

THE TEXT AND ITS MARGINS

*Post-Structuralist Approaches
To Twentieth-Century
Greek Literature*

edited by

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and
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PREFACE

The present volume is, in every sense, a collective effort. It represents the fruits of several years of critical exchange among the nine contributors (graduates from different universities in Greece, the U.K. and the U.S.), whose contact with the School of Hellenic and Roman Studies at the University of Birmingham led, after many long and intense discussions, to the establishment of a seminar on post-structuralist approaches to modern Greek literature. By December 1981, the success of these seminars encouraged us to invite contributions from the most active participants. It was an unambitious beginning, arising from local and particular needs; yet it is hoped that our venture will stimulate further studies along similar lines from a wider circle of young scholars and extend to other fields of medieval, Renaissance and modern Greek studies. Despite the fact that some of our contributors have left the relatively sheltered world of graduate studies for academic posts or continued research elsewhere, critical exchange of opinion has been maintained throughout.

Our decision to publish was prompted by two factors. First, the dearth of periodicals on modern Greek literature in languages other than Greek has hitherto stifled attempts to communicate with a wider and more informed readership among those interested in European culture. Second, dissatisfaction with the state and status of modern Greek literary criticism, both within Greece and outside, particularly in the field of contemporary literature, urged us on to action. Three major deficiencies attracted our attention: first, the negative influence of philology, or "the dead hand of classicism," prevalent among so many scholars who have arrived at modern Greek literature from the discipline of the classics; second, the biographical impressionism and romantic dilettantism inherent in so many approaches to Greek authors and

texts; third, an almost total disregard for discussing and defining critical approaches. In short, the backwardness of literary criticism in our field cannot be ascribed to the "inferiority" or "marginality" of contemporary Greek culture.

The central concern of our volume is with twentieth-century literature, viewed both from the inside and from the outside (not literature-in-itself but literature in relation to its borders, margins and adjacent fields). With this end in view, the editors have played only an administrative role throughout, and the emphasis at every stage has been upon collective discussion. We have not dictated subjects or theoretical approaches in order to give an overview of a representative selection of monumental works, but have encouraged each contributor to select texts, topics and approaches that might open the debate on literature to include a cluster of problems related to other discourses (for example, linguistics, history, "folklore"). It is not our aim to write an introduction to modern Greek literature, still less to propose a "correct" alternative approach to texts that will uncover "real" meanings; rather, we wish to explore, in an experimental but disciplined way, a plurality and diversity of methods that elucidate particular texts, but which can also be applied productively to other texts. Each paper, in differing ways but at the same time, constitutes a close yet dynamic reading of a text, as well as a methodological proposal striving not at conclusions and closures but at suggestions that will pave the way to other interpretations and methodologies.

Readers may be perturbed to find, within a single volume, so many seemingly conflicting approaches, which might conveniently be labeled "epistemological," "rhetorical," "psychoanalytical," "stylistic," "deconstructionist," "tropological," etc. But in fact no single paper can be identified with one particular theory; on the contrary, prevailing theories are used rather than followed, and the boundaries between them are transgressed with an intellectual freedom of approach that is intended to appeal to a readership outside modern Greek studies, including those concerned with the application of contemporary critical theory to modern literature.

Why bother? (some will object). Why seek to encumber a small but complex field, so far uncontaminated with passing fads

and fashions, with the latest apparatus of post-structuralist criticism? Our present commitment is based upon the four following objectives: first, to bring modern Greek studies to the attention of scholars in other literatures, thereby promoting a higher level of debate and exchange of ideas with scholars in related disciplines, especially within comparative European and American literature; second, to activate the kind of radical, questioning approach among young critics and scholars that is a prerequisite for the development of modern Greek studies; third, to break down the nation-state isolationism of different disciplines within modern languages, which are too often regarded as the sacrosanct territory of experts in particular linguistic fields; and last but not least, to develop and creatively apply contemporary critical theory, in the belief that no reader or critic can give an "innocent" or "purely objective" reading of any text, and that theory has a strategic role to play, both in raising modern Greek studies above the stagnating effects of philology and biographical impressionism and in promoting a new kind of dialogue among scholars in the field.

Against the range and diversity of texts and critical approaches in this volume there are some more fundamental unifying forces than mere names and texts, which give to our studies a certain cohesion. First, thematically, all contributions deal with twentieth-century works not as texts within the closed hierarchy of a literary canon, but as living texts that constitute the literature and culture of our time, and as such demand from each of us a political responsibility to review and revise. This commitment to the present is especially relevant in the study of a literature that has had such a complex genealogy as modern Greek, from its slow and uneven emergence in vernacular verse of the twelfth century to the present day. Second, all contributions are ignited by different aspects of the post-structuralist debate, giving close textual readings based upon theoretical awareness and making methodological proposals. In this sense, the function of each paper is similar, and theoretical coherence is given to a diversity of texts and fields, while our common experience of discussions in Birmingham ensures a fundamental openness in approaches.

Not all texts discussed in this volume will be familiar to all readers. This is deliberate strategy, since we wish to draw the

attention of *all* readers, inside and outside modern Greek studies, to a variety of texts that have been either treated as the privileged domain of traditional critics or regarded as unworthy of attention. To this end, all quotations from texts are cited in translation, with key words given in transliteration (according to the most recent system of the Library of Congress). Familiarity with a particular text is not, and should not be, a prerequisite for the reader's interest and ability to follow a critical argument.

The arrangement of articles is neither chronological, generic nor thematic, but designed to foreground the methodological interconnections.

