

a litany in my slumber

Stephanos Stephanides

Tesseris Trikomitisses mes to steno me kopsan
tzi itoun verkin ologrison tis kathemias i koxa

[Four women of Trikomo crossed me in the alleyway
And beams of pure gold glist'ned from the girdles round their waists]

– Couplet from Cypriot Oral Tradition

What is this life? An illusion
a shadow, and a fiction.

– Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream* (from Segismundo's monologue) (2012: 58)

And this island: who knows it?
I spent my life hearing names I never heard before.

– George Seferis, 'Helen' (1981: 355)

I escaped the 1974 war on the island by a strange twist of fortune. I had not lived on the island since 1957 when Demosthenes took me away furtively, and now for the first time since then, Demosthenes suggested that we visit the island together. *We'll spend some time in Trikomo*, he said. *We'll stay with Elengou*. I was overjoyed. Demosthenes knew I harboured a grievance and a mostly concealed anger toward him, since he took me away suddenly from the island in the Middle Sea without explanation, far away from my *amor matris* and with no promise of return. I had gone back to the island only twice in the '60s when I was a teenager. Katerina bought my tickets. He got in a panic when I received the ticket the first time, and we got into a long argument about whether

CounterText 1.1 (2015): 105–130

DOI: 10.3366/count.2015.0010

© Edinburgh University Press and the contributor

www.eupublishing.com/journal/count



I should go or not. On the second occasion Katerina came to take me herself. We met in London to travel together. She insisted I cut my hair and bought me a new outfit of clothes, so I would not be conspicuous as an Englishman when I entered the village. *You speak Greek like a Turk, and I cannot take you to your grandmother dressed like an English boy.* Demosthenes was still disturbed at my longing to return to the island, and seemed to feel my stubborn clinging to my childhood memories as a threat. It was as if my return would have been a kind of patricide. He always seemed to underestimate how close the village had held me in its embrace and he thought that by now I should have got over it. Katerina's family always related the story of Demosthenes taking me away to the island in the northern sea as a kind of *pedomazema*, or *devsirme*, as her mother Milia would say, who would tell Katerina: 'Go bring the boy to me. I want to see him once more before I die. Chrisostomos died heartbroken because he never saw him again.' At the end of my second visit she wept, saying she would not see us again. She died ten days after we left.

Demosthenes got upset at this talk of child-snatching. He would argue that he was my father, not a Janissary, and he had a right to take me away whenever he wanted. I still remembered when he suddenly imprisoned me in a damp house with a coal fire in the darkness of Manchester as if I were some Segismundo and I had to learn that life is a dream and dreams are only the dreams of dreams. He dumped me in Manchester with Rona, Nina and Auntie Noreen and went back to Bristol on his own. Theios Georgios could speak to me in my tongue, but I never saw him in the house. He was always



in a place called Didsbury where he owned a hotel called the El Morocco. *How can I speak to them?* I asked Demosthenes desperately. *You have to learn English!* he retorted emphatically. Did he want to prevent me from inheriting the island in the Middle Sea? Why did it bother him? If it was his kingdom he had abandoned it. What had he done to be flailed by the wind and the goddess Iris? Why did he snatch me away with him as he sailed off with the wind? Not long after coming ashore at Dover and making our entry onto the island through a tunnel like the mouth of a whale, I became rebellious and resilient. I refused to stay and integrate in the life of this other island, as it now seemed was Demosthenes' intention. He did not know how to handle me. He did not have the wisdom of the sibyls. His knowledge was of a different kind. I understood mysteries the way the sibyls taught me but Demosthenes, I now realised, had become unpredictable. Or so it was for me. I am not sure how far ahead Demosthenes had planned to leave me in Manchester. I was never sure of his plans. Was my exile to Manchester planned? The English had sent the revered Archbishop Makarios into exile in the Seychelles because he threatened to expel them and rule the island himself. But why did Demosthenes leave me in Manchester? I was not an archbishop and I was just a boy. All I did was to refuse to speak English. In Cyprus they wanted to ban English from schools. Why did I have to learn it and why did I have to stay here? And where was Katerina and when would I see her again? Did he think I was dangerous because I threw vinegar at the picture of the Queen in the school he put me in for a few weeks in Bristol? He was the one who told me that the Queen was German, just like the one in Greece, so why should we want *enosis* if we could be independent? He now told me that we were in

their country and we had to respect their queen. He took me to Manchester after the winter solstice during the darkest time of the year when the *kallikanjaroi* are all around creating mischief in people's houses. The sibyls would have made *lokoumades* to entice them onto the roof terraces the night before the epiphany and then shut them out of the house. They would keep some *lokoumades* for me to eat inside the house, and the next morning they would bring a priest to bless the house sprinkling water all around with a sprig of holy basil, which according to Elengou was brought to the island from India by Ayia Eleni, Mother of the Emperor Constantine. There were no roof terraces here and Auntie Noreen did not know how to make *lokoumades*, so I had to sleep inside a cold dark house inhabited by *kallikanjaroi* and people who only spoke English, and no priest would come on the day of epiphany to bless the house. Demosthenes said I had to learn the address off by heart because if I got lost no one here would know where I live if I simply tell them the name of my uncle or grandfather. So I had learnt to recite 97 Egerton Road North, Walley Range in a way that the Mancunians would understand. Rona became my Ariadne on this rough isle and she taught me to follow the kerb closely to find my way to Oswald Road School when I could not see in front of me because of the fog. And with time, like Rumi, I would realise that darkness can also be my candle. English poets and seers I would later read in school, John Milton and Gerard Manley Hopkins, would teach me how dark thinks the light as I wake to feel the fell of dark dark dark dark amid the blaze of noon, and one day I would aspire to become a 'poeta de la noche' like Lorca.

When in 1974, in early spring, Demosthenes unexpectedly suggested we go to Trikomo together, I felt that this would mark a new turn in the relationship. And Elengou, my only surviving grandparent, had turned 80 the summer before. She wanted to see us before she died. In my childhood she ordered the world for me, instructing me in the rituals of nature, cycles of life, family histories and genealogies. But then on April 25th of 1974 the Portuguese 'carnation' revolution took place. I was excited. I had travelled to Olissibona the previous two summers, imagining the journey of the second Odyssey and continents across the ocean beyond Hesperia. Virtually all the students in the University hostel where I stayed were from the overseas provinces – as the Portuguese called their colonies – and in despair about the colonial war. They anxiously anticipated that the regime would fall and warned me about who to speak to and who not as the student residence had its spies. I had to return to Lisbon and join the revolutionary celebrations. I would use some of my post-graduate travel assistance research grant to study Portuguese poetry in the Lisbon archives for a few weeks in the summer months. *Let's go to Cyprus in September instead*, I said to Demosthenes. I wanted to go to Lisbon while at the same time I frantically anticipated my return to Trikomo in early September. Demosthenes agreed, so, in early July, when the academic year was over, I set off for Lisbon instead of Trikomo.

