

Literature as
National Institution

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National Institution
STUDIES IN THE POLITICS
OF MODERN GREEK
CRITICISM



Vassilis Lambropoulos

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Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK was written between 1981 and 1984 in Columbus, while I was working as assistant professor in Modern Greek at the Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures of the Ohio State University. Some of its parts appeared previously in earlier versions: chapter 1 in Margaret Alexiou and Vassilis Lambropoulos, eds., *The Text and its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature* (New York: Pella, 1985); chapter 3 in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 3: 1 (May 1985); chapter 8 in the *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10: 1–2 (Spring 1983); chapter 9 in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1985); and the Postscript in *Simioseis* 20 (February 1981). I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reprint. An earlier version of chapter 4 was delivered as a lecture at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, London, and Birmingham in 1982.

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Literature as
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Introduction

THIS IS A BOOK about literary criticism, about that critical discourse which deals systematically with texts considered literary. It is therefore twice removed from those texts. In this sense, it exhibits no immediate interest in textual features, characteristics, structures, and qualities—in either immanence or fullness; it is a work about, not of, literary criticism. It focuses on what criticism does with literature, on the organization by criticism of that realm of knowledge and experience commonly known as “literature.” This viewpoint marks the book as an exploration of literary status rather than style. I have sought to examine how criticism confronts, disseminates, and promotes literature—what kind of truth, according to criticism, literature possesses and provides.

For an inquiry about the truth of literature, the traditional romantic and postromantic practice has been to look into the “text itself” in order to describe its authenticity (variably understood as originality, literariness, reflexivity, rhetoricity, ideality, or iconicity). That ontological approach, oblivious of its own place in history and culture, disregards the conditions allowing for its own operations and perceives the object of its study as a work rather than a function. Thus it prioritizes and privileges the independent text—the written, the writing, the Scripture, the language of the Book, the always already and forever there. It is only recently that we have gained a broad historical awareness of the cultural situation of literature and have realized that it precedes and determines literariness. Institutional and ideological developments in the academic and other marketplaces have forced us to admit that a meaningful literary reading is performed and understood against a necessary background of literary training, competence, and a particular cultural literacy. Nothing

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looks literary or is recognized as such unless we already know what literature is; we must already have been shown literary pieces, learned the proper codes, mastered the conventions, and followed the rules. Accordingly, the aim of criticism should be the definition and description of those conditions necessary for the recognition of "literature," for the production of appropriately literary texts. But criticism happens to be the very institution dedicated to this task of text construction, and this disqualifies the institution for such an investigation: the production of literature cannot become criticism's central object because criticism as an institution is itself housing literature's production.

This is a book, then, about the institutionality of literary criticism—literary criticism as a cultural and national institution with its own sites, mechanisms, and jurisdiction, which produces, safeguards, and propagates the truth of literature. This vocabulary may perhaps sound familiar in the late 1980s, but its relative popularity does not, as yet, reflect many dramatic changes in the prevailing modes of reading. Although it has become quite appealing and fashionable among scholars to employ literary criticism as an indication of liberal disposition, its persistent applications to canonical texts (with the suspicious aim to "reread" the classics) and mainstream (or "commonly taught") languages serves only to confirm their status, affirm the allegedly boundless self-reflexivity of the masterpiece and reinforce the violent supremacy of Western civilization. I purposefully decided to refrain from this self-congratulatory and self-serving indulgence of the profession and concentrate instead on its critical practices: the modes of reading established by and constitutive of criticism. From this perspective, literary criticism becomes the institutional space where the application of acceptable reading tactics produces literary texts. For this reason, all the individual discussions of literature included in this volume start with a piece of criticism, rather than a piece of literature, thus emphasizing the aspect of production and displacing epistemological issues. I deal with productive or nonproductive readings, not with created texts.

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It has been a strategic decision. By following this course, I wanted to establish some of the constitutive elements of literary production: the intertextuality of writing, the mediatedness of understanding, the formative role of reading expectations, the enabling presence of relevant literacy, the conditioning horizon of tradition, the institutionality of interpretation, and the economic character of axiology. It is both a refusal to grant literature independent existence and autonomous value and a choice to examine the economy of its constitution. Thus, throughout the book I discuss literature's natural public uses and the politics involved. If the political is the institutional and if production is practice, then criticism as an institutional practice serves the political production of a particular domain of knowledge—the truth of literature or truth-as-literature. I fear the rest is interpretive formalism and decadent ontology: aesthetics.

Aesthetics has evolved since the mid-eighteenth century as a secular hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of the profane medium rather than of the divine message. But it never outgrew its biblical faith and its protestant methods: from Baumgarten to Beardsley, from Bakhtin to Booth, and from Benjamin to Bloom, hermeneutics remained a search for deep meaning and revelation, an analysis of the book, and a negative eschatology of perfection; it saw writing as creation and reading as interpretation. Hermeneutics beautified the text and idolized its form. Furthermore, it provided grounds of legitimation for the author, the critic, the specialist, the scholar, the academy, the curriculum, the anthology, the journal, the conference, and the university press—all the roles and enterprises centered on what was most human in man, the humanities. The institutional procedures of constitution, circulation, and consumption of texts were rendered immune from doubt and protected by the theology of art and its rules, rites, and rituals. But this is no longer true, given deconstruction and the recent “confusion of theoretical tongues.”

With deconstruction, the discourses of poststructuralist criticism committed the ultimate political hubris—the totalitarian aspiration of tyranny. The poststructuralists proclaimed criticism

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as the highest stage of literature in the same way that the romantics had earlier proclaimed literature as the highest stage of language; and they argued aggressively for the superiority of the self-reflexive over the literary, while the structuralists had equated the two. Now all literature aspired to the state of self-reflexivity and criticism. What followed is common memory: criticism went bankrupt after trying in vain to prove that it was its own justification, contrary to all previous theory, which had accepted its subservience to literature; debates about political issues such as institutionality, tradition, canon-formation, evaluation, gender, race, power, and violence erupted everywhere. Soon, it appeared that two main paths were open to future research: pragmatist acquiescence, in the name of an agnostic realism, deals with problem-solving in the context of local communities; and political resistance, inspired by a historicist skepticism, opposes all impositions of interpretive authority.

This book follows the second path and deals with the discourses of literary criticism, the discursive practices of literary production. The perspectival methodologies of genealogical historicism inform the book, and it examines strategies employed in specific institutional sites and social contexts in order to produce certain cultural literary values. The text is seen as a product—a commodity and an exchange value whose circulation is regulated by mechanisms of distribution, exclusion, and imposition in a historically determined field of power forces competing for authority. I have chosen to look directly into the operations of literary criticism to undercut the artistic privileges of literature and the positivistic claims of scholarship. My effort has not been to stand outside the realm and attack it, but to expose its guiding principles by stressing their intrinsically political character. This is done in a sophisticated spirit through direct agonistic involvement with the policies criticized. To the extent that my book debates legitimacy, contests power, and plays the only game in town—a town insistently viewed as a *polis* of competing interests, rather than a community of conflicting goals—it is a rhetorical enterprise.

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Clearly and openly this political book subscribes to the ethics of resistance and deals with the institution of literary criticism—its principles, operations, and products; and it opposes that institution as a cultural establishment. By “institution” I refer to any concrete and recognizable organized element in a society, a social formation that includes an organization and its respective laws and customs. Therefore, “institution of literature” denotes a particular system of reading and writing practices, with its own set of rules, code of values, and cultural space, where texts are treated in terms of inherent meaning and artistic quality. I do not oppose those who happen to control it or even their methods, and I do not seek a better or different criticism. The target of my critique is criticism itself, and the argument is about its dispensability and disposability. I believe that criticism—literary or other—has run its historical course, as an institution, and has exhausted its cultural services. I need not necessarily appraise this overall phenomenon, at least not here. But the demand of the times, in the wake of poststructuralism, is no longer to change criticism but rather to abolish it. In the studies that follow I mean to contribute to this goal. An investigation into the politics of criticism can only take another step toward its abolition, a political step against and beyond the limitations of aesthetic understanding. As for the question that may be raised about the future of literature and art in a world without any grammarians or custodians of beauty, the answer can only be direct and simple: what “literature” or “art”?

FOR THE PURPOSES of such a political and antithetical approach to criticism I was fortunate enough to choose, for reasons not altogether voluntary, the realm of modern Greek literary studies. I do not think that another area could have proved more suitable for my explorations or more challenging to my ideas. Here some explanations are in order.

Contemporary Greece as a state and as a country, as a political entity and a historical experience, remains the most spectacular and interesting construct of idealism. Conceived by romantic

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Hellenism, established by the most intricate and paradoxical interplay of international political, economic, and ideological forces, and sublimated consistently by all subsequent quests for the true origins of Western civilization, it continues to exert an incessant fascination on our imagination, for it is presumed to be a unique case of historical, racial, and cultural continuity. The reasons behind this still popular image are multiple and complex. It may suffice at this point to paraphrase a platitude and note that, had it not existed, Modern Greece ought to have been invented. Indeed, perhaps it was. All that can be said with certainty is that the inhabitants of the ancient place, starting in the late eighteenth century and especially after the successful revolt against the four-century-old Turkish domination, found themselves under immense external pressure to respond adequately to the inflated expectations and to adjust properly to the exalted demands of European and American romanticism which, from Goethe to Beethoven and from Shelley to Delacroix, needed to affirm and satisfy its classical yearnings. This pressure to be true Hellenes was presented to the Greeks as their only way or chance to define an acceptable identity and justify their political claims. The choices were limited and the time for reflection unavailable; after much hesitation, they, and especially those who considered themselves "victors," opted for cooperation.

Among the numerous priorities facing the liberated nation as it tardily entered the scene of modern history, a rejuvenated culture was one of the most urgent: the country had to start immediately creating its autochthonous monuments and showing that the ancient spirit was still alive and flourishing. Literature, in particular, had to be cultivated and promoted, so that linguistic and intellectual continuity could be eloquently attested. Intellectuals in the West were already looking into the folk songs for signs of a lingering spiritual vitality. Thus, Greek writers started reading and writing in the glorious shadows of Homer, Aeschylus, Thucydides, and Plato. The unparalleled models were still there, but were their inheritors worthy of that treasure? Foreigners and Greeks of the diaspora alike asked this question, and

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it had to be answered both positively and expeditiously. Before long, the romantic anxiety of belatedness took over all the creative forces of the nation and directed them to a single, obsessive purpose: ancient idioms, styles, genres, and themes were emulated, similarities between past and present were sought, old traditions and institutions were revived, even puristic purges—for example, linguistic, thematic, ideological—were conducted on a large-scale effort to prove and guarantee continuity, coherence, and commensurability between classical and modern literature. At issue was not quality but identity; they sought authentic Greekness.

Although the case of contemporary Greece was extreme, it was far from unusual. Recent genealogical research into the humanities has shown that the emergence of disciplines as we know them today, such as linguistics, folklore, history, archaeology, philology, and philosophy, coincided with the development of a new political entity and reality, the national state. These disciplines were established to serve the quest for the state's own unique identity, and they were soon integrated in an institution that became the repository of national self-knowledge, the university. The ideological positions and fundamental presuppositions of the disciplines originated with the concrete political needs felt by the first nations of the eighteenth century: a distinct origin, history, language, and tradition that would together define a native ethos and justify the claims to autonomy and independence of that entity. These disciplines, therefore, did not develop as fields of study for given realms of human experience; rather, they were established to produce the respective aspects of an alleged national experience and thus analytically compose its identity. Literature, in particular, far from expressing the collective soul portrayed by humanistic criticism, became the textual category which philology constructed when called upon to provide a local, native writing tradition. In that distinctively historicist sense, this category remains bound to the broader one of the nation; all literature is national, and there is nothing but national literature. As such, it serves a specific political purpose: it ascribes

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to certain texts and modes of writing an ontological character, that of artistry; it defines their cultural constitution in terms of an indigenous origin; and by so doing it contributes to the effective demarcation of a unique national identity. This insight helps us realize that beauty is after all an ethnocentric notion, the author a chauvinist of writing, and artistic quality a national property.

These basic aspects of the literary enterprise can be clearly recognized in the tasks prescribed to the modern Greek writer. His work had to fulfil two requirements: to be literary and to be Greek. To satisfy the first requirement, stemming from the romantic and realist tastes of the nineteenth-century, the literature had to present important ideas, deep feelings, rich characters, and intense experiences through artistic means (that is, through a refined and affecting linguistic expression). According to the other requirement, the work had to reflect the Greek reality in a total way—in terms of language, subject, style, structure, and message. Of the two, the second was the stricter and sterner because of its critical importance: Greekness could possibly exonerate the absence of some literary qualities, but no artistic merit could compensate for its lack. A work exhibiting no concern about, or sense of, national identity was worse than just bad: being one of no justifiable interest to the nation, it was simply irrelevant. Literature had to be national, or be nothing at all. Hence, two roles were available to the author: that of the mirror, which depicts by reflecting, and that of the seer, who guides by prophesying.

It was never easy, however, for the aspiring writer to comply with the demand for Greekness, since the meaning of the concept has been always fiercely debated. Its essence has been a subject of persistent and all-encompassing controversy, and conflicting descriptions of its contours have been given. Obviously, on this issue depends much of the future course of the country and the self-understanding of its people. Every writer must first decide about Greekness and then create accordingly while, of course, simultaneously defending his choice. Consider a simple example, the perennial “language question.” It was agreed that a

work ought to be written in the truly Greek idiom. But a debate has been raging for more than two centuries about the precise character of that idiom between purists, who propose ancient (classical or Hellenistic) models, and the demoticists, who promote the commonly spoken language. Thus, any writer's decisions about personal expression entail taking sides on this controversy, and the Greekness of his idiom still cannot win unanimous acceptance. The same should be said about the other aspects—subject matter, style, structure, and message; their selection and development must conform to a comprehensive model of Greekness, but there is always more than one available and claiming supremacy. Involvement in larger issues is unavoidable: any choice shall be inspected and judged; but at least the basic commitment must be made and convincingly shown.

Greekness, then, as the highest criterion and as an explicitly ideological principle raised unequivocally to the ultimate literary standard, has retained its prestigious, unassailable position since the 1830s, safeguarded by critics and observed by authors. But neither historical chance nor patriotic provincialism prevailed. Significantly, Greekness has also been the exclusive measure of merit for almost all non-Greek students of literature. Even a hasty look at the reception of Greek literature abroad reveals that the extraordinary appeal of writers like Kazantzakis, Vassilikos, and Samarakis, and the prestigious international prizes won by Seferis and Elytis (Nobel) or Varnalis and Ritsos (Lenin) have been openly explained and justified by the Greek character which foreign audiences discovered in their work. This response has further reinforced the conservative attitudes of Greek critics and has helped their ethnocentric concerns survive intact. Criticism, it seems, has trapped Greek writing in an endless, irredeemable quest for national authenticity; it has defined its duties in exclusively nationalist terms. Its mission is to support the claims and care for the interests of the modern state, which is projected as the benevolent, eternal motherland bestowing existence and identity.

The critical system informed by such ethnocentric concerns is

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the focus of this book. My purpose is to present the range, ideological character, and typical manifestations of those concerns through a selective examination of representative critical approaches. I argue that Greek philology and criticism have always viewed the artistic text as a transparent sign developing out of the national roots, whose signifier is the form of the work, its artistry, and whose signified is its very Greekness, its identity. Critics have traditionally examined the two concepts in their interdependence to see how they match, how they fit together, and especially if the artistry of the text provides a faithful and powerful picture of its identity. Thus, writers have responded dutifully to the ideological demands of the modern Greek state and have served its political exigencies by supporting, in the realm of culture, its assertions about the generating power of the national roots; in other words, they have contributed to the legitimization of state authority by inventing one of its cultural achievements, literature, and naturalizing it as an expression of the ethnic tradition.

One might perhaps object that this kind of book should not be the first priority for Modern Greek Studies; that a more introductory one is still needed, one continuing the groundwork started some twenty years ago by familiarizing the English-speaking audience with major Greek authors and works through surveys, translations, and monographs; or that this volume is probably too advanced for that audience, to the extent that it presumes some familiarity with the field, including works not yet available in foreign editions. These arguments, however, might apply if it were part of my purpose to endorse the critical tradition established so far and adhere to its doctrines. That is obviously not the case. My completely different, even antithetical approach is directed against that very tradition and its humanistic epistemology. In this book, I am not dealing with Modern Greek Studies but with a broader set of issues in whose context the very category "Modern Greek Studies" is symptomatic of a wider problem.

By addressing myself to critical rather than literary, to theoretical rather than artistic, issues, I want to achieve two supplemen-

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tary goals: to examine the ideological inclinations of Greek criticism and to highlight the necessity for an informed and skeptical historical awareness in literary studies in general. My discussions of Greek criticism purport to show how the field emerged in response to concrete political needs in the realm of culture as the new state had to prove its national composition, purity, continuity, and autonomy. The individual chapters analyze specific acts of literary production and describe the mechanisms, discourses, and strategies involved. These acts are each time situated in the area of criticism as a cultural practice.

Thus, I show that the discourses of criticism have constructed texts invariably as artworks, employing as a measure of aesthetic and ultimately moral merit the Greekness of the literary sign, the ethnic authenticity of literature. If that is the case, I contend, it is pointless for specialists—critics, reviewers, scholars, philologists, professors—to continue interpreting more works, since they can only strengthen the existing critical tradition, consecrate the established canon, and preserve nationalistic fantasies. Greekness works essentially as a valuation of institutional authority since it is a concept of exclusive power. It is particularly suspect and dangerous because much more than just literature or art comes under its decisive jurisdiction, membership in a community, social status, and political recognition are also included. By designating true identity, it legislates the rights of any citizen. In our specific case, designating literary quality arbitrates aesthetic merit and artistic status, intellectual importance, readership, prominence, availability, and influence. These are potentially oppressive functions that criticism was called upon to fulfill.

Furthermore, I have dealt with Greek criticism as an outstanding and exemplary case of modern literary criticism in general. At least in the small but developing field of Modern Greek Studies, nationalism is often admitted and talked about openly. Things seem much worse in the so-called advanced fields, where ethnocentric compartmentalization reigns supreme, as evidenced by divisions in departments, centers, journals, conferences, book series, and fields specializing in national cultures. There the

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autonomy and uniqueness, if not the supremacy, of one particular nation goes unchallenged and rather defines the scope and approaches of research. Needless to add, questions about the nationalistic origins of modern concepts like tradition, culture, art, or literature are simply inconceivable to those who have dedicated themselves to their protection.

It is the second goal of my critique of Modern Greek Studies as a field to indicate the nationalistic fallacy inherent in the enterprise of literary criticism as it has developed since the mid-seventeenth century into an interpretation of great artistic texts. The significant fact that the emergence of the Greek state, criticism, and literature coincided, illustrates in the most graphic fashion their close mutual dependence: how criticism constructs the literature needed by the state of the industrial age, thus participating actively in the invention of a national identity. In the case of Greece, this interdependence between state, criticism, and literature, established at the point where the industrial age and the romantic spirit—history and the individual, revolution and belatedness, progress and apocalypse—converged beyond disentanglement or reconciliation, can be seen in disturbing clarity. But, in fact, such interdependence supports any critical enterprise, any interpretive reading, and any institutional practice related to the artistic text; moreover, it effectively conditions its production and consumption. Here again, modern Greece, kept safely at the periphery of contemporary culture, can be found at the center of the ethnocentric politics which produces the discourses of cultural domination.

ACCORDING to the antifoundationalist view propounded here, literature does not inhere in texts but is produced by the application and interaction of established reading techniques. To analyze it we must look into those cultural practices that make it possible and meaningful. We need to see how the game of “reading literature” is played, how the relevant rules are authorized, who can participate in it, where it can take place, and also what is at stake. The most interesting space to be investigated is

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naturally the institution of criticism, the official site for games of reading and the authorized arbitrator of literary taste. Under its jurisdiction, literature was naturalized when reading as an act of private recovery was sanctioned. The individual chapters of the book examine the conditions, the powers, and the effects of this jurisdiction. At the end of the book, in the Postscript, by exceeding the realm of Greek criticism I have attempted to interweave the various findings of this examination and indicate paths toward an alternative system of rules and practices. I repeat that my interest is certainly not oriented toward a better or enlightened criticism, rather, it is explicitly aimed against criticism, which I see as a romantic bourgeois institution, and in favor of sophistic inventions and rhetorical uses of texts—any texts. Once we reach a political understanding of the discourses that produce literature and of the practices of interpretation involved, it is a matter of intellectual integrity, I believe, to discontinue our commitment to the respective exercises of authority and to look for other sources and forces of power.

The first essay deals with questions pertaining to the writing of literary history. It focuses on the first paragraph of the “Preface” that C. Th. Dimaras wrote for his *History of Modern Greek Literature* and examines its epistemological and methodological assumptions. Enterprises like this have seemed so far quite unproblematic since they claim to record a tradition. But I show here that in fact they monumentalize a canon, a particular selection of literary masterpieces. What is more, the literary canon itself is a national monument and the apotheosis of a projected indigenous culture. Dimaras, like the rest of his colleagues who have labored on a similar work, reified and reaffirmed a national culture: he wrote a history of Greekness in literature, a Greekness whose version had already been formed by a discourse—critical, philosophical, political, legal, sociological, historical—that emerged in the 1930s as a reaction to a threatening atmosphere of despair, defeat, and disbelief that followed World War I. To his project, I counterpropose a genealogy of literature, a study to

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investigate how and why certain texts have been privileged with aesthetic values and incorporated in a dominant canon.

The second essay moves from the broader issue of how a total and native tradition is canonized to the more narrow one of canonic reading. Here I draw from the skillful reading by George Seferis of *The Memoirs* of General Makriyannis as a work of artistic prose, which established that warrior of the 1821 Revolution as the major writer of Greek prose. It is an intriguing case of ingenious invention: a sophisticated author with modernist affections and affectations reads superb literary qualities in the reminiscences of a freedom fighter, who acquired his literacy to publicize his experiences. His argumentation is based on a clear-cut conception of Greekness: what inspires, justifies, and elevates this confessional writing is its authenticity, its firm grounding in the national soul. Thus, a successful performance in the game of reading literature yields a spectacular result: an old but so far neglected masterpiece of folk literature, a new addition to the national treasure. I conduct my analysis of the strategies employed in the context of the politics of interpretive communities and intend to show how invested interests are served by text productions. Such communities, I imply, have achieved authority when they can participate successfully in the formation of a canon engraved and stored in the national unconscious.

Another successful act of invention but of a different nature and scale is presented in the next essay. While Seferis's approach was that of literary interpretation, this one follows a more philological path, the critically annotated edition. Iakovos Polyas, a critic and translator, edited the manuscripts of the poet Dionysios Solomos after his death and prefaced them with a biographical essay. That volume introduced the work of the poet to the public, which so far knew only very few of his early compositions, and confirmed his reputation as the bard of the reborn nation. But what was presented and still is viewed as a mighty piece of scholarship is essentially a literary work: Polyas used the conventions of a distinctively romantic genre of fiction, the *Künstlerroman*, which presents the spiritual growth and intellectual peregrina-

tions of an artist, to fashion the figure of Solomos as a national poet. The ideological emergencies of the times demanded and soon welcomed the construct. The editor's device proved a salutary choice: the scattered fragments that he inherited were painfully unsuitable for the publication eagerly anticipated by the Greek audience. By editing and arranging them according to rules provided by a respectable genre and by responding sensibly to a set of fixed literary expectations, he achieved an artistic effect that has not yet outlived its political purposes.

Chapter 4 moves from the use of Solomos to the poet's own readings of his work. This shift should not be surprising; critical discourses operate not only in public but also during processes of composition, thereby drastically affecting both critics and writers. Solomos is a case in point. The desperate fragmentariness of his output is usually attributed or even credited to a noble perfectionism that allegedly molded and inhibited his creativity. But a careful look at his aesthetics reveals that his idealism was the constant cause of self-destruction. This idealism should be understood as both philosophical and patriotic, directed to both the Hegelian idea and romantic Greece. His search for the absolute in art, or rather his affliction by this critical standard that he gradually absorbed and internalized as his basic working principle, damaged all attempts at completion. Solomos hoped that Greece, as the Mother and Muse of writing, would bless his work with the true national identity, blending and fusing signifier and signified and turning unobtrusively the verbal sign from a literary to a natural one. Witnessing his desperate struggle against the perils of signification and the arbitrariness of language reminds us of the extent to which the institution of criticism not only produces literature but also influences any attempt to create it.

A detailed reading of an unfavorable book review that objects to the indeterminate structure and character of a novel follows. We saw earlier how Polylas achieved an effective closure on the fragments of Solomos and offered the result to the national culture. Here, a critic is unable or unwilling to do that; on the contrary, he criticizes the novel *Whirlwind* by Yannis Beratis for its

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unsettling openness, which leaves the reader suspended between fiction and truth, imagination and reality, impression and belief, beginning and end. The review itself does not mention any requirements with respect to the national genuineness of the work, but we can understand its failure to produce a satisfactory result only by referring to certain effects of that criterion. The power of the concept of Greekness to ascribe aesthetic quality and status prevented Greek literature from developing any awareness of its own institutionality: "Greekness" presupposes a transparent, unproblematic signifier which points to a signified essence; it also demands that literature play a missionary role in cultivating and distilling the national psyche. Therefore, it has conditioned the reading expectations, or the literary competence, of the audience and has reduced its involvement in the realm of fiction to acts of realist recognition. Ultimately, only what has been already prescribed by the principle of Greekness can be read positively as literary.

The pervasive and imposing presence of this principle is examined next in its application to literary language. The discussion begins with a description of Greek modernism in Linos Politis's *History of Modern Greek Literature* but centers on a postmodernist story by Renos Apostolidis. Through narrative analysis, Politis shows that, despite a few exceptions, a Greek postmodernism is structurally impossible because the tradition never really experienced the turmoil of the avant-garde. Without such an event, the nomothetic authority of romantic aesthetics prevails unquestioned. Authors have always written Greek as if it were the only language, a natural medium of expression, and only rarely and temporarily have some of them suspected its conventionality. Dissenting voices were quickly suppressed on grounds of national psychological and moral health and never allowed to suggest that the authentic might be after all a fantasy or a fallacy. Thus, radical experimentation has been indefinitely suspended since only the exalted voice of lyricism and the faithful mirror of realism are accepted as trustworthy vehicles of Greekness. As long as literary language may aspire to nothing but imitation, Greek writing

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remains at a stylistic stalemate; furthermore, no criticism questions its servitude to the narcissisms of ethnocentrism.

The seventh essay pursues the topic of this prohibitive conservatism into axiology by presenting another instance of literary invention, a collective one: it is the *oeuvre* of Yannis Ritsos as produced in the volume celebrating his seventy years. Here not one writer but seventy-two intellectuals contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of a long and distinguished career in literature. The system of artistic values invoked and the range of approaches exhibited interests me. The participation of foreign contributors makes the occasion special: as it is discovered, they, too, like the rest who honor the poet, share the same basic conception of literature; Greekness emerges as a fundamental element of that conception. The enumeration of their points of agreement leads to an examination of shared strategies of validation and then to a general description of the work portrayed in these appreciations. I conclude that these readings together produce "Ritsos" as a literary commodity, endowed with the highest artistic values, in response to the specific aesthetic needs of the audience for modern Greek literature. These needs are part of the larger economy of literary taste and seek satisfaction in enterprises like this one, resulting in the consecration of masterpieces and their assimilation into the canonized tradition. It must be understood that Greekness as an epiphany of the national spirit is an integral part of the aesthetic desires nurtured by the reading public of Greek literature and therefore a major source and measure of quality.

The next step is to proceed from a synchronic investigation of art production and value attribution to a diachronic one. This is done in a close examination of the fate of one particular text, a poem by C. P. Cavafy. This composition, in the span of some fifty-five years, has gone through an impressive number of what are conventionally called "receptions" with a wide variety of results. I mainly attempt to trace the development of this interpretive history and to show that, behind each individual act of invention and underneath every reading, an operating dis-

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course allowed for a performance. Furthermore, I classify those performances according to their enabling discourse in three categories and show that, beyond apparent disagreements, ideological positions may well coincide and coexist. To grasp the mechanisms of production, we must look into the discourses that constitute and circumscribe bodies of literary knowledge. The discourses of Greek criticism, for example, have never been free of nationalistic biases; on the contrary, they have always tried to accommodate the question of identity by contesting among themselves the concept of Greekness. Through their fierce struggle for exegetical authority the prevailing sense of authenticity is established, despite later assurances about advanced maturity, improved understanding, or ethnic awareness.

The last essay gathers together the main points made about the study of literature so far and deals with the major challenge presented to the humanities, and to Modern Greek Studies in particular, by the languages of theory. The challenge goes beyond humanism, idealism, romanticism, and formalism—the four basic dimensions of thought in our modern age of the last two centuries—beyond the age of the autocratic subject. The urgency of this challenge can be clearly perceived in that sublime romantic construct known as Modern Greece and especially in the critical paradigms devoted to its widely admired literature. The critics' ethnocentric orientation, guided by political demands for systematic demarcations and defenses of the national identity, has sanctioned only mimetic modes of writing and an obsessive inquisition of the ethnic origins of the literary sign. This quest for purity and autonomy—the Greekness of the text—still arbitrates merit, shapes taste, determines status, and regulates production; it can be overcome only when undermined from inside by counterinductive procedures exposing its rhetorical tactics and ideological inclinations. An anti-aesthetic, use-oriented criticism—a political reading of the concepts, nation, tradition, and literature that will uncover their necessary interdependence—is necessary to point to their cultural conventionality and dissolve their alliance.

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The central concern of this book is stated in its subtitle: the politics of literary criticism. Since the seventeenth century, those politics of the field and its corresponding disciplines and professions have been producing a new body of systematic knowledge, "literature," and have been taking care of its truth. I have focused on the production of critical knowledge as the truth about literature in order to investigate the invention (and *not* the structure, the literariness, the rhetoricity, the reception, the essence, the message, or the origin) of those texts commonly considered artistic. My emphasis is on acts of construction and use based on relevant training and performed according to game rules in institutional sites where authority is contested. I propose a political approach to criticism, a study of the politics of literary knowledge, and a genealogy of the truth called literature. Toward this end, I conduct a number of microscopic investigations inside the domain of Greek criticism and analyze the conditions of literary understanding. These are all case studies, and, if of any value, they should be applicable to any other national literature because every literature is national and every criticism ethnocentric. The Greekness of the literary text as the ideal of a national tradition is another name for the apocalyptic dream of dialectics (the romantic science of logic): transcendental synthesis of name and object, restoration of his face to God.

This is obviously a self-consciously political book: it raises issues of interpretation, knowledge, tradition, and authority in the context of literary studies; it discusses both the epistemological assumptions informing and the working principles reflected in current reading practices. While benefiting from certain trends in the poststructuralist problematic, it proposes a countercritical, sophistic approach to the cultural monument called literature. And it suggests the question: which technologies of power enable and often encourage us to take the subjective position of a reader and enjoy or know literature, and who stands to gain what in this case? I propose that the disciplines of literature, having exhausted themselves after years of humble servility (criticism) alternating with rebellious adventures into epistemology (theory), must

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examine their own constitution and functions and face their social responsibilities. Undoubtedly, they will not emerge intact, or even safe, from this review, but again they do not seem to have much choice. Perhaps the national state, which established and guaranteed their exclusive territories and colonies when particular services of legitimation were in demand, does not need them any more; after all, these days authority can well be exercised without their feeble support. Perhaps literature has outlived its uses and criticism its purposes: it is high time for both to retire gracefully—or finally abandon their autonomy, abrogate their privileges, and start resisting those who profit from their cheap labor.

November 1984

Toward a Genealogy of “Literature”:
The Institutionalization of Tradition
in C. Th. Dimaras’s *A History of
Modern Greek Literature*

LET US TALK about literature; let us talk about what we mean by “literature,” about the uses of the word; let us talk about the effective uses of “literature,” the recognizable references, the established meanings of the term. We should look at it as a sign, part of a meaningful code; that is, we should look at literature as a sign of a code which makes possible knowledge and communication about literary texts. At issue is the knowledge of and communication about literature, the discourse of its truth, and the discursive constitution of the knowledge about literature. We are thus already within the realm of criticism, the institutional site of such inquiry and knowledge. Criticism gives us an authoritative account of the nature and history of literature. Let us then talk about criticism, literature, and history, and let us provisionally call them all “Greek.”

In a recent comprehensive survey, “Histories of Modern Greek Literature” (Kehayoglou 1980), despite the sufficient informative 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 failed to examine their epistemological assumptions. Histories (of any kind and field), however, are not clear panoramic overviews, describing the evolutionary development of a field or discipline; rather, they are interpretations and revisions of its tradition, and therefore expressions of an aesthetic, philosophical, and political choice. 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 are examined and unless fundamental questions pertaining to epistemology and ideology are dealt with, elaborate bibliographical guides will only help scholars, teachers, or students to locate a book.

For example, 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 instance, a comparative reading of other similar histories that followed would show that most of them, including the one by Linos Politis, were essentially composed as responses or reactions to Dimaras's grandiose conception; or another study, an intertextual reading of the essays and polemics published by members of the so-called "Generation of the 1930s," would reveal how the reevaluation of Greek literary and cultural tradition they effected was finally consolidated in an official form by this history. Yet, I believe that a different approach must take priority: an effort to scrutinize it generically as a scholarly work and trace the critical discourse supplying its principles.

I want to discuss how histories of national literature are written and how aesthetic and other ethnocentric dogmas determine their methodological criteria; I also want to offer an alternative research project, a history of literariness, rather than literature. To this effect, first I describe, through a close study of the first paragraph of Dimaras's Preface, the assumptions lying behind the

comprehensive act of reading which constitutes this work of definitive interpretation. In the second part of the chapter, I outline a radical alternative to the subject through the politics of discourse, using Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (later ingeniously renamed following Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*) as a model for historical investigation.

Thus, the preface begins:

The title of this work is *A History of Modern Greek Literature*. If we analyze each term in the title, we shall have a precise idea of the content of the book. The term *logotechnia* (literature) contains the notion of the *techne* (art) of logos. Here, however, literature is considered in its broader sense and it means the totality of written monuments, excluding those concerned with special disciplines. Even so, such a definition lacks required breadth: we do not forget that what distinguishes our letters is the great contribution of oral speech, especially through the folksong. It also happens that some works of a scientific character, particularly among those concerning the so-called theoretical sciences, are written in such an artful form that they should be included among literary works regardless of their scientific nature. Further, we should not forget that certain branches of knowledge express an orientation of the mind corresponding, during the period in which it prevails, to the monuments of the verbal art: philosophical, historical, geographical interests, as well as those which pertain to the natural sciences, accordingly leave their imprint on literary production too. Hence, such works also have their place here, not for their scientific dimension but as an aid to a more precise understanding of the spirit dominating literature during a given time. Later, when these works are regularly integrated into the overall intellectual life in their more specialized character, they cease to interest the historian of letters. What is important is the moment of orientation, not the later regular evolution of the individual branches of sci-

ence. Hence, the history of letters and the history of learning are terms nearly overlapping with the history of literature as presented here.¹

The author begins by suggesting that “each term in the title” provides “a precise idea of the content of the book.” This introductory statement is unfortunate in that it lacks proper historical understanding. Dimaras is dealing with terms and ideas, not with concepts and notions; in this way he endorses 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—for example those by I. Rizos Neroulos (1827), A. Kambanis (1925), or B. Knös (1969)—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, culturally specific notions of understanding?

The first attempt to map the territory uses a tautology: *logotechnia* is the *techne* of *logos*; literature includes what is literary. That much is taken for granted: literature is first of all what we all know it is, what the word itself means. The next sentence enlarges this definition to make it include all written nonscientific works. The implicit distinction between the “referential” and the “emotive function” of language drawn through Seferis and Eliot from Ogden and Richards could be, for some, at least a practical one in its crude matter-of-factness: literature is everything written that is not nonliterary. We are still within the realm of the tautological, but it seems that now the term covers not only the artistic but also the monumental: it embraces a totality of monuments, not just a collection of documents.

¹ Translations are mine. The American translation is consistently unreliable and often unacceptable. Dimaras’s writing suffers from a pervasive lack of precision and direction, but at least it makes more sense in the original.

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 every text in which the Greek community of critics and artists between the two world wars discovered literary quality or potential. Therefore, the discussion seems unable to achieve its ultimate goal as we know it from its final realization: the revision of tradition and its sovereign canon. The initial revisionary move is very subtle: notice that the first definition identified literature with the literary, while the next with the nonliterary. Its realm is already much broader. Every history of literature is in practice the history of an alternative literature. The primary purpose of Dimaras's *History* was to effect a permanent appropriation of the institution of Greek criticism by the discourse of the native conservative modernist movement as expressed mainly in the essays of its eminent representatives, like Seferis, Elytis, Karandonis, Sahinis, and Nikolareizis. Thus, a reformation of aesthetic values would result in both the suppression of standards and works promoted by the aestheticist and the radical movements of the early twentieth century and the establishment of the new ones. But for this effort to achieve its goals, the rules of the game and the mechanisms of prohibition and rejection operating on the borders of the reigning discourse had to change, while the norms of aesthetic understanding had to be revised. 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.

The second 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 to include 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, and acts of transmissions become parts of tradition. Significantly, there is no mention of any criteria. The reader may wonder about the principles according to which admittance will be judged, but such criteria are absent both from the paragraph at hand and the book. Simply by attributing a vague cultural relevance by particular works, events, or phenomena, the author feels free to include, demarginalize, or push to the periphery whatever either serves or threatens his strategic purposes.

After breaking the lines demarcating the artistic from the non-artistic text and the written from the spoken word, Dimaras proceeds aggressively—in the next sentence—to break more boundaries, those between art and science: even “works of a scientific character” can be considered literary under certain conditions. Of these conditions, only one is mentioned, an “artful form.” The absence of any explanation and the awkward term trigger some embarrassing questions. First, how does one determine whether a form is “artful”: by employing biographical, stylistic, political, or some other criteria? Second, is artfulness a matter of originality, conventionality, or propriety? Is it an outcome of authorial will or of critical evaluation or both? Third, is every artful form artistic? And, 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, although it is surprising for a work first published in 1948 (and a preface that has survived throughout its seven editions) after the heyday of major modern movements of criticism, such as Russian Formalism, American New Criticism, the Prague School of Structuralism, or the Geneva School of Phenomenology; the reason is primarily the authoritarian aim

informing the whole enterprise which aspired to a total review of the canon of modern Greek literature—or rather a scholarly confirmation of the tradition already tentatively revised by the Generation of the 1930s against the predominant aesthetic trends of their time. The book's pretensions to an epistemological innocence reflected in its pseudohistorical method serve to conceal its ideological identity.

Returning to Dimaras's text, we note that, according to the last argument, "despite their scientific nature," even "some works of scientific character" can be considered as literary works, provided 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 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* includes additional works from national folklore 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 slated explicitly, and to that effect he devotes not just one, as in the previous stages, but five long sentences. 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 oeuvres. 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 time" 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 point to particular discussions that cancel this argument. A con-

textual analysis of this paragraph proves that its main points, instead of aiming at definitional clarifications, work towards 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 he abolishes the then current constitution of the idea of literature; thus, the individual revisionary acts of interpretation can follow unobtrusively.

The use of the term *evolution* testifies eloquently to the biological model of explanation employed throughout the book. Indeed, he maps the development of modern Greek literature according to stages of evolution and turning points of change. He describes schools of thought and artistic movements 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. Moreover, internal struggles and territorial fights are muted, the authority of dominant discourses is 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 learning 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 previous critics.

The primary purpose of my argument so far has not been to criticize *A 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, although I find the first paragraph of the Preface interesting as an ingenious piece of strategic deconstruction, I strongly disagree

with the purposes it serves. The undermining of the romantic notion of literature is a commendable task when it interrogates such privileged notions as unity, fullness, and transparency; but the idealistic principles employed by Dimaras simply address the same old problem of ethnic identity and anteriority only to offer a new solution. His attack on the independence and autonomy of literature aimed at a revision of the established hierarchies which eventually—as a history of the reception of the *History* would show—made the Generation of the 1930s the true heir of the best national cultural tradition.

AFTER the examination of the epistemological assumptions of Dimaras's alternative solution, I will devote the rest of this chapter to a series of preliminary suggestions, not about yet another history of modern Greek literature but about its genealogy. C. Th. Dimaras is the best Greek historian of ideas. To understand clearly the method he has been practicing, one may first turn to its most dedicated spokesman, Arthur O. 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." He describes it as 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).

On the other hand, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault has suggested the following critical 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, of distant correspond-

ences, of permanences that persist beneath apparent changes, of slow formations that profit from innumerable blind complicities, 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's survey is written from the particular humanistic viewpoint exposed in the above descriptions. 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 historicist approach. Foucault, who has researched 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 (1972, part 4, chap. 1: 135–40). These points will provide the basis for the construction of the following genealogical model.

I. Literature is a social institution dominated by different discourses in different historical periods and simultaneously affected by the discourses dominating other contemporary institutions, such as criticism. As Foucault states, genealogy "tries to define . . . those discourses as practices obeying certain rules" (1972, 138). It is not an evaluation of authors, books, oeuvres, ideas, or personal achievements and cultural influences, but a description of the discourses that allow 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, for example, remains an unsolved enigma for these histories since no traditional historical explanation can account convincingly for both Athenian romanticism's popular success and its artistic failure. Dimaras, in chapter 20 of his book, finds no quality, originality, ideas, depth, or balance in the voluminous work of those romantics and has only words of derision for it: "Thus we have a literature without roots or with shallow roots, which becomes easy prey for every kind of influence" (299). Today, however, it is all

too easy to dismiss the mass appeal of a poet like A. Paraschos or Y. 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" (1972, 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 (e.g., 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: 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 sites, contours, limits, and operating mechanisms of the prevalent discourse. According to Foucault, 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" (1972, 49). It should not have as its aims to recover the "spirit of the age" after the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922 or during the civil war of the 1940s, trace the erotic or political sources of Cavafy's inspiration, or blame moral prejudices for N. Lapathiotis's 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 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 speculations 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 after the 1880s; (b) the number of its alternative versions circulating in either rejected popular chapbooks or the Greek oral tradition (in Crete and especially the Ionian Islands, with dramatic representations); and (c) scholarly and popular reactions to uses of the text as edited and performed today. Dimaras, instead, concentrates on its intrinsic artistic qualities and its successful assimilation of popular and foreign tradition (80–81). The work wins his praise for its coherent, expressive power, and originality. Tradition is understood as lending source, not enabling force.

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; in turn, it establishes new rules of composition, production, and consumption, 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, his return to the ancients, and his understanding of popular tradition, critics like Dimaras (483) fail to notice the battle which Greek nationalism won through his work against the cosmopolitan modernism as first proposed by Cavafy and T. K. Papatsonis; similarly, by evaluating exclusively the masterful architectural plan of Od. Elytis's *The Axion Esti* (1960), they miss 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 achievement, 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” (Foucault 1972, 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 their situatedness 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 norms define the dominant aesthetic which directly affects the writing and reading practices of the time. The fierce clash of critical discourses around Cavafy’s poetry, the philological industry around Seferis’s 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 Yannis Ritsos and George 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's 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 from the Greek Enlightenment, which has been trying to determine the origins and describe the continuity of the Greek nation, portrayed Seferis's work as the sacred *text* of a model language, a written language recovering from the original sources and articulating the essence of Hellenism.

This 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 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." It could also explain why the nationalist Dimaras, in his appendix, devoted five lines to Ritsos and three pages to Seferis. Following the same approach of historical specification, the poetry competitions organized by the University of Athens (1850s–1870s), the short-lived, turn-of-the-century literary magazines (like *Techne* and *Dionysos*), or the reception of K. Karyotakis by the Left and that of K. Varnalis by the Right must be examined as concrete manifestations of particular discourses: 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; instead, it can be described in a parallel examination with the discourses marginalized by it and of those from other institutions which 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 I. Polylas and Sp. Zambelios, Em. Roidis and A. Vlachos, Y. Apostolakis and Varnalis, or G. Seferis and K. Tsatsos can be read as instances of the ongoing struggle between the dominant and the peripheral discourses. Similarly, acts of censorship (e.g., the disappearance of the work of P. Panas and Y. Sarandaris) and others of revision (e.g., the tactical discovery of Makriyannis), acts 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 anti-theoretical reading (i.e., a counterreading) of modern Greek criticism that will eventually abolish the artificial barriers between high and low, good and bad, professive and reactionary art.

The case of Panayotis 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. Significantly, parody has been the most rare and the least appreciated genre in modern Greek literature. For Dimaras, his satires simply indicate the advanced stage of Heptanesian culture and taste (296). The historian of ideas pays little attention to ideas that struggle beyond reconciliation or assimilation; certainly, he was not the last to consider those poems entertaining curiosities. In fact, their critical power remains still unrecognized. Panas's 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's work has never been collected.

III. Genealogy deals with individual discourses, situating them in their historical, cultural, and linguistic specificity and describing their mechanisms of operation and rules of domination. For this enterprise to succeed, a preliminary dismantlement of traditional ideas is absolutely necessary. (As illustrated through the analysis of the beginning of Dimaras's Preface, a similar act of revision has been indispensable even for the composition of another history of literature.) But it is necessary to go further and epistemologically critique the whole cluster of romantic notions about the artwork, the author, influence, progress, tradition, and the supporting philosophical principles. The history of literature, or of any other art, is by its very nature a *catalogue raisonné* of masterpieces which attributes aesthetic achievements to artistic geniuses, thereby acknowledging and exclusively honoring the authority of the creative subject. Genealogy, on the other hand, dismisses this idealistic approach by viewing literature 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 spirits are included, only discourses and their contest for institutional power.

