

Smyrna: Large-format panorama of the seafront. Late 19th-century postcard. (Antonis Mailis Archive)

vein of irony here – one of the main features of Politis’ writing – and much sarcasm, as well as incessant discussion, mainly in *Hecate*, of philosophical and other matters.

Politis was born in Athens but grew up and came of age in the cosmopolitan environment of the city of Smyrna, where he came into contact with Western European culture and literature. However, memories of the lost city, after its defeat and the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922, did not begin to surface in him until his third novel, *Eroïca*, which appeared in 1937 and was the novel that made his reputation. This novel, which critics considered to be superior to *Grand Meaulnes*, the novel it was modelled on, appears to take place in Patras, where Politis was transferred and worked between 1934 and 1942, but the story begins with childhood memories of Smyrna. Its heroes are children imitating adults, pretending to be firemen, wearing helmets like those worn in ancient times and trying to put out fires they themselves have started. This innocent childhood ‘heroism’ is very skilfully interwoven with a precocious introduction to death and with the first erotic awakenings of adolescence. Time is continually changing and the action seems to be shifted away from the feats of imaginative heroes to the valour of the heroes of *The Iliad*. So when Andreas, the protagonist, dies, his beloved friend Loizos organizes athletic games, partly as a way to re-activate the group and partly as a parody of the burial games for Patrocles in *The Iliad*. The novel is characterised by a harmonious interconnection of many different motifs, and by its ‘musical’ structure. It is written with humour and with nostalgia both for lost youth and its guileless ‘heroism’ and for Greece’s heroic past, which seems to have haunted these child heroes.

After World War II profound changes can be observed in Politis. The author, who until then had been accused of indifference to public issues, became a member of the Communist Party, and did so during a period of intense political conflict and civil strife (1944-1945). Later he even became a founding member of the Greek Leftist Party (EDA). He ran for parliament but was not elected. This political shift in Politis can be seen in his next novel *Gyri* (the name of a neighbourhood in Patras) in 1945. This was followed by the publication of some short stories and also a historical drama about Constantine the Great in 1957; and in 1963, at an advanced age, he published



Refugees from Asia Minor boarding boats, 1922. (E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)



The city set alight by the Turkish cavalry. The Greek inhabitants waiting for boats. (The Association of Smyrnans Photographic Archive)



Panic reigns as people board the boats. (E.L.I.A. –Manos Haritatos Archive)



Kosmas Politis at home in Psychiko, Athens. (E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

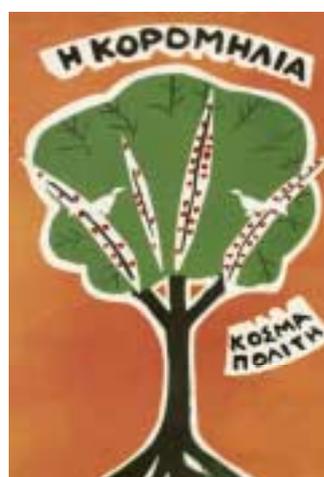
his last complete novel *In the Hadjifrangou Quarter* (a neighbourhood in Smyrna). The action takes place at the beginning of the 20th century in Smyrna well before the 1922 Disaster, at a time when native Greeks, Turks, Jews and other nationalities lived side by side in the city without animosity – a climate and an era that other authors have also tried to bring to life. Although *In the Hadjifrangou Quarter* represents a conscious return to the shores of Asia Minor, it cannot be said to be a typical ‘historical novel’. Nevertheless current history and, for the most part, the city itself seem to dominate the action within a spirit of cosmopolitanism and peace, but there are sinister forebodings concerning the future. The novel appears to be composed of small, unconnected stories, which are interposed and apparently unrelated to the main characters, yet it never loses its unity. The free use of dramatic time, the continuous

alternation between past and present (the main narrator is both a child in the Smyrna of old and a refugee in the present), the interweaving of the fictitious with the real, the skilful narrative disorder and also the intensity of emotional experience are the primary components of the novel, making it one of the most important modern post-WWII works. Politis’ unfinished novel *The End* was published posthumously.

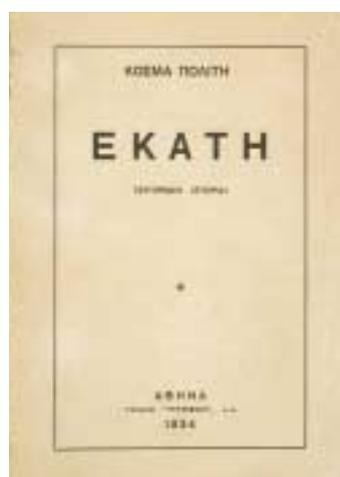
In one of his rare interviews Politis claimed that he felt himself to be an “amateur writer”, which is, as he said, not a good thing; and elsewhere he stated, clearly ironically, that he considered art a game. The truth is that this ‘non-professional’ novelist succeeded, through ‘play’, in acquiring an important place in modern Greek prose, and his novels (in particular the first and the last two) became the favourite reading and the reference point of many generations.



Greece 1963



Greece 1959



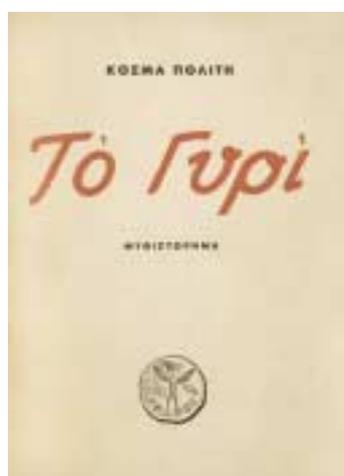
Greece 1934



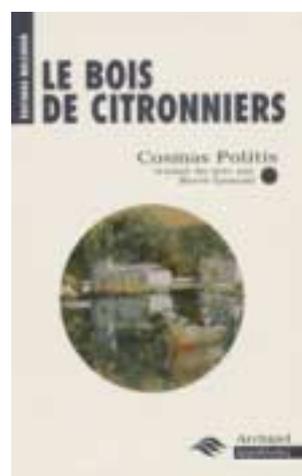
Greece 1937



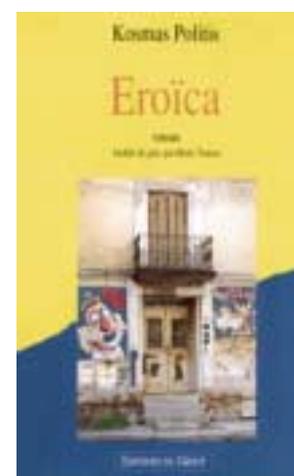
Greece 1930



Greece 1945



Switzerland 1995



France 1992



Makeshift refugee housing, Anafiotika quarter, below the Acropolis, Athens. Photograph by Nelly. (Benaki Museum Photographic Archive)



