

MODERN GREEK STUDIES YEARBOOK

PUBLICATION OF MEDITERRANEAN, SLAVIC, AND EASTERN ORTHODOX STUDIES



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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AND
EASTERN ORTHODOX STUDIES

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The main objective of the *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* is the dissemination of scholarly information in the field of modern Greek studies. The field is broadly defined to include the social sciences and the humanities, indeed any body of knowledge that touches on the modern Greek experience. Topics dealing with earlier periods, the Byzantine and even the Classical, will be considered provided they relate, in some way, to aspects of later Greek history and culture. Geographically, the field extends to any place where modern Hellenism flourished and made significant contributions, whether in the "Helladic space" proper or in the *Diaspora*. More importantly, in comparative and contextual terms, the Mediterranean basin and Europe fall within the province of the *Yearbook's* objectives. Special attention will be paid to subjects dealing with Greek-Slavic relations and Eastern Orthodox history and culture in general.

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Nanos Valaoritis and Thanasis Maskaleris, eds., *Modern Greek Poetry: An Anthology* (Jersey City, N.J.: Talisman House, 2003), xi, 626 pp. \$24.95 paper.

Recently, an impressive number of modern Greek poems have been finding their way into English. After a period of silence for over a decade, when no anthologies appeared, in the last eight years eight surveys have come out in England and the United States. In chronological order, there appeared in April/May 1996 the special issue "Greece" of *London Magazine* (ed. Alan Ross), in 1998 *Grind the Big Tooth: A Collection of Contemporary Greek Poetry* (ed. Robert Crist) and the special issue "Greek Poetry" of *Modern Poetry in Translation* (ed. David Ricks), in Spring 1999 the special issue "Greek Poetry: New Voices and Ancient Echoes" of *Agenda* (ed. David Connolly), in 2003 the literary anthologies *Greek Writers Today*, vol. 1 (ed. David Connolly), *Modern Greek Writing: An Anthology in English Translation* (ed. David Ricks), and the volume under review, and finally in 2004 the bilingual *A Century of Greek Poetry, 1900-2000* (eds. Peter Bien, Peter Constantine, Edmund Keeley, and Karen van Dyck). To these can be added volumes and special issues that present translations of individual poets or collections, and of course the literary magazine *Mondo Greco*, published twice a year and edited by Dino Siotis in Boston since 1999. In addition to this flourishing activity (greater than anytime since the 1970s), it is quite interesting to note that all of the above surveys focus mostly or exclusively on poetry, while over the last twenty years the major literary phenomenon in Greece (in terms of both artistic quality and mass popularity) has been the return of the historical novel and the ascendancy of post-modern fiction.

The book at hand covers nearly one hundred years (1890s to 1980s) and presents about one hundred poets. It represents a major publishing event in that it is the first anthology to introduce experimental writing to the English-speaking world. For readers interested in Greek literature that questions conventions and pushes the boundaries, this is the book to buy. They will discover a trove of irreverent, inventive, challenging verse mostly unknown outside Greece.

First, a word about the editors. Ioannis "Nanos" Valaoritis, the great-grandson of the national poet Aristotelis Valaoritis, is the greatest poet of the Greek diaspora since Cavafy, and the greatest Greek author alive today. He has been writing with distinction in every conceivable genre since his earliest years and is also the last great representative of the tradition of the poet-essayist that began with Dionysios Solomos. Thanasis Maskaleris, Kazantzakis Chair Research Professor Emeritus, was one of the pioneers of Modern Greek Studies in the United States, especially in institutional terms, where the entire field had to be charted in the early 1970s. Teacher, scholar, translator, administrator, writer, and advocate, he has acquired a comprehensive view of Modern Greek on the American campus and beyond. The two editors used to be colleagues at San Francisco State University and have lived for almost four decades in the same city.