The idealized signature of Solomos, which Dimaras includes, the lost portrait of A. Kalvos, which he replaces with numerous psychographic observations, or the obscure identity of the author of *Elliniki Nomarchia* [1806] whose unevenness he attributes to "youthful imperfections" (155), from a historicist perspective, mean nothing. Likewise, what Cavafy used to tell his friends (or A. Embirikos didn't), what Y. Beratis destroyed (or N. Gatsos didn't write after all), why Y. Kambysis came back (or I. Papadiamandopoulos left) are meaningless speculations. Such information is completely irrelevant for a genealogical understanding. The suicide of I. Karasoutsas, the madness of R. Philyras, or the drug addiction of N. Lapathiotis are of mere biographical value, although often used 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; rather, they are 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 K. Palamas against Cavafy; Palamas as a defense of Ar. Valaoritis against Solomos; Elytis as a defense of Ang. Sikelianos against Karyotakis; El. Vakalo as a defense of Cavafy against Sikelianos; or, to enter the adjacent territory of criticism, Al. Argyriou as a defense of P. Spandonidis against An. Karandonis; and Z. Lorentzatos as a defense of Y. Apostolakis against T. Agras. Needless to say, these names should be read and used only “under erasure,” only as signs referring to cultural phenomena rather than as identifications of individuals or of collected works.

The search of Zisimos Lorentzatos (1915) for a transcendental Greekness is just such a cultural phenomenon of particular significance. While Seferis defended the meaning of literature from Cavafy’s ironic skepticism, Lorentzatos has been conducting a parallel battle against Tellos Agras’s formalism along the lines set up by Polyas and Yannis Apostolakis (1886–1947). This critical debate has centered on the notion of style. The cosmopolitan aestheticism represented by Cavafy and Agras effected 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 discourse of Victorian puritanism employed by Apostolakis—“a great moral personality” (444), according to Dimaras—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 art towards moral 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 Y. Vizyenos, Nietzsche in K. Hatzopoulos, Joyce in N. G. Pentzikis, Éluard in Elytis, or Ginsberg in L. Poullos. But it would be another unfortunate lapse into the history of literature for genealogy to search for this type of evolutionary pattern 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. In "The Subject and Power" Foucault 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 as 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)

Such a 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 N. 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 social institutions. 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. Historicist 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. Yannopoulos and I. Dragoumis, or the linguistic nihilism pushed to its extremes by P. Takopoulos—against reigning "forms of power." This kind of study undermines the metaphysical assumptions inherent in aesthetic appreciation, as epitomized in histories and anthologies, and diffuses artistic 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" (Foucault 1972, 139). The idea of the author, the creative subject, is dismissed along with all other notions of origin. The moment of the construction of the work is not important, but the process of its emergence as an artwork, its cultural production, is. An act of recovery tries to save the original from abuse and, by referring to sources of inspiration and intention, reveal the work in its purest form and real meaning. But genealogy "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's *Porphyras* (1849) is far more important for a reading of Elytis's *Second Lieutenant* (1945) than the poet's own experience of the Second World War; the popular success of Gr. Xenopoulos is far more closely related to his audience's expectations, which Dimaras mentions (427) but fails to explore, than to his faithful depiction of social reality; and the rediscovery of Kalvos (1792–1869) by Palamas in 1889, which Dimaras records (397) but fails to explain, was more a successful appropriation by the militant patriotic discourse of the "Great Idea" than a long-overdue reevaluation.

Indeed, the history of the uses to which Andreas Kalvos has been put provides a wealth of interesting material for a chronology 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 1970s” 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. Dimaras, in his *History*, discusses the life, “the drama of the poet,” “language and verse,” the technique, the tenor, and the ideas of his poetry. For him, the exasperating difficulty is the impossible access to the writer’s complex psychology, and the continuous fluctuations of his reputation do not constitute a problem. However, a genealogical approach ought to overcome this ignorance. Instead of trying in vain to recover the true, the real, meaning of the work, the genealogy 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 an interpretation of interpretations—a critical metacommentary on the modes of emergence of the artistic sign Kalvos.

Genealogy as an approach describes systematically how works become discourse-objects and how constructed objects emerge as artworks. But its self-awareness—what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls “historical consciousness”²—should 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

² “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 judgement and prejudices. It must, in fact, take account of its own historicity” (Gadamer 1975, 323–24)

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; its results are relevant, if not urgent, for our life, our self-understanding, our involvement in the game of power.

After arriving at this point, even the cautious reader of Dimaras's *History* will probably feel quite unhappy and insecure with the above conclusion. Clearly, the skepticism of this chapter is not an answer to his positivistic expectations for 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 epistemological but political. In a world where discourses, systematizations of formulated knowledge, relentlessly clash for power over constitutions of sense and truth, it is imperative to resist all disciplined safety and fight against any establishment of authority. In this particular case, in order to keep modern Greek writing fresh, informative, and productive as a field of inquiry, we ought to oppose all attempts at its totalization by disturbing the sovereign hierarchies and by 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 debates that will encourage a more active role on the audience's part—that is, imaginatively adventurous understanding and irreverently creative writing.

Who has been Reading Masterpieces
on Our Behalf? George Seferis,
Makriyannis, and the Literary Canon

WE SAW IN THE FIRST CHAPTER that literary histories aim to institutionalize a national tradition of native masterpieces. As is usually the case, this new tradition has already been tentatively formed and outlined in a critical discourse which countered and opposed a prevailing orthodoxy by offering a number of strong revisionary approaches and readings. The work of the historian, in its turn, follows as an attempt to consolidate gains made, unify them in a comprehensive totality, and claim institutional status. If successful, his history becomes the epitome of a new orthodoxy and canon and provides the legitimate evaluative measures of aesthetic appreciation. It would be interesting now to turn our attention to those revisionary readings which pave the way for rewriting literary history by changing the established rules of reading and appropriating texts on behalf of an emerging new discourse. I have chosen an unusual case where a work, in order to be successfully appropriated, had not just to be reread but actually invented and classified as a literary document because I want to highlight the complexity of the task and the possible range of the strategies employed. The case is not unique, in the sense that many national canons have included a few writers of nonimaginative prose: Gibbon and Carlyle in English literature, Emerson and Thoreau in American, Rousseau and

Voltaire in French, and so forth; but even the general phenomenon remains unexplored, as far as I know, since the mechanics of such appropriations have not been studied in any detail.

The centrality of *The Memoirs* by General Makriyannis for contemporary Greek culture is undisputable: the work has been repeatedly published in many editions, analyzed from different perspectives, taught at all educational levels, and used as either a source of inspiration or a stylistic model by many poets and prose writers. The scholarly and popular interest in it continues undiminished, and its influence has been felt, apart from literature, in other arts, like music and painting, and in such disparate domains as criticism, historiography, and even political rhetoric. Undoubtedly, it has become one of those texts where modern Greek sensibility, consciousness, and patriotism look, as if at a mirror, to recognize themselves and meditate on their choices—a truly national work.

The cultural authority of *The Memoirs* is largely based on its status as first and foremost a literary masterpiece: this is how philologists and critics have regarded it and why historians of literature have deemed its inclusion in their surveys imperative. For both scholars and laymen, the work's supreme virtue is its literary value—a combination of real language, unique style, fascinating content, and moral message united in the major personal testament about modern Greek life and identity. It is strange, however, that questions about the work's genre or the very legitimacy of its artistic status have not arisen, especially in light of the fact that similar writings by other fighters of the War of Independence in the 1820s (like Christophoros Perraivos, Emmanuil Xanthos, Nikolaos Kasomoulis, Photakos, and Theodoros Kolokotronis) have not been given comparable respect and have drawn little critical attention. Only Makriyannis's text has been singled out from a great number of memoirs as a work of exceptional quality. But perhaps this phenomenon is not so strange: after all, genre theory and criticism remain frightfully absent from the agenda of Greek literary studies, as the general public regularly discovers to its confusion when the annual State Literary Prizes are

announced and honored works are made arbitrarily to fit into given categories. This is only one manifestation of the romantic pathology of Greek criticism: it concentrates, with only rare, isolated exceptions, on individual works and/or authors and analyzes, totally bewitched, their inimitable uniqueness. Comparative studies as a notion or approach remains alien to this celebration of the genius, which ignores the cultural situatedness of art.

I would like, then, to discuss the Makriyannis paradox, the inclusion of a nonliterary work in the literary canon and the consequences for its reception. I intend to do so in three steps: first, by dealing with the normative character of literary reading; second, by investigating a specific and highly indicative instance of the process which led to the canonization of *The Memoirs*; and third, by examining the significance of such a successful operation for the politics of interpretation and the nature of literature itself. The successive stages of the discussion will center respectively on three main texts: "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" by Stanley Fish, "[A Greek-] Makriyannis" by George Seferis, and "Political Criticism" by Terry Eagleton.

Stanley Fish in his recent work on the constitution and authority of interpretive communities has suggested that literary texts (and artworks and facts and data) do not exist as such but are rather produced by certain practices of understanding. Instead of being the discovery and appreciation of particular inherent features, the reading of a text is an act of production whereby the application of specific strategies makes it literary, or anything else for that matter. But these practices of understanding and strategies of reading are not the reader's invention: they originate in and are sustained by a body of systematic knowledge—what T. S. Kuhn would call "paradigm" and Michel Foucault "discourse"—that gives them their effectiveness and authority. The practitioners of a certain discipline as well as other people, specialists and nonspecialists, who share the same assumptions and employ the same practices, belong to one interpretive community with its own epistemological principles and ideological identity. Inter-

pretation, then, is not so much a question of free choice and imagination or empathetic understanding as it is one of selection among a limited number of approaches and means of production. Cultural circumstances create interpretive communities that construct readers who produce texts.

Reaction to Fish's ideas, directed almost exclusively to his critique of aesthetics as an ontology of artistic beauty, has tried to reaffirm the validity of established values and exegetical methods. His colleagues have run to the defense of texts and of those critics who promote the idea of a safeguarded critical pluralism. This kind of negative response, stemming as it does from the fear of the subjectivist chaos and the trembling over a potential endlessness of interpretations, has pushed into undue obscurity one of the most interesting parts of his theory, that which deals exactly with the process of aesthetic production, which Fish opposes to the romantic notion of the artistic creation.

In the second of his four lectures on "Interpretive Authority in the Classroom and in Literary Criticism" [1979], Fish (1980) discusses reading as an act of recognition rather than recovery—an act trained in the practices of literary perception. The lecture, ironically titled "How to Recognize a Poem when You See One," begins with one of those hilarious stories which delight and provoke Fish's readers. He talks in his casual manner about the day when the students of one of his classes, upon entering the room, found on the blackboard a vertical list of six words, names of scholars directly related to the previous class's assignment. Their professor chose not to tell them the truth; instead, he declared that the set of words was an example of seventeenth-century English religious poetry, which they had been studying. In the pages that follow, Fish describes in detail the extraordinary and yet completely unsuspecting pains which his students took in order to make sense out of what they were told was a poem, until they finally succeeded in producing a meaning complex and elaborate enough for a text of seventeenth-century English literary qualities and religious inclinations.

Fish draws from his example a series of arguments against lit-

erary ontology, which can be summarized in five major points; their logical continuity provides a coherent position on reading.

Fish begins, "It is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities" (326). Literariness does not inhere in the text but results from a particular kind of approach to texts: when we pay literary attention to a text, *any* text, we produce a literary one. A text can be read in many possible ways and yield different kinds of information, depending on the purposes we make it serve. As histories of reception show, texts have been approached through widely different angles and therefore have been made to mean equally different things. It is the character of our perspective, rather than the nature of the work, that makes dissimilar, even incompatible viewpoints possible. What we read is what we have been looking for, not what we find: if it is literature we seek, then literature is what we recognize.

And Fish continues his argument: "The conclusion, therefore, is that all objects are made and not found, and that they are made by the interpretive strategies we set in motion" (331). Our approach to a text consists of a series of interpretive strategies we apply to produce the desired outcome. Practicing literary reading is not simply a matter of personal attitude or disposition, an exercise of free intellect or imagination: the application of specific strategies according to sets of rules determines the particular approach. *What* we read depends on *how* we read. Paying a certain kind of attention to a text, say a literary one, means employing certain reading strategies, those appropriate to literary interpretation and constructing a work of literature.

Moreover, Fish writes, "Interpretation is not the act of constructing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them" (327). The interpretation of literature is the particular reading skill necessary for the production of literature. Its effective uses produce literary texts, and only those who are familiar with it can make them; in other words, I don't know what literature is unless I have the skill to construct it. Therefore,

in order to pay a particular kind of attention and achieve a certain approach to a text, literary or otherwise, we must first be familiar with the appropriate set of rules and know how to use those interpretive strategies conducive to the required kind of understanding. Reading, then, depends on its means and ends, not on its subject; and literature is the result of a successful literary reading, not its antecedent object. Literature is what I choose to read as literature, but how I read is not my choice because the appropriate way is a learned skill not an improvised approach.

Fish elaborates on the reader's role in literary creation: "Thus while it is true to say that we create poetry (and assignments and lists), we create it through interpretive strategies that are finally not our own but have their source in a publicly available system of intelligibility" (332). The rules, methods, and tactics which belong to and partly constitute a particular approach—literary, biographical, historical, scientific, religious—are not devised by the individual reader and should not be credited to his talent, fancy, or genius. Literary reading is a skilled technique which has to be acquired. The abolition of the humanistic notions of the artistic work and its creator, which follows from our earlier rejection of literature as an aesthetic entity, does not lead to a confusion of tongues and interpretations, as the normative function of the interpretive communities indicates. Alternatively, replacing those romantic projections, as some theorists of poststructuralism have done, with the supreme figure of the critic who reigns alone over the domain of interpretation would be just another idealistic fallacy. Interpretive strategies are methods of understanding—seeing, reading, listening, perceiving—supplied by discourses and supported by communities of interpreters. We learn how to understand from practices of understanding that are locally (in our own time and culture) available and demarcate the current possibilities of intelligibility. Consequently, we read/make literature by using those relevant strategies which today pertain to the literary. The discourse, the rules, the strategies, and the application are all public—historical, social, and conventional.

The last point deserves further elaboration because it goes

beyond the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy that, more than has been recognized, plagued romanticism and forced it, in defense of the subject, to side with man, that is, the individual in exile, the alienated social being. In fact, the idea that literary works are made and not recovered does not open the doors of anarchy to a free-lancing subjectivism because the practices of producing literature are, like all other practices, culturally specific. If any interpretation is potentially conceivable at a given historical moment and cultural space, very few are possible and even fewer acceptable. To produce literature, we have to choose from the limited repertory of available practices and follow those rules which will make it legitimate to the eyes of at least one existing interpretive community; otherwise our reading will seem totally idiosyncratic and will remain uncommunicable. Thus we realize that, whenever we want to attract attention and give credibility to our interpretations, the current discourses, the prevailing norms, and the established canons constrain our hermeneutic freedom and largely dictate to its wishes the paths they may follow.

Fish observes that his students were able to produce a religious poem from the names on the blackboard because they applied familiar public knowledge—those rules of reading which tell a member of the contemporary academic/scholarly critical community what a seventeenth-century English poem is. This comment leads him to his most radical conclusion: “In short, to the list of made or constructed objects we must add ourselves, for we no less than the poems and assignments we see are the products of social and cultural patterns of thought” (332). When we assert that poems are made and not recovered, we destruct not only aesthetics as the romantic ontology of beauty, but also subjectivity itself. What my passive syntax implies is that nobody makes poems; poems are made because readers and interpreters, too, are cultural constructs of historical forces and formations. “One can respond with a cheerful yes to the question ‘Do readers make meanings?’ and commit oneself to very little because it would be equally true to say that meanings, in the form of culturally

derived interpretive categories, make readers" (336). It is a comment worth keeping in mind when one is reading Lambropoulos reading Fish reading a poem constructed by his class.

This is in summary the theory of literary reading Fish advanced in his lecture. The answer he offers to the problem posed in its title (and implicitly to the other one, posed in the title of his book) is obviously that we recognize a poem when we see one because (and only when) we are members of a particular community of interpreters who share certain reading practices facilitating such approaches to texts that make them literary. We know that a text is a poem because, as Wittgenstein would argue, we have been shown poems and we have been told what is being recognized as one. We are also able to read a poem because we are not only familiar with the rules of the game of reading literature and specifically with the practices of reading poetry but we have also been trained to perform acts of literary production.

Fish offers an epistemological challenge to traditional criticism by shifting the *locus* of literariness from the text to one of its possible uses, the aesthetic—from the "object itself" to one particular mode of its consumption. His major contribution so far has been that this critique has made the search for the distinctive features of literary essence, guiding the ideal of a science of literature since the early twentieth century, extremely problematic. It is enough to compare Roman Jakobson's phenomenology (which locates the aesthetic in the message-centered poetic function of the language) with Fish's pragmatism (which determines as aesthetic certain literature-oriented practices of reading) to realize that the practitioners of stylistics—who saw the promises of positivism emerge anew in formalism, structuralism, New Criticism, and reception aesthetics—now face the demand to prove that what they find is not simply an eminent function of their search or an immanent component of their fundamental assumptions.

In the second part of this essay, I will concentrate on the methodological significance of Fish's position for the study of criticism and its operations in culture. His description of the processes involved in acts of literary recognition and production, I will try

to show, can be used as an interesting model for an investigation of critical mechanisms that consecrate or marginalize, promote or suppress, texts as literature. The use of such a model in Modern Greek Studies could be particularly important; it would examine the role of those interpretive tactics that allow for the persistent complacency, narcissism, and isolationism in the field.

The Memoirs by Makriyannis ([1907] 1966) offer a case in point: an autobiographical work by an army officer who fought in the war for liberation from the Turks and was later involved in the politics of the newly-born state—a work which, as far as one can tell, was neither written nor edited, published, presented, or received as literature, when it first became available in 1907—has been treated since the late 1930s as a text of high literary quality. What made its inclusion in the literary canon possible? What turned it into an exemplary stylistic achievement of overpowering influence? What gave it the cultural authority it still possesses? These questions should be the subject of a book length study—a genealogy of its interpretations and the struggle of critical and other discourses for power over it. Here I will limit myself to a discussion of the first major literary production of the work: its reading by George Seferis as a masterpiece of Greek literature. To paraphrase Fish, the subject of the next section is: how Seferis recognized a literary work when he saw *The Memoirs* of Makriyannis.

SEFERIS gave his public lecture on Makriyannis in Alexandria and Cairo in 1943 and published it in Cairo's Greek newspaper the same year. The text was subsequently printed in all three editions of *Dokimes* ([1944, 1962] 1974), in the *Eklogi* (1966) from the second edition, and in the English selection *On the Greek Style* (1966). Obviously, its importance for the author was paramount. Furthermore, Seferis's life-long interest in *The Memoirs* is evident in all his work, including poems, notebooks, diaries, essays. In the *Dokimes* in particular, the presence of Makriyannis is especially prominent in the early essays (1937–1947), but it is also felt in many others, including the Nobel Prize speech (1963)

and the very last essay, "*Panda pliri Theon*" (1971). All this information, testifying to Seferis's commitment to the systematic promotion of Makriyannis, is not provided to document the author's attitude but rather to remind the reader of Makriyannis's towering presence in a large part of Seferis's writings.

I must take this clarification as an opportunity to explain, before proceeding to discuss the essay, that the poet's feelings and the General's intentions are excluded from my considerations: I am not interested in how Seferis felt about *The Memoirs* or in what they meant to him personally; nor am I interested in either what Makriyannis tried to do or whether he achieved it. Since the purpose of this analysis is to examine how the former reads the latter and to what effect, I am reluctant to discuss, or even accept as valid, questions like what did Makriyannis really say? Did Seferis understand it correctly? Where he did fail? How can we improve his reading of *The Memoirs*? Instead, I focus my discussion on which interpretive strategies were employed in this case to produce a literary work? How effective were they? What purposes did they serve?

In his first strategy Seferis devises an *author*, based on the assumption that behind every masterpiece a creator's mind thinks, invents, collects, arranges, and perfects. Seferis in section 2 of his essay narrates Makriyannis's life story, presenting him as a brave hero of the War of Independence, a democrat, and patriot who realized, perhaps better than anybody else at the time, the meaning of the national struggle for liberation. Although his behavior was at times abrupt and idiosyncratic, he was a "magnanimous man" (1966, 54), "a man of good intentions" (47). He was also illiterate, "just capable of writing" (31). But despite his lack of learning, or, as it is argued later, because of that, Makriyannis "feels, and makes us feel with him, that he is a man on whom God has conferred the gift of speech" (33). Conscious of that divine gift, he "never stops working at the means of expression" (37), improving his techniques and rethinking his responsibilities as a writer. Even though he was not a great artist in the usual sense of the word, his "coarse writing" (31) resembles an

old wall where the movements of the craftsman composing a solid whole can be securely traced. This dedication to his humble craft, which he felt as a national mission, made him “one of the most cultivated souls in the Greek world” (35). The voice heard in the text is unmistakably his, a voice of common wisdom and personal integrity that speaks about “the abiding will of the author to paint his own very self upon the paper” (32).

The second strategy applied by Seferis, after he has identified and credited an author for the work, is to ascertain its *authenticity and truthfulness*. This he does by describing the expressive power of its language. Being uneducated, Makriyannis writes in the real language which real people speak, and therefore he is able to articulate his ideas in an immediate and transparent way. Nothing pretentious or artificial obscures what he says: he speaks his mind openly, forthrightly, bravely, and one can hear in it a lifetime’s experiences reverberate. The authenticity of his testimony inheres not only in its intensely personal character but also in its language of “real feelings” (40). When, for example, he expresses his appreciation of the works of ancient art, he gives his voice to the soul of the Greek people: “There is more weight in this sentence of a simple man than in the effusions of fifteen gilded academies” (39–40). We should be thankful that he remained illiterate and free from the disorienting influences of formal education so that he managed to stay attentive to the spirit of his people and become “a great teacher of our language” (59). As Seferis has argued elsewhere, “his words function” (1974, 2:88) because they are not the rhetoric of an intellectual but the testimony of a man “who knew, as evidenced by his life, both the weight of speech and the weight of pain” (1974, 2:341).

The third strategy is the recognition of a “*significant content*” (Seferis 1974, 2:55) [emphasis added] that accounts for great prose. Seferis establishes a clear distinction between poetry and prose based on the basic metaphor, borrowed from French symbolism, of poetry as dance. When something is written in verse, it has a particular freedom of movement which gives each word an individual quality and to the whole a grace of pure beauty;

prose, on the other hand, depends more on what is said than on how and demands accuracy and importance—a content of some significance. In this respect, *The Memoirs* presents an exemplary case: “The content of Makriyannis’ writing is the unending and tragic struggle of a man who, deeply rooted in the instincts of his race, is striving for freedom, justice and human dignity” (Seferis 1974, 2:55–56). What Makriyannis has to narrate is by definition important since it is related to the War of Independence and its repercussions. It is even more important because history is told from the unique perspective of a person who devoted himself to that task, witnessed the glory and the misery of his age, and suffered unjustly for his contribution to the national resurgence. “The story of Makriyannis is more than a history of events. It is the story of how the people felt towards the events of that great period in which the Greece of today was born” (41).

The fourth interpretive strategy is directed to the invention of a unique artistic *style*. According to Seferis, “the meaning that wants to be expressed and the language which must give a form, a positive existence to the meaning” are the two opposing forces that “unified in the end, create the style” (61). But Seferis uses style to indicate two different things: “the difficulty encountered when a man tries to express himself” (61) and the outcome of the effort. Makriyannis’s style is so real and unique because his language was natural and his content unique. In the “rhythms” of his “tonality” and the “shades” of his “colors” (33), the richness of Modern Greek and the experiences of a life spent in the battleground and in public meetings merge to create a literary masterpiece. What makes Makriyannis “the most important prose writer in modern Greek literature, if not the greatest” (54), is that his experiences were invested with a powerful “voice” (61) because they found the expression of a true literary style. “This style of things, this style of necessity, this style of effectiveness” (62) gives the work its coherence and unity.

The last strategy employed by Seferis applies to the *message* of *The Memoirs* and in a way sums up his construction of the text as a literary work. If its artistic qualities inhere in the harmonious

fusion of content and language, its greatness derives from its national character. This work proves and defends the continuity of the Greek race and culture. What is observed about the paintings the General inspired the painter Panayotis Zographos to create can also be said about *The Memoirs*: "It is a rhapsody that is old and at the same time we are hearing it for the first time" (39). It proves that the neglected folk tradition is alive and strong and thus serves the education of the nation. "And the culture, the education, which Makriyannis shows is not fragmentary, is not, as it were, a piece of private property. It is common lot, the spiritual wealth of a race, handed on through the ages from millennium to millennium, from generation to generation, from the sensitive to the sensitive; persecuted and always alive, ignored and always present—the common lot of Greek popular tradition" (35–36). In times of need and crisis, it has the potential to reorient the ideals and hopes of the nation toward a better understanding of their origins. Makriyannis "is a surefooted messenger of the long and unbroken tradition of the people, which, because it is so deeply rooted in him, can teach us not just through one man's voice but in the voice of many, and can tell us what we are and how we are in our deepest selves" (63). Greek history as recorded by him allows the reader to disregard the sterile rhetoric of the educated elite and rediscover his roots going all the way back to antiquity.

These are, then, the strategies Seferis uses to appropriate *The Memoirs* as a literary work. The whole essay is organized and argued with great acumen and an astounding sense of tactical purpose. But nowhere is its cunning more evident than in the calculated suppression of its artistic standards. Seferis turns a text into a literary one by performing a literary reading: he starts with certain aesthetic assumptions shared by a community of interpreters; then he applies to the text the corresponding reading practices that aim at recognizing in it, according to the initial assumptions, the distinctive features of literature. His application of interpretive strategies is informed, of course, by an aesthetics which defines, first, what is literary and what is not and, second,

what is artistically good or bad. Seferis does not state his convictions in these respects; but we can induce them from the strategies he adopted and, by reversing the procedure, infer his system of aesthetic principles.

For Seferis, a good literary work in Greek has four distinct qualities: it uses the common, lively language of the people; it has its own unique and authentic style—voice, music, and colors—that make it the full expression of a conscious intention; its content is of real life and the significant moments of human experience; and finally, its message is an expression of Greekness, the transhistorical essence that defines the national ethos. The harmonious coexistence of these qualities makes a text great, that is, literary, good, important, and Greek. Clearly, Seferis's aesthetics is idealistic, romantic, and nationalistic; he sees the literary artwork as the beautiful and autonomous creation of the talented genius who speaks in the untainted language of the folk about the eternal Greek identity.

Today the reader of his reading can more easily appreciate the strength of his performance since the recent Greek intellectual history (and, I would argue, political reality, too) provides ample evidence of its success. Some could counter, though, that this indisputable success is naturally due to the fact that the qualities noticed by Seferis were already there but had not before been evaluated properly. However, this humanistic response is contradicted by the classroom episode narrated by Fish as well as by similar examples from academic experience or literary history with which we are all familiar, including the varieties of attention given to Seferis's own work. On the contrary, the informed reader will have more disturbing questions to ask: Why was the publication of *The Memoirs* delayed for fifty-six years, and why "for half a century this invaluable text was unavailable, lost in absolute darkness" (30)? Why did it attract no attention during the first twenty-five years of its public life? (Seferis chose to ignore both these questions of immediate pertinence.) Is there a connection between this essay and the other studies that the poet was working on at that time or between the essays and the historical

moment of their appearance? Finally, why did his reinterpretation of Makriyannis succeed?

It would be interesting at this point to return to Fish and look for his possible contribution to the discussion of these questions. During his examination of how reading practices work, he reaches a radical position: “poems and assignments are different, but my point is that the differences are a result of the different interpretive operations we perform and not of something inherent in one or the other” (330). After this comment—deserving contrast with Jacques Derrida’s concept of *differance* and its ideological complacency—one assumes Fish will be able to account for the political nature and implications of those epistemological differences. In fact, the title of his next lecture, “What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?” contains an explicit promise to that effect. But unfortunately in what follows the philosophical limitations and lack of political awareness of American neopragmatism (witnessed, for example, in the work of W. V. O. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, and Richard Rorty) once more become apparent.

Fish starts by observing that “what is at stake in a disagreement is the right to specify what the facts can hereafter be said to be. Disagreements are not settled by the facts, but are the means by which the facts are settled” (338). Different interpretations, then, compete for rights, not for texts; they contest for acceptability, not truth, accuracy, or validity. Thus, the right interpretation won the right to interpret. We can therefore rephrase the title of the lecture and say that “the real question is what gives us the right so to be right?” (342). The question is unavoidably a political one, and so is Fish’s answer: “the literary institution which at any one time will authorize only a finite number of interpretive strategies” (342). Of course, there is no final settling of disagreements: “within any community the boundaries of the acceptable are continually being redrawn” (343). Rules are changed, norms transformed, standards revised, and efforts made to accommodate recent arrivals on the scene. “A new interpretive strategy always makes its way in some relationship of opposition to the old,

which has often marked out the negative space (of things that aren't done) from which it can emerge into respectability" (349).

Fish talks about codes and reforms in the literary institution and refers to "the unwritten rules of the literary game" (343). He acknowledges that the notion of the game describes the operations of the institution and that it accounts for every arrangement and change in it: "there are no moves that are not moves in the game" (355). But his interest is pragmatic/descriptive, not political/critical: this is how things are, he is saying, but there is no use in just thinking about them; instead, play, perform, and enjoy. There is a set of questions he will not consider: What are games about? What are the goals of the players? How do people win? What are the consequences of victory? Who oversees the correct application of rules? His Wittgensteinian viewpoint allows Fish to notice the existence of games and describe their constitution; at the same time, it prevents him from realizing that games are about power and not just for fun. Apparently, he is too fascinated by agonistics to pay enough attention to politics and admit that, if the name of the game is interpretation, its goal is absolute power—that is, authority.

QUESTIONS about the politics of interpretation, like those we have now raised in this investigation, are dealt with in Terry Eagleton's sophisticated, amusing, and provocative book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). He has written an introduction to literary theory in order to prove that both literature and literary theory are "an illusion," "a branch of social ideologies" (1983, 204), an introduction that at the end admits to being more of an obituary to its subject. Eagleton is in agreement with Fish's position on the institutional basis of reading practices. Significantly, the first chapter of his book, which presents the Anglo-American New Criticism, has the surprising title "The Rise of English." In it, literature, aesthetics, and criticism are viewed as cultural institutions created during the romantic era, and their emergence is directly associated with "the failure of religion" (22) to instruct and comfort people during an age of social upheaval and scien-

tific progress. Eagleton's discussion of the academic establishment of English as a field in the early twentieth century begins with a step that Fish was rather reluctant to take: "Literature, in the meaning of the word we have inherited, is an ideology. It has the most intimate relations to questions of social power" (22). Ideology and power are exactly the two crucial aspects of the operations of the literary institution introduced by Eagleton, which enable him to move on to the politics of critical discourses. He adds a Foucaultian dimension to Fish's "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?" by answering: institutional power; then he asks why.

Fish would not disagree, I suppose, with the assertion that "there is no such thing as literature which is 'really' great, or 'really' anything, independently of the ways in which that writing is treated within specific forms of social and institutional life" (202). Neither would he differ with the following description of canon formation: "Literary criticism selects, processes, corrects and rewrites texts in accordance with certain institutionalized norms of the 'literary'—norms which are at any given time arguable, and always historically variable" (203). But he would be rather apprehensive, I believe, about adopting the position that "critical discourse is power" (203), and then moving from the games played with the term literature to the discursive practices in the literary field. It is highly indicative of his apolitical, and therefore politically conservative, stance that Fish has nothing to propose and his thoughts lead nowhere: "The final question concerns the practical consequences of that argument. Since it is primarily a literary argument, one wonders what implications it has for the practice of literary criticism. The answer is, none whatsoever. . . . The reason for this is that the position I have been presenting is not one you (or anyone else) could live by" (370). Only the exit of passive acquiescence and political apathy seems to remain open.

Eagleton, on the other hand, has his own idea to counterpropose—not the correct or a better kind of theory, but a totally different type of discourse, a modern rhetoric of interpretive strate-

gies that could be called “discourse theory” (206). Assuming “all theory and knowledge” is not merely institutional, as Fish has argued, but markedly “interested” (207), Eagleton advocates a new approach of “Political Criticism” (according to the title of his book’s conclusion), “which is neither ontological or methodological but *strategic*. This means asking first not *what* the object is or *how* we should approach it, but *why* we should want to engage with it in the first place” (210). For Eagleton, “all criticism is in some sense political” (212) since its subject itself is a cultural institution, the product of political negotiations between communities of interpreters and power relations among discourses.

Our investigation of Seferis’s reinterpretation of Makriyannis was suspended a few pages ago, when we were confronted with a series of questions the theory of Fish could not help us answer. Now, after the brief discussion of Eagleton’s ideas on the politics of literary production, we can see those questions under a different light and move to the final stage of this investigation. Now its central questions are: What does Seferis’s essay do to *The Memoirs*? What are the results of the interpretive strategies it uses? What does its reinterpretation achieve?

First, Seferis defends the fundamental nationalistic notion of a continuity encapsulated in “the soul of our people” (1966, 38). In Makriyannis, he insists, we can retrieve not only the essence of modern history but also its origins, which go back in time to the very first beginnings of Greek civilization. We recognize in Seferis’s arguments the ideology of demoticism which contested with purism mastery over the past and finally managed to appropriate it through the folklorist dogma of survivals: “If we want to understand the ancient Greeks, it is always into the soul of our own people that we should look” (58). This is not a position that the Metaxas dictatorship (1936–1941) would have found objectionable. On the contrary, it has yet to be argued that this regime was an extreme but logical, although certainly not unavoidable, conclusion of demoticist nationalism. In fact, such defenses of uninterrupted continuity and cultural unity justified the populist

politics of the dictatorship, something most intellectuals at the time failed to realize. Seferis shares the same attitude: he defends a continuity existing “in real feelings, and not in abstractions about the beauty of our famous ancestors or in hearts that have become dried up from a cataleptic fear of the common people” (40). Both he and his superiors advocate, in their nostalgic idealism of aesthetic repose, the nameless, faceless “common people.” (This persistent politics reminds us that all debates between ancients and moderns in contemporary Greece have been about the nature of continuity and have not touched on the validity of the concept itself, which remains the supreme national preoccupation.)

The second result of Seferis’s rereading is a drastic revision of modern Greek literary history. Following the publication of his first major poetic work, *Mythistorema* (1935), in the years from 1937 to 1947 Seferis tried to revise the canon of the national literature; his success in changing the canon’s constitution has lasted until today. During those ten years, in his writings on Kalvos ([1937] 1942), Palamas (1943), Makriyannis, *Erotokritos* (1946), Cavafy (1946), Theofilos (1947), and on various aesthetic subjects, he redefined the character of the Greek language, literature, and tradition to an extent which, because of its continuing impact, remains unrealized. His seminal essays on Makriyannis, *Erotokritos*, and Theofilos, in particular, had a double target—academic orthodoxy and the literary generation of the 1920s. The struggle for intellectual authority in which they participated was about not only the old tradition but also the recent past too.

Essentially, with these three pieces Seferis managed to marginalize the anticonformist tendencies and social protests of Greek symbolism and aestheticism. Above all he suppressed the challenge against the intellectual establishment articulated by dissenting voices—X. Lefkoparidis, Al. Veinoglou, and Y. Skaribas in fiction, Ph. Politis, Kl. Paraschos, and I. M. Panayotopoulos in criticism, D. Glinos and K. Karavidas in scholarship, Y. Steris and Y. Bouzianis in painting, D. Mitropoulos and N. Skalkottas in music—especially after the Asia Minor Disaster (1922) and the

collapse of the irredentist "Great Idea." For Seferis, the real artist was the craftsman who did not know that he was creating art, "the illiterate who traveled the road of a great life, who with such pains and effort set down on paper the things seen by his conscience" (63). Literature, he taught, should return to the people and draw its inspirations and means from that inexhaustible resource of national rejuvenation: this is how the literary work would achieve true Greekness.

Another major aspect of the essay of Makriyannis, from a strategic viewpoint, is the assault on progressive modernism. As I mentioned earlier, at the time Seferis wrote studies of three important representatives of literary tradition: he appropriated Kalvos as a protosymbolist (an exercise that deserves a detailed comparison with the reading of Kalvos published by Odysseus Elytis in 1946 as the application of a different set of interpretive strategies, surrealist ones, to the same author); he praised Palamas as the true national bard, the poet of the Greek race; and he launched his longest revisionary enterprise, the undermining of what he shrewdly perceived as the ultimate threat to his increasing authority, Cavafy's modernism.

An attack on progressive modernism also forms the conclusion of the essay on *The Memoirs*, one which consists in a masterful discussion of the crisis in language and art between the two World Wars in Europe. Seferis suppresses the subject with great dexterity, as he refers to modernism in general terms without mentioning its name, without making any cultural specifications, and without dealing with any of its rare Greek manifestations. But at the end he offers his fellow intellectuals the vision of "resurrection of the life of man, in its most serious sense" (64), one that will come true in his country when "enlightened and educated people will understand (because they will be truly enlightened and truly educated) that the culture and discipline of their soul can be greatly aided by such works as this one by Makriyannis, which is, I believe, the conscience of a whole nation—a testament of supreme value" (65). Seferis opposed the more experimental forms of modernism by producing the true indige-

nous literary masterpiece—the work of Makriyannis. Through similarly successful appropriations, conservative Greek modernism managed to assimilate certain innovative techniques of its international counterpart without allowing for its more radical manifestations (in, for example, Joyce, e. e. cummings, Borges, Tzara, or Khlebnikov), which might threaten the credibility and respectability of literature as a national institution. By adhering to models of reasonable innovation and seasoned introspection (drawn, for example, from Conrad, Eliot, Éluard, Lorca, T. Mann, or Hamsun) Seferis and the other modernists protected Greek literature from the intrinsic challenges to signification and representation articulated elsewhere.

A national tradition redefined, a literary canon revised, and the more unsettling modernist trends suppressed: all this served, of course, a relentless self-promotion which was never to cease. Seferis understood the politics of interpretation better than any other Greek writer with the single and for him haunting exception of Cavafy. He reminds us of what Kermode wrote about Eliot: “He was ready to rewrite the history of all that interested him in order to have past and present conform” (1966, 111–12). His work has been in many respects a massive exercise in rewriting which conceals ingeniously and often charmingly its goals. Notice how ingenuous his self-reference to “a handful of young people who began to write after the catastrophe for Greece in Asia Minor” (25) seems and how he tries to keep a disarmingly low profile when he volunteers to his audience: “at least I can point out to you the path I followed myself in my approach to a work so generally ignored” (26). That tactic of self-promotion through self-effacement, which he adopted from T. S. Eliot’s literary theory, is typical of his whole work: when he calls two poetry collections *Book of Exercises*, the collected essays *Dokimes* (essays/attempts), and his translations *Copies*, the humble tone conceals the strenuous effort to advertise himself as a great artist. His study of Makriyannis is a case in point: if his interpretive strategies both stem from the same aesthetic assumptions which inform his own poetic work and serve the production of a literary masterpiece, then the ultimate purpose served by his reading of

The Memoirs becomes clearly to present himself as the true heir of the General's art—to present his work as the only one that is fully and truly national, artistic, and great. This is the authority sought by his revisionary interpretation.

Did Seferis succeed in these purposes that we saw embodied in his essay? To supply an adequate answer, we would need, as I indicated earlier, the documentation of a genealogy of the interpretations of *The Memoirs* that followed his. (Here we can only note parenthetically that his reading provided the epistemological space for the second philological edition of the work by Linos Politis in 1947.) But even a cursory look would suffice to remind us of the presence of Seferis's Makriyannis in every domain of Greek intellectual life as a model of writing, thinking, and patriotic ethos: we will find him behind the repeated efforts to define Greekness in opposition to Western rationalism as the transhistorical unity of a nation and continuity of a race; we will even find him behind the fact that, since modernism, Greek literature and criticism to a large extent have been cut off from artistic and philosophical developments in the West. His is perhaps the symbolic name that this national epidemic of self-forgetfulness and self-abandonment could take.

If political criticism is to be not just a political reading but a political rewriting too, then I think contemporary Greek criticism (and literature and art) is faced today with an urgent (and yet unfortunate and belated) priority: the undermining of Seferis's exasperating presence and the debunking of his legislative authority in every part of public rhetoric and conduct. It is not an attitude of hostile competition that I propose but one of antithetical opposition. His is a language we must unlearn and a rhetoric we must expose if we feel that for some reason all did not end or was not said

On the secret seashore
white like a pigeon
(from "Denial")

as he and the caretakers of his reputation would like to have us believe.

The Fictions of Criticism:
The “Prolegomena” of Iakovos Polylas
as *Künstlerroman*

THE NATIONAL authenticity of the literary work is sought and ascertained by criticism in many different ways. In the case of C. Th. Dimaras’s *History of Modern Greek Literature*, it was recovered through the establishment of an indigenous tradition that spans ten centuries of local intellectual achievement. In the case of George Seferis’s approach to Makriyannis, it was recognized in the unmediated voice of a genuinely personal writing which envisions and incarnates the ethnic identity. We may call the first method historical and the second stylistic. Another available method is the scholarly or, more specifically, the philological one. It employs techniques of text editing to fashion a work according to certain holistic and integrative aesthetic and political criteria. The thought of aesthetic taste and political preference invading and permeating the scholarly territory of philology may come to some as a surprise, if not an insult. But this is only because we do not yet have enough theoretical inquiries into the epistemology of the philological enterprise that would show its dependence on standards of artistic axiology. I shall point to some possible directions for such an inquiry by investigating the ideological biases of a particular annotated edition, the restoration of the work of Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857) by his first editor, Iakovos Polylas (1826–1896).

This chapter does not propose a new, more competent reading of Dionysios Solomos, but it attempts to destruct the most venerable one ever produced by drawing attention to the literary genre whose conventions support its popular claims to authenticity. I aim to deal with the "Prolegomena" written by Iakovos Polyklas and prefixed to all editions of Solomos's oeuvre that have come out this century, not as a critical biography but as a *Künstlerroman* (a short, dense novella of personal education, the novel of the artist). My main argument is that this should be read as an artistic rather than scholarly text—a magnificent literary work that successfully set the standards used in every approach to the poet and thus effected a canonic interpretation and an interpretative closure.

Two years after the decorated poet died, Polyklas produced an extraordinary work of imaginative scholarship—or what Harold Bloom would call "strong reading" (1976, 6)—by preparing an authoritative edition of his extant compositions, which were literally scraps and fragments in a state of dispersion. The peculiar significance of this achievement lies partly in Polyklas's ability to project convincingly an image of order on what seemed to be an incomprehensible mess of unsuccessful experiments. Polyklas chose to offer to the newly-born Greek state its national poet, to the then pervasive spirit of heroism an encomium of virtue, and to the reading public of the time a distant, yet familiar figure of solitude and courage. By extracting masterpieces from a work in frustrated progress, by reducing variety to variations, and by introducing to popular mythology the overarching specter of Blake's bard "who Present, Past, & Future sees," he established firmly the monument of the Poet as Hero in true Carlylean fashion.

The authority of the "Prolegomena" has remained virtually unquestioned. Since its first publication in 1859, when it introduced the poet's extant works, it has always been taken at face value as the best biography and critical appreciation of Solomos. Even the standard edition of his collected works by Linos Politis ([1948, 1955] 1960) begins with it and obeys the principles of its policy. Given the exclusive emphasis and complete trust granted

to its patriotic message, the text has been treated not as a literary monument but as a critical document: it is read for the value of its information. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Solomic scholarship, after the initial excitement over the publication of the manuscripts by Politis in 1966, has followed a rather pedantic and unproductive path. In fact, I would argue that, as long as *Polylas* is considered a trustworthy guide into the poet's workshop, the related exegetical labor will remain a series of humble footnotes to his first editor's masterful interpretation, bereft of any hermeneutic awareness and critical insight.

The destruction, then, of Polylas's "Prolegomena" and its powerful influence is a priority for Greek criticism. Its purpose is not, of course, to recover the "real" Solomos and discover the one hidden behind the well-known portraits, but rather to liberate his work from the limitations imposed by that definitive reading and render it available to new, fresh approaches. Needless to say, such a destruction, if successful, would likewise entail the destruction of the author Solomos—the unique literary genius invented and eulogized by patriotic pride. As long as the figure of the national poet constructed out of scattered fragments remains an aesthetic object of romantic admiration, any attempt to look at his manuscripts is doomed to fragmentation and repressed idealization since we still read them only as if they were the foundations of the canon as well as the origin of the belated anxiety of modern Greek literature. The idealization of his fragments fragments our artistic and/or critical ideals.

I would like to propose two strategies for the destruction of the "Prolegomena," and for this particular occasion I follow the first. A possible approach could be a generic one—that is, to read the text as a literary monument, specify the genre to which it belongs, and point to the conventions supporting its functions. Another destructive reading could be written as a genealogical approach that would define the historical (including political, social, and ideological) conditions under which the work was received and consumed so effectively as a critical document by various discourses. The former would concentrate on the artistic

conventionality of the work, the latter on the arbitrariness of its critical readings. Having as a common target the statue of the bard erected by Polyas, both would try to expose that aspect of his writing consistently suppressed by the humanistic tradition of Greek criticism: its textuality—that is, the rhetorical constitution of what still is the supreme romantic semiosis in modern Greek.

Thus, this chapter will attempt to read the “Prolegomena” as a work of literature and place it in a particular genre subcategory, the *Künstlerroman*. But I must first introduce the genre of fiction to which it belongs, the *Bildungsroman*. My brief discussion will be based on two broad surveys: one by Martin Swales, which covers the period from Weiland to Hesse in Germany; the other by J. H. Buckley, which covers the period from Dickens to Golding in England.

