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JOURNAL OF THE HELLENIC DIASPORA

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THE GREEKS IN EGYPT: ETHNICITY AND CLASS

by ALEXANDROS KITROEFF

DEPENDENCY, REALIGNMENT AND REACTION:
MOVEMENT TOWARD CIVIL WAR IN
GREECE DURING THE 1940s

by PHILIP MINEHAN

THE POETRY OF NICOS PHOCAS: A SELECTION

AGAINST "THE VIOLENT POWER OF KNOWLEDGE"

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AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF POWER"

by VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS

UNIV. of MICH.
FROM GRAMMOS TO TET:
AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN GREECE
AND BEYOND

by ELIAS VLANTON

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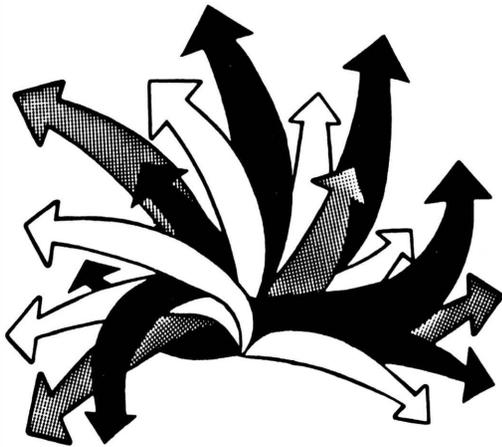
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Resisting on "The Power of Knowledge and the Knowledge of Power"

by VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS

*The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.*

Lambropoulos quoted Shakespeare, nodding in agreement as he finished the paper. The envelope containing it had his correct address but instead of his name it was simply directed "Against 'The Violent Power of Knowledge.'" Lambropoulos was not totally sure that he was the right person to receive it, so he kindly asked the postman who brought it to stand for a second at the door of his apartment, till the addressee could be perhaps identified by a second reading of the 'printed matter' enclosed.

Lambropoulos was slightly perplexed. The author had the indiscretion to use his name many times without quotation marks, but he realized that in fact the paper made references to quite a few Lambropuli—a new species?—and that increased his embarrassment: was he one of them, at least one of the possible receivers? was he part of the party criticized? The text was confusing in its desperate personification of ideas. "Who are you," inquired the postman, who was growing impatient. "Call me Ishmael," snapped the other. "That's none of your business. Your job is to understand codes, apply rules, and read signs—not to discover real persons or trace intentions. In this respect, you are like me, a professional interpreter. We both forget about individual identities, trying only to deliver messages: we perform, we do not explain." "That is true," agreed the postman thoughtfully. "I would be interested to see what you can do with this paper."

Ishmael started slowly, structuring his reasoning. The text is (self-?) attributed to one "Beaton." First, let's bracket his name and render it phonetically, so that we can get rid of intruding questions of authorship, biography, intentionality, motivation, and others of similar irrelevance. Let's blur the voice of the writer by using his name as a sign: [biytn]. Through this strategic use of the sign, we can proceed to re-textualize his "statements of present belief" and examine their "power to explain"

in its hermeneutic context from an appropriately political viewpoint. By bracketing the name, we cross out the 'author' and attend to the discursiveness of the language which speaks his authority. Now, after having proven our "disinterested aloofness," we can look for the addressee.

The first Lambropulus encountered in the paper is the writer responsible for another paper called "The Violent Power of Knowledge." Ishmael knew that this one was not he, since he ended his own text under the same title with an explicit abdication of any authorial ownership or privilege: "I am not 'I.'" He had no wish to take credit for a "blockbusting tour-de-force" and pretend that it was an achievement of his individual talent. He refused to identify with that figure and receive the paper, conceding that his was the voice behind the text. Texts are commodities which do not belong to anybody in particular.

Another Lambropulus was attacked in the series of forceful objections that followed: clearly, [biytn] was offended by his "arrogance of tone," "excesses of personal libel," "liberal sprinkling of catch-phrases," and other violations of philological decorum. The species accused was the scholar, who is normally expected to conform to the prevailing exegetical practices that defend decency and protect mediocrity from questions irritating the insecurities of their legitimacy. Ishmael noticed the cross-eyed persistence of [biytn] in ignoring quotation marks, which made him unable to distinguish between the signified, the name, and the person—let's say 'Seferis,' Seferis, and Seferiades. He also noticed his anxious eagerness to be counted among "the initiated" by providing the sources of current "clichés"—and duly acknowledged his success. At the same time, he pointed to the failure of [biytn] to understand the pivotal concept of intertextuality, and his unfortunate lapse into influence-chasing: how could he attribute securely the 'full presence' to Derrida and not, say, Heidegger? the 'fear of belatedness' to Bloom and not to Bate? the 'writerly desire' to Barthes and not to Kristeva or . . . or . . .? Ishmael wanted to say that in his paper he was simply forthright and unpretentious. But [biytn] says he was ambitious; and [biytn] is an honourable man.

On the other hand, Ishmael felt that he had tried to expose the ontological fallacies of orthodox philological scholarship and had expressed actively his indifference toward the conventional expectations of those who claim exclusive knowledge for their profession. Obviously, he could not receive this paper as a scholar, since his own had defied the proprieties which downgrade literary interpretations to humble footnotes serving masterpieces.

