

# Classics and National Cultures

Edited by  
SUSAN A. STEPHENS AND PHIROZE VASUNIA

2010  
**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

## Contents

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1. 'out of eure sanscreed into oure erylant': Ireland, the Classics, and Independence <i>Nicholas Allen</i>	16
2. Marooned Mandarins: Freud, Classical Education, and the Jews of Vienna <i>Richard H. Armstrong</i>	34
3. Classical Culture for a Classical Country: Scholarship and the Past in Vincenzo Cuoco's <i>Plato in Italy</i> <i>Giovanna Ceserani</i>	59
4. Classical Education and the Early American Democratic Style <i>Joy Connolly</i>	78
5. Mimicry and Classical Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's <i>The Mimic Men</i> <i>Emily Greenwood</i>	100
6. Editing the Nation: Classical Scholarship in Greece, c.1930 <i>Constanze Güthenke</i>	121
7. Eastern European Nations, Western Culture, and the Classical Tradition <i>Asen Kirin</i>	141
8. The Cosmic Race and a Heap of Broken Images: Mexico's Classical Past and the Modern Creole Imagination <i>Andrew Laird</i>	163
9. Unbuilding the Acropolis in Greek Literature <i>Vassilis Lambropoulos</i>	182
10. How to Build a National Epic: <i>Digenes Akrites</i> and the <i>Song of Roland</i> <i>Fernanda Moore</i>	199

1. Heraclitus on the Highveld: The Universalism (Ancient and Modern) of T. J. Haarhoff <i>Grant Parker</i>	217
2. Auerbach, Homer, and the Jews <i>James I. Porter</i>	235
3. Contestatory Classics in 1920s China <i>Haun Saussy</i>	258
4. The New Alexandrian Library <i>Susan A. Stephens</i>	267
5. <i>Translatio</i> and Difference: Western Classics in Modern Japan <i>Yasunari Takada</i>	285
16. Alexander Sikandar <i>Phiroze Vasunia</i>	302
<i>Bibliography</i>	325
<i>Index</i>	361

## Notes on Contributors

**Nicholas Allen** is Moore Institute Professor at National University of Ireland, Galway. He is author of *Modernism, Ireland and Civil War* (2009) and *George Russell and the New Ireland* (2003) and editor of *That Island Never Found* (2007), with Eve Patten; *The Proper Word: Collected Criticism—Ireland, Poetry, Politics* (2007); and *The Cities of Belfast* (2003), with Aaron Kelly. He is currently working on a book about the cultural histories of 1916.

**Richard H. Armstrong** is Associate Professor of Classical Studies and a Fellow in the Honors College at the University of Houston. His latest book is *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World* (2005). He publishes on the reception of ancient culture and translation studies, with a particular interest in the development of early psychoanalysis. His current book project is *Theory and Theatricality: Classical Drama and the Early Psychoanalysis, 1885–1914*.

**Giovanna Ceserani** is Assistant Professor of Classics at Stanford University. Her interest is in the classical tradition with an emphasis on the intellectual history of classical scholarship, archaeology, and historiography since the eighteenth century. She is currently completing a book on the modern study of Magna Graecia. Her recent publications include articles on the history of classical scholarship and the history of archaeology. She is the co-editor with A. Milanese of *Antiquarianism, Museums and Cultural Heritage: Collecting and its Contexts in Eighteenth-century Naples*, a special issue for the *Journal of the History of Collections* (2007).

**Joy Connolly** is Associate Professor of Classics at New York University. She is the author of *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (2007) and articles on ancient education, Latin poetry, Greek imperial culture, and the early modern reception of classical texts. Her current and forthcoming work includes *Talk About Virtue*, a book about the relevance of Roman political thought for modernity, along with essays on the character of Aeneas, Pliny's account of liberty under autocracy in his *Panegyricus*, and social justice in Sallust's *Jugurtha*.

**Emily Greenwood** is Associate Professor of Classics at Yale University. She is the author of two books, *Thucydides and the Shaping of History* (2006) and *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics*

## 9

## Unbuilding the Acropolis in Greek Literature

Vassilis Lambropoulos

Whatever the Acropolis may be,  
It doesn't exist without us

Montis 1978: 22

Do Greeks care about the Acropolis? If we look at their literature, we hesitate to answer. In both poetry and prose, the 'sacred hill' appears very rarely, and when it does, it is usually an object of attack rather than admiration. Greek writers of the last two centuries seem profoundly uninterested in visiting or discussing the famous site. Given the importance of antiquity for modern Greek culture, as well as the centrality of the Acropolis in the literature of travels to Greece, the literary stance is puzzling. This chapter will offer an answer to the puzzle.

The Acropolis is one of the best-known and most-visited places in the world, a place that people recognize and admire even without ever visiting it. In addition to its ancient glory, it has acquired the aura of a modern topos that has been discursively and institutionally constituted. The Acropolis is a countersite in that it exists both in an archaeological location and in the collective imaginings of Western tradition—both *in* and *outside* history. The Acropolis evokes not only the classical Athenians who built it, but also modern creators like Melville, Thackeray, Flaubert, Freud, Hofmannsthal, Woolf, Durrell, Malraux, Heidegger, Golding, Walcott, and Derrida who recorded their visits in literature, theory, and reflection. In marked contrast, it does not evoke contemporary Greeks. In turn, we find that Greeks do not

In addition to the two editors of this volume, I am grateful to Stathis Gourgouris, Gregory Jusdanis, Ilia Lakidou, Neni Panourgia, Apostolis Papageorgiou, Efthymia Rentzou, Manolis Savidis, Sakis Serefas, Takis Theodoropoulos, and Augustine Zenakos for providing me with interesting ideas, important references, and rare documents. I appreciate their interest in this project. Parts of the chapter have been presented at the conference 'From Aristotle to Us' at La Trobe University and the Gennadeios Library of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. I thank Peter Murphy and Maria Georgopoulou for these generous invitations.

exhibit a corresponding enthusiasm but instead something entirely different. The reason is that the 'technology' of travel writing on Greece has disciplined them into oblivion.