Refugees from Asia Minor, 1922. (E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

The defeat of the Greek forces in Asia Minor in September 1922 was followed by a violent process of total eradication of Hellenism from one of its most ancient sites. The precise number of the dead and missing has yet to be established; a great many managed to flee to Greece. However, the majority of the Greek population of Asia Minor was exchanged for the Turkish residents of northern Greece and Crete. Even today, the Greek word *prosfygia* still denotes the endless influx of refugees (estimated to have exceeded 1,000,000) from Asia Minor in the early 1920s. The nation which had seen its dreams of the restoration of a lost homeland become reality at the end of WWI, once again found itself in the throes of chaos and despair. Yet thanks to the dynamism, hard work, and national pride of the refugees, Greece soon got back on its feet sufficiently to effect social, political and artistic change. The Asia Minor refugees, from Constantinople and Pontos, are today completely absorbed into Greek society. Both the older and younger generations keep the memory and the tradition of these lost but never forgotten homelands alive.

Fotis Kontoglou's significance for the history of modern Greek literature is not in dispute, but he is difficult to place, resisting as he did any identification with literary groups, schools and movements. Moreover, he jealously guarded his dual identity as writer and artist, which further complicates the picture. However, his work, when evaluated as a whole, invites the conclusion that he was less a writer in the conventional sense of the term than a creator and interpreter of images.

Kontoglou was born in 1896 in Ayvali, Asia Minor, where he was educated to a very high standard. In 1912 he enrolled in the School of Fine Art at Athens and worked closely with the painter Spyros Papaloukas.

After losing his family during the Turkish destruction of Ayvali (1914-17) he set off to travel around Europe, where he took up a variety of jobs, including coal mining and turnery in a number of cities. Once in Paris he attended art classes and worked for the periodical *Illustration*, where he came into contact with the leading figures of the contemporary scene, including Rodin and Maeterlinck. The bizarre tales of treasure hunters and pirates which abounded in Paris fuelled his imagination.

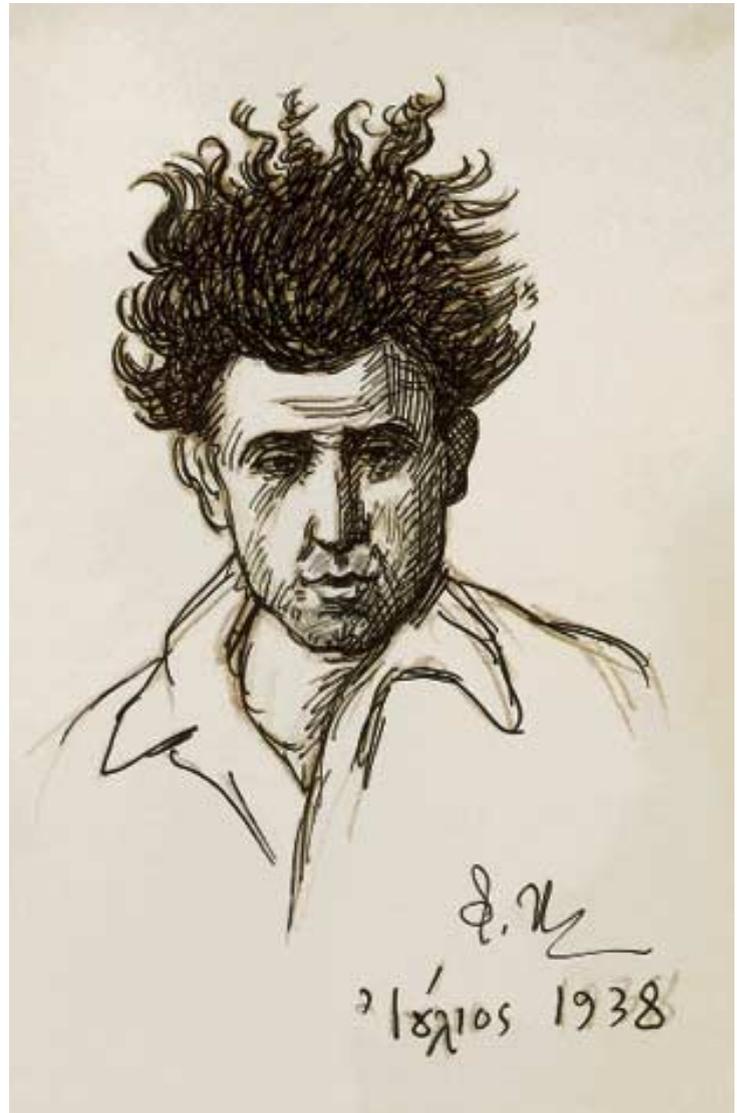
In 1919 he returned home, but the Asia Minor disaster of 1922 forced him to flee to Mytilini as a refugee. From there he moved to Athens where he made a name for himself with the publication of his first book *Pedro Cazas* (1920), "the story of a Spanish buccaneer who either lived for three hundred years or returned from Hell, told for the first time". The book carried the author's own exquisite illustrations, was lauded by the critics, but despite its positive reception in literary circles, Kontoglou never chose to mix in the usual way with the literati of the capital.

In 1923 he made a trip to Mt Athos where the Byzantine and post-Byzantine artistic tradition and the simplicity of the humble monastic life on the Holy Mountain made a profound impression on him. The results of this encounter with nature and spirituality on Athos are discernible in *Vasanta*, a collection of assorted texts, including the short story *How Ignatius Feared, Thief, Met his Death*, letters, memoirs, poems and translations of Shakespeare, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, *Robinson Crusoe* and the Psalms of David. In this work, all the themes which were to preoccupy Kontoglou throughout his literary career are clearly discernible.

The sea, ascetics, 'primitive' African natives, spirits and goblins, the entire spectrum of historical and mythical memory, reawakened in the forgotten, extraordinary narratives of famous, frequently marginal, characters, were all sources of inspiration for Kontoglou who, as a genuine artist, used the power of the imagination to reconstitute this heroic world, transforming it into an Eastern tale in simple and accessible language, after first "making everything a painting". In *Journeys* (1928) and *Astrolabe* (1934) he describes some of his favourite places, and processes or collects stories from around the world, his sole criterion being that they should be beautiful and bring pleasure to the reader. *The God Konanos* (1943) adopts a more cryptic style, relying more on allegory and symbol.