Swales argues that the *Bildungsroman*, the formation novel as an account of the hero’s youthful development, was born out of an intense fusion of literary practice and aesthetic theory “in specific historical circumstances, that is, within the *Humanitätsideal* of late eighteenth-century Germany. It is a novel form that is animated by a concern for the whole man unfolding organically in all his complexity and richness. *Bildung* becomes, then, a total growth process, a diffused *Werden*, or becoming” (1978, 14). According to the very first use of the term by Karl Morgenstern in the early 1820s, this kind of novel “portrays the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness” (Swales 1978, 12).

Both scholars take pains to distinguish the *Bildungsroman* from the other two genres of fiction with which a possible overlapping sometimes creates confusion. The first is the *Erziehungsroman*, the education novel, “with an emphasis on the youth’s training and formal education” (Buckley 1974, 13); this is “explicitly (and narrowly) pedagogic in the sense that it is concerned with a certain set of values to be acquired, of lessons to be learned” (Swales 1978, 14). The other genre is the *Entwicklungsroman*, “a chronicle of a young man’s general growth” (Buckley 1974, 13); this has “one central figure whose experiences and whose changing

self occupy a role of structural primacy within the fiction” (Swales 1978, 14). The *Bildungsroman* is quite different in that “with its concern for the *Werden* of an individual, [it] is able—in Hegel’s and so many theoreticians’ terms—to redeem the prosaic facticity of the given social world by relating it to the inner potentialities of the hero” (Swales 1978, 23). Although, like all novels, it tells the story of a hero, this story has a deeper resonance because it “is enacted within the finite realm of social practicality, and it also partakes of the infinite realm of his inwardness, of his human potentiality” (Swales 1978, 17).

Buckley admits that he tried unsuccessfully to go beyond the limits of the German term and render its range in an English synonym: “the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation, even the life-novel” (Buckley 1974, vii–viii). But any such translation loses the rich connotations of its original tradition. To remain faithful to that tradition, Swales begins his analysis by using once more the standard definition of the genre provided by Dilthey in 1913: “A regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony” (1978, 3). Although somehow vague and in certain cases partially inapplicable, this general description maps the intellectual territory where the drama of self-realization and personal growth takes place. Steiner calls it “a tale of ripening, a *paideia*” which “takes its hero on a ritual quest. His voyage (with its dim roots in the chivalric ordeal) leads through successive trials of initiation” (Steiner 1964, 271, 272).

As mentioned before, the books by Buckley and Swales cover the British and the German traditions respectively. In discussing Buckley’s work, Swales makes a series of interesting distinctions between those two literary traditions, which further elucidate the specific identity of the genre. I will summarize them in three points. First, the *Bildungsroman* “is written for the sake of the journey, and not for the sake of the happy ending toward which that journey points” (Swales 1978, 34). The conception of expe-

rience it is built upon is neither related to a concrete sense of finality nor inspired by a specific goal in life, since "the meaning of the growth process, of the *Werden*, is to be found in the process itself, not in any goal whose attainment it may make possible" (34). Second, the novel is not concerned with the practical question of accommodating the hero in the existing social reality. The tension between the individual and the social is not resolved by a linear plot in actual and easily recognizable terms. The forces awaiting the hero in his rites of passage are defined in elusive, rather philosophical ways because "they tend to be ontologically, rather than socially, based" (35). Finally, despite its idealism, the *Bildungsroman* does not culminate in full consciousness or the hero's complete self-realization, but it always describes his development and intellectual adventures in a social/cultural context impossible to escape or ignore. "It follows, then, that neither 'consciousness' nor 'activity' are separate realms which man can choose to enter or leave. Rather, he inhabits both in their interdependence" (35-36).

The *Bildungsroman*, although perhaps the most typically German literary genre, immediately after the great success of what is still considered as its first masterpiece, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-1796), spread to most other European literatures and continues to thrive to our day. In fact, the persisting lack of scholarly interest in this genre outside Germany is somehow compensated by the high critical appreciation of many works in this category. It is particularly interesting, though, that its most representative, philosophical, and self-reflective expression, the *Künstlerroman*, has remained almost exclusively German. With very few spectacular exceptions in other languages—like Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* (1906-1912) and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)—its German products are unsurpassable both in numbers and in popularity.¹

The *Künstlerroman* is the *Bildungsroman* of the artist that

¹ And the *Künstlerroman* has even affected the lyric theater. Think of Richard Wagner's *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* [1868] where Walther's artistic growth turns the work into a magnificent *Künsteroper*.

describes his development from childhood to maturity. Naturally, emphasis is given here to questions related to the nature of the genius, the essence of art, and the importance of aesthetic values. In this romantic subgenre par excellence, the alienation of the creative talent from a cruel reality and a materialist society returns like a *leitmotif* throughout every work. As for the earlier claim about its extreme self-reflexivity, it can be easily justified, especially in light of formalist and structuralist criticism: the novel is, at least in part, about its own nature, construction, and self since its development coincides with that of the hero and the problems he has to resolve are again met at every stage of the work's progress. That is why the major Künstlerromane, from Wieland's *Agathon* (1767) to Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947), are at the same time important treatises on aesthetics. It comes as no surprise, then, that the great figures of romanticism worked on a magnum opus that would detail the education of a poet; it is even less surprising that all these works, although well-planned and repeatedly revised, remained in a desperate state of fragmentation: Hölderlin's *Hyperion* (1797–1799), Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1799–1800), Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1798), Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* (1819), Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* (1821).

In *Natural Supernaturalism*, M. H. Abrams treated Wordsworth's *The Prelude* as an epic about the "Growth of a Poet's Mind," and it is to his insightful comments on the Bildungsroman that we lastly turn our attention before discussing the "Prolegomena" by Polylas. In a long passage entitled "Redemption as a progressive self-education," Abrams traces the ideological origins of the genre back to post-Kantianism which

incorporated a conceptualized version of the design of Christian history. In this process the redemptive goal of the history of mankind was shifted from the reconciliation and reunion of man with a transcendent God to an overcoming of the opposition between ego and non-ego, or a reconciliation of subject with object, or a reunion of the spirit with

its own other, and this culmination was represented as occurring in the fully developed consciousness of men living their lives in this world: the justification of the ordeal of human experience is located in experience itself. Accordingly, the history of mankind, as well as the history of the reflective individual, was conceived not as a probation for the other-worldly heaven but as a process of self-formation, or self-education, of the mind and moral being of man from the dawn of consciousness to the stage of full maturity. (187–88)

Thus the course of human life became a secularized *Heilsgeschichte*, a *Bildungsgeschichte* which found its artistic expression in the literary genre of the Bildungsroman. Since in this context of philosophical idealism “everything essential that exists and happens is referred, ultimately, to the ‘becoming,’ the evolving history, of human consciousness,” the epistemological focus of the age changed radically and “the Christian history of the creation, fall, and redemption was translated to the realm of human consciousness as stages, or ‘moments,’ in its evolving knowledge” (Abrams 1971, 188). Abrams reminds us appropriately that Hegel “considered the plot of history to be the self-realization and self-education of the spirit, and that the result of this process constitutes the justification of God’s way to men” (189).

These ideas about the self-sustained cultivation of the mind go back, of course, to Herder, who viewed history as a *Bildungsgeschichte*, defined the aim of life as “the education of humanity” and argued that man’s supreme goal is “to earn for himself by practice this degree of light and certainty, by means of which, under the guidance of his Father, he may become a noble freeman by his own effort; and he will become one” (quoted in Abrams, 203–204). Abrams rightly emphasizes the centrality of this concern which envisions man’s union with nature and the eventual restoration of a lost paradise: “Romantic philosophy is thus primarily a metaphysics of integration, of which the key principle is that of ‘reconciliation,’ or synthesis, of whatever is

divided, opposed, and conflicting" (182). It is from this ideological perspective and in this intellectual context that we should examine "the distinctive Romantic genre of the *Bildungsgeschichte*, which translates the painful process of Christian conversion and redemption into a painful process of self-formation, crisis, and self-recognition, which culminates in a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward" (96). Let us then summarize the main characteristics of the *Künstlergeschichte* before proceeding to read the "Prolegomena" as a representative example.

The *Künstlergeschichte* is a text in narrative form which, although belonging simultaneously to another genre in terms of its literariness (e.g., novel, poetry, criticism, biography, philosophy, etc.), can be classified as such because it narrates a tale of growth. This is a story of personal becoming: the progressive stages of initiation into life and art which lead to higher levels of awareness and achievement; on his way to maturity and full power, the talented individual faces a series of aesthetic and moral problems as well as conflicts with an unsympathetic society; finally he—since he is always male—reaches self-realization and comes to grips with the world in its essence; and thus he responds courageously to a missionary call.

Certainly, readers familiar with the "Prolegomena" have already recognized in this synopsis the master design of the text. Still, some might object that Polyklas describes the poet's real life accurately and that this was actually the path which Solomos followed to everlasting glory. But it is the rhetoric of the narrative, the hyperbolic literariness it radiates in subliminal exhilaration, that points to the models of its catachrestic textuality—models that originated not in the poet's life but in his critic's readings.

POLYKLAS narrates the gradual growth in maturity of an artistic genius born in the late eighteenth century on a small Greek island. Nature bestowed upon him its best gifts: talent, enthusiasm for life, love of freedom, and a passionate soul. Although he felt love for all people and respect for his teachers, he had an

uncompromising attitude toward social pressure or scholasticism. Poetry spoke to his heart from an early age and brought him in direct communion with the outside world, as if nature were inviting him to become its best interpreter. But while his mind responded openly to Art's call, he was faced for the first time with the others' lack of sensitivity and understanding, an alienating experience that would recur often in his life.

His mind was by nature very Greek and very critical, inspired by a searching spirit and supported by a delicate sensibility. Those abilities, along with his moral virtues, led him to discover Beauty and Truth. But while he was in Italy for higher studies, he realized that his country's rebellious resurgence against the Turkish domination was at the same time the vision of the ultimate national revolution and of Art's return to its original homeland. With the same eagerness with which he responded earlier to nature's call and followed the path of Art, now he responded to his soul's urge and returned to his country, giving up the prospects of an illustrious career in Italy.

He returned and became the bard of the Greek revolution, the most romantic revolution of all. To sing its praises, he took the spirit of the language really spoken by men, cultivated it, and raised it to the high spheres of imagination. Although he nurtured some doubts about the importance of his calling, he drew inspiration and encouragement from Homer and the other ancient masters and struggled against the difficulties of his craft. His mind was noble, brave, independent; he devoted his critical and creative faculties to hard study in order to enable lyricism to fly to poetic and national heights. He strove to achieve inspirational purity, artistic unity, and moral exaltation. He alone heralded the dawn of a new Hellenic art, articulating the nation's strong will and redefining Greekness.

His purpose was aesthetic as well as moral. But he had to sustain unfair criticism, misunderstanding, social indifference, and isolation. His heroic soul, burning with patriotic passion and artistic vision, was devoted exclusively to his mission; he ignored an ungrateful society, its hypocrisy and corruption. No external

disturbance seemed to diminish his unflinching courage or affect his simple, affable manners. But then he suddenly found himself implicated in a lawsuit that tormented him for years and, although it did not influence him intellectually, hurt his heart and changed his life. He was forced to move permanently to another island and continue there, working intensely on his grandiose conception, an epic poem about the War of Independence as encapsulated in a single incident.

Those were critical years. Feeling and imagination had to be coordinated in order to depict artistically the struggle of mind and individual will against the temptations of nature and the forces of evil. The poet now grew suspicious of friends, held aloof from society, and became increasingly isolated in his proud loneliness. Although the antipoetic spirit of the time fought his integrity, he succeeded in preserving his artistic identity intact, even at the cost of refusing to visit the Greek mainland since eternal Greece had made his work and vision her real home. From now on, art and philosophy meant everything to him: in their remote realism, he felt free to explore the possibilities of a heavenly marriage of form and content, of Beauty and Idea. Only nature remained his faithful friend, with whom he could communicate without any obstructive mediation. He found refuge in her mysterious world, away from the imminent powers of darkness.

Both his unwavering defense of enlightened reason and moral integrity and his arduous progress into perfection and reconciliation made his endurance reach an early limit and sent him to death—and immortality. Although his work remained necessarily fragmentary, it has a deep unity derived from its spiritual qualities and design. Other ingenious minds like his own will recognize and honor the unfinished yet flawless achievements of this noblest of men and greatest of artists.

This is the story Polylys has to tell, one which I reread here deliberately as the repetition of a common romantic myth, the return of stock narrative formulas, and the recounting of a familiar allegory about the fate of modern art. In terms of plot, characterization, technique, style, and philosophical orientation,

it constitutes a complete and typical *Künstlerroman* in that it follows the rules of the genre and fits into the norms of its tradition. It is the life story of a major artist which "has been philosophico-poetically written" and can be divided into six parts: "Genesis," "Idyllic," "Pedagogy," "Getting under Way," "Sorrows," and "The Everlasting Yea." The first deals with his "inward vivacity that promised much" and the early development of a "certain deeper sympathy with animated Nature." The second depicts the "happy season of Childhood" and the dual influence of "culture and nurture." In the third, we learn about the studies of "an incipient Philosopher and poet in the abstract" until he decided to abandon "his legal Profession." The fourth part presents the young man realizing his "Capability" and deciding to fight "against the great Empire of Darkness." The fifth describes a period of crisis and the agony of his "Love for Truth." Finally, the last portrays the triumph of "Freewill" and "Freedom" over "Necessity," and the end of the artist.

The *Künstlerroman* as a genre follows the artist through "various successive states and stages of Growth, Entanglement, Unbelief, and almost Reprobation, into a certain clearer state of what he himself seems to consider as Conversion." While this model obviously applies to Polykas, much more emphasis is laid on growth and its organic development than in the other parts, with the result that the stage of crisis is presented as a social conflict with internal repercussions rather than a private problem of individual consciousness. Not for him the tormenting doubts or violent passions that haunted the age of Byron, Schiller, and Pushkin. The path taken by this poet was narrow but straight, leading to maturity without major changes, revisions, or surprises. In this respect, another diversion from the norms of the genre should be mentioned: the absence of the crucial theme of "Romance," "the ache of love" (Steiner 1970, 273). Thus, the psyche of the poet is purged of concerns other than intellectual, and the story unfolds uninterrupted and unobstructively.

In the "Prolegomena," as in every *Künstlerroman*, the poet is the only character that matters. He is the favorite of "Nature,"

the gifted artist whose mission is “to preach-forth this same HIGHER that sages and martyrs, the Poet and the Priest, in all times, have spoken and suffered; bearing testimony, through life and through death, of the Godlike that is in Man, and how in the Godlike only has he Strength and Freedom.” He finds his “Calling” in art and the meaning of life in the “Christian Religion,” trying “to embody the divine Spirit of that Religion in a new Mythus,” that of the resurrected Hellas: “in the Idea (*in der Idee*) he lived, moved, and fought.” His life can be seen as a sequence of rites of passage: he is faced with a series of demanding choices related to his profession, public role, place of stay, work, and beliefs. His decisions inaugurate new phases of experience and creativity while daringly deviating from the standards and expectations of society. “A feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude,” he flies into nature, in secret communion with “Eternity and Immensity.” But people have no understanding of his efforts. “Everywhere cast out, like oil out of water, from mingling in any Employment, in any public Communion, he has no portion but Solitude, and a life of meditation.” Still, although his career was catastrophic, his work as a search for essence will be of everlasting importance.

Among the devices employed by this text’s narrative technique the salient one is undoubtedly “the Editor,” the voice of the objective narrator. This is a common device in the *Künstlerroman*, which gives to the story an authentic distance, that of a real life recounted. But since that was not simply a life actually lived but a spiritual one, an artist’s odyssey through “fantastic Dream-Grottoes,” his “Biography” contains necessarily “only a hieroglyphical truth.” The editor, therefore, instead of narrating real events, narrates intellectual adventures—texts. “Great Men are the inspired (speaking and acting) Texts of that divine BOOK OF REVELATIONS, whereof a Chapter is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some named HISTORY.” The explicit presence of Polyas as editor in the “Prolegomena” is thus an agent of truth reassuring the reader: this is exactly how things happened. On the other hand, it conceals the work’s fictional status. Far from

being "a complete picture and Genetical History of the Man and his spiritual Endeavour," the text is a literary work presented as a true account by its omniscient narrator.

It is of course through a stylistic examination that the literariness of the editorial intervention and interpolation can be seen. The language of the "Prolegomena" is a serious parody of Greek, which inserts Hegelian diction into the demotic syntax. The solemnity of the tone and the serenity of conviction distract attention from the witty mannerisms that prolong the sentences, giving them the artificial life of complex statements. Indeed, the farcical element has almost never been absent from the *Künstlerroman*. In most examples of the genre, the reader is also encouraged to laugh at the hero's voluntary misery or single-minded zeal by the idiolectically exquisite ornaments of a style unabashedly self-referential and loud. The Teutonic economy of Polyas's style asks in comic despair: "in what words, known to these profane times, speak even afar-off of the unspeakable?" The answer, as usual in similar cases, lies in a baroque conflagration of rhetorical tropes with illuminates the dark corners of the poet's heart. The reflexivity of this style—indulgent in abstract nouns, superlative adjectives, consecutive subordinate clauses, polar semantic oppositions, and composite words—erupts in memorable apothegms with an embarrassing variety of possible uses. Not only in terms of plot but also in terms of language and style the *Künstlerroman* is an adventure into the private eccentricity of the genius, "a soul so circumstanced" that even the burlesque rhetoric of life (i.e., the editor) imitating art (i.e., the original work) cannot render it in all its uniqueness.

After the preceding brief comments on the plot, the characterization, the narrative technique, and the style of the "Prolegomena," we come finally to its philosophical orientation. "Apart from its multifarious sections and subdivisions, the Work naturally falls into two Parts: A Historical-Descriptive, and a Philosophical-Speculative." The first describes the author's solitary life and alternates with the overlapping second one, which deals with his efforts to compose "a true Book" "by victoriously penetrating

into Things themselves.” The *Weltanschauung* of the artist in every *Künstlerroman* can be securely characterized as a “high Platonic Mysticism” seeking to transcend disunity and achieve “the decisive Oneness he ascribes to Nature.” The artist believes that “Division” has spread everywhere in the world. “Nothing that he sees has a common meaning, but has two meanings.” He therefore strives to reunite the invisible spirit with its visible manifestation, matter, in works of perfect beauty and to reach “into the promised land, where *Palingenesia*, in all senses, may be considered as beginning.” Polylas recounts such a quest through art for a “Natural Supernaturalism.”

As becomes clear, the “Prolegomena” should be read as a condensed *Künstlerroman* that exhibits almost all the distinctive features of this romantic genre; it describes from a deceptively detached viewpoint and in a highly rhetorical fashion a passionate private search for aesthetic transcendence and spiritual fulfillment. The interesting parallels between this text and *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* or Ugo Forcolo’s *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1802) demand separate treatment. However, remember that in this single text Polylas made his impressively convincing case about Solomos as the grand romantic figure with such integrative power and mythopoetic ingenuity that he was unable to say anything substantial about the same subject for the rest of his life. His Solomos has been, and still remains for most of us, the only one possible because he is so intensely fictional and the only one conceivable because he is so incestuously readable. By aestheticizing the author, Polylas effectively detextualized his work: he saved the country from the unsettling uncertainties over his dispersed writings by offering it its national poetry. The ultimate paradox is that today Solomos prevents us from reading his work; his signature blinds us to his autographs. Unless we sacrifice him, along with the comfort of our national pride, we will never be able to read his (whose?) texts.

What distinguishes Polylas’s *Künstlerroman* and gives it special appeal is that, at first glance, his narrative cannot be read as fiction since obviously a person with the name of Solomos did exist;

Polylas is allegedly talking about the experiences of a real author, and this reinforces his claim to objectivity and truth. But, as I have argued, the pivotal narrative device of effective concealment deployed by the writer here is the role he assumes as an editor; that is, the scholarly guise given to his project when a Künstlerroman is presented as a practical work of *Literaturwissenschaft*. Now I would like to push this point further and venture a complementary hypothesis: not just the “Prolegomena” but the whole edition of Solomos’s extant works is a Künstlerroman; additionally, Polylas’s success in establishing the poet’s reputation as the national and the greatest Greek author is due to his commanding fictionalization of his life *and* work. Thus, his edition belongs to the literary genre of many masterpieces: Wieland’s *Geschichte des Agathon* ([1766] 1794), Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* [1777] and *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795), Ludwig Tieck’s *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798), Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1836), Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich* ([1855] 1880), Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), Hermann Hesse’s *Peter Camenzind* (1904), E. M. Forster’s *The Longest Journey* (1907), Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe* (1906–1912), Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), and Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1947).

Since my principle aim in this chapter was to propose the destruction of the Polylas edition of Solomos, let me explain here that I use the term “destruction” owing more to Walter Benjamin’s cultural materialism than to Martin Heidegger’s metatheology. Thus, destruction is directed against what the former called the “aura” (Benjamin 1969, 223) of the artwork: its proclaimed authenticity. This destruction encompasses the cultural authority of the text and its power exerted over anthologies, histories, and textbooks (not to mention contemporary writers), canonizing the poet, perfecting his compositions, and eventually positing their totality as the origin of modern Greek literature. I also suggest that the best way to defamiliarize this work, now glorified by philological superstition and intentionalist fallacies, and

subject it to fresh approaches, is to counterread it against that sublime parody of the *Künstlerroman*, Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836); in fact, I have already surreptitiously used quite a few unattributed quotations from that book in my preceding discussion of the genre conventions adopted in the "Prolegomena."

Carlyle, himself a translator of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, based the composition of his colossal mockery of literary romanticism and philosophical idealism on the same rules followed by Polyas, but through tropological inflation Carlyle turned them inside out and exposed their conventionality. His book seemingly deals with "the Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh," "Professor of Things in General," and concentrates on his magnum opus, the "Origin and Influence of Clothes." Two of its real subjects, however, are the impossibility of editing and the essential fragmentariness of writing. The narrator is trying constantly to read disparate texts, understand dissipated meanings, and make disseminated writings connect. Geoffrey Hartman, a shrewd reader of the book, observes:

The formal effect, in any case, is a fading of the distinction between original and commentary. Quotation is king, yet everything is quotation. In *Sartor* criticism has found its carnival colors. Carlylese, instead of being a metalanguage, merges with the idiom of its source: its originality is its impurity, the contamination of gloss and original. But since the source is invented, Carlylese is actually a self-educating prose, maintained by the fiction not of a source alone, but of a source that needs an editor-translator-interpreter. Here is a feigning indeed, though in the service of criticism. (1980, 49)

The relevance of these comments to Polyas's work is immediate because they define its hermeneutic dimension, editing-as-interpreting, and emphasize the inherent mediatedness of all understanding.

To appropriate an observation made by Paul de Man on Höl-

derlin's *Hyperion*, the "Prolegomena" is in all respects a typical Künstlerroman "where the notion of *Bildung* . . . is defined as the eccentric road man travels toward the primeval unity of the immediate. The poet is one who accepts nature (the immediate unity of Being) as his guide instead of submitting to some institution that accepts and perpetuates the separation between man and Being" (1983, 257–58). But when the "Prolegomena" as a grandiloquent literary defense of idealism is contrasted to the farcical philosophy of bottomless signification permeating *Sartor Resartus*, the aesthetic aspirations of the enterprise are disclosed. Hartman observes that Carlyle's novel "is the Age of Criticism producing—out of itself as it were—a fiction. The Negative is converted into Being, to echo Hegel" (1980, 49). I believe that Polylas's book—and not only its introduction—should be seen from a similar perspective but with strong political overtones. Here the Age of Criticism and Revolution is producing its supreme fiction, a national literature.

The edition of Solomos by Polylas is one of the few real romantic novels in Greek and certainly the best, at least in terms of genre: a compact Künstlerroman. Its production and appropriation by subsequent critical discourses should be temporarily abandoned. The whole book must now be read as a piece of fiction in two successive parts: one theoretical, the "Prolegomena," where an author, Solomos, is devised and his *Bildung* mapped; and the other practical, Solomos's poetry, where his work is edited in a readable, naturalized form. Thus, in the former part we are instructed about how to read the latter; the two, Prolegomena and poetry, confirm and verify each other. This is the story of the great national bard: his life, ideas, and works; his progress to maturity and aesthetic creativity; his artistic achievements. Both the life story and the work are fictional, as indicated by the adherence to narrative and pseudophilological conventions. Polylas invented not only an author, a literary figure, but also a work, an aesthetic whole. His edition must be destructed because it is still editing the gaps and the silences of those manuscripts, replacing the writer's absence with the creator's pres-

ence. In a literary monument of effortless yet gripping power, a romantic critic established not only an artist and his poetry but also a single reading of the chaotic manuscripts Conte Solomos left behind.

On the other hand, I would not entertain the idea that this Solomos whom we know is a fake or forgery, and therefore I would refuse to subscribe to a hunt for the real Solomos. Although I am proposing that we destruct Polyklas's Solomos, I am fully aware of the fact that we cannot destroy him. It is impossible to forget or eliminate his edition, at least at this point, because it has made possible what we perceive as modern Greek literature. It can only be parodied, and this is the probable function I see a work like *Sartor Resartus* (or alternatively a deconstruction of the manuscript) serving. But, one way or another, Polyklas will remain with us for many years to come; even so, I do not see why he should continue as the object of only servile admiration, not anger or laughter.

Incompleteness as Damnation:
The Poetics of the Romantic Fragment in
Dionysios Solomos's *The Free Besieged*

What relationship do we have to such a text that allows us to call it a fragment that we are then entitled to reconstruct, to identify and implicitly to complete?

PAUL DE MAN, "Shelley Disfigured"

DISCUSSIONS about the politics of criticism usually focus on criticism itself as a cultural institution and analyze either its operations or its products. Undoubtedly, this is the proper realm for such an investigation. On the other hand, we must be careful not to exclude from potential consideration the appeal and influence that critical discourses may have on work produced outside our own institutional territory—work, for instance, in education or the performing arts. For example, consider the seemingly unrelated area of artistic creativity. Aesthetic and other standards of propriety, legitimacy, acceptability, and currency affect processes of composition, too. A writer may choose to adopt, modify, or transgress them, but he is never totally unaware of their existence or immune from their power. It would be interesting, therefore, to see the results of his attitude to those rules of writing and norms of literary understanding as his work unfolds. For an examination of this type and in light of the previous discussion, I have selected the poetry of Dionysios Solomos. We saw in the third chapter how his first editor inventively restored his frag-

mented writings to a total work by combining principles drawn from aesthetic idealism and romantic patriotism. As we will soon discover, the poet himself was also heavily indebted to, and fatally inhibited by, very similar principles. However, they are essentially different; Solomos eventually rejected the tempting solution of a spurious unity guaranteed only by the national identity of the literary work.

The fame of Solomos as the Greek national poet has constantly distracted critical attention from his greatest accomplishment: the typically romantic art of unaccomplishability. Despite the innumerable attacks of philological explication and exegetical reconstitution, his work remains, in its fragmentary state, puzzlingly open to new arrangements and interpretations. The uneditability of Solomos, probably the major question of modern Greek philology and one of crucial theoretical importance, should be the subject of another study. In the meantime, the following passage might serve as an epistemological warning against humanistic aspirations similar to those entertained by Pahini-Tsantsanoglou (1982):

The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing . . . against difference in general (Derrida 1976, 18).

That is why every restoration reduces Solomos's texts to literature. By now it is obvious that no critical edition will ever manage to impose upon it the homogeneity and wholeness of an oeuvre; it will remain inconclusive in its incompleteness. In this chapter I examine the aesthetic assumptions that account for this work's inherent fragmentariness by focusing on Solomos's com-

ments on the poem "The Free Besieged" and foregrounding his artistic efforts against the intellectual climate of his time.

Iakovos Polylas in his "Prolegomena" implicitly identified art as conscious, glorious failure. But failure was not simply the result of the sublime efforts of Solomos, but a source of aesthetic *angst* as well as the mode of the creative experience for the romantic artist; as such, it was incarnated in the typical genre of the whole era, the *fragment*. Although romanticism tried eagerly to abolish the neoclassical genre considerations that demanded every kind of artwork comply with the established hierarchy of styles by conforming to certain rules according to its formal category, the movement can justifiably be credited with the emergence of this peculiar new artistic species, this antigenre. It is only very recently that the fragment has begun losing its emotional aura, generated by glamorizing biographies that go back to James Boswell's *The Life of Johnson* (1791), and has been examined from the viewpoint of literary theory.

The romantics set themselves the highest task that art had ever faced: the apprehension and depiction of absolute truth veiled by phenomenal reality. The reality of a Newtonian world was no longer to be trusted; behind reality, the essence of things, hidden yet dimly perceived, was there to be discovered and rendered intelligible by the scientist and visible by the artist. But this drastic shift of attention from the audience's dictates to the talented artist's dicta, from the public's expectations to the creator's divinations, made urgent the need for an alternative credibility: which dominant quality would guarantee the authority of the work and validate its claims on truth?

In order to save the notion of truth, which Kantian aesthetics had already ostracized from the domain of art as alien to that of beauty, the romantics replaced the ability for perfection, measured according to public standards, with the nobility of intention. Perfection, the quintessential classical quality resulting from harmonized balance that, as an ideal, haunted the romantic fascination with antiquity, was thereafter rendered impossible. When in the eighteenth century art (with other fields like philology and

linguistics) gained its autonomy¹ but lost its external justification by being completely dissociated from reality and morality, its appeal to truth could not be sustained by its mimetic perfection; in fact, it depended either on the approval of the public taste or a favorable comparison with the exemplary ancient models. Therefore, the artwork, deemed imperfect by its nature and constitution, was also conceived as communicating a fleeting glimpse at truth through private, psychical, and intellectual forces.

That was the first clear intimation of the “sense of an ending,” obliquely expressed in the uncomfortably romantic dichotomy between the classic and the romantic. The Age of Revelation and Revolution, when measured against the Age of Order and Hierarchy, felt the first fatal blow to its apocalyptic hopes: this was the second Fall of Man so eloquently described in the great crisis lyrics of the English language from William Wordsworth to Wallace Stevens. The bitter feelings generated by that Fall (into regressive signification and subjectivity) and consequent Exile (into art and/or silence) mark since then every turn in the path of western civilization in its quest for unattainable perfection. This course led Solomos, like Coleridge and Hölderlin, from one unfinished project to another, from heroic to mystical romanticism, from Greek to Italian—in addition to his move to Corfu (1828), drinking, and probably homosexuality.

The inherently fragmentary nature of the artistic work became a convenient excuse for lack of perfection—an idealist escape from any shattering comparisons with tradition. The aesthetic notion of fragmentariness was widely invoked as a self-evident objectification of the “romantic agony,” the artist’s desperate strife to perceive truth and articulate it with comparable convincingness. In the ensuing Satanism, where Solomos’s “Lambros”

¹ “The nineteenth century was to dissolve that link (the reciprocal kinship between knowledge and language), and to leave behind it, in confrontation, a knowledge closed in upon itself and a pure language that had become, in nature and function, enigmatic—something that has been called, since that time, *Literature*” (Foucault 1971, 89).

and "The Woman of Zakynthos" clearly belong, the revolt against neoclassical tradition was painted as the necessary hubris against the organic deficiency of language, a "terrible beauty."

This demonic defense of art is present even in contemporary critical discourse. Since Blake's time, it has been assumed that artistic expression as the supreme mode of divine revelation can never be complete and consummate because it will never manage to identify itself with its object and thus become itself absolute; no matter how important an artwork is, it will be always subject to different interpretations and misinterpretations, uses and abuses. Therefore, it will never become true. The search for essence—like the attainment of full identity between the word and the thing, the signifier and the signified, language and the world, or art and truth—is doomed to failure. Consequently, the resulting work, instead of being viewed as a measure of the success, should be experienced as a testimony on that personal search—a scrap of that untranslatable, irreducible knowledge mediated by the artist. Eventually, the work was thought to have a revelatory character, if not tone, and was duly credited to its creator's aesthetic martyrdom by massive acts of exclusive interpretation, such as the "Prolegomena" of Polylas.

It is interesting that, although a multitude of artworks since the late eighteenth century have been, intentionally or otherwise, left incomplete or unfinished, their quality very often wins high critical acclaim. The work of the great romantics abounds in diverse examples from every field of art: literature, painting, sculpture, music, theater, opera. But the subtle subject of their classification is on the whole wishfully neglected: what are the pragmatic or generic differences, if any, between the fragmentary, the unfinished, the fragmented, the finished, and the perfected work? Those critics who do not disregard this issue tend to blur the differences by introducing an equation between the fragmented and the unfinished on the one hand and the finished and the perfect on the other. Thus, it remains unclear if fragmentariness inheres in the deficient will of the artist, in the biographical particulars of his life, in the conditions of the work's transmission,

in the arbitrariness of interpretation, or in the very nature of art itself.

The notion of the fragment soon became broad enough to include every piece of art supposedly extracted from the intention or inspiration of the author: from the original manuscript or project, from an extinct or damaged tradition, from an ideal or sublimated form. Everything was a potential fragment by being artistic—a fragment of a frustrated revolt against time and material fragmentation, of a universal truth, of an absolute work. The notion became inclusive through the attribution of its mystical qualities to any significant constituent part of a whole: an icon or a fresco is a fragment from a church, a tragedy from its respective tetralogy, a movement from its sonata or symphony, a poem from its series or collection, and so on. Only one question has been left unanswered: If we ascribe this characteristic to the part, what is the analogous quality for the remaining whole?

Romanticism was not content with discovering fragments but proceeded, infatuated as it was with remnants, ruins, and wrecks, to create new ones—for example, Shelley's "A Fragment: To Music" and Keat's *Hyperion. A Fragment*—or to invent others through the scrupulous fragmentation of complete works into exemplary excerpts or images. Edgar Allan Poe declared: "What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief" (1965, 22). And Friedrich Schlegel concluded: "Many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at the time of their origin" (1982, 121).

Criticism contributed significantly to this process. The short passage or work (tellingly canonized in new minimalist genres like the portrait, the lyric, and the *lied*), radiant with strength, intensity, and insight, was exalted as art in its highest, purest manifestation. In *The Mirror and the Lamp* M. H. Abrams reminds us:

Reference of poetry to supreme moments of unsustainable feeling and imaginative impetus made it common for romantic theorists to focus upon the short and incandescent passage as the manifestation of poetry at its highest. . . . In a fashion going far beyond Coleridge, the poetic quotations and anthologies of De Quincey, Lamb, and Hunt give evidence of an almost total fragmentation of poetic works into supernatural lines, excerpts, and scenes. (1953, 134)

Biographies of artists took the sensational form of the “adventures of a soul” traced through the fragments of its efforts. The developmental, dynamic process of the organic growth as an evolutionary cosmic and artistic model promised no particular end or purpose but prefigured the reconciliation of the parts torn apart—“that deep romantic chasm”—and the restoration of the whole in a unifying synthesis.

Deep at the heart of the romantic promotion of the fragmented work lies the ambition to locate perfection-as-the-quest-for-truth above and beyond the realm of aesthetics, in the territory of the private creative effort. In this way, the standards of evaluation were transferred from the mimetic functions of the work to the moment of its visionary creation. And art was judged according to what it was not, according to what it could not be, according to what it intimated by and in its crippled, muted form: “a distinct recollection of the whole” (Coleridge, “Kubla Khan”). Great art, as this argument assumed, remains ontologically yet magnificently deficient and unrealizable since its necessary task, the command and faithful revelation of absolute truth, is always interrupted “by a person on business from Porlock” and is ultimately impossible. We thus arrived at the glorification of failure according to its scope, sincerity, and morality. Nostalgia, that most emotional aspect of romantic consciousness, transformed the unfinished work into “rescued fragment” of absent wholeness, transposing aesthetic criteria to the unattainability of perfection and replacing the rewarded neoclassical expectations with the crucified romantic intentions as a measure. These are the

very traditional lines along which Polylas gave Solomos to the Greek nation; the mainstream of the relevant critical tradition has not digressed from them at all.

In an attempt to break with this outdated tradition, I have been sketching the intellectual background that informs the aesthetic aspirations of Solomos as exemplified in his work. It is an unfortunate impediment in our effort that we still lack a comprehensive survey of his poetics—a survey of the ideas about poetry of the artist who, along with Cavafy (but on completely different grounds) has been the greatest “poet-critic” (see Wellek, Lukács) of the Greek language. The publication of his manuscripts has provided a valuable wealth of material, as a commentary running parallel to his compositions, that covers all fields from metrics to aesthetics and still awaits the competent theoretician to analyze its systematicity and relate it to the literary text. At this point, I will focus the discussion on a series of self-addressed notes that Polylas called “Meditations,” referring to the second and third drafts of *The Free Besieged*. (Page numbers in parentheses refer to Politis’s *Dionysiou Solomou Aftographa Erga*, 1964.)

THERE are two dominant ideas around which all these critical comments of Solomos are structured, those of the organic whole and the absolute truth; essentially the two are rather thinly disguised transformations of the archetypal romantic distinction between form and content. Organic whole as a naturalistic conception of form emphasizes elements of totality and growth, of well-wrought unity, of harmonious interrelated intradependence, while absolute truth as an idealist conception of content emphasizes transcendental elements of an apocalyptic epistemology that are instrumental for the retrieval of an unmediated divine presence. These principal notions circumscribe the aesthetic autonomy first propagated by German idealism: a form that dispenses with public approval and a content that dispenses with external reference combined into a completely self-validating and self-authenticating work of art. Clearly, that was Schelling’s territory, and it became Coleridge’s and Solomos’s.

In this romantic conceptual framework, the image of the artist-as-creator is directly analogous to that of God, in that the artist reacts to his alienation from nature and the world by creating the autonomous universe of art—a counterworld, an antireality. This is exactly what poetry has to emulate: “The Universe in its totality is undoubtedly invested with beauty in the supreme grade; because it is of a Perfect Simplicity, of an Infinite Richness, and of a Constant Harmony” (472a). But poetry can compete: “The Whole poem must express the Meaning like a World in itself Mathematically graded, rich and profound” (424). Or in another description, “The Absolute existence of the Poem must be pregnant with many senses. . . . Thus a Unity of many forces manifests itself in the balance of forms” (403). These are the most succinct statements on the required wholeness of the poem in that they contain all its distinctive features: balance, autonomy, unity in variety, harmony, and self-sufficient strength.

The contours of aesthetic wholeness are implicitly outlined in a comment on the French philosopher Blasche: “A growth in time of the Unity of Intelligence into a Multitude of various representations and conditions. But the impression must be informed by consciousness, that is, she must understand it and give it spiritual form, she must create, in a spiritual way, the meaning and change it consciously” (472a). Additionally, Hegelian idealism provides a more concrete image of the purported outcome: “Meaning remains always the same, from the beginning to the end . . . ; and so truly every word comes out saturated with meaning, and the work appears Individual according to the spirit of the Generality that generated it” (403). Finally, the organic model of the plant is used to describe how the poetic idea should be concretized: “Adapt to the Spiritual Form the Story of the Plant which begins from the seed and returns to it after passing through all the Vegetarian Forms as if in Grades of Growth, that is, the root, the trunk, the leaves, the flowers, the fruit. Adapt it and think profoundly about the Existence of the subject, and also the Form of Art. Be careful so that this process will take place without the minimal interruption” (475). This

passage provides a general outline of the working method that Solomos adopted while laboring over the successive drafts of *The Free Besieged*, if not earlier—a self-defeating method that would never let him arrive at the promised land of aesthetic redemption.

For Solomos, the greatest artistic quality of a poem was organic unity; he himself called it the “sense of organicity” (474b). Every poem should be a unified and unique totality, exalting with its multifarious structure an idea and subliming a manifestation of moral action. This conception helps us realize that the real problem of composition for him was not how to write good lines or make fine poetry but rather how to create a whole—“a Strong Unity and a Continuous Progress” (475)—by connecting the parts indissolubly. Undeniably, he wrote some of the most interesting verses in the Greek language; still, he was unable to integrate them in an artistically unified text. His works remained fragmentary not because of their deficient quality but because he could not provide their missing links. The parts did not connect; he never established unity and continuity.

Solomos had been striving for compact unity and uninterrupted continuity throughout his mature work, from the revisions projected for the reorganization of his “Ode to Lord Byron” in the early 1830s to the self-addressed admonitions contained in the latter manuscripts: “Think profoundly about this Unity because it must not change. But do not immerse yourself in it unless exclusively” (480a). One feels compelled, therefore, to take the next logical step and ask the pedantic question: Since this author had everything so carefully and wisely planned, since he was so intensely aware of his missionary duties as a national poet, and since he was also such an astute judge of his own work, why didn’t he succeed? In fact, why did he keep failing so persistently in his desperate efforts to achieve organic perfection and self-sufficient integration? The biographer or the critic who subscribes to the intentional fallacy would easily blame his character, intellectual incompetence, or personal problems. But in this respect Solomos was no exception in the pantheon of his age: he shared the same difficulty with all the poets of the romantic era—Blake,

Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Hölderlin, Foscolo, Hugo, and Pushkin. All were afflicted by the anxiety of incompleteness Schlegel (1968, 141) described so succinctly: "The Romantic type of poetry is still becoming, its peculiar essence is that it is always becoming and that it can never be completed."

Such a widespread intellectual phenomenon cannot be accounted for simply by a biographical, psychoanalytical, historical, or sociological explanation; the consistency of the failure indicates that it is philosophical in nature and aesthetic in character and inheres in the assumptions informing poetic practice at that time. It is not that Solomos could not finish any of his major works but rather that he kept failing to complete his great work, *the* poem he was striving to compose. Every new beginning and each new effort following "Lambros" was above all another attempt at the composition of the absolute literary work—not the perfect but the complete one—that poets from Keats and Mallarmé to Valéry and Pound have envisioned, but only Wagner and Joyce among all artists seem to have achieved.

This distinction between perfection and completeness is important for the general scheme of my account. The perfect artwork, as the neoclassical aesthetic ideal, is the work of the master that is created through the rational employment of the means proper to a concrete, mimetic aim that can be validated by the audience through a comparison with reality. The complete artwork, on the other hand, as the romantic aesthetic ideal, is a work of the genius that draws exclusively from internal resources to depict a transcendental idea sustained by its organic autonomy. Solomos was unable to complete a poem not because he could not finish it but because he could not compose it. He was unable to connect the parts so that organic unity could be effected and the work would be brought to existence; he kept adding one perfect line to another until their disconnectedness forced him to give up.

Solomos never measured the quality of his work against history or reality since he took flight from both to capture their essence. His effort was not directed toward describing the siege of Misso-

longhi, the survival of a Cretan fighter, or the death of a British soldier—all topics appearing in his works—but toward making cosmic sense out of them, thus turning what happened into an event of supernatural significance. The organic unity of the artwork was thought and desired as the reflection of an absolute idea, as its material manifestation: “You must think profoundly and with immutable concreteness (once and for all) about the nature of the Idea before realizing the Composition. The most substantial and the highest content of the real Human Nature, Fatherland and Religion, will be incarnated in it” (479). The supreme command that appears in the later manuscripts is: “Think profoundly about the nature of the Idea” (476b).

The poem had to be composed according to the true nature of the idea that would dictate its rules to it. The very conception of the poem, as indicated in the “Meditations,” was nothing less than a spectacular abstraction; here is a description of the work, where the aesthetic principle of the organic unity is translated back to its idealist origins: “A full and beautiful Republic of Ideas that represent substantially the Monarch who is concealed from the senses. Then it is a true Poem. The Monarch who is latent in the senses and who is recognized only by the Spirit into which he was born, exists outside the territory of time. But a Republic of Ideas sets down his powers Sensibly in Time” (471). This suprahistorical image of the work leads further back to the ultimate origins of art: “The Nation of the Ideas must be created of Thought or Essence, from which a clear and profound sense must transpire. Thought, Essence, Truth, Absolute Meaning, as Hegel says” (476a). Thus, we arrive at the conception of aesthetic wholeness as metaphysical disclosure: essentially, the poem aspires to an unimpaired presence and complete unmediatedness that will disclose pure essence through its deep meaning.

Here a distinction between content and meaning according to the poetics of Solomos might be appropriate. Content is composed of various thematic units subject to alteration and transformation, while meaning is the moral message of the story that reveals significant aspects of human fate and duty. Content as

well as language and rhythm are means to the end of the poetic apprehension of the great meaning, the articulate essence. As now well confirmed by his notebooks, Solomos relentlessly changed the content of his works, sometimes incorporating elements from older projects into new ones, in his incessant pursuit of the ideal meaning. Throughout his mature work, the tension between “Word—Work—Meaning” tends inconclusively to burst into the definitive, the absolute work, but balanced unity fails to prevail. The tension is created by the interaction of the powers populating this republic of ideas. In order to grow, the poem has to be fertilized with a variety of forces: “Impregnate the Poem with Forces. Forces of thought, forces of faith, moral forces, forces of the Soul . . . , forces of knowledge. Thus Meaning passes through all these Forces and leaves itself there. And thus one achieves/obtains Truth” (474b). It is through this twist of argument that Hegelian aesthetics appropriates truth from neo-classical reality by identifying the Idea as the apparition of Truth and, as we saw before, Art as the material realization of the idea. Only Art, according to this new philosophical scheme, is not of secondary importance as a substitute for real knowledge; on the contrary, it is elevated to the status of the strongest and noblest expression of human creativity because in its realm Truth and Beauty blissfully coincide: “Art is the active link between Truth and Beauty, and their identification. She pulls the one from Reason and constitutes it like her own soul, like its image (think better)” (471).