Artemis Leontis has discussed fields like archaeology, aesthetics, and history in terms of Foucauldian disciplinary technologies: 'Early in the nineteenth century, Europeans began to deploy in Hellas the narratives, methods, rules of conduct, modes of expression, and institutions of the discourse of Hellenism. . . . On the site of ruins, the disciplinary technologies of Hellenism applied their force on individual bodies by controlling access to the site and separating "safe" authorities from "dangerous" (i.e., heterogeneous to all other) populations' (Leontis 1995: 56). Since at least that time, travel writing has also functioned as such a technology, disciplining Greeks into inferiority or irrelevance. In nearly all travel literature, Greeks do not speak about the hill, usually because they are not found there.

One example of the limiting, or perhaps blinding, effects of disciplinary technologies is that they prohibited recognition of the presence upon and around the Acropolis of a local population. People had continued to use the Acropolis as a very effective *kástro* or *frúrio* 'fortress' well into the nineteenth century. . . . Both Greek-speaking rebels and Ottoman authorities recognized that to hold the Acropolis was to win Athens, a strategic site in the battle to control the Attic peninsula and to create an independent Hellas. While this was happening, Europeans continued to discuss ways of protecting the supreme values of Hellenism, which the Acropolis represented for them from 'vandalism' by the very groups who were seeking the physical protection of the Acropolis as a citadel-fortress. (Leontis 1995: 58)

Hence the dramatic difference between the Hellenes of eternity and the Greeks of history.

To find a Greek on the citadel we have to go to Greek literature. We can begin with the first scene of the novel *The Broken Hands of the Aphrodite of Melos* (2002), a postmodern exploration of modern Greek hybridity by writer Nanos Valaoritis (b. 1921). It is spring 1820, just a year before the launch of the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire. The book opens with a descent from the Acropolis. Sebastian Moronis, the narrator, has just spent a horrible night at the Frankish Tower in the Propylaia, where the Turkish authorities imprisoned him the previous day. From his dirty cell at the top floor of the Tower he could see the Parthenon but he had no mind for admiration. The nearly two hundred shacks that occupied the hill, built for the Turkish garrison and their families, reminded him of all the torture methods his captors might use on him. He is accused of stealing antiquities but the truth is that it was the very Turkish Albanian from whom he had bought a pouch of ancient coins who turned around and accused him of

stealing it. On this morning the Turkish soldiers are taking him from the Acropolis to the Tower of the Winds for trial. He fears that they will interrogate, sentence, and promptly execute him. The official representatives of the Western powers, who are accompanying the soldiers, will silently consent to such an outcome since it would help them retain total control over the illicit trade of antiquities so that only the French and the English can compete over the treasures that keep appearing on the market.

Moronis, the prisoner who is taken down from the Propylaia by this strange group of occupiers and diplomats, is a Greek of Italian descent living in colonial Corfu as a British subject. Eventually the Turkish judge spares his life, acknowledging his odyssean non-identity: 'You are "nobody" like all the Rum, Greek. You have neither trust nor ethnicity' (Valaoritis 2002: 16). He offers him as a servant for life to his adopted son, the Janissar Selim, but the new master turns out to be a lost cousin from Egypt who was sold as a slave and brought up as a Muslim. Sebastian and Selim share as an ancestor the great Alexandrian poet Aristomenis Moronis who left Egypt in 1801. That was life in cosmopolitan Athens (23) right before the Revolution, where one could find diplomats, artists, emissaries, nobles, adventurers, and in general people in pursuit of art, love, and profit, often in intriguing combinations. The town provides a fitting setting for the opening pages of a sprawling work that traces the broken arms (one holding the apple of discord, the other the end of her dress) of the Aphrodite statue as they travel for two centuries through famous capitals, households, and periods, as well as literary genres and styles.

Once the Acropolis was liberated, Greeks had their first opportunity in almost four centuries to take a leisurely walk on the imposing hill that had been an inaccessible fortress under the Ottomans since 1456. This does not mean that they all admired the accomplishments of their ancestors. After all, the aesthetically pure approach is as recent as the invention of modern aesthetics. Visitors spent their time on the Acropolis in quite different ways. Distinguished scholar and writer Georgios Tertsetis (1800–74) describes his visit with four eminent Greek politicians in 1836, just two years after Athens became the capital of the newly independent state. It is interesting to see their different attitudes once they passed through the Propylaia. One of them asks somebody to show him where a hero of the War of Independence was killed. Another meets somebody who criticizes the late President of Greece. The third goes to the highest point and takes in the open sea. Only the fourth walks up to the Parthenon and contemplates it in silence and absorption, which is particularly interesting if we recall that a Turkish mosque has been standing within it since the early eighteenth century. These individuals are not average Greeks: they represent the political leadership of the nation. And yet

the self-sufficiency of the monument is not evident to them, even though they have gone up 'to see the Acropolis and its antiquities' (2002: 14). However, as the attention of the strolling politicians is drawn to different things, there is work going on around them that will focus the attention of future visitors in a deliberate and sharp way. The hero of *The Tumblers* (2004), the second novel by actor and writer Yiorgos Kotanidis, is a diaspora Greek who comes to Athens that same year to establish the first theatre in the free nation. On his second day in his new country, as he is given a tour of the Acropolis by a French duchess, he sees workers are tearing down a Venetian rampart and some Turkish houses and restoring the first monument, the temple of Athena Nike, all under the supervision of Greek and Bavarian archaeologists and architects. Two years earlier, Bavarian architect Leo von Klenze launched the first modern Acropolis restoration project, starting with the very first modern restoration of a classical monument, the Temple of Nike (1835–6). In a few decades, all medieval and Ottoman buildings will be torn down. Nothing but ancient ruins will be visible on the site. The Acropolis as we know it today will be created. With a mere four, and insignificant, exceptions, nineteenth-century Greek poetry will ignore it. Interest will not grow much in the twentieth century but it will adopt a radical disposition: it will turn destructive.