The volume opens with Lambropoulos' epistemological critique of the "History of Ideas," more specifically of literary history and its implied hierarchy of aesthetic values. This critique, applied paradigmatically to Dimaras' *History of Modern Greek Literature*, is followed by a positive proposal for a "genealogy" of literature. An outline for a genealogy of modern Greek literature is suggested, which seeks to replace traditional preoccupations with authors, sources, influences and criteria of artistic merit with questions of how texts compete in a struggle for power over the institution of literature (and criticism), and how the determining factors of what constitutes Greek tradition are constantly revised. The model for genealogy is drawn from Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

Foucault's concern is with the emergence of various disciplines and the struggle of discourses for power involved in each. This aspect has been insufficiently studied in relation to literary authors and texts. Jusdanis brings to our attention an unusual aspect of Cavafy's modernism by focusing on the politics of his poetry, tracing the interconnections between three poems (one hitherto untranslated) and one prose essay on apparently disjunct themes. Here, conflicts situated by Bloom in the human psyche are shown, according to the Foucauldian model, to be situated in the public domain of the struggle for power. He brings out the interrelatedness in Cavafy's work of poetic discourse with other discourses, and stresses, from a political perspective, the relativity of interpretation.

Dimiroulis, in his paper, aims at an analysis of rhetorical tropes in one of Seferis' well-known poems, "An Old Man at the

River Bank," and explores the antithetical relations between rhetorical figuration and grammatical structuration within his own poetic language. On this basis are questioned Seferis' persistent invocation of "humble art," his notion of a strict "economy" of writing and his Greek version of modernism.

Andronikos' study takes us from the politics and rhetoric of literature to the psyche of the addressee, or the psychological mechanism involved in the reading of a text. He examines the neglected question of the subconscious expectations and demands that every reader brings to the reading process, rejecting the traditional assumption that readers are clean subjects confronting the literary object (the text). He opposes certain reader-response theories by developing ideas from Barthes and Janov to draw attention to the factor of self-forgetfulness on the reader's part. Dispensing with the authorial perception, he explores the perceptions of narrator/reader in Myrivilis' *Vasilis Arvanitis*. Imagery is analyzed to indicate the psychological forces that lead the narrator to identify with his hero, and the reader with the narrator.

From addressee to the text itself: instead of traditional discussion about coherent structures, totality of meaning, reality and its mimetic qualities, Kakavoulia proposes, through close stylistic analysis of plot, character and point of view, the indeterminacy of the text, its elusive nature and inflationary meaning. Her study of Axioti's *Would you like to dance, Maria?* shows why traditional questions of narratology, such as "what happened?" or "who is speaking?" cannot be asked in the case of every text. The confusion of narrative times and voices results in the text's lack of external reality and extreme self-referentiality. She accepts the dissipation of meaning proposed by Derrida, but suggests that we accept the author's invitation to a dance of the reader with the text as an alternative to the fall into the abyss of signification.

The invitation is taken up by Alexiou, who conducts the reader across a wide range of Cavafy's poems, not in the direction of the dissipation of meaning or the death of texts, but toward uncovering the mechanics and the subversive power of poetic *logos*, *via* the consideration of the sophist's role. According to Derrida's principles of deconstruction, the "dangerous drugs" of poetry and eros are shown, first, to convert words, metaphors and concepts into a chain of ever-shifting oppositions; and, second, to act as

disseminating agents. Cavafy's recreated images and poetic excursions into the diachronic interstices of Greek tradition are seen neither as nostalgia nor as escapism, but as part of a will to save concrete moments of experience from history. Only writing, or the inscribing of discourse, is infinite, viewed always from the present perspective.

Herzfeld takes a critical perspective on the conventional sense of the category "literature" itself. His material, a verse quarrel from a Cretan village, is of a kind usually excluded from literary anthologies despite its obvious textual affinities with acknowledged modes of "folk literature." When material of this sort does appear in folklore collections, it is usually so lacking in social context that we are forced to posit a reified context for it in order to make any sense of it. Herzfeld shows that this stylized sense of a context, analytically separate from "the text," creates an artificial distinction, since a performer pulls much of what is ordinarily thought to be context into the text that is created at the moment of performance. By seeking literary properties in the social context as well as the verbal text, Herzfeld both dissolves and expands the categories of "text" and "literature." This makes it possible to escape some of the older forms of elitism and ethnocentrism in interpretation, especially as it also makes *local* concepts of meaning part of the mode of interpretation of locally produced verse.

Diachronic elements in Stewart's approach to the position of the Nereids among the *exotika* of Greek folklore are not neglected (as has been fashionable in certain circles), although they are explored not as part of a search for "origins" but rather through an analysis of specific words, metaphors and symbols within the whole cultural context of Greek myth, ritual and literature. Narrative techniques in the telling of contemporary tales are not ignored. Finally, the relevance of folklore for Greek literary studies is reassessed in terms of cultural tradition in its widest sense, rather than in terms of romantic notions of "Greekness." Throughout, the structuralist approach is considered but judiciously abrogated in favor of a more holistic cultural approach.

Romantic notions of Greekness are the object of Tziouvas' closing analysis, which implicitly criticizes the prevailing tendency to limit cultural studies to observation and description within self-

enclosed systems and in isolation from other disciplines and discourses. His study opens new paths for considering the interconnections between the discourses of literature and history, and examines the organic discourse of demoticist nationism (*ethnismos*) by means of a tropological approach to notions of Greekness. Demoticism tried to revise tradition and to appropriate the national past in order to acquire an interpretive—and therefore institutional—power over every text and enterprise. No innocent communication can take place between author/reader/text in any one case.

Most aspects of the act of communication of literature are therefore at least touched upon in this volume: from epistemological assumptions and political implications we move to questions of rhetoric, author/reader/narrator and to the text/language/writing, concluding with a consideration of relevant cultural and ideological factors.

This is an open enterprise . . .

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TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF MODERN GREEK LITERATURE

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In a recent comprehensive survey of the histories of modern Greek literature (Kehagioglou, 1980), despite the sufficient coverage given to every manual and textbook in print, the lack of any theoretical considerations gave an alarming sign of the humanistic pretensions operating at the heart of what still in modern Greek studies is characteristically called "philology." The reviewer took the necessary pains to describe and compare the existing histories in terms of content and structure, but neglected all ideological problems, thus failing to specify their epistemological assumptions. Histories (of any kind and field), however, are not clear panoramic overviews describing the evolutionary development of a practice or discipline but interpretations and revisions of its tradition and therefore subject to political evaluation. Histories of literature are themselves immersed in literary tradition, thus offering only one of its possible versions from a culturally conditioned viewpoint. Unless their historical specificity and discursive identity is properly examined, unless fundamental questions pertaining to aesthetics are dealt with, elaborate bibliographical guides will not help scholars, teachers or students any more than librarians to locate a book.