Since the 1940s, most accounts of Greek literature have presented post-Enlightenment writing as a Hegelian evolution toward the grand synthesis of the Generation of the 1930s. Anthologies and surveys in languages other than Greek trace the march of literary history up to the triumphant reconciliation of all trends in the work of poets honored by the Nobel and Lenin Prizes. One obvious liability of this approach is that it overlooks writers who do not fit the idealist view of literature as manifestation of the spirit. Another one is that it reduces any poetry appearing after the 1960s to, at best, a conservative role in preserving and reiterating a synthesis that presumably constitutes the greatest national monument. Poetry of our era cannot forge new paths because it has nowhere to go.

The completion of a new national canon in the 1960s, accomplished by a broad configuration of authors, critics, scholars, journalists, and artists, brought the indignant reaction of certain intellectuals and creators of that decade. The latter had no institutional power, only enthusiasm and innovation. They started their own groups and magazines, and voiced their passionate opposition to a stifling consolidation. Their goals converged with those of the revisionary left that was resisting the ideological orthodoxy and socialist realism of the Greek Communist Party.

At that time, the conflict between forms of national monumentalization and philosophical experimentation, in Greece as elsewhere, was vehement. In 1967 the military dictatorship suspended this conflict, giving the conservative cultural forces an unexpected lease on life. Then, in an effort to create the broadest anti-junta front possible, disagreements in ideology, art, and identity were shelved. If national artistic icons could be mobilized in the anti-military opposition, there was no point in questioning their cultural relevance while living under a state of siege. Philosophical issues re-merged after the fall of the dictatorship in several quarters and in many forms. But by the late 1970s the revisionary task was much harder, first because the fermentation of the 1960s was gone, and second because the national view of literature had acquired new, pseudo-radical legitimacy under the mantle of resistance against the colonels. Since cultural resistance of the junta years focused fatally on national identity, the new canon which had claimed this identity since the 1940s emerged stronger than ever. The monumentalist view of history was proclaimed in unprecedented celebrations of a transhistorical Greekness that promised to reconcile and redeem all past national divisions.

The anthology under review is meant as a corrective to such a monumentalist approach to history, which limits severely the chronological and artistic scope of Greek poetry. It pursues its goal not by proposing an entirely new approach but by deconstructing the dominant one, that is, opening it up to new possibilities from within. Thus, it constitutes the first comprehensive look at Greek modernism from a consistently postmodern standpoint. The book is structured according to nine poetic trends: symbolist forerunners, traditional neosymbolists, mainstream modernists, surrealists, modernist existentialists, left-wing poets, avant-garde, neomodernists, and neosurrealists. Within each trend, poets are listed in the order of their birth. The overall goal is to provide a historical picture only partially based on chronology, which instead invites readers to draw alternative connections among poems and poets.

To take an example from the Generation of the 1930s, Seferis (born in 1900) is grouped with mainstream modernists, Embirikos (1901) with surrealists, Karelli

(1901) with existentialists, Pentzikis (1908) with the avant-garde, Ritsos (1909) with neosymbolists, and Vrettakos (1911) with the left wing. This original arrangement separates writers of the same generation and so complicates the established picture because it emphasizes stylistic variety over chronological homogeneity. It helps us see behind the traditional grouping of a "school" a rich variety of discourses that represent roads taken and not taken by Greek poetry. Thus, we can discern the substantial debt of Kavadias to Skarimbas, Sarantaris to Papatsonis, Dimoula to Karelli, Gogou to Katsaros, and Siotis to Engonopoulos. To take another example, this time from the Generation of the 1970s, the anthology distinguishes among neomodernists (Jenny Mastoraki), neosurrealists (Pavlina Pamboudi), leftists (Rena Hatjidhaki), and the avant-garde (Erse Soteropoulou). This is something new for, as with its predecessors, this generational group has never seen its differences highlighted.

