Íkaros wäre sicherlich stolz auf mein Zeitgefühl, dachte ich mir und begann zu zählen wie viele Schlafstunden ich vollbracht hatte. Sicher über achtzehn, nahm ich an, wenn man bedenkt, dass ich noch vor Mittag eingeschlafen sein musste. Aber wo war Eleánna?

Als ich beschloss aufzustehen und nach Spuren der anderen im Haus zu suchen, bemerkte ich, dass das Bettlaken unter mir und auch mein Kleid in der Höhe meines Beckens nass waren. In diesem Bereich war ich nicht nur feucht, sondern auch eiskalt, als hätte ich einen Schneemann ausgetragen, der im Laufe der Nacht geschmolzen war. Als ich die Decke wegzog—jemand musste mich zugedeckt haben, während ich schlief—fiel ein Zettel aus. Ich hob ihn auf, las ihn und kurze Zeit später befand ich mich unten im Wohnzimmer, in einer fremden Hose und einer fremden Bluse. Darin sah ich zusammengeschrumpft aus, wie ein ausziehbares Fernglas. So wie Alice, nachdem sie aus der Flasche mit dem Etikett „TRINK MICH!" getrunken hatte. Oder war es nachdem sie vom Kuchen gegessen hatte, auf dem „ISS MICH!" geschrieben stand? Ich erinnerte mich überhaupt nicht, ob wir bis zu dieser Stelle gekommen waren und wie viel ich geschafft hatte zu lesen, bevor ich eingeschlafen war.

Bevor ich das Haus verließ, warf ich einen Blick auf das Foto im Wohnzimmer. „SCHAU MICH AN!" sagte die junge Frau, die ich war und doch nicht ich war.

„Ich bin mir sicher, dass es für all das eine logische Erklärung gibt", sagte Íkaros zu mir. Kaum hatte ich den Schlüssel ins Schloss gesteckt, hörte ich drinnen das Telefon läuten. Er versuchte, sagte er, schon seit gestern Abend, mich zu erreichen. Es freute mich, das zu hören. Ich stellte ihn mir vor, wie er die Tasten eine nach der anderen drückt, hoffnungsvoll zuerst, dann enttäuscht, am Ende sicher etwas besorgt. Und diese Gefühlsreihe hatte ich hervorgerufen. „Ich habe dich angerufen, weil ich weiß, dass du dir Sorgen machst"—mit dieser Wendung hatte er mich wieder in der Mangel. Íkaros hatte ein großes Talent für das, was man „die Kampfkünste der Beziehungen" nennen könnte.

Das gleiche war vor einigen Monaten passiert, als er auf eigene Initiative begonnen hatte, einige seiner Sachen zu mir nach Hause zu bringen und sie dort zu lassen. Hauptsächlich CDs, Kleidung und Bücher. Wir hatten das nicht abgesprochen und ich war mir nicht sicher, ob ich das überhaupt wollte. Trotzdem, um keinen Mangel an Begeisterung zu zeigen, fragte ich ihn eines Tages: „Warum bringst du nicht auch deine Zahnbürs-

te?" „Überstürzen wir die Sache damit nicht?" antwortete er mir. „Ich bin mir nicht sicher, ob ich schon bereit bin, zusammen zu wohnen." So war Íkaros. Ein Griff und du liegst auf der Matte.

„Aber wie war dieses Foto im Haus des Arztes genau?"

Ich hatte ihm vom Pferd, dem Mädchen mit den weißen Haaren und dem mysteriösen Foto erzählt. Die Einzelheiten, wie ich dort eingeschlafen bin und—das Verdächtigste—dass ich in fremden Kleidern zurück nach Hause gekommen bin, habe ich rausgelassen, da es schwer zu erklären gewesen wäre; nicht, weil er eifersüchtig geworden wäre—ich hatte jegliche Hoffnung aufgegeben, in ihm solche bescheidenen Gefühle zu wecken—sondern weil es Zeit gekostet hätte und er gerade von einem Kartentelefon in Chamonix anrief.