The last passage leads to the concluding stage of my unwinding argument that has been charting some basic aesthetic ideas of Solomos and their philosophical contours. Art was valorized by romantic idealism as the *locus identitiae*, the meeting point, of Truth and Beauty, where absolute essence is incarnated in total form. Thus, the rift between language and the world, between the word and the thing, caused during the seventeenth century social and ideological upheavals, is healed as the arbitrariness of the sign is transcended through and in art. The appropriate method for this purpose is delineated in the very next sentence of

the above passage: "This Thought, when concretized, must undergo/go through all possible Forms, endure them all aesthetically, and when there are no more, then it is True" (471). This awesome task amounts to nothing less than practically covering every conceivable use of a word/sign until the real dimensions of its Truth are discovered.

Clearly, for Solomos, the ultimate purpose of art was something even beyond Truth being arrested in a consummate form, in a perfectly transparent literary sign; it was the highest ideal of philosophical idealism, the reconciliation of opposites into the absolute identity: ". . . an Absolute Identity between Spirit and Nature, the subjective and the objective world, understanding and its object" (476a). The grand scale and the utopian character of the entire project now become obvious: this is the dream of transcendence whereby physics becomes metaphysics (425) and romantic alienation (from nature, history, and reality) is abolished; this is the edenic vision of redemption from all representation that later informed Flaubert's demonic desire to dispense altogether with external reality and compose a pure text about nothing.

Solomos was unable to make the parts connect, and therefore unable to complete anything, after his own system of ideas and beliefs became deeply divided by romantic oppositions between being and existence. However, he continued recording his pentecostal ruminations while hopelessly invoking his muse to grant him a glimpse of eternity. He also continued criticizing his work with almost suicidal determination and integrity, trying to seize a grain of unadulterated meaning, a moment of linguistic innocence. He was not deceiving himself completely since he could at least realize that: "'Nobody ever arrives'; not at the absolute grade but he attempts to in the soul of all people" (472b). Yet, he accepted his quest as a fate and observed its commandments as a duty. He destroyed himself without ever producing *the* work, perhaps not even *a* work; but he left a valuable legacy to modern writing: an urgent sense of creative responsibility that confronts questions of identity—national, aesthetic, semiotic, or other—

INCOMPLETENESS AS DAMNATION

with the utmost suspicion and faces the inevitable dissipation of meaning and dispersion of Greekness with the wise dignity of heroic despair.

In one sense no text is finished, since its potential range is always being examined, hence extended, by every additional reader. (Said 1977, 53–54)

The Hermeneutics of Openness in
the Novel: The Unsettling Modernism
of Yannis Beratis's *Whirlwind*

The end is the return of all things to the Unit, which is
God.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC, *Louis Lambert*

All ideological activity appears in the form of utterances
compositionally *completed*.

JULIA KRISTEVA, "The Bounded Text"

GREEKNESS, like any other notion of identity, is an idea of fixed boundaries and closure: it excludes what is not authentic and true, the non-Greek, and portrays the original, the eternal Hellenic, as an autotelic unity. The authentic is exclusive, sealed off, closed: it does not tolerate uncertainty, indeterminacy, or openness. That is why Polylas had to impose standards of homogeneity and wholeness to the Solomic manuscripts in order to produce an integrated literary work and a national monument. The same logic, of course, was operating behind the poet's own inability to complete any of his major projects. The logic of identity—be it aesthetic, semiotic, social, ethnic, or other—dictates the requirement for demarcation and closure, for finite and self-sustained entities.

This requirement has always been part of the traditional critical expectations. It translates into the stern demand for a well-

rounded work that ends in a fulfilling way to supply missing information, answer all questions, and solve all problems—for a work that is both finished and complete. What happens, though, when this demand is not adequately satisfied and when a reassuring sense of completion does not follow a literary reading? I shall examine such a case of frustrated expectations to see who is responsible for such a failure of communication. This examination entails both a look at the system of reading rules that apply to literature and some references to the problematics of reception theory. At its end, a necessary correlation will emerge between two mutually supportive principles: the national (Greek) and the organic (autonomous) unity of the literary work; these principles have been not only the epistemological basis of all aesthetics but also the fundamental criteria invoked by the political struggles in and around the institution of criticism.

Upon the publication of the novel *Strovilos* (Whirlwind) by Yannis Beratis (1904–1968) in 1961, Greek critics greeted it with unrestrained embarrassment. While no one said that the book was bad, none of the reviews seemed to know what it was really about or how it should be read. A representative example of this public response was the review by Dimitris Raftopoulos in the literary magazine *Epitheorisi Technis* (1962). According to that reader, the novel, although well-written, lacked “content,” “soul,” and “logic” because it was not in touch with reality, it was not an expression of personal experience, and its psychological and intellectual origins were obscure. Although Raftopoulos found elements of “abstraction” which allowed him to attempt a comparison with Franz Kafka’s narrative technique, he was unable to answer the main questions posed in his review: What is Beratis trying to say? And where is Beratis heading? He concluded that the artistic effort had failed since only “an irrational and inconsequential story of crime adventure” remained. Furthermore, he called the work “a desperate experiment against realism and against the novel itself, an alchemic experiment in order to get something out of nothing.”

I would like to concentrate on this interesting phenomenon of

the negative critical reception given to *Whirlwind* not only at the time of its first publication but even twenty years later, as testified by the indifferent silence which unanimously hailed the book's second printing. I aim to investigate its causes and see if they reflect the low quality of the work or the inability of the critics to come to grips with it. But before discussing the review in hand, I will try to schematically outline the novel.

The nameless narrator and two friends, a man and a woman, are participating in a covert operation against an invisible enemy in a faceless country which perhaps could be their own. In the prologue, the three get together in a country house and set out on their mission. In part 1, they have crossed a lake by boat and arrive at another part of the countryside where they run into a strange crowd of peasants setting up home in a junkyard. They leave the same day, after meeting with their leader, a cleric, and travel by car to a big city. The next evening they manage to trap a young man on his way to his new position as a bank accountant and take his papers. In part 2, the narrator arrives at a small town and takes the young man's place in the bank under his name. Later on, the woman joins him and helps him successfully flood the market with forged money. When he has to leave, an old lady arranges his escape from the town by boat. He joins the third member of their group, the other man, at a lighthouse. They both go aboard a luxury ship where they meet the woman and her psychiatrist. They arrive at a city, but soon the two men are betrayed, barely managing to escape by train back to the countryside. In the epilogue, the narrator takes his friend, wounded during their escape, to a monastery for treatment. He meets the strange abbot, who gets killed, and the two friends once more flee.

This is the plot of the novel. The events are presented in chronological order by its perplexed hero, who throughout seems to know and understand no more than the reader: "I don't know if I regretted my initial decision but the truth is that I was under the impression that I had become caught in the gears of a huge machine which dragged me powerless, God knows where" (Ber-

atis 1980, 127). The story begins and ends abruptly, and its surrounding details, causes, and repercussions remain tantalizingly obscure. The hero does not have a name whereas his lady friend has many; other names are often mentioned but their owners never appear, and even their existence is far from guaranteed. Explanations are deceptively promised by the development of events and allusions to constantly missing information, but they are rarely, and then only partially and deficiently, provided. The characters seem to have no personal history or secure future, and they remain elusive since they are simply depicted through their actions but never described. The present is obviously the absolute time of this novel, and actual events constitute its exclusive, convoluted logic.

One particular aspect of the work deserves separate mention here: the complete identification of story and plot. The power of the narrative to capture and fascinate the reader's attention consists in that it makes him follow and share the narrator's search for meaningful explanation. Since the story is told exclusively in the first person from the protagonist's viewpoint and since he fails continuously to recover any information vital to his understanding of past and present events, at no point does the reader know or understand more than he does; therefore, it is equally impossible for him to make full sense of anything. Thus, the story the book tells and the narrative sequence of events are completely identical and coincide with the self-consuming present, the absolute time of the book. All one knows is what is happening, not when, where, how, or why. There is nothing outside the text because there is no time outside the moment of the plot.

The loose structure of the novel, then, apparently justifies the reviewer's exasperation: it makes understanding so difficult that one can refuse to take it seriously. On the other hand, to comprehend the reaction of Raftopoulos, the aesthetic assumptions informing his judgment must also be examined: on which principles and expectations was his rejection based? It is important to remember that negative criticism may reflect not only artistic failure but also failure of aesthetic understanding. To judge the

critic's evaluation one must clarify where the failure and subsequent lack of communication occurred.

OUR INVESTIGATION begins with an insightful comment which represents the spirit and the attitude of the whole review. Raftopoulos rightly observes: "The development of the story could be any other without any detriment, or it could stop at a different point or continue indefinitely." The critic's objection seems to stem from his idea of the artwork as a unified, organic whole. Contemporary Soviet semiotics has given some interesting scientific formulations to this romantic idea. Yury Lotman has described the contours of the artwork's autonomy:

Artistic structures by their very nature have a sharply limited message. Here the end and beginning of the text are marked significantly more heavily than are messages in ordinary language. . . . The function of a work of art as a finite model of a "speech text" of real facts which is by nature infinite makes the factor of *delimitation*, of finiteness, the necessary condition of any artistic text in its primary forms: hence the concepts of the beginning and end of the text (narrative, musical, etc.), of the frame in painting, of the footlights in the theatre. (1976, 9-10)

Raftopoulos feels that in *Whirlwind* the rule of finiteness, a necessary condition of true artistry, has been violated by the work's open beginning and end; consequently he condemns it for lack of proper delimitation. Lotman, on the other hand, warns against such intolerance by emphasizing that "an apparent non-ending or non-beginning in a work of art is a particularly marked structural device" (1976, 10) and therefore should not be rejected indiscriminantly.

While Lotman is ready to examine the abnormalities of the aesthetic structure from a functionalist viewpoint and see how they work in the context of a specific work, the Kantian demands of Raftopoulos do not yield to this kind of evidence. But what if one actually likes the novel? What if, despite the cybernetic frus-

tration, one enjoys this catastrophic adventure? Can we then mediate between the theory of orthodox aesthetics and the experience of aesthetic pleasure? Alan Friedman has offered a very useful, pragmatic (or perhaps pragmatist) suggestion: "No one can gainsay a fellow reader's or critic's sense that an ending is 'unsatisfying.' But, it may be possible to suggest that the root of his dissatisfaction is an expectation that pertains to older forms, to assumptions which more recent forms have all along been bent upon undermining" (1966, 37). Rather than concentrating, then, on the reviewer's principles themselves we can examine the expectations they generate and what leaves these expectations eventually unfulfilled.

When Raftopoulos complains about the work's incoherent organization and remoteness from reality and laments its attack on realism, he gives a clear hint of the inclinations of his taste: it is the absence of the mimetic qualities of the traditional novel which unsettle his expectations here. Since the promises that the work gives remain unkept and the interwoven enigmas it poses unresolved, the traditional reader's disappointment is entirely justifiable. Clearly his reading practice has been dictated by older writing conventions Friedman has aptly summarized:

The major traditional pattern, or roughly that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, postulates as its unspoken assumption about the shape of events that the climactic moments of widest moral expansion will be regularly followed by a limiting moral situation, a final re-organization of experience which restricts, either by narrowing or by moving in an opposed direction, the specific emotional and ethical expansion undergone in the climax. Briefly, in the traditional novel, experience is closed. (1966, 17)

Friedman, in his chapter, "The Closed Novel and the Open Novel," succinctly defines the teleology permeating the structure and the development of realist fiction: "From the beginning and all along, events are arranged with the assumption of a closed ending in mind: and all the other techniques in the book—such

techniques as tone, caricature, direct comment by the author—serve to reinforce the validity of the final ethical consolidation” (1966, 18). But in *Whirlwind*, although the arrangement of events is built on the cherished assumption of a final consolidation, the repeatedly anticipated solution never comes. As Raftopoulos bitterly discovered, this work mocks the techniques of the grand European novel by inserting unexpected elements of chance, secrecy, and instability. In fact, both its refusal to answer questions and explain its self-propagated mysteries and its reluctance to grant the information necessary for satisfactory closure make *Whirlwind* a decisively open work which challenges the reader’s demands by disorienting and confusing his expectations.

Narrative devices related to strategies of closure have been frequently discussed by modern criticism, particularly Russian formalism. Boris Tomashevsky, for example, in “Thematics” examined such techniques as “delayed exposition” (1965, 73), where information is tactically withheld, and “limited narration,” where “the whole tale is filtered through the mind of the narrator (a person in a position to know) and each piece of information is accompanied by an explanation of how and when he learned about it” (1965, 75). In “Literary Genres” Tomashevsky also defined four “systems” of narrative closure (1978, 86–87) which he distinguished from “poetic closure” (1978, 77). Even before him, Heinrich Wölfflin had introduced the distinction between “closed and open form” in the arts, elaborating extensively on their specific functions.

Ideas about closure, however, acquired wide currency among critical discourses only within the last twenty years. Perhaps it can be argued that the contemporary popularity of the term “closure” signals the change in the problematics about how literary works end. Marianna Torgovnick has even suggested that the notions of ending and closure are different in that the former “straight forwardly designates the last definable unit of work—section, scene, chapter, page, paragraph, sentence—whichever seems most appropriate for a given text,” while the latter “designates the process by which a novel reaches an adequate and

appropriate conclusion or, at least, what the author hopes or believes is an adequate, appropriate conclusion" (1981, 6). Therefore, the former is a quantitative designation, and the latter qualitative: by identifying the form of an ending we define the last unit of a text; however, by describing the effect of a closure we explain the impact of the ending on the whole text. "The discussion of closure includes the discussion of aesthetic shape . . ." (6). What is important is not what happens at the end but how that ending affects the work.

This proposed evaluation of the functions of endings depends again on the reader's aesthetic assumptions and his conception of the artwork in particular. Torgovnick, for example, postulates the romantic idea of organic wholeness when she argues that "we begin with the ending, but evaluate its success as part of an artistic whole" (6) and presents her principle criterion: "The test is the honesty and the appropriateness of the ending's relationship to beginning and middle, not the degree of finality or resolution achieved by the ending" (6). Thus, we find ourselves once more in the sphere of Kantian concerns about aesthetic structure that inspired Lotman's semiotic models as well as the reading expectations of Raftopoulos. Moreover, the territory of investigation as demarcated by Torgovnick covers the entire range of questions the latter had to ask since her evaluation of closure extends to "the study of the themes and ideas embodied in the text of relevant extratextual contexts that help form those themes and ideas, contexts including the author's life, his times, and his or his culture's beliefs about human experience" (6). Criteria to help specify which other contexts are relevant to the text and to what extent are not provided, but the author tries to define basic strategies of closure according to terms which far exceed the actual literary work and cover practically every aspect of the artistic communication.

Torgovnick limits her study of endings to strategies of closure. David Richter, however, in his discussion of endings in a particular genre, the "apologues," addresses himself to the broader problem of the very necessity of closure and rejects the idea that,

while the traditional form is closed, the modern one is open. After introducing the specific area of his examination, rhetorical fiction, he asks: "What then is it that determines the completeness of these functions, and what makes us feel that they are over when they end?" (1974, 19). The second part of this question appears to invite a consideration of the grounds for the audience's response—what allows us to know that a piece of fiction has ended. But the critic, in agreement with principles shared by Torgovnick, has already defended the notion of the coherent aesthetic whole and therefore his rejection of the possibility of the open work presents an ontological rather than evaluative argument: since, he believes, the Aristotelian demand for completeness remains fundamental for all literature, real narrative openness is impossible. Open works "are indeed organized artistic wholes whose endings make us feel that the works are over, and whose construction is such that our intuitions tell us that nothing of importance has been left out" (8). It is artistic construction that tells our aesthetic intuitions that the work is essentially closed. If the so-called closed and open works both arrive at aesthetically satisfying ends, then openness is apparently just another type of closure, the most liberal one. And what if the end is not satisfying? Then the work has failed. When Richter criticizes Thomas Pynchon's *V* and concludes that "the novel as a whole does not present its thesis as an experience carrying emotional conviction" (134), his observations echo Raftopoulos's complaints about *Whirlwind*, another "inanimate" work.

Richter's primary target is what he calls the "glorification of the openness of open form" (6), the positive emphasis which this aspect of modernist fiction has received by contemporary criticism. A special example of this kind of criticism has been the pioneering study of Robert Adams, where the open end was investigated as a strategy of Western literary tradition that can be traced to the Greek drama. Adams strikingly combined a modernist and an ancient tragic perspective in his influential definition: "The open form is literary form (a structure of meanings, intents, and emphases, i.e., verbal gestures) which includes a

major unresolved conflict with the intent of displaying its unresolvedness" (1958, 13). Adams was aware of the relativity of his concept and the methodological difficulties involved in its precise definition: "With a quick eye, a keen nose, and a mediocre amount of determination, the critic who wants to do so can easily discover an element of openness in almost any literary form" (1958, 201). Nevertheless, he noted that "works of this character are largely ignored in most aesthetic systems" (16), and therefore the need exists to bring their distinctive features to a wider critical attention. His own provisional solution was an intentionalist approach that divided "works in open form into three classes according to the motive of the artist: to express a philosophy, to gain a perspective, or to fulfill the requirements of a style" (206). But any effort to bring the creator back from the exile he was sent to by the New Critics was destined to fail. Adams's effort to loosen and open up the tight artistic structures of American formalism was interesting yet ineffectual in its regressive turn to the authorial authority.

While Adams tried to describe the modes of unresolvedness, Beverly Gross focused on another aspect of modernist openness, the handling of time. "Time is the factor which ordinarily sets the boundaries for the action of a novel" (1966, 363), she observed. "In many open-ended novels, however, time is much more than a chronological factor: it may do much more than merely set the boundaries for a plot—it may itself be the shaper of that form; it may be felt as a force having an almost solid presence within the novel; and it may in some cases be itself the novel's central subject" (363). After examining the crucial presence of time in works by Proust, Joyce, and Woolf, and their deviation from the traditional requirements for unity of plot and consistency of character, Gross concludes: "These novels are 'open' because what is propelling the movement of each is not a current of action moving through time, but a current of time revealing and expressing itself through action" (363). These are significant comments; they foreground narrative elements, time and its fluctuations, whose constitutive functions are usually neglected.

In his study of turn-of-the-century fiction, Friedman, probably the best-known theorist of openness, has argued that in our time “the novel turned to a new structure, to a flux of conscience that finished in the experience of incompleteness” (1966, 179). Combining the two aspects of unresolvedness and endless time we have just discussed, he related the open novel to modern times and suggests that its “deliberate avoidance, in the depiction of an experience, of any resolution of an experience anywhere is not only a narrative sequence; it is an ethical statement in its own right” (184). The message of this statement, which reflects the experience of contemporary man, is “that whether our heroes or anti-heroes perish or flourish (for it simply doesn’t matter in *this* respect), they must continually attempt to transcend—to order finally, finally make sense of, finally limit, and hence transcend—their disturbing, expanding experiences which *in fact* cannot be transcended, can never be transcended” (187). Thus, in the openness of the modernist novel we are invited to find something about ourselves and the open-endedness of our lives which attempt in vain to go beyond the limitations and constraints of historical time.

AFTER this brief survey of some recent theories about endings in fiction, we may now return to the comment that prompted the necessary digression. Raftopoulos criticized the disturbing openness of *Whirlwind* and rightly observed that the book has no apparent beginning or end. Indeed, its open-endedness appears to be the novel’s salient and most pervasive feature since it recurs at every turn of the plot. As the story unfolds rapidly, everything remains mysterious, and all tensions and questions persist unresolved: no concrete information about persons, times, and locations appears; no explanation about actions and events comes forward; only tenuous and insecure links between successive events emerge. The reader sees events through the eyes of the narrator who is himself repeatedly caught lost, misinformed, disoriented. Neither he nor the perplexed reader understands his behavior, his purposes, or his ultimate aims. Only the seemingly aimless devel-

opment of the story is foregrounded against the collapse of narrative causality: the logic of the overriding necessity governing the twists of the plot eludes the grasp of rationality. If the basic laws of literature are transgressed and the *formal* requirements of the particular genre are neglected, why should the reviewer or any other reader show any patience with or respect for this work?

Concerning the frustration of stumbling through the reading of an open work, Adams has offered an instructive comment worth quoting in its entirety:

A characteristic, then, of one sort of open-formed work is the *direct and unmediated quality of its relation to the audience*. By inputting to its reader no character at all, or a condition purely negative, the work in closed form disguises or minimizes its essentially relativist relation to the reader. Works in the open form make this relativism explicit. They often imply an image of man as an essentially divided and self-antagonistic creature. Although he may be ignorant of this fact at first, the work brings him to a realization of it; and to do so it must stand at once closer to the reader and further from its own actions or characters. Its proper effect always precludes simple identification between reader and character; an element of self-consciousness enters into the proper reaction to the work in open form. (208–209)

Thus, Adams advises that a truly responsive reception of such a work must itself be modern, self-conscious, and open; literary openness requires a corresponding openness on the reader's part. But when a critic like Raftopoulos approaches the work with self-protective trepidation and simultaneously tries to preserve intact his traditionalist aesthetic ideas, naturally he will reject it to protect the validity of his assumptions. Perhaps the total lack of communication testified by his review owes more to his conservative attitude, his inability to engage his principles of evaluation in a dialogue with the work, than to the novel's low artistic qualities.

For example, Raftopoulos mentions dismissively the three memorable discussions the hero has with a painter, a former pro-

fessor, and the abbot—that is, with representatives of the major domains of art, science, and religion, respectively. He calls these discussions “flashes of thought which, however, lead nowhere and are not connected anywhere” because he cannot see any sufficient links connecting them to the overall plan. On closer examination, though, their crucial importance can be detected: they encapsulate the major theoretical problems of Beratis’s novel. The first discussion is about the impossibility of artistic beauty. The young painter tries eagerly to show the hero the paintings he is striving to accomplish, but he realizes that since all he has at this point are their titles and his concepts about them, he cannot really show anything; he can only narrate and project these works-to-be: “From this, however, he said at last, taking his third sketch in his hands, from this, however, I’m afraid you won’t see anything yet, and rather I’ll have to *narrate* it for you, that is, as much as it is possible to narrate a painting” (1980, 139). The second discussion concerns the impossibility of true knowledge. The former professor of philology confesses bitterly his inability to channel selflessly his passion for honesty toward a noble cause because he knows that everything can be expressed and understood in two ways: “Have you ever thought that it is impossible for the *absolutely truthful* person not to consider *at least* two truths?” (181–182). The third discussion explains the impossibility of religious belief: the tormented abbot describes the difficulty of giving yourself to God since “Faith is identical with Despair” (223) and man’s alienating addiction to this world is irrevocable.

All three discussions center on a basic polar opposition (form–content, word–meaning, belief–reality) and deal with the ideal of the ultimate signified, that absolute essence which the people committed to art, science, and religion fail to grasp. These theoretical discussions map the intellectual territory through which the adventures of the narrator evolve meaninglessly in diverse yet always inconclusive ways. But from our perspective, the hero’s quest dramatizes the familiar experience of the impossibility of realist fiction and the necessary indeterminacy of modern litera-

ture and art in general. Both modernist artist and the reader who consumes texts in the age of mechanical reproduction share this experience. Nevertheless, even though contemporary aesthetic expectations have abandoned most of their mimetic demands for a faithful representation of the world, readers still desire to feel some sense of unity established, at least what Richter calls “balanced irresolution” (5).

Edward Said’s generalization is pertinent here:

Formally, the mind wants to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginning of all things (or at least a limited set of central things), but like Oedipus the mind risks discovering, at that point, where all things will end as well. Underlying this formal quest is an imaginative and emotional need for unity, a need to apprehend an otherwise dispersed number of circumstances and to put them in some sort of telling order, sequential, moral or logical. (1978, 41)

Said’s account of a fundamental reading expectation applies to the case of Raftopoulos: the reviewer becomes disappointed by a book that, when treated as an independent artistic entity, does not provide enough answers and therefore cannot fulfill his needs. Despite its impressive technique, the work does not satisfy the reader but, on the contrary, provides an unpleasant experience. It is true that, if we isolate *Whirlwind* from its intertextual tradition and judge it by itself, Raftopoulos seems to be right. But I question if we can legitimately do that at all. Can we separate the novel from our other reading experiences and these from the rest of our experiences, thus privileging a moment of pure, unmediated reception from which personal prejudices and inclinations are safely excluded? And, if we cannot do it, which path should our investigation pursue?

Adams, dissatisfied with his own method, has indicated an alternative direction. “We like to see a problem ‘worked out to the end,’ a familiar premise followed rigorously to its final conclusion” (1958, 211), he admits, concurring with Said. But when we deal with an open work, our criteria must be modified: “The

measure of such a work is not its structural unity but its total relevance and intensity. One cannot, of course, show that relevance and intensity are 'there' in a work of art" (211) since they obviously "exist only in relation to a particular reader, who may or may not be susceptible to their impact," and therefore they "have a certain clear historical significance" (212). While the first criterion refers to "an author's congruity with the patterns of thought and feeling diffused through an age" (212) and the second to a reader's strong "emotional response" (213), they are both external to the work proper, its own structure and qualities. Thus, Adams realizes a poetics of the open work should include a study of the very experience of openness—to what and for whom a form may be open; furthermore, any theory of literary values should also take into account literary experience itself, that is, the individual actualization of these values.

The experience of the reader, or rather its conventional pre-suppositions, becomes the focus of the theory of "literary competence," a refined version of "affective stylistics," proposed by Jonathan Culler. His initial premise attempts to go beyond the limits of the structuralist enterprise: "The work has structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way, because these potential properties, latent in the object itself, are actualized by the theory of discourse applied in the act of reading" (1975, 113). Reading literature requires the mastery of special conventions related to this specific act, the proper knowledge of certain "rules" (in the Wittgensteinian sense) which allow one to play successfully the game of reading literature. This particular performance "is a rule-governed process of producing meanings" (126) of aesthetic significance. According to this theory, then, "what requires explanation is not the text itself so much as the possibility of reading and interpreting the text, the possibility of literary effects and literary communication" (127). To this, another qualification should be added: "The question is not what actual readers happen to do but what an ideal reader must know implicitly in order to read and interpret works in ways which we consider acceptable, in accordance with the institution of litera-

ture" (123–24). Culler borrows from Chomskian linguistics the scientific aim "of formulating the internalized competence which enables objects to have the properties they do for those who have mastered the system" (120) and translates it into what he sees as the task of a poetics of reading: "to construct a theory of literary discourse which would account for the possibilities of interpretation, the 'empty meanings' which support a variety of full meanings but which do not permit the work to be given just any meaning" (119).

Thus, the question asked earlier about the methodological validity of isolating the text from its reception has been answered negatively: it is epistemologically impossible to separate the literary work from its experience. This new position explains, partially at least, the failure of Raftopoulos to communicate with *Whirlwind* as a self-sustained artwork. But this also has important implications for our own investigation: if Raftopoulos failed because he separated the text from its sustaining discourse, we in our turn cannot defend it by doing the same thing; instead of trying to discover artistic qualities that the reviewer overlooked, we must look into the reading conventions which he, because of disabled literary competence, did not succeed in mastering and/or applying.

In his sketch for a "Poetics of the Novel," Culler has described the "mimetic contract" that binds the author and the reader of fiction: "the basic convention which governs the novel—and which, *a fortiori*, governs those novels which set out to violate it—is our expectation that the novel will produce a world" (1975, 189). "Novels which comply with mimetic expectations assume that readers will move through language to a world . . ." (196). Raftopoulos approaches *Whirlwind* with all the legitimate representational expectations derived from the mimetic contract which sustains the realist novel: in terms of plot, theme, and character, he anticipates finding certain requirements of intelligibility, unity, and coherence fulfilled so that through language and rhetoric a world may be recognized. When he complains that the author is not in touch with reality, that the content is "either

nonexistent or deceptive” because only “events and shapes—plot and persons—obscure things” have been left in the work, he is only expressing his deep disappointment upon finding the contract unfulfilled and himself lost in the unfamiliar world of a problematic textuality. This embarrassing encounter proves Culler’s point that “the difficulty of interpreting some works provides evidence of the restricted nature of the conventions actually in force in a culture” (123). In similar cases, the determination of a critic to confront the very conventionality of those conventions and question their validity is a true sign of an open reading, the kind of response that an open, or at least strange, work really demands. Sadly, as Culler has acknowledged, “we have developed powerful strategies to prevent texts from becoming writing” (200), to prevent the rupture of the established conventions which guarantee a safe understanding.

RECENTLY, though, it seems that the situation in criticism has changed. The poststructuralist concerns about fundamental questions pertaining to the nature and limitations of art, especially literature, have opened up a new problematic about margins and borders to a degree that perhaps makes many scholars share Geoffrey Hartman’s worries:

Criticism in the past was able to invent new types of closure to stem the drive toward endless interpretation. That drive is dangerous because it suggests that the interpreted object (Scripture, and now art) is but a means to reflection and might be replaced by pure mind or pure ideology. . . . Given our broadened historical perspective, however, there is now more helplessness about interpretation as it stretches toward an infinity of statements and contaminates art itself. The recent emphasis on intertextuality may even disable the question of how closure is possible. Nothing, according to this theory, not even meaning closes writing off; the spirit cannot master the letter. (1981, 149–50)

Contemporary discussions of endings focus exactly on the very possibility of closure and offer two answers from widely different

angles: one from the deconstructionist, the other from the semiotic.

The deconstructionist position, given a negative answer eloquently expressed by J. Hillis Miller, became the viewpoint of D. A. Miller's study on the traditional novel. Hillis Miller argued that the concept of the line, as symbolized in the image of the thread, is always confounded by repetition, which "is what disturbs, suspends, or destroys the linearity of the line. . . . The thread is the labyrinth, and at the same time it is the repetition of the labyrinth" (1976, 70). His comments, which aspire to a transhistorical applicability to all fiction, discover in the monological image of the line just another logocentric model derived from Western metaphysics:

Narrative event follows narrative event in a purely metonymic line, but the series tends to organize itself or to be organized into a causal chain. The chase has a beast in view. The end of the story is the retrospective revelation of the law of the whole. That law is an underlying 'truth' which ties all together in an inevitable sequence revealing a hitherto hidden figure in the carpet. The image of the one tends always to imply the norm of a single continuous unified structure determined by one external organizing principle. (1976, 69-70)

On the other hand, as Hillis Miller points out, relationships of meaning do not develop between sign and thing but sign and sign, and therefore threads do not unfold linearly but rather lead to multiple knots: "any single thread leads everywhere" (74), he states emphatically, discarding the sequence as a graphocentric illusion. "Narrative is the allegorizing along a temporal line of this perpetual displacement from immediacy" (72).

His conclusion gives us reason to assume that *Whirlwind* is perhaps a novel *par excellence*: "No narrative can show either its beginning or its ending. It always begins and ends still in *medias res*, presupposing as a future anterior some part of itself outside itself" (1978, 4). Discussions of closure are necessarily inconclusive: "The notion of ending in narrative is inherently 'undecid-

able' ” (1978, 3). What is customarily perceived as closure simply conceals the ultimate aporia of all narrative, its own impasse, because “no novel can be unequivocally finished, or for that matter unequivocally unfinished. Attempts to characterize the fiction of a given period by its commitment to closure or to open-endedness are blocked from the beginning by the impossibility of ever demonstrating whether a given narrative is closed or open” (1978, 7).

As if to demonstrate this very impossibility, D. A. Miller set out to deconstruct closure by explicating “the constitutive unrest of narrative” (1981, 282). His target is not closure itself but rather the concept of closure in the traditional novel as formulated by radical critics and advocates of modernist fiction in the following assumption: “Everything in a narrative exists in view of the hidden necessity determined by its final configuration of event and meaning” (1981, xiii). His counterargument “is not that novels do not ‘build’ toward closure, but that they are never fully or finally governed by it” (xiv)—an idea which essentially sees problematic endings as a paradigmatic manifestation of the uneasiness felt in novels over their control on expressive means.

Miller begins his exploration by posing the concept of the “narratable: the instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise” (ix)—something extratextual coming apparently from the real world, either waiting or asking to be narrated. Moreover, he insists that the center of his interest is not an external conflict between novel and reality, but an internal one between the principles of literary production and the claims of closure which cannot capture, hold, contain the narratable since it “inherently lacks finality. It may be suspended by a moral or ideological expediency, but it can never be properly brought to term” (xi). Miller proceeds to analyze a series of novels by Austen, Eliot, and Stendhal in order to show their intratextual insecurities.

In the last analysis, what discontents the traditional novel is its own condition of possibility. For the production of nar-

native—what we called the narratable—is possible only within a logic of insufficiency, disequilibrium, and deferral, and traditional novelists typically desire worlds of greater stability and wholeness than such a logic can intrinsically provide. Moreover, the suspense that constitutes the narratable inevitably comes to imply a suspensiveness of signification, so that what is ultimately threatened is no less than the possibility of a full or definitive meaning. (265)

While the novel attempts to give it a definitive form and arrest it in its aesthetic confines, the narratable escapes all impositions of closure because it involves unresolvable dilemmas which artistic means cannot tame. That is characteristic of fiction in general: even in the traditional novel, there exist infectious elements of discontent which make closural efforts eventually ineffectual since the supplement of the narratable always goes beyond the formal limitations of an ending.

Nevertheless, even though real closure is impossible, D. A. Miller rejects the claims made in defense of modernist literature about the contemporary open work. Since “closure is fraught with self-betraying contradictions” (281), its question is not one to ignore because it seems both to adhere and inhere in fictiveness itself: “the novel continually *promises* the totality it cannot, at any single moment, deliver” (279); neither can it stop giving this promise and avoid the anxiety of its consequences. “Even, therefore, when one thinks closure impossible, one may never be able to think it away” (281). This confirms one of Richter’s central statements: “The question of the form of the novel has not been avoided or even made less important in the novels of open end; as form becomes a matter of changes in consciousness rather than in fortune, the problem of shape, of completeness, of closure becomes, if anything, more urgent” (1974, 9).

Despite its radical claims, the deconstructionist position is feverishly idealistic and equally logocentric to the orthodoxy it criticizes; it privileges the text not with a single meaning of traditionalist criticism but with an inexhaustive possibility of poten-

tially multiple meanings which renders it invulnerable to any critical approach, including the deconstructionist itself. In both cases, the primacy of the text reigns supreme, protected by the humble secondariness of the scholarship which serves it. From this viewpoint, *Whirlwind* would be seen as a novel of exemplary openness, but at the same time this openness would be acclaimed only as a necessary corollary of the rhetoricity of language. Of course, it is only the literary masterpiece that possesses real self-deconstructive power, and unfortunately *Whirlwind* has not been evaluated as one. D. A. Miller's study is another piece of evidence for the particularly disturbing fact that deconstruction has never questioned the established canon of the Western logocentric tradition it criticizes. On the contrary, it has done everything possible to reinforce it by proposing laboriously additional proof of its authority: the latent self-deconstructing quality of the texts which comprise it. Miller claims that closure as well as openness are impossible, but the great texts already know it and exhibit that awareness artistically. It follows that, at best, the reader, and especially the critic, can only recognize this fact since they have obviously nothing to say that is not already said and contained in the work.

After his copious pronouncements on the ontology of literary endings, Hillis Miller concluded paradoxically on a sound pragmatist note: "The best one can have, writer or reader, is what Frank Kermode, in his admirable phrase, calls 'the sense of an ending'" (1978, 6). However, since our whole discussion was triggered by the observation that a certain reviewer was unable to have or make this gratifying sense, it is time to turn to the other poststructuralist suggestion. As a matter of fact, the semiotic position is entirely different from the previous one; its perspective is materialist, its approach communicational, and its focus the cultural constitution of the artwork.

In her studies of completion and finitude, Julia Kristeva provided an astute epistemological starting point when she noticed that the history of the novel is dominated by the "devalorization of writing," a phenomenon whose other side is the "valorization

of the oeuvre, the Author, and the literary artifact" (1980, 58). To amplify the same comment, this means that the history of a particular literary genre, the novel, is the history of the cultural valorization of literature as an art form, of the author as a talented creator, and of the work as a complete and autonomous artistic unit. Because of its semiotic and ideological constitution, then, "the novel is already 'literature'; that is, a product of speech, a (discursive) object of exchange with an owner (author), value, and consumer (the public, addressee)" (1980, 57). When we read a novel, we participate in an exchange; what we pay for is "literature," not a quality but simply the market value of a cultural product. Traditionally, criticism had assumed that there existed autochthonous qualities in a text that made it literary, and so it was searching for what Russian formalism branded "literariness"—the innate characteristics, the ontological foundations of the literary work. Kristeva boldly rejects that idea and sees literariness not as the sum total of the work's distinctive features but rather as the outcome of a particular approach, the aesthetic, to a text. The concept of literariness "can only be accepted within an ideology of valorization of the oeuvre (as phonetic, discursive) to the detriment of writing (textual productivity); in other words, only within a bounded (cultural) text" (1980, 59). Literariness, then, is the overall marked quality of the text produced when a particular discursive practice, that of reading literature, is applied; since both the practice and its application are culturally specific, their product, literariness, is culturally specific, too.

The semiotic approach deals not with the essence of literature but with its cultural construction and production always historically situated. Barthes made this point explicit: "Every fiction is supported by a social jargon, a sociolect, with which it identifies: fiction is that degree of consistency a language attains when it has *jelled* exceptionally and finds a sacerdotal class (priests, intellectuals, artists) to speak it generally and to circulate it" (1975, 27–28). Kristeva illuminates the point by adding: "The succeeding social text eliminates all notions of production from its scene in order to substitute a product (effect, value): the reign of *literature*

is the reign of *market value* occulting even . . . the discursive origins of the literary event" (1980, 57–58). For our own specific purposes when dealing with narrative endings, this position entails that we should investigate not closure—that is, how novels end—but structural finitude—an audience's sense of closure varying historically and culturally. "The structural finitude characterizes, as a fundamental trait, the object that our culture consumes as a finished product (effect, impression) while refusing to read the process of its productivity—'literature' " (Kristeva 1980, 55).

The question of closure, then, is part of the larger question of how the text is produced and is turned into literature, or even work. To approach it from a deconstructionist viewpoint would be to study its rhetorical configurations ahistorically and explore their indeterminacy which leads to the abyss of openness. To approach it from a semiotic viewpoint, on the other hand, would be to historicize radically Culler's model and study the presuppositions of literary competence and the conditions for a reading performance—namely, when and why a literary text has been perceived as an open or closed one.

Therefore, to return to *Whirlwind*, analysis should concentrate on the work's cultural production by public taste and certain interpretive communities. We started this discussion with one symptom of this production: the inability of a critic to read the novel successfully because he could not make its parts connect and felt there was no logic, order, or system in it. As indicated by Raftopoulos's "performance," the actual review, his reading competence was severely limited because it was based on traditional, conservative aesthetic assumptions emanating from the realist novel of the nineteenth century. This handicapped his appreciation of a modernist text and made it look inconsequential, chaotic, meaningless. We conclude that the failure in artistic communication was on the critic's and not on the work's part, not because we have proved or can prove that the novel is a good or a really open one but because we have established that the reviewer's approach was closed. Openness, far from inhering in

art forms, is a by-product of performance. Instead of talking about the open work, theorists should discuss the ways in which conventional reading practices are transgressed and even revised by open performances.

There is, though, one last question we have to address: If the closed approach of Raftopoulos prevented him from performing a successful literary reading and producing a satisfactory aesthetic experience, does this necessarily mean that *Whirlwind* should always be appreciated as an open novel? The answer would be positive only if openness were an ontological feature of the work so that every reader and each generation could discover and recover it. In fact, this happens to be Alan Friedman's attitude to the problem; he suggests that "a few novels which were regarded in earlier centuries as freaks or sports were composed in an open pattern; and have come in our time, furthermore, to be considered both major aesthetic success, and also oddly in the modern key" (1966, 22). The modern spirit, he believes, has helped us reevaluate them and appreciate their neglected or misunderstood openness. Only now are we in a position to see the open form as something not exclusively modern but as always functional in the margins of literary discourse. "The new myth of continual openness in the flux of experience has provided us with a new tradition. Early novels written in the open pattern do not now seem to us to be inconsistent as we look back from our present vantage point; to audiences contemporary with those novels, the form seemed inconsistent with 'reality' " (1966, 187).

Friedman places the question concisely in the modernist context: "Can we say, then, and say it quite regardless of whether the novel is light or dark or speckled, that the expanding responses of the self through the time and world of modern fiction are finally uncontained? Can we say that final episodes which might in the past have delineated a containing reorganization of experience, no longer do so—morbidly hesitate to do so, cheerfully refuse to do so?" (1966, 30) Again, his answer is positive since he argues that "the expanding flux of conscience in modern fiction is left finally open. It is 'open' in one of the three senses: finally uncon-

tained, finally unreduced, or finally still expanding" (30). But is it possible to use the word "finally" so easily, when we recall that in the past works initially received as open and startling to their audience were later normalized by successive appropriations and eventually became closed upon successfully entering the canon? I agree with Friedman's aphorism: "Endlessness has become an end in itself" (30). Still, its validity for modernist fiction does not justify the search for and invention of a relevant tradition (in typical Borgesian fashion) in order to legitimize a modern literary phenomenon, especially in light of Culler's discomfiting observation: "Any work can be made intelligible if one invents appropriate conventions" (123). Clearly, the history of interpretive conventions that contribute to the formation of public taste and the establishment of literature as a cultural institution has to be taken under serious consideration.

Interestingly, this scholarly consideration is given due and instructive attention by Barbara Herrnstein Smith in her chapter "Coda: Beyond Closure" (1968, 260–71). After presenting her elaborate taxonomy of the modes of closure, at the end of her book she openly admits: "There is hardly an observation or assumption made in this study concerning the nature of poetry and the relation between art and closure that has not been challenged by some development in contemporary artistic activity or theory" (260). This immediately puts her descriptions in a radically historical perspective: notions of closure change, following the change in the assumptions about closure. She gives a specific example, the introduction in modern art of the notion of chance, and explains how extensively this has affected our idea and expectations of closure. In conclusion, she concedes "that we have been speaking only of 'special cases,' that our observations are dependent, throughout, upon definitions of art and poetry and assumptions concerning the experience of both that have only limited validity" (270). We are therefore left to understand that one can speak of closure only in a given context of aesthetic principles and norms, assumptions and rules—only in the context of

a particular "game": one can only speak of culturally specific and definable *reading conventions of closure*.

In the case of *Whirlwind*, the reactions to its first publication, typified in the review by Raftopoulos, as well as the complete silence which followed the work's reprint twenty years later, prove that for the time being the work's openness endures and continues perplexing and embarrassing its audience. Some, especially those familiar with the published excerpts from Raftopoulos's notebooks (see Beratis 1969), might credit Beratis himself with this success; others would refuse to grant this recognition to a cultural construction of our humanistic past: "As a creature of language, the writer is always caught up in the war of fictions (jargons), but he is never anything but a plaything in it, since the language that constitutes him (writing) is always outside-of-place (atopic)" (Barthes 1975, 34). The unfortunate fate of this novel, an interesting indicator of the persistingly conservative inclinations of Greek criticism, documents the inability to face the challenges of modernist fiction to which its ethnocentric obsessions result.

Of course, it is well known that instances of resistance to modernist experimentation are far from rare and that conservative literary expectations have flourished in other critical traditions, too. What makes the case of Greek criticism particularly interesting is that the institution of literature occupies such a central position in the national culture that the realist demands have acquired the primacy and urgency of an undeclared public policy. In this case, taste is severely affected by, and in its turn reinforces, ethnic identity and pride. The national authenticity and the realist truthfulness of the work are the basic requirements determining the production and consumption of literature. In other countries realism as a set of aesthetic expectations and reading rules has measured works against a model of bourgeois social reality. To the extent that chance, disorder, and violence might be convincingly proposed as parts of contemporary experience, the modernist assault on resolution and closure could be justified even on the realist grounds. In Greece, however, realist expectations were based more on a sense of national history and tradition, where

the teleological criteria of unity, continuity, and growth acquired vital importance for the nationalist ideology. While elsewhere closure has been a way of establishing sense outside history, here it still is a matter of ascertaining the reason of history. The hermeneutics of openness remains an unsettling issue for the closed politics of the national institution of Greek literature. Friedman has observed that “the shape of life imagined in our novels has so often been reflected back on our actual lives that our novels have helped us see or imagine we see ourselves” (1966, 180). Clearly, Greek criticism still chooses to play the safe game of a realist and nationalist reading, and stay

a way a lone a last a loved a long the
“power of completion.”

[“The professor is someone who finishes his sentences” (Barthes 1975, 50).]

Writing Greek as the Only Language:
The Impossible Postmodernism
of Renos Apostolidis's
"The John of my Life"

MODERNISIM remains an unsettling issue and experience for Greek criticism because its intensely self-referential and self-reflective strategies challenged the romantic and realist reading conventions and expectations according to which the field was operating. When a work like the *Whirlwind* required an educated response to its openness of structure, the critic did not have either the relevant literary competence or even a corresponding openness of mind and taste to help him produce a satisfactory result. It is significant, for example, that the only versions of modernist verse widely received and cultivated in Greece were the poetry of T. S. Eliot and the surrealist verse of Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon because of their deep roots in the familiar imagery of French Symbolist poetics. On the other hand, bold linguistic and stylistic experimentation was rejected as unhealthy, and all formalisms were ridiculed as signs of confusion or decadence. The artistic and theoretical explorations of the arbitrariness of language, the conventionality of signification, and the institutionality of art did not appeal to the quest for the national origins and identity but rather threatened to undermine its credibility since such explorations could potentially question

the ideal of a full Greekness itself. But we should not rush into generalizations. The subject deserves detailed analysis. In the previous chapter, I approached it by discussing the issues raised by a particular modernist strategy, openness in the novel. In this one, to explore the ideological character of the Greek reactions to modernism, we must begin with the local understanding of this very word.