In terms of critical acclaim, public success and scholarly influence, *A History of Modern Greek Literature* by C. Th. Dimaras remains the best achievement in this area. Methodologically speaking, there are many possible viewpoints for a critique of this massive work. For example, a comparative reading of other similar histories that followed would show that most of them

(including the one by Politis) were essentially composed as responses/reactions to Dimaras' grandiose conception; or another study, an intertextual reading of the essays and polemics published by members of the so-called "Generation of the '30s," would reveal how the revaluation of Greek literary (and cultural) tradition they effected was finally consolidated in an official form by this history.

Yet, the purpose of this paper is different: to scrutinize a scholarly work, attempting to trace the critical discourse supplying its principles—namely, to describe, through a close study of the first paragraph of Dimaras' "preface," the assumptions lying behind the comprehensive act of reading that constitutes this work of definitive interpretation. In the second part of the paper, a radical approach to the subject through the politics of discourse is outlined. While the first part adopts Jacques Derrida's "negative hermeneutics"¹ as a strategy, the second uses Michel Foucault's "Archaeology" (later ingeniously renamed after Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*) as a model for historical investigation.

Here, then, is the full text from the preface.

The title of this book is *A History of Modern Greek Literature*. If we analyze each term in the title, we have a precise idea of its content. The term *logotechnia* (literature) contains the notion of art of expression. However, this book considers literature in its broader aspect as the totality of written works, excluding those concerned with a specific discipline. Even so, such a definition lacks essential breadth. Indeed, we should not forget that what distinguishes Greek letters is the contribution of oral transmission originating principally from the folksong. It also happens that some works of a scientific character, particularly those concerning the so-called theoretical sciences, are written in such a painstaking form that they should be

¹"Modern hermeneutics, therefore, which seems so high-flying, is actually a negative hermeneutics. On its older function of saving the text, of tying it once again to the life of the mind, is superimposed the new one of doubting, by a parodistic or playful movement, master theories that claim to have overcome the past, the dead, the false. There is no Divine or Dialectical Science which can help us purify history absolutely, to pass in our lifetime a last judgment on it" (Hartman, 1976:211-12).

included among literary works despite their scientific basis. Further, we should also keep in mind that certain branches of knowledge express an orientation of the mind that corresponds to the predominant artistic records of each period. Philosophic, historic, and geographic interests of a period, as well as those which treat of natural sciences, also leave their imprint on literary production. Hence, such works also have their place in this study, not from their scientific viewpoint but as an aid to a more precise understanding of the spirit dominating literature during a given period. From the moment these works are integrated with the intellectual life in their more specialized character, they cease to interest the historian of letters. What is important is the moment of change not the later evolution of the various branches of science. Hence, history of letters and history of culture are recurrent terms in the history of literature as presented here.

The author begins by suggesting that "each term in the title" provides "a precise idea of" the book's "content." This introductory statement is unfortunate in that it lacks proper historical understanding—a failure that can easily be found almost everywhere in the rest of the book. Dimaras is dealing with terms and ideas, not with concepts and notions, endorsing in this way the fallacy that, just as poets are endowed with talent and periods permeated by the *Zeitgeist*, terms are likewise invested with ideas in a static, unambiguous way. His initial claim unavoidably leads to the absurd conclusion that works bearing identical or similar titles (e.g., those by Rizos Neroulos, Kambanis or Knös) are dealing with exactly the same subject, regardless of the historical moment and the cultural place of their composition. Do terms like "history," "Greek" and "literature" refer to eternal ideas with a stable meaning? Or do they represent current notions of understanding that are culturally specific?

The author volunteers to analyze for us the terms of the title but tacitly refrains from admitting that he is imposing his own ideas upon them, that he is trying to manipulate public consent and revise literary tradition according to the dogmas of a new discourse, already established in the critical idiom during the late

1930s. Far from it, he will soon lay claims to objectivity by stating that (a) "we are concerned with developing a structure out of the facts and not with straining reality by superimposing a preconceived structure," and (b) "we are concerned with history, not criticism" (xv). But is there an objective historical description, a value-free work of literary scholarship? The above claims will be examined here with regard to the conception of the first term, "literature."

Before the detailed discussion begins, we can say that generally this text is a fascinating, indeed a masterful example of (self-)deconstructing epistemology. Its main body contains a synoptically proleptic deconstruction of the concept of literature in five successive stages that aims at preparing the ground for a new constitution of the relevant notion which is attempted at the end of the paragraph. In trying to enlarge and defend it, the author makes the concept ever more broad, unstable, untenable, until he loses control over its specific meaning and eventually ends up in the abyss of variably overlapping discourses without even the existential benefit of *aporia*.

The first attempt to map the territory uses the romantic definition of "literature" as the "art of expression"—and immediately gives rise to the spectre of the creative subject, the artist. Whose "expression" (the gifted individual's)? What bestows upon literature the status of art (the individual's talent, inspiration, or hard work)? Finally, what is expressed: emotions, feelings, opinions (and how)? This Wordsworthian notion of expression mystifies the verbal art by explaining away its nature in biographical terms. Even though, later on, the reader is reassured that "this is not a history of writers but a history of literature," throughout the book (from the table of contents to the chronological table) it remains obvious that this is another gallery of geniuses whose intellectual adventures are followed until they meet the fate of Solomos, who "found peace in the arms of his creator" (240).

Still, the author is unhappy with his definition and, instead of trying to make it concrete, he attempts to improve it by enlarging it to include all written nonscientific works. This (implicit) distinction between the "referential" and the "emotive function" of language, drawn through Seferis and Eliot from

Ogden and Richards (1930:149, 223), and Richards (1934:267, 273), could be, for some, at least a practical one in its crude matter-of-factness: literature is everything written that is not nonliterary—i.e., the artistic text on the page as defined by New Criticism.