A third Lambropulus becomes the target of the author's outrage against what he perceives as the annihilation of criticism—and this new one must be a critic, thought Ishmael. [biytn] blames him for imposing "an incogruous analogy between critical discourses and the politics of totalitarian states," and wonders about the purposes of producing or reading literature any longer, if this depiction of things is correct. He even reprimands him for dishonesty and totalitarianism. Ishmael felt

mildly amused. Of course we are *not* producing or reading literature: we are just *consuming 'literature'* by applying specific (e.g., in modern times aesthetic) interpretive practices. Why worry about it? It exists only as a cultural institution. Significantly, there was no word in the paper about the nature, the constitution, and the operation of critical discourses, no concern about the politics of interpretation—only a moralistic and alarmist attempt to rescue its reputation from ideological taint. Behind the noble vision of a "Platonic dialogue or Hegelian dialectic," he could see the imminent threat of the Platonic Republic and the Hegelian State loom large—hence his own concern about the totalitarian politics of states: it was the state, not any "other parties," that he branded as totalitarian.

Ishmael found himself in agreement with the opinion that "for one critical approach to prevail over another [] it had to demonstrate that it possessed explanatory power with regard to a text"—which of course accounts for the invention and establishment of texts and canons: this is precisely what drew them to fierce competition. He himself had focused his critique against the notion of the autonomous text, foregrounding its historicity by outlining the history of its successive appropriations. As a genealogist of interpretations, he had no interest invested in saving 'Cavafy' from abuse or oblivion. But [biytn] says he was dishonest; and [biytn] is an honourable man.

The next Lambropulus invented happened to be an assistant professor who was too accused of dishonesty: instead of observing the logical consequences of his alleged nihilism and committing suicide, he was holding to his post and publishing his views. Only now did Ishmael start grasping the plot of the paper in his hands: [biytn] was arraying a series of established and commonly acceptable subjective positions, trying to lure him into one and trap him under a label or category or role. Unable to deal with philosophical ideas and methodological problems, he was building an insidious *argumentum ad hominem* by provoking Ishmael to come out and identify himself. "Who are you," [biytn] would like to ask personally the principals of *Götterdämmerung*, "and what makes you think you can sing?"—thus effectively diverting any suspicions about the institutionality of opera. Ishmael had assumed that exercises in prosopopoeia like this one were impossible after the last scene of the Chereau production of *Der Ring*, where the massive anonymity and the pervasive historicity of the crowd facing the audience stunningly presented the intersubjectivity of discourse.

Any results?," interrupted the postman.

*I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.*

Ishmael recited flatly. Obviously, he did not care whom the sign [biytn] stood for; but only because he wanted the envelope delivered properly did he voice the question: whom is [biytn] beating? Not him, at least not in this case. Accidentally, he was a university professor, but

not one who found criticism "pointless and reprehensible"; on the contrary, he believed that there is much worth saying about criticism exactly because, for some time, it had been pretending that it had something "of even temporary validity or subjective integrity to say about literature or the world." Therefore, he could not receive this paper. But he was able to see clearly the intrigue, how [biytn] was striving to subjectize and consequently subject him-to turn him from no(t)one to some-one. He had to resist. But [biytn] says he was arrogant; and [biytn] is an honourable man.

The rest of the paper left him entirely unmoved and indifferent. Its largest part was devoted to a regressive defense of humanism which these days could be taken seriously only as a parody in its belated advocacy of a Ptolemaic order of texts and hierarchy of values. To insist (*contra* Gadamer, Feyerabend, Kuhn, Rorty, Cavell, Derrida, Foucault, Fish, Eagleton, . . .) that "authors, texts and critics all exist [] outside of quotation marks" even ignorance cannot justify. What then? Ishmael froze: he felt the cold hand of the secret police of academic criticism searching for his ideological identification card and heard [biytn]'s beatification of the subject interrogate his beliefs: what is your purpose, "to provoke constructive debate" or "deconstructively to foreclose it"? are you for or against us? do you support or do you condemn criticism? Ishmael summoned his courage and decided to keep resisting on.

When he discovered the last Lambropulus presented in the paper, he was well prepared. After being called upon and asked to apologize as an author, a scholar, a critic, and a professor, finally he was now identified as a moral consciousness—and put on trial. He refused to respond. He was not interested in the game but in its presuppositions, not in texts but in practices, not in works but in interpretations, not in persons but in discourses, not in truth but in institutions, not in morality but in ethics—not in values but in their (Nietzschean) genealogy and re-evaluation. He refused to be treated as a subject, to be pushed into a pre-arranged subjective position sanctified by [biytn]'s Beatitudes which allowed for legalized violence, the "power to explain"; he would resist subjectification and subjection not as an idealist revolutionary but as a sophist: by subverting the game opposing the rules, confusing the players, provoking the audience. His "real purpose" was anti-agonistic: achieving not the importance of being [biytn] but the integrity of not being any Lambropulus. He intended to resist on.

The postman decided that the paper was undeliverable. "Should I return it to sender?" Ishmael disagreed:

*O masters! if I were disposed to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong,
Who, you a know, are honorable men.*

And then he suggested: "No, just publish it; and I will send him a copy of Derrida's *La Carte Postale*. Ours is the post-age." He was again in a good mood. "Would you stay for some Wagner," he proposed spontaneously, adding: "How about the Immolation Scene?" The postman stood. "Have you got any Sex Pistols?" he asked. "What kind of music are you into?" Ishmael wanted to know. The postman was standing at the door, at the threshold, at the margin, like a radical difference: a resolute experiencing of borders. "We are not into music," he retorted; "we are into chaos."