„Mir scheint, dass all das, was du beschreibst, nur deshalb so ein traumartiges Ausmaß angenommen hat, weil du drei Tage gar nicht geschlafen hast. Ich bin mir sicher, dass wenn jemand anderer dabei gewesen wäre, er es anders erzählen würde."

„Wie meinst du, anders?"

„Ich weiß nicht. Realistischer. Jedenfalls nicht wie ein seltsames Märchen."

„Und das Foto? Wie würde diese dritte Person erklären, dass sie sich in einem Foto im Haus eines Unbekannten erkannt hat?"

„Ich weiß nicht. Vielleicht warst es auch nicht du. Vielleicht war es jemand, der dir unheimlich ähnlich aussieht."

„Das kann nicht sein. Ich sag es dir, ich habe meine Kleidung wieder erkannt. Der rote Pullover und die grüne Hose. Erinnerst Du dich? Ich habe dir erzählt, wie ich diesen Pulli kaputt gemacht habe. Genau diese Kleider trug ich auch auf dem anderen Foto. Ja, auf dem Foto, das ich dir am Anfang, als wir uns kennengelernt haben, geschenkt habe. Nur dass ich darauf eine Schachtel hielt und kein Buch über Schizophrenie." Für einen Moment, breitete sich zwischen meine Wohnung und den Alpen, wie eine weiße Decke, ein Raum des Schweigens aus.

„Das Buch, von dem du redest... Erinnerst du dich vielleicht an den Titel?"

„ Warte mal... Ich glaube es hieß „Das Gesicht des Anderen"... Nein... „Der Verlust des Anderen..."

„Der Verlust des Gesichtes?"

„Was? Kennst du es?"

„Unfassbar..."

„Wie? Was? Du kennst Herrn Hippokrátous?"

„Nein, aber ich kenne den, der das Buch geschrieben hat. Ha…ha!"

„Wie? Persönlich?"

„Ja. Ich werde es dir erklären. Aber jetzt habe ich kein Guthaben mehr. Ich werde dich bald wieder anrufen."

„Wie meinst du bald? Sag es mir jetzt! Íkaros…"

Ich schaute den Hörer wie ein Wesen an, das gerade noch normal geatmet hatte und plötzlich gestorben ist.

Meine Wohnung ist ein Saustall. Mir ist das egal, aber morgen kommt Herr Hippokrátous vorbei, um mir meine Kleider zurück zu bringen und es wäre ja unhöflich, ihn nicht herauf zu bitten. Vielleicht würde er denken, dass ich wütend bin, dass seine Tochter beim Schlafen ins Bett gemacht und mich nass gemacht hatte. Auf der Notiz, die er mir auf dem Bett hinterlassen hatte, bat er sehr um Verzeihung, fünf Mal hatte er das Wort „Entschuldigung" geschrieben. Das komme bei Eleánna ab und zu vor, dass sie ins Bett macht, erklärte er mir, auch noch in diesem Alter.

Als er gestern Mittag ins Zimmer kam, um zu sehen, was geschehen war, fand er uns, eine neben der anderen, so unbeweglich schlafen, dass er sich Sorgen machte und sein Gesicht dem Gesicht seiner Tochter näherte, um zu sehen, ob sie noch atmete. Dann erkannte er am Geruch, was passiert war und nahm Eleánna, um sie zu waschen. Neben das Bett legte er einige Kleider von Aristéa bereit, die ich anziehen könnte, wenn ich aufwache.

Danach gingen alle hinunter, um Mittag zu essen. Mich ließen sie schlafen, weil sie der Meinung waren, einen Menschen aufzuwecken, der an Schlaflosigkeit leidet, sei wie das Brot aus den Händen eines Hungernden zu nehmen. Genau so hatte er es geschrieben.

Das Wort „Hungernde" erinnerte mich an meinen eigenen Hunger. Ich steuerte hoffnungsvoll auf den Kühlschrank zu. Darin fand ich einen Hähnchenflügel, eine Plastikdose fragwürdigen Inhalts und eine kleine Tüte mit Walnüssen, die mir Íkaros, soweit ich mich erinnere, von irgendeinem Berg mitgebracht hatte. Welcher Berg es war, weiß ich nicht mehr. Ich entschloss mich, die fragwürdige Dose aufzumachen. Aus weißlichem Salzwasser kamen Spitzen von Fetakäse zum Vorschein. Ich hielt sie mir unter die Nase. Dann machte ich den Deckel wieder zu, stellte die Dose in den Kühlschrank zurück, beugte mich über die Spüle und übergab mich. Wohlgemerkt: Ich übergab mich mit der gleichen Leichtigkeit, mit der Eleánna ins Bett gemacht hatte.

