



2011

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Recommended Citation

Pagnouille, Christine, Past into Future: Cyprus' Undivided Literature — Aydin Mehmet Ali and Stephanos Stephanides, *Kunapipi*, 33(1), 2011.

Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol33/iss1/19>

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Abstract

Cyprus is one of those places in the world where the commonplace of coming to terms with the past in order to forge some possible future takes on a most acute significance. It may not be necessary to go back beyond a half-century or so to understand the way the past has been used by both Greek and Turkish nationalists to keep resentment, rejection, and indeed hatred of the other ethnic community alive. Still it does not seem too far fetched either to consider that, as often happens, such enmities are fed by a long previous history. Cyprus is strategically located between three continents:

CHRISTINE PAGNOULLE

Past into Future: Cyprus' Undivided Literature — Aydın Mehmet Ali and Stephanos Stephanides¹

*with a touch of the hand
I will know I have found the brother
in milk and blood
I had relentlessly forgotten*
(Stephanides 'Sentience' 26)

Cyprus is one of those places in the world where the commonplace of coming to terms with the past in order to forge some possible future takes on a most acute significance. It may not be necessary to go back beyond a half-century or so to understand the way the past has been used by both Greek and Turkish nationalists to keep resentment, rejection, and indeed hatred of the other ethnic community alive. Still it does not seem too far fetched either to consider that, as often happens, such enmities are fed by a long previous history. Cyprus is strategically located between three continents:

The island's geographical position has long made it a zone of indeterminate encounter between heterogeneous cultures and populations, ambiguating the cultural and political borders of 'Europe' and 'Asia', and 'the West' and 'the East'. (Stephanides 2009b)

As a consequence it has had a 'hopelessly complex multicultural history' (Stephanides 2009b), claimed as it was by rival powers over the centuries, indeed the millenia. As Mehmet Yaşın points out,

the Cypriot identity was already under occupation from the beginning of history. The transition of Cypriots into a state structure, the adoption of their own — or having themselves 'adopted' — language and alphabet, and the culture of the region, and thus finding an identity has always been through external interventions. The outsiders have interrupted internal dynamics, changed the character of the country and determined its fate. (34)

The island was ruled in turn by Phoenicians, Assyrians, Egyptians, and Persians. Cyprus was part of the Greek empire, which became the Christian Byzantine empire. Then crusaders came from the West; by the end of the twelfth century Richard the Lionheart had introduced Roman Catholicism into this overwhelmingly Orthodox area. It was briefly ruled by the Knights Templar, then it became a feudal kingdom under the Lusignan family, until the last queen sold

it to the Venetians. By this time it was under attack from the Ottomans who took over in 1571. Self-awareness among Greek Cypriots and an explicit wish to be united with Greece (*Enosis*) started to develop with the Greek war of Independence in the 1820s. In 1878, after the war between Russia and the Ottoman empire, Cyprus became a British Protectorate; and then in 1925 after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War it was made a crown colony. British colonial policy further aggravated ethnic tensions: when independence was achieved in 1960, in keeping with the British approach so far, the constitution gave the Turkish minority political rights that were resented by some as excessive; it certainly sanctioned divisions wherever it could. There were armed groups on both the Greek and the Turkish sides, and from 1963 onward the word 'atrocities' became a routine part of life on Cyprus. The propaganda on each side projected misdeeds (gang rape, torture, summary execution) onto the other, representing them as inhuman brutes, although as Yiannis Papadakis narrates in *Echoes from the Dead Zone*, Greeks and Turks share a similar culture, and Greek and Turkish Cypriots have more in common than is readily acknowledged by politicians.

For Turkish Cypriots a sense of belonging to the same island as Greek Cypriots was paradoxically brought out by the official partition of the island. In mid-July 1974 the military junta in Greece supported the Greek Cypriot nationalist organisation EOKA B which took power in Cyprus and overthrew Archbishop Makarios, who had just been re-elected President with a sweeping majority. The latter appealed to the UN to stop such unlawful acts and, allegedly in response, Turkey invaded the island a few days later. UN forces enforced a ceasefire and have since patrolled the 'Green Line' between Turkish controlled north and the rest of the island (this remainder is the officially recognised Republic of Cyprus — now populated by Greek Cypriots). Greek Cypriot families had to leave their houses and villages to move to the south just as Turkish Cypriots living in the south had to be 'relocated' on the northern side of the demarcation; these people also resented the presence of immigrant Turks who had been encouraged to settle on land abandoned by Greek Cypriots in the war and given away cheaply by the Turkish government. This can account for a stronger sense among the Turkish Cypriot population that they belong to Cyprus. Among Greek Cypriots, however, the Turkish invasion is still deeply resented, as Papadakis notes in his introduction, exposing the one-sided approach that exculpates the Greeks whereas the Greeks were also largely responsible for the events that eventually led to partition:

Everyone knew how Turkey had invaded Cyprus in 1974, out of the blue, ostensibly to protect a small Turkish minority there, grabbing forty per cent of the territory and tearing away one third of its population from its ancestral lands, turning them into refugees; everyone knew about the killings, the rapes and the 1,619 persons still missing or unaccounted for. (2005 5)

The latest historical development is the Republic of Cyprus (which officially includes the north) joining the EU in 2004. Intransigent moves on various sides have resulted in the current stalemate, and a still-divided island.

The contrast between ethnic propaganda, albeit qualified and muted, and attempts at bringing communities together can be illustrated in the radically different approaches to editing and publishing policies. Apart from the popular media pandering to prejudices, a collection of short stories such as *Face of an Island: Twenty-Four Short Stories from Cyprus*, edited by Panos Ioannides, presents a single face of the island since the preface and many of the stories articulate the dominant discourse in the south. On the other hand, the five substantial contributions that make up the collection *Turkish Cypriot Identity in Literature*, edited and translated by Aydın Mehmet Ali and published in 1990 all testify to a sense of groping uncertainty and to a clear-sighted view of the Cypriot predicament. Similarly, though along different lines, the journal *Cadences: A Journal of Literature and the Arts in Cyprus*, launched in 2005, is dedicated to exploring and interlacing various linguistic and ideological contributions; the editorial statement repeated in each issue clearly points to its programmatic intention to contribute to mutual understanding:

Writers in Cyprus think, feel, and express themselves in several languages, Greek, Turkish, and English being three of the most prominent. *Cadences* is a bridge between them, a meeting point at which writers of the diverse communities of the island may find each other, and learn from their encounters with difference. It is committed to building bridges between the communities ... while both encouraging students and new writers and publishing those who are more established. Published by the Department of Humanities at European University Cyprus, it has an advisory editorial board composed of prominent writers and academics from the Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, Armenian Cypriot, Palestinian, American and London Cypriot communities. Its aim is to reflect the diversity of the island's writing and in the process enhance cultural understanding and communication. Writers inevitably see things differently from politicians, and by attending to the cadences of their many voices, we can learn something of the rhythms of experiencing diversity together.

Cadences includes contributions in the three main languages, with or without translations.

Significantly, both Stephanides and Mehmet Ali not only publish in this journal but are members of the editorial board. Their names point to their respective Greek and Turkish origins, and their friendship as well as obvious similarities in their approach to the trauma of their country illustrates the journal's project. Both write in English out of choice and because of biographical circumstances. Aware as they are of the importance of language in acknowledging the other community they use both Turkish and Greek in their writings. In Mehmet Ali's 'Bedtime Story' the use of Greek by the Turkish Cypriot mother is an essential narrative element. Stephanides', quoting the Turkish poet Gür Genç, his pointed reference, as well as his dedication to Aşık Mene, a Turkish Cypriot artist whom he calls his brother in the poem 'Sentience', also point in the same inclusive direction.

Stephanides was born in Trikomo, in Mesaoria, northeast Cyprus in 1949. When his parents separated his father took eight-year-old Stephanos to 'darkest Manchester' ('Archaeology of a Tooth' 27). He stayed in Britain until he completed

his university education in Cardiff. Stephanides travelled extensively and lived in several countries including Guyana for several years in the 1980s. It may not be mere chance that two countries he is particularly fascinated with — Guyana and India — are also ‘divided to the vein’ as Walcott would put it.² He returned to Cyprus in 1991.