After WWII the cosmopolitan artist of the 1920s became increasingly introspective and hardened his stance against technology and against the tendency of Western culture to dominate. Henceforth Kontoglou was to evaluate everything against the criterion of the Christian faith and Orthodoxy. He

## FOTIS KONTOGLOU



The writer and artist Fotis Kontoglou, *Self Portrait*, 19x13 cm, 1938. (Private collection)

became increasingly absorbed in the legends of the saints which he recast in a lively demotic language (*The Secret Garden*, 1944). At the same time Kontoglou mounted a crusade to preserve Greek tradition as expressed in folk art, music, popular song and Karagiozis shadow theatre, forms which were on the wane in the wake of the turn towards European culture. The main front on which he fought this crusade was in the realm of ecclesiastical art, and he arranged several exhibitions of icons and published books on the subject, for example the monumental volume *Expression* (1960). In this way, Kontoglou managed to rekindle interest in the largely forgotten splendours of Byzantine icon painting (which tended to be seen as a rather insignificant chapter in the history of Western art, as the painter George Hadjimichalis recently observed). Citizen of the world, and the citizen of no country. He provoked great arguments and divisions only to prove an immense unifying influence and a great apologist for Greek cultural identity.

# THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

For sixty-five years, from the liberal military coup of 1909 until the fall of the 1967-74 colonels' dictatorship, fledgling modern Greek democracy searched for an identity and endeavoured to develop with slow, unsteady and faltering steps.

These long-lasting disturbances caused a large portion of Greek prose writing to lean towards a realistic depiction of national wars and political and social instability. Pitting their heroes against all sorts of adversity, Greek novel and short story writers between the years 1930-1960 attempted to provide answers to complex issues of national identity and at the same time to provoke discussion of awkward dilemmas on the subject of personal responsibility and the necessity or futility of personal commitment to causes. The most prominent characteristic of pre- and post-WWII Greek prose writing, as critics have pointed out, is a terrible passion for inquiry – a passion which sought to define the national, social and moral issues of their era.

Many of the best novels written between the two World Wars, such as *Leonis* by Yorgos Theotokas, *The Chronicle of a Town* by Pantelis Prevelakis, *Aeolian Earth* by Ilias Venezis and *The Violet City* by Angelos Terzakis, strove to find the deeper meaning of being Greek. The authors expressed nostalgia for their place of birth, which had been irrevocably obliterated either because time, in the course of progress, had mercilessly destroyed the old, familiar, beloved face of the city and its inhabitants, or because the intermittent years of military conflict and population exchanges had transformed their place of origin into a place of fantasy and dreams outside the domain of reality.

Wanting, in addition, to make sense of the conditions within which the new Hellenism was formed and shaped, those writing between the two world wars turned to the historical novel, such as *Princess Ysabeau* by Angelos Terzakis with its medieval heroine, *The Cretan* by Pantelis Prevelakis with its militant heroes, *Captain Michalis* by Nikos Kazantzakis, and *The Lord of the Castle* by M. Karagatsis, a novel about the War of Independence which opened in 1821. The investigation of the realities of modern life between the two world wars was in fact the aim of certain prose writers, giving rise to such works as *Argo* by Yorgos Theotokas, whereas a deep-rooted nostalgia for the adventures of adolescence and a natural cosmopolitanism produced the spellbinding novel *Eroica* by Kosmas Politis. Many of these writers took on the role of national spiritual leaders and at the same time became apologists for the values of the beleaguered Greek civil democracy.



Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas, *Girl Seated in an Armchair*, 1939, tempera on plaster, 37 x 30 cm.  
(Private Collection, Benaki Museum - Ghika Gallery, Athens)



(Hestia Publications Archive)

### YORGOS THEOTOKAS

Yorgos Theotokas was both the pathfinder and the theoretical backbone of the new school of Greek literature in the 1930s. He demanded dynamism and inventive ideas from his age and generation. In his novel *Argo* (1933) he undertakes the ambitious task of presenting both the individual and the collective features of the young students at Athens University. He was firmly of the belief that the novelist must arrest reality at the time of its birth, in other words at the moment when phenomena which define the future are created.



(E.L.A. Photographic Archive)

### PANTELIS PREVELAKIS

Through his prose works, Pantelis Prevelakis observes the Greek past in a highly original manner. In his *Chronicle of a Town* (1937) and in *Death of De' Medici* (1939), the author, who frequently exploits the rich resources and expressive potential of the vernacular to lend authenticity to the words of his heroes, signals to his readers the importance of cohesion and security in a society which has yet to open itself up to major new influences. And in this respect, Prevelakis is the mythmaker of collective memory.



(National Research Institute Photographic Archive)

### ANGELOS TERZAKIS

A highly reflective essayist and novelist. Most of Terzakis' novels communicate his conviction that mankind has reached a dead end, both on an individual and a collective level. In *The Bound* (1932), *The Decadence of the Tough* (1933) and *Without God* (1951) the writer demonstrates the fragility of family, sexual and social relationships, as they follow their inevitable trajectory towards decay, degradation and decadence. What Terzakis is at pains to emphasise as he denounces his heroes is their personal rejection of conscience and their inability to find salvation in external reality.



Photo by Johanna Weber

### DIDO SOTIRIOU

Dido Sotiriou was born in Aidani in Asia Minor in 1909. From her first novel, *The Dead Are Waiting* (1959) to the work which established her reputation, *Bloodied Earth* (1962), she draws on the tragedy of 1922. Her central hero is a farmer who looks back with nostalgia to the days when Greeks and Turks lived side by side in peace before the Disaster of Asia Minor. In *Bloodied Earth* Sotiriou shows that the cause of the catastrophe was not some time-old metaphysical racial hatred, but was determined by political interests of the time.

# THE AVANT-GARDE NOVEL

## THREE INSTANCES



N.G. Pentzikis in 1982, holding a forget-me-not.  
Photograph by Yannis Vanidis.