Heute jedoch hatte ich nicht wirklich etwas in mir—meine letzte Mahlzeit am fernen Ende eines fast dreißig Stunden langen Tunnels waren gerade noch zu sehen—und so war das Einzige, das mühsam meine Speiseröhre hochstieg, eine Mischung aus Lindenblütentee und Milch, die ich, sobald sie in meinem Mund ankam, als unerträglich sauer empfand. Mein Magen drehte sich um, aber außer dieser widerlichen, dürftigen Flüssigkeit kam nichts anderes mehr hoch. Ich gab die Bemühungen auf, hob den Kopf und schluckte wieder ein wenig von dem ekelhaften Zeug runter. Dann versuchte ich Luft zu holen, aber es war unmöglich. Meine Kehle war zugeschnürt. Noch ein Versuch. Nichts. Als ich begriff, dass ich wahrscheinlich jeden Moment qualvoll ersticken würde, rannte ich zur Eingangstür, stürmte die Treppe hinunter und klingelte bei den Nachbarn unten, während ich gleichzeitig etwas ausstieß, was einem Todesröcheln ähnelte.

Während sie drinnen noch Zeit brauchten, um mir aufzumachen und ich weiterhin nicht atmen konnte, erinnerte ich mich an das einzige Mal, dass ich—laut meiner Oma—beinahe erstickt war. Ich war drei Jahre alt und hatte mir ein rundes metallisches Schild von „El Greco" in den Mund gesteckt, das um den Hals einer Puppe hing. Nach einer Schrecksekunde packte mich meine Oma an den Knöcheln, drehte mich auf den Kopf und fing an, mir auf den Rücken zu schlagen, bis das verdammte Ding aus meinem Mund rauskam und meine Oma in Tränen ausbrach.

Im Glühen dieser plötzlichen Erinnerung sah ich als einzige Lösung mich auf den Kopf zu stellen, weil aber niemand da war, um mich umzudrehen, dachte ich daran, Anlauf zu nehmen und mich mit den Händen auf den Boden und den Beinen nach oben zu stellen, ähnlich wie beim Handstand, den ich als kleines Mädchen im Turnunterricht gelernt hatte. Bald begriff ich, dass Handstand nicht wie Fahrradfahren ist, das man nie verlernt. Und so, als gerade in diesem Moment die Tür aufging, war ich schon zusammengebrochen und zusammengefaltet, wie wenn jemand versucht hätte, mich in eine sehr kleine Schachtel hineinzuzwängen. Das Gute war, dass das Zusammenfalten der Gliedmaßen, der Wirbel und der inneren Organen das glückliche Resultat hatte, dass die saure Flüssigkeit aus meiner Kehle herauskam, so meine Atemwege befreite, und die Schwelle meiner Nachbarn verunreinigte mit etwas, das sehr einem kleinen schmutzigen See ähnelte.

Die Tür wurde von einem kleinen Jungen mit einer Hasenscharte geöffnet, der oft so ungestüm und hyperaktiv war, dass Íkaros ihn Hase nannte. Der ehemals rastlose Hase starrte mich an, wahrscheinlich in

stummer Furcht, vielleicht aber auch—das kann ich nicht ausschließen—mit sadistischer Neugier. So ähnlich schaute auch mein Bruder die Grillen an, die er in einem länglichen, engen, metallischen Behälter gefangen hielt, nachdem er ihnen zuerst die Flügel ausgerissen hatte. Die Grillen schienen sich nicht zu erinnern, dass sie jemals Flügel gehabt hatten und liefen nicht mit der Panik von jemandem, der Gefahr läuft zu sterben, sondern mit der Geistesabwesenheit von einem, der in eine unendlich viel wichtigere Angelegenheit vertieft ist, herum. Vielleicht sah ich jetzt genauso aus, dachte ich mir, auch wenn es sich dabei nicht wirklich um einen Gedanken, sondern um ein Bild handelte, dessen brutale Klarheit mich fast erblinden lies und das mir, beinahe gewaltsam, eine dauerhaftere Wahrheit vor Augen hielt, deren Details ich jedoch nicht deutlich erkennen konnte.