It seems that nobody has been completely happy with the term modernism: it is unclear, vague, inadequate. But at least there has been a general tacit understanding that its diverse uses refer to a series of interrelated literary and artistic movements of the early twentieth century and to the crisis of expressive language, mimesis, and tradition that shook the foundations of romanticism at the time. Modernism has come to be identified with the revolt of form against content, time against space, consciousness against experience, and language against reality in the work of such eminent practitioners as Joyce, Valéry, Bely, Pound, Rilke, and Kafka. Surprisingly, this term has not been assimilated into the Greek critical vocabulary; it has not even been of much use for the studies in modern Greek literature written in other languages. The attempt of a few critics to translate the word into Greek (and call, for example, certain writers *Neoteriki*) has not found a receptive audience; even today all those who write about the Greek authors influenced by the Western modernist movements refer to them by the awkward name “the Generation of the 1930s.” Furthermore, as indicated by this choice of term, researchers still deal with individual authors, and at best with a particular group that appeared in the mid-1930s and started dominating the intellectual scene in the late 1940s, but they neglect the massive European and American phenomenon of modernism.

A very representative example of this tendency can be found in a work hailed as a landmark in Greek criticism. Chapter 16 of *A History of Modern Greek Literature* by Linos Politis is entitled “The Generation of 1930: Prose” and examines the impact of modernist developments on fiction. Politis, an academic scholar,

describes the change in orientation and practice, before discussing individual authors:

The new writers turned their eyes to broader horizons, tried to trace more complicated psychological conditions, and to face more serious social and human problems, and also to cross the narrow limits of Hellenism and to make an advance parallel with that of European prose. Finally, they made a determined attempt to go beyond the limits of the short story or the *nouvelle* and to express themselves in the contemporary form *par excellence*, the novel. With a purely literary conscience, they also attempted a renovation of style and language, drawing on the tradition of the most esteemed demotic prose writers (e.g. Karkavitsas or Vlachoyannis), but at the same time enriching their picturesque vigour with a fuller, up-to-date feeling for language. (247)

The picture presented by this description is so general, so insubstantial, so nonspecific that the passage constitutes a model for scholarly writing to be avoided at any cost—how to write without saying and risking anything in particular. Although the critic speaks about “broader horizons,” “more complicated . . . conditions,” “more serious . . . problems,” “a fuller . . . feeling,” as well as crossing limits, going beyond, and renovating, he is unable to specify in positive terms a single characteristic of this movement, let alone describe its emergence or nature in any concrete historical, aesthetic, or stylistic way. Thus, he succeeds in sharing with us only his total darkness and mystification about the period. His task was not an easy one, but a comparison with some noble and instructive efforts (see, for example, Lodge 1976, 481) would suffice to show his inability to make any sense out of the major intellectual phenomenon of our century and its appearance in Greece.

My aim, however, is not to criticize the critic but to use his case as an example of the persisting structural inability of criticism to deal with modernism in the context of Greek literature, which constitutes a major failure of understanding. It is my belief

that the Greek attitude toward the modern crisis in the arts is a subject of significant importance and deserves immediate theoretical, historical, and stylistic investigation. In this chapter I intend to examine the question of Greek modernism indirectly by discussing its aftermath, the possibility of a Greek postmodernism, as it appears in “The John of My Life,” a story by Renos Apostolidis. Through a contemporary perspective I propose to look back and see what made modernism in Greece a repressed influence, voiceless and faceless, the unnamable of its twentieth-century culture.

First we must begin with the definitions of some basic terms. David Lodge in his inaugural lecture “Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism” sketched a synoptic literary history of the last hundred years, the modern period, by defining the dominant modes of writing. The first and most important one has been modernism, which rejected the established norms of tradition. “Modernism turned its back on the traditional idea of art as imitation and substituted the idea of art as an autonomous activity” (Lodge 1981, 5). The main principle of orthodox aesthetics, derived from a literal reading of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, was mimesis; its austere uses made art subservient to reality and accountable to truth, thus locating the measure of its success outside its own realm. Modernism is art that rejects this dependency, dispenses with the outside world, and draws from its own internal resources. While nineteenth-century literature, and especially the tradition of the great novel, was seen to be about the real world of nature and people, by the beginning of the twentieth century literature has become a matter of textuality—self-supported, self-sustained, self-referential. Texts now dealt with themselves and with other texts, as literature tried to reach higher degrees and levels of purity—silence, nothingness, openness, music, autonomy—in a narcissistic search for perfect, immaculate beauty. Accordingly, the experience of art takes absolute priority over secular concerns as the familiarity with the given world is repeatedly surprised, tested, even repudiated, by the

strategies of an unremitting pursuit of originality which makes everything strange and new.

The invasion of life by art and the latter's aggressive declaration of independence, already predicted and advocated by the generation of Rimbaud and Wilde, provoked, as a backlash, the emergence of another mode of modern writing, *antimodernism*. "This is writing that continues the tradition modernism reacted against. It believes that traditional realism, suitably modified to take account of changes in human knowledge and material circumstances, is still viable and valuable" (Lodge 1981, 6). It rejects the preponderance and prioritization of textuality and "regards literature as the communication of a reality that exists prior to and independent of the act of communication" (6). Antimodernism has nothing decisively new to offer in terms of either theory or practice; in fact, it usually does not have any theory since it attempts to defend the old theories by proving their validity in practice. It constitutes a major return to mimetic norms and to ideas of content and reality. Accordingly, even when its politics is radical, its aesthetics remains deeply conservative since it propagates the view that art is always subservient to criteria and causes derived from other, superior and truer realms of human experience.

Lodge finds that, at least in Anglo-American literature, the two trends have been participating in an ongoing rivalry: "I would suggest not only that these two kinds of writing, modernist and antimodernist, persist throughout the modern period, but that we can map out alternating phases of dominance of one kind or another" (1981, 7). This process, which he describes in convincing detail, can be accounted for in two complementary ways: first, by investigating the impact of external historical and cultural circumstances upon art; and second, by tracing the functions and development of the literary system itself. The second explanation, Lodge proposes, may profit from the insights of Slavic formalism (in its Russian and Czech versions) and the notions of ossification and defamiliarization in particular. "Experiment can become so familiar that it ceases to stimulate

our powers of perception, and then more simple and straightforward modes of writing may seem wonderfully fresh and daring. To use the jargon of the Prague School: what is foregrounded by one generation of writers becomes background for the next" (10). Thus, when the tactics of semantic inflation advanced by modernism become rules, the strategies of realism cultivated by anti-modernism seem exciting and invigorating; but when these strategies stagnate, in their turn, into norms of composition, the reaction of modernism is again welcome as an antidote to sterile imitation.

Recently, however, a third kind of writing has emerged which, because of its dialectical relationship to the previous ones, has been called postmodernism. This new mode "continues the modernist critique of traditional realism, but it tries to go beyond or around or underneath modernism, which for all its formal experiment and complexity held out to the reader the promise of meaning, if not of *a* meaning" (Lodge 1981, 12). Undecidability is the primary operating principle of this trend because despite its emphasis on originality, modernism did not reject the notion of the artistic whole as formulated by idealist aesthetics; this has been probably its heaviest debt to romanticism. Moreover, with such feasts of tight organization and multilayered coherence as *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, modernism achieved this goal more impressively than did any other period. Postmodernism withholds the basic promise of meaning and totality and exposes the reader to contexts and situations where nothing makes complete or particular sense. Lodge takes a closer look at these strategies of calculated perplexity: after adapting Roman Jakobson's fundamental metaphor-metonymy dichotomy and establishing its isomorphism to his modernism-antimodernism distinction, he concludes: "Jakobson's theory asserts that any discourse must connect its topics according to either similarity or contiguity, and will usually prefer one type of connection to the other. Postmodernist writing tries to defy this law by seeking some alternative principle of composition. To these alternatives I give the names: Contradiction, Permutation, Discontinuity, Randomness, Ex-

cess, and *The Short Circuit*" (13). The postmodernist universe is a multicentered open space where time is dissipated and meaning floats uncontrollably from signifier to signifier. Anything seems to go but at no point can we ask with any certainty what, where, and why. Clearly, the future of this trend, one that for most people is too confusing to enjoy and too difficult to live with, depends on its role as an oppositional force and its corresponding cultural efficaciousness. "There is considerable disagreement among critics and aestheticians as to whether postmodernism is a really significant and distinctive kind of art, or whether, being an essentially rule-breaking activity, it must always be a minority mode, dependent on a majority of artists trying to keep to the rules" (15).

AFTER these terminological clarifications necessary for our discussion, I now turn to Greek postmodernism and concentrate on one of its finest and rare examples, "O Yannis tis Zois mou" (*The John of my Life*) by Renos Apostolidis (1924). The most conspicuous feature of his story is that it is not a story at all; in fact, it consists of seven different beginnings of a story, seven of its potential beginnings that all fail to lead to completion. Thus, the story is intensely, obsessively, and self-defeatingly self-reflexive in that it narrates its very impossibility: successive efforts at completion and completeness founder—no end, closure, or whole can be achieved. The fragmentation of narrative and the dispersion of meaning are presented as immanent to writing and insurmountable.

Each of the seven beginnings, all numbered and clearly marked as such, seems to have a basic theme, a thematic axis, which is its source of inspiration and hope for synthesis and transcendence—a notion or idea where writing takes refuge to ask for support toward the achievement of literature. These seven themes can be categorized: love, history, experience, consciousness, death, action, and motherland. Although each part begins with resolution and hope, very soon its supporting ideal is proved inadequate, when transcribed into language, and thus the goal of

literature remains elusive. This central position of the text is stated unequivocally at the very beginning: "*The story which you will read is the vain attempts of one of its heroes to write it—a truer phrase than this one I haven't found. It is clear, that is, that the one who attempted it didn't have the complete abilities for something like this—and yet he tried, as much as he could, and naturally (although he knew it, he saw it) he simply failed*" (Apostolidis 1967, 160). This level of utmost self-reflexivity immediately established persists throughout the text and frustrates each successive attempt at organic articulation. At the same time, another parallel level is continuously operating, that of direct communication with the reader: the writer addresses his audience in the second person singular or plural to ask questions, tease, provoke, instruct or plead. Thus, the textual awareness of the work, combined with the anxiety over its reception, stumbles over every step, stops at every turn of its development, terrified by the rhetoricity of a language it cannot own and the demands of an audience it cannot control, until one beginning is abandoned in despair and a different approach begins that eventually will not fare any better.

The story's construction makes it impossible to summarize; it really consists only of seven attempts at a story. Its techniques share very little with the norms of the realist narrative, although they presuppose them in their entirety as an oppositional force. But for the benefit of the reader who is unfamiliar with Apostolidis's story, I shall give a rough thematic outline. In the first beginning, the very impossibility of the story is introduced as its subject and is compared to that of a great yet timid, unrealizable love. The second deals with the progress of history which various modern trends, like psychoanalysis, try to displace or rationalize as reality of a deeper order. The third moves through two of the purest realms of experience, the beauty of nature and the innocence of adolescence, and depicts the author's suffering over his inability to match them with true words, to transform the myths of personal life into literature. In the fourth beginning, consciousness faces the enigma of God and its incommensurable

relation with existence. In the next, the idea of an ultimate end looms large over the desire of experience to survive on a piece of paper. In the sixth, after the reader is provoked into wondering if and when the story will come to its main topic, the idea of life as a great act, a drastic solution that abolishes the problem itself, is explored in the interstices of absence and silence. In the last part, “seventh beginning—and end,” the author resigns himself to learning how to live without transcendence within the familiar territory of one’s emotional motherland—country, family, and friends; still, the text ends or stops with an allegorical story in which the narrator searches, among all the people called John that he knows, for the one who is his guide and savior, the John of his life, but he cannot recognize him.

The decisive features that give this work of Apostolidis its post-modernist character are its central concerns with the acts of writing and reading literature. The “author”—the main persona/figure of the story, the narrating “I,” not the person who composed or signs it, presents openly and unashamedly his artistic self, his efforts, his strategies, and his failures, and tries to engage the reader in dialogue and self-examination. He exposes his own devices and inabilities, but he also expects the reader to lay bare, if not down, his prejudices and expectations and to free himself from the binding conventions that his approach observes.

Let’s take a more detailed look at these typical postmodernist concerns. The text plays at, revolts against, and is haunted by the paradox of its own existence, the fact that its inabilities allow for its possibility. This scandalous and yet constitutive asymmetry between language and expression is reflected in its dominant mode, discontinuity. Unity and coherence are only artificial constructs invented by bad writers; as soon as writing tests the limits of narratability it discovers that “whatever we call *myth* and *story* never had the unity presented by those who manage to put together and serve up for their neighbors only wingless myths and forged stories!” (160). A true story has to begin over and over again because even the beginning is not a real start but only a symptom and a moment of that fundamental discontinuity: “Let’s

start over from the beginning! . . . Why from the beginning? What is the beginning? Where did it ever exist? In what on earth? . . . In nothing! . . . Let the beginning be today. Let it be from whatever! . . . Don't be afraid. It is obvious that the world does not have continuity . . ." (186). This discontinuity and incoherence become organizational principles since they are dictated by language as strategies of resistance against the iterance of literary writing and its false ordering of the world.

This attitude toward literature precipitates composition into an intense foregrounding of textuality. Questions of language and writing are confronted, glossed over, analyzed and reformulated throughout the text in an attempt to say: this is not what you think, this is not what it cannot be, and yet this depends on what it is not. While the modernist work is about itself, the postmodernist one is about its unrealizable other, the imposing presence of an absence. The excruciating self-referentiality of this text thematizes its existence as the ultimate lack of reference and draws on diverse intertextual resources from Spinoza to Sartre or appeals to authorial authorities, like the Gogol of *The Dead Souls*, to seek redemption from the sin of language when reaching the zero degree of representation.

Along with the discontinuous order of the narrative, the overfloating dissipation of meaning creates an overarching sense of excess. No measure or rule of balance is observed: adjectives abound, sentences wander aimlessly, a plethora of punctuation marks and typographical devices baffles the eye, the rhythm changes asthmatically from paragraph to paragraph, the style and length of the seven parts vary without visible purpose, and disparate narrative elements intermingle and intersperse leaving threads and ends hanging loose. The author sees no particular reason to follow the rhetorical directions supplied by the canon of realism or the discipline of modernist composition: his text speaks only language, neither reality nor art.

Of course, he knows the narrative conventions very well—plot, hero, development, credibility, peripeteia, closure—but he chooses to defy them. Furthermore, he knows that tradition,

transmission, and training have made the audience internalize these conventions into reading expectations, and he is determined to upset and confuse them: “apparently you have ‘another’ story up your sleeves, and this one you expect—even though you have it, it belongs to you, it is known to you (all is known to you)” (161). He mentions some of the reading expectations by name: the demand for a story line and a coherent plot, for clarity and brevity, for a hero and a woman protagonist, for originality, even for a male author who lets the myth develop without interfering. These demands have been legitimized by the establishment of well-defined genres. But this is a *game* that the postmodernist writer refuses to play; instead, he provokes the audience’s predisposition: “*One thousand and one beginnings—without end!* I will put this as a title. And I will recount all the beginnings! In all their frivolity, their agony! . . . Don’t make ‘sense’ of it—since it is sense that you seek and sense does not exist; I won’t provide it, I won’t tell lies so that you can say: *he lies!*” (185).

As we see, the concerns and the tactics of this text converge on the question of reading, and more specifically on reading as the reception and consumption of literature. Apostolidis challenges his reader to transcend his traditional requirements and his safe approach to texts and engage in a dialogic discussion *on* literature *through* literature; if they both concede that writing is not transparent and reading is not unmediated, together they must examine the nature of the text at hand in the context of writing and reading practices. Thus, the audience is not presented with a closed, autotelic work but with an open, indefinable piece and is invited to participate in its creation. Although the text keeps promising implicitly and explicitly some kind of unity, firm sense, and gratification, these rewards never come because the author is unable to grant them by himself. Instead, he invites cooperation by asking: what and how does one read? In other words, what is literature, and how is it read? His is necessarily an incomplete project.

These questions can be asked from different perspectives and their answers can be sought in various areas. In the case of Apos-

tolidis, the questions refer to the nature of literature, as perceived from the viewpoints of the addresser and the addressee, and are therefore ontological: they are expressions of the authorial anguish over the inadequacy of language. Therefore, his preoccupations are essentially romantic. At points, he is enthusiastic about the expressive capabilities of his medium: even though you cannot tame it, you can still utilize its infinite descriptive potential; at other points, he despairs and begs for the reader's understanding: "Forgive me, my reader, my brother; I mean you whom *I never regarded*, and yet only you I regarded, unwillingly—forgive my inability, since whatever I want to give to you walks with such difficulty and monotony . . ." (184). Ultimately, we recognize in his *Weltschmerz* the aesthetic affliction that spurred the first metaphysical search for the ineffable some two hundred years ago: "I don't want to change an iota—and yet everything tends to change in order to be said! . . . (Have you considered how language [logos] becomes opaque when it pursues a thing down to its root—where there is *no language?*")" (192). The Hölderlinian drama, the realization that since the sin of an autonomous literature we have been condemned to the fall in an inadequate language, is maniacally reenacted in this text, until all hope of salvation that would absolve us of all representation and heal the wound of the spilt sign fades away: "Oh, language is unable to deliver what was *in the beginning one and the same* before language and the necessity of language!" (212). Signification, incompleteness, discontinuity, and unfulfillment mark with lack, absence, and silence our plight, our exile from the land of the promised identity between word and thing.

It is these complex features and this agonizing message that make "The John of my Life" an exemplary work of Greek post-modernism. I chose to concentrate on it in order to examine at some length a type of work and a writing mode that have received practically no attention by Greek studies either in Greece or abroad. The neglect of Apostolidis is partially explainable by the experimental character of his literary output, which has openly challenged the specialists and the reading public to review their

aesthetic criteria. The reason behind the general reluctance to deal with works like this one is that the audience is often unprepared for such an encounter. The problem is intensified in the context of contemporary Greek culture, where the national character of the institution of literature is still feverishly defended and debated by critical discourses. Let us not forget that the local version of realism, ethnography, remains the dominant mode of Greek fiction, while the experience of modernism survives largely alien and quite threatening to it.

Threatening and dangerous are the right words: the dominant tradition of Vikelas, Papadiamandis, Karkavitsas, Myrivilis, Terzakis, Samarakis, and Plaskovitis, established by conservative criticism, will resist a critique of its mimetic methods and repel the crisis of language and writing manifest in modernist innovation; at best, it will only make harmless concessions, as in *Akyvernites Polities* (1960–1965) (*Drifting Cities*, 1974) by Stratis Tsirkas and *O Gennaios Telemachos* (1972) by Alexandros Kotzias, where techniques borrowed from Faulkner and Joyce, respectively, make token appearances. This defensive attitude of fear and self-righteousness goes deeper than simple questions of influence from abroad or artistic evolution and maturity. It reflects the militantly ethnocentric reaction of mainstream Greek literature and criticism against the radical trends in Western art during the first twenty years of the century, a reaction of panic which accounts for the total absence of an avant-garde movement in Greece. In order to understand this phenomenon better, I shall discuss a recent piece of non-Greek fiction belonging to the category of the avant-garde that bears a striking resemblance to Apostolidis's story, and I shall compare the two works to show what makes Greek postmodernism so paradoxical: the lack of a modernist tradition and of an avant-gardiste understanding of literature.

ITALO CALVINO'S *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* is a novel about and of beginnings. It tells the story of a reader who begins a novel, discovers that he has only its first part in his hands, and in the ensuing search for the rest he finds another volume which

proves to be just another book's beginning; this pattern is repeated over and over again as new books are tried, but they all have merely a new beginning to offer. The work consists of one introductory chapter, ten different beginnings, each followed by a chapter depicting the frustration over the book's incompleteness and the search for the whole text, which invariably leads to a new book rather than the rest of the previous one, and a very brief epilogical chapter. Calvino (1923–1985) has written a work of glaring virtuosity and dazzling complexity, a theorist's novel, for the reader versed in contemporary literary theory is bound to enjoy it in many exceptional ways. For the specific purposes of this investigation, I shall discuss some primary structural features of the work on the level of thematics, features related to its organization as well as its aesthetic problematic:

a. The story of all twelve chapters is marked by the presence of a major figure, personal or abstract, instrumental in the progress of the story and representative of an agent participating in the act of literary communication. In order of appearance, these are: the reader, the real one, who is reading Calvino's book; the other reader of the work, the one created/projected by the book itself; the nonreader, the one implicated by but not actively interested in books; the professor, who explicates and teaches; the publisher; the translator; the artist of books, who uses them for alien, non-literary purposes; the writer; the mediator, who intervenes under various guises in the circulation of books; the censor; the library, which hosts all publications; and the intersubjective consciousness of the reader and other reader, which constitutes the site of interpretation and the book itself.

b. A variety of factors interrupt each book and leave it in a state of interminable beginning: the reprinting of the same signature, the same sixteen pages; sheets left blank because pages were not printed; intentional fragmentariness on the author's part; physical fragmentation, the breaking up of the book into signatures; disappearance, loss, theft, or confiscation of the book; recomposition and crumbling by a malfunctioning computer terminal; and

the interruption of a manuscript's delivery by the arrest of the author.

c. Each interruption of the book poses the question of the impossibility of finishing and/or closure by alluding to different endemic difficulties and problems: the destruction of the idea of progress by the disconcerting experience of repetition; breaks and chasms; fragmentariness; the interference of theory; lack of wholeness; opaqueness; lack of authenticity; the intervention of disruptive historical forces; and the errors of technological reproduction.

d. The various books encountered by the inquisitive reader have and assume different physical forms: Calvino's real book; oral or printed translation; printed signature; photocopy; manuscript; diary; different books under the same cover; or book processed by computer.

e. Every adventure in the search for the complete work raises a major theoretical issue: the reader's expectations; translation; narrativity; the role of the author; forgery and falsification; the politics of circulation; intertextuality and tradition; finally, the uses of the text.

Now I shall compare these elements with those used by Apostolidis. As indicated in this simple enumeration of thematic features related to its plot and poetics, Calvino's novel has a much broader scope than Apostolidis's story because it exhibits a wide-ranging interest not only in beginnings and endings, authors and their audience, writing and reading, but also in many other factors involved in the production of literature. While Apostolidis sees literature as a dialogue between creator and receiver, Calvino treats it as a complex act of communication. It is of course to Calvino's advantage that he is very well informed about current developments in literary theory and that he succeeds in integrating this awareness in the structure of the text. Thus, he is able to avoid the first person singular or plural, which gives a certain melodramatic quality to "The John," and let his prose address the reader directly in an impersonal, detached, and yet urgent

manner. In his work, none of the traditional privileges of the authorial voice is taken for granted.

Most notably, Calvino is not tormented by any of the romantic anxieties and insecurities of Apostolidis: his writing is free from the agony of inadequacy, the search for the ineffable, and the passions of language witnessed in the latter's efforts to transcend signification. On the contrary, his novel reinstates literature in the public domain by depicting how books are not just written and read but also how they are printed, edited, published, circulated, translated, analyzed, taught, used (and abused), and stored. In this cultural context, the actions of the author and his audience are put in the proper perspective of the overall act of literary communication, and the fallacious independence of the subject is debunked. Calvino does not worry, as does Apostolidis, about the reception of his book because he knows that reception is so pervasively permeated and saturated by processes of cultural mediation that it is best understood as an operation of public production.

This difference in attitude is also illustrated by another point of divergence between the two books. Apostolidis presents seven beginnings of one and the same story that cannot be told and completed; he has one story to tell, perhaps *the* story, but his personal weakness and the bottomless rhetoricity of language will not let him follow a straight narrative path. Calvino, on the other hand, presents the beginnings of ten different intertextually linked stories. He has many stories to tell, and he tries to start as many as possible, even though the interference of both internal and external factors interrupts them. Both writers share the same pivotal concern, unnarratability; but the former views it ontologically and attributes it to the abyss of language separating people from each other, while the latter views it historically and attributes it to cultural circumstances. Apostolidis insists that there is one story to tell and one book to read, that of the impossible story; Calvino would argue that, if the book is one, it is the history of the discontinuity of Western literary tradition.

In the thick intertextual nexus of the *Traveler*, the aesthetic

reception is not seen as a private dialogue between writer and reader but as a social act of communication occurring at particular institutional sites and affected by factors such as agents, circumstances, procedures, operations, and beliefs. Calvino gives prominence to the catastrophic aspects of this act: he emphasizes not regularity, immediacy, transparency, effectivity, but breaks, gaps, discontinuities, margins, distractions, entropy. According to Apostolidis, the story is one, but it has to remain unfinished, barely begun, because of the irreducible asymmetry between language and truth, signification and reality, human understanding and the world, creation and reception. According to Calvino, however, the stories are innumerable, but none can be completed because the practices of writing and reading take place in and derive meaning from the public institution of literature itself. They are not individual activities by intersubjective and intertextual operations whose availability, possibility, and performativity depend on the unique configuration of factors and functions that constitutes a particular historical moment and space; therefore, they should be seen only as aspects of the production of the work.

Although, as I explained earlier, "The John," as a work focusing on the presuppositions of literary reception, belongs to postmodernism, Calvino's novel, with its attention to the conditions defining literary communication, seems to belong to an altogether different category. We may understand its character better if we return temporarily to David Lodge's distinctions between modernism, antimodernism, and postmodernism in his scheme of viewing the three kinds of modern writing through technique and style. I suggest that we can take a different approach through the aesthetic problematic of each kind and extend the scheme to cover the main movements of the last two centuries:

- Romanticism concentrates on the *author* and the possibilities of artistic creativity.
- Aestheticism focuses on the more exclusive idea of the *author-as-artist*, the inventor of beauty who lives in and for art.

- Modernism brings to the forefront the *work* itself and the self-reflexivity of writing.
- Antimodernism returns to the real *world* and practices art as its faithful representation.
- Postmodernism emphasizes *reading* and the difficulties of understanding.

This is clearly a convenient scheme which some may find oversimplified. It has been proposed because it has the advantage of mapping aesthetically the evolution of literature, artistic writing. (I would argue, for reasons that will soon become apparent, that for a consideration of the writing crafts, forms, and genres before the mid-eighteenth century, before humanism, we need concepts and principles completely different from those in use for the study of the writers from Goethe to Grass, from Wordsworth to Heaney, or from Emerson to Barth.) My scheme, then, intends to show the major developments in the literary interests of literature itself since it acquired its independence and was recognized as art. In it we can see how the institutionalization of one particular discourse as literature led its practitioners first to examine their role and subsequently elevate it, then to concentrate on their creations, later to try securing a place for reality, and finally to explore the possibilities of reading. We notice also that in this process each successive step and each change in orientation marked another phase in the growing dissatisfaction of authors with their domain; they were unable to find sufficient grounds for justification either in their own role and work or in the outside world and audience.

Out of this discontent another trend emerged, one that developed a consciously political understanding of literature and therefore did not deal with any of its aspects or contributing factors but with its very institutionality—with literature itself. An eccentric work like Calvino's novel, which expresses a pragmatic understanding of the act of literary communication in its contextual dimensions, belongs to this category of writing, which I have

saved for last and shall now add to my scheme. Undoubtedly, it has been the most controversial, disparate, and undecided, one that never became a solid movement or established school but still reappears periodically, cutting across the edges and boundaries of the identity and territory of the others. I am referring, of course, to the avant-garde and its artistic politics. I intend to examine it at greater detail through the dialectical perspective provided by Peter Bürger in his 1984 *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. After this investigation, I shall conclude by describing what I see as the impossible tasks of Greek postmodernism.

BÜRGER proposes that literary studies should abandon their traditional aesthetic convictions and should shift their scholarly interests to the social functions of art. Aesthetics has been the philosophy of immanent beauty and has therefore sought it in the work itself. But value is a trope of function, not a mode of existence: it does not inhere in a construct but depends on its socially determined uses. To describe a work, we must talk about functions, not features or qualities—we must specify not what it is or what it does but how it works in society and how it is worked upon. This type of research has nothing to do with what is known as sociology of art, which studies what it believes to be the reflection of history and society in the mirror of art; it is rather a sociology and genealogy of art, of art as an institution. Bürger introduces the category the institution art as a departure point in his discussion of the avant-garde.

If we want to trace the emergence of the institution art as a historical phenomenon, we need to understand its acquisition of independence. This is how Bürger, quoting Jürgen Habermas, defines it:

In bourgeois society (and already before the bourgeoisie also seized political power in the French Revolution), art occupies a special status that is most succinctly referred to as autonomy. “Autonomous art only establishes itself as bourgeois society develops, the economic and political systems

become detached from the cultural one, and the traditional world pictures which have been undermined by the basic ideology of fair exchange release the arts from their ritual use." Autonomy here defines the functional mode of the social subsystem "art": its (relative) independence in the face of demands that it be socially useful. (1984, 24)

This has been a social/cultural development of far-reaching consequences. The systematization of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy coincided with the seizure of political power by the bourgeoisie and the consolidation of its economic strength. Its mission was to elaborate on the nature of the artistic activity which, in separation from everyday life, was catering to the disinterested pleasures that the new dominant class could afford to pursue. Thus, aesthetics from the time of Kant conceptualized the divorce of artistic creation from the rest of the social production and supplied its philosophical justification when moral and practical criteria were removed from its set of principles. Since then, art has been isolated in its nonpurposive domain of pure beauty and promises enjoyment for its own sake in exchange for self-abandonment and self-forgetfulness. Bürger stresses appropriately that even today this bourgeois category, by detaching a particular kind of creativity and experience from the context of social praxis and by claiming this independence for its practices and pleasures, continues to obscure its historical development and its ideological character while privileging itself with its own autochthonous truth.

Bürger, following the pioneering work of Walter Benjamin, advocates a genealogical critique of the aesthetic ideology. His survey is based on the panoramic observation that, after the sacral art of the medieval age and the courtly art of the Enlightenment, came the autonomous art of the bourgeois or modern era. The evolution of the institution art and the quest for autonomy reached its apogee with aestheticism, where beauty became its own end: its self-isolation, self-enjoyment, and self-glorification signaled the full development of this cultural system, but it also

inflicted distress on many of its practitioners because of the social ineffectuality of art. The total dissociation of art from life achieved by aestheticism was the main precondition for the avant-garde, which turned self-indulgence into self-criticism. Only after the process of institutionalization was completed was a reaction possible, and, when it came, it had to be active and political:

The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content. (Bürger 1984, 49)

Therefore, it is always important to distinguish between modernism and avant-garde. Avant-garde did not revolt against tradition and did not introduce new styles and techniques; it attacked the institution art and criticized its basic assumptions: the immanence of beauty, the autonomy of the work, the originality of genius, the transparency of language, and the privacy of reception. In fact, it would be accurate to say that the avant-garde was the intrinsic theory and politics of art since its interests circled the question of its status and examined it from the viewpoints of philosophy (what is considered art) and economics (the mechanisms of its distribution). Its ultimate aim was nothing less than the abolition of autonomous art and the reintegration of its practices and crafts into the social praxis. The avant-garde saw itself as a revolutionary force in the domain of culture and conducted an intellectual guerrilla warfare against the jurisdiction and the market operations of an institution that established itself as the arbiter of artistic quality and merit.

Bürger limits his examination to the particular period commonly identified with the emergence of the avant-garde and with movements such as Dadaism and futurism. But I want to suggest that the uses of the term can be heuristically extended to include, beyond that cultural revolt (i.e., the historical avant-garde), later, contemporary, or even future works which have similar functions and take the institution art as their primary subject. Thus, I have already characterized the *Traveler* as an avant-gardiste novel. I believe the notion will be useful and the action of such works relevant as long as ideas about an autonomous art persist given ideological encouragement, economic support, and official approval by museums, libraries, galleries, opera houses, dance schools, national theaters, concert halls, anthologies, histories, textbooks, prizes, reviews, philological editions, revivals, and restorations. On the other hand, the success of such works in criticizing the institution, undermining its sanctified sites, and upsetting its practices should not be credited, *at least* not exclusively, to the individual works and the insight of their creators because this treatment would again privilege art, and in the worst of cases avant-garde art. We cannot pretend sympathy toward its causes and simultaneously deal with the avant-garde as if it were just another modernist movement. If we understand it historically and respect its role in the cultural context, we must use its own principles and criteria when we describe it, too.

The avant-garde is function and action: it is not the work of genius; it is not a work at all; but rather it is that particular use of works which criticize and resist their founding and hosting institutions. In more than one sense, there are no avant-garde works but only avant-gardiste interpretations of works which may, or may not, be purported to be avant-garde. This is the essential paradox of this mode of art: because it attacks the autonomous status bestowed upon works by the institution, it must be included in this ontological critique and denounced, or it will lose the aesthetic status itself. If a work is made to express an avant-gardiste attitude, there is nothing inherently and inviolably there to prevent conservative uses, but a strong interpretation can

always claim a revolutionary role for a traditional piece. Since value is function, the significance of any work—even its own artisticity—remains a matter of public negotiation between interpretations and discourses and may change along with other cultural values. At best, we can only offer our understanding of an avant-gardiste work as a view of its potential, a suggestion about its possible radical uses. In what follows, I shall outline my approach to this artwork from two complementary perspectives: its attitude toward the institution art and its philosophy and aesthetics; and its disposition toward its role and the audience. I invite the reader to keep in mind the preceding analyses of Apostolidis's and Calvino's fiction. My observations may help establish a further differentiation between the two and point to the structural impossibility of Greek postmodernism.

The avant-garde took as its main target romantic aesthetics as actualized in the institutionality of the artistic domain and questioned its basic notions: (1) the category work, with its assumptions about unity, coherence, independence, and wholeness; (2) the transparency of a meaning that is conveyed without the mediation of communication codes and networks; (3) the idea of infinite originality which strikes the receiver with the power of the new; (4) the Promethean inventiveness of the creator; (5) the hermeneutic consciousness of the reader; (6) the privacy of the artistic experience as an encounter between two individual talents; and (7) the continuity and superiority of Western art's tradition. This unappeasably critical attitude makes the role of the avant-garde manifestly oppositional: the mechanisms and the conventions of the institution are exposed in an effort to reveal the ideological character of its ontology. Art is provoked to abandon its stance of seclusion and exclusion and to face again its social responsibilities.

To make its critique convincing, the avant-gardiste work has to apply it first to itself and integrate its political awareness into its methods and action. Towards that end, it adopts the following strategies:

- It denounces unity by being nonorganic, nonholistic, and non-exclusive.
- It proclaims itself graphically as a constructed artifact.
- It opens itself to the influence of circumstances, chance, and use.
- It presents itself as a commodity to be consumed and exchanged.
- It is built on an aleatoric, inconsequential montage of materials, rules, styles, and tropes.
- It makes direct references to its institutional basis and status.
- It purports to shock by challenging and frustrating the expectations of the audience.
- It invites the reader to participate actively in its production and circulation.

The combination of these strategies unsettles our familiarity with art, violates its fundamental law of undistracted enjoyment, and makes a very disquieting experience. The public is alternately perplexed, insulted, and admonished to take art in its hands, reclaim it from its curators, and exercise its right to create, interpret, and use it in all kinds of social transactions. The avant-garde never rests its case for an unrestricted creativity, artistic or other. Calvino's *Traveler* is a very impressive contemporary example which challenges us to rethink in institutional terms the social conditions for the communicative act of literature—and to do something about them.

GREEK POSTMODERNISM has been a marginal phenomenon that has received no critical or scholarly attention. One of the reasons is the continuing domination of fiction by the provincial concerns of ethnography and of poetry by the antiquated techniques of surrealist symbolism. Another, allied reason is the unanimous respect that literature as a national institution still

enjoys from all quarters. Thus, an ideological formation consisting of romanticism, naturalism, nationalism, and cliental favoritism stifles any dissent or opposition. Still, my analysis has been driving at a third reason I have called structural: the absence of a significant avant-garde and a bold modernism. Postmodernism as a recent mode of writing must be understood dialectically, that is, with its other two related modes in the background: it was the effort to go beyond the towering achievements of modernism and to react to the regressive tendencies of antimodernism; it was the effort to explore the conditions of reading literature; and it was the effort to draw from the lessons of avant-garde and appeal to the creative initiative of the audience. But it could not succeed or even be understood without grafting its problematic onto an enlightened awareness of what came before. Greek postmodernism finds itself in the awkward position of sending messages whose code remains largely incomprehensible and participating much more in developments in other literatures than in the local tradition.

Consider the character and the fate of three books that are, in my judgment, the most important poetic expressions of postmodernism in Greece: *O Tropos na Kindinevome* (The Way [for us] to Risk, 1966) by Eleni Vakalo, *Anonymo Piima tou Fotinou Aiyanni* (Titleless Poem by Fotinos Aiyannis, 1974) by Nanos Valaoritis, and *Monon dia tis Lypis . . .* (Only by Sorrow . . . , 1976) by Vyrion Leondaris. All three display a highly sophisticated interest in the practices of writing and reading, especially in the agencies mediating the reception of literature; all three dictate a theoretical treatment that would raise major aesthetic issues; and all three, totally neglected by critics and audience, have had no impact in their field. There was no conspiracy of silence, of course, only a widespread public embarrassment: apparently, nobody knew what to do with them or how to respond. Significantly, even after the works were collected or reprinted (in 1981, 1977, and 1983 respectively), the same impotent silence persisted, and their appeal did not increase. But this is far from surprising when we realize that Greek intellectual life

lacks both the critical vocabulary and the relevant tradition that could make them meaningful.

There is evidence for this argument supplied by the works themselves. Because they are engaged in the contemporary post-modernist problematic unfolding abroad, and at the same time lack an indigenous modernist tradition to count on, debate, and transcend, they are forced to return to much older, venerable models for the intertextual support necessary to revise established modes of writing and orient them toward questions of reception. For example, Vakalo rereads D. Solomos's *Porphyras*, Valaoritis revises Angelos Sikelianos's *Prologue to Life*, and Leondaris rewrites K. Karyotakis's *Elegies and Satires*. Apostolidis's point of return, Y. Vizyinos's story "The Only Journey of His Life," fits into this category. These responses to some turning points in the history of Greek literature are insightful and fascinating, but they illustrate the very limited capabilities of Greek postmodernism, which I have deemed essentially impossible. For how can daring attempts like these succeed when, as we saw in the passage by Linos Politis, criticism has yet to develop a basic conception of modernism, when fiction has yet to liberate itself from the representational demands of an urban naturalism, such as Yorgos Ioannou's, depicting the details of everyday neighborhood life, and when poetry has yet to discover paths other than the repetition of Seferian angst rehearsed by Takis Sinopoulos?

The tradition of twentieth-century Greek literature has been one of staunch antimodernism. Experimental modernism was never introduced, debated, and understood in its context; on the contrary, it was desperately resisted and repelled. When the threat of avant-garde became obvious, the national tradition became fiercely antimodernist and conservative to bar the possibility of a fundamental crisis. All that the institution literature allowed for was a streamlined, apolitical, normalized version of French surrealism in poetry and German expressionism in prose; there, literature kept only their visionary and metaphysical elements, and wove them into the symbolist aesthetics of the early century. Other attempts at a radical modernism that would both

raise questions of form, style, language and revolt against the norms of composition and reception were soon repressed by systematic ridicule or neglect. Thus, the continuity of tradition was never disturbed: Seferis succeeded Palamas, Elytis succeeded Sikelianos, Myrivilis succeeded Voutyras, and K. Politis succeeded K. Hatzopoulos in an unproblematic transition. Behind this antimodernism, however, which reacted violently against all kinds of innovative writing practiced with such excitement abroad, we detect once more the reigning ideological power of nationalism, which undertook various defensive guises after the 1922 Asia Minor catastrophe and the collapse of the irredentist projects. Following its final defeat, the imperial dream of the Great Idea was internalized as the ideal of the great experience, exclusively Greek—native, local, insular. With the destruction of the centuries-old diaspora, the doors to the outside world, and especially to the infidel West, closed hermetically; the nation resigned itself to the bitter reality of being a finite state and concentrated more and more on the affirmative experience of immediate collective pleasure—national pride. The new intelligentsia of that period (Seferis, Tsatsos, Kapetanakis, Kalomiris, Pikionis, Tsarouhis, Katsimbalis, and of course I. Metaxas) was willing to provide this instant and yet exalted gratification to the masses: they called it *Greekness*.

Greek culture missed a major opportunity in the late 1920s, when the ideological pressure upon writing to join the national consciousness in its spiritual, as opposed to the recent territorial, adventures reached the point of no return. Instead of withdrawing into the aesthetic realm and declaring itself the supreme treasure of its tradition, artistic writing could have taken on more rhetorical and interventionist roles with the help of an openly political criticism and could have participated directly in the critique and transformation of the public domain, questioning the hegemonic culture and especially its institutional formations. Since the nationalist ideology demanded from them public service, creative and critical writing could have fulfilled this duty in an aggressively inquisitive, rather than a wishfully servile, manner. In the

rest of Europe and in the United States, a similar opportunity afforded by the eruption of the avant-garde was missed too when, with modernism, the artistic practices successfully claimed total independence and absolute autonomy from the social sphere, severing their last links with other discourses. In Greece, the parallel and even more distressing development was the cooperation of literary writing through antimodernism with the capitalist and state demands for the complete nationalization of the arts.

The nationalism of the 1930s—the official and dominant ideology since then—painted contemporary Greece as a romantic work of art, perhaps God's supreme one. Autonomous, independent, self-regulating, unified, and beautiful, it also guaranteed the reality of this edenic picture with its primary assumption: the complete and perfect identity between the Greek language and the Greek world. With a masterstroke of metaphysical genius, Greek was safely protected from any possible questioning when its assumed transparency was attributed not even to its equivalence or correspondence to reality but to its Greekness. The nationalism (*ethnismos*) of demoticism had already paved the way for such a move, but its future became uncertain after disaffected intellectuals like P. Yannopoulos, K. Varnalis, K. Paraschos, Y. Kambysis, R. Philyras, K. Karyotakis, T. K. Papatsonis, and C. P. Cavafy started playing dangerously with formalism, polysemia, and doubts about the validity of their work. The transference of the transcendental center of transparency from the Hellenism of the world to the Greekness of the work canceled the possibility of intellectual unrest. In exchange, demoticism as a linguistic theory and an educational philosophy was honored and institutionalized. However, the severest loss is that, after Greekness was established firmly in the national consciousness as both the horizon and the justification of all understanding, an indigent avant-gardiste phenomenon critical of the conventional language and the institutional art could never emerge. To our day, the clarity of signification and the continuity of tradition safeguard, as basic notions, the ethnocentrism of Greek culture against the threat of disruption and any ideological inquisition.

Authors still write Greek as the only language because Greek has undergone no crisis and their practices have not been questioned; the terms of national continuity and cultural authority provide the only way they conceive of their tradition.

Greek postmodernism, as a symptom of the schizophrenia of contemporary Greek culture, is deeply paradoxical: the absence of an avant-garde makes its tasks impossible and its messages extremely difficult to communicate; its community is limited to those few who care in a positive, receptive way about intellectual and artistic developments abroad and feel a need to participate in them; its voice of dissent is controlled by the exclusion apparatus which the politics of cratylic ethnocentrism have developed over the last fifty years. At least for some time to come, it will be unable to reach a wider audience because readers can neither recognize it nor perceive it as a trend foreign to the local scene, which so far it has been. On the other hand, it is too late for an alternative Greek modernism to be cultivated, now that the movement has receded even in its native lands. This leaves art in a state of bewilderment with the ultimate choice between narcissism and self-criticism; the open question is whether there can be a Greek avant-garde that will attack the ossified institution and revitalize artistic creativity and pluralism. The existing conditions of stasis and sterility suggest a positive answer, but the stakes are too high for the whole culture to risk an internal examination of such scope.

I can think of only one contemporary avant-garde work: *I Keni Diathiki* (The Empty—as opposed to the New—Testament, 1975) by Paris Takopoulos, a wild attempt to write a Greek *Finnegans Wake*. It is an anarchic, savage, maddening novel that builds an extravagant, hyperlexist parody of modern Greek. While Joyce's effort was to redeem language by preserving its very dissipatory and dispersionary forces in a monumental literary edifice, Takopoulos has nothing noble in mind; he only ridicules the Greek language by exposing the absurdity of its conventionality, by driving it to its logical extremes of meaninglessness, and by reducing it to an inarticulate, rambling psychobabble. One

can hardly make any sense out of the novel, but again this is its main point: nothing makes sense in modern Greek as a national natural language. The book goes beyond criticism to reject altogether the idiom of the nationalistic obsessions. After its publication, the language should never have been the same; it should at least have entered a period of serious self-examination by rethinking its foundations, functions, and services. Needless to say, nothing remotely similar to this has happened. The book left no scar on the national linguistic and cultural consciousness, sinking quickly into oblivion without anyone's notice.

Postmodernism is the impossible paradox of contemporary Greek literature—a deviation, an aberration, a scandal. It transcends the official discourses of naturalist ethnography and surrealist symbolism to speak an unfamiliar, difficult, and demanding language. It will not enter the mainstream because its tradition is quite foreign; and it will not have any special effect unless its ingenious emphasis on reading stirs an interest in the arbitrariness of literary signification and inspires the first Greek avant-garde. Without a comprehensive, intrinsic critique of the institution literature, its output will remain a marginal phenomenon that future histories may not even record. The question remains open: is such an avant-gardiste critique feasible? If it is feasible, the avant-gardiste critique must struggle against romantic aesthetics, historical linguistics, idealist philosophy, and above all the pandemic anxiety of Greekness; it must disregard the issues of continuity and unity; it must speak Greek as just another language; and it must expose the fallacies of transparency, directness, unmediatedness, permanence, identity, equivalence, presence, immediacy. One wonders, however, if such an inquiry into the politics of literary interpretation is still viable when language has successfully assimilated, and therefore erased from memory, the functions of the nationalist ideology—when all that art aspires to is Greekness, that is, the culture of national narcissism.