Up to this point—the second stage of the elaboration—the whole discussion seems well contained within the contours of critical orthodoxy—accepting at face value everything that the Greek "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980:14) of critics and artists between the two wars called literary—and therefore unable to achieve its ultimate goal as we know it from its final realization: the revision of tradition and its sovereign canon. For an institution to be successfully appropriated by a discourse, for a discursive practice to be effectively transformed, for new objects to emerge as artworks and others to disappear from the canon, a drastic act of rereading must be exercised not only on the main body and the highest hierarchical positions, but also in the margins of the dominant discourse.

Every history of literature is in practice the history of an alternative literature. The primary purpose of Dimaras' history was to effect a permanent appropriation of the institution of Greek criticism by the discourse of the native modernistic movement as expressed mainly in the essays of its eminent representatives (including Seferis, Elytis, Karandonis, Sahinis, and Nikolareizis) and their literary magazine, *Ta Nea Grammata*. Thus, a reformation of aesthetic values would result in the suppression of standards and works established by the symbolist and decadent movements of the early twentieth century and the successful emergence of the new one. But for this effort to achieve its goals, the rules of the game and the mechanisms of prohibition and rejection operating in the borders of the reigning discourse had to change, while the norms of aesthetic understanding had to be revised.

The first such revision occurs in the next stage of the argument—the fifth and sixth sentences of the text—where the door is opened to folksongs and orally transmitted material in general. Here boundaries are transgressed/broken to allow for the inclusion of the vast field of folklore. Songs and other elements of folk culture can be subjected to aesthetic evaluation, and new genres can enter the mainstream. Speech invades the written word,

the anonymous is admitted into the artistic, acts of transmission become parts of tradition. Henceforth, Greek literature will never be the same again—its meaning has changed, its history is rewritten. Significantly, there is no mention of any criteria. The reader, especially the student, must already be wondering about the principles according to which admittance will be judged; but such criteria are absent both from the paragraph in hand and the book. Simply by attributing a vague cultural relevance to particular works, events or phenomena, the author will feel free to include, demarginalize or push to the periphery whatever serves (or threatens) his strategic purposes.

After breaking the lines demarcating the artistic from the nonartistic text, and the written from the spoken word, Dimaras proceeds aggressively—it takes him the next sentence—to break more boundaries, those between art and science: “literature” may contain the “notion of art of expression” but even “works of a scientific character” can be considered literary under certain conditions. Of these conditions, only one is mentioned, a “painstaking form.” The absence of any explanation and the awkward term trigger some embarrassing questions. First, how does one determine whether a form is “painstaking”—by employing biographical, stylistic, political or some other criteria? Second, is painstakingness a matter of originality, conventionality or propriety? Is it an outcome of authorial will or of critical evaluation (or both)? Third, is every “painstaking form” artistic? If so, can this be beneficially applied to other arts? Fourth, is artistic quality only a matter of form (and what is “form”)? Fifth, are art and science separate, interdependent or overlapping fields? Sixth, according to the author’s liberal assumptions, do we really have works of a “gay,” even beautiful “science,” fulfilling Nietzsche’s ideal?

No one already familiar with the preface or other parts of the history should expect any answers to these questions. The main reason for this silence is not the book’s manifest lack of theoretical self-awareness, surprising as it is for a work that was first published in 1948 (and a preface that has survived throughout its seven editions), appearing after the heyday of major modern movements of criticism like Russian Formalism, American New Criticism, the Prague School of Structuralism or the Geneva School of Phenomenology; the reason is primarily the

authoritarian aims informing the whole enterprise, which aspired at a total review of the canon of modern Greek literature²—or rather a scholarly confirmation of the tradition already tentatively revised by the “Generation of the ’30s” against the predominant aesthetic trends of their time. The book’s pretensions for an epistemological innocence reflected in its pseudohistorical method serve to conceal its ideological identity.

Returning to the text, we note that, according to the last argument, “despite their scientific basis,” even “some works of scientific character” can be considered as literary works provided that their form is satisfactory. But we are not told how this can be decided and who is the master of the relevant expertise, although we know that, later on in the book, works of such quality will be credited for their artistic merits. Still, it is obvious that the author has already ventured far in his exploration of the term “literature.” By now, his history is going to include additional works from national folklore (and acts of their transmission) as well as others from the theoretical sciences. If the humanistic assumptions of this approach are not yet sufficiently clear, in the fourth successive adjustment of the initial definition they will be stated explicitly, and to that effect not just one, as in the previous stages, but five long sentences are devoted. In its final stage, this gradual dismemberment of the then prevailing notion of literature—notice the steadily expanding length of the four preceding sentences—will culminate in the apparent artistic legalization of all works, documents and *œuvres*. Naturally, the author cannot bestow aesthetic value upon all of them; but by pointing to their cultural significance, he can at least deem their consideration absolutely necessary for a survey of this kind. Thus, any branch of systematic knowledge, any discipline, any science related to or representative of the “spirit dominating literature during a given period” can be shown to leave its “imprint on literary production.”

A modern theoretician might try to make a superficial case out of the seemingly intertextual leanings of the above suggestion. But one does not have to open the book at random in order to

²Indicative of this overarching aspiration is the fact that no other history of modern Greek literature published in this century was considered important enough to be included in the “Chronological Table” (of literary and cultural landmarks) of the Greek edition.

point to particular discussions that cancel this argument. A supposedly intertextual approach would be incompatible with the following ahistorical principle: "The aesthetic or historic importance of a writer or a work, in my estimation, emerges basically from a detailed examination of him [sic] or his work" (xv). (Furthermore, the discussion here is about the "spirit of the age," not Foucault's "discourses" or Kuhn's "paradigms.") A contextual analysis of this paragraph proves that its main points, instead of aiming at definitional clarifications, work toward the usurpation of certain terms, so that enough ground will be cleared when the actual examination of literary phenomena begins. As we shall see, at the end of the paragraph the then current constitution of the idea of "literature" is abolished, so that the individual revisionary acts of interpretation can follow unobtrusively.