Contrary to what students of modern Hellenism may expect, the Acropolis does not have a prominent place in Greek literature of the last two centuries. In fact, it makes only a rare appearance. For example, during the eighty years between 1858 and 1938, research has identified just ten writers who composed poems on the Parthenon, and not a single one between 1938 and 2002 (Giannakopoulou 2002). In the twentieth century, even when the Acropolis makes an appearance, instead of generating ideas of greatness and glory, it finds itself under attack from internal or external forces. As we shall see, Greek literature consistently unbuilds the Western heterotopia.

This 'destructive' (in Heidegger's sense) tradition was inaugurated by the avant-garde and Trotskyite writer Nicholas Calas (1907–89) with a piece which appeared in his first collection, *Poems* (dated 1933 but released in October 1932 under the pseudonym Nikitas Rantos). The poem, 'Acropolis', draws on the infamous bombardment of 1687 that irreparably damaged the Parthenon during the siege of the Ottomans on the Acropolis by Venetian artillery under Captain Francesco Morosini. A powerful imagery creates the impression that today the site is undergoing another bombardment as the poem is littered with several cylinder forms—cylinders of cannons, Kodak films, coins, finger rings, floodlights, lenses, tubes of six-o-six, even words.

These have replaced marble slabs, creating a monument to modern technology and exploitation:

Nothing but cylinders to be seen round here  
 straight fallen columns  
 of marble or others  
 of roll-film, Agfa, Kodak  
 of coins—change  
 from negotiated dollar and sterling  
 cylindrical too these very words  
 fall juicily  
 words inspired  
 by the horror we feel  
 at Morosini's cannon-fire—  
 the cannons too cylindrical  
 each day razing the acropolises  
 restored by others in their negatives.

(trans. by David Ricks, quoted in  
 Giannakopoulou 2002: 260)

The poem includes a long list of attackers worthy of Morosini—Ernest Renan with his 'Prayer on the Acropolis' (1865), Fred Boissonnas with his albums of pictures, Nelly's with her naked female dancers, Karl Baedeker with his guidebooks, Yiannis Psycharis with his version of Greek demoticism, agents with their advertising images, tourists with their snapshots, designers with their fashion shows. Ironically, this time the monument is being destroyed not by being reduced to pieces but by being photographically restored. As the most legendary ruin is reconstructed daily by all the means of mechanical reproduction, it turns into a popular modern commodity; it becomes a slogan, a sign, a spectacle. In fact, by the time he visited the Acropolis, Jacques Derrida could not find anything else to talk about except a nameless, faceless slumbering photographer (Derrida 1996).

In addition to its photographic reconstruction, in the years 1922–33 the Parthenon underwent its second modern restoration, following the first one in 1898–1902. The project inspired the famous French historian André Charbonnier to propose the revival of the Panathenean Festival following on the model of the successful revival of the Delphic Festivals in 1927 and 1930. The results of the project were presented in 1931 to the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, a gathering of over one hundred specialists from some twenty countries that was convened by the Office of Museums of the International Institute of Intellectual Collaboration of the League of Nations. The Congress produced

the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments, the first of its kind, which was adopted by the League the following year. Thus the discursive restoration of the monument to a purer form during that period was a complex imaginary project, both physical and cultural, to which many sciences and all the arts contributed with enthusiasm.

In contrast, Calas does not refer to an earlier, greater, era. His exclusive focus is on the present, the era of the aesthetic and commercial proliferation of acropolises. He is reacting not only to commercialism but to idealism as well; he ridicules the photographic reproduction both by tourists and by artists, foreigners and Greeks. He has in mind images included in cheap guidebooks and limited-edition art books, empty talk as well as elevated discourse about heritage, the 'rhythm of an Adler machine', and the speed of cars like the Delage Grand-Sport (1921) to which Le Corbusier compared the Parthenon in his 'Architecture, Pure Creation of the Spirit', a 1922 piece (later included in the 1923 essay collection *Towards a New Architecture*) on the lessons of the Acropolis for modern architecture. Yet, as an avant-garde poet and critic, Calas also finds in Morosini's destruction a certain grandeur. In the text 'Promyth', published in 1936, he claims that 'art is a gun powder keg, and the proof is the Parthenon' (Calas 1977: 73). The unpublished poem 'Black Flames', written in 1935–6, elaborates:

The dream requires work. Make the most personal one if you want your life to become yours.

[...]

Let's take dreams from where they exist. Morosini chose the Acropolis. If Morosini did not exist we would not know what a ruin is and we would confuse it with memory.

Do you prefer Pheidias or Morosini? The car or the accident?

It is not easy to answer: Why do you dream that you are falling if you do not desire it? Without dreams you will never become I/EGO. (Calas 2001: 22)

No work better represents the idealism ridiculed by Calas than the work of the Swiss photographer Francois-Frédéric (Fred) Boissonnas (1858–1946) who, from 1903, made numerous trips to Greece during the next twenty-five years and produced thirteen albums based on them, defining the photographic image of the country in the first half of the twentieth century and beyond. His extensive work commences right after the Acropolis conservations of 1885–90 reached down to the natural rock, removing from it the last post-classical ruins, and (in albums like *Le Parthénon* of 1910–12) it memorializes the place as it has never looked since its days of ancient glory. His approach, which transformed professional photography into high art, was further justified when the Acropolis was turned into a stage by other photographers who introduced theatrical elements, such as dancers Isadora Duncan (1920),

Mona Paiva (1927), and Nikolska (1929). Recent volumes that must have had an impact on Calas included Albert Thibaudet's *L'Acropole* (1929) with copious Boissonnas illustrations, and the photographer's *Le tourisme en Grèce* (1930) with his own text and pictures. The former made a passionate case for the harmony between nature and architecture by emphasizing the qualities of sunlight on the rock, while the latter promoted modern Greece as a place with tremendous tourist magic.