I had first travelled to Iberia at the beginning of the decade, enjoying seas and oranges and the smell of olive oil – healing the pains of nostalgia for a lost childhood. My dream was to embrace the whole of the Mediterranean, from Andalusia to Istanbul,

from Tangier to Alexandria, Beirut, Damascus. First I would find the Garden of Hesperia and then see what roads there were beyond. The ancients located the Garden of Hesperia in Iberia, and I decided I would set off to find it. I had to find the golden fruit. I wondered what kind of fruit I would find and of what colour and hue. Would it be an orange or a pomegranate? An old schoolteacher told me the *portokali* reached the Ottoman empire from Portugalia and that's why we call it *portokali*. But then I learnt the Portuguese brought it from Asia, and the orange was not known to the ancient Mediterranean people. Could the golden fruit be the pomegranate? The sibyls mix its seeds with sesame seeds, blanched almonds and grains of boiled wheat, making *kolypha* to feast on in commemoration of the dead. A fruit for a requiem, for mourning and renewal. Elengou told me that Stephanos would sell pomegranates to Arab merchants who came to Famagusta. He liked talking to them in their language and on their ships about life in his beloved Alexandria. They would use the pomegranates to make molasses, as we do with carob and with grapes. I also learnt that the Maltese call the pomegranate Lightning Fruit because it bursts open when it ripens, leaving a crack in its skin resembling a flash of lightning. And in Spanish, it has the same name as the city of Granada. Whether orange or pomegranate, if it was the golden fruit it would reveal itself when I least expected it, as the world revealed its secrets. It will cast shadows where there is light and light will unfold where there are shadows. It will open up densities into spaces and new directions for the spirit. Different people took me to different parts to find the golden fruit. In early spring, I hitchhiked to Valencia with Javier de Blas to sleep among the orange groves. I shivered all night with cold, even inside my sleeping bag. I learnt that orange pigmentation was a response to the chill of the Mediterranean winter, whereas in tropical climates they remain green. In April I went on an endless train journey to see oranges blossom on the patios of Seville. Guitars strumming and rhythmic clapping would echo in their perfume. But Lluís Mari believed the best time to see the Garden of Hesperia was in January, on the island of Mallorca. So we went to stay at the town of Soller after travelling on the night boat. We ate *ensaimadas* with our coffee for breakfast and walked up a mountain trail from where we saw the golden fruit glittering below in the winter sunlight, all the way to the sea.

I had spent the sixties moving between three islands, like three fragments of myself that I could not piece together in any way into a whole. My life seemed totally incongruous. I had expanded my sense of self and home from one island in my early childhood to three islands in my teenage years. And that's how I became Solo Trismegistus. I shared a legacy with Hermes Trismegistus who hailed from Alexandria like my grandfather. So I would be Alone, and three times powerful. This was better than being alone one time. In a multiplicity of aloneness you could never be lonely. Three different lonely voices talking inside of me sought out new voices. Each island voice brought me in touch with myself in a different way, and now the Garden of Hesperia opened up new roads and promises. Yet I remained always in mourning and in longing for the island in the Middle Sea, and I did not want its sensuality and beauty to fade

from my memory. And Katerina still reigned like Queen Maya on the Ilha Formosa in the China Seas. I spent summers there with her, and I became apprentice to Buddhism and the worlding of the world. And with time I began to grow attached to the island in the northern sea, when in the sixties it displayed a flamboyant sensuality I hadn't seen before. In my teens, I blossomed with the times, although never quite forgetting the island I first saw veiled in a foggy darkness, enveloping damp, cold terraced houses. But I had found gods and muses and poets to guide me in its ways. I trailed through its fields and country lanes on long summer nights eating wild berries, drinking from its streams, and lying in its green meadows. Some nights I would cycle or walk through fields to Oldland Common and meet Sally outside her farmhouse. We would kiss behind the stables where she kept her horses. She was top of the literature class at school and liked to talk about books and sometimes would get tickets for us to go to the Bristol Old Vic. I told her she reminded me of Helen Schlegel in *Howards End*. She told me I would like *Passage to India* even more. Especially since I was a colonial. She was right about the better book, but she did not resemble Adela Quested in any way. Her father had been an officer in the British army and served in the island in the Middle Sea in the 50s. We wondered what it would have been like if we had met there as children.

Each island had brought me some pain and sorrow, with great moments of joy. I carried them with me like congestions of karma waiting to be released. Each island telling me the world's secrets in a different way. I wanted to know more so I had to break the island triangle. If I was melancholic or nostalgic, this did not grip me in inertia. It set me in motion, and with ambivalence of purpose I would travel with libidinous excess and a rucksack on my back, lay my body down anywhere, making it porous and vulnerable to the world's touch, following whatever my soul desired.

If I say 'soul' and not 'heart' as idiomatic English might require, it is because I hear my grandmother speaking in her tongue: *oti i psyche sou lahtara, whatever your soul desires*. 'Psyche' pronounced *psee-shee* means 'soul' in the island's dialect. Whenever I asked the sibyls *what are we going to do now?* they would sometimes utter this phrase like a magic incantation, invoking multiple possibilities in my imagination and opening up a dilemma of desires and impossible choices. Where did my *psee-shee* come from? It was my *psee-shee* but how did I know it and how did I make up my mind? Or did my spirit make up my mind for me? The reverberation of *psee-shee-psee-shee* was like a whispering of secrets in a murmur of voices impregnated with a longing to unfold into a sea of expectations. Who knows how it did it and for what purpose? Sometimes it took you in one direction and then another. The whole world is a secret hidden inside us, revealing itself only when you least expect it; the greater the revelation, the greater the rush like the acacias outside my window running up and down the hillside in a flurry of green and yellow. Or like running into the warm October sea below the church of Ayios Filon and feeling it embrace you like a touch of honey from Ttallou's beehive, or silk woven on Alisavou's loom with the thread made by worms fed with



the leaves from her mulberry trees. When it touches your skin, it feels like the touch of some goddess and your *pseeshee* floats away wherever it desires. But *pseeshee* might be imprisoned in bodies and sometimes change colour. I watched the chameleon – the lion of the earth – change from brown to green as it moved up the tree in Elengou’s courtyard, and I would roll around on her earthen floor freshly sprinkled with water to see if my skin would change colour.

It was a meaningful coincidence that Demosthenes and I were planning to return to Trikomo in early September 1974. It was the same time of year that we went to the village together for the last time in 1957, before he took me away from the island. August had ended and summer had ended, but I didn’t feel like summer had ended. People had a sense of an ending because they had to return to work or school. I resisted a sense of an ending by anticipating a sense of beginning without knowing what kind of beginning, since I always wanted to live in a joyful state of uncertain flux where there are no ends. We were driving to Trikomo to a beginning or an end or a crossroads of eternal return. The fields had changed colour. When we left the spring before they were green covered with red poppies and splashes of yellow dandelions, rushes of irises wild and purple. I wondered what colours were unfurled over my school, if red, white and blue, or blue and white, if the English had imposed a curfew and if the school would be open or shut. Demosthenes had not spoken about school. He kept in touch with news about the struggle and he received news about who the English had captured and who they had killed. He was always talking in the *kafeneio* while playing

backgammon but he had not said much to me about his conversations. And I had not bothered to inquire about school. I preferred not to. No hurry. Not eager to go back to any school. Whatever he had in mind, he would tell me soon enough. Right now as we drove he enthusiastically jolted my gaze skyward to see the swallows' line of flight and the diving of the sun, the *vouttiman iliou*, as he called it, quoting a line from Lipertis, one of the island's dialect poets. I had no idea of his plans or dreams, nor that he had planned his own line of flight when he told me to look at the sky and see how the September clouds were coming. The swallows were gathering for their flight to the south. If I had known that Demosthenes himself was also planning a line of flight – sailing north not south – I would have told him he was going in the wrong direction. Or why go anywhere? The days were still hot, so there was no reason to fly away yet. Right here was just fine for the moment. As we drove from Salamis along the coastal road, I stuck my head out of the open car windows to feel the waves of changing days spread out in yellowing fields, unfolding in front and inside me under the ripening sun sinking in between the mountains, catching fire in joyful exit into the dying embers of dusk like a final moment of illumination and hallucination. Why was the sun dipping or diving silently, I wondered, or perhaps it was making a sound in the far distance I could not hear? What kind of sound would it make as it set fire to the mountains or quenched its own heat as it sank into the sea? Could the sun be numbed into silence? My ears were clogged up with seawater and maybe that's why I couldn't hear it. The sibyls knew how to unclog ears with words of olive oil warm to the ear, like the magic of their language. I stuck my head out the window to seize the sensuality of my thoughts in the dusty sweetness lingering and licking me with a tongue of warm air and sea, clinging on until – until as long and as far as I could stretch out the borders of my barefoot summer – until whenever and however far that might be. Demosthenes told me sharply to bring my head back in before I lost it, as he veered to the left of the hot asphalt road to make room for an oncoming car and suddenly turned off, churning the dust over a trail through the wheat-whispering fields, heading toward the village, avoiding the main road. After the admonishment, I pulled my head inside, now covered with a membrane of dust particles and chaff. Satisfied to have another layer of grime over the sea brine and sand grains that covered my skin. My body exuded the nectar of the sea. I pulled my legs onto the hot cracked leather car seat and turned my attention from my head to the soles of my hardened, calloused feet, contemplating the secrets they had absorbed all summer long from the skin of the uneven earth humming in the exhilarated heat. I knew the warmth would linger until the sticky web of October and the feast of *Ainakoufos* – Demosthenes would call him *Ayios Iakovos* – but I insisted on calling him *Ainakoufos* as that's how I heard the Trikomites call him. He was the healer of hearing so if you were deaf, *koufos*, or had an ear ache, you went to the church to make a votive offering or a prayer and then receive warm drops of olive oil in your ear and listen for the sounds of the world and even of heaven, they said, if you close your eyes and pray. His feast was on October 23rd. The day after my birthday. Lalla the Lightfooted, who was present at my birth in the house