What Makes Good Literature Good
and Literature: The Politics of
Evaluation Surrounding the Work
of Yannis Ritsos

THUS FAR I have discussed a number of instances and modes of literary production: through history writing, through interpretation, through criticism, through editing. In all the specific cases presented, though, the agent of the production was one person—a historian, a critic, an author, or an editor (and also a Greek, a specialist, and a man). In this chapter, to avoid giving the false impression that individual invention may suffice for the generation of literature as a public value, I shall examine a different instance of production, collective evaluation. I aim to investigate its economy, the system of artistic standards that supports such an act, and the aesthetic principles that make validation meaningful. The questions I ask are essentially very simple: Why do people read literature? Which are the needs they feel and the qualities they seek in engaging in the enjoyment of particular texts? By raising these issues, I am also taking the next logical step in my exploration of the politics of criticism since I propose to look into the economics of that institution: the discursive politics of literary knowledge is naturally affected by the current situation in the market for literary goods and the fluctuations of such major

values as truth, pleasure, and Greekness in the stock exchange of literary taste.

Ours seems to be an age with no respect for poets. The figure of the bard has disappeared in most countries, and the oracle of verse is now deserted. At least since Mayakovsky, if not Byron and Hugo, poetry, no longer able to inspire and instruct large numbers of people, apparently survives in noble, introspective isolation. Its public role has diminished so drastically that public issues themselves have been eliminated from its concerns, to a degree that makes it today the most private and often esoteric art. Modern Greek intellectual life, however, offers a very interesting exception: in its domain, poetry has lost almost none of its appeal; it still flourishes and grows in popularity. Public esteem for the poet is high, and his work retains a significant importance for large constituencies of the audience. In moments of personal distress or national exaltation, people turn to him for diversion, enjoyment, inspiration, or guidance. The great number of collections published, reviewed, and sold testifies to this: the love for poetry and the admiration for its seers make people want to stay informed about its development and eager to contribute to it by trying their hand at versification. In this contemporary cultural scene, the poet is still a hero.

An eminent example of this phenomenon is the monumental *Festschrift* published to celebrate Yannis Ritsos's seventieth birthday (Makrynikola 1981). It is a large-scale tribute to a poet who enjoys national and international reputation and who, apart from winning numerous prizes and honorary degrees, has seen his work translated into many languages, repeatedly reprinted, anthologized and analyzed, taught in high schools and universities, presented on stage, set to music, and illustrated by artists all over the world. Reflecting this massive appeal the scope of the honorary volume includes tributes, memoirs, poems, and studies from fellow writers, friends, scholars, critics, artists, and others who pay homage to the poet and to poetry. The array of names is impressive as is the attempt to consider many parts and aspects of Ritsos's work. Undoubtedly, the volume succeeds both in

offering a comprehensive picture of the poet's personality and lifelong poetic labors and in honoring a man of courage, conviction, and dedication. The *Festschrift* will probably be of lasting value for those who want to delve into this work for reasons of study, education, or enjoyment: it stands as the testimonial of an era to one of its most astute witnesses.

The contributors to the volume, flabbergasted by the sheer bulk of the writer's output, try to answer, each in her or his own way, the basic question: what makes Ritsos (born 1909) such a great poet? The essays approach the question from widely different angles and on many levels of discourse, giving the book a panoramic quality. But through this polyphony of approaches, a certain not unpredictable consensus emerges: this truly great poet is a major literary voice of our time. This unanimity shows that different evaluative procedures may result in a common conclusion, as long as they observe current standards of objectivity and accuracy according to which their validity can be tested against the object of study. Thus, it would be interesting to examine the testimonial volume as a whole, a collective expression of this evaluative consensus, to discover its unifying elements and see how Ritsos is portrayed in it. By analyzing the points where the individual approaches converge and agree, we may be able to find where the poet's true greatness lies. Obviously, such an investigation can present insights not only into Ritsos's own public figure and work but also into the current practices of evaluation in the criticism of Greek literature; then we may understand how artistic merit is conceived and appreciated.

The volume on Ritsos seems to provide an excellent opportunity: a field for the investigation of the aesthetics of Modern Greek Studies. The evaluative consensus reached in it and the numerous areas of agreement where the contributors meet are telling expressions of a particular critical ideology. I would like to emphasize that, although my study concentrates primarily on the practices and politics of criticism in Greece, I have already indicated the general situation abroad in Modern Greek (literary) Studies is not very different. Both local and the international

scholarly communities specializing in this literature share most philosophical and methodological principles, and their evaluations often coincide. The reputation of Ritsos is a case in point. Since the participants in the collection represent different countries, languages, ages, professions, and attitudes, by asking who the Ritsos is emerging from this tribute, we also ask a number of unavoidable supplementary questions: Who is the poet in the consciousness of his contemporary audience? What does poetry mean for those actively interested or engaged in the study of modern Greek literature? How is evaluation practiced in this realm? Which are its axiological presuppositions? How is appreciation validated? How are aesthetic values established and circulated? Obviously, it is not easy to avoid the theoretical consequences of the deceptively simple decision to read and enjoy Ritsos's work.

For an investigation of this kind, for an investigation into an aesthetic consensus, we need more than a theory of artistic beauty; rather, we need a theory of aesthetic ideology to help us understand the basic positions of the critical unanimity expressed in and as this volume. Since the consensus produced is the outcome of various interactions and exchanges not only among the different views presented there but also among others omitted or excluded, we need an economic theory of aesthetics, a theory of the production and circulation of aesthetic values. Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1979, 1983) has offered some very useful suggestions toward the construction of such a theory, and I intend to follow her path in exploring the economics of the aesthetic value. I shall outline a theory which expands on her positions and restructures the project according to the needs of my own investigation, in the hope that this will continue her original discussion and contribute something of possible interest to it. I am directly and inestimably indebted to her insightful observations. However, I should stress, that, because I have tried to graft Herrnstein Smith's ideas onto my different argumentation in a very liberal way, familiarity with her essays is indispensable for the reader interested in the great extent of my debt.

EVALUATION is the art of evaluating, of comparing and putting a value, a worth, on something—for example, an object, an idea, a position. We constantly evaluate: we decide what to do, when, where, how, with what, with whom, and so on. An artistic evaluation is the act of evaluating something as a work of art: I consider these colors on a canvas or this car engine or this printed text or this carved stone as art and not as something else, something that can serve other purposes. And an aesthetic evaluation is the act of evaluating an artwork as good or bad: for example, I believe *Emma* is better than *Great Expectations*; I prefer Mahler's "Seventh" to Bruckner's "Third." Each evaluation is an economic decision, a choice among available and competing claims and options for the allocation of various resources. More specifically, my evaluative act resulting in an aesthetic value is an economic comparative decision by which I adjudicate how I want to allocate and handle my time, energy, ideas, and money in this realm of experience; this decision affects my investment in attention, beliefs, and goods with respect to art.

Although personal judgment and private taste help determine the values of an individual, they cannot create values automatically approved and accepted by the public. A public value, the outcome of certain operations in a dynamic field, makes sense only in the context of needs and interests represented and satisfied by a social economy; outside its proper economic system, any value is meaningless. Values are by definition comparative: they acquire importance and price through comparison with other, preexisting values. Thus, an aesthetic value makes sense only when priced against other aesthetic goods; it is meaningful only in the context of an aesthetic economy, one defined by aesthetic needs and interests. How I feel about Brahms is a matter of personal evaluation and private taste, but Brahms's public aesthetic value is an altogether different subject, determined by interactions among audience, musicologists, historians, reviewers, teachers, performers, concert programmers, and record company executives. And his artistic value is a question of yet another order. That is why, if we want to form an idea about Brahms's

current value, we must look at encyclopedias, dictionaries, record guides, orchestra programs, and conservatory curricula.

We all, then, evaluate artworks, but established aesthetic values result from the transactions among individual evaluative acts taking place at various institutional sites according to the rules of a particular economic system, the aesthetic one; this is, of course, part of the larger network of socioeconomic-political relations governing society. Aesthetic value is contingent upon the factors contributing to the preservation and transformation of this system, as well as other, circumstantial ones: its determination depends not only on the evolution of the system but also on outside developments that affect its operations. Therefore, we would be entangled in an idealistic fallacy if, in the course of discussing an aesthetic value, we were to compare it to the "work itself" in order to ascertain its validity or accuracy. Instead, we must think of and question it in terms of the relevant market and context: In which economic system does it make sense? Which system dictates this value? Which interests are invested in it? Which needs are served by it? Which economic principles does it reflect? Any aesthetic value acquires its sense and validity from its supporting system of values, not from the "artwork itself": its study entails an inquiry into the system's economics of aesthetics, the economic theory of art.

Aesthetic value, then, is not the manifestation or recognition of natural qualities but an attribute which results from economic considerations, decisions, and negotiations. Perhaps the most convenient way to visualize its producing system is to think in terms of the prevailing structure of tastes and preferences in a culture: what most people or the most influential people like to see, hear, discuss, attend, visit, or buy. These trends reflect the aesthetic inclinations of the public. The problem with the notion of taste, however, is that it seems to emphasize agreement and unanimity at the expense of other aspects and factors of public evaluation, such as interests, debates, profits, marketing, dissent, or even chance. The economic conception of the situation, on the other hand, which sees exchanges of and about values

unfolding in the context of an economic system with its own conventions, rules, regulations, interventions, and markets, allows a better model because it represents more vividly the dynamics producing and supporting aesthetic values.

At this point, I would like to return to an earlier distinction between the artistic and the aesthetic and to use it in my discussion of values. Usually we tend to forget that something valued aesthetically carries a presupposed aesthetic value constitutively based on another valuation, the artistic one: every aesthetic value includes and presupposes an artistic value, incorporated in the very decision to judge an object from an aesthetic and not, say, a moral, political, or practical viewpoint. The judgment that “the *Thinker* is a masterpiece” means that this sculpture is art *and* it is great art, but somebody else may well think it neither great nor art; clearly, this judgment confers upon the object two values. I am therefore proposing the terms artistic and aesthetic to distinguish between statements referring to the artisticity of an object and others referring to the artistry of an artwork. The former make an ontological evaluation—is it art or not? The latter make a qualitative one—how good is the art? The judgment of artistry, of course, assumes artisticity as given. Of course, the above distinction between two separate stages of evaluation is almost always artificial, and I proposed it here only for reasons of convenient clarity, not methodological accuracy; one does not decide first whether something is art and then whether it is good art. There is no real difference between classification and evaluation or first and second stages of evaluation: we judge the nature *and* the quality of art simultaneously. Still, I have chosen to introduce and retain provisionally this distinction to point to different aspects of, rather than steps in, evaluation.

What is then usually concealed by the affirmation of an aesthetic value is the evaluative nature of the classification of an entity as art and subsequently its commodification as an artwork—the economic consensus to treat it as artistic. Let us concentrate on literature and be more specific. A text admired as literature, for example Rousseau’s *Confessions*, has been evalu-

ated twice: first, it acquired the value of literature (and not memoir or autobiography or philosophy, etc.); second, it acquired the value great literature (and not good or bad or mediocre or uninteresting, etc.). Thus, it became first an artistic commodity, a literary work, and then one highly valued and much demanded. Consequently, its market value (covering not only the price of the actual book but also the work's inclusion in anthologies and textbooks, its influence on other artists, and the acceptable verdicts of criticism) is the outcome of two valuations (and certainly many individual evaluative acts, that is, economic decisions). What the reader buys, then, or what the teacher teaches reflects two results of an economic consensus: the text-as-literature and the literary-text-as-great-art. Note also that the term text itself expresses a valuation based on an altogether different economy.

Both valuations, along with their outcome, the current aesthetic value of the *Confessions*, make sense only in a specific economic system and can be accounted for in terms of its dynamics. Their respective supporting systems, although interdependent and mutually constitutive, may be distinguished as follows. The first broader system is that of sociocultural values. In its domain, we may ask these questions: What makes an altar, a personal letter, or a chair an artwork? What allows this object to be perceived as such? What kind of appropriation makes it assume this function and not another? Which discourse claims it to be artistic? Which uses does the artistic function permit? In this system, the artisticity of an entity is decided. The second system is that of the aesthetic values. In its domain, we ask questions of quality: Why is Eliot's poetry better than Auden's? Can a machine be beautiful? Is abstract art for everybody? Which orchestration of *Boris Godunov* is preferable? Did Chekov write good dramas or bad comedies? In this system, the aesthetic merit of an artwork is estimated. In both cases, the decision about a value, which of course is never permanent but reached through debate and negotiation, makes sense only in the particular domain *and* under certain market conditions: the change in them

can potentially allow for a Japanese *Hamlet*, for Soviet rock music, and for Italian westerns. Unavoidably, the introduction of new values affects the status of old ones and signals a change in the aesthetic economy. When this happens, we must look for the operating interests and for targeted profits, rather than think in terms of influence, maturity, or universality, which are themselves aesthetic.

These observations indicate that not only value but also the value of an evaluation is contingent upon the historical moment; its importance will follow the fluctuations of the market. However, this should not be interpreted as a position of axiological relativism; where there is an economic system, there are rules, regulations, quotas, embargoes, and inflation. Measures and interactions impose limitations that make it impossible to defend subjectivism or the random arbitrariness of taste: values are kept under vigilant control, and the threat to protectionism may only come from the development of new industries, not from the doctrines of the specialists. With regard to the history of the market, it is also worth remembering that, most of the time, evaluation is not merely the estimation of value; it is the judgment of previous evaluations. Since entities which were until then value-free (and therefore neutral, uninterpreted, and unknown) enter the sphere of economic considerations infrequently, what we regularly evaluate is not an object or phenomenon or idea but rather existing values, and these acts intend to reform the system. Most evaluation is reevaluation, and it presupposes an active involvement in ongoing transactions of aesthetic goods, be they works, dogmas, principles, or methods.

Artworks come to our attention bearing marks of their valuational history, of the exchanges they have undergone. The survival of the older ones has been affected by interactions among investors, brokers, institutions, discourses, conditions, and mechanisms which are all part of the aesthetic production, care, distribution, and consumption. The same can be said about phenomena traditionally used as examples of the enduring power of the classic, such as the rediscovery of El Greco, the oblivion of

Nicola Piccinni, the recent rehabilitation of romanticism, or the publication of the rectified *Ulysses*. These developments are simply signs of dramatic upheavals in the volatile market of aesthetic values, and their repercussions should lead us to investigate the causes not by looking for the inherent qualities of strong works but studying the ones that lost their value and asking why. Considerations of the economic dynamics, when made in the sociocultural context where they operate, must ultimately raise the question of authority—one that pertains to its public expressions, to the institutional spaces where it is enacted, and to the modes according to which its normative power is exercised.

I shall deal momentarily with the last dimension of the question, which brings us to the crucial issue of validation: How is literary value, as the product of the dynamics intrinsic to the economy of the aesthetic market, validated? How is the commodity value of a text-as-literature imposed and asserted? Indeed, what has made us believe in the great importance of Ritsos's work? The means and the operations vary from context to context, from system to system, but I can make some general comments. Validation gains credibility and authority by becoming invisible: the more successful it is, the less noticeable. This is achieved when the value it generates is seen not as an attribute but as the total structure of certain inherent features, when it is perceived as natural, generated directly by the work, rather than conventional. The natural value can be enjoyed, while the conventional one invites doubts and questions: successful validation privileges the viewpoint of the evaluation it confirms as the only proper perspective, and it standardizes the corresponding approach, making it look correct and not just strategic, thus effectively outlawing other interpretive and economic possibilities. Successful validation also works by demonstration: it transfers values from the market to the work and shows that it results from the interactions among features, not among other values.

Effective validation offers an aesthetic value ready for reception and self-forgetful enjoyment of artistic merit. While the consumer of the value of literature is aware of the market, the

receiver is not: for him, the economic aspect of evaluation has been obliterated, and he sees the product as a gift, noticing the reward or gain, not the price. The reader of *War and Peace* is happy to pay in money, attention, ideas, beliefs, and respect in exchange for a literary masterpiece and the comfort, consolation, and reassurance a great artwork can provide. Because the temporality of the work is concealed, the historicity of understanding is suppressed, too; both the text and its consumption are fused into art and become timeless: the first as a literary work of everlasting value, the second as clear, immediate, dialogic encounter with it. The economic contingencies are thus totally eliminated; the naturalization of the value is complete.

In my treatment of the volume on Ritsos, I shall attempt to ignore the established aesthetic values, which usually determine our appreciation of his work, and bypass the effects of their validation by dealing with the collection itself as a product of the dynamics of aesthetic economy. I shall therefore look into the value of Ritsos's work, the literary value Ritsos, as it emerges from the various transactions conducted in the volume. However, a word of perhaps unnecessary caution is appropriate here. My own evaluation of the valuative consensus reached by the contributors should be seen in the same context where it claims evaluations operate; it should be viewed, that is, as a personal evaluative act which tries to intervene in the current economic system of aesthetic production and exchange, and alter some of the conditions in the market. Of course, by itself it is impossible to achieve much without the support of and opposition from other acts similarly oriented, but it could play either an important or an insignificant role in this direction, depending on the responses encountered in the concrete market situation. This reminder only serves to alert the reader to the potential economic implications of his decision on this chapter and book.

My plan for the following discussion of Ritsos comprises four stages. First, I shall see the volume as the product of diverse exchanges and negotiations among aesthetic decisions, reflecting an evaluative consensus about Ritsos's work. After a description

of this consensus, I shall examine how its outcome is validated in terms of truth, knowledge, and power. Then, I shall discuss the work of the poet as a commodity produced in and by the volume, and I shall inquire into its suggested retail price, its value in the market of literary goods. This will lead me finally to the questions of the aesthetic needs the particular commodity promises to satisfy, and therefore its predicted, desired, and targeted uses. The conclusion may give us an insight into the constitution and the operations of the contemporary market for Modern Greek literary products.

LET US BEGIN with the description of the evaluative consensus that underlies the seventy-two contributions and essentially defines and establishes the value of Ritsos for his audience today. My approach does not intend to emphasize homogeneity at the expense of diversity but rather to combine the aesthetic assumptions shared by the participants; homogeneity and unanimity are not part of the approach but presuppositions of the literary value established and confirmed by the whole book. I choose to present it by enumerating the major points of agreement among the contributors.

1. The oeuvre which carries Ritsos's name is the work of a great poet who has conscientiously devoted all his energies and creativity to the ideals of poetry. Through his laborious efforts, in solitude, sometimes in exile, often without recognition, he has managed to find a voice of personal expression exclusively his. The drama of his life—poverty, displacement, illness, persecution, isolation, neglect—is invariably included and reflected in his verse to a degree that makes them inseparable. The genius of the artist is everywhere manifest in his writing and painting, creating, perfecting, and offering to the people not only his work but also his self.

2. The numerous texts of the work can be classified along established and recognizable genres and categories—poetry, prose, and poetic drama; novels, short and long poems; personal, erotic, national, historical poems; book-length compositions, col-

lections, and so on. The poet has observed the traditional distinctions without unduly transgressing any conventions, and thus his work can be approached with convenient familiarity. The respect for the norms he has shown facilitates a systematic classification and indicates the function of the texts desired by their creator.

3. Each text, short or long, is an autonomous whole which deserves individual study. This independence corroborates the autarchy and power of literature. One may explore aspects of content, form, structure, style, or belief of any piece by seeking adequate answers in its organic self-sufficiency. The text constitutes a universe in itself, with its own territory, laws, and message; it can be considered the minimal unit of the oeuvre. Although analysis may later expand to include extrinsic relationships, it must begin with a microscopic reading of that unit's fundamental elements in their native environment. This possibility is guaranteed by its most distinctive quality, beauty.

4. The text is the true picture of the world, an authentic representation: it may portray the existing reality, project a future one, reconstruct the past, venture into myth, reflect the poet's inner world, or stage a drama of ideas. But in all cases its authenticity is not measured necessarily according to data from scientific knowledge and personal experience: it is tested against what is represented, and principles of morality, imagination, politics, psychology, and so on may be used. We can always ascertain correspondences with the world we already know, as long as the work speaks artistic truth in its own way, since the worlds of literature are authenticated by their enveloping aesthetic merit.

5. The nature, the composition, the subject, and the message of the work, all in harmonious combination, give it its authority as an artwork. Its artistic autonomy, beauty, and its aesthetic authenticity, truth, make it a literary achievement worthy of various kinds of study, especially philological and critical. These two arts of reading—the one explanatory, the other interpretive—deal mainly with classic oeuvres, and this one deserves the most thorough scholarly attention. Much research on many levels still

needs to be done, but one hopes that solid foundations for it are laid today.

6. The work belongs to a venerable, centuries-old tradition and merits a place of distinction in its literary canon. The work's excellence radiates not only through its intrinsic features of distinctive quality or extrinsic standards of truthfulness but also through any comparison with the best of its kind. When read in parallel with masterpieces from the ancient and modern Greek tradition, its multiple relationships with them emerge to indicate how many important lessons the author learned, the influences he creatively assimilated, and why this tradition eventually has been meritoriously preserved and continued in and by his poetry.

7. The aesthetic authority of the work, the subject of study for the community of specialists in literature, does not limit its appeal to this small constituency. On the contrary, its potential audience is limitless. As indicated by the range of contributors to the volume, by the successive reprints, and by the ever-growing number of translations, the greatness of this work does not restrain its accessibility: communists and clergymen, authors and professors, intellectuals and laymen, men and women, younger and older admirers, people of various races and nationalities from all over the world, writing in different languages. This work, open to anyone who cares to make the effort and important enough not to discriminate among readers, welcomes everybody.

8. The same inviting openness is exhibited regarding a wide diversity of approaches: from the scientific to the autobiographical, from the systematic to the informal, from the Marxist to the Christian, from the aesthetic to the ideological. The work allows potentially for an infinite number of approaches, and in exchange for the attentive listening it has something to reveal and offer to each of them. Its universality appeals to all people and all ways of reading. This unrestricted, democratic, or rather, socialist, availability is a sign of how its message can cross boundaries and transcend preferences in speaking about the meaning, the ideal of a better life. When it comes to the transmission of

artistic truth, neither methods and conditions nor linguistic, cultural, national, and other barriers matter.

9. Along with the macrocosmic quality of universality, the work has an equally strong microcosmic one, its pronounced and irreducible Greekness. From its chthonic resources it derives its most distinctive characteristics, as it speaks Greek, it belongs to the Greek tradition, it converses with the Greek past, and it defends the perennial Greek values. Its national identity defines partially its ideological and philosophical positions, too, since its recurring central subjects are the passions of the Greek people and their cherished dreams of a secular resurrection. This is a truly national work, as natives and foreigners have acknowledged, one that expresses the nation's deepest desires and at the same time teaches its people about their mistakes, their origins, their future, and their tasks. The poet holds up a mirror in which modern Greece recognizes its face and realizes its destiny.

10. In a work of such scope, volume, depth, consistency, and appeal, the highest values of literature are incorporated and affirmed. Any encounter with it renews our faith in art to provide aesthetic fulfillment, reveal new worlds, and guide the search for a brighter future. Art is still alive, still thriving and playing an important role for those who seek an inspiring vision: in our technological age of lost belief and orientation, it remains the only voice that speaks to humankind about the divinity of this life and provides a moral purpose and justification for it.

Since most of the contributors honoring Ritsos find themselves in full agreement with most, if not all, of these points, we can say that the respective ideas summarize the evaluative consensus reached in this volume, which establishes the current value of the poet's work in the specific system of Greek literary economy. The points were presented here as a description of its aesthetic value. But of equal interest to its constitution is also its institution, the ways whereby a collective valuation is given validation. In each particular case, the strategies of validation, which entails the public acceptance of the value, vary and depend on the principles, the structure, and the situation of the market, but, as we

saw earlier, their common ultimate aim is to present evaluation as description and therefore to naturalize value. I shall distinguish between three main strategies of validation employed in this collective judgment to give credibility to the value of Ritsos's work as established in the volume.

a. Functions of the object are presented as attributes of the work. The artistic autonomy, the aesthetic authenticity, and the cultural authority of the text are described as generically intrinsic characteristics of literature and not as results of an aesthetic approach. Value is asserted as the sum total of the qualities of the literary text. The object of study is systematically isolated from the market and dealt with independently: its intertextual links with its surroundings, tradition, and language are forcibly severed, while readers are invited to concentrate on the page. Even influences are credited to its power of creative assimilation. Thus, the product of relations is portrayed as an independent object and the outcome of economic dynamics as the source of the aesthetic evaluation. The commodification of art and the reification of its value is complete to the extent that worth is disguised as merit and the market as nature. Desires can be now safely transferred and invested in literature; Ritsos's work has repeatedly offered this service to the Greek political unconscious.

b. Mechanisms of production are presented as conditions of reception. After the text has been successfully constituted as a work of literature by being artistically isolated and aesthetically privileged, the same strategies are applied to its distribution. The operations that effected its constitution by granting it artistic status and aesthetic quality are now isolated and privileged as the proper conditions for its correct reception. The contribution of cultural, institutional, ideological, technological, and other factors affecting and determining the production of the work is suppressed: there is no reference to such facts as the printing of the volume by the publishing house with exclusive rights to Ritsos's output; the affordability of his books; the national and international marketing campaigns; the glamorization of the translations through lavish luxury editions; the poet's idolization by socialist

countries and parties of the left; the mythologization of his life by the media; the historical circumstances that favored the popularity of his work; its promotion through musical compositions, prizes and honorary degrees, exhibitions, ceremonies, support from fellow travelers and comrades; or the cultural needs of a disaffected public who found consolation and satisfaction in this heroic poetry. Factors like these are being normalized when seen as part of the necessary conditions for a full understanding and appreciation of such a magnificent work. In this way, they become immune from any critique that would question the interests invested therein.

c. The agents of the production are presented as the specialists in evaluation. The group of participating interpreters, members of different communities, is granted the authority of aesthetic judgment: it is tacitly assumed they all have the appropriate talent, ability, experience, training, knowledge, and information to perform this judiciary task. Under exactly which capacity they serve is not stated explicitly, nor are the criteria for their selection provided; apparently, similar explanations are considered redundant, given the fame and reputation automatically associated with these names. Even this silence confirms, in a negative way, that the contributors are the specialists who know.

These main strategies of validation guarantee the objectivity, accuracy, and unanimity of the evaluative consensus. They are used to turn the text into artwork, the production into reception, and the mediation into interpretation in the eyes of the buying public; essentially they disguise economics as an ontology, the market as reality. (I note in passing here that capitalism invented aesthetics to provide exactly this service, but I reserve further comment on the topic for the conclusion of the chapter.) Combined, the above strategies achieved the total deinstitutionalization and naturalization of literature-as-art, whereby a cultural industry was transformed into a literary monument.

Now that the conclusions have been certified, we can see clearly what kind of commodity they have produced and also inquire about its suggested value. The commodity is a literary

work in tens of books and collections, comprising over 120,000 lines of poetry, some prose works, and a few translations and essays. It meets the standards of the literary market today: it observes the established rules of writing and publishing; it is written in recognizable forms and styles; it strives for beauty and significance; it is personal and original; it can be read and enjoyed in reflexive isolation; it is related to the real world through reflection and to the world of texts through influence; it is supported by a firm cultural tradition; it is available and open to specialists and laymen alike; it can be approached through different perspectives. In sum, this work of literature contains the promise of aesthetic and other complementary rewards.

This is the literary commodity “the work of Ritsos” as manufactured in and by the honorary volume. I now return to my heuristic distinction between artistic and aesthetic evaluation. It is worth reiterating here that commodification, the production of a text as a literary work, is the first stage of effective valuation, whereby a written document is deemed artistic and nothing else and is thus appropriated by one or more critical discourses and brought into the economic system of literature. When one keeps in mind the distinctively positive connotations that the category literature carries in our culture, this observation becomes very important: it points to the special privilege that works credited with any literary quality enjoy and to the authority they exert; it points to the lack of respect for texts that may have other virtues but are not considered art; it points also to the nature of the struggle for critical recognition among writers *and* to that for the appropriation of texts among discourses.

After a text has been artistically produced, the process of its aesthetic evaluation takes place inside the relevant economic system, and the literary commodity is priced. It is analyzed, compared, and judged, and its merit is evaluated so that it can be reckoned with as a value. In the case of Ritsos, as presented in the volume, the work is unequivocally valued as a masterpiece for the following reasons:

THE POLITICS OF EVALUATION

- The *author* is a genius who has all by himself striven against the most adverse circumstances to build a work of awe-inspiring proportions, great inspiration, and popular education: the execution of his insightful plan has been spectacular.
- Each *text* is a small or large self-contained universe which provides for a gratifying experience: its perfectly balanced structure, its depth, and its magic command dedicated attention.
- Each text introduces an authentic *world*, familiar or not, where readers, recognizing something from their own selves and reality are encouraged to think about the life they want and admonished to take their fate into their own hands.
- The work is a landmark of a literary and cultural *tradition*: in its multiple associations with it and its imaginative mining of its resources, it reaffirms its own origins and the tradition's unity, continuity, and greatness.
- The universality of the work transcends all obstacles and reaches the heart of humankind: its potential *audience* is everywhere on earth because its humanistic message translates easily into the language of basic common feelings.
- The expressive power of the work transcends circumstantial constraints: the specific conditions of any *reception* can hardly limit its appeal, since its essence is spiritual, transhistorical, and eternal, not material, temporary, and perishable.
- While the messages of the work are catholic, its meaning has an inalienable identity defined by its earthly *Greekness*. Above and beyond all else it is Greek; it incorporates, preserves, and celebrates what is best in the uninterrupted Greek culture—its principles of virtue, heroism, independence, integrity, humility, and brotherhood.

The combination of these elements, attributed to the work itself, constitutes the market price of Ritsos's literary output or, we may say, of Ritsos, that sign circulating through books, his-

tories, anthologies, studies, records, newspapers, exhibitions, journals, lectures, and conversations as the value of a literary sign in the aesthetic consciousness of the public interested in Greek literature. We may understand this value more clearly if we conceive it as the price one pays when one buys a book by Ritsos, takes a course on Ritsos, loves a song because of his lyrics, attends a panel discussion of his work, recites his verses to a friend, quotes him to defend an argument, or collects stones he has painted. A transaction occurs in all these cases; one pays in money, attention, admiration, time, or ideas in exchange for something charged with aesthetic value. Of course, people should be free to decide for themselves what they want, but the cover, the name, and the marketing often create false expectations or even deceive and seduce. This does not mean that people should be told about nutrition information or daily allowances when it comes to the consumption of literature, but one might be permitted to fantasize about a group of consumers' advocates (consisting of disenchanting readers and radical critics) who would request that, for the protection of prospective buyers, aesthetic ingredients (according to the current standards of taste) be listed in a conspicuous place on each item.

Naturally, the ultimate question is whether the product will sell, whether the goods will be seen as attractive and the price reasonable, so that the desired dividends can be made. As far as Ritsos is concerned, the sales have been very good, both in the local and in the international market, and most people involved in this trade—publishers, instructors, translators, critics, musicians, leftist ideologues, curators, even imitators—have profited and reinvested in more stocks, while the demand remains high and the possibility for mergers of different kinds stays open. The volume under examination reflects this situation and capitalizes on it: its evaluative consensus, apparently based on a comprehensive survey and an accurate estimate of the current market, does not represent something new but rather gives a monumental expression to the feelings of admiration, confidence, and opti-

mism shared by producers, investors, analysts, as well as public reaction.

One aspect of the poet's fame deserves special comment here. Ritsos has been a Communist. This is a fact well-known to his audience from references and messages in his work, statements, interviews, biographical information, and public gestures. It seems that this commitment tainted for decades his reputation in Greece and abroad and made him a cult figure in leftist circles. During the 1960s, however, criticism started producing his work as a national monument and turned the poet from witness of historical drama to seer of ethnic destiny. Primary responsibility for this turn of approach may rest with Marxist criticism which, during the 1960s, an era of political liberalization, was anxious to make its heroes widely acceptable by elaborating on their artistic achievements. What is important for our discussion is that first the local and then, in the next decade, the international literary industry apparently did not have any great difficulties in appropriating this ideologically militant and uncompromising work and selling it as literature in the capitalist market of the bourgeois aesthetic pleasures. By looking, then, at this reflection of a strong market for Ritsos products, we can ask the last questions of our inquiry into this aesthetic economy: Which specific needs do they address and promise to satisfy? What do people who spend on or invest in their greatness find there that inspires them with such trust?

Judging from the strategies of advertising and the pleasures of consumption, we can infer that Ritsos as a literary commodity with a high aesthetic value caters to the following:

- the need for diversion through art from the pettiness, the predictability, the banality, and the demands of everyday life;
- the need for artistic totality, for a work that is whole, complete, coherent, and closed;
- the need for transparency, for an immediate, direct, and full understanding without gaps or breaks;

CHAPTER 7

- the need for a restitution of the traditional humanistic ideals and an enlightened, compassionate morality;
- the need for a sense of unity and common cause among people of different race, language, and culture;
- the need for a renewed sense of continuity, diachronically between periods and traditions and synchronically between realms of experience and knowledge;
- the need for a belief in evolution, progress, and a better future, without injustice and inequality;
- the need for an affirmation of one's literary competence, the good feeling that everybody can participate in the feasts of literature; and
- the need for an affirmation of literature itself and art in general as a supreme domain of achievement, where the artist, representing every human being, breaks free and consummates his abilities.

Ritsos promises to satisfy these needs, fulfill these desires, and reinforce these hopes. I believe that to most of my readers the needs enumerated are not unfamiliar. I am referring here not to their own attitudes toward literature but to set of expectations implicitly outlined above, which make one think immediately of aesthetics. Ritsos appeals eloquently to the expectations that originated in the definition of art by the romantic philosophy of beauty. In fact, if we transfer the notions we have just listed from the area of the audience to that of the work itself, and if we assume, reversing our approach in this chapter, that what the audience is looking for does exist in the work, we will arrive very close to the aesthetic conception of literature as it survives today from the age of Wordsworth and Schiller. This epistemological insight into the relativity of taste, as well as into the interaction between taste and the market, turns attention away from the commodity itself to the nature of the needs the commodity is supposed to serve: Are they real or not? Is Ritsos appealing to

some real intellectual and psychological needs or to conventional, aesthetic ones, created and subsequently exploited by the economic system that has produced it? Are these needs natural and common, arisen from our humanness, or are they artificial ones, dictated by an industry trying to sell its product? Are they conditional on *physis* or on *nomos*?

I suppose the answer depends on one's basic philosophical orientation. From a metaphysical perspective, be it Kantian or Marxist, it will be a positive one: aesthetic needs are among those on whose satisfaction survival and a good life always depend; they may take on different expressions from time to time, but their essential structure remains unaltered. On the other hand, a negative answer will come from a historicist perspective: all needs as needs originate in a particular economic system, and only *its* survival, and the survival of those people who are defined as such by these needs, depends on their satisfaction; different systems create different needs. In the first instance, the aesthetic experience becomes a constant and an absolute, best served by the classic work, in human life—as does, of course, the idea of human itself; in the second, it is radically relativized and appears contingent on the economic system of each culture. When the two perspectives are pushed to their logical extremes, the question becomes: Are we to see man and his social labor (artistic, interpretive, evaluatory, or anything else) as a matter of need or use? Or, to return to our narrow territory, is literary value an object of aesthetic need or a product of aesthetic use?

According to the path followed so far, my approach would tend to favor the second of the previous options. Still, I am afraid that the very acceptance of this polarity might indicate a primary metaphysical choice to the degree of its validation. To transcend the polarity, I propose that we must look at the semantic range of the ancient Greek word *chreia*, where both need and use were interwoven: the two terms are mutually supplementary in the fundamental economic sense that they create, support, and provide for each other in the historicopolitically determined space of a market. Bereft of any ontological foundations, they develop in

conflict and accordance, conforming to the basic rules of an economic system. Man as a social being is both need and use, and this is manifested in all areas of his labor. It applies, for example, to literary values: they are addressed to needs but are the products of use; and they may be in turn subjected to further uses which will make them suitable for different needs. The needs to which Ritsos appeals are conventional, but this does not mean necessarily that the uses of this value have to be conventional, too.

Our investigation has brought us very far: we have examined in broad terms the economic constitution of a literary value by concentrating on one of its manifestations, the volume honoring Ritsos, and by describing the evaluative consensus it reflects, the strategies of its validation, its structure, and its allure for the audience. We could have started deductively, inquiring first into the constitution of the market for literary values and then concentrating on the particular example, but that would have required a much longer exploration. Our approach, however, has covered sufficient ground to allow more general comments in conclusion.

The literary value Ritsos, as the volume makes evident, is a product of a system whose rules can be traced to aesthetics, the romantic economics of beauty. Aesthetics was based on the capitalist principles of a free market and the private ownership of the means of production, which introduced and instituted the notions of the artist, the work, and the audience as we still understand them today. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, capitalism, a new economic system, emerged and gradually prevailed. In the realm of art the necessity arose for a theory that would supply the model and the justification for a reformed market and hierarchy of values. Thus, aesthetics was established to play that role. It advocated a free economy, effected the naturalization of artistic commodities, consecrated the ownership of the means of production by the artist, and of course helped his alienation from society.

My argument is that not only the circulation of literary texts but also the very production and consumption of literature today is a capitalist phenomenon, which takes place according to eco-

conomic rules prescribed by aesthetics. But with the ongoing transformation of capitalism in our postindustrial, postmodern age of information, the literary market is undergoing a drastic transformation, too, as indicated by its present inability to promote and produce contemporary geniuses and masterpieces, or to anticipate and control the changes in public taste. What is at stake here is the authority, the exchangeability of the established artistic and aesthetic values, now that demand is decreasing. It appears, though, that these transformations in the literary market and institutions will take some time until they affect Greek literature: this system is still based on the interactions between orthodox aesthetic values and needs, as indicated by the success of Ritsos, a typical product of the capitalist economy of art.

The Violent Power of Knowledge:
The Struggle of Critical Discourses for
Domination over Constantine P. Cavafy's
“Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400”

THE PRECEDING ANALYSIS of the constitution of the literary value Ritsos concentrated on the synchronic aspects of the production of an artistic commodity. I emphasized, however, that evaluation is most of the time reevaluation, the reconsideration of an already established worth. Now I would like to focus on the diachronic dimension of the same operation and trace the fate of a particular text through its successive readings by different economies of beauty and systems of literary knowledge. The interpretive history of a work bears the marks of its appropriation by various critical discourses; it also testifies to the power struggles conducted among discourses for institutional authority. Behind every interpretation, every individual act of invention, there exists and operates a dependable machinery of relevant systematic knowledge allowing for the proper understanding, in our case, the literary one. Let us move, then, from axiology to epistemology and examine the fundamental presuppositions of such an understanding. This move will also give us the opportunity to distinguish between competing discourses and their conflicting claims to truth. For this case study, I have chosen a poem by Constantine P. Cavafy, the most controversial Greek writer.

Fifty years after Cavafy's death, the popularity of his work and the amount of exegetical labor devoted to its faithful annotation continue to increase steadily. Commentators, essayists, critics, philologists, and artists return with self-defeating reverence to that small body of texts and attempt to elucidate its complex messages. But the most surprising aspect of this growing industry is not exactly its large scope but rather its wide variety. There are as many interpretations of the literary sign Cavafy as critical approaches to it, each one striving for inclusiveness of coverage and exclusiveness of appropriation. The erotic, the political, the didactic, the historical, the symbolist, the mythopoetic, and other Cavafys compete for our attention, and for absolute interpretive authority.

Unfortunately, since the scholarly interest in the disciplines of criticism—their emergence, individuation, development, and transformation—remains completely nonexistent in Greek Studies, we lack not only a history of modern Greek criticism but also any major study on the production and circulation of individual literary works. With a noble idealism and naive innocence typical of its romantic conception and orientation, modern Greek scholarship keeps returning dutifully to the original works and investigating the authenticity of their origins and meanings in order to recover the author's, conscious or unconscious, intentions and the true identity of the literary sign. The tradition of the works' transmission, their functions and malfunctions, readings and misreadings, and uses and abuses, incites no interest whatsoever, since the established mythical image of the text as a transparent sign is still one of ethnicity, purity, and full presence.

The case of Cavafy, however, remains a strong challenge to the humanistic presuppositions underlying Greek criticism. The number of existing approaches, and the embarrassing variety of their results, cries for a history of his work's reception, especially a theoretical inquiry into the epistemology of Cavafian criticism that would describe the ideological investments in it. It is part of my purpose here to break some ground toward such an inquiry by proposing a general systematic approach to the interpretive

history of literature. The first part of this chapter consists of a reading of Foucault's reading of Nietzsche's reading of Schopenhauer's reading of . . . , while the second is a reading of Cavafy's reading of Athenaeus's reading of ancient Greeks poets' reading of . . .

All that goes to show the inherently intertextual and consequently antimetaphysical nature of the whole enterprise: my reading is just another text on texts, just another reading that interpolates texts between other texts (that is, readings between readings), makes certain diacritical comments, and draws certain differential conclusions, while simultaneously trying in vain to cover itself and preempt future intertextual counterarguments that may attack it. To rephrase the preceding statement in conventional and more practical terms, the first part of this chapter outlines the project of a genealogical investigation by opposing it to the historical one and poses power and the struggle of discourses for domination as its concrete objects, the second part offers as an example, and not a model, of such an investigation a genealogy of the production of the poem "Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400" (1920)—a microscopic genealogy of the struggle over Cavafy's work in general. One might choose wishfully to call these two parts theoretical and practical, respectively; but there is no way that this study could effectively object to such (or any other) treatment and appropriation, no matter how much it would disagree with its principles.

IN HIS BOOK *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault proposed, through a comprehensive methodological review of his past work, a new historical discipline called "archaeology" and clarified its orientation and goals by opposing it to the traditional "history of ideas" (see, especially, part 4, chapter 1). Three years later, in his seminal essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), Foucault abandoned the old term and revised the elaborate methodology accompanying it, under the commanding influence of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Instead, he adopted the very term genealogy and outlined his new

project by opposing it to humanist history, while avoiding, at this time, the development of a detailed plan of investigation.

The defining characteristics of genealogy, according to Foucault's essay, are the following:

a. "It opposes itself to the search for 'origins' " (1977, 140); it does not try to recover the true identity of things and phenomena, the unity of their original creation, by searching for the intentions and motives of the creator, the moment of their immaculate conception, the "spirit of the age," or their inviolable autonomy and perfection. Genealogy is the "history of an error we call truth" (144).

b. It "does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity" (146) between the present and its foundations; on the contrary, it traces the "complex course of descent" (146) and shows the disparity and dispersal, the heterogeneity and heterogeny, of things by studying them in their concrete manifestations and culturally conditioned uses—that is, their material existence and the historical factors that allow for it. "Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history" (148).

c. It does not follow the naturalistic model of evolution that describes historical developments according to their organic necessity; it deals with the emergence of things and the play of forces involved in it. Things are not created; they appear as a result of a struggle for domination over a set of rules. The emergence of a thing ensues after the successful appropriation of those rules by one particular interpretation in a specific game situation; ". . . the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history" (152).

IN SUMMARY, it can be said that genealogy rejects the metaphysical postulates of the humanistic/romantic discipline of historiography and its positivistic/scientific pretensions. Instead, it posits, as its own subject, the cultural/historical emergence of things (or ideas or phenomena) and their descent from the interaction of intersubjective forces in games where these forces develop com-

petitive relationships and struggle for the appropriation of rules, that is, for domination.

During its transformation from archaeology to genealogy, Foucault's idea of an antihumanistic discipline gained in philosophical strength what it lost in methodological rigor; it also improved its strategic focus and political awareness, while losing its scholarly prestige and appeal. The primary purpose became less descriptive and more polemical; knowledge itself receded into the background, while power, as the "will to knowledge" (again, after Nietzsche), became the central notion.

As this chapter has been intimating so far, yet another approach to Cavafy and the genuine meaning of his poetry would be an idealist and futile attempt to return to the original sources and reconstruct the act of creation. Even a dexterous presentation of data—of a biographical, historical, or aesthetic nature—cannot illuminate the tradition surrounding and delivering the work to us, unless, of course, one still happens to subscribe to the ontological theory of art and prefers to ignore its historical materiality and to dispense with cultural transmission. What is needed for his historicist understanding is, in our case, a genealogy of the sign Cavafy, namely, an investigation of its descent—the points, moments, and conditions of its emergence: how it has been read, produced, and constituted, used, appropriated, and transformed; which games have centered on it, which forces have contested for it, and which powers have been exercised over and through it. The supreme point of reference for any genealogical study becomes, obviously, power in its specific, local, and temporal manifestations.

The forms and relations of power as manifested and invested in various institutions of social control and discipline have been repeatedly examined by Foucault in his mature work. But the most succinct and illuminating discussion, with far-reaching implications for the study of all cultural formations and systems, is contained in his first book on sexuality (1980), where power is conceived as the "will to knowledge" and is thus linked to truth. In this part of the essay, power and its operations will be exam-

ined, and four tentative “rules” for their systematic description will be advanced, according to the philosophical principles and the methodological objectives provided by Foucault in the chapters 1 and 2, “Objective” and “Method” in *The History of Sexuality*, part 4. There are four main characteristics of power.

a. Immanence: “[P]ower must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization” (92). Power is not abstract and general but concrete and specific; however, it is not a force in itself, not even the result of one force’s action, but the outcome of every force relation. “Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships . . . but are immanent in the latter” (94). All relationships, all relations of forces, are, in one respect, relations of and about power. “One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (93). It is the name of the game; power is immanent in the game; and there is nothing outside the game.

b. Continual Variations: “The omnipresence of power: . . . because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (93). Its “juridical representation” (89), the traditional legal model of its description, conceals its strategic character and its rhetorical situatedness: power does not belong to the sovereign or the ruling hegemony or anybody else. “Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points” (94) by all forces participating in the game since it is immanent in the relations they develop.

c. Double Conditioning: “Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective” (94). The exercise of power always follows certain objectives and serves certain interests. But there is no

center or permanent structure in the game. Local centers emerge due to overall strategies which depend on specific force relations; and these relations, in turn, are affected and transformed by the particular overall strategy. Thus, there is a constitutive mutual interdependence between forces and their tactics on the one hand and the overall strategy on the other. The double conditioning and the “strictly relational character of power relationships” becomes clearer when their oppositional nature is taken under consideration. “Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (95). Mutual interdependence, therefore, conditions not only strategies and tactics but also power and its opposites. “Where there is power, there is resistance” (95).

d. The Tactical Polyvalence of Discourses: “We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (101). Discourses are not uniform bodies of knowledge or stable embodiments of truth; they vary in function and their functions vary: their constitutions change, their potential uses are innumerable, their operations are complex, their elements are distributed in irregular fashion. Discourses both enunciate and compete for power; essentially, they are discursive formations whereby power turns into knowledge and strives to appropriate the rules of the game and solidify them as truth.