Two famous visitors who arrived in Athens just months after the publication of Calas's poem can be taken as emblematic of opposite approaches to the Acropolis. When Filippo Tommaso Marinetti traveled to Athens in February 1933, the Athenian daily *Elefthero Vima* asked him to write a manifesto for the occasion, which it published under the title 'Raise your Flag: Manifesto to the Youth of Greece'. The Italian Futurists had been the first to ask for the systematic destruction of antiquities. In the famous 'Futurist Manifesto' of 1909, after calling for the demolition of museums and libraries, Marinetti had declared: 'It is from Italy that we launch through the world this violently upsetting, incendiary manifesto of ours. With it, today, we establish *Futurism* because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni and antiquarians' (Marinetti 1972: 42). This time, though, Marinetti did not ask for the destruction of the monuments, but he had the Parthenon shout to Greek students during a stormy night: 'Leave through my columns quickly because I am the prison of futile wisdom.' His advice to them was to turn their back to the Acropolis and kill their melancholy and nostalgia with original discoveries (Tournikiotis 1994: 245). A few months later, in July 1933, Le Corbusier, another influential writer of manifestos who had first visited Greece in 1911, returned for an international architecture conference. By polemically juxtaposing in his manifestos cars and grain elevators with ancient monuments, he had identified classicism as inherently modern and hoped that design would learn from classical scale and simplicity. His renewed call for a modern classicism was eagerly adopted by the Athenian press, but not by writers.

Greek authors who did not take as radical a stance as Calas's nevertheless remained sceptical throughout their lives. The Sorbonne professor and militant demoticist Jean (Yiannis) Psycharis (1854–1929) is an early example. In his poem, Calas mocks him for demoticizing the word Parthenon into 'Parthenos' (Psycharis 1971: 159). Apparently he has in mind the chapter 'The Ancients' in Psycharis's controversial travelogue *My Journey* (1888) where the scholar narrates his first ever trip to Greece in 1886. In it, the Odessa-born Psycharis (who married the daughter of Ernest Renan) climbs the Acropolis at noon and encounters all the famous ancient Greeks from the archaic to the Hellenistic era, working and conversing. Predictably, the diaspora scholar glorifies his ancestors, yet his visit ends on a very different note

when Aristophanes asks him about modern Greek achievements, and Psycharis is embarrassed to admit that they are non-existent. The comedian consoles him that these things take time but adds another consideration:

Then again it may be our fault that nothing has happened until now. Do you know what it means for a people to have us as ancestors? Do you know what kind of burden we are? Take a good look at the Acropolis. It looms over Athens as if it is about to fall on it and crush it. Our [modern] people here have the same fate: ancient glory is always about to crush them. Our poor children. You feel sorry for them and love them. They are doing their best. (Psycharis 1971: 167)

This is remarkable, especially coming from the son-in-law of the author of the 'Prayer on the Acropolis'. Even a nineteenth-century Greek expressing tremendous admiration for antiquity can depict the Acropolis as a threat to modern life.

Calas's contemporary and Nobel laureate, George Seferis (1910–71), represents another example of deep ambivalence. While sometimes he admires the monuments and feels he can relate to them, at other times he feels that they are doomed. Typical of the latter attitude are two responses from the opposite ends of his creative life. In 1926–8, before publishing his first collection in 1931, Seferis worked on *Six Nights on the Acropolis*, a novel whose central idea is, in the author's own words, 'the sickness of Athens, the sickness from Athens' (Seferis 1974: 284–5). The work was revised in 1954, and published posthumously in 1974. At the end of the third section, the protagonist Stratis, a writer, and his intellectual friends, have spent another night with a full moon on the Acropolis. Here is his parting thought before their descent: 'He had the impression that the Acropolis was new until that night and that two thousand years of compacted time had suddenly exploded and had turned it to rubble' (136). This sense of destruction and new beginning is confirmed later, at the beginning of the fifth section, when Stratis concludes that they find themselves in the first day of creation: 'The Acropolis is finished.' A friend consoles him: 'It was time we stopped acting like limpets on these stones. We had reached a dead end' (172).

More than forty years later, in 1970, in one of his last essays, Seferis discusses the interpretation of dreams and pays homage to Freud, citing his disturbance of memory on the Acropolis in 1904 (as recorded in 1936), by narrating a dream of his own. In it, he returns to Greece after a long absence to find the country highly modernized. When he climbs the Acropolis, he witnesses the auctioning of the Parthenon: to increase its revenue, the state is selling its monuments. To the general enthusiasm, today the highest bidder is an American toothpaste company. When everybody leaves, Seferis is left gazing at a frightfully bare Parthenon whose columns have been buffed into

huge toothpaste tubes (Seferis 1981: 327). In the case of both the early novel and the late essay, the grandeur of the rock is exhausted and the site is barren.

We find comparable views, also separated by decades, in the novels of George Theotokas (1905–66), a third eminent member of the famous literary generation of the 1930s, and a good friend of Calas and Seferis. His first novel, *Argo* (1933–6), deals with the governing bourgeois elite of the interwar generation. Nikiforos Notaras, a young student from a family with Byzantine roots, is an aspiring writer and national reformer who has returned from Paris and is dreaming of a rebirth of Hellenism. One night, under an almost full moon, he climbs the Acropolis, like his contemporary heroes in Seferis's *Six Nights*. As he admires the marble serenity and perfection of the buildings, he begins to hear a 'silent music', a combination of funeral march and triumphant hymn, whereby the rock proclaims that, while everything else perishes, it endures. 'The silent music of these ruins was something very stirring and harrowing, a contradictory paean that was tearing his soul, paean to the ephemeral and the eternal, to oblivion and to glory, to vanity and the absolute. He shook with terror. He felt terribly lonely in the night of the Acropolis, weak and defenseless against the world and fate' (Theotokas 1980: 100). The experience throws the narrator into utter confusion.