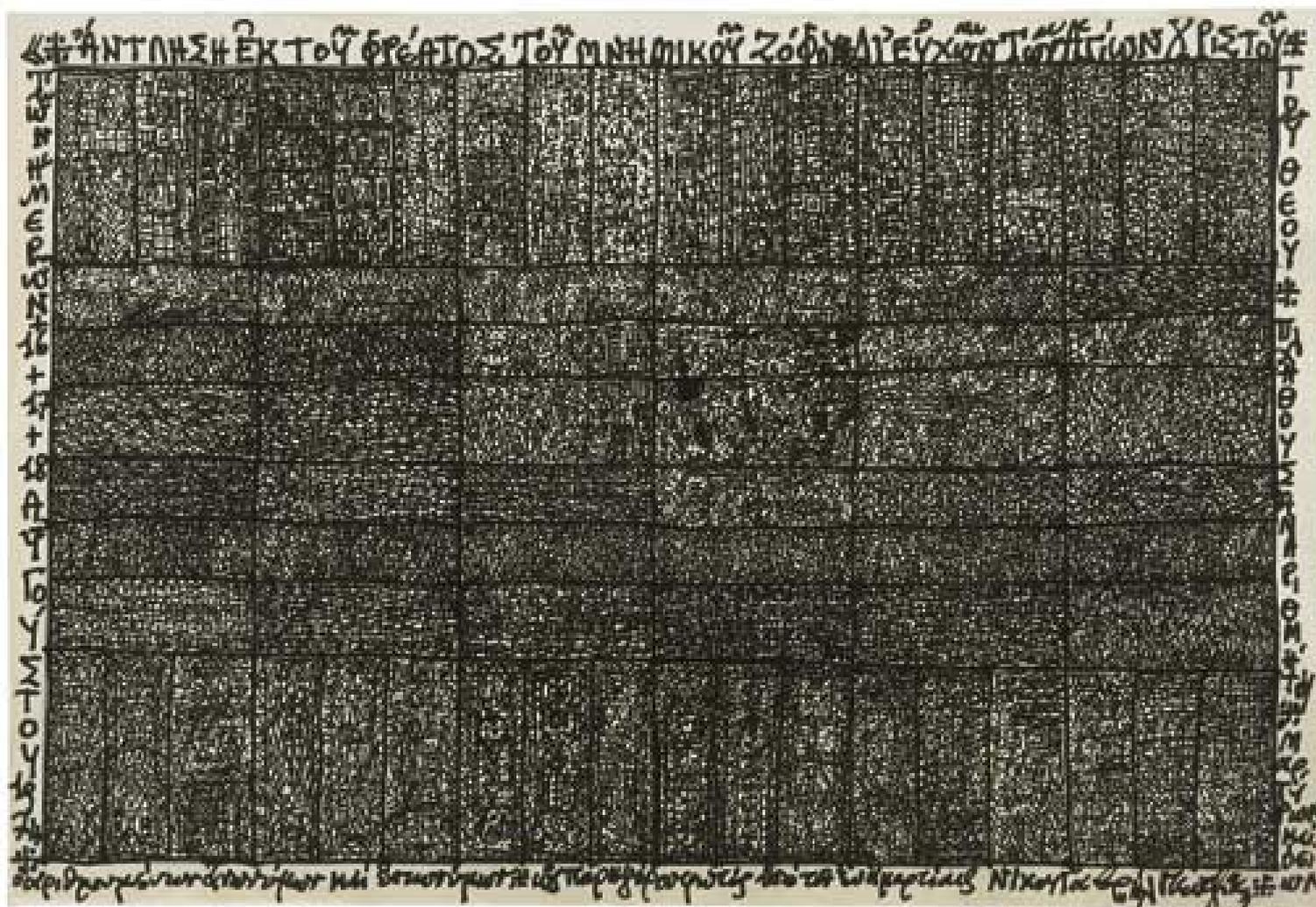
N.G. PENTZIKIS AND KOCHLIAS

Few modern Greek writers have met with the critical embarrassment that was reserved for N.G. Pentzikis (1908-1993). His eccentric style developed round a highly personal poetics based on description: listing, cataloguing, classifying, recording minute details. *Architecture of a Dissipated Life* (1963) and *Archive* (1974) center round the logic of discontinuity, a carefully charted wandering among closets, files and cabinets, an *ordo neglectus*, a systematic anarchy. A continuous yet fragmented text analyses and compounds apparently endless self-commentary and variations. It delves deep into the specific, the apparently trivial and insignificant, exploring the last particle of time and space in its effort to represent all: it is a work in search of its own guiding principles. *The Novel of Mrs Ersi* (1966) is marked above all by a disjointed, paratactical mode of writing, where the principal theme is constantly marginalised. This novel presents us with a kaleidoscopic text that has done away altogether with a conventional time frame, weaving the threads of the future, the present and past in a single fabric. The overriding style of *Mrs Ersi* is that of a palimpsest, of the imbrication of narrative, where an old story (by G. Drosinis, 1922) is retold and recast. The tale by Drosinis provides the main characters and general plot, but Pentzikis' reworking, remolding and transformation creates a startlingly phantasmagoric parody of the original the likes of which have not been seen elsewhere in Greek letters.

Pentzikis plays games constantly with his own programme



Thessaloniki, view of the White Tower from the harbour, 1932, photograph by Perikles Papahadjidakis (Benaki Museum Photographic Archive).



N.G. Pentzikis, *Drawing from the Well of Indistinct Memory*, 18x24 cm., 1974. (Private Collection)

and with the traps that he sets in his own tales. If the protagonists of the OuLiPo were able to read his works they would surely have made him a leading member of their movement.

It seems unlikely, perhaps, that a restless, unorthodox personality like Pentzikis could have been the moving spirit behind the short-lived (two years) avant-garde review published in Thessaloniki under the title *Kochlias*. Sharing a number of features with the Athenian arts review *Trito Mati* (Third Eye) – largely on account of the close friendship of Stratis Doukas with Pentzikis – *Kochlias* attracted the collaboration of a small group of artists and young writers (Themelis, Pentzikis, Kitso-poulos, Karelli, Xefloudas, Svoronos, Tsizek and others). The review came out in a total of 22 issues and succeeded in blending the modern with the traditional (chiefly Byzantine), and, in its translation section, introduced a significant number of foreign writers to the Greek reading public that were only later translated in Athens-based journals. Writings by Joyce, Eluard, Neruda, Apollinaire, Lorca, Lautréamont, Kierkegaard, Dos Passos and others all appeared in the pages of *Kochlias*, and certainly played a part in the formation of the style of the Thessaloniki ‘school’ of writers. Besides foreign writers, *Kochlias’* pages also hosted works by the younger generation of writers in Northern Greece.



The periodical *Kochlias*, no. 18, Thessaloniki, June 1947, carrying Pentzikis’ translation of Mallarmé’s *Igitur*.