The use of the terms "evolution" and "change" testifies eloquently to the biological model of explanation employed throughout the book. Indeed, the development of modern Greek literature is mapped according to "stages of evolution" and "turning-points" of change. Schools of thought and artistic movements are described naturalistically as succeeding one another in a natural sequence with only minor disturbances affecting their course. A solid hierarchy of major artists and minor figures is established, individual achievements are evaluated, and the idea of progress is consistently defended. Internal struggles and territorial fights are muted, the authority of dominant discourses is cunningly concealed behind ephemeral patterns of intellectual life, continuity is discovered everywhere, and all is made to fit into a homogeneous scheme of organic growth. The ending of the paragraph triumphantly concludes this argumentation with a description of literature that embraces all the humanistic "theoretical sciences." In this book, the author implies, the history of literature, the history of "*belles lettres*" and the history of culture almost overlap—they support, illuminate and define each other. This attitude leaves literature at his mercy: by adding larger concentric circles around the initial one—that of the conventionally planned territory—he manages to destabilize it and bend the limits of its discourse as designated by the previous critics in power.³

³Incidentally, he does the same to the discourse of his own field, literary scholarship, but an examination of this would exceed the scope of this paper.

The primary purpose of my argument so far has not been to criticize the *History of Modern Greek Literature* as such, but to question the epistemological assumptions underlying the very idea of composing such a history along similar lines. In fact, I find the first paragraph of the preface interesting as an ingenious piece of strategic deconstruction, but strongly disagree with the purposes it serves. The undermining of the romantic notion of literature is a commendable task when it interrogates privileged notions of presence and transparency; but the idealistic principles employed by Dimaras simply address the same old problem of anteriority only to offer an alternative solution. His attack on the independence and autonomy of literature aspires toward a revision of the established hierarchies that eventually—as a history of the reception of the *History* would show—made the "Generation of the '30s" the true heirs of the best national cultural tradition.

With the epistemological assumptions of Dimaras' alternative solution having been made manifest, the rest of this study will be devoted to a series of preliminary suggestions, not about yet another history of modern Greek literature but about its genealogy. The term is borrowed from Nietzsche and the methodological model from Foucault.

* * *

C.Th. Dimaras is the best Greek historian of ideas. To understand clearly the method he has been practicing, one can first turn conveniently to its most dedicated spokesman, Arthur Lovejoy. According to Lovejoy, the history of ideas "is especially concerned with the manifestations of specific unit-ideas in the collective thought of large groups of persons." "It is, in short, most interested in ideas which attain a wide diffusion, which become a part of the stock of many minds." Additionally, it is an "attempt to understand how new beliefs and intellectual fashions are introduced and diffused, . . . how conceptions dominant, or extensively prevalent, in one generation lose their hold upon men's minds and give place to others" (Lovejoy, 1936:19-20; see also 1940).

Foucault, on the other hand, in one of the major theoretical books of the century, has given the following compact definitions

of the history of ideas before opposing to it his own notion of genealogy: "it tries to rediscover the immediate experience that discourse transcribes"; "[it] is the discipline of beginnings and ends, the description of obscure continuities and returns, the reconstitution of developments in the linear form of history" (137). "It is the analysis of silent births, or distant correspondences, of permanences that persist beneath apparent changes, of slow formations that profit from innumerable blind complications, of those total figures that gradually come together and suddenly condense into the fine point of the work. Genesis, continuity, totalization: these are the great themes of the history of ideas" (138).

Even from the beginning of the preface, it becomes clear that Dimaras' survey is written from the particular humanistic viewpoint exposed in the above description. In outlining my tentative model for a genealogy of modern Greek literature as an institution, I will try to avoid these shortcomings by adopting a radical hermeneutic⁴ approach. Foucault, who has himself researched into social institutions (such as the madhouse, the clinic and the prison), follows his discussion of the history of ideas with the establishment of four major "points of divergence" between it and genealogy (part 4, chapter 1, 135-40). These points will provide the basis for the construction of my genealogical model.

I. Literature is a social institution dominated by different discourses in different historical periods, and simultaneously affected by the discourses dominating other institutions contemporary to it, such as criticism. Genealogy "tries to define... those discourses as practices obeying certain rules" (138). It is not an evaluation of authors, books, *œuvres* or ideas, of personal achievements and cultural influences, but a description of the discourses that allow for their emergence. Although histories of "schools" and "movements" impose homogeneity upon discontinuity and create a museum of masterpieces, a test case like Athenian Romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century remains an unsolved enigma for them, since no traditional historical explanation can account convincingly both for its popular success and for its artistic "failure." Today, it is all too easy to dismiss the mass

⁴For a brief overview of the German tradition of the field, see Palmer.

appeal of a poet like A. Paraschos or Sourris by applying modern aesthetic criteria, but that will never help our understanding, which, contrary to what Lovejoy thought, has to be strongly antipathetic, rather than "sympathetic" (1936:18), in order to discover the norms of literary competence and performance of the time.

"[D]iscourse," says Foucault, "is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they... can be assigned particular modalities of existence" and they "belong to a single system of formation" (107). Therefore, we may "speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse," or literary (and critical) discourse. A genealogy of modern Greek literature should examine the constitution of this last type in various periods—e.g., what "literature" meant in the Balkan diaspora, in Crete under Venetian rule, or in the Ionian Islands under British occupation—and the impact of other dominant discourses (like those of linguistics, theology or politics) upon it.

Such an examination would resist the conventional tendency to deal with individual artists, analyze single works or detect influences. In order to define the specific cultural meaning and importance of literature as an institution at a historical moment, it should study the relevant practices of reading and writing, and describe the institutional site, the contours, the limits and the operating mechanisms of the prevalent discourse. This is a "task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49). It should not have as its aim to recover the "spirit of the age" after the Asia Minor disaster (1922) or during the Civil War of the 1940s, trace the erotic or political sources of Cavafy's inspiration or blame moral prejudices for Lapatiotis' despair; in short, it should not read works as "documents," as signs referring to a particular order of reality, but as "monuments" of a discourse. "Discourse must not be referred to in the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs" (25).