Born in Nicosia in 1947 Mehmet Ali went to London to escape from warfare in her country in 1963; London is where she discovered love and life, and is where she now feels at least as much at home as on her native island. According to the contributor notes to *Turkish Cypriot Identity in Literature* she is ‘[a]n educator, translator, writer and community activist’, and founded ‘the Turkish Education Group and FATAL (For the Advancement of Turkish Arts Literature)’ (Mehmet Ali 1990 121). Being an internationalist to the bone, she actively promotes understanding among people and particularly among those ethnic groups that are all too often pitted against each other. She is also deeply committed to creating situations in which women can shape alternatives and thus gain confidence. Her main weapon is writing, publishing both her own and other women’s texts. In this respect the collection of stories and poems she published with Gülfidan Erhürman, *Bize Dair / Pink Butterflies* is exemplary: it brings together poems in Turkish with only four of them translated into English, and short texts, stories or direct personal memories in English.³ Her writings are ground-breaking in several respects. She was among the first Cypriots to write about gang rape and about homosexuality. Her use of two adjectives as one word (‘Cypriotturkish,’ ‘Cypriotgreek’) is her way of bringing out the perplexing complexity of an artificially divided identity:

Turkish-Cypriot-Woman. Cypriotturkish woman. Is the relationship as simple as a dash in between? The divided person of a divided land continues her division even further in another land. Searching for the pieces to put together, to claim. Searching for ‘wholeness’. (Mehmet Ali 2005 89)

It could be argued that because of these circumstances Mehmet Ali and Stephanides are not representative of average Cypriots, that they are more attuned to the English-speaking world than to their home island. This is however belied by their deep commitment to the present and future of Cyprus, and by the fact that many Cypriots share their concern, not only among academics like Stavros Karayanni, *Cadences’* editor-in-chief, but also among ordinary citizens on both sides, as reported by Papadakis.

Stephanides’ poems about Cyprus all touch upon the delicate alchemy of memory. One of his more entertaining works is ‘Archaeology of a Tooth’, (2005b) in which the eponymous tooth metaphorically represents the pain of partition, and the need for it to be bridged. The first lines move from confidence in the new teeth a child starts growing after six, to the concealment of a broken tooth with a crown. Stephanides describes this moment in a memorable line, as ‘A juncture of memories with jagged edges’, the last words a reference to both the pain of the injury and to the conflicting factions tearing at his island. It may be suspected

from the words ‘comfortably concealed’ that the smoothness is deceptive and that ‘silent putrefaction’ is festering away underneath; the crown is but a seal on ‘quiet mourning’, hiding the pain of exile. What is repressed becomes a source of rampant infection on the day the poem’s narrator crossed back to the north and visited Trikomo for the first time in decades. The extraction will ‘pull out [the] root’ of the stench — that is, the concealed mourning. What it does is make the gap visible; bring to light the division, ‘fragmentation and deracination’. It now has to be bridged, not only with an orthodontic device — ‘A porcelain smile to hide memory’s holes’ — but also with words:

as I rehearse words
That will bridge the gap my tongue slips through
As it feels for words that steal the air

and

To trap the air in words that bite and hiss (2005b 28)

The last words of the poem — ‘to pacify the pain in a memento of empty air’ — neatly express the need for remembrance if words are to heal the scars. About the middle of the poem we come upon five lines that consist of questions about the nature of memory and which, I would say, are characteristic of Stephanides’ tendency to the abstract. Yet in this case ‘memory’s beginning’ that lies ‘in fragmentation and deracination’ has an obvious relevance to his own experience and to that of all people who have known exile and who belong to divided countries.

The overwhelming energy of life, the sheer force of elementary sensual experience powerfully counters the awareness of death and loss in two of Stephanides’ other poems, ‘Requiem for Trikomo’ (2005c) and ‘Sentience’ (2005d). While ‘Requiem for Trikomo’ rambles in apparently disconnected parts, ‘Sentience’ floats on unresolved ambiguities in the syntax and references. The epigraph to ‘Sentience’ consists of four lines by Derek Walcott:

*So what shall we do for the dead,
To whose conch-bordered
Tumuli our lifelong attraction is drawn
As to a magnetic empire.*