Although these are descriptions of the four main characteristics of power in its material manifestations, clearly, no method could ever provide valid guidelines for an objective description of the field or a scientific taxonomy of the games played, the rules followed, and the strategies adopted in force relations. For this reason, Foucault has suggested that we “must construct an analytics of power” (90) and try to analyze its mechanisms. This must necessarily be a historical/cultural investigation of concrete

cases, of specific situations “in the field of multiple and mobile power relations” (98). To that end, he has additionally proposed four “cautionary prescriptions” (98), corresponding to the distinctive characteristics of power described above, that might protect the investigation from absolutist epistemological fallacies. After outlining these far from normative rules, I will set out the goals of my own excursion into the field of Cavafian criticism.

a. Rule of Immanence: “Between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority. . . . We still start, therefore, from what might be called ‘local centers’ of power-knowledge” (98). We will examine the concrete manifestations of power in force relations developing in a historically specific game situation and the ensuing possibilities of knowledge.

b. Rule of Continual Variations: “We must seek . . . the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process” (99). We will examine how force relations are constantly transformed, how their distribution changes, how power is exercised through them, and how that affects the constitution of knowledge.

c. Rule of Double Conditioning: “[O]ne must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work” (100). We will examine this asymmetrical dialectic in order to find the aims informing the tactics applied, the interdependence between these tactics and the overall strategy of the game, and the nuclei of resistance that develop at various points and cause their revision and readjustment.

d. Rule of the Tactical Polyvalence of Discourses: “[I]t is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (100). We will examine the variety of their functions and effects, that is, the specific ways in which power is exercised strategically and produces knowledge effectively. “[W]e must question them on the two levels of their tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategic integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their

utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur” (102).

In short, the crucial points of our interest and reference will be local centers of force relations historically situated where strategies of power, through their mutual interaction with specific tactics, are constantly transformed and produce polyvalent discourses—that is, multiple constitutions of knowledge that aspire to absolute authority, truth.

To make the preceding discussion of power explicitly relevant and to connect the first with the second part of this chapter, I will paraphrase freely a long passage from *The History of Sexuality* (97), adapting its suggestions to the purposes of our own genealogical investigation. The important question we must address ourselves to is not, given the presence of Cavafy’s work in the corpus of modern Greek literature, how and why power needs to establish a knowledge of it. Rather, in a specific type of discourse on literature and in a specific type of critical discourse and its relations with other critical discourses similarly oriented to a concrete form of extortion of truth, that of Cavafy’s poetry, what were the most immediate and most local power relations at work, how did they make possible these kinds of critical discourses, and, conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations?

What follows is a genealogy of the descent of a literary test—an investigation into the conditions of its possibility as circumscribed by force relations that developed between discourses competing for its explication (i.e., domination over it); it is a genealogy of the power-knowledge relationships that have produced the text through various constitutions of its truth. Still, at this last point of our first part, a warning seems appropriate: “power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (86). Nietzsche’s conception of power as read and revised by Foucault remains one of struggle, fierce fighting, violence, prohibition, suppression, and appropriation. Based on the Heraclitean model, it bereaves all human communication

and creativity of idealism, innocence, and purity. Therefore, any critique of power relations has inherently the character of resistance against particular impositions of authority; to refute them effectively and to achieve our strategic/political goal of undermining prevailing forms of domination, “we must immerse the expanding production of discourses” on Cavafy’s work “in the field of multiple and mobile power relations” (98) and expose their hidden metaphysical assumptions that disguise those relations as true knowledge.

THE FULL TEXT of Cavafy’s poem follows.

The actor they’d brought in to entertain them
also recited a few choice epigrams.

The room opened out on the garden
and a delicate odor of flowers
mingled with the scent
of the five perfumed young Sidonians.

There were readings from Meleager, Krinagoras, Rhianos.
But when the actor recited
“Here lies Aeschylus, the Athenian, son of Euphorion”
(stressing maybe more that he should have
“his renowned valor” and “sacred Marathonian grove”),
a vivacious young man, mad about literature,
suddenly jumped up and said:

“I don’t like that quatrain at all.
Sentiments of that kind seem somehow weak.
Give, I say, all your strength to your work,
make it your total concern. And don’t forget your work
even in times of stress or when you begin to decline.
This is what I expect, what I demand of you—
and not that you completely dismiss from your mind
the magnificent art of your tragedies—
your *Agamemnon*, your marvelous *Prometheus*,
your representations of Orestes and Cassandra,

your *Seven Against Thebes*—merely to set down for your
 memorial
 that as an ordinary soldier, one of the herd,
 you too fought against Datis and Artaphernis.”
Young Men of Sidon (A.D. 400)¹

The poem (hereinafter referred to as “Young Men”) was published in 1920, appeared as an object of analysis and knowledge in the late 1920s, and was first appropriated by the prevailing critical discourse of the time, that of patriotic moralism. The principles governing the constitution of knowledge and the appropriation of literary values in the framework of this discourse were already quite clearly articulated during the debate between Yannis Apostolakis (1923) and Kostas Varnalis (1925) about the significance of Dionysios Solomos’s poetry—a debate essentially centered on the moral and political responsibilities of the artist. The question was not abstract and general but practical and urgent: Which were the possible roles and tasks for the poet after the Asia Minor Disaster? For more than a century, from Rhigas Pheraios to Kostis Palamas, the Greek poet had advocated and praised territorial expansionism, eagerly trumpeting the coming of a third empire and the resurrection of the eternal Hellenic spirit. The national humiliation in 1922 shattered the dream and left him desolate in search of a new vision.

Both Apostolakis and Varnalis tried to provide a meaningful solution by going back to Solomos, who first conceived of the poetic vocation as a mission. Their suggestions, advocating Victorian idealism—the poet as hero—and romantic Marxism—the poet as revolutionary—respectively, met on a crucial point of convergence, the dogma of patriotic moralism. In this context “Young Men” first appeared in the domain of literary criticism and was subsequently judged according to the validity of its moral message.

¹ C. P. Cavafy, “Young Men of Sidon (A.D. 400),” in *C. P. Cavafy: Collected Poems*, trans. E. Keeley and P. Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 100.

Two different positions were expressed: the first, supported by Y. Vrisimitzakis and G. Xenopoulos, saw the poem as a negative depiction of cultural decay; the other, defended by I. A. Sareyannis and M. Spieros, understood it as a positive advocacy for the powers of great art. According to the negative interpretation, the poem portrays the "youth of that age" (Vrisimitzakis 1975, 57), whose corrupted moral standards lead to arrogant irreverence. Xenopoulos went even further and polarized the discussion: his was the only correct explanation, and those who might disagree were wrong; if Cavafy disagreed with it, then the treatment itself of his subject was wrong. Obviously, what remained untouched by doubt was the moral standard used to measure the poem's value.

According to the positive interpretation, on the other hand, the poem is a bold defense of art and its contributions to society. Sareyannis thought the poem contained the poet's admonition to his nation and dealt with a "national problem," which Spieros described as the close connection and eventual identification of art with life: for the first, the "artist is a hero"; for a second, a "soldier on the battlefield." They both took up the youth's challenge to Aeschylus and tried to clarify and emphasize its moral implications: the artist has his own fights to fight as defender of national values, and this mission was underplayed in the tragedian's epitaph.

Even though the two interpretations differ in their appreciation of the poem's provocative message, they belong essentially to the same critical discourse, that of patriotic moralism, since they examine the content of the text as a moral message and judge its acceptability on explicitly ideological grounds. The unstated principles behind the two different positions that take sides either with the old man of Athens or with the young man of Sidon are the same: they stem from nationalism and moralism and attempt to preserve their complementary values. To label the negative interpretation conservative and the positive one progressive would be entirely misleading: the second one does not defend the independence of art; it only tries to secure a place for the displaced

artist in the realm of public service and to accommodate art as an ideological commodity valuable to the nation. The two interpretations represent different reading practices, but they share the same ultimate concern about the moral responsibilities of the artist toward society and agree that the obsequious response should be the highest criterion for the evaluation of his work. Thus, art becomes subservient to morality.

While this critical discourse was trying to define a reputable social space for art by proving its usefulness at any cost, it simultaneously tried to control its circulation. And while certain overtones detected in Cavafian criticism indicated a wishful attempt to praise Cavafy's poetry using standards similar to those that promoted Palamas to the status of national poet, the literary school of decadence and cosmopolitanism that emerged at the same time succeeded in turning attention to the private drama of the "poète maudit" and gradually established (and was itself produced by) its own critical discourse, that of biographical intentionalism, to honor that drama appropriately.

As its name suggests, this discourse shifted the critical focus from the message of the poem to the intentions—or should we say "passage"?—of the poet, from the public functions of the artwork to the private world of the artist. According to its tenets, what bestows significance on the work and makes it important is not its uses in society but its meaningful construction by its creator. The previous discourse made value a public moral issue, the new one a private personal matter beyond the reach of social strictures. At this point literary criticism dispensed with the principle of the morally good and socially useful as an evaluative criterion.

We can distinguish two main approaches inside the critical discourse of biographical intentionalism: the psychological, advocated by T. Malanos, T. K. Papatsonis, Dimaras, and L. Piniatoglou, among others, which produced the so-called erotic Cavafy; and the ideological, advocated by Tsirkas, that produced the political Cavafy. This second major discourse made its triumphant official appearance and overwhelming impression imme-

diately after the poet's death in 1933, with the publication of Timos Malanos's first book. Cavafy's intentions became the exclusive center of attention, examined mainly from the viewpoint of his experiences and, above all, his sexuality. The interpretations offered by the previous discourse were undone with excruciating patience and in great detail, while alternative ones were suggested to make the texts fit into the new overall scheme.

The case of "Young Men" was no exception. Critics rejected both the original question about how good the message of the poem is and the ensuing problem about the usefulness of art in modern society; they posed another query about what the poet wanted to say, followed by an inquiry into the origins of his real intentions. The answer was simple, of course: the nameless youth from Sidon is just another poetic persona; "the words he said are Cavafy's words" (Malanos 1957, 346). As for the nature of his motivation, biographical evidence pointed to the "excessive, almost pathological weakness of Cavafy for his work" (347).

Thus, the message went from public, and therefore subject to social criticism, to personal, coming from artistic genius: one could not evaluate it without considering the artist's life and intentions. Naturally, the psychological reading practice of biographical intentionalism gave rise to a need for more information about the poet to explore his motives further. Publications like those by Y. Lehonitis and M. Peridis amply served that need and obviously belong to the same discourse. They supported it by supplying additional evidence and more interpretations along the same lines. The quality of that evidence is exemplified in the following typical passage: "I have to say that in a related conversation with the poet I formed the impression that he shared the opinion of Mr. Sareyannis. Perhaps because that interpretation seemed to him broader and gave to his poem nationalistic, patriotic meaning and value. We should not forget that Cavafy was a fanatic nationalist. He did not consider any struggle futile for the service of Hellenism" (Lehonitis 1977, 37).

This passage is also an apt reminder of the complexity of force relations that develop between discourses. Although our survey

presents the critical discourses that have generated the knowledge of Cavafy in a seemingly linear fashion, this description does not correspond exactly to the ways in which their competition for authority was conducted. Lehonitis, for example, while trying to present the real Cavafy, is anxious to stress his patriotic motives. Thus, the values of patriotic moralism are not abolished here but are transferred from the work to its creator. In fact, even after they lost their centrality and became marginal, they remained operational in approaches like Tsirkas's, which had them serve a progressive political cause. Clearly, no discourse ever has absolute power: authority is constantly contested.

The critical discourse of intentionality which invented the person Cavafy and gave us his first biography read "Young Men" as a "passionate and forceful protest for the spirit and Art" (Peridis 1948, 223). For it, the youth impersonates Cavafy—to like the poem is to agree with the poet. Reading follows the adventures of a soul in the realm of private experiences as reflected in personal ideas. Thus, the totalizing effect is complete; it also seems absolute because it is supposedly based on objective evidence. While the discourse of patriotic moralism was more concerned with the functions of art, which necessarily vary according to the historical context, biographical intentionalism became obsessed with the origins of art in the human psyche, which are fixed and ideally recoverable.

At a certain point, an attempt was made to combine the two discourses into a broad synthesis that would seriously consider all biographical evidence but would use it to ascertain the potential impact of the poetic message. This tendency proposed the didactic Cavafy by attributing the possible public functions of his poems to his meticulously executed intentions. The attempt at a friendly reconciliation of intentionalism with moralism was obvious: yes, good art is useful art; no, its usefulness cannot be decided by the public; yes, useful art is what the good artist creates; no, art is not useless—the good artist makes artworks for the public's beneficial use.

The application of this approach to "Young Men" was partic-

ularly interesting. Of course, it is Cavafy who “becomes indignant” and “with the mouth of the youth from Sidon shouts angrily” (Papanoutsos 1971, 131); we know his motives, we know that throughout his life he identified with the youth’s intellectual concerns: “In this poem Cavafy’s credo is stated categorically” (132). Yet his real motives are praiseworthy because the poem does not limit itself to a personal expression of beliefs but is addressed to a specific audience—the artistic community. It is one in a series of “Admonitions to fellow-artists” (129) that instruct craftsmen of the verbal art how to write strong poetry. Thus, the usefulness of the poem is proved and attributed to its creator’s good intentions; although the origins of the message are private, its possible public uses are extensive and important, and therefore of high value.

This effort to establish a reading practice that would combine the means of biographical intentionalism with the ends of patriotic moralism soon failed because of its obvious naiveté. Discourses strive for absolute authority, not peaceful coexistence; they try to annihilate each other, not collaborate. What is more, in our case, at the time Evangelos Papanoutsos was formulating that theory (1947), Seferis was launching his massive attack (1947) that would eventually change the course of Cavafian studies. But before moving to the next phase, we must examine the alternative version of biographical intentionalism proposed by Stratis Tsirkas under the rubric of the political Cavafy.

The common assumption that the psychological and the ideological approaches are antithetical completely misses the point of their epistemological orientation. Despite significant differences on the methodological surface and much noisy slandering, the approaches share the same critical presuppositions since they focus attention on the author’s intentions, avoid aesthetic considerations, refuse any rights to the audience, and return faithfully to the moment of the original creation. Their essential disagreement is about the poet’s subjectivity and the supreme forces governing its character: Are they physical or mental? Do they belong to the sphere of subconscious motives or to that of conscious ide-

ological beliefs? But they never question the imposing presence of the talented artist who wills his poetry.

It is highly significant that in their attitudes to "Young Men," a text with no explicit reference to political ideas, the two practices of the same discourse produced the same result: Tsirkas (1973, 366) could not find any time to deal with that already controversial poem, but he could easily afford to agree with the identification of Cavafy with the youth by only slightly historicizing the older explanation and turning the text into yet another symbolic gesture that justified the poet's determined devotion to art. Here, again, the main methodological trick of the ideological approach is exposed in all its crudity: although this theory was talking about politics, it concealed the transhistorical idealism of its own ideology by concentrating exclusively on the composition of a jigsaw puzzle out of Cavafy's own politics without ever discussing the political ideas expressed in his poetry. It is hardly remarkable that it produced the political Cavafy and not the politics of Cavafy's poetry and poetics. Thus, the role of the author as the creative subject remained sovereign, and the metaphysics of his presence in the work stronger than ever.

This other practice of the second discourse to appropriate Cavafy's work had all the attractive elements of the romantic genre of literary biography, as well as the methodologies of critical positivism: it discovered suffering and nobility of intention behind concrete facts. Additionally, as an alternative to the decadent imagination of the homosexual, the enlightened class consciousness of the intellectual was vividly documented: the glamour of debauchery was replaced by the glory of dissent.

The persistent attachment of the Left to Cavafy thereafter, as evidenced in both criticism and poetry, is a safe measure of the popular success of this alternative: the poet came out clean and good, his work of some probable use for the education of the masses, and progressive causes gained another ally for their pantheon of geniuses. Still, that reevaluation was by no means a real revision; ironically, the two practices of the same discourse competed mostly over Cavafy's symbolist poems and, of course, over

the true meaning of private symbols. The political reevaluation drew most of its initial inspiration from the analysis of "Those who Fought for the Achaian League" (1922) in the seminal essay by George Seferis (1981), but it missed the ultimate aims of its strategy. However, with that lecture to the public the gradual emergence of a new discourse began and, with it, Seferis's relentless battle against Cavafy, which was going to mark the rest of his work with a hysterical "anxiety of influence" and "fear of belatedness."

Symbolist formalism, the discourse which revised the norms of intentionalist Cavafian criticism, was oriented toward the aesthetic appreciation of artistic features residing in the text and their interpretation as historical symbols of mythic proportions. Some attention had already been given to stylistic elements by Tellos Agras, himself a symbolist poet. The new discourse largely adopted his empirical method in dealing extensively with matters of form but drew its inspiration from the attitude of Palamas to Cavafy vociferously expressed in a series of interviews and articles in the late 1920s.

Kostis Palamas's remarks soon became and still remain notorious for their vehemence: "His texts look like *reportage*, as if he is trying to give us *reportage from the centuries*" (Christofidis 1926, 180); "The works of Cavafy, versification, language, expression, form and essence, look to me like notes that cannot or do not deign to become poems" (Palamas 1929, 217); "The poems of Cavafy are like drafts that tend to become poems but do not succeed" (Dimakos, 1929, 225). Palamas was careful enough to accuse him of writing bad poetry but not of being a bad poet so his own reputation as the national poet of Greece remained intact for quite a long time. It was on that pedestal, vacant after his death in 1943, that Seferis had his eyes fixed since he appeared on the public scene of letters. In the 1940s, however, he came to realize that his success was not essentially a matter of succeeding Palamas but rather of displacing Cavafy. To this task he devoted all his energy and cunning and fought persistently on the two fronts of poetry and criticism—on the first by embez-

zling, and on the other by attacking Cavafian techniques or writing. Eventually, he did become the new national Greek poet simply by playing successfully the anti-Cavafian Cavafic.

But he should not be credited with this success. The Greek conservative modernist movement commonly known as the "Generation of 1930s" found in him the rational voice of formalist classicism, the calm acceptance of apolitical nationalism, and the refined posture of aesthetic outlook that the movement itself represented in literature. Seferis was actually invented by modernist symbolism in its efforts to suppress the cosmopolitan skepticism practiced by decadent symbolism between the two wars, to marginalize the radical experiments of unorthodox writers like Papatsonis, Dorros, and Calas, and to revise the canon of tradition. None of these three goals could be reached without debilitating, debunking, and debasing Cavafy's manifestly disturbing, discomforting, and discomposing influence. In this respect, Seferis played a role he did not choose in a power game he did not create and achieved an authority that was not his: the old man who sat at the seashore of Asine—a literary place, a wasteland of interrupted continuity—and offered his vision of Greekness to the state was only saving its nationalistic discourse from the abrogation and negation contained in Cavafy's idea of the ultimate, irredeemable exile—Greeklessness, that is, extraterritorial Hellenism.

The gist of Seferis's argumentative strategies is paradigmatically encapsulated in his treatment of "Young Men." The initial premise or promise is deceptive: "I judge Cavafy as a poet"²

² The very same premise was first stated with equally deceptive innocence at the end of his essay of Cavafy and Eliot (1947). It should be stressed that it opened up the necessary epistemological space which allowed George Savidis to edit Cavafy's work and, simultaneously, make an industry out of it. Savidis's doctoral thesis (1966) is the best product of symbolist formalism; in that, after turning them into fake scholarly problems of aesthetic significance a traditionalist bibliographical method serves to answer biographical questions: "What happens in 1891 to the poet Cavafy?" (1966, 108) Or "Why did Cavafy publish these poems?" (133). In the early 1960s, the combined efforts of Seferis (1962) and Savidis (1963, 1966) succeeded where other similar efforts had failed: Cavafy, by having his work edited and objectively elucidated, finally entered the canon of modern Greek literature—he was normalized.

(1981, 442). Only much later will the credulous reader discover that, for the critic, the poem contains a “personal preaching” (446). In between, he will have been seduced by a typical masterstroke of Seferian ingenuity: the reply of Aeschylus himself that the anxious latecomer feels free, apparently as an equal, to improvise. Thus, Seferis resets the rules of the game: you play the youth, I play the tragedian; and he wins easily by proving that the artistic result is very poor indeed. In a more general remark of devious implications, we are even reminded that when Cavafy is using older poetic texts in his work, he “clearly fails” (443); whereas, it is intimated, Seferis, who was himself already quoting Aeschylus in his *Mythistorima* (1936), succeeded. The conclusion of his reading has resounding Palamic overtones: another potentially good poem that ended a wasted effort.

In the context of the critical discourse of symbolist formalism, the above interpretation created something of a stir. Some later critics wholeheartedly agreed with it and pronounced the poem “unsatisfactory” (Liddell 1974, 177). Others tried to justify it by explaining that “Cavafy views the occasion with a certain ironic detachment,” an occasion “that reflects the divorce between literary society and the realities of history that Cavafy sees to be characteristic of a civilization during the final phase of its decline” (Keeley 1976, 126). And some claimed that “the young men of that ancient city-state are also the youths of contemporary Alexandria” (Pinchin 1977, 67). Since these ideas, as well as the books that host them, operate under Seferis’s heavy shadow, the poem had to wait until its reevaluation by Yannis Dallas to regain a convincingly positive value; and Dallas had to write a whole book, *Cavafy and History*, to counter effectively the Seferian study which focused on what could be called Cavafy and Myth. Seferis examined Cavafy by employing, as a criterion, T. S. Eliot’s technique of using myth as an “objective correlative”; Dallas, on the other hand, inserted into symbolist formalism the perspective of biographical intentionalism and thus grounded his artistic considerations on the supposedly firm basis of objective evidence. In addition, he refined Seferis’s systematic investiga-

tions into form by reviving the stylistic approach of Agras and integrating it into an analysis of "aesthetic structures."

While Papanoutsos's effort had a marked combinatory character, Dallas's aims at inclusive integration. It takes the symbolic incarnation of history in aesthetic structures as the main object of a scrutiny with pronounced scholarly aspirations. By attributing the presence of artistic elements invested with symbolic expressivity to the conscious intentions of the author, he presented the most satisfactory image of Cavafy ever proposed, without sacrificing any metaphysical assumptions of traditional criticism.

The criterion guiding Dallas's reading is explicitly stated in the very chapter of his book that deals with "Young Men": "His [Cavafy's] principle, to weave into the warp of history his personal problems and the problems of his age" (Dallas 1974, 100). His approach discusses all kinds of information that relate the poem to its personal, cultural, historical, or textual origins. The reading remains faithful to the dogmas of symbolist formalism: sources and parallel texts, intrinsic and extrinsic evidence, social context and private motives are all used to discover how aesthetic structures symbolically express the poet's ideas about his life, age, and art. Cavafy's poetics is seen as the artist's symbolics, while form and content, private and public experience, means and ends, life and art, are nicely balanced. The integrative approach produces an aesthetic whole that saves the text from Seferis's rejection. Its main device is turning form into style and the author into an artist. Thus, the standards of the evaluation are revised: form no longer matters as the embodiment of truth, but style as the actualization of beauty does.

With performances of such caliber, the uses of symbolist formalism seem to have come to their logical end since all their resources have been exhausted. Along with this development, there have been signs that another discourse, a new one, might start emerging, using the essay as a vehicle to propose Cavafy as a radical poet of Wildean eccentricity and Gidean sensibility, dealing with the erotics of writing. To preempt the arguments of

that discourse and secure permanent authority, Dallas has published recently the single most comprehensive analysis of a Cavaian text; and that necessarily had to be "Young Men." In returning to it again, he mounted an offensive arraying and dexterously combining all the discursive practices of reading available to a Greek literary scholar today.

His new study leaves almost no aspect of the poem untouched: first, it reviews the tradition of its reception and then subjects the text to three kinds of analysis—"morphological," "philological," and "critical" [*sic*—deemed necessary to unlock its layers of meaning. Never have the crude, uninformed, and unsophisticated methods of modern Greek philology and criticism been employed to more spectacular effects or so much literary metaphor paraded to testify to a text's ontological claims. Its conclusion is worth quoting in full: "This is truly a poetry that, though playing simultaneously on many thematic and psychological and ideological levels, is organically and absolutely concentric. Each one of his poems is a prism. How is it structured and how is it interpreted? It is interpreted each time by the reader's consciousness. And it is structured by the poet . . ." (Dallas 1982, 81).

Dallas's holistic reading, by proposing the idea of the monocentric but multifaceted work and describing it as a prism, managed to secure a viewpoint and self-assuring satisfaction for every perspective, be it biographical, stylistic, moral, historical, political, or sociological. Thus, opposing approaches are reconciled as the parts of the text are made to connect harmoniously; the author is credited with the quality of the work, and the reader is granted a rich choice of possible explanations. The center does hold, while the particular discourse producing it is shown to give access to all the poem's aspects and secrets; at the same time the author acknowledges some help from the older discourses now reduced to an auxiliary status. Finally, an important after-effect of this treatment should be mentioned: modern critical methods of structuralist orientation that have started tentatively to spread through Greek studies are rendered redundant by the systematic empiricism of this approach. Common sense and the values of

good old humanistic education triumph over imported epistemological considerations, potential threats to long-cherished assumptions about the immediacy and transparency of literary writing as well as the authority of the critic. The text is neutralized by being totalized.

I WILL ATTEMPT to summarize the main points of this survey. I have described the three discourses of literary criticism that have so far successfully appropriated Cavafy's poetry, and some of the discursive practices they engendered, by concentrating microscopically on the history of the production of one particular text, "Young Men." As we have seen, each discourse has been a product of power relations (and has, in its turn, participated in the formulation of new ones) within the field of criticism that has centered on Cavafy's work, trying to dominate its explication, determine the conditions for its appropriate reception, and eventually gain absolute control over it. The ultimate aim of the three discourses, which have constituted through their power relations various forms of knowledge of Cavafy, was the same consolidation of exclusive authority, but their tactics of competition and means of appropriation were entirely different.

Patriotic moralism used the notion of the good and socially useful as its principal criterion, and it judged the message of the poem according to moral values. Biographical intentionalism used the notion of the true and the personally authentic as its principal criterion, and it investigated the content according to psychological evidence. Symbolist formalism used the notion of the beautiful and the artistically integrated as its principal criterion, and it evaluated the form according to aesthetic standards.

All three discourses gave strong but exclusive interpretations, essentially different productions of different poems. There is no such thing as *the* poem "Young Men" but only an interminable series of interpretations and reinterpretations, some of which acquire enough validity to form temporary constitutions of its knowledge. The "thing-in-itself," the "text on the page," is an aesthetic construct; only through successful appropriation by a

discourse does the text become a poem, or anything else, and through each different appropriation a different poem.

Every discourse offers an exclusive interpretation of the text as the only correct one. All interpretations of "Young Men" have resulted from power relations, and the successful ones emerged as constitutions of knowledge and consolidations of authority. By placing the text in a particular discursive field and relating it to a concrete, stable point of reference, they effected a closure and mastered its reception. The individual readings of the poem described in this chapter were attempts at an exclusive, repressive, and prohibitive exercise of interpretive authority—not violations of an object but violent productions of a thing as an object-of-knowledge. Each one identified it with a definitive meaning and imposed on it a specific structure and fixed center. There was no room left for doubt or dissent, no space open for further exploration. Principles derived from notions like usefulness, truth, and beauty were employed to appraise the text according to an absolute measure and to discover its permanent characteristics and value.

In this sense, one cannot speak of a better or worse, more or less correct, interpretation of "Young Men," since all of them were exercises of the interpretive will to truth which seeks to establish absolute power as real knowledge. Their different aims and tactics produced different constitutions of the text, but all these constitutions were guarded by the same strategies of exclusion and suppression that protect the authority of discourses. Inasmuch as these interpretations offered solutions, answered questions, explained meanings, recovered origins, guaranteed qualities, gratified expectations, and kept inventing Cavafys, they were all predatory, despotic, totalitarian readings trapped in the endless and relentless struggle of explications for domination.

That is why this chapter has dealt with the politics of Cavafian interpretation as exemplified in the ideological history of the consumption of "Young Men" by criticism; that is why this chapter has undertaken to expose the idealist, humanistic, and ethnocentric principles supporting these critical enterprises; that is also

why this chapter has no position to take or suggestions to propose about “Young Men”—because the poem does not exist but is rather produced by historically specific discursive practices that are intellectual exercises of explicatory power and juridical terror, that is, of “true,” “objective,” and “authentic” knowledge. Mine is only a genealogical interpretation, a political interpretation of interpretations, a skeptical resistance against the domineering interpretations, an interpolation of interpenetrations, an interrogation of interrelations, and an interspersion of interpersonal intersections. That is why it is not mine; that is why I am not “I.”

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CHAPTER 8

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Encountering the Poststructuralist
Challenge, or Beyond Humanism:
The Paradigms of Contemporary Greek
Criticism and the Languages of Theory

Just as any act of periodization periodizes the person
doing the periodizing, so also, categorization politically
categorizes the person categorizing.

MICHAEL RYAN

LITERARY CRITICISM is the cultural institution where the systematic formal knowledge of literature is produced. I have argued that literature, the verbal art, is a national product and a bourgeois commodity whose value is established through the clash of critical discourses for exegetical authority. For this reason, I have been discussing the politics of that institution, examining it as a definable field of force relations and power struggles where hegemony over the game of reading literature is constantly contested. I chose to select my examples from Greek criticism because I find its ethnocentric politics paradigmatic of the constitution and the operations of the institution of criticism in general, as we have known it in the last two centuries. In my last case study, I shall sketch a map of that realm as it may be viewed from a poststructuralist perspective. I wish to draw the reader's attention to two points: first, the current situation in Modern Greek Studies, a field inspired and authorized by the

highest principles and criteria of romantic idealism; second, the challenge presented to the humanities by the more radical trends in what today has come to be called Theory. I believe that the urgency of this challenge is reflected in the present autocentric orientation of Greek Studies in full force. Ultimately, the question is one of political awareness and responsibility, not scholarly progress, academic recognition, or moral growth: How is the nationalist quest for the Greekness of the literary work as well as the metaphysics of identity and the aesthetics of literature to be resisted?

It has been a common assumption that the great number of existing histories of modern Greek literature reflects the growing maturity and sophistication of Greek literary studies. Specialists in the field argue that the variety of approaches used in these surveys, while establishing a sense of tradition and achievement, has also stimulated both significant research and major reappraisals. If one adds to this scholarly labor the anthologies, the dictionaries, the encyclopedias, and the studies on particular periods and schools, the picture of a thriving critical industry clearly emerges. It is then very difficult to try and reconcile these promising signs with the pervasive scarcity of metacritical work, beginning with the embarrassing absence of a history of modern Greek criticism itself. How can a field develop without introspection? How can a discipline refine its methods or advance its causes without undergoing vigilant self-examination? The lack of theoretical reflexivity on the part of contemporary Greek literary studies often gives the alarming impression that Greek criticism, obsessed as it remains with issues of aesthetic and ethnic identity, does not even know its history.

In this context of apparent epistemological poverty, the subject of the Second [annual] Poetry Symposium organized by the University of Patras in 1982, Greek Criticism, came as a pleasant surprise, and its program seemed to encourage many long-overdue reconsiderations. Unfortunately, judging from the published proceedings, the symposium proved to be a major disappointment; it only confirmed the most disturbing fears about the

conservative involvement of criticism with Greek literature. Significantly, the panel with the most promising title, "Trends and Schools of Greek Criticism in Our Century," was the least interesting, providing little more than an incomplete, uninformed, and timid list of names, dates, and clichés and deserves to be studied as a typical symptom of the intellectual malaise plaguing the field at its present state of development.

For the limited purposes of my investigation, I intend to concentrate on the final paper presented in that panel, "Problems of Modern Greek Criticism during the Last Twenty Years," by Yorgis Aristinos. Because of its topic, it was the paper most closely associated with the central concerns of the whole symposium; in fact, it attempted to stand up to that challenge by charting the territory of contemporary criticism—an aim that it happens to share with this study, although one may predict that this is going to be their single common element. I shall begin my examination by discussing this general presentation and its particular methodological model.

Aristinos divided his paper into two parts. In the first, he describes the recent and still prevailing conservative critical tradition and laments its "improvisatory and asthmatic [*sic*] character" (1983, 315). He points to two main characteristics of this tradition, impressionistic writing as a process of false "*identification*" (315) and the lack of scientific and philosophical foundations, and he arrives at the vague but interesting conclusion that "the conditions did not allow for the cultivation of autonomous and independent thought in Greece" (314). In the second part, the paper takes an optimistic turn as it provides a synoptic survey of more modern trends that have only recently emerged with the potential to change the overall orientation of criticism. The names attributed here to these trends are: interpretive-explanatory, interpretive-genetic, sociological, psychoanalytical, and semasiological criticism.

Although this taxonomy is offered as tentative, it provides some very useful indications about the epistemic problematics of Greek criticism and its ability to advance a relevant theory. For

example, since we are not told anything about the criteria informing the taxonomy, one wonders if its writer has managed at all to avoid the endemic impressionism he was criticizing earlier. One also fails to see what is so modern, if not recent, about the trends defined and on which grounds they really break from the established tradition of amateurism. Furthermore, the recent emergence of these trends is not accounted for in any manner. Finally, I am far from convinced that a division according to schools of thought and theory, which obeys the methodological principles of the humanistic history of ideas, is a particularly felicitous way to describe and analyze the critical tendencies and predilections of a specific historical and cultural moment.

It is to his credit that Aristinos made a first attempt to map the contemporary scene of Greek literary studies, but his empirical approach to the question could only yield a general, blurry, non-specific picture which adopts and depicts uncritically the claims on truth and method made by the majority of practitioners. That is why other attempts must be made to reach a truly metacritical understanding of the field. I consider this a task of utmost urgency, if we really want to comprehend the present situation and open new paths for future research. With this goal in mind, I shall counterpropose an alternative taxonomy of critical discourses in Greek literary studies, based on a research model immensely influential in other areas and coming originally from the history of science—T. S. Kuhn's theory of paradigms.

KUHN based his catastrophic view of scientific revolutions—radical breaks with tradition in the development of the natural sciences as one theory is succeeded by another, incommensurable one—on the notion of the “paradigm.” In his pioneering book, he defined this notion with three descriptions stemming from different perspectives: first, sociological—“universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (Kuhn 1970, viii); second, analytic—“accepted examples of actual scientific practice—examples which include law, theory, application, and

instrumentation together—provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research” (10); and third, pragmatic—“a set of recurrent and quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications. These are the community’s paradigms, revealed in its textbooks, lectures, and laboratory exercises” (43). Although these definitions share common elements and seem to describe the same idea, the diverse uses of the term throughout the book gave rise to some misunderstandings and made Kuhn return to the subject in a postscript appended to the second edition.

In trying to refine his conception, Kuhn provided a clarifying distinction between two different meanings of the term, the one broader than the other. According to the first, a paradigm is “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (175); the objects of such a constellation of group commitment are constituents of what is usually understood as “theory” (and what Kuhn calls instead “disciplinary matrix”), and as such “they form a whole and function together” (182). According to the second meaning, paradigms are only “one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions” (175) employed as shared examples. Eventually, to avoid further confusion, Kuhn saved the term “paradigm” for the first meaning of the word only, while giving the term “exemplar” (187) to the one referring to models of problem solutions.

After these clarifications, it is worth emphasizing that Kuhn’s investigation always retains a distinctly historicist character in that it is directed to concrete historical situations and cultural contexts. Kuhn is *not* interested in individual achievements or particular theories but in assumptions and methods that affect and determine the operations of communities of scientists: the focus of his persistent attention remains the scientific community, as he investigates the “community structure of science” (176). His notion of the paradigm as “what the members of a *scientific community share*” (176) presupposes the basic premise

that “normal science and revolutions are, however, community-based activities” (179)—one of truly revisionary implications because it disregards the independent subject and his inventions in the realm of research and scholarship and foregrounds the idea of a subject inexorably situated in culture. Yet, Kuhn proceeds to abolish not only the autonomy of the scientist but also the independence of his study object, when he asserts boldly: “A paradigm governs, in the first instance, not a subject matter but rather a group of practitioners. Any study of paradigm-directed or of paradigm-shattering research must begin by locating the responsible group or groups” (180). Thus, his negative epistemology dispenses with both the Cartesian observer and the Kantian world which he—always male—was deciphering in order to concentrate on the irreducibly historical and cultural constitution of knowledge. The postscript concludes on a resounding Wittgensteinian note: “Scientific knowledge, like language, is intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all. To understand it we shall need to know the special characteristics of the groups that create and use it” (210).

Throughout his famous book, as well as in later studies which supported and amplified its arguments, Kuhn dealt exclusively with the natural, or what he calls the “exact,” sciences. Although the impact of his work on the philosophy of science was profound, very few attempts have been made to explore the possible applications of his theory for alternative approaches to the history of other disciplines, and these have not gained the author’s full approval. The reason behind this reluctance may be sought in both Kuhn’s surprisingly cautious, if not timid, explorations of the consequences of his own theory and in the often misleading way in which other scholars’ attempts were conducted. The most characteristic example of this situation can be found in Kuhn’s “Comment” on a discussion of the parallelism between science and art. Following the panelists’ lead, not only did he deal obediently with artistic practices, thus unjustifiably equating craft and discipline while ignoring criticism altogether, but he also admitted that the topics he examined in his own book “have long

been basic for the art historian" (Kuhn 1969, 403); thus he drastically narrowed their potential extrascientific scope to matters of art creation.

I would like to argue that Kuhn's notion of the paradigm can be indeed particularly useful in a historical study of epistemology because it can draw attention to the production and the uses of knowledge. Just as his history of science discusses how scientists understand and how the right to be a scientist is acquired, or denied, for that matter, likewise one may examine the constitution and the operations of other interpretive communities—those of legislators, theologians, philosophers, historians, philologists, and critics. An investigation into their assumptions, notions, methods, and procedures could shed new light on their beliefs and researches; on a larger scale, one can also conceive of inquiries into how scientific, religious, historical, philosophical, or literary knowledge and conviction (or even experience) are produced and what kind of world they constitute for their practitioners and audiences.

But before I outline my experimental application of such an approach to modern Greek criticism, I feel I should take a measure of precaution. The picture of the territory offered by Aristinos in the Patras symposium on criticism was criticized earlier for its naive and pedantic adherence to the traditional model of categorization according to established and easily recognizable "schools of thought." It was also this simplistic approach which further let the writer lapse into ascribing the recent, allegedly promising, developments in the field "not to schools or trends, since our social and intellectual constitution did not allow for their birth, but to certain individuals" (1983, 318). Kuhn, of course, has been consistently aware of this pitfall. When he observes, for example, that the "proponents of different theories are like the members of different language-culture communities" (205), his interesting adaptation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is momentarily blurred by the use of the word "theories," which may foster the impression that this argument is simply about

well-defined systems of ideas. In response to this danger, Kuhn has offered elsewhere the following explanation:

I have never intended to limit the notions of paradigm and revolution to major "theories." . . . More important, paradigms are not to be entirely equated with theories. Most fundamentally, they are accepted concrete examples of scientific achievement, actual problem solutions which scientists study with care and upon which they model their own work. (Kuhn 1969, 412)

As we saw, Kuhn later gave the name "exemplar" to this second meaning of the term "paradigm." I shall return, therefore, to the first one, and in the rest of this chapter I shall understand paradigm as denoting the system of beliefs and ideas that a particular interpretive community shares and on which it bases its research. I shall now try to sketch a different map of the field of contemporary Greek criticism by describing what I perceive as the dominant paradigms and the respective communities of specialists whose knowledge they both express and constitute. Three points should remain clear throughout this description: first, communities are not identical with either critical schools or any disciplines; second, paradigms are not identical with trends of thought or literary theories; and third, both communities and paradigms are historical and social/intersubjective concepts, and therefore they group together assumptions and methods (the second) and practices (the first), not institutions or individuals, who may in fact produce different types of work which belong to different categories.

The first paradigm I shall call *lyrical impressionism*. Its basic assumptions stem from romantic aesthetics in what is perhaps its most popular, or populist, version. The artwork is a beautiful object of an autonomous quality, made to last forever and be admired by all ages. This creation of a talented and unique genius reveals, by incarnating the inspired visions of his imagination, something valuable about the essence of the world and the meaning of life. But the heights and the abyss of a poet's

mind are not readily accessible to everybody: for their terrible truth to be communicated to the majority of people, the intervention of another mind, properly attuned to the music of higher spheres, is necessary. Only another artist, it is believed, or at least an artistically inclined person, can truly comprehend the messages encapsulated in an artwork and help the audience listen to them receptively.

The community of the interpreters who share these aesthetic assumptions consists primarily of authors who feel naturally qualified to translate for the broad public the masterpieces of literature, the artistic ciphers of the centuries. Their attitude is programmatically antiscientific because they see great art as a sacred mystery which remains beyond the reach of disciplined intellect or method. Usually publishing in literary magazines, they employ the essay to communicate their ideas, since it is the least *restraining genre of expository writing*. Their style, quasipoetic and often unashamedly emotional or even confessional in tone, dramatizes the encounter of an artistic sensibility with an artwork in the expression of an artist's talent. Although these encounters take widely different forms, we may deduce a general methodological path of three stages in which most of these personal library adventures occur: the adventure leads from the reading of the work and the first emotional response to it, through a meditation on the life and the usually anguished intentions of its author, to some generalizing speculations about the meaning of life and the instructive guidance provided by the work in our agonizing search for such meaning.

Lyrical impressionism registers impressions and personal spontaneous relations in a poetic vein and a markedly subjective mood of introspection. Its discussions focus on matters of content, of thematic and psychological meaning revealed when the beautiful covers of form are removed. Correspondingly, the criteria for evaluation are essentially moral, or rather moralistic, because the ultimate judgment of the work measures the validity of its content for one's life and conduct according to some basic humanistic principles. Thus, what the attentive sensibility of the

gifted reader produces out of its intuitive understanding of literature is a system of rules for moral behavior—a morality which may be conservative or aestheticist but still always thinks and judges in terms of good and bad. Among the best-known older practitioners of this paradigm we can include Palamas, Xenopoulos, Papatsonis, Karandonis, Hatzinis, and Terzakis, and among those representing it today Tsiropoulos, Malevitsis, Frangopoulos, Triandafyllopoulos, and Gouliamos.

The second paradigm I shall call *political realism*. Its assumptions stem from the aesthetics of traditional Marxism or liberalism. Here the talents and the privileged status of the author are not the center of direct critical attention: his work is treated not only as a gift to the world but also primarily as the artistic actualization of particular historical forces and social trends. It is seen, therefore, less as a source of light—the inner light of the poetic mind as conceived by lyrical impressionism—and more as a mirror reflecting phenomena and events from reality. Genius is no longer either self-sufficient or independent: it is not self-sufficient because it does not work with only its inspiration and other intrinsic resources but needs the material provided by the outer world; and it is not independent because it needs a certain transfiguration of external conditions and circumstances for the creation of the artwork. Thus, while lyrical impressionism concentrates on the interplay between mind and ideas or images, political realism concentrates on the interplay between consciousness and the world—society, history, and culture.

The community of the interpreters who share these aesthetic assumptions consists mainly of well-read critics and reviewers explicitly committed to progressive political causes. They consider it their duty and mission to enlighten their audience, and of course reach the largest one possible, about the correspondences between the superstructure of art and the base structure that simultaneously conditions and is reflected in it. For this reason, these critics publish in newspapers, weeklies, and literary magazines, employing the article, the most accessible and digestible genre of expository writing, and cultivate a self-consciously

easy and attractive style to deal in a rather self-effacing manner with artworks in the context of social phenomena. They try to project conviction, not personality, and they appeal to rational, rather than emotional, faculties.

Because of its ideological inclinations, this attitude is in principle quite proscientific, and some of its followers have even advocated the application of scholarly methods to literary criticism itself; but the rules of such methods have yet to be formulated. In the meantime, the methodological path dictated by this paradigm starts with the work itself and the world it portrays; it then moves, through an examination of the historical conditions that contributed to its creation, to a broader social criticism and an explicit or implicit call for political vigilance and reform.

Political realism is by design a commentary on older or modern social reality, which tries to serve the causes of those oppressed by economic and other forms of exploitation. Ultimately, it seeks to advance political awareness, if not activism, through the "correct" appreciation of literature, itself considered one of the most important instruments of liberation. Discussions focus not on the content of the work but on its message, not on what it says but on what it is talking about, and not on its moral meaning but on its political significance (positive or negative). Obviously, in both cases literature draws its supreme justification from outside realms and principles extrinsic to it, moral and political respectively: the first pertain more to the individual's improvement, the latter to the amelioration of social conditions. Although this is a heuristic distinction, only for reasons of temporary convenience does it assume here that the line separating the two is not a thin, if not artificial, one. For both paradigms, literature serves educational purposes, but in the case of political realism these purposes must have an immediate validity, historically sound and politically effective. Among the older practitioners who have subscribed to them were Roidis, Varnalis, Avgeris, and Varikas, while those representing them today include Argyriou, Dallas, Maronitis, Ziras, and Aranitsis.