To take a concrete example, a genealogical study of the Cretan play *Thysia tou Avraam* would dismiss as futile speculation whether it was an early work of V. Kornaros or not, briefly

summarize the extent of its debt to L. Groto's *Lo Isach* and concentrate instead on (a) the number, nature and distribution of popular editions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until it was "rediscovered" by modern philologists from the 1880s onward; (b) the number of its alternative versions circulating in (rejected) popular chap-books; also, the Greek oral tradition (in Crete and especially the Ionian Islands, with dramatic re-presentations); and (c) scholarly and popular reactions to uses of the text as edited and performed today.

Even though a certain discourse may be closely identified with the constitution of the literary institution at a given time and place, the fierce struggle continuously conducted by (and among) other discourses attempting to overpower the dominant one must not be underestimated. For this reason, the chronological order of events, far from being a linear, progressive one, is a series of catastrophic breaks occasioned when a discourse defeats and replaces another, establishing, in its turn, new rules of composition, production and consumption, and thus redefining the idea of its institution. The dangers (and attractive promises) of aesthetic appreciation lurk everywhere along the path of genealogical investigation. By praising Seferis for his innovative techniques, the critics fail to notice the battle that Greek nationalism won through his work against the cosmopolitan modernism as first proposed by Cavafy and Papatsonis; similarly, by evaluating exclusively the masterful architectural plan of *To Axion Esti* (1960), one misses its supreme strategy of appropriation whereby nationalistic surrealism sweepingly conquered (and thus reinvented) the Greek literary tradition of the last ten centuries. In general, when concentrating on individual achievements, one continues to see transhistorical alliances where only exercises of, and contests for, authority exist.

II. The task of Genealogy is clearly not to "rediscover the continuous, insensible transition that relates discourses, on a gentle slope, to what precedes or to what follows them. . . . On the contrary, its problem is to define discourses in their specificity" (139). In marked contrast to the history of ideas, which describes recurrent intellectual motifs and patterns reappearing in various forms, genealogy, as a "differential analysis of the modalities of discourse," shifts the perspective and emphasis

from continuity to disconnectedness. Every discourse has to be dealt with separately in its own historicity. Discourses are unique phenomena culturally determined, and it is their situatedness that should interest the historian—what makes each one "irreducible to any other" (139).

The authority of a discourse over the institution of literature is exercised by the imposition of certain rules and limitations on the construction and circulation of artworks that circumscribe the creative freedom of the author, the critic, the teacher and the audience. During the period of its domination, certain artistic norms⁵ define the dominant aesthetic, which directly affects the writing and reading practices/habits of the time. The fierce clash of critical discourses around Cavafy's poetry, the philological industry around Seferis' work and the international reputation of Kazantzakis and Ritsos should be explained from this viewpoint as examples of the intricate politics of interpretation involved in any act of public appreciation.

An interesting parallelism, for example, could be made between the ways in which the discourses of populism and nationalism—both crossing the conventional barriers separating the political right from the left—appropriated the work of Ritsos and Seferis respectively. Populism, the romantic discourse of domestic politics advocating the rights of the Greek "people," their spoken language and their liberation from western influences, projected Ritsos' poetry as the *voice* of the bard whose melismatic incantations about *Romiosyni* elude, by sheer force of inspiration, aesthetic scrutiny. Nationalism, on the other hand, the discourse of philosophy and "high culture" dating back from the Greek enlightenment, which has been trying to determine the origins and describe the continuity of the Greek "nation," portrayed Seferis' work as the sacred *text* of a model language, a written language recovering from the original sources and articulating the essence of *Greekness*. The above line of argument could show why the "readerly" Ritsos won the Lenin Prize, has everything that he writes published (and much of it turned into very popular

⁵"The aesthetic norm . . . is the form regulating man's aesthetic attitudes towards things; therefore the norm detaches the aesthetic from the individual object and the individual subject and makes it a matter of the general relationship between man and the world of things" (Mukarovsky, 31).

songs) and convinces with his "content"; while the "writerly" Seferis won the Nobel Prize, will have everything that he ever scribbled annotated and aesthetically appreciated and satisfies with his "form."

Following the same approach of historical specification, the poetry competitions organized by the University of Athens (1850s to 1870s), the short-lived, turn-of-the-century literary magazines (like *Techne* and *Dionysos*) or the reception of Karyotakis by the left and that of Varnalis by the right must be examined as concrete manifestations of particular discourses (rather than ideas). The importance of these intellectual phenomena does not lie in their contribution to the progress of culture, as the humanist in every scholar would like to believe, but in their function as new (open or closed) spaces for the contestation of the literary institution.

In a genealogical study, literature as an institution must be kept distinctly apart from all the others; still, its dominating discourse cannot be described autotelically, but in a parallel examination with the discourses marginalized by it and of those from other institutions that threaten or are affiliated with it. Their comparative, interdiscursive study must examine the constitution of the dominant discourse as well as its policies and means of territorial control—its mechanisms of admittance, exclusion, ostracism and suppression. In this light, the famous public discussions on poetry between Polylas and Zambelios, Roidis and A. Vlachos, Apostolakis and Varnalis, or Seferis and Tsatsos can be read as instances of the ongoing struggle between the dominant and the peripheral discourses; similarly, acts of censorship (like the disappearance of the work of Panas and Sarandaris) and others of revision (like the tactical discovery of Makriyannis), which are protected by histories of literature and defended on aesthetic or intellectual grounds, will be exposed in their ideological dimensions. A genealogy of modern Greek literature must be, above all, an antithetical reading (i.e., a counterreading) of modern Greek criticism that will eventually abolish the artificial barriers between "high" and "low," "good" and "bad," "progressive" and "reactionary" art.