with the green balcony just up from Ayios Iakovos church, said I came into the world accompanied by *pana'yrri* sounds and smells from across the square. You would hear the grapes squelch as they burst their skin with joy and the cracking of the almonds and intoxicating smells of deep fried *loukoumades* dripping in honey, almonds roasting, grapes matured with concentrated sweetness metamorphosed into all possibilities and forms we dreamed and conjured up, *epsima*, *petimezi*, *palouze*, sweet then creamy, then *sojouko* hanging on string, and the *pana'yrkotes* rousing the spirit with the plenitude of sounds of lute and violin, feet hopping and waists gyrating in the fumes of *zivania* poured in small glasses. My nose would draw close to the brim of a small glass, in anticipation of an order of intoxicating moonshine I was not yet allowed to enter. In a few years I would be allowed to sip sweetish wine diluted with water. The adult world was handed down to me diluted, and I did not know that this return to Trikomo was hail and farewell for Demosthenes. And so it was for me too, although he didn't tell me. In October I would be somewhere else under the cloud-capped sky and I would not enjoy the wealth of October in the Middle Sea for many years to come.

Perhaps that's why Demosthenes wanted a quiet entry to the village that day. He said there would be no passage for the car through the throng of people on their Sunday afternoon stroll along the road lined with acacias and eucalyptus trees, nor through the dusty seaward trail through the orchards with ripening September figs. If we had continued straight on the main coastal road from Famagusta, we would have ended up at the little church of Ayios Iakovos opposite the Cinema Hellas and the *kafeneio* of the

Anagenesis Association. Here Demosthenes usually met his cronies, to chat and catch up on the news on who the English caught, killed, or imprisoned, how his football team was doing, who had left the village or the island. If we took that road we would get there in the middle of the afternoon buzz. When people finish their walk, they would either fill the Cinema Hellas or slowly make their way home, stopping to speak to everyone they saw along the way.

I knew all the ways to enter and exit the village depending on how you travelled, whether you went on foot, on donkey, or on bicycle. There were stony trails through the surrounding fields, and pathways through groves and orchards. If you went on asphalted roads, there were only two ways to enter or exit. I had travelled every way and on every kind of vehicle. I mostly travelled on foot unless I went way beyond the village boundaries. I would follow Elengou everywhere on foot, to the cemetery, and to the small stony church of Ayia Anastasia that stood alone on an elevation in the middle of a field, or to her sister Ttallou to fetch honey, to Lefkou's sheepfold to fetch milk, *halloumi*, *anari*.

Or if I did not venture out with Elengou, I would wait for the older boys wandering by the house of Milia and Chrisostomos where I lived and trail behind them into the olive groves. I would shout 'Wait! Wait! I'm coming too. Take me with you.' Milia would stand at her door shouting at us, too arthritic to chase after me and catch me as I ran away quickly to get out of reach of her voice and pretend I didn't hear her in case she wanted to call me home. The fields opened up to the sea and I knew if we walked far enough we would smell the salt. Milia called out to the boys to keep an eye on me: 'Watch out for snakes! Don't let him walk barefoot! Don't lose him! Make sure you bring him back – all of him.' The older boys told me about snakes. The black snake was good and there was no need to be afraid because it wasn't poisonous. Pappou Ksharis enticed one with milk to keep it near his granary to keep away the rats. Unlike the *koufi* that was poisonous. And it was deaf. That's why it was called *koufi*. It was no use shouting to scare it away. I found a big stick to walk with like the older boys, and we thumped them on the ground as we walked on the trails in the fields so the viper would run away with the vibrations.

When we entered the village that day in early September of 1957, I had been away since late spring and I was excited at the thought of the crowd taking their Sunday afternoon walk, going to the cinema and the coffee shop. I wanted to flit around and in and out among the people and see what was new in the village and tell them of my journeys around the island. People walked in rows of three, four or more, arm in arm, stopping and chatting and circling around at the end of the road, and I loved to jump about like a grasshopper moving up and down, grabbing people by the hand and walking with them for a while before running off to join another group. But I raised no objection to the quiet entry through the fields that Demosthenes had taken today. Greater was the pull of the familiar strip of road where I could glide freely through houses, in and out of covered hallways, arched porches and open yards with enclosures for chickens, goats, rabbits. Yaya Elengou and Yaya 'Milia, like crumbling

pillars of wisdom and weary guardian spirits, were my cornerstones in this little piece of street that was my cradle—the cocoon of my pupation. All the neighbours in-between their houses I would call *Thkeia*, not because they were real aunts, but in respect of a kinship based on the proximity of dwelling. Whenever I returned, I would want the whole street to know I was back. So I would go freely into any of their houses shouting *Thkeia!* at the top of my voice – there was Thkeia Maritsou, Thkeia Rikkou tou Koutoumba, Thkeia Niki tou Pappou Kshari. Today I will shout as I enter: *Thkeia. It is I. I am here. I have returned.*

Elengou had received word of our imminent arrival from the boy in the *kafeneio*, who was sent by the bus driver we saw on the road near Salamis the day before to give her the news that we were coming. I imagined her waiting for me as always, with a bucket of well-water and an aluminium cup ready to bathe me, pouring fresh well-water over my head, making my skin shudder until the touch of her hands like hard oiled aromatic wood let the blood flow through my veins. As she scraped sea debris from the soles of my feet, breaming me like a boat, I would glow like a new vessel ready for sailing. I glimpsed unheard memories in the frail hair under her *kouroukla*, tied for housework without the *skoufoma* she wore to cover every strand as she went on her excursions beyond the surrounding houses for an errand, or a visit to some other part of the village. The darkest shade she saved for wakes and funerals, and I would go with her like a dog-star of nocturnal rites and dreams of kin and ancestors, sisters and saints invoked in a murmur of voices raspy like the earthen floors of the houses. Elengou's voice still held the ineluctable trace of dewy dusk softening the contours of this stark, thorny paradise, wise like Pherepapha touching everything in motion, trading sorrow for wonder in exuberant song. Her children told me when she was young her voice would bring under-worlds to over-worlds when the paschal full moon passed over, cracking the egg of the world in the rush of spring and melody of orange blossoms.