The last paradigm, which I shall call *symbolist formalism*, is

informed by assumptions that acquired currency with the French symbolism and the English aestheticism of the late nineteenth century. Here the artwork is separated from its creator and social environment and viewed as an autonomous, self-regulating structure characterized by a number of definable inherent features. The aesthetic functions of these features determine the artistically unique quality of each work; they are perceived and known under the comprehensive name of form. Form is not what the work is about—the author's intentions or the surrounding social reality—but how the work appears and exists. The historical conditions and the authorial involvement in the act of creation appear irrelevant: only the work itself, the beautiful and perfect text, matters. Accordingly, its analysis should dispense with all extrinsic information, such as biographical, psychological, historical, sociological, and concentrate on the immanent evidence, the linguistic construction of the work. Even though the talented author is duly credited with its creation and the importance of the circumstances underwriting it is recognized, it is the internal, self-sufficient economy of the text that is laboriously explicated in order to let its beauty shine in purity.

The community of interpreters who share these assumptions consists primarily of academics, who feel that they have been properly trained, and therefore qualify by specialization, to analyze the work and help the general public better appreciate the artistry of beauty. Their attitude is professionally scholarly and their role totally subservient, they put themselves humbly to the service of the text, and, in an effort to renew the claims of traditional philology and reaffirm the authority of the literary canon, they describe in painstaking detail the intricacies of aesthetic structures. They usually publish in *literary magazines* and *academic journals*, conforming to the standard requirements of the scholarly paper to express their ideas since its rigorous form facilitates an impersonal style that seems to promote only the object of research. The methodological path they follow moves from a careful and exhaustive examination of the text to an interpretation and evaluation of its formal features and possibly to a con-

clusion that places it in the context of the writer's oeuvre, the literature of the period, the evolution of a genre, and so on.

Symbolist formalism as a paradigm provides the model for a criticism at its most systematic—philology with the aspirations of an exact science. It is also criticism at its most modest: without seeking to improve the moral or political consciousness of the public, it simply helps it appreciate and enjoy art as such more fully. That is why it concentrates on form, on what appears to be the immediate, tangible, almost quantifiable aspect of art, seeking literature's justification in beauty (that is, perfect form) and not in external factors. In this way, philology seems to return to its own disciplinary origins—the illumination and propagation of what is best in Western civilization.

Symbolist formalism is the self-sustained criticism of a self-sustained art. As a phenomenological position, it draws its methodological principles and vocabulary from the early Russian formalism of the early 1920s, the English New Criticism of I. A. Richards, or the orthodox French structuralism of the early 1960s. But it finds itself in a peculiar position: because there has been no modernism proper in Greek letters—with certain works by Dorros, Papatsonis, Cavafy, Embirikos, Sarandaris, Pentzikis, Xefloudas, Axioti, Beratis, and a few others proving, as exceptions, the general rule—but rather a late Symbolism in free verse or introspective prose and in surrealist guise and because the Greek literary language has undergone no crisis of means or confidence, symbolist formalism, finding it impossible to develop in a way parallel to that which its foreign models followed in their later years, instead continues observing standards originally advanced by the movements of symbolism and aestheticism. This has additionally prevented it from even reaching the levels of purism achieved by other formalisms and usually allows for the mastermind of the author to reappear close to the end of the study and reclaim its outcome. It is an erratic process that we observe in the work of older practitioners, like Apostolakis, Agras, Seferis, Nikolareizis, Dimaras, and L. Politis, and which persists in that of

contemporary ones, including Kapsomenos, Kehayoglou, Kokolis, Vayenas, Yatromanolakis, and Savidis.

These are then the three prevailing paradigms in the scene of Greek literary studies in Greece today. I have deliberately limited myself to the Greek scene in order to keep a critical distance from the international one, in which my own work is situated; if one were to include in the general picture the communities of practitioners working abroad, certain minor adjustments would have to be made in the descriptions of the operating paradigms. The proposed scheme distinguishes three different critical paradigms which incorporate various modes of reading and established practices of interpretation and evaluation affecting not only the production of current literature but also its future course. In the preceding pages, I have tried to define their distinctive characteristics and delineate the contours of their function. What this analysis has produced, though, is not only a list of differentiating features but also a group of remarkable similarities between the paradigms—a set of assumptions tacitly shared by all three to a degree that allows for the emergence of a surprising unity and unanimity among the specialists in the field. These basic assumptions follow.

1. The transparency of language. Words may have one or multiple meanings, but meanings correspond to real things or phenomena: through language, a world is perceived, and its reality apprehended. Language is a medium of expression and communication, an unproblematic carrier of signification, and literature is its maximum, most effective and powerful use.

2. The full presence of the text. The specialist in literature deals with a written page of high artistic quality. Its presence in his conscience is clear, immediate, and unmediated: the text is always there—available, readable, repeatable in its unique integrity; the reader with the appropriate talent and education who tries hard can have direct access to its meaning.

3. The genius of the author. The writer is the ultimate source of literature: he is the gifted man who becomes a master of the

artistic means and creates verbal art. The work is his inimitable creation, and he takes full credit for the success of his efforts.

4. The authority of the critic. While the writer writes, the critic authorizes; he is the well-trained specialist who can elucidate the difficulties of the text, reveal its secrets to everybody, and assess its qualities. His role is to mediate between the creator and his audience, facilitating a responsive response to art.

5. The irrelevance of gender. Like literature, criticism is a male occupation; in its domain, men write about the works of men: it is a man's world. Not that there are no proficient women practitioners in the field, but to the extent that they became such the difference of their sex is obliterated. In fact, gender distinctions do not seem to matter at all in literary studies since critics, *although men, assume that they write like men, that is, people.*

6. The supremacy of the canon. Critics interpret and evaluate texts of artistic merit. New works are read against the established canon, the repository of literary masterpieces with which we are all familiar through anthologies or textbooks. Works of the highest quality will eventually be incorporated in the canon and become part of a great cultural tradition.

These extensive similarities among the three paradigms, these very fundamental assumptions shared by all, are not enumerated here to blur the distinctions recorded earlier. The distinctions are important and should be kept in mind because they enable us to notice the differences in the constitution, the interests, the methods, and the practices of these paradigms. The similarities, on the other hand, point to a deeper epistemological connection that brings them together into the same epistemic formation. They indicate specifically that all three work and evolve as offspring of a tradition that still appears powerful and in the particular field of Modern Greek Studies is apparently the dominant one: romantic humanism. I am referring, of course, to the tradition that emerged after the breakdown of neoclassicism, the Age of Reason, and by giving birth to idealism, romanticism, Hellenism, and philology created the Age of Man.

I am afraid that, before we have a comprehensive genealogy of

Greek criticism, or at least some in-depth studies of its major phenomena, it will not be possible to venture a systematic account of the development of the humanistic tradition in this realm. The matter is even more complicated by the very unfortunate fact that, after the victory of the Demoticist movement over purism in the early twentieth century—that is, after the ancients lost the battle for domination over the past to the moderns—the discourses of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criticism were massively suppressed along with their almost extinct linguistic idiom. But we may at least look at the contemporary scene, observe the cluster of forces operating there, and pose some hard questions: Why has the number of critics been decreasing in the last several years? Why is there as yet no Greek scholarly journal devoted exclusively to literary studies? Why is there no association of specialists? Why are scholars not publishing in foreign journals, and why does their research receive so little attention abroad? Why is there no theory included in most academic curriculums? Why are there so few studies reflecting on the field itself? Why is there no interest whatsoever in aesthetics? Why have the ancient and Byzantine theories of art been totally forgotten? Why, finally, is there this extreme alienation from theoretical and methodological developments in the West throughout our century, and especially in the last twenty years, after the advent of poststructuralism?

These questions obviously require an extensive and comprehensive treatment exceeding the scope of my investigation. This chapter has not dealt with specific institutional practices as much as with ideological assumptions. On this level of assumptions and presuppositions it might have some constructive suggestions to offer. These will be therefore related to the theoretical and scholarly orientation of the field and will indicate potential ways in which it can reorganize, open, expand, and refine its methodologies. Having based my descriptions so far on Kuhn's theory of paradigms, I will derive my suggestions from one of the most astute readers of Kuhn's treatise, Paul Feyerabend, and more specifically from the defense of epistemological anarchism he pre-

sented in his seminal *Against Method* and further elaborated in his collection *Science in a Free Society*. I shall first summarize Feyerabend's theory of counterinduction and then focus on those major arguments I see as pertaining to the present situation of Modern Greek Studies.

THE STARTING POINT of Feyerabend's argument is a basic premise unlikely to cause much disagreement: "*I regard every action and every piece of research both as a potential instance of the application of rules and as a test case*"; this means that "we may permit a rule to guide our research," as we usually do in our routine work, at the unavoidable expense of some unexplored possibilities; "but we may also permit our research and our activities to suspend the rule" (Feyerabend 1978, 165) and decide to test an alternative approach, despite its lack of credibility, and check the validity of the established rule. Feyerabend argues that the second procedure is the one truly beneficial for the advancement of science because it means "tracing the consequences of 'counterrules' which oppose some familiar rules of the scientific enterprise" (Feyerabend 1975, 29). Counterinduction, the use of a radically different approach to see what happens to the established one, and perhaps to the whole practice, proposes an incompatible alternative to the accepted rule or theory and thus tests its validity and limits. "Both the relevance and the refuting character of decisive facts can be established only with the help of other theories which . . . are not in agreement with the view to be tested" (1975, 41). This, from an orthodox, conventional perspective, is necessarily an act of transgression: "*the validity, usefulness, adequacy of popular standards can be tested only by research that violates them*" (1978, 35).

Feyerabend reminds us that the disciplinary constraints of our training and scholarly practices usually impose a one-dimensional perspective on our understanding; thus, discussions and exchanges commonly concentrate on the nature of the evidence at hand and find it very difficult to acquire or even tolerate a

reflexive attitude toward first premises and principles. To advance our research, he insists, we have to question what we do.

Therefore, the first step in our criticism of customary concepts and customary reactions is to step outside the circle and either to invent a new conceptual system, for example, a new theory, that clashes with the most carefully established observational results and confounds the most plausible theoretical principles, or to import such a system from outside science, from religion, from mythology, from the ideas of incompetents, or the ramblings of madmen. This step is, again, counterinductive. Counterinduction is thus both a *fact*—science would not exist without it—and a legitimate and much needed *move* in the game of science. (1975, 68)

The outcome of such an epistemological disposition and methodological openness is of course the demise of such traditional beliefs as the ideas of objectivity, progress, and independence in science: the barriers between the disciplines, between the specialist and the layman, the object and its observer, or the fact and the fable, break down to clear a field of unlimited and infinite possibilities, as science becomes accountable to society, not to truth:

Knowledge so conceived is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to the truth. It is rather an ever increasing *ocean of mutually incompatible (and perhaps even incommensurable) alternatives*, each single theory, each fairy tale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition, to the development of our consciousness. Nothing is ever settled, no view can ever be omitted from a comprehensive account. (Feyerabend 1975, 30)

These comments on the numerous and endless paths of possible research bring us, with their scandalous egalitarianism, to

Feyerabend's most controversial nondoctrine: in his own words, "there is only *one* principle that can be defended under *all* circumstances and in *all* stages of human development. It is the principle: *anything goes*" (1975, 28). Before reacting with revulsion to its inflammatory rhetoric, though, we must remember that this is an epistemological principle, not a moral or an immoral dogma. A milder phrasing might render its thrust less threatening: "All methodologies have their limitations and the only 'rule' that survives is 'anything goes' " (1975, 296). Clearly there is one absolute rule, *that* there are no absolute rules. Although any involvement in scholarship and science explicitly presupposes and demands that we follow and abide by systems of rules, it is worth remembering that their value is heuristic and far from permanent or inviolable. "No system of rules and standards is ever safe and the scientist who proceeds into the unknown may violate any system, however 'rational.' This is the polemical meaning of the phrase 'anything goes' " (1978, 165).

Feyerabend's position has been repeatedly dismissed as extreme skepticism or nihilism by people unwilling to read it in the context of his critique of scientific realism. What is principally foregrounded in his view of the scientific enterprise is the decisively historical character of the evidence.

Methodological rules speak of "theories," "observations" and "experimental results" as if these were clear-cut well-defined objects whose properties are easy to evaluate and which are understood in the same way by all scientists. However, the material which a scientist *actually* has at his disposal, his laws, his experimental results, his mathematical techniques, his epistemological prejudices, his attitude towards the absurd consequences of the theories which he accepts, is indeterminate in many ways, ambiguous, *and never fully separated from the historical background*. This material is always contaminated by principles which he does not know and which, if known, would be extremely hard to test. (1975, 66)

Many scientists reluctantly agree that the paradigm under which their community works and their discipline operates necessarily limits the caliber of their research. What most members of a community find detrimental to admit, though, is that the evidence they are dealing with—materials, facts, phenomena, events—is determined too by their main hypotheses about man and his world and that, therefore, knowledge is ineluctably marked by its historical character.

While in the convenient isolation of the laboratory, the library, the classroom, and the conference hall we tend to aspire toward progress and a fully-accomplished encounter with the essence of things, thus transcending the surrounding and all-encompassing and situating horizon of cultural reality, Feyerabend reminds us that “there are changes which are not results of a casual interaction between object and observer but of a change of the very conditions that permit us to speak of objects, situations, events” (1978, 70). And the argument about the historical nature of the evidence leads, in turn, to a more pragmatic understanding of the function of the rules as the regular operation of conventional norms of scholarly activity and scientific behavior in a particular institutional and cultural context. Feyerabend’s relativism is inspired by an elegant insight derived from the history of science.

Standards are intellectual measuring instruments; they give us readings not of temperature, or of weight, but of the properties of complex sections of the historical process. . . . We cannot specify standards before we know the subject matter the standards are supposed to judge. Standards are not eternal arbiters of research, morality, beauty preserved and presented by an assembly of high priests that is protected from the irrationality of the common ramble in science, the arts, in society; they are instruments provided for certain purposes by those who are familiar with the circumstances and who have examined them in detail. (1978, 37, 38)

It seems that we have now touched on another thorny issue, that of relativism, and we need some additional explanation to

account for the standpoint of epistemological anarchism on the courses available to or advisable for scientific research. Feyerabend has already warned about the possible reactions of the caretakers of every orthodoxy: "Relativism is often attacked not because one has found a fault, but because one is afraid of it" (1978, 79). More specifically, "For the great majority—and that includes Christians, rationalists, liberals and a good many Marxists—there exists only one truth and it must prevail. Tolerance does not mean acceptance of falsehood side by side with truth, it means human treatment of those unfortunately caught in falsehood" (1978, 80). Incidentally, one may recall here Michel Foucault's investigations into the therapeutic treatment of such sinners as the heretics, the madmen, the prisoners, and the perverts by those safeguarding the dogmas of truth in other ages.

Feyerabend has clarified his own position by drawing a sharp distinction between philosophical and political relativism: "*Philosophical relativism* is the doctrine that all traditions, theories, ideas are equally true or equally false or, in an even more radical formulation, that any distribution of truth values over traditions is acceptable" (1978, 83). This is the argument of ahistorical, extreme skepticism whose defeatist idealism Feyerabend, following Wittgenstein, rejects. "*Political relativism*," on the other hand, "affirms that all traditions have equal *rights*" (1978, 82), and it is interested not in ascertaining the validity of beliefs and theories but in defending their legitimacy and creating space for their free cultivation. It asserts that all judgments are relational and depend on an underlying tradition which sustains their claims to truth: their currency, far from permanent or absolute, hinges on the status and the power of that tradition. This radical historicization of science pushes Kuhn's theory of paradigms to its logical limits and to the political conclusion of epistemological anarchism: Feyerabend advocates an open and free exchange between tradition and theories, beyond the rules of institutionalized rationality commonly known as scholarly standards.

Some of my more liberal readers may find themselves sympathetically inclined toward the idea of an unrestrained exchange between scientific traditions, but they may still worry about the

dangers of an uncontrollable proliferation of interpretations. Let me conclude this discussion, then, by explaining that Feyerabend has not provided a defense of proliferation, much as he is in favor of it, but rather he has shown that no rational argumentation or disciplinary demarcation can exclude it because plurality is constitutively embedded in scientific practices. “Proliferation does not mean that people can’t have well-defined and even dogmatic views, it means that research consists in playing views off against each other rather than in pursuing a single view to the bitter end” (1978, 147–48). This makes for a particularly significant position in that it does not advocate an other of science, something that is very important but outside its realm and should therefore be incorporated in it; it does not call for science’s improvement but rather points to the fact that the games of proliferation play a fundamental role in it, a role suppressed in the name of balance, unity, and homogeneity. A truly deconstructive investigation in its own unique fashion, Feyerabend’s theory belongs to the best achievements of contemporary negative hermeneutics with its meticulous insistence on the historical constitution of all knowledge: “We have to conclude then, that *even within* science reason cannot and should not be allowed to be comprehensive and that it must often be overruled, or eliminated, in favor of other agencies. There is not a single rule that remains valid under all circumstances and not a single agency to which appeal can always be made” (1975, 179–80). After the discussion of relativism, we can now better understand why this is not a philosophical idea but a historical observation which entails a political stance. “*Given* science, reason cannot be universal and unreason cannot be excluded” (1975, 180). Even the position of epistemological anarchism, Feyerabend implies, is a culturally situated one which makes sense only “*given* science,” in the context of the Western tradition and from the viewpoint of our postindustrial, postmodernist, poststructuralist age. He defends the legitimacy, not the validity, of unreason, which is the other side rather than the antithesis of reason—its supplement, its indispensable and inalienable negative. When he asserts boldly: “Without ‘chaos,’

no knowledge" (1975, 179), the quotation marks signify that "chaos" means only what modern science has suppressed as unreason, what it has ostracized as unscientific, what it has banned as false—its own constitutive otherness that could be used to question the logic of identity and the metaphysics of reason. Feyerabend's ultimate purpose is political, orienting his critique against the normative operations of institutionalized and consecrated ideology: "I want to defend society and its inhabitants from all ideologies, science included. All ideologies must be seen in perspective. One must not take them too seriously. One must read them like fairytales which have lots of interesting things to say but which also contain wicked lies, or like ethical prescriptions which may be useful rules of thumb but which are deadly when followed to the letter" (1981, 156). Once again, he is not envisioning idealistically the abolition of ideologies; he is only suggesting polemically that we learn how to resist their totalitarian grip: his is a determined propaedeutic for resistance against all impositions of knowledge-as-truth.

Feyerabend, like Kuhn, has dealt with the natural or exact sciences and has drawn his examples mainly from the history of astronomy. But I believe that attention to his negative epistemology and to his critique of the "chauvinism of science" and the artificial distinction between context of discovery and context of justification in particular, as well as to his emphasis on the historico-cultural character of the evidence and the cosmological assumptions supporting every method, may help the reorientation of Greek literary studies and facilitate the introduction and integration of theoretical considerations into its practices. While reason and application, theory and practice, remain distinguishable from each other, the conventions of romantic humanism will prevail. But if we are willing to admit that the contemporary critiques of scientific reason, arguably of the same age as the discourses of the humanities, pertain to the philological and critical practices as well, at least to the extent that the ideal of an exact science has had a pervasive effect on the literary disciplines, we may then start suspecting that both art and science and perhaps

even nature itself as areas of study, knowledge, and experience belong exclusively to the modern age of the last three centuries, the Age of Man, whose demise we have been witnessing for the last forty years. Cornelius Castoriades has described this turning point very succinctly:

We have witnessed the disruption of the entire orientation, program and goal of Galilean science, which has provided the foundations of scientific activity and the keystone of its ideology throughout the last three centuries. What has succumbed is an approach to knowledge which constitutes its object as a process evolving independently of the subject, which can be located within a spatio-temporal framework of universal validity and utter transparency, which can be assigned to incontestable and univocal categories (of identity, substance, causality), and which, finally, is expressible in a mathematical language of unlimited powers, the internal coherence of which was, so it had seemed, no more problematic than its miraculous pre-adaptation to this object. (1984, 149–50)

IN CONCLUSION, I shall offer some concrete suggestions for a future research on Greek literature that would follow counter-inductive procedures, not necessarily in any attempt to overthrow the dominant paradigms or destroy the prevailing rules but to test their validity (and consequently their institutional authority) by introducing experimentally alternative, or preferably incompatible, theories. Here are some representative examples of projects for such a research:

- A history of modern Greek literature which sees the Generation of the 1880s as a late extension of romanticism and that of the 1930s as a surrealist late symbolism. Under this light, the fragmentary, dispersed, and inconsequential modernism cultivated in a few works only acquires an exceptional preeminence in its irreconcilable marginality.

THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST CHALLENGE

- A survey of the production of certain works under various groupings—for example, according to author, period, style, genre, or even character development, meter, and beginnings—that traces the history of their interpretations and appropriations by coexisting or successive paradigms.
- A history of marginal (autobiography and kitsch), rare (satire and tragedy), or unacknowledged genres (the fragment and the national poem), that foregrounds aesthetic categories and functions of an unusual, neglected, or simply unacceptable order.
- A genealogy of a particular paradigm or interpretive community which describes its struggle for recognition, its modes of domination, its research conventions, its aesthetic standards, and the picture of literature that its revision of Greek tradition produced.
- A history of a particular institution related to the production of literary opinion—e.g., the university, poetry contests, book reviewing, literary journals, publishing houses—that discusses the politics of interpretation conducted in that site.
- A study of the public literary taste that would discuss literature and its standards of excellence strictly from the viewpoint of the audience, thus giving prominence to such nonaesthetic factors as pleasure, use, accessibility, prestige, and indoctrination.
- A series of literary readings of works from discourses which are not ordinarily considered as literary, such as political oratory (e.g., G. Papandreou's speeches), philosophy (D. Kapetanakis's treatises), criticism (Elytis's essays), or journalism (R. Apostolidis's diatribes).
- A history of Greek literature based on actual possibilities whose cancellation affected its development: the original publication of Solomos's work in its real fragmentary stage; the triumph of purism over Demoticism; the poetry of the 1930s dominated by Dorros, Drivas, Sarandaris, and Embirikos; or a criticism working on the principles introduced by Roidis.

These tentative suggestions, despite their dramatic overtones, do not aim directly at the destruction of current norms of scholarship. To echo Feyerabend, “My intention is not to replace one set of general rules by another such set: my intention is, rather, to convince the reader that *all methodologies, even the most obvious ones, have their limits*” (1975, 32). These suggestions are not offered as possible subjects for more doctoral dissertations or studies of unexplored areas; in fact, they are not offered as subjects at all but as alternative *approaches*, as different methodological *conceptions*. The study of Greek literature in Greece and abroad during this century has been following an empirical path from idealism, where reason governs research, to naturalism, where research determines reason (see Feyerabend 1978, 24–25, 31–33). Therefore, it has been developing a growing interest in and concern about its scholarly status, expressed mostly in a positivistic quest for the most accurate and scientific method. Counterinduction as an alternative investigative procedure could expose the vanity of this enterprise, already felt in Western scholarship, and help the proliferation of paradigms, while at the same time integrating theory into practice and establishing a comprehensive and yet decentered and eccentric theoretical practice or practical theory of Modern Greek Studies in general. In one very pragmatic sense, it is not a question of better method but of more and more methods, of a freer exchange between paradigms.

Above all, the cultivation of counterinduction, the advocacy of the contemporary languages of theory, and the defense of proliferation, the preoccupation of this chapter, seem to me to provide for the most adequate and courageous response of the study of Greek writing to the decisive and unavoidable epistemological challenge of our postmodern episteme against romantic humanism, including the value or commodity literature itself, as portrayed by Lyotard:

Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, “*fracta*,” catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as

discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word *knowledge*, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy. (1984, 60)

If we do not want to isolate the field of Greek studies from others, if we do not want to protect its artificial, ethnic identity and independence, if we do not want to inhibit its development, and if we do not want to privilege our work with intellectual superiority and set it apart from the labors of society, it appears that we must soon face the combined tasks of epistemological reflexivity, historicist awareness, and political responsibility.

Modern Greek Studies, the humanist and nationalist disciplines of philology and criticism, and by extension history, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy, like its subject, Greek literature and culture, has never experienced a crisis of conscience or legitimacy. Therefore, it is somehow unfortunate that I must conclude not on a more optimistic note but with a crucial question that has yet to be answered: If the emergence of theory is always a sign of a healthy crisis threatening the foundations of orthodoxy, and if the recent upheavals in the paradigms of the human sciences reflect such a positive development, can the enterprise of Modern Greek Studies possibly respect theory and allow for its unsettling inquisitions, knowing that its very existence is at stake?

What is at stake, then, is a politics of multiple centers and plural strategies, less geared toward the restoration of a supposedly ideal situation held to be intact and good than to the micrological fine-tuning of questions of institutional power, work and reward distribution, sexual political dynamics, resource allocation, domination, and a broad range of problems whose solutions would be situationally and participationally defined. (Ryan 1982, 116)

Postscript: *Peri Hermeneias*

LANGUAGE

If all knowledge is mediated by language, all understanding is linguistic by nature. Language makes understanding as well as speaking possible. To understand is only to understand a language. Language is not a neutral means of communication, a transparent medium that serves human needs; it is the opaque horizon of human understanding. Nothing can be known in itself but only understood in and as language. Language is not based on a correspondence between word and thing but on an arbitrary and yet conventional difference between word and word(s). Sense is not provided by the meaning of individual words or other verbal formations; it is produced by signification, the active and inventive use and understanding of differential relations as the absence of identity and consequently of any ultimate object of reference. Meaning is not established in a process of reception but by the act of semiotic translation from one sign to another. Translation is an elemental function of language: to mean is not to refer, to mean something with something else, but to translate, to say something in another way. Meaning is difference—never absent, never inherent, always possible, always arbitrary, but still bound by conventions. Meaning is not what is meant since its exchange is not based on one to one relationships; its economy is one of continuous surplus. Meaning is inflationary. Lack, absence, or silence are but literary inventions: they are not rhetorical tropoi but romantic topoi. Language cannot be questioned, doubted, or avoided. To speak is to understand, to know a language, to take part in language games.

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GAME

Language is arbitrary by its nature but conventional by its constitution; it is practiced as communication and thus is always historically situated; it is arbitrary yet its practice in communication is conventional. Rules, norms, and other conventions define and limit all communicational exchanges by establishing fields of performance and conditions of success. To communicate is to take part in a language game; to communicate effectively is to take part successfully in a language game. Every use is a performance aimed at acceptance, which takes place in a given framework of social relationships. Use does not depend as much on personal intentions or wishes as on the system of rules, expectations, and strategies that each time allows for certain choices. Language as performance is socially and historically conditioned: there is no real freedom of expression. To speak, that is, to partake in a language game, is to adopt an already available role: language is public, communication is social. The subject cannot speak, therefore it does not exist. To succeed in communication, one has to adopt a certain role in order to make himself heard. The game-space is inhabited by roles available to individuals according to their communicational intentions and selections. To communicate is to play a self, to assume and manipulate a role. But the game is not a freeplay of individuals that provides innocent pleasures; it is a particular arrangement of the contest for authority within an institutional space.

INSTITUTIONALITY

All communication is directly affected by developments in the institutional sites where authority is contested by various discourses. Discourses, those explicatory systems which map and master areas of thought, knowledge, and craft, strive for domination over institutions; they aspire to naturalize them and impose absolute games, thereby effecting the identification of the

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game with the world. The more institutionalized a game, the more strict and rigid it becomes. Absolute institutionalization brings about stability, balance, and forgetfulness; in such a totalitarian state of affairs, codes seem natural, conventions are seen as rules of behavior, performances lose variability, and roles become fixed. But the struggle between different discourses over institutional authority is interminable. The infinity of language and the very nature of the game permit only temporary stability and normalization. The driving force motivating all game-playing is the will to power, which gives it the character of agon. To play a game is to exercise one's will to power against one's opponents in order to win. By adopting different roles, by employing various discourses, by taking strategic positions, one is striving to become the winner, if not the master, of the game. The ultimate aim of communication is not self-expression but domination. To speak is to will one's power. Communication should be examined in political and economic, not in intentionalist, terms since it is the semiotic activity proper; to communicate is to negotiate interpretations.

INTERPRETATION

Since all understanding is public and takes place in various games of communication, it has to be correlated with the institutional sites which provide for its conditions. Understanding is not the private experience whereby a meaning is detected or explained, illuminated or recovered, but a public activity by which a difference is interpolated between two pieces of knowledge; and thus an interpretation is invented. Interpretation is public, since every interpolation follows some of the rules of the game; and it is meaningful not because it reveals something that is there but because it happens in a game situation. Interpretation is the fundamental mode of every performance, the playing of the game. And since the game is a contest for institutional authority and the purpose of all performance is to gain power, the

aims of interpretation should be equated with its invention, legitimation, or appropriation. Ultimately, interpretation is an act toward appropriation, which does not violate any privileged domain of meaning or sacrosanct depository of supreme values, but attempts—by usurping the object/idea/phenomenon under consideration from another discourse—to submit it to different discursive practices and grasp it firmly. Anything can become an object of any interpretation that makes it and uses it according to certain conventions to represent the world, satisfy the desire for knowledge, and feed its will to power. Therefore, art, too, may be anything.

ART

Art is not a private enterprise, a self-enclosed occupation for the talented individual. Art is not created by artists but produced by specific operations of public taste. It is not constituted by a series of artworks but appears out of the competitive interaction of various aesthetic interpretations and discourses. Art is the institutionalized form of the bourgeois public taste for the beautiful; its characteristics are not innate in some works but are invariably attributed to any work in order to submit it to a certain discourse's mastery. Art is what is considered to be art in exactly the same manner that this act of considering takes place. Art is for use and *only in use*; it is a *particular kind of interested use*. Since everything depends on the use/consumption, conditioned by cultural practices, anything can be submitted to a specific practice of aesthetic production and be read/used as art according to the dominant institutional conventions. Art has no autonomous ontological status of its own; it is subject not to personal charisma but to structural change. The history of art is the history of the contest of various discourses for the domination over art's value system. Mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, repression, and marginalization are constantly at work to defend that system's authority from doubts and disruption. Art is a modern field of interpretive

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agon where the standards of evaluation—the hierarchy of values—are contested, and it is delimited by the rules of the game of aesthetic communication.

AGON

Since art as a cultural institution neither comprises a fixed corpus of established works nor exists in a stable, eternal form, it cannot posit as its subject matter its own self, probably art's supreme fiction. Its ultimate subject is its cultural presuppositions that define its practices, consumption and transmission. Art, irrevocably trapped between language and temporality, attempts to overcome its conventionality in order to obtain its own special place and win mastery over its determining factors through their neutralization. To say that all art is about the conventionality of art is not to suggest an advanced state of awareness, whereby a particular institution employs a self-reflexive metalanguage and seeks to acquire a kind of responsible self-determination. Art thinks about its arbitrary conventionality in terms of power, succinctly realizing that this has always been the space and the purpose of a fierce struggle for domination. Various discursive forces clash around this or any other value system, trying to exert a commanding influence upon it and gradually appropriate it by establishing a convincingly natural identity between language and reality through ascertaining the presence of a fixed referent. Each one of these forces strives to defeat the others and render reality legible in its own terms; each one tries to take command of the rules of acceptance and prohibition that determine the status of art's value system; each one's strategy of appropriation is encoded in a proposed definitive, exclusive interpretation of artworks.

ARTWORK

The object made by the artist is not an artwork; it is a conglomeration of unbalanced structurations and dissociated contiguities.

What makes it artistic is the artistry of every specifically aesthetic interpretation and its acceptance into the canon of art usually through a process of normalization. The thingness of the work, the work itself as the result of a creative exercise, is insignificant: artistically it does not exist. The work does not correspond to its description; neither does it respond to its reception. It is only institutionalized as an artwork through the successful (that is, publicly approved) application of the appropriate interpretative conventions that locate it in the realm of a particular tradition (as that is embodied in institutions like the university, the library, the archive, the opera house, or the museum). The work becomes significant after its effective submission to that enculturating process. The work of the artist or any other is not an ideal object to be discovered or recovered but only a cultural complex of signs to be interpreted; every different interpretation follows an established discursive practice and exerts on it the violence of a particular type of discourse in order to make it come into existence as an artwork, that is, to produce and appropriate it. No interpretation is ever inherent in the work, just as no meaning is ever inherent in any interpretation. The artwork does not exist as an object but appears in every interpretive event of aesthetic significance. Its absolute existence and its definitive interpretation is always postponed by its illusionary presence, though impending in all kinds of aesthetic expectation. The work only tends to exist; its probable subject is not itself but the longing for a self, which aesthetics and criticism call beauty.

BEAUTY

All criticism is romantic: it was born and developed out of models of intrinsic reading provided by the textual criticism of the Bible and the classics. The basic hypothesis on which philology was founded has been that of an aesthetic whole characterized by purposeful symmetry, balance, and self-containment. Thus, a new branch of scholarship emerged, dedicated to the restoration of that lost totality. Ruins of texts, edifices, sculptures, and art

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objects were considered as fragments of a full presence and natural order, and the noble effort launched to decipher them resulted in an imaginary return to the ancient, original, and eternal composition—the recovery of the pure idea of the work's originality and perfection. The nostalgia for law, hierarchy, and transcendence, which haunted the widespread discontentment with civilization, found significant expression in the notions of the monument and the masterpiece, where the representation of godliness was supposedly shepherded. The attribute of pure, objective beauty was the romantic stratagem for art's naturalization. Criticism, the judgment of holistic beauty, totalized the work in such a way that it became a transparent and independent whole providing its own justification and autotelic experience. The concern for beauty shared by both the critic and the romantic artist, though a promise for profane transcendence, was a powerful investment of the bourgeois will to power: it advertised in aesthetic terms the reconciliation of all opposites, the remission of guilt, the arrival of a new order, and the incarnation of the Absolute Spirit.

CRITICISM

Criticism (that is, applied romantic poetics) is the institution charged with overseeing the production and promotion of the bourgeois value system art; it is based on the idealist notion of the real artwork whose revelation it tries to serve in a faithful manner. The romantic poetics is an aesthetics of metaphysics that attempts to establish a transcendental center, the locus utopiae, and to define accordingly the meaning and value of the work. The principles of criticism reserve the best places for what is considered to be original, authentic, and classic, thus suggesting that there exist some sovereign values characterized by originality, truthfulness, and timelessness, where the essence of civilization and humanity rests. These principles govern the ethnocentric ways in which humanism conceived of the whole Western art and literature as

a living presence, and they explain the categories of plenitude, independence, unmediatedness, and subjectivity conferred upon the artwork. Criticism undertook the mission to produce a national cultural heritage and protect it from heresy and corruption. In the same way that authority tries to prove itself indispensable by opposing abundance to want and satiation to need, criticism contends to establish its power by cultivating belief, admiration and identification, thus promoting the institutionalization of art and, through explanatory evaluation, gradually transmuting its conventionality into naturalness. Nevertheless, the defense of artistic quality by criticism remains entangled in two false and forged assumptions: the superiority and disinterestedness of its discourse and the uniformity and clarity of language itself.

QUALITY

Since the locus of the artwork is not the object itself, its maker's imagination, or the receiver's mind, but the place where the institutional presuppositions of its emergence converge, mingle and interfuse, the work cannot acquire a distinct quality, a permanent place in a fixed hierarchy of aesthetic values. On the contrary, its quality is each time defined according to the dominant artistic notions. The work's strenuous effort for stability, homogeneity, recognition, and authority is unavoidably doomed to failure. All art is a fierce contest for art's value system, and all qualities are not properties of the work that can be appreciated and appraised, but marks of the work's proficiency towards the highest goal: the revision or solidification of the rules of the game, the maximal appropriation of art's system of values by that artwork. Since art is applied criticism about art's conventionality, the quality of the work depends and is defined according to its function in that field of conventions and the success of its effort to take an active part in it. Quality is not the outcome of the maker's activity but the result of the work's antagonistic relation-

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ships with other works it implicitly criticizes. The work's quality is the public appeal of its view about art-as-an-institution for that institution; eventually, it is the authority of jurisdiction earned by the work in the game of aesthetic communication. To understand quality as the primary category of the work is to insist that the work itself at every moment exists in a cultural system of values as its quality—as an evaluation of art's institutionality and at the same time, since subject to conventionality, as a cultural value under constant revision. These conditions drastically limit the role of the artist.

ARTIST

The institutionality of art is not conceived by the artist through a theoretical abstraction or in a cultural vacuum; on the contrary, he or she is interested in its present manifestations as exemplified in the fate of certain artworks. The artists, the romantic and alienated craftsmen, conceive art in concrete terms drawn from certain works, and they enter the contest over its meaning and territory by coming to terms with these works. This creation is constructed against works which inspire them with admiration, awe, or fear, or works which draw a response of indignation and dismissal. Their work comes to be a practical criticism of what is commonly and currently taken as art. What they receive and understand is the dominant opinion about art as bequeathed by tradition—the dominant aesthetic. They choose some works, whose place and rank seem to them exemplary of that prevailing aesthetic, and support, revise, or condemn those works. What differentiates the artist's position from that of the critic or the interpreter is that the artist prefers to criticize art in its own terms, that is, by using its own conventions. This game is one of production and appropriation as well, since the artist tries to prove that this work and that only can be identified with art. When artists attempt to advertise creation as a faithful picture, even an integral part of reality, and when they try to lure the audience

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into recognizing this style as anamnesis of truth, they seek to prove that their works are not products but natural, real objects. Thus, the artist denounces the artfulness of art in order to obliterate all traces of artificiality in it. Art making is intrinsic art criticism, since it expresses implicitly an opinion about its presuppositions and functions, about its constitutive institutionality. Its product is examined as art by interpreters.

INTERPRETER

Criticism has been the discourse of romantic exegesis, of secular hermeneutics: the interpretation of art. In the same way that the author is privileged as the creative subject behind the artwork so the critic is viewed as the gifted person who responds to the work and gets an insight into its significance and origin (be it intention, subconscious, age, or structure). In a historicist approach to art, however, criticism has no place at all; it joins the author, the work, and the beautiful in the obsolete realm of aesthetics, where it belongs. In that realm we must also relocate the critic as a subject whose knowledge and will masters and serves the work in its totality. Every individual attempt at interpretation is a personal understanding, nothing more than an instance of interpretive activity, an application of the relevant discursive practice. But the interpreter is neither exempt from the game of the aesthetic communication nor innocent of matters related to desires, intentions, and position. To speak of the circulation and acceptance of the work is not to enumerate particular acts of interpretation but to relate them historically and specify their appeal. The interpretation of a work consists of the interaction between various acts of personal understanding, again conditioned by existing interpretive practices and conventions of invention embodied in the readers' expectations and responses. The tension and the conflict arising from that interaction stage another contest for art's system of values, this time about the agents of its mediation, evaluation, and distribution. Interpretation as a product is not the individual

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understanding of a work but the intersubjective results of its public consumption.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Interpretation is not a secluded encounter of the disinterested subject with a perfected artwork which appeals to the feelings and the intellect, a private activity enacted by the emotive and mental forces of consciousness, but a public encounter, mediated by learned practices, established conventions, and appropriate techniques of mastery. The critical fallacy, the notion of interpretation as the free exercise of a will unrestrained by codes and conditions, is only a projection of the idea of the artist/creator onto the procedures of apprehension. Since art consists of the game of aesthetic communication wherein various discourses compete for its institutionality, every performance, be it artistic or critical, is interpretive by nature. Who interprets? No one. Interpretation as an act is not a brave, bright deed but a performance, and the interpreter, the person who inaugurates that event, is not its creator but only the performer of a role acted in a space and under conditions provided by the game. No one interprets; something is interpreted as an artwork. There is no correct, truthful, or valid interpretation but only different interpretive discourses, like artistry, craft, criticism, rhetoric, philosophy, and philology. The public event of interpretation has no unity of its own, derived from the subject's action or the object's wholeness; its only coherence comes from intersubjectivity—the employment of codes, rules, techniques, and strategies allowed by established procedures and acquired as aesthetic competence whereby the will to power participates in the contest and attempts to gain authority. Interpretation cannot be substantiated as the act of the artist or the critic, since theirs is only a part in a game whose structure is decisively social and differential. That is why interpretation is about value exchange.

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EVALUATION

The rules of the game are always, although constantly transformed, grammatically patterned. To play, to perform a role, is to speak a language that one cannot create or even freely choose since to play is to speak to someone and not to express oneself playfully. That is why no statement, even one not absolute in claims or fierce in tone, can gain an institutional inviolability and become from modus of language locus of experience. Nobility of intentions or validity of inventions cannot be appreciated too far away from the institutional sites of human communication; these sites are the game-spaces where the contest for authority takes place. To recognize the institutional contextuality of all social behavior is to be aware that, from one significant aspect, all communication is an exchange of messages about and for authority; moreover, the quest for power motivates all interpretive struggle. Though the abolition of authority is impossible within social conventions, the limits of resistance against all impositions of authorial voice and all attempts at the identification of the game with reality remain flexible. A truly critical understanding does not explain or prove; it reinscribes historically upon experience, arbitrariness upon institutionality. Unacceptable yet insurmountable, it shows antithetically that successful institutionalized art and criticism, like all other forms of romantic authority, places ontological claims on truth to legitimize the violent pleasures and the hegemonic claims of the bourgeois subject. The critical understanding of truth and its authority begins with the inquiries of rhetoric.

RHETORIC

An object is structured as an artwork in a certain rhetorical situation defined by the conventions of art-reading, the aesthetic expectations of a reading public, and the conditions of its consumption as an artifact. The study of aesthetic competence

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resulting in various performances called interpretations is rhetoric. Rhetoric does not study the artistic results but their presuppositions on the communicative level: it describes the rules of the signifying practices which create rather than detect artistic relations by inventing and distributing various elements and units of the work, and the communicative conditions emerge from certain semiotic objects as aesthetic works. Rhetoric as a method characterizes the overall approach of an antithetical and political understanding. In the realm of art, it is a theory not of reception but of the aesthetic receptivity, a semiotic theory of art-as-value that attempts to describe the conditions and the limitations allowing certain practices of understanding to develop into aesthetic readings by rendering an object into a meaningful and beautiful artwork. Rhetoric covers the range of strategic choices available to the audience and market of art: the decoding devices arrayed in an aesthetic interpretation, the aesthetic competence defined by any dominant taste, and the conflict of interpretations couched in terms of contestative tactics. As the first undertaking of critical historicism, it is a political economy of the aesthetic value, and it sets the presuppositions for the circulation of polyvalent readings.

CRITICAL HISTORICISM

Critical historicism, the political approach to the cultural value system art, is a counter-criticism of art as the artistically expressed art criticism. As a rhetorical study of the conditions of aesthetic understanding, it must not only transcend the limitations imposed upon criticism by its role as the servant of masterpieces but also make aesthetics altogether redundant. Criticism proper is not inferior to art; art, rather, is a kind of criticism, possibly the critical activity par excellence. Whereas romantic criticism, by supporting and acclaiming performances, helps the game's naturalization, the task of historicism is to disrupt the absolute though illusionary reality of the game by hinting at its conventional

foundations and by detecting the function of signs under the apparent nature of things. Critical historicism cultivates a self-aware act of political, use-oriented reading—aware of its own presuppositions and its role in the game. Its purpose is not to evaluate and rank artistic qualities but to situate art in culture, to expose the mechanisms of its production, and eventually to use it rhetorically and strategically. For this reason, it should not foster familiarity with the work but try to make it new, strange, other, usable, and open; it should promote paradox, wonder, and doubt by pointing to differences instead of correspondences, substitutions instead of correlations, disruptions instead of connections. Nevertheless, it must remain clear that by advocating dissemination and not unity, and by defending the proliferation of crafts against the institutional authority of art, the historicist approach is not working for the destruction of the communicative channels or the demolition of the game. Though problematizing unity, continuity, immediacy, subjectivity, and all hegemonic notions of truth, it does not adopt the romantic dream of revolution or the theological despair of the fall into language; on the contrary, it defends the survival and renewal of game-playing by exposing performances including itself to the public taste, by promoting a broad awareness about its nature, and by inviting intervention and participation from all social areas—in short, by resisting the authority of aesthetic interpretation.

RESISTANCE

The ethics of critical historicism is the politics of resistance. Its deployment of rhetorical approaches consistently draws attention to the relativity and historicity of all values, their fragmentary and conventional nature, and proposes that understanding is evaluation is appropriation is reproduction. All value judgments regarding art should be examined against the background of aesthetic competence and public taste, and all truth, facts, phenomena, ideas, and systems should be understood only as evalua-

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tory modes, interpretive tropes. The term “Sophistics” may be used here to refer comprehensively to the ethics, the politics, and the poetics of a sceptical, polyphonic, resistant, tactical criticism. Sophistics is a relentless and unremitting rhetorico-historical criticism of the evaluative nature of all problems and of the conventional, historical nature of all values—a political critique of the judicial system that legislates reality, identity, and virtue. Sophistics by its very function is always openly political and antithetical; it never supports any systematizations of experience but rather bares processes of naturalization. Its tasks are to disrupt all notions of identity upon which authority is founded and to resist autistic understanding by deconstructing the apparent unity of meaning. Since it questions the answers without ever answering the questions, it can never be definitive or final; unavoidably, it remains selective, deficient, biased, partial, engaged. Still, it is not a joyful fall in the abyss of the signified absence, a celebration of the original sin, but an open-ended activity of skeptical courage, pace, and figure that today intervenes and challenges the theological politics, from dialectics to negative hermeneutics, of our modern occidental civilization.

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VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS is Associate Professor in the Modern Greek Studies Program at Ohio State University.