The case of P. Panas (1832-1896) seems exemplary in many respects. His work is "low" literature of the highest order and

covers areas as disparate as lyric poetry, parody, translation and journalism. Strictly audience oriented, it was very popular and functional during his lifetime, but apparently its disturbing, unsettling strength did not survive the test of German aesthetics as administered by philology and criticism. The most interesting part of his poetry consists of anarchic satires that ridicule both Athenian and Ionian romanticism by exposing the uniformity of their stylistic formulas. Parody has been the most rare and the least appreciated genre in modern Greek literature. Panas' compositions, along with the rest of his work and his political ideas, have been suppressed for almost a century now. The canon of the tradition established by the discourses of nationalism would not allow for such an intensely personal testimony about the unresolved dilemmas of romantic idealism: good poets educate the nation—they don't commit suicide. Panas' work has never been collected.

III. Genealogy deals with individual discourses, situating them in their historic, cultural and linguistic specificity, describing their mechanisms of operation and rules of domination. In order for this enterprise to succeed, a preliminary deconstruction of traditional ideas is absolutely necessary. As illustrated through the analysis of the beginning of Dimaras' preface, this act of revision has been indispensable even for the composition of another history of literature; and as we now know, his dismantlement has served certain vested interests very effectively. But it is necessary to go further and to subject to an epistemological critique the whole cluster of romantic notions about the artwork, the *œuvre*, the author, influence, progress and tradition, along with the supporting aesthetic principles of organic unity, structure, totality, autonomy and presence. The history of literature (or any other art) is by its very nature a *catalogue raisonné* of masterpieces that attributes aesthetic achievements to artistic geniuses, thereby acknowledging and exclusively honoring the "authority of the creative subject" (139). Genealogy, on the other hand, dismisses this idealistic approach by viewing literature not as a library of *œuvres* but as a social institution, and its history as one of interpretations and the conflicts among them; in its concerns, no talents and their triumphs or ages and their spirit are included, only discourses and their contest for institutional power.

The idealized signature of Solomos,⁶ the lost portrait of Kalvos or the obscure identity of the author of *Elliniki Nomarchia* (1806), from a hermeneutic perspective, mean nothing; what Cavafy used to tell his friends (or Embirikos didn't), what Beratis destroyed (or Gatsos didn't write after all), why Kambysis came back (or Papadiamandopoulos left)—such information is completely irrelevant for a historical understanding. The suicide of Karasoutsas, the madness of Philyras or the drug addiction of Lapathiotis are of mere biographical value, although often misused to mystify the politics of interpretation and the author's own desperate involvement with it. Literary works are neither created by gifted artists nor discovered by insightful critics, but produced through the complex interplay of artistic wish, interpretive will and public taste. Reading is always public and intertextual, and genealogy foregrounds these particular characteristics. Instead of being subjected individually to self-contained aesthetic approaches, texts should be read as they have been written—against each other. Seferis should be read as a defense of Palamas against Cavafy, Palamas as a defense of Valaoritis against Solomos, Elytis as a defense of Sikelianos against Karyotakis, Vakalo as a defense of Cavafy against Sikelianos—or, to enter the adjacent territory of criticism, Argyriou as a defense of Spandonidis against Karandonis, and Lorentzatos as a defense of Apostolakis against Agras. Needless to say, these names should be read/used only "under erasure," only as signs referring to cultural phenomena rather than as identifications of individuals or collected works.

The search of Lorentzatos (1915) for a transcendental Greekness is just such a cultural phenomenon of particular significance. While Seferis had been constantly defending the meaning of "literature" from Cavafy's deconstructing skepticism, he had been conducting a parallel battle against Agras' formalism along the lines set up by Polylas (1825-1896) and Apostolakis (1886-1947). This critical debate has centered around the notion of style. The cosmopolitan aestheticism represented by Cavafy and Agras described through it a Wildean world of elegant appearances where the beauty of form promises an elusive, earthly pleasure but refuses to anchor truth or grant salvation. The dis-

⁶For some dexterous (and delightful) desecralizations of the writer's signature, see Foucault (1969); Derrida (1977); Hartman (1981: *passim*); and Fish (1982).

course of Victorian puritanism employed by Apostolakis and Lorentzatos defines good style as the mark of moral excellence with a Carlylean fervor that castigates all expressions of sensuality and tries to reach beyond the sin of language toward aesthetic redemption. Set in the proper ideological framework, the sign "Lorentzatos" stands for the oppressive critical discourse of moralism that approaches art as the prayer of the pervert and attempts to save essence from its seductive grip.

Philology and criticism continue to look for the inspiring influences of Dostoevsky in Vizyenos, Nietzsche in Chatzopoulos, Joyce in Pentzikis, Éluard in Elytis or Ginsberg in Poulis. But it would be another unfortunate lapse into the history of literature for genealogy to search for this type of evolutionary patterns, since this would lend support to ideas of intellectual progress and cultural continuity typical of the humanistic utopia. Even the callisthenics of the artistic will as described by Harold Bloom in his theory of influence cannot account for the constitution of the subject, the availability of roles in a particular game and the institutional constraints exercised upon every performance. Foucault has recently suggested "another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (1982:780).

This radical study of power relations inside and around the institution of literature might begin at its periphery, and examine specific notions of literariness and quality in order to explain, for example, how certain genres (like the prose poem) fall out of fashion, how certain works (like that of Kalas) are suppressed, or how certain discourses (like that of philosophy) invade the territory. Such an approach would also examine the impact on Greek literature of controversies such as those about the "Language Question" or the "Great Idea" in terms of antagonistic

strategies working for the appropriation of a social institution. Here, the main point of interest is neither the political beliefs of individual authors nor the potential contribution of particular works to mass class-awareness. Historical understanding must proceed from crucial points of conflict and trace the significance of the "forms of resistance"—be it the enlightened criticism defended by Roidis, the amalgamation of genres practiced by P. Yiannopoulos and I. Dragoumis or the linguistic nihilism pushed to its extremes by P. Takopoulos—against reigning "forms of power." It is not the development of the realist fiction or the science of folklore that should draw the attention of the genealogist and the hermeneut, but rather the efforts of discourses that defied their authority to resist their imposition. This kind of study undermines the metaphysical assumptions inherent in aesthetic appreciation (as epitomized in histories and anthologies) and diffuses aesthetic values in order to render the field available again to new explorations.