Yannis Skarimbas photographed in Halkida in the early 1980s.

YANNIS SKARIMBAS (1893-1984) was something of an outcast poet and playwright. Living in Halkida (where he remained throughout his life), he emerged on the literary scene during the interwar period, alongside the generation of the 1930s, though he was always careful to maintain a distance from the prevailing literary modes of his day. His own highly personal and iconoclastic style, his liking for the dislocation of discourse, his tendency to turn the apparently ‘true’ inside out, and his faith in the power of wordplay were defining characteristics that set him slightly apart from the surrealist school to which so many critics sought to attach him. He seeks to surprise the reader through his strategy of caustic satire and subversive irony, which serve to keep his pen on the verge of scandal. In his first novel, *The Divine Goat* (1933), he employs an avant-garde style that formed the basis for his future experiments in his personal anti-novel genre: the deranged and enigmatic tales of *Mariambas* (1935), *Figaro’s Solo* (1939), and *The Waterloo of Two Fools* (1959). A solitary stylist, eccentric, sarcastic, and a menace to every convention and rule, Skarimbas has largely escaped the serious critical attention that he deserves.



Halkida, 11 June 1948. Photograph by Stefanos Malikopoulos. (Benaki Museum Photographic Archive)

MELPO AXIOTI (1905-1973) is surely one of the most important women writers in modern Greek letters. She belongs to that large group of writers and artists whose life and work became inextricably linked to the politics of the Left. She joined the Communist Party in 1936, and later worked tirelessly in the Greek resistance under Nazi occupation. In 1947 she left Greece for France in order to escape likely imprisonment on account of her political activities. She had already published *Difficult Nights* (1938), the highly unconventional novella *Shall We Dance, Maria?* (1940) and the equally avant-garde *Twentieth Century* (1946). Following her expulsion from France (1950), where she had been part of a large circle of distinguished intellectuals including Eluard and Aragon, she began a long trail of exile in the 'People's Republics' of Eastern Europe. These were the years of loneliness and isolation, when she limited her writing activity to militant political tracts that conformed to the party line. After 17 years outside Greece she returned and, shortly before she died, published her masterpiece *Kadmo* (1972). Despite her periodic submission to the conventions of socialist realism, Melpo Axioti created an innovative, stream-of-consciousness style that marked her out from her fellow Greek writers. Traditional narrative is overturned and split open in her works, while a strange perception of time emerges, forged out of the games of the fantastic and the fits of memory.



(Kedros Publications Archive)

# M. KARAGATSIS



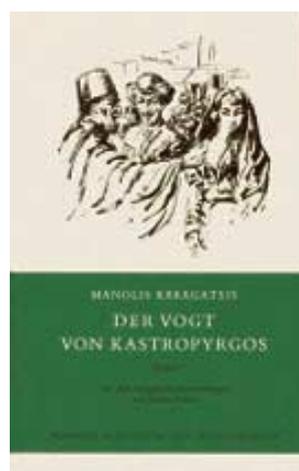
The novelist M. Karagatsis. Photograph by Andreas Embiricos.  
(Marina Karagatsi Archive)

Despite his relatively short life (1908-1960), M. Karagatsis was a highly prolific writer, with an impressive list of short stories and novels to his name. From his earliest publications to the present day, Karagatsis is a unique publishing phenomenon: no other fiction writer of his generation was and still is read as avidly. Karagatsis handles a vast array of narrative forms, ranging from the historical to the social, to fantasy literature and exotic adventure, but always preserving intact a compact mixture of realism and expressionism at the heart of his work. From the first titles which established his reputation as a writer - *Colonel Lyapkin* (1933), *Chimaera* (1936), and *Jungermann* (1938) (undoubtedly some of his greatest works too)—to the novels of his maturity, Karagatsis' focus was on erotic passion, violence, impulsive reactions to the difficult and unexpected situations life presents, and the quest for the different or the absolute in a world which legislates with harsh measures, setting provocative limits on human freedom and personal expression.

Karagatsis was above all a beguiling narrator and skilful storyteller. His many heroes often find themselves suffocated by the terms of unworkable social contracts. Their frequent victimisation and marginalisation at times assumes the form of something holy. Karagatsis always succeeds in constructing a captivating narrative in which the plot is always paramount. Two of his most important creations, the Russian Colonel Lyapkin and the French heroine Marina (married to a Greek captain) both lead very turbulent lives: the Colonel, hounded by guilty memories and broken by his weakness for alcohol; Marina, consumed by insatiable erotic passion) they are gradually led with mathematical precision to total ruin. For Karagatsis this kind of annihilation was the rule, the outcome of the negative strength of his characters in combination with the bleak environment that produced them.



France 1991



Switzerland 1962



Germany 1968



Albanian Front, 1940. By the banks of the River Devolis. Photograph by D.A. Harissiadis. (Benaki Museum Photographic Archive)

## THE PROSE OF WAR

The wars that Greece took part in during the 20th century (the Balkan Wars, World War I and World War II) and the aftermath of these wars (the Asia Minor Disaster and the Civil War) were responsible for the emergence in Greece, as elsewhere, of what has been called 'the war novel', though one might question the exact connotation of this term: first, in regard to the word 'war', since in none of these novels are there direct descriptions of wartime conflict but rather of the conditions soldiers endured in wars fought with advanced technology and of the suffering of the combatants and of civilians after the war; and,

second, in regard to the word ‘novel’ in as much as there is not a classic structure with a composite plot and a plausible ending. Because of limited space, reference will be made to certain works only by way of example.

The novel *Life in the Tomb*, by Stratis Myrivilis, successively sub-titled ‘Manuscripts Found in the Backpack of Sergeant Antonis Kostoulas’, ‘Tales of War’, and now ‘The Book of War’, was first published in 1924 in the literary series ‘I Kambana’ on the island of Mytilini. It was re-issued in an updated edition in Athens in 1930, with additional revisions in subsequent editions from the 3rd edition in 1931 to the 7th in 1955. It contains the published diary entries and undelivered letters written by the now deceased sergeant, Antonis Kostoulas, from the trenches in Macedonia during World War I.

The novel *Number 31328*, by Ilias Venezis, later sub-titled ‘The Book of Captivity’ or ‘The Book of Slavery’, first appeared in print in 1924, was published in 1931 and again, with minor but noteworthy revisions, in 1945 and 1952. It is a chronicle of the author’s own ‘captivity’ as a prisoner of war in a labour camp in Anatolia from 1922 until his release.