Will you ever sing again, Yaya? I asked as she rubbed me dry. Then she burst out with a few lines. *Your eyes have stung me, but I hold them with pride, if days pass without seeing them, I cry and I am not appeased.*

Τα μάτια σου με κάψανε
μα εγώ τα καμαρώνω.
Σαν κάνω μέρες να τα δώ

κλαίω και δεν μερώνω and then she stopped suddenly and said *run along now* and I joyfully repeated the rhyme *kamarono merono*, as I made a dash down the street as swiftly as a September lizard darting in the golden idleness of the summer's overflow to my childhood shelter. My childhood home was with Chrisostomos and Milia. I always slept in my brass four-poster bed, with a mosquito net protecting me like a tent. They would be waiting for me, balmy as the evening dusk after the fierce light of day had grown dim. Chrisostomos went up the ladder to the roof terrace where he would take in the melting magma of his tribe of stars. He would not stay there the whole

night as he did on August nights, but descend into the shadows of night, appearing and disappearing in the shifting light of the paraffin lamp flickering in hesitant delight, as riotous life turned into dream and the names of the sibyls a litany in my slumber: *elengou, marikkou, stassou, ttallou, koullou, lefkou, rikkou, maritsou* until the *ou* turned to *oummm*, and then I would fall into the dreamless sleep that comes after the moment in the night when the nightingale stops singing, when a thick veil of darkness seals memory behind closed doors and window shutters. Dawn would break the seals once more aided by the sound of brooms clearing the dirt into the street. Chrisostomos will perform morning ablutions over an aluminium basin in the yard, seeking the melody within him to breathe out the light:

ni pa vou ga di ke zo ni
doxasi to deixanti to phos
pa di pa ni pa
terirem terirem

I loved to hear the night litany at the Church of Panayia. If the *psaltes* were good they would seize the mystery of angels and nightingales and the *terirem* would make your head swirl like a dervish.

We were only in Trikomo for a few nights when Demosthenes announced he would take me to Engomi, a village west of the island's capital, to stay with my uncle Pheidias and his family, and I could go to school there for a while. I did not suspect that it would only be for three weeks, and then we would go beyond the island's shores. Chrisostomos and Milia seemed on the verge of tears when I picked up my clothes from their house. They did not know Demosthenes's plans for me, but they realised for sure that it was the end of my life with them. I was their first grandchild and they had nurtured me since infancy when Katerina and Demosthenes separated. I declared confidently that I would return soon. I won't miss the *pana'yni* of Ainakoufos for anything, I said.

On the last day, Elengou took me to Chrysanthi, her old schoolteacher. She was about fifteen years older than Elengou. She was the first teacher appointed for the first girls' school in the village founded at the end of the 19th century. Chrysanthi came to the village as a young teacher from the capital and she married Alexandros, the uncle of Chrisostomos, who owned the Han. The oldest family photo I have is a school photo of Chrysanthi with her class, including Elengou when she was ten. Chrysanthi lived in the rooms upstairs. Downstairs were stables for camels, horses, donkeys and mules. I went downstairs to watch the camels with fascination, as if they were sages and saints with calloused knees. They were kneeling in meditation like Ainakoufos, patiently waiting to hear the sounds of an invisible world to come. I ran up the stairs from the courtyard to the kitchen to inform Elengou and Chrysanthi that I wanted grated *anari* on half the macaroni and *saltsa* on the other half, but I did not want *anari* on top of the *saltsa*. I liked to taste them separately. After lunch, Chrysanthi gave me a *loukoumi* and a little sip of

coffee, so she could read my cup as she liked to do for Elengou and all her former pupils when they visited her. She did not wear a headscarf like the village women even though she was a widow. Her hair was tied up in braids or in a bun. She looked into my eyes as she spoke, only occasionally looking inside the cup where she saw a beautiful lady, even more beautiful than Rita Hayworth, who would give me new clothes and perhaps a new toy. So far it was obvious. Nothing new here. Katerina gave me something new every time we met. If she could not decide between two shirts, she would buy me both. Then there was an open road, and many journeys to places I hadn't been before. She saw a train. I had never been inside a train. The limited train service on the island had closed down.

*

So in 1974 my revolutionary spirit drove me toward Olissibona, but Trikomo and Elengou never left my thoughts. We always talked of revolution and now one happened by surprise and I had to go there and see the process. I thought Franco would die first and this might then bring change to Portugal and eventually, hopefully, the dictatorship would fall in Greece. But things had happened differently. It was not long after I arrived in Portugalia when my Levantine Isle hit the Portuguese headlines. Archbishop Makarios, the President, had been overthrown in a coup organised by the ultra-right EOKA B backed by the Greek Junta. In response, Turkey invaded and occupied an area of the island around Kyrenia, on the northern coast. The Archbishop was missing and presumed dead but he reappeared, like Rasputin. He said he read his own obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*. He had been rescued in a British helicopter and was reinstated a few days after the coup. I was not sure what all this would mean for the island. There had been violent conflicts in '63, '64, '67, the UN was brought in in '64, then there was the looming shadow of the Greek military junta since '67, which posed a threat to the Archbishop as he formed a coalition with the left. I communicated with postcards in those days, so I wrote to Demosthenes, promising to follow up with a phone call when I found time to go to the *telefónica* to make an international call and he could give me his take on the situation. I never made the phone call and I got a brief but somewhat pessimistic reply to my postcard letter about waiting and seeing what would happen next. Days went by and I heard no news. I was absorbed in the archives in the mornings and sought out the pulse of the streets in the afternoon and evening. I would sometimes seek out the political rallies and revolutionary speeches and then go chasing poetry and song, drinking *vinho verde* and eating sardines grilled on charcoal along the way. I often wandered around with a Welsh friend called Richard Rees who I called Ricardo Reis after one of the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa, whose footsteps we followed around Lisbon. He suggested that I invent three heteronyms to write about my personae on three islands. Then there were various friends from lands colonised by the Portuguese. Among them were the Goan born Linda de Souza and Alvaro Araújo, a teacher of literature and a journalist from the province of Para in Brazil. He had long black shiny hair and sharp cheekbones and a wide smile. When we met I asked him if

he was Tupí and he answered: *Tupí or not Tupí. That is the question.* I only got half the literary joke at the time and later he gave me a copy of the *Anthropophagic Manifesto* by Oswald de Andrade where the phrase appears. We would all stroll to the *barrio alto* to listen to *fado* and talk of notions of *saudade*. An Andalusian in the group said it was the same as *solea*, which was derived from *soledad*. I told them of the *Amanes* of Asia Minor and wanted to sing *Ah, Aman Aman*, but I couldn't sing like I did when I was a boy. Alvaro taught me the words of the song *Chega de saudade* (enough of longing) *se ela voltar, se ela voltar, que coisa linda, que coisa louca, if she return, if she return, how lovely, how crazy*, the sad melody of longing dissolving into the rhythm and the verb in future subjunctive. Perhaps the future should always be in the subjunctive.

It was on the day after the August 15 holiday that we went to meet the Brazilian crowd on the beach with their musical instruments, singing, dancing, drinking *caiperinhas*. When I arrived, one of the party asked me *O meu cipriota, voce liu as noticias? Do you know what's happening on your island?* He showed me the newspaper. The Turkish army had made a second advance since the July occupation of the area around Kyrenia. The newspaper had a map of the island with a line drawn through it, indicating how far the Turkish army had advanced. The island was split in two. Before I had time to get into silent brooding, I excused myself from the company to get a train to the *telefónica* to call Demosthenes and get more details. My stay in Lisbon would be coming to an end and I had to quickly tie up loose ends and take my leave. I had a warm send-off from my friends, with wishes for my eventual return to my island in the Middle Sea after the war was over, and when I was ready for a second odyssey they would welcome me in Brazil with open arms. I went back to Bristol to spend some time with Demosthenes.