These words express some helpless attraction to the dead; yet in the first lines of the poem (‘I know this day of May will be the day / The dead will awaken only once’) the situation is reversed: the dead are invited to awake on a particular day of May when they are not yet too remote (‘Next spring will be too late’) and when life is still pulsing strong enough (‘Next month the fragrance of spring / Will fade away into the summer drought’). This Day of the Dead, out of tune and time with the Day of the Dead on November 2, is a day of intense living involving our deepest, most elemental senses — touch, with the ‘shudder of the skin’, the feel of the sea that recalls ‘the sensual bosom of our dead mother’; smell and taste, with ‘the aroma of the bush our grandmother used to burn / To bake the bread in her

clay oven'. Sensuous appeal, awe and even fear are close together, as suggested in these lines, which is reminiscent of Rilke's first Duino elegy,

We feel it in the shudder of the skin
 In the redness of the poppy
 Everywhere the dead send their messengers
 But many turn their heads away in dread (25)

The dead the speaker is calling upon are the relatives and neighbours he left in Trikomo, and particularly his mother and father, when they were together 'dream[ing] their dreams' on the 'green balcony' of his childhood. Because the small town lies in the north, there are new inhabitants replacing the Greek Cypriots who had to flee south of the line, which is why he is greeted by 'a stranger': 'you will send a stranger to tell me my story', with 'you' here standing for his parents, or possibly just for his mother. The stranger is friendly and welcoming: 'He will first give me fresh lemonade / to quench my thirst', however he is now the official owner of the place, and as such he has the key to his past. Significantly when he looks down from the balcony, he sees both 'bell-towers' and 'minarets' as in another poem 'Broken Heart'. 'Byzantine saints' are mentioned next to 'wailing prayers of unseen hodjas', and likewise in 'Bedtime Story', Mehmet Ali points to a brotherly closeness between Muslims and Orthodox Christians when the Turkish Cypriot Osman remembers how they would go and light candles for their departed Greek Cypriot former neighbours in the all but deserted Orthodox Church in the north: these are as many gestures of inclusive tolerance. Similarly, the last lines (used as an epigraph to this article) seal his acknowledgement of kinship with his Turkish Cypriot friend, working out reconciliation beyond the feud through a comprehensive act of remembering.

The narrative element is stronger in 'Requiem for Trikomo'. The first part of the poem is in the shadow of the past, though not altogether in the shadow of death. Sacred numbers echo each other — five, seven, three. Three is repeated three times: three roads, three towns, and three socially important buildings — the coffee shop, the church and the cinema all jostling each other in the memory of the young boy. Aphrodites and Madonnas merge into the magic of Melina Mercouri and Sophia Loren 'surging from the blue', which she does repeatedly in *Boy on a Dolphin*, an image which is both literal if we think of the film *Boy on a Dolphin* and easily associated with the birth of Venus rising from the sea. In the last lines of this stanza, mourning is called 'longing' and is figuratively linked to the wheat the speaker's grandmother, Eleni, milled on the day her husband died, a juxtaposition that is also a reminder of how closely life and death belong together. This parallel introduces the bolder comparison of the speaker laying himself out in the earth to decompose and thus achieve an intensely sexual experience of union.

The last stanza begins on a factual note,

Today Kathy shoots photos for the post-mortem
 To seize the lost house in my voice

Yet the second line already disrupts expectations: how can a house be lost in his voice? How can you ‘shoot photos’ of a voice? Then all in a flash, smells ‘[send] [him] running / to the random sensuality of seas’, ‘life [explodes] from the stones’, and in the last lines ‘mourning’ becomes an all-embracing movement originating in the desiring body:

Desire of my body mourning
Stretching in all directions

While we find the same note of longing and a similar sensuality in ‘Ars poetica: Sacred or Daemonic’ (2005e), this poem also has a decidedly humorous dimension. It revolves on an often playful ambiguity, first, allegedly on the source of the poet’s inspiration but also on the proximity of sexual consummation and death, as suggested in Pierre de Ronsard’s erotic and humorous elegy used in the epigraph:

Je ne veux plus Maistresse à tel prix appaiser
Ma chaleur Cyprienne, et mesmement à l’heure
Que le Soleil ardent sous la Chienne demeure

...

En ces temps faisons trêve, épargnons nostre vie
De peur que mal-armés de la philosophie
Nous ne sentions soudain, ou après à loisir,
Que toujours la douleur voisine le plaisir.