More than thirty years later, the narrator of Theotokas's last novel, *The Bells* (1966, published posthumously) is another national intellectual, a banker who is undergoing a mental breakdown. At one point, he abandons abruptly a conference he is attending in Stockholm to return to Athens and visit again the Parthenon, the 'divine marble poem' (1971: 74), in order to regain his balance in life. Once back on the rock, his first response is predictably ecstatic but soon he has a hallucination where the monument appears to be delicate and fragile. How can it be so self-confident about its secure future? The sea breeze from the Saronic Gulf that refreshed the night visitor to the Acropolis in *Argo* rises again. This time, though, it turns swiftly into a destructive force that hits the rock across its width and height. Within seconds, the breeze tumbles first the other monuments, last the Parthenon, and after piling them in a heap of materials, sweeps everything away, leaving the rock bare and parched. The promise of eternity that haunted the young Notaras has been shattered.

As Gregory Jusdanis has noted, Greek 'Modernism reacted against the calcification of classicism. Moreover, it became disenchanted with the restoration project in which archaeology was a chief participant. Instead of taking the past as a given to be exploited, modernist writers problematized their relationship to it. They increasingly asked themselves whether we could know the past at all as archaeology had promised, whether it could be resuscitated in a way still meaningful to the present, and whether the past had become a dead

weight' (Jusdanis 2004: 43–4). The three major modernists, Nicholas Calas, George Seferis, and George Theotokas, present the Acropolis as a site that falls prey to commercial, technological, and natural forces. Instead of praising its transcendent qualities, as did nearly all the contemporary foreign travellers, they see it as vulnerable and defenceless. They find that great art and classical values cannot protect themselves from appropriation and manipulation, let alone the passing of time. It is not that Greeks do not subscribe to aesthetic idealism, but, when it comes to the greatest symbol of their culture, they exhibit a remarkable scepticism toward its ability to still function as an eternal, sublime model.

This theme is not uncommon in Greek prose. The prologue of the short-story collection *The Bidet and Other Stories* (1970) by Marios Hakkas (1931–72) opens with the dazzling whiteness of the incandescent Pentelic marble. Immediately, an interior monologue is heard, struggling self-critically with the doubts of a disaffected leftist: 'Here I've wasted my time trying to beautify things. I've used my life to tide this landscape, to open a human path. I ended up throwing stones at the wind' (Hakkas 1986: 182). Two pages later, at the end of the prologue and the painful monologue, the hill now appears ashen like cement, with the Temple of the Wingless Victory a graveyard for broken, defeated wings. The novel *The Inconceivable Landscape* (1991) by Takis Theodoropoulos (b. 1954) includes the story of an old archaeologist who is suffering from depression caused by his obsessive idea that the Parthenon is doomed to disappear.

This sense of inescapable decay, this certainty that no shape, no matter how complex may be, can become self-sustainable . . . makes him consider himself useless and he wants to start all over again. Recognizing his weakness, he revolts against his Sisyphean fate and starts chasing his ghosts. In these instances he becomes aggressive and puts himself at risk since little things enrage him. The other day he quarreled with a taxi driver because he thought that he was taking him on purpose to places in Athens from where you can see the Acropolis. He asked him what he was driving at, what he wanted to say with the things he did and, as you can understand, the other guy threw him out. (Theodoropoulos 1991: 161–62)

This scepticism, which was first articulated by modernists, is pushed further by writers of the first post-Second World War generation, who take the next step and propose that the Acropolis be deliberately destroyed.

Yiorgos Makris, a friend of Nanos Valaoritis, was a man of letters who at twenty, in November 1944, wrote and circulated among his many eminent friends a manifesto, 'Proclamation no. 1', calling for 'the blowing up of ancient monuments, propaganda against antiquities, and every object we don't like' (Makris 1986: 253). The first destruction envisioned is 'the blowing



up and total demolition of the Parthenon which has really suffocated us' (253). Philosophically the document advocates a 'nihilism' of the 'psychologically and artistically superior' (252) destructive act that contributes to the cosmic cycle of death and rebirth. It rejects as alien to life the chronological and historical consolidation of art (as practised, say, by Pheidias) in favour of an existential and 'essential eternity' of formless matter that perishes and returns transformed. The document was supposed to be the first proclamation of the 'Association of Aesthetic Saboteurs of Antiquities'. In many respects, its ideas are not original and can be traced to the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. (For example, Calas was a member of the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Artists established in 1939 in Paris by André Bretton.)

What makes this document striking is its historical context. It appeared just months after the Acropolis, like the rest of Athens, was liberated from the Germans and freed of the swastika, which was removed from the hill. The idea of the demolition of a monument which had just returned to the hands of the free world must have been shocking, yet it captured the views of those marginal intellectuals who felt trapped by the dilemmas of the civil war that broke out in Athens two weeks later, in December 1944 (and lasted until 1949). The Parthenon that had been conquered by time and tourism now offered a lesson in the despotism of history and the tyranny of form. Liberation of creative instincts could only be achieved through the destruction of permanence.

Makris committed suicide in 1968, when he was forty-five, and did not live long enough to put his message into practice. The act was carried out by the hero of Christos Chrysopoulos's book-length story *The Bomber of the Parthenon*, a man of approximately the same age, interests, and world view with the young Makris. On Friday 5 January 1996, at 8.30 p.m. there was a series of explosions on the Acropolis. Marbles, stones, and pieces of the rock were hurled to great distances, and there was a fire in the surrounding flora. Seventy kilograms of dynamite caused total catastrophe. The next morning the world realized to its horror that there was nothing left: all monuments were destroyed. An introductory note refers to X. K., a twenty-two-year-old unemployed idealist who remains a visionary adolescent and is possessed by a certain neurosis: he has matters to settle with the Parthenon. The 'terrorist story', as the author (born in 1968) calls it, lasts four days, beginning on Saturday with the arrest of X. K., who the day before bombed the Parthenon, and ending on Tuesday with his secret execution.