I still wanted to go back to the island that September, and he scoffed at my naivety. Was I crazy? *To do what? What do you think you can do? Fight the Turks?* He finished all his sentences with *listen to me, my son. Use your scholarship and finish your thesis and the world is your oyster. Trikomo is gone. The island is doomed.* Demosthenes had spoken as if he was finally vindicated for taking me away from the island as a child. If I had been there, I could have been missing or dead, or in some prison camp in Turkey. But I still wanted to see Elengou, even though Trikomo was now under Turkish occupation and we could not cross the ceasefire line. *Elengou would probably not remember you*, he said. *She is mostly living in the 1930s and she'll think you are your grandfather Stephanos arriving from Alexandria.* I didn't want to believe she would not remember me. Senility had set in, he said, and she did not even remember there was a war and that the island was now divided. She lived with Theio Pheidias in the village of Engomi, where they had taken her after the July coup. When left alone she would set off to go back to Trikomo on foot until the police would find her and bring her back to Engomi. He also heard from Pheidias that their sister Maroulla had escaped from Trikomo, walking through the fields carrying whatever she could in a small bag to flee the oncoming Turkish army, and she found her way to Larnaca where she took a ship to Piraeus. We imagined she was with her eldest daughter Elli who was a music teacher and lived in Athens with her husband, a Greek rock musician.

I went back in despair to Cardiff and tried to settle down to write up my thesis. First I had to write an essay report on the research I had done had done in Lisbon to present to Alexandre Pinheiro Torres, but I was moving along at snail's pace. It didn't take much to distract my attention to other things. I became friends with Roberto D'Amico, an Argentine actor and director, a fellow at the University theatre who drew me into his plays, and I spent more time learning long monologues than writing my research. People were always passing through, coming and going to different places and sleeping over on the floor with their sleeping bag. Eugenio Navarro shared a house with me for a while and was another major source of distraction. He came from the Gran Canaria, and had lived, as I did, on this northern island since he was a boy of eight and was eager to leave. We would sing together Bob Dylan's lines: *there must be some way out of here*.

In March 1975, I was surprised to hear that Henry Kissinger would visit Cardiff. Why would he come to Cardiff, of all places? He was coming to visit his friend and British counterpart James Callaghan, a Cardiff man, who was Foreign Secretary at the time. I was pulled into activity by a guy called Mike who was a member in the IMG. We would sometimes have a drink in the Student Union, and he tried to get me to go to their meetings. I rarely went – I thought them dreary and portentous. I knew they thought I was too arty, bohemian or too *lumpen* to dedicate myself fully to the revolutionary struggle, and probably more interested in Trotsky's relationship with Frida Kahlo than the significance of the 4th International. However, whenever they organised a free bus to London for a demonstration I always signed on and was ready to go and march, especially if someone like Tariq Ali was speaking. This time Mike wanted me to help mobilise victims of US foreign policy in the East Mediterranean to march in protest against Kissinger's policies. Bring together any refugees I knew from my island. I told him that my compatriot Aydin Mehmet Ali would be better than me at such things – she was like the Pasionaria or a Rosa Luxemburg of the Levantine Sea. But she must have left Cardiff, as I hadn't seen her for years. Mike remembered her when she ran for President of the Student's Union in the early '70s. He called her a Vanessa Redgrave type. Vanessa was one of my favourite thespians. But Mike meant it as a disparaging remark about her affiliation with the Workers Revolutionary Party, a rival Trotskyist group. So I volunteered to help anyway I could, make placards, distribute leaflets and try and get people involved.

As we were marching and shouting *Ki-ssin-ger Mur-de-rer*, I spotted someone dressed in what resembled the long robe of a Greek Orthodox priest. At a distance I thought it was Theio Panayiotis, but I had to get close to see for sure. Demosthenes had announced a couple of years before, with some amusement and his usual scepticism about the clerics, that his friend had been ordained into the priesthood taking on the name of Papa Loukas. I hadn't seen him for years and I still remembered him as I first saw him on the day of our arrival on the island in the northern sea. He was a moustachioed patriarch and seemed much taller and overpowering then. Now, with his longish priestly hair and beard he looked quite different from a distance, but when

I came close, the face was unmistakably his. I didn't know what to do at first – whether to call him *Theie* and kiss him on each cheek or to call him *Pater* and kiss him on the hand as my grandmother had taught me to do to the priest who offered me the bread after I took communion. I was dithering for a while, and then went for the safer choice and kissed him on the cheeks as he would have expected from a younger kinsman. This was the safer choice for a number of reasons. If the comrades I was marching with saw me kissing his cheeks it would look rather comradely, and they might think he was some kind of red priest like the ones in Latin America. Kissing his hand would have been evidently Orthodox, yet it could be theatrical, and I liked theatre. Theio Panayiotis also had a sense of theatre in the ritual performance of the church. He had instilled in me the ritual theatre of the church before he joined the priesthood when he was the chief *psaltis* in the Greek Orthodox church in Bristol's Ashley Road. He assigned me to recite the Lord's Prayer in the litany on Sundays. I would enter with great solemnity facing the congregation and then make a turn to face the altar as if I were about to speak to god himself, and then I would begin dramatically: *Pater Imon*. He also had a great sense of rhythm and pace in ritual processions, and on Holy Thursday he put me in the lead of the procession bearing the cross, while other boys followed with other church paraphernalia as he would punctuate the rhythm and feeling of the drama with great talent and skill. The priest said I was a saintly boy, while Demosthenes smiled with gentle mockery. As I was sizing up the trappings of Theio Panayiotis and his new identity as priest I had a flashing glimpse of my lost childhood. He was also taking me and my clothes in, probably disapprovingly, wondering who I had taken after with my unkempt hair and dingy clothes laundered weekly but without discrimination of colour mix, temperature or type of cloth. My sweater was dotted with burns from cigarette ash. He must have thought that Demosthenes had led me astray toward the left and even atheism, but Demosthenes himself dressed very neatly and cleanly. Always a *levantis*. Despite the obvious initial awkwardness of body language in the mutual recognition and adjustment to our changed relative physical shape and size and the garb that now identified us, our exchange was warm and we exchanged some words about *agona*, *epistrofe*, *anastasi*, *struggle*, *return*, *resurrection*. *Come to church for Pascha! Look after your father as he grows older!* We suddenly moved apart as the demonstration reached a frenzy when Kissinger's car approached and people tried to break through into the area cordoned off by police. I didn't see him again for twenty-five years, when he was an officiating priest at Katerina's funeral rites. We had both resettled in the Middle Sea again by then. He kissed me like a kinsman saying *eonia tis i mnimi*, eternal be her memory.

As I went off after the demonstration, I remembered when I had first met him on the first day of our arrival on the island in the northern sea. At the beginning, we slept in a room above one of his restaurants. He had trained as a cobbler at a young age and because of his mellifluous voice he was recruited by the Church as a *psaltis*. He emigrated to Britain in the mid-thirties, living at first in Cardiff, then for a while in Southampton, and eventually settled in Bristol. When I met him, he was already a

successful restaurant entrepreneur, owning by this time a whole chain of restaurants and bringing people over mostly to work in the kitchens. Many of them were young women from Trikomo or other Mesaoria villages such as Lefkoniko, Avgorou and other smaller villages. So he had created a whole clan of Mesaorites around him, and he talked and moved around with great authority, looking like a moustachioed *mukhtar* and *archontas* in his own village. The *archontiko* was a tall Victorian house several storeys high somewhere on Gloucester Road, or maybe it was Cheltenham Road. At first I was in awe of the house and I ran up and down the stairs exploring. The house was on a slope and the entrance was high above the road. You had to climb twenty or thirty concrete steps to get to the front door where 'Trikomo House' was written as a tribute to our native village. There was a basement, several floors and an attic, and I loved running up and down to explore and meet the numerous Trikomo women who lived in the house with his family. They worked in the kitchens of the restaurants day and night and all week long, and otherwise kept house. Unlike the kitchen staff in the restaurants, all the waitresses were English. They would refer to Uncle as 'the Godfather' among themselves, and otherwise he was known as Mr Michael among the English as they couldn't pronounce Mikhailides. He only became Papa Louka when he was ordained into the priesthood.