In addition to the stress on difference and multiformity, this volume brings to the fore the dissenting quality of Greek verse. Next to perfectly crafted poems praising love and the sea, we find intemperate, dissonant, protesting pieces challenging unity, continuity, stability, and harmony wherever they find them—in history, faith, education, community, family, psyche, etc. Poetry validates and celebrates but it also questions and discredits; some lines fulfill while others infuriate; verses may speak openly or obliquely. For some forty years, the two editors have been reading Greek literature in San Francisco, one of the most cosmopolitan and polyphonic poetical environments in North America. In their bold choices, the Mediterranean meets the Pacific. These choices will enable many readers, Greekless or not, to discover extraordinary writers of great vitality who are participating in our times with a sharp eye for history and an inventive ear for myth such as (in chronological order) Ektor Kaknavatos, Epaminondas Gonatas, and Nikos Phokas (all born in the 1920s), Vyron Leondaris, Thanasis Tzoulis, Tasos Denegris, and Kiki Dimoula (born in the 1930s), and Ioanna Zervou, Dimitris Kalokyris, Andreas Pagoulatos, and Maria Efstathiadi (born in the 1940s)—all of them very much alive and publishing!

In addition to the two editors, translators include a broad array of eminent practitioners, from the late G. Katsimbalis, Rae Dalven, Lawrence Durrell, Kimon Friar, and James Merrill, to John Chioles, Edmund Keeley, Peter Bien, Jane Assimakopoulos, George Economou, and David Ricks. The range of translators adds exceptional strength to the volume, as it gives the reader samples of different idioms of rendition. For example, the sixteen poems by Milto Sachtouris come from no less than five hands, suggesting the idea of a translation workshop on a single poet. If a quibble is allowed on a twenty-year labor of devotion to poetry, the book would have been fairer to its range had it included a few indices listing who published and who translated which poem where and when.

This volume needs to reach all those who know Greek poetry from its canonical figures, from ancient (Homer to Theocritus) to modern (Romanos to Gatsos). Sophisticated readers of Greek ought to get acquainted with this extensive body of poetry in order to develop a more inclusive view of Greek verse. The line from Calliope to Callimachus to Kalvos to Cavafy to Kalokyris, though not continuous (but then, what is?), represents a tradition with remarkable coherence and resonance. Furthermore, this tradition deserves broader study at the college level. University teachers of Greek literature and culture routinely adopt surveys of history and society for their courses. Teachers of anthropology, history, and politics would similarly enrich their courses if they added such an anthology to their textbooks. Enhanced by a general introduction and prefaces to the nine sections (all written by Valaoritis), as well as succinct portraits of the ninety-three poets, this volume explores twentieth-century Greece from the standpoint of its most representative authors. Here poetry, the preeminent Greek art of the period, captures political, social, military, cultural, and personal turmoil and transition. It is worth keeping in mind that, among Greeks, poetry (like all the arts) is not considered a "high" endeavor in any elitist sense but rather belongs to common culture, hence its sense of civic responsibility, and the corresponding interest in it of media and the educated public.

Predictably, anthologies invite complaints about omissions and objections

against biases, especially when they claim comprehensiveness and objectivity. This one wears its commitments on its sleeve, and is therefore open about its philosophical positions. Readers who disagree will be forced to declare theirs. Translations also invite criticisms for accuracy and sensitivity. But then again, if there were a proper way to put Cavafy into English, we wouldn't have seven translations of his entire corpus, let alone innumerable others of individual poems. It may be more realistic to explore the world that anthologies of this kind construct, keeping in mind that they are imaginative creations of their editors. The volume which Valaoritis and Maskaleris have put together offers a Greek world of absorbing beauty and tremendous power.

Vassilis Lambropoulos
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John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xii, 270 pp. \$23.00 paper.

John Binns's primer on the Orthodox Churches is certainly the first and probably the last general study of Orthodoxy to open with a discussion of the Syrian Orthodox Church. The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches—usually the prime focus of such works—do not make an appearance until well into the second chapter. Binns's choice of Syria as a starting point announces his determination to examine Orthodoxy in all its diversity: geographically, culturally, and theologically. The introduction invites the reader to walk down Straight Street in contemporary Damascus, a route that runs past the churches or residences of three patriarchs of Antioch: the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch, and the Greek Catholic (Uniate) patriarch of Antioch. Thirty miles to the west in Beirut, Binns reminds the reader, reside the leaders of the Antiochan Syrian Maronite Church and the Syrian Catholic Church. "The life of the Christian communities in Syria shows clearly that there is not one single Eastern Orthodox Church, nor one doctrinal tradition which can be called Orthodoxy" (2).