X. K. is a typical hero of Romantic and post-Romantic literature: the revolutionary intellectual who is preoccupied with the grand Act, the unique act that blows up complacency and reaches an entire society with its bold

message. (For example, in drama, from Schiller's *The Robbers* to Camus's *The Just*, rebels envision acts of destruction whose evil is redeemed by their disruptive socio-political effect.) When X. K. begins looking for such an act, the choice is obvious: the monument that rules over the city. As he explains in his confession, he grew up hearing about its perfection and often went up there, challenging it to prove its greatness. He gave it many opportunities to overwhelm him, to seduce him, to conquer him. But the monument failed again and again. This made X. K. consider the motives of those who have been seduced by it. He found that people admire the Parthenon because beauty means nothing to them. If it did, they would seek it in themselves and those around them, not on the high rock. They would capture the spirit rather than lead such a spiritless existence. Admiring the monument is what they have been taught, not something they understand. The real power of the Parthenon is not aesthetic but symbolic—not its perfect presence but its circulation that floods the city with imagery, from t-shirts to restaurants, and postcards to companies. What does the Parthenon symbolize? People usually invoke measure, reason, freedom, and the like. In fact, it represents sameness: it helps the locals identify with the native and the familiar, protecting themselves from the different in their midst and the foreign from abroad. It helps them believe that they are not barbarians. Thus the Parthenon is just a construct. Having demythologized it, the narrator expects the monument to collapse under its own hollowness. Yet it continues to exercise its power and judge those below. 'There it is over there, still standing. People who do not know beauty consider it a model of elegance. People without knowledge have it a symbol of wisdom. People without spirituality have it as their spiritual guide. People who do not know how to live have it as a pathway. People who do not create have it as an alibi' (Chrysopoulos 1996: 24). The secret of its survival is not its strength but people's need to find excuses for their poverty. It helps them feel ancient, strong, great. The narrator realizes that he can fight the symbol but not the collective unconscious that reproduces it. He can fight the alibi but not the guilt that seeks it. His only option is to destroy this inheritance that inhibits instead of enabling, so that people can begin all over again as if born yesterday (30). Thus he starts daydreaming about the sublime spectacle of the explosion.

The dominant ideology is represented in the story by the testimony of a guard who remembers X. K. as a regular visitor to the Acropolis who never looked at anything else except the Parthenon, contemplating it as if in prayer. He feels that everything has been lost and without the monument people are nothing. He blames the whole country for the crime: 'We killed it, all of us' (39). People were small and unworthy of such greatness. The monument, which could see, feel, and speak, grew unhappy with its ongoing decline. The disappointment hurt and weakened it till it started rotting. In the end, it

puked its ruins on the population out of disgust. It chose its killer and asked him to put it out of its misery. After accusing the people for so many years, it has finally sentenced them (40). To the guard's mind, there is no doubt that, in his way, the killer loved the Parthenon too (42).

The story resonates with the revolutionary project of annihilation that uncompromisingly destroys the ruling order. As was the case with Makris's 'Proclamation', action turns against not a political system or a social structure but a regime of truth and its greatest sign, hence the story's subtitle, *The Demolition of Symbols*. The young loner is the greatest idealist who remains untouched by the consolidated power of artistic permanence and can see through the Parthenon myth. The moral of the story (61), though, is that this act will have no substantive impact because the motives of X. K. will never be disclosed: he has already been executed, and his testimony is locked away and will eventually be burned unopened. A replica of the temple is under construction and will be completed next year. Meantime, the secret service is exploring the possibility of foreign sabotage and scores of minorities have been arrested.

Similar foreign interests seem at first to lie behind the catastrophe that hits the Acropolis in *Sacrilegious Flight* (2003), the third novel by writer and attorney Vassilis Gouroyannis (b. 1951). The story takes place in the 2020s, some twenty years after the memorable 2004 Athens Olympics, those faultless Games which, from their Apollonian opening to their Dionysian conclusion, gave Greeks the opportunity to show a global audience why they are the worthy inheritors of a glorious heritage. The latest restoration on the Acropolis is approaching completion. On a fine day in June, an unidentified jet fighter evades all Greek radars, enters from the east the blue Attica sky, flies dangerously close to the monuments on the hill, and disappears before it can be intercepted. The tremor caused by the low flight leaves the Parthenon seriously damaged in an unprecedented way: its famously curved columns which rise in the shape of a pyramid, creating the illusion of straight lines, have been shaken out of shape and have been straightened. As a result, the architectural integrity of the temple has perished: every line appears crooked. The country is in shock: who could have done this and to what end? The recent landing of Turkish troops on the Greek island of Kos in the Dodecanese, and the provocative occupation of its airport for several hours, make it easy to establish a suspect. Thus both national sovereignty and cultural heritage are at stake in this attack against the bedrock of Hellenism. In his youthful manifesto, *Free Spirit* (1929), Theotokas had declared: 'An airplane in the Greek sky above the Parthenon exudes a new harmony that nobody has conceived yet' (Theotokas 1973: 70). Gouroyannis composes a wild parody of this notion, staging such an event a century later.

While in *The Bomber* we see a single individual grappling with the Parthenon, in the *Flight* we see an entire community. As repair work commences, the narrative follows for two years a group of some two hundred archaeologists, conservators, artisans, workers, guards, soldiers, and other state employees—a microcosm of Greek society working on the Acropolis. They belong to two major groups: a minority one of 'Greeks by blood' (people of Greek descent), and a larger one of 'Greeks by brevet' (adult children of immigrants who came to Greece in the late 1990s, primarily from Balkan and East European countries). The novel dramatizes the deeply interested way in which each group views the Parthenon. Even though it is a symbol of purity and it is supposed to elicit only disinterested admiration, all claims about it have an instrumental character.