The poem brings together the speaker’s unquenched yearning and the dislocated condition of his country. It begins with uncertainty as to the identity of the addressee: initially the reader, and then an anonymous ‘I’, while later including the woman/goddess he wants to strip naked, and finally Cyprus.

The poem begins and ends with a warning: ‘Do not be deluded’, ‘So don’t believe me’, followed by an explanation, respectively: ‘I have a split tongue’ and ‘For different daemons speak within me’. What comes next, both in the first and in the last lines, can be read either as most intimate or quite public and indeed political, and the two readings have to be accommodated. The ‘missing parts’ (those striking last words in the poem) are the ‘heads and genitals’ recklessly lost ‘in the world’s tormented ideology’, both private parts and amputated parts of the island.

The first stanza suggests a hopeless loss:

Moving between reluctant whispers
And inaudible pulse articulating peace
You know you will never find
In the lull of your dead muses
And the platonic lambda
How to reach pure sound?

The muses are dead, and who knows yet about the ‘platonic lambda’?⁴

The second stanza moves on dream-like shifts and associations. It begins with a sense of complete disorientation enhanced by signs in two languages. That the

road should be ‘one way’ echoes the one-sidedness of exclusive approaches. In the following lines verbs normally associated with the police and with dogs are inverted: ‘the police sniff’ and ‘their dogs label me “under control.”’ Next the speaker escapes such oppressive constraints to indulge in the erotic sensuousness suggested in the epigraph.

And when I find you
 I strip you naked
 In reckless desire for your disease
 (or was that only in my dream?)
 I do not know if it's your malady I want
 or if I am diseased by your desire

The phrases used about desire are reminiscent of both Ronsard in the early sixteenth century and John Donne one century later, with the paradoxical association of disease and desire, the play on sounds, and the mannered use of the word ‘malady’. Both the context and the use of the word in English in the Renaissance point to venereal disease, which takes readers back to Venus-Aphrodite. The slightly confusing syntax of the line ‘weaves halos fudging stories’ matches the suggested uncertainty, which only increases when the stories turn out to be about ‘roaming phantoms on an overlay of cities’. In the last lines of this long stanza the speaker poet turns words into powder, just as statues can be pounded into grit, in an act of wilful destruction. ‘Chasing’ in the next line can mean either hunt for or hunt away, but the restriction expressed in ‘merely’, which is echoed in the word ‘lack’, suggests the latter. Actually, we must not choose, we have to combine the two meanings, however contradictory. So it can be argued that this allusive extravaganza is one of his most successful attempts at retrieving missing parts and restoring broken stone.

Where Stephanides’ poems take readers on oblique and allusive journeys on which words call up sensuous experience, Mehmet Ali’s stories are grounded in facts and definite situations. The complexity of her stories lies in their structure and in the combination of various time layers and different perspectives.

‘Caught Out’ and ‘Bedtime Story’ share their main location in London and a focus on a homosexual relationship. In ‘Caught Out’ the story of the family scandal referred to in the title is framed by marketplace gossip. A young man called Ahmet who is married to a beautiful girl called Cernalyie is ‘caught out’ with his male lover (Cernalyie’s cousin). Outrage is compounded by the fact that the lovers had been using a flat bought with wedding money. The lover is sent back to Cyprus and Ahmet drifts into gambling and drinking. The story alternates between the perspective of Ahmet and that of his wife with passages that report their respective childhoods, and italicised unpunctuated paragraphs that read as transcripts of half formulated thoughts. Though quite tragic for some of the characters, partly because of the framing story, this narrative has the light touch of a comedy of manners.

'Bedtime Story' takes place in a London hospital. Two young London Cypriots, both suffering from AIDS, both homosexual, are placed in adjacent beds. One of them, called Osman in Cyprus and Ozzie in London, is a Turkish Cypriot who left the island to avoid being drafted into the Turkish army. The other (Antoni, Tony) is a Greek Cypriot; he came to London with his family when they had to flee the Turkish invasion in 1974. While the rest of his family went back to the Republic of Cyprus, he stayed because he was in love with a Turkish Cypriot. The narrative begins in the perspective of Osman's mother, then alternates between Antoni and Osman. The last paragraph is quite effectively removed from any of the characters' perspective. It consists of short almost factual sentences, which record Tony's death, and the final uncertainty as to what will happen to his body. Time periods include Osman's leaving Cyprus and his mother three years earlier, and the two young men's tense first meeting a couple of days before. The story contrasts the mothers' attitudes. Antoni's mother disowned him on hearing that he had a Turkish lover. The greater transgression is not that the lover is a man but that he belonged to the inhuman people that did those terrible things to the people in the village where they used to live, killing and taking the men away, raping the women including young girls: 'how could I love a Turk my eternal enemy after what they had done to us?' (64). Osman's mother, on the other hand, who had been devastated when he left, flies over as soon as she hears of his being ill and comforts Antoni with sweet Greek words.

