

CANTO MEDITERRANEO

The spell of each wave
like the scent of absence

like the distance between
two longings

like the ray's shadows
in another light

try to heal
with a different grief

but some heartaches
resist

even now
generations later

I return to you, Rebetiko

to your qanun, oud
toumperleki, politiki lyra

and I ask

in what language will I love
in what waters will I breath

in what voice will I find the world
in what sound will I find the beats

in what sun will I learn to speak
in what love will I learn to sing

now I listen to Kalaitzidis
play Marco Polo's Dream

swim back, swim back
some day

my life
is in your refrains

listen, listen
a song can change a people

I'm Venetian and Greek
I'm Jerusalem in Arabic

I come from the outskirts of cities
and the sea

and to you Rebetiko, I return..

[Rebetiko is Greek urban blues. It fuses Greek, Turkish, Arab and Jewish musical traditions, and the songs deal with themes of exile, loss, longing, love, and death. It began in the poorer neighborhoods of Asia Minor and grew in the outskirts of Athens, Thessaloniki, and Piraeus after the Greek Catastrophe of 1923. Kyriakos Kalaitzidis is a composer and oud player, and considered one of the most important contemporary musicians, and scholars of music of the post-Byzantine era and of the Mediterranean.]

Nathalie Handal [1969] was born in Haiti and raised in Latin America, France and the Middle East, and educated in Asia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Her recent poetry books *Life in a Country Album* (2019), praised as "illuminating the luxuriance and longing of deracination — a contemporary Orpheus"; and the flash collection *The Republics* (2015), winner of the Virginia Faulkner Award for Excellence in Writing, and the Arab American Book Award. She is the author of eight plays, editor of two anthologies, and her creative nonfiction have appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Irish Times*, among others. Handal is the recipient of awards from The Lannan Foundation, Centro Andaluz de las Letras, Fondazione di Venezia, among others. She is a professor at Columbia University, and writes the literary travel column "The City and the Writer" for *Words without Borders* magazine. Nathalie Handal currently lives in New York, USA.