*A Prisoner’s Story*, by Stratis Doukas, first came out in 1929, followed by a revised edition in 1932 and further revisions in later editions, mainly in the 1958 edition. It records, in the form of an oral account, the adventures of one Nikolas Kozakoglou who is arrested by the Turks during the Asia Minor Disaster, escapes with a friend, lives in hiding with him disguised as a Turk, and eventually manages to escape and regain his freedom in Greece.

*The Broad River* by Yannis Beratis first came out in 1946, followed by an expanded edition in 1965. Its initial hand-written title was ‘A Journey through War’. It describes as an adventurous experience both the up-country trek of the author/narrator to the Albanian front, during the war between Greece and Italy, in order to broadcast propaganda to the Italians, and his unruly ‘descent’ following the German invasion of Greece.

Finally, there is *Descent of the Nine* by Thanassis Valtinos, which was written in 1959 and first appeared in the periodical

*Epoches* in 1963; it was published in book form in 1978. It relates the oral testimony of a young guerrilla, the sole survivor of a group of defeated communists travelling through the Peloponnese trying to avoid arrest and make their way to the sea and to freedom through inhospitable mountainous terrain.

Almost every one of these texts refers to a different war, therefore to a different time, and in terms of place they cover just about everywhere, including greater Greece. They differ in their form and in their content between the first writing (close to the time of war) and their definitive publication, which means that almost all the authors extensively reworked their material either for artistic or for ideological reasons, the prime example being Myrivilis. It has recently been suggested, moreover, that both the change in the dedication of Doukas’ novel (1st edition: “Dedicated to the common suffering of the Greek and Turkish peoples”; 3rd edition: “Dedicated to the common suffering of all people”) and also the addition of verse from the Psalms instead of chapter headings in Venezis’ work, may be due to the fact that these authors were now looking at the Asia Minor Disaster within the context of the Jewish Holocaust.

Although each of these novels refers to a different war, one can still discern certain similarities in them, the most characteristic being the use of the first person singular. Whether his voice is the same as the author’s (Venezis, Beratis), or belongs to a persona (Myrivilis), or to a common man, the narrator makes use of diaries, letters, confessions, oral testimonies or travel journals in order to illustrate a pre-eminently historical event, such as war. This he does not in the style of a working historian but through the use of the records and sources of historical writing. The use of the first person narrator signals a departure or a turning away from the historical recording of a public event, which, in any case, is not easy to describe. It also limits the individual’s attention to those facts and insignificant events he saw and heard with his own eyes and ears and, above all, experienced with his own body (hunger, thirst, violence). The historical event is approached through forms that are peculiar to personal experience, not to the experience of the heroic personage or the victor but to that of an all-inclusive, collective “I” attempting to survive or, in the best of circumstances, to preserve some human dignity.

Of course, wars are not all the same. The thwarting of the enthusiastic hopes of young people, who believed that World War I was an opportunity for all sorts of revolutionary changes, is manifest in Myrivilis’ work, and is expressed by the author as a denunciation of war in unfailingly lofty tones with extravagant use of the demotic form of modern Greek combined with pronounced stylistic affectation. On the contrary, World War II, believed in Greece to have been a necessary moral response to fascism, is depicted as such by Beratis, a first-hand witness, through his use of a simple selection of counterpoised details drawn from everyday life on the front, which the author arranges with artistry and musicality. The remaining three authors write of the fate of the vanquished and the persecuted during the Asia Minor Disaster or the Civil War. In these works the horror of war is not described realistically through conventional literary devices (except perhaps by Venezis whose ‘over-literary’ figures of speech may, it has



Stratis Doukas (right), author of *A Prisoner’s Story* (1928) at N.G. Pentzikis’ Pharmacy (see pp. 198-99), a well-known meeting-place for writers in Thessaloniki in the 30s and 40s. (Agra Publications Archive)



Thrasos Kastanakis, Stratis Myrivilis, Angelos Terzakis, Ilias Venezis, Zappeion, in the early 1930s. (E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

been suggested, be read ironically) but rather through recourse to a quasi-oral style. Oral speech as testimony, incorporating as it does features of local dialects, adopts an extreme stylistic humility that does not re-enact but rather alludes to, in the most conversant manner, a people's struggles for survival under conditions of human degradation.

A first-person narrative guarantees the authenticity of oral testimony. We should not, however, overlook the fact that at the same time these works contain in indirect or allusive form intertextual features or more general cultural experiences that may have shaped their artistic technique and that assuredly permit us to read them on another plane. The Psalms used as chapter head-

ings by Venezis, the dialogues of Doukas' heroes so reminiscent of Lives of the Saints, themes from Christ's Passion on the Cross or the Book of Revelation by Saint John in Myrivilis' work, or the Xenophon-inspired *Descent* in the title of the second half of Beratis' novel, or in Valtinos' *Descent*, together with references in the latter's work to ballads of the klephts – 18th- and 19th-century freedom-fighters – and *Descent into Hades*, demonstrate that even what appears to be unpolished spoken narrative is connected, either directly or through irony, to classical tales of heroism, war, and conflict. In this way the fragmentary nature of personal experience acquires a universal character.

Christos Kapralos, part of the frieze of the *Battle of Pindos Monument*, 1952-56. (Christos Kapralos Museum, Aegina, Greece)





(E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

### STRATIS MYRIVILIS

Stratis Myrivilis (1892-1969), a novelist whose dominant theme was war. His most important work *Life in the Tomb* (1923-4) was based on his personal experiences in the trenches of WWI. Myrivilis expresses his distaste for every aspect of war and describes the horror of conditions both in the camps and in the trenches, both during fighting and in the few moments of respite. His deep-seated anti-military philosophy shines through scenes of extreme violence, scenes designed to shock the reader into identification with the author's message of universal peace.



(E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

### ILIAS VENEZIS

Ilias Venezis (1904-1973), an author whose writing drew heavily on his ordeal as a prisoner. As a teenager during the Asia Minor Disaster, Venezis was sent to a Turkish labour battalion, and his panic and despair during this time come through in his very immediate writing. *Number 31328* (1924) remains one of the most powerful accounts in Greek of the horror of imprisonment, enslavement and the abandonment of a young spirit to an forbidding and hostile world.