Dimitrákis—das war der Name des Hasenjungen—entschloss sich den Zauber unserer einvernehmlichen Passivität zu lösen, indem er sich die kleinen Fäustchen vor die Augen hielt und ein leises Weinen anfing, das sich in wenigen Sekunden zu einem wilden Schrei entwickelte. Als wäre ein Alarm ausgelöst worden, begannen sich verschiedene Türen zu öffnen und Mieter in Schlafanzügen zu meiner Hilfe zusammen zu strömen, während ich mich bemühte, mich wieder zusammenzusetzen.

„Mir geht es gut!" versicherte ich den ratlosen Gesichtern um mich herum, von denen zwei meine Ellbogen ergriffen hatten und versuchten, mir aufzuhelfen. Einer meiner Knöchel war geschwollen und tat weh. Zudem fühlte ich einen Stich irgendwo links in meinen Rippen. Wenn ich mich nur nicht übergeben hätte, dachte ich, als die Mutter des Hasen mit einem Kübel kam. Wenn ich mich nur so verkleinern könnte, dass ich wie eine Maus unter ihren Beinen verschwinden könnte, seufzte ich, und Tränen begannen aus meinen Augen zu rollen. „Warum muss das alles immer mir passieren?" begann ich mich schweigsam zu bemitleiden, während ich mich gleichzeitig beschimpfte. „Du solltest jetzt besser aufhören, wie ein kleines Mädchen zu weinen!" fuhr ich mich an, so, dass ich nur noch mehr weinte.

„Aber was ist Ihnen denn passiert?" fragte mich ein Mann, den ich zum ersten Mal sah.

„Rückstoß meines Erbrochenen", gab ich meine Diagnose, während ich meine Nase hochzog und meine Augen mit dem Ärmel einer riesigen Bluse abwischte. Die Vergegenwärtigung, dass ich immer noch die fremden übergroßen Kleider anhatte, ließ mich noch gedemütigter fühlen, als wäre ich in das Alter zurückversetzt, in dem die Blicke der Anderen einen dazu bringen, sich hinter dem—damals—schützenden Sofa verstecken zu wollen.

Biggest (Alice), 2012
Ceramic on steel base, 180×60×60 cm
Photo: ANT STRACK

„Sie weint vor Schock" erklärte die Bewohnerin des ersten Stocks einem Bewohner des dritten, die verschwörerisch zu einander gekommen waren und mich aus Distanz beobachteten. Vielleicht hatten sie Angst davor, dachte ich mir, dass sie ihre Hosenbeine im fraglichen See dreckig machen würden, in dem ich wie ein amphibisches Tränenmonster herrschte. Vielleicht nimmt mich die zukünftige Mythologie in ihre Seiten auf, als diejenige, die sowohl in den feuchten Sumpfgebieten der Gefühle, als auch in der Trockenheit ihrer Abwesenheit überleben konnte. Das war ein schönes Bild, ich vergaß einen Moment meinen Kummer. Meine Tränen ließen langsam nach und das Einzige, was fehlte, war noch, dass die Mutter des Hasenjungen mit dem Wischen fertig wurde, damit das Leben zu seinem vorigen trockenen Zustand zurückkehren und ich die Treppe meiner neununddreißig Jahre wieder hinaufsteigen konnte. Und das dauerte nicht lange.

„Verzeihen Sie mir!" entschuldigte ich mich vor dem inzwischen stummen Mieterchor, streichelte den Kopf des Hasenjungen und verschwand von der Bildfläche in den Aufzug. Bevor sich die Tür schloss, sah ich noch seine Mutter den Putzeimer mit dem dreckigen Wasser hineinschleppen, hier und dort herum spritzend, als würde sie ein Kind ziehen, das sich in Tränen aufgelöst hatte.

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