It turned out that although he had been a childhood friend of Demosthenes, our kinship was through Katerina. As soon as we met he went to great pains to explain our connections. He told me a lot of names I hadn't heard before. The British tried to establish surnames, but before that people were known by their fathers or grandfathers, or by epithets and nicknames people gave them, and sometimes prefixes like *Hadji* or *Papa*, if they had made a journey to the Holy Land or if they had become priests. So you had to know genealogies to really understand family connections. His father was old uncle Styllakos, he informed me, who was married to Aphrodite, daughter of Euphrosyne, the younger sister of old Kakoullou who was the daughter of Papalouka. Demosthenes was impatient with talk of lineage and hailing of ancestors and was about to turn the conversation elsewhere when I suddenly got excited about hearing about old Kakoullou, Katerina's great-grandmother who lived to be a hundred and ten or even older according to some, as they did not know the exact year of her birth. I knew all about her so I picked up the conversation. People attributed her longevity to a shot of *zivania* or wine every morning with her breakfast, I said. And I also knew that she was the daughter of our revered ancestor Papaloukas, the priest and teacher who had gone to Smyrne to train in Byzantine music with maestro Nikolaos, and when he came back he travelled to churches around the island, training people to chant. Theio Panayiotis told me more about Papalouka. He was born in Lefkoniko but while in Trikomo at harvest time, he courted and married a young woman called Marikkou who came to Trikomo to thresh the fields with her brother Achilleas. Papaloukas married her and settled in the village, becoming a Deacon of the Church and eminent leader in the village. When the island became a British Protectorate in 1878, he led a delegation to meet the new governor of Famagusta,

Lieutenant Swaine, and asked for assistance to feed the villagers whose grain crop was suffering with the drought, and there was not enough food to eat. We thus established our lineage and kinship proudly, speaking especially of those who were priests and teachers as we were the royal family in the village. I wanted to speak more about Kakoullou, her husband Menoikos Liasis and their six sons, one of whom was my great-grandfather Dimitris, but Demosthenes took the conversation in another direction, and they started talking about business. There was evidently some allegiance between them that brought them together in times of crisis or of need. It seemed a strange connection that this man who was a pillar of the church and restaurant entrepreneur would reach out his hand to someone who was of the secular – probably atheist – left. Yet he had brought Demosthenes to join the clan, to sort out his book-keeping and accounting, and the documentation for people he was bringing over from the Middle Sea. The management of the paper work of his businesses had got out of control, and he wanted one of his own people to sort things out for him. Demosthenes was like a *koumbaro*, well-educated for his time, spoke good English, and was experienced in accounting and book-keeping. I do not know who initiated this allegiance of friendship and business. Whether Panayiotis had made a work proposal to Demosthenes and it suited him as he was looking for an exit from the island in the Middle Sea, or whether Demosthenes wrote to Panayiotis for the same reason and it suited Panayiotis's needs. I did not know the motives or the plot that brought about this journey. But in years to come I would learn that this was not the first time Demosthenes had run off somewhere and his friend Panayiotis was there to give a helping hand.

He always seemed a bit stern and I shied away from him, trying to keep a distance, but when we went to Trikomo House on Sundays I could be among the frolic and gossip in the kitchen. There I felt I was in the village and all the girls would speak in a dialect that I understood perfectly well, and would call my name affectionately in the diminutive, as the old sibyls would do in the village. One Sunday he called me from the kitchen. I sensed that perhaps he wanted to make me happy since he had been told I was not settling in well to my new life. He wanted to make me the centre of attention and give me a chance to exhibit my talent for oratory and performance, which he was certain I possessed as he had identified me with the caste of descendants of the likes of Papaloukas. Uncle himself was said to be a manifestation of this legacy, with his fine singing voice that had destined him to the Church. He said he had heard I was very talented and I could sing and recite poems, and asked me what I would perform for our company today. I thought first of one my favourite songs from the film *Stella*: 'O Minas Exei Dekatris,' 'The thirteenth day of the month.' He didn't expect me to volunteer a song of doomed passion from the film *Stella*. *Something more patriotic, perhaps?* He suggested. I was out of practice as it already felt like years I was on this other island, and I did not sing or recite poems every day as I did in school before we left the island in the Middle Sea. He lifted me up on a chair so everyone could see me while I declaimed loudly, giving special emphasis to words like *andreiomenei* to show I could say difficult words that I could barely understand. I managed to get through the first two verses

of the *Hymn to Liberty* by Dionysis Solomos up to *Haire Haire Elefteria* without hardly stopping for breath, and cognizant of singing something about an awesome sword and the earth and the bones of dead Hellenes of long ago rising again and hailing liberty. He clapped saying *bravo bravo* and pulled me close to him saying if I practice saying the *Pater Imon* with similar eloquence, he would let me recite it during the liturgy the following Sunday. Yes, Theie, I agreed, anxious to rush off to the kitchen, but he gestured me to sit down close to him with the men at the table. I did not realise how soon I would forget this poem by this Hellenic Romantic national poet in my new environment, and that that evening might have been the last time I ever recited or sung it. Decades later I found an English translation by Kipling rendered freely in his own way without ever mentioning Hellenes and without the emotional Romantic flow of the Greek of Solomos. *We knew thee of old, O, divinely restored, By the lights of thine eyes, And the light of thy Sword. From the graves of our slain, Shall thy valour prevail, As we greet thee again, Hail, Liberty, Hail.*

In the meantime, Demosthenes was teasing his priestly friend with anti-clerical jokes. He told the story of an Englishman who hailed a village priest saying *ha-ire ha-ire*, pronouncing the *ai* as a diphthong after the classical pronunciation he had learnt at Oxford. The priest who was not used to hearing it pronounced thus thought he was calling him an ass – *ga'ire ga'ire* in the island dialect. Was the Englishman foolish and the priest stupid? I didn't quite get the point. They poured more wine and Demosthenes started saying how this patriot poet Solomos spoke Italian before he learnt Greek, and even his famous poem that had become the Greek National Anthem was inspired by some famous English poet called Lordos Vyronas. I didn't understand the point of all this talk since they both agreed on freeing the island from colonial rule. But Demosthenes was sceptical about who would be fit to rule. I didn't understand that he was saying that our priests who wanted to liberate the Hellenes of Cyprus knew less about Hellenism than our British rulers who were educated in the Classics. Uncle remained stern and unflinching despite the taunting and tantalising about priesthood and patriotism, and began to explain how the Europeans were our friends and after a complaint from Greece to the Court of Human Rights, they would investigate human rights abuse by the British who were imprisoning and killing our youth fighting for our freedom. I was getting tired of this political talk. My thoughts had turned to Katerina. Every time I heard the name of Dionysis Solomos I would think of Katerina meandering like a river, defining her own route from her apartment overlooking the Venetian walls, disappearing into the moat, and re-emerging on the other side, sauntering past the statue of Solomos who would turn his head and call to her: *Haire, Haire*. I pretended I wanted a glass of water and made a quick escape back to the kitchen, where the conversation was much more lively and I could speak with the women as if I were at home in the village. I remember Georgina, Lola, Loulla, Maroulla, uncle's wife Koulla, his sister Kyriakou, and his daughter Niki, all gathering around and laughing merrily, teasing me because I wanted to sing o 'Minas Exei Dekatris' for Theio Panayiotis. They asked me what other film songs I knew. I volunteered *Ti einai afto pou to lene agape'*

from the film *The Boy on a Dolphin*. I saw it at the Cinema Hellas, in the open air the previous summer. After we watched it at the cinema, we would watch it every night from someone's rooftop terrace at a distance without hearing the dialogue well, which most of us couldn't understand anyway because it was in English. Nor could we read the subtitles at a distance. But we already knew the story and we would explain what was happening to those who hadn't seen it. Sophia Loren played a spunky beautiful Greek peasant woman called Phaedra from the island of Aegina who earned a living diving in the sea for sponges. A greedy and wily English art collector, played by Clifton Webb, paid her to dive for the bronze boy on a dolphin lying at the bottom of the sea, from a shipwreck in ancient times. She outwitted him and saved the statue for the Greek government, its rightful owner. An American played by Alan Ladd fell in love with her and helped her save the statue from the Englishman. The role of the American caused controversial debate. Some just accepted that he was a Philhellene. The communists said the Americans were as imperialist as the English. The nationalists thought a Greek should have played the romantic lead. As long as it was not Giorgos Fountas, I protested. He killed Stella, and if he gets jealous he'll kill Phaedra too. But we were all in love with Sophia Loren and when she began to sing the song in Greek and her face filled the screen, we stopped arguing and stood up and sang with her with passion and panache, especially with the repetition of the refrain *s'agapo, s'agapo, s'agapo*.