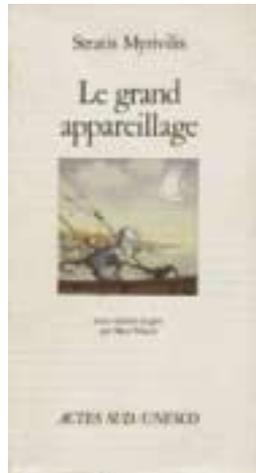
(E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

### YANNIS BERATIS

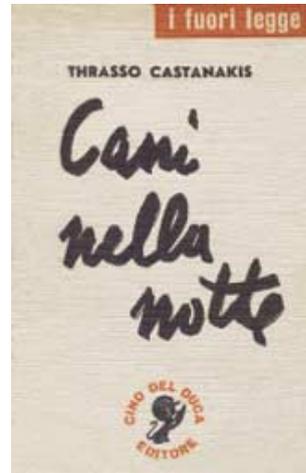
Yannis Beratis (d. 1968) established his reputation as a novelist with two titles which came out in the same year, *The Broad River* and *Itinerary of '43* (1946). *The Broad River* is an account of the Greco-Italian war from the perspective of a soldier, who, rather than becoming consumed by the high-flown ideas and high-sounding sermons about the fatherland, (or alternatively, against the war-mongering spirit) chooses to record the heroism displayed daily by his fellow soldiers fighting, quite literally, body and soul in the trenches. Events on the Albanian front are narrated in detail, but in a manner that is far from sensational. Beratis' descriptions are often elliptical and his characters sketched with only a minimum of detail, but enough to provide an outline and the perspective of an entire life.



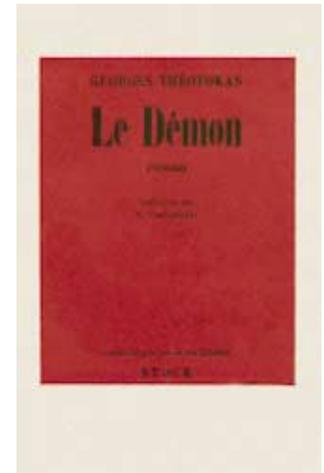
Switzerland 1984



France 1984



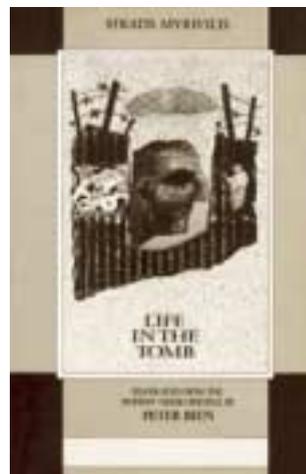
Italy 1959



France 1946



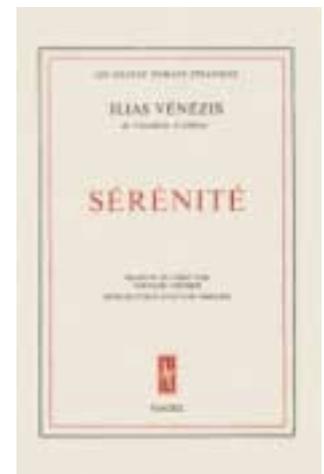
Romania 1988



England 1987



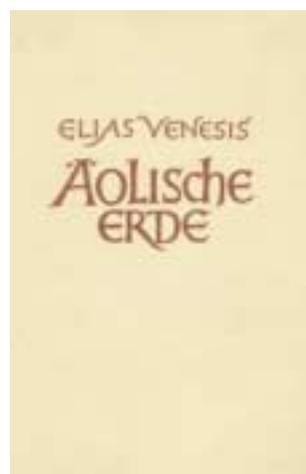
France 1945



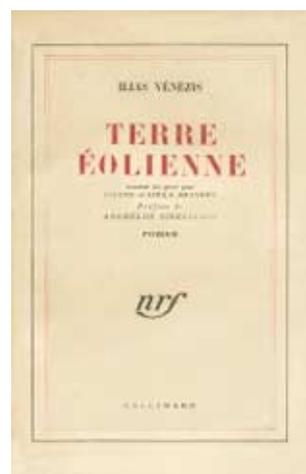
France 1971



The Netherlands



Germany 1977



France 1946



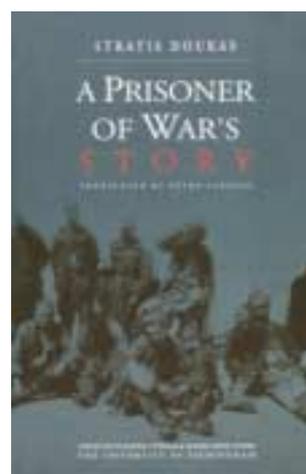
Greece 1999



Germany 1986



Turkey

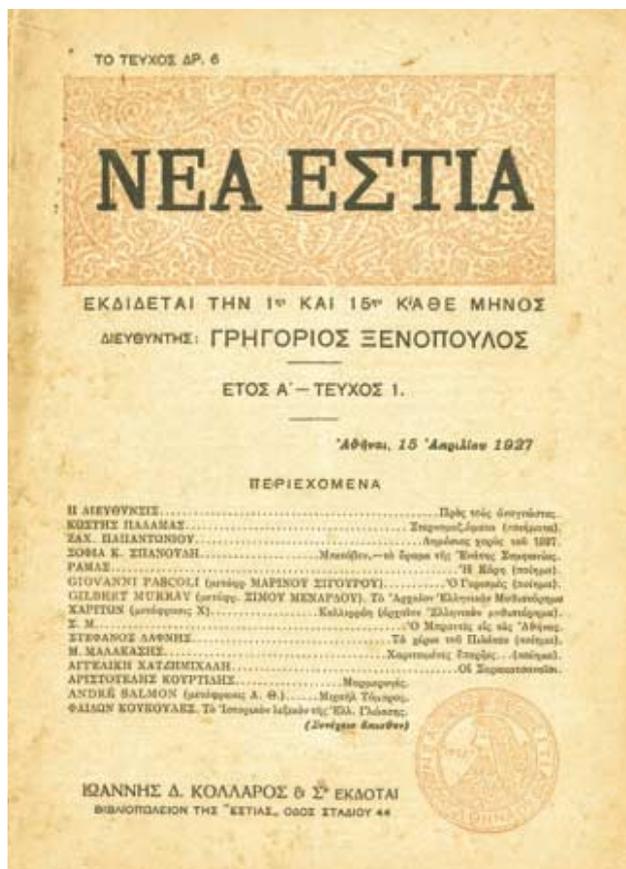


England 1999



France 1993

# LITERARY REVIEWS OF THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES



## NEA HESTIA

*Nea Hestia* was launched in 1927 by Grigorios Xenopoulos, the journal's first editor. In 1933 Petros Haris took over, and edited the publication for fifty-five consecutive years (1933-1987). From 15 April 1927 to 15 June 1998 *Nea Hestia* was published uninterruptedly every fortnight, even during the German Occupation.