This story of two young people dying of AIDS is hardly the kind of comforting tale one could read children at bedtime but it is indeed a bedtime story in the most literal sense. The element of pathos introduced by AIDS may be rather expected, but it can also be argued that it gives added poignancy to a mutual recognition that is sealed and hallowed by the endearing words spoken in Greek by Osman's mother. To use Freud's description of attitudes to mourning (*wiederholen, durcharbeiten*) as reformulated by Dominick La Capra, it can be argued that the other mother's attitude, is typical of the 'acting-out' moment of mourning, when the patient is caught in the compulsive repetition of tragic events, and cannot 'work out' the more detached view that makes forgiving if not forgetting possible.⁵

'Forbidden Zone' mainly consists of direct narration that shifts between reporting what happened on the 20th and the 21st July 1974 and describing people on Famagusta beach in November 2008. Clues to the later date are the empty hotels half buried in sand and the boards 'tangled in barbed wire' (188) with the 'black soldiers gun in hand' (188) and the trilingual warning to trespassing tourists that gives the story its title. The narrative includes increasingly longer passages in direct speech in which a man who participated in the 1974 events tells about them thirty-four years later. The memory of violence and the wound it inflicts on both victims and perpetrators is central to the story. The narrative juxtaposes grim humour such as references to the flippant indifference inherent in mass tourism with a horror that should be unspeakable but is translated into words.

A Greek Cypriot family were celebrating their son Aris' birthday in one of the hotels along the beach when Turkish planes began bombing. Father, mother and child managed to drive away unscathed. They collected some belongings and, like many others, attempted to escape to the south. However, they were held up by Turks and Turkish Cypriot militia. The men were lined up near a dam and eventually shot dead; the women were raped. The slim elegant mother was taken aside and almost pulled apart in a savage raping, yet she survived and even took her son back and drove away with only one functioning arm and foot.

The absurdity of the killing is brought out by the utter absence of grounds for personal resentment between the two groups as illustrated by the fact the Greek Cypriot father is a lawyer who would defend Turkish Cypriots as well as Greek Cypriots.

What happened to the young couple is echoed in the poem by Mehmet Ali entitled 'searching for the one missing' and published in *Cadences* in 2009. It is laid out in two columns, with instructions on the left ('you have to be convinced', 'you have to stop feeling') and alternative or cumulative multiple answers on the right, ending with the repetition of 'wait' — an endless and pointless waiting, a hopeless non-mourning (52–53).

The possibility of a one-sided reading is ruled out. Indeed another Turkish Cypriot character who is mentioned both in the older man's remembering and in the direct narrative is a boy who looks fifteen and is actually thirteen, Hasan, who seems composed and collected, but suddenly releases a visceral need for revenge: he had come back home to find his whole family slaughtered by EOKA guerillas.

As the story weaves together different periods it also suggests parallels between characters and situations. Though readers are not to know who those 2008 people actually are, the woman on the beach recalls Maria, the elegant Greek wife and mother who was raped in 1974, probably partly because of the way she 'calls for the sounds to come to her' (189) from the deserted hotel. Her silent call is answered in the 2008 present by the laughing piping voice of a three-year-old girl playing in and out of the sea and demanding her father's attention. The father pays scant attention, looking rather at the approaching woman. He may not be the grown up version of the thirteen-year-old who stopped the fleeing car on the road out of Famagusta and held the boy Ari, but he has the same tattoo on his forearm. The final paragraph is one long balanced sentence in which several strands are brought together and somehow laid to rest, in great poetic density:

The woman with the dark hair walking barefoot on the beach notices the tattoo of the lurid red crescent and star on the inside forearm of the man playing with his daughter running in and out of the water's edge amongst the descending shadows of the deserted ghost hotels in the Forbidden Zone guarded by the black shadow soldiers on red boards tangled amongst barbed wire as the sun goes down in the West. (201)

The remembering man on the beach is the central figure in 'Forbidden Zone.' Especially in the penultimate part, readers share his sense of guilt and grief. He wanted the mass graves to be found and the past slaughter to be exposed, but all

he can excavate is his memory. The pounded remains of the dead were used to stabilise the roads leading to the new luxury of hotels built for the Turkish army. His grandson — significantly? — takes great pleasure all the while in tearing and destroying, as indeed children will. Does this point to some streak in human nature that drives us to violence?

Papadakis states that ‘If a reunited federal Cyprus does eventually join the EU it will become the first EU Muslim-Christian federation. Cyprus for once could become a beacon — well, at least a candle — of hope in this post 9/11 world that has witnessed boundaries turning into iron lines of divisions’ (2005 251). This does not seem impossible. For three centuries, from the end of the seventh until the end of the tenth century, Arabs and Byzantines — Muslims and Orthodox Christians — cohabited in relative peace. This historical parenthesis of coexistence could comfort some reasonable expectations. Particularly with such committed writers as Stephanides and Mehmet Ali, literature performs a difficult duty of remembrance and acts as a constant reminder of complexity. As Stephanides writes in his introduction to *Excerpta Cypriana*, literature is ‘an interactive form of agency’,

a battle of the imagination between inert substances and volatile forms of difference, between the local and the world, across generations, ethnic groups, sexual orientation, and literary languages, moving through the memory and forgetting of repatriates and immigrants, and of those dislocated within the island by a history of violence or simply by time itself. (online)

Inevitably the memory of violence is inscribed in Cypriot literature, as it has been through the centuries and all over the world. So far it has not prevented its relentless absurd repetition. Should we assent to Adorno’s grim assertion that poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, that is, that literature dealing with acts that violate human dignity should not be written? But how can we live in a world deprived of poems? To his wistful question *wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?* Hölderlin answers in an almost grandiloquent gesture,⁶ yet even if poets are not, as he claims, ‘holy priests’ ‘wandering through a holy night’, do they not bring out echoes, piece broken parts together, re-member, and thus contribute to some heightened understanding?

The poems and stories discussed in the present article are so neatly achieved, so ultimately pleasurable that it raises the question that can be asked about any work of art commemorating absurdity and horror: are not these somehow transfigured, transmuted, turned into beauty? Is not the world made whole again? And if words can heal, should we not worry that it makes further slaughter possible, indeed even a source of inspiration?

NOTES

¹ All poems by Stephanides quoted in this article can be found in this issue of *Kunapiipi*.

- ² See the lines ‘I who am poisoned with the blood of both [Africans and Europeans], / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?’ in ‘A Far Cry from Africa’ (1962).
- ³ ‘We have decided to leave our emotions, pains, thoughts, angers, hopes, loves and love for life in the original languages in which we have lived them through and publish this book in our two languages’. (Mehmet Ali 2005 6)
- ⁴ In Plato’s *Timaeus*, we find that God created the Cosmic Soul using two mathematical strips of 1, 2, 4, 8 and 1, 3, 9, 27. These two strips have the shape of an inverted ‘V’ or the ‘Platonic Lambda’ since it resembles the shape of the 11th letter of the Greek alphabet ‘Lambda’.
- ⁵ See for instance the following passages in La Capra’s interview with Amos Goldberg: ‘Acting-out is a process, but a repetitive one. It’s a process whereby the past, or the experience of the other, is repeated as if it were fully enacted, fully literalised’ (Shoah Resource 5); and ‘When one comes to certain problems, such as that of mourning – which can be seen in Freud as one important mode of working-through – one may never entirely transcend an attachment to a lost other, or even some kind of identification with a lost other, but one may generate countervailing forces so that the person can re-engage an interest in life. One sign of this in the process of mourning is the ability to find a new partner, to marry, to have children; and not to be so enmeshed in the grieving that the present doesn’t seem to exist for you, and there is no future’ (6).
- ⁶ ‘Aber sie sind, sagst du, wie des Weingotts heilige Priester, / Welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht’, Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘Brot und Wein’ *Elegien*, 90–95.

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