*

I think it was around the time of the anti-Kissinger demonstration that Toni Rumbau and his wife Mariona Masgrau came to stay. They were on their way to Lisbon from Copenhagen. She had been given political asylum in Denmark to escape persecution for distributing illegal propaganda in Franco's Spain and now that Portugal was democratic, they would go to Lisbon and wait for Franco's death so they could return to Spain. They were talking about starting a puppet theatre. She would make the puppets and he would write the scripts. I was reading Italo Calvino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies*, where the characters told their stories with Tarot cards. Toni went out and bought me a pack of Tarot cards so we could tell each other stories. He hoped to find inspiration for the adventures of his puppet character Malic who would travel around the Mediterranean and around the world. We wondered what stories the cards told about us. Mariona saw Eugenio riding a horse with naked innocence and the sun shining upon him, whereas she saw me overcast by deceptive shadows of moonlight, and she saw a hermit-like figure inching along with a lantern and hoping for a revelation to show the way forward. I would have to bide my time and the moment for the way out would come, I thought. Since the war the village lingered in my imagination like a ghostly hallucination. The allure of the world was always there, but where in the world to go? Perhaps somewhere beyond Hesperia, I thought. I could of course be diligent and practical. Just get on and finish the thesis and go wherever there was an academic job, as Demosthenes and my supervisor were expecting.

In October that year Lluís Mari came from Barcelona. She wanted to give birth to her baby daughter in London so she would not have to declare a father on the birth certificate. In Franco's Spain birth certificates had to include a father's name. Eugenio and I brought her from the hospital in London to Cardiff, where she stayed for a while with her baby daughter. Lluís declared us godfathers even though she did not declare a father. We invented a ritual and bathed the baby girl in a big ceramic bowl I kept in my room. I told them that on my island you had to wash the baby's diapers for at least three days to seal the godfatherly commitment, and we did that too. So we became *koumbaroi*. Lluís returned to Barcelona, and a few weeks later, in November, Franco finally died.

Soon afterwards, Eugenio decided to go to Barcelona and check out the scene. The city was overflowing with new life. He left with about a day's notice and as usual left a trail of unfulfilled commitments that I had to answer when people came looking for him. The next day someone turned up on the doorstep looking for him, with a violin in one hand and a squash racket in the other. I told him that he had gone off to Barcelona the day before. He looked at me in disbelief: *But we made a date to play squash at the Student Union just three days ago. He is an impetuous Canary*, I replied. *You leave the cage door open for a minute and he'll fly away. And this one is from the Great Canary. You know Canaries well?* he asked. *Are you a Canary yourself?* No, *I'm from another island. In the Middle Sea. Sadly, they eat song birds there. I haven't lived there for years. What island are you from?* I asked, suspecting from his cadences that he was from the West Indies. *From Guyana*, he said, *and it's not an island. Aren't you a West Indian?* I said. *I'm West Indian from South America*, he continued. I tried to get him to explain how the West Indies got to South America but he just wanted to play squash. *I can't help you*, I said. *I've never played. And so when is Eugenio coming back? Probably next week, but perhaps never. You never know with Canaries. They don't always find their ways back.* He was bemused, not knowing if I was joking or playing around with him for whatever reason. I was just bantering flippantly – a little impatient at habitually explaining Eugenio's unpredictable moves to friends or lovers who came looking for him. But I was also curious. I had never met a Guyanese before. I turned the conversation to his violin and I learned he was a student in the Music Department, but he had no interest in continuing the conversation. He seemed irritated, perhaps at my frivolous chatter or because he had been stood up by Eugenio or because he just wanted to play squash.

As it turned out I was intuiting what would happen when I said Eugenio might never come back. His moves had always been unpredictable. I received a post card telling me he was not coming back at all. I was not altogether surprised, although I was left speechless at the suddenness and resoluteness of the decision. He had teamed up with our friends Toni and Mariona to set up a puppet theatre group called *La Fanfarra*. They had great success in the streets of Barcelona and were received with zealous enthusiasm. He had decided that his vocation was to be a *titiritero* – a kind of Catalan *karagkiozliki*, I thought. He would write a letter to the University terminating his studies. He instructed me to pack up his belongings until he might be able to make

a trip and pick them up. I could keep his bed frame and mattress if I wanted. He knew I always coveted it. It was a huge mattress in a wooden frame close to the floor, like a raft over a dirty pool of water in the form of a shabby blue-grey carpet stained with spilt red wine and coffee. When we spoke on the phone, I took on a paternalistic tone at the abandonment of his studies, like an older brother trying to talk some sense into him. I was a few years older, and a post-graduate teaching assistant. I sometimes gave him tutorials so I spoke like a teacher. *You'll graduate in a year and a half. Why don't you wait and then you can do what you want?* No way. This was the moment and he could not miss it for anything. He had made up his mind and he was sure this was what he had to do. I was secretly envious at this reckless expression of freedom and independence. I tried not to show it. Milia had taught me to be mindful of the envy of others and not to let my envy touch those I love. So I wished him success. *Mashallah*, I said, to ward off the evil eye, and to hedge my bets with the divine as Milia taught me, I sealed it with the sign of the cross from right to left in the Orthodox way. Milia said, *if you cross yourself when you say 'praise Allah', you are protected from both Christian and Mussulman*. She learnt this from her kin in the mixed village of Ayios Sozomenos. I did not want to project an eyeful of envy on my friend. I would bide my time and wait for the opportune moment to get up and go and follow the call when I heard it inside me. These things happened unexpectedly, I thought, so I tried not to expect it. But I was highly susceptible to suggestion.

A few weeks later, I think it was still winter, several Hellenes suddenly approached me in the student union. I was taken aback – not knowing where they had come from – and I was somewhat anxious about what kind of speech would come out of my mouth. They spoke smoothly and rapidly, punctuating everything with *re malaka*. I spoke Cypriotica in Bristol kitchens now and again, remembered some chants and prayers from church when I was a boy, and had some knowledge of classical Greek as Mr Sykes, my Latin teacher, volunteered to teach me in the sixth form. He said *since you are a Hellene and you want to study literature at university, you should learn to read Plato and Homer in their own language*. But I only heard *kalamaristika* – as we call it on my island – from the movies I saw when I was a boy. But they weren't too concerned about my way of speaking. Mike of the IMG told them I was a Hellene with politically progressive ideas who spoke English like a native. One of them remembered seeing me kissing a priest at the Kissinger demonstration. They wanted me to be on the executive board of the Hellenic Society. With my command of English I could represent them well in the Student Union. I was hesitant. Another distraction. I will never finish the thesis, nor leave this island in the northern sea, I thought. But their energy was contagious and I liked the idea of becoming a kind of dragoman and learning to imitate their kind of speech and rhetoric. I could still speak to Elenkou if I met her but I would have to read Antonio Gramsci in Greek to debate with these guys. Before I knew it I was pulled into a flurry of activities, endless political argument, cooking, eating, dancing, singing. Most were there only for a year doing their MA before going back to Greece. Vassilis, a fervent Communist Party supporter, but a little crazy, charming and fun to be with,