IV. Finally, the genealogical inquiry is not an act of recovery—"it does not try to repeat what has been said by reaching it in its very identity" (139). The idea of the author, the creative subject, is dismissed along with all other notions of origin. What is important is not the moment of the construction of the work but the process of its emergence as an art work—its cultural production. An act of recovery tries to save the original from abuse and, by referring to sources of inspiration and intention, unconceal the work in its purest form and real meaning. Genealogy, on the other hand, "is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object" (140). In this sense, Solomos' *Porphyras* (1849) is far more important for a reading of Elytis' *Second Lieutenant* (1945) than the poet's own experience of the Second World War; the popular success of Xenopoulos is far more closely related to his audience's expectations than to his faithful depiction of social reality; and the rediscovery of Kalvos (1792-1869) by Palamas in 1889 was more a successful appropriation by the militant patriotic discourse of the "Great Idea" than a long overdue reevaluation.

The history of Kalvos' reception/use provides indeed a wealth of interesting material for a diachronic semiotics of literary taste. His work has been repeatedly "rediscovered" by successive

"schools." First, the Demoticists invented an alternative national poet, the bard of the continuity of the race; later, the Symbolists emphasized the dark musical quality of his decadent imagination; Surrealism celebrated the lyrical strength of his sweeping imagery; and more recently the self-proclaimed "Generation of the '70s" portrayed him as a forerunner of the "beat" ethic. It is with these cultural uses of his work as an object of discursive practices that a genealogical description should deal. Instead of trying in vain to recover its true, its real meaning, it should study its emergence as a discourse-object through the above appropriations—the different forms of its cultural constitution and the politics of the respective interpretations. Needless to stress, this would not be yet another scientific exploration but a perspectival interpretation of interpretations—a critical metacommentary on the modes of emergence of the artistic sign "Kalvos."

Genealogy as a discipline describes systematically how works become discourse-objects, how constructed objects emerge as artworks; but its self-awareness—what Gadamer calls "historical consciousness"⁷—does not let it forget its own specificity: being an interpretation, "it is nothing more than a rewriting." It is not objective or discourse-free; it is relative and perspectival. It examines rules, norms and codes while other, analogous conventions govern its own operations. A suprahistorical inquiry into the mechanisms of discourse conducted without any institutional restrictions is impossible. Every scholar, historian, critic or reader belongs necessarily to an "interpretive community" whose reading and writing habits constitute a discursive practice. Despite the opposite impression given by its name, genealogy looks at the present through the past;⁸ its results are relevant, if not urgent,

⁷"Historical consciousness knows about the otherness of the other, about the past in its otherness. . . . It seeks in the otherness of the past not the instantiation of a general law, but something historically unique. By claiming to transcend its own conditionedness completely in its knowing of the other, it is involved in a false dialectical appearance, since it is actually seeking to master, as it were, the past. . . . Historical consciousness in seeking to understand tradition must not rely on the critical method with which it approaches its sources, as if this preserved it from mixing in its own judgment and prejudices. It must, in fact, take account of its own historicity" (Gadamer: 323-24).

⁸"Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text is part of the whole of the tradition in which the age takes an objective interest and in which it seeks to understand itself" (Gadamer: 263).

for our life, our self-understanding, our involvement in the game of power.⁹

After arriving at this point, even the cautious reader of Dimaras' *History* will probably feel quite unhappy and insecure with the above conclusion. Clearly, the skepticism of this paper is not an answer to his positivistic expectations from a "science of literature" or his anticipation of stable, safe knowledge. If things are so relative, why really bother at all? If there is no progress in research, if culturally bound interpretations endlessly succeed one another, what are our chances for retrieving some essence from history, some presence from our past? But for me the real question is clearly not an epistemological but a moral one. In a world where discourses (i.e., systematizations of formulated knowledge) relentlessly clash for power over the very human capacity to make sense, our duty is to resist all disciplined safety and fight against any establishment of authority. In this particular case, in order to keep modern Greek literature fresh, informative and productive as a field of inquiry, we must oppose all attempts at its totalization by disturbing the sovereign hierarchies and foregrounding marginalized or suppressed discourses that can still question their validity. I am not talking about alternative histories but about genealogical investigations that will make the writing of more histories problematic. Instead of being remapped, the whole territory should be opened to discussions that will encourage a more active role on the reader's part—that is, imaginatively adventurous understanding and irreverently creative writing.

⁹"... to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves" (Gadamer: 359).

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C. P. CAVAFY AND THE POLITICS OF POETRY

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The politics of Cavafy's poetry has been largely ignored or misunderstood, since traditional criticism assumes that his *oeuvre* itself is apolitical. Thus, any study of its politics that was undertaken proved to be biographical in so far as it involved the search for Cavafy's personal political orientation and its relationship with the current *Zeitgeist*. This approach, whose epistemological assumptions are based on the romantic notion of art as the expression of the artist's personality, is the one most often used in Cavafian criticism. Regarding his *oeuvre* as a transparent medium, critics read his work in order to find Cavafy in it. As a result, the person that was ultimately discovered—depending on the interests and wishes of each critic—ranged from the licentious masturbating homosexual to the political and committed citizen.

One of the first to move in this direction, with regard to Cavafy's politics at least, was G. Vrisimitzakis, who in his essay "The Politics of Cavafy" attempted to illustrate that Cavafy was indeed a political poet (Vrisimitzakis, 1975). The chief aim of this study was to uncover Cavafy's own political philosophy, or to be precise, his political *Weltanschauung*; in other words, it entailed a cursory analysis of "political" poems—which in fact can be categorized under the so-called historical classification—leading to the conclusion that "Cavafy's politics is a politics of disenchantment... a politics of decline" (Vrisimitzakis, 1975:34). With such an impressionistic definition of politics, it is not surprising that Vrisimitzakis has received little attention since.

Subsequently, Tsirkas, in *Cavafy and his Epoch* and *The Political Cavafy*, undertook to interpret Cavafy's poetry from a