The main question on everybody's mind is how true essence is established, preserved, recovered, and reconstructed, be it the essence of an artwork, a place, a person, or an ethnicity. As time, weather, foreign occupations, and human ignorance leave their marks on artefacts and bodies, the deeper truth of essence begins to fade. Most characters in the novel are determined to recover and reclaim essence from the past, but their searches collide over the same objects or courses. These searches pursue various forms of correspondence—between the original and the restored, the ancient and the modern, the straight and the crooked, identity and history, appearance and reality, name and meaning, form and content. That is why the country is engaged in a large-scale restoration project, caught in a 'feverish paroxysm of antiquity worship' (Gouroyannis 2002: 132). This is the 'national illness' which finds expression in returns and restorations.

The book is a hilarious postmodern allegory that parodies several metaphysical assumptions, from art to identity to continuity. It deploys an explicitly deconstructionist technique which turns everything and everybody into a mixture, showing that purity is always contaminated: ethnic Greeks have foreign blood; ancient figures resemble the immigrants (not the natives); the jet fighter turns out to be Greek (not Turkish); and all reconstructions cause more damage.

The most virtuosic use of deconstruction is its deployment in discussions about the Parthenon itself. Even before the sacrilegious flight, we are told, the temple was not what it seemed to be. Already in antiquity it had been destroyed and rebuilt. It had undergone four reconstructions. Its whiteness was only the loss of brilliant colours. Its apparent straight lines are curved. Given the unique kind of damage done to the monument by the sacrilegious flight, the work of repair needs to be explicitly deconstructive (96): everything that has been straightened by it must now be re-curved; everything that fits the idea of harmony must be de-formed so that the appearance of harmony

may return. The entire edifice must be taken apart. This is the great device of the novel that shows the conventionality of representation, the artificiality of correspondence, the historical natural of the timeless.

A professor who holds seminars on the Acropolis tells his students that the Parthenon is a 'cultural Centaur' (123), and it only reflects the condition of the people around him. Instead of seeking to restore harmony, Greeks should embrace the principle of non-correspondence, accepting that often things do not fit. A few people may be ready to repeat Freud's question: 'Does the Parthenon really exist?' (98). Yet, most Greeks in the book have a monumental view of the temple, a firm belief in its transhistorical essence that no interpretation or circumstance can taint.

Such is the belief in the total self-sufficiency of the monument that some see it as 'a living body' (56), the perfectly trained body of a dancer which salutes eternity in a frozen position, while others find the same person 'disobedient, almost autistic' (83), in his refusal to accept that reconstructions will be good for him and co-operate. Some see it as a patient who has physical wounds and needs healing, and others as one who needs systematic psychiatric treatment 'to recover its lost identity, to recover its memory' (169). In all these views, the Parthenon has taken on a life of its own, a life that is simultaneously artistic, cultural, ethnic, and symbolic. It no longer symbolizes, or even embodies—it lives.

In addition to the body, the novel deploys other metaphors. The Parthenon may also be conceived as a mirror that reflects not only the barbarians who attack it but also the Greeks who worship it (74). It is also possible that, since the last attack, the mirror hangs in the reverse, with its back side out, and 'it no longer mirrors the playful light but darkness' (183). A more radical view sees the monument as a convex mirror of Athenian glory. Athens was flourishing when marble was still in Mount Penteli because its citizens had no need for mirrors and were content to see their reflection in the waters of Salamis. After the Persian Wars they could walk on the Acropolis without stumbling and look fearlessly at their city among the ruins of temples. Thirty years later, they felt insecure enough to seek self-confirmation in a mirror of their own making, an exquisite artwork which reflected the past but distorted the present.

Another remarkable device of the novel is that it uses the open-air setting of the Acropolis to show the performative character of postmodern classical interpretation; that is, of all contemporary interpretation that deals with the classics. Everybody on the hill performs the Greeks—the guides do it for the tourists, the autochthons for the heterochthons, the scholars for the media, the press for its audience, the professors for the students, and so on. They all lay claim on Greekness by enacting in public an identity which they argue is

coherent, authentic, and ancient. In general, Gouroyiannis undermines classical notions to question stereotypes of all kinds—to show that straight lines, white marbles, ethnic homogeneity, and cultural continuity are all constructs. Together with almost all writers of his generation he can claim that the Parthenon 'is above all a locus/topos of our imagination' (Theodoropoulos 2002: 115).

These writers know that the Acropolis as an imperial and colonial construct leaves no place for living Greeks (Gourgouris 1996: 128–40). Travel literature has silenced them. Photography has edited them out of its timeless locations. Advertising has erased them from its images of blue sky. In film, if there is an encounter at all, it will resemble either that of an American archaeologist with an uneducated sponge-diving girl (Sophia Loren) from Hydra in *Boy on a Dolphin* (1957), or that of an American intellectual called Homer with a prostitute from Piraeus (Melina Mercouri) in *Never on Sunday* (1960) who cannot even keep *Medea's* story straight. Even recent academic books, like *The Parthenon* (2003) by Mary Beard, or *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present* (2005), edited by Jenifer Neils, do not mention any modern Greek writers, thinkers, or artists. It is as if the locals cannot visit, write, paint, or remake the Acropolis. Twentieth-century Greek authors understood this well: the Acropolis as heterotopia has no room for them. That is why, when they call for its 'destruction', they are trying to undermine a classicism without living Greeks. Their approach can be defined by another Heideggerian term: they are 'unbuilding' the edifice of Western Hellenism—not destroying it but taking it apart and revealing the layers of its construction, the history of its metaphysics. Commentators who have referred to the burden of the glorious past may have seen only part of the picture. Moving beyond belatedness, Greek writers have been conducting a critique of classical ideology. By doing so they create the possibility of a different culture, one that is not beholden to conservative classicism, reactionary humanism, oppressive monumentalism, and a Hellenism that disciplines Greeks.