handsome and long-haired like a rock star, had bought a Land Rover which he was planning to drive to Athens. Four of them were going together and they had room for one more. Come with us, *re malaka*. You can stay with my family the whole summer. Since you love poetry, we'll get to Athens on time to see Ritsos recite his poetry at the Communist Party rally. I said I would think about it. I thought about it. A few days later I told him I would go. And I would not come back, I added. I will find a job and stay. He looked at me with astonishment and admiration at my resoluteness, and told me to reduce my belongings to a minimum. I took a rucksack with my clothes and a box of notes for my thesis research neatly organised with references and bibliographies on index cards, a typewriter, and a few favourite books and LP records. We took the raft-like mattress I inherited from Eugenio, which fitted neatly into the back of the vehicle for three of us to sit. I left the rest of my belongings in Demosthenes' garage. He was shocked at my sudden decision, and so was my thesis supervisor. If I didn't produce a thesis, I would have to pay back my scholarship money. Don't worry, I said. The thesis is all in my head. *We want it typed on A4 paper*, the professor said, *not just in your head*. I will write it within a year, I said with great confidence as he looked at me with disbelief. I sat at the back of the vehicle looking at the road we left behind us, as I used to do as a boy sitting on an ox cart on the way to the potato fields by the sea shore. Soon I would also cross the sea to Elengou, I thought. But not long after I arrived in Athens, I received news that Elengou had passed away soon after her 83rd birthday. I never saw her again, but I would always hear her voice.

I never returned to live on the island of the northern sea, and I would spend years on another Odyssey in the Americas before I settled again on the island in the Middle Sea. And it would be many more years before I got to Trikomo, which was called Yeni Iskele by its new inhabitants. In the spring of 2003, on April 23rd, two days before the 29th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution, the checkpoints across the divide were opened for the first time. No one knew for how long, or if this move might lead to reunification. Thousands lined up to cross from south to north and north to south. I never believed that Elengou had died. She has grown small and invisible, like the Sibyl of Cumae. I hear her speak as she brushes against the leaves of my basil plants when I water them. She sings and tells me stories. Sometimes she speaks of the four women of Trikomo in rhymed couplets. She will stop after the first line: *Tesseris trikomitisses mes to steno me kopsan* and then wait and see if I remember the second line of the couplet. I wonder if she will remind me of the missing line once I reach her house in Trikomo. Will her house still be standing?

Glossary

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Amanes</i> | a popular mode of singing and genre of song expressing emotional intensity and feelings of grief and lament. Originating in Byzantine and Ottoman musical traditions with lyrics exclaiming <i>Aman Aman</i> (from the Arabic, Lord, have mercy!). |
| <i>Anari</i> | a Cypriot ricotta-type cottage cheese. |
| <i>Archontas/Archontiko</i> | a wealthy person recognised for leadership and generosity / a house or mansion in which he resides. |
| <i>Ensaïmadas</i> | Mallorcan sweet bread. Usually eaten for breakfast. |
| <i>Epsima</i> | grape must. |
| <i>Fado</i> | Portuguese genre of music infused with melancholy, longing, and often resignation giving it the name of <i>fado</i> (fate). |
| <i>Halloumi</i> | a Cypriot cheese traditionally made of goat and sheep milk, but now frequently with cow's milk. |
| <i>Hermes Trismegistus</i> | Hermes "Three-times Great" is attributed with writing the Hellenic-Egyptian <i>Hermetica</i> in the 2 nd or 3 rd century CE |
| <i>Kalamaras/ kalamaristika</i> | name by which Cypriot Greeks refer to Greeks from Greece, and the way they speak the Greek language (<i>kalamaristika</i>), in contrast to the Cypriot vernacular Greek. |
| <i>Kafeneio</i> | coffee shop. |
| <i>Kallikanjaroi</i> | malevolent goblins that stay underground sawing the world tree. They surface at the winter solstice and stay until the epiphany when the sun moves again. |
| <i>Karaghiozi</i> | main character in the Greek shadow puppet tradition. Deriving from the Turkish shadow puppet tradition of <i>karagöz</i> (meaning black eyes). The suffix <i>liki</i> (from Turkish <i>lik</i>) turns it into a collective or abstract noun. |
| <i>Koufi</i> | poisonous snake aka <i>finá</i> . Blunt-nosed viper. <i>Vipera lebetina</i> . |

a litany in my slumber

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Koumbaros</i> | form of kinship known as <i>koumbaria</i> acquired by serving as godparent and/or best man/woman at a wedding. <i>Koumbare</i> is also a familiar form of address among men e.g. mate, buddy. Fem., <i>koumbara</i> or <i>koumera</i> . |
| <i>Kouroukla</i> | aka <i>mantila</i> , <i>tsimperka</i> , headscarf traditionally worn by all women. Colours and designs change with age and marital status. Nowadays they are only worn by some older women in the rural areas of Cyprus. |
| <i>Leventis</i> | a gallant male. Derived from Italian <i>Levanti</i> referring to people from the Levant, or Eastern Mediterranean, and taking on negative connotations. |
| <i>Loukoumades</i> | deep fried dough soaked in honey and cinnamon (from Turkish <i>lokma</i>) |
| <i>Loukoumi</i> | sweet based on gel and sugar, most commonly flavoured with rosewater, bergamot orange and lemon (from Turkish <i>lokum</i>). |
| <i>Mukhtar</i> | elected head of a village or neighbourhood (<i>mahalla</i>). |
| <i>Palouze</i> | dessert of grape must thickened with flour. |
| <i>Pana'yri</i> | Cypriot pronunciation of <i>panigyri</i> , a feast or public celebration on a holy day or saint's day. The participants, the <i>pana'yrkotes</i> , sell seasonal products, food and drink, and the festive atmosphere is enhanced with music, dancing and singing. |
| <i>Pappou</i> | grandfather. |
| <i>Pedomazema</i> | a collection of children. Describes the practice in the Ottoman empire of abducting Christian pre-adolescent boys for training as Janissaries and indoctrination into Islam (Turkish <i>devşirme</i>). |
| <i>Petimezi</i> | grape molasses (Turkish <i>pekmez</i>). |
| <i>Pherepapha</i> | one of the variations of the name Persephone. |
| <i>Psaltis</i> (pl. <i>psaltes</i>) | official singer in the Orthodox Church. |
| <i>Re malaka</i> | <i>re</i> is a familiar interjection to address someone. <i>Malaka</i> literally translated into British English <i>wanker</i> but is used among friends to simply mean 'dude.' It is insulting to use with strangers and may also be used pejoratively to call someone a jerk or a fool. |

CounterText

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Saltsa</i> | sauce. |
| <i>Skoufoma</i> | a <i>kouroukla</i> which covers the hair, forehead, and ears. A black one is worn by old women, widows and those in mourning. A white one may be worn as protection from the sun when working in the fields. |
| <i>Soujouko</i> | (aka <i>shoushoukos</i>) candle-shaped sweet made of stringed almonds dipped into <i>palouze</i> and hung up to dry so it may be sliced with a knife. |
| <i>Theios, Theia</i> | uncle, aunt, and familiar form of address for elders. In Cypriot vernacular Greek it is often pronounced with a k inserted before the diphthong. |
| <i>Terirem</i> | improvised melody around syllables without meaning like repeating a mantra: te-ri—rem-ri-ri-rem. |
| <i>Titiritero</i> | puppeteer. |
| <i>Yaya</i> | grandmother. |
| <i>Zivania</i> | grape-based distillate traditionally made at home or in monasteries in Cyprus. |

Note

Stephanides is grateful to the International Writers' and Translators' Center of Rhodes for inviting him as a resident writer for three weeks in the summer of 2013 and providing the environment to continue work on this piece of writing for publication.

References

- Calderón de la Barca, Pedro (2012), *Life is a Dream*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum, Mineola: New York: Dover Thrift Publications.
- Seferis, George (1981) *Collected Poems 1924–1955*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.