*Nea Hestia* is Greece's oldest and most reputable literary periodical and plays a seminal role in the literary life of the country. Researching modern Greek literature would be unthinkable without reference to its many thousands of pages.

In September 1998 *Nea Hestia* began to appear on a monthly basis, with Stavros Zoumboulakis as editor. It serves as a lively forum for the most creative minds in the country and engages in dialogue with some of the most important writers and works from abroad; it is a forum for the exploration of ideas, free of dogmatic bias.



## TA NEA GRAMMATA

*Ta Nea Grammata* was a monthly periodical, founded by the bibliographer Yorgos Katsimbalis, mentor to several of the writers of the so-called '30s generation'. It was edited by the young critic Andreas Karantonis. During its short life (1935-1940: second phase 1944) it had a profound impact on the contemporary literary scene, functioning as the main organ for this generation. Some of its most distinguished contributors include George Seferis (see p. 170), Odysseus Elytis (see p. 186), Nikos Engonopoulos (see p. 178), Andreas Embiricos (see p. 178), Y. Theotokas (see p. 205), Kosmas Politis (see p. 198), A. Terzakis (see p. 205), M. Karagatsis (see p. 210), K T. Dimaras, as well as older writers such as Kostas Palamas (see p. 134) and A. Sikelianos (see p. 154). *Ta Nea Grammata* made a concerted effort to introduce and promote Modernism in Greece, and both through poetry and prose and critical writing succeeded in changing the orientation of Greek letters: it brought about a revision of the canon by creating a new modern tradition which championed 'Greekness' in bold new terms.



# THE PROSE OF COMMITMENT

Post-WWII prose writers carried on with unabated passion the artistic inquiry into the modern Greek landscape. They were, however, markedly different from their pre-war predecessors. Having grown up during the German Occupation, the Resistance and the Civil War they clashed with the establishment and were intensely critical of every kind of authority. Hounded, imprisoned and exiled, leftist writers aligned themselves not only against the victors of the Civil War but against their own party leadership. But non-leftists were also faced with reprisals and intimidation by the post-Civil War state. Regardless of their ideological and political positions, post-war writers became part of a more general trend – one not purely Greek. Like their European and American counterparts, they lived through the disappointment of seeing their hopes for a safer and more just future dashed, with the result that there also grew up in the world of Greek arts a particularly emotion-fraught genre that we might call the ‘literature of outrage’.

*The Shorn* by Nikos Kasdaglis, *The Defenceless* by Dimitris Hatzis, and *The Courtyard* by Andreas Franghias brought to the forefront cases of wrongdoing to marginalised groups in order to demonstrate the deep-seated injustices of a social system which, in their opinion, was ailing as a whole. In his novel *Under Siege* Alexandros Kotzias declaims, through the activities of a paramilitary butcher, the blood-thirsty instincts that led to the catastrophic conflicts of the Civil War, while in Stratis Tsirkas’s *Drifting Cities* and in Aris Alexandrou’s *Mission Box*, sharp criticism is levelled by the authors at the left-wing leadership for the unconscionable way they led their party to defeat and destruction. *The Dam* by Spiros Plaskovitis deals with the fatal sin of an arrogant technology-centred society that believed in its own boundless omnipotence. Authors such as Renos Apostolidis, Nikos Bakolas, Antonis Samarakis and Rodis Roufos have expressed themselves in a similar vein.

When wounds are still open and bleeding, as they are in Greece’s recent history, the dead-end meanderings of the human soul seem a luxury and can perhaps be left on the sideline. This is why the basically social, historical and realistic tendencies in WWII and post-WWII Greek fiction seem like the most natural choice to expect. This did not, however, prevent the creation of a number, though small, of brilliant works of modernist prose, such as the dazzling *Figaro’s Solo* by Yannis Skarimbass, the profoundly experiential, autobiographical *My House* by Melpo Axioti and the ethnocentric *Hours with Mrs. Ersi* by N. G. Pendzikis. In its more mature period, moreover, post-WWII realism boldly tried out radical innovations aimed at grafting upon more traditional forms of narrative some of the techniques invented by modernist schools, such as the internal monologue and stream-of-consciousness writing, or an entirely depersonalised neutral narrative account, and also self-referentiality and inter-textual references.



Vasso Katraki, *State III*, engraving in stone, 1969.



(E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive).

## ARIS ALEXANDROU

Aris Alexandrou (1922-1978), poet, novelist, essayist and translator, in his one and only novel, *To Kivotio* (*The Mission Box*, 1975), broached aspects of the Greek civil war in singularly critical and penetrating fashion. It was a pioneering work in Greek literature, which did away with representational conventions and shattered the edifice of realist literary contrivance. *To Kivotio* is the anti-epic of the Greek Left: it takes a cool look at the noisy heroics, the loud moral confidence, and the illustrious leaders of the movement. The myth of infallible party orthodoxy and the precepts of a specific doctrine of the Left are mercilessly scrutinised. The success of *To Kivotio* has tended to overshadow Alexandrou's strangely lyrical poetic output and his work as a translator. He produced superb translations from the Russian literary tradition.



## ANDREAS FRANGIAS

Andreas Frangias' (b. 1921) four novels *People and Houses* (1955), *Wrought Iron Gate* (1962), *Plague* (1972) and *The Crowd* (vol. I, 1985; vol. II, 1986) explore aspects of collective memory and political history. The author constantly returns to the traumatic experience of the German Occupation and the Civil War to point to the deep scars they left on a society which was already in many respects deeply divided. His historical material gives him occasion to add flesh and blood to his own mythical figures, allowing them to unfold gradually and reveal themselves for what they are.



## NIKOS KASDAGLIS

A political writer in the true sense of the term, Nikos Kasdaglis has been writing for the past forty-five years about the exercise of brute violence, whether he is describing bloody civil strife in the streets of Athens under the German Occupation, in *The Grooves of the Millstone*, or the militaristic brutality of Greece's post-Civil War camps, in *The Shorn* and in *Mythology*, or the harsh aggressiveness of the April dictatorship. Without taking a position as to good or evil, right or wrong, the author confines himself to recording people's passions at the height of intensity: the moment when his subjects feel on their bodies the weight of inexorable mechanisms