We encounter similar attitudes in the arts too. The title of the first Athens Biennial International Art Exhibition, which took place from September to November 2007, was 'Destroy Athens'. Over fifty artists from all over the world were invited to critique three superimposed layers of stereotypical Athens, which the three curators (Xenia Kalpaktsoglou, Poka-Yio, and Augustine Zenakos) defined as follows in the 'Concept' page of the site <<http://www.athensbiennial.org>>:

Athens as a lived city is perceived almost exclusively through negative stereotyping (e.g., the pollution, the apartment building, the demonstrations) by its inhabitants.

Athens as a site-to-visit is advertised through positive stereotyping (e.g., the antiquities, the Olympic Games, or even Greek hospitality) by the Greek nationalistic construct in absolute accord with the worldwide cultural and tourist industries.

Athens as an emblem of western certainty is conscripted, again through positive stereotyping (e.g., the birthplace of democracy), to alleviate the guilt of a hegemonic civilization.

Unsurprisingly, every aforementioned layer is usually expressed through an aesthetic codification, be it the supposed 'real' Athens with its desiccated urban cityscapes, or the tourist Athens with its Acropolis, or the universal, timeless Athens—that imaginary, ahistorical place, where justice and democracy always rule and inspire us.

In exhibits and other events, participants attacked both negative and positive stereotypes of Athens, questioning dominant notions of place, past, and identity.

We can find an alternative Athenian view of the Acropolis in the chapter 'New World in the Old Place: The New Panathenaea' of the futuristic young adult novel *From the Departing World to the Coming World* (1935) by writer Petros Pikros (1900–56). Two young people, a Greek boy and a black girl, travel the globe in a utopian future where socialism has prevailed in the world. As their flying machine circles the Acropolis, they find that the Parthenon has been fully repaired. After centuries of damage inflicted by Byzantines, Venetians, Ottomans, English, and certain Greeks, the temple has been restored to its original form by the ruling 'universal civilization', the global regime of brotherhood. Now it occupies an eminent position in world culture but it is no longer considered the perfection or completion of anything. It is just a great page in the story of humanity. Obviously Pikros's novel belongs to science fiction. But it is remarkable that its Greek vision restores the Acropolis by the whole world for the whole world.

With all due respect

We have more important issues than the Acropolis

(Montis 1978: 22)

## Bibliography

Calas, Nikolaos (1977), Odos Nikita Rantou (Athens: Ikaros)

(1983), Graphe kai phos (Athens: Ikaros)

(2001), "Mavres floges" Anti 731 (February 9), 22-3

Chrysopoulos, Christos (1996), O vomvistic tou Parthenona i To gkremisma ton symbolon (Athens: Anatolikos)

Derrida, Jacques (1996), "Demeure, Athènes" in Jean-Francois Bohnhomme: Athènes à l' ombre de l' Acropole (Athens: Olkos)

Giannakopoulou, Liana (2002), "Perceptions of the Parthenon in Modern Greek Poetry" Journal of Modern Greek Studies 20: 2 (October), 241-72

Gourgouris, Stathis (1996), Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece (Stanford: Stanford University Press)

Gouroyiannis, Vassilis (2002), Vevili ptisi (Athens: Metaichmio)

- Hakkas, Marios (1986), Apanta (Athens: Kedros)
- Jusdanis, Gregory (2004) "Farewell to the Classical: Excavations in Modernism" Modernism/Modernity 11:1 (January), 37-53
- Kotanidis, Yiorgos (2004), Oi saltibagkoi (Athens: Kastaniotis)
- Leontis, Artemis (1995), Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland (Ithaca: Cornell University Press)
- Makris, Yiorgos V. (1986.), Grapta. Ed. E. Ch. Gonatas (Athens: Vivliopoleion tis Estias)
- Mallouchou-Tufano, Fani (1998), I anastilosi ton archaion mnimeion sti neoteri Ellada (1834-1939): To ergo tis En Athinais Archaialogikis Etaireias kai tis Archaialogikis Ypiresias (Athens: I En Athinais Archaialogiki Etaireia)
- Marinetti [F. T.] (1972), Selected Writings. Translated by R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- Montis, Kosta (1978), Anthologisi apo tis Stigmes 1958-1975. G. P. Savidis, ed. [correction for the record: anthologized by the author, with the help of Yiorgos Kehayioglou.] (Athens: Kedros)
- n.d [= no editor] (2002), ...Egrapsan via tin Acropoli, 1850-1950 (Athens: Enosi Philon tis Acropoleos)
- Pikros, Petros (1935), Apo ton kosmo pou erchetai ston kosmo pou fevgei I afto pou den sophistike oute o sophos Aristotelis (Athens: Petros Dimitrakos)
- Psycharis, Yiannis (1971), To taxidi mou [1888] (Athens: Ermis)
- Seferis, Yiorgos (1981), "'Glosses' ston Artemidoro ton Daldiano" [1970]. In Dokimes vol. 2: 313-31 (Athens: Ikaros)
- (1974), Exi nychtes stin Acropoli (Athens: Ermes)
- Theodoropoulos, Takis (1991), To adianoito topio (Athens: Estia)
- (2002), Oi metamophoseois tis Elladas (Athens: Okeanida)
- Theotokas, George (1971) Oi kampanes [1966] (Athens: Vivliopoleio tis Estias)
- (1973), Elefthero pnevma [1929] (Athens: Ermes).
- (1980), Argo [1936] (Athens: Vivliopoleio tis Estias)

Toumikiotis, Panagiotis, ed. (1994), O Parthenonas kai i aktinovolia tou sta neotera chronia (Athens:

Melissa)

Valaoritis, Nanos (2002), Ta spasmena cheria tis Afroditis tis Milou (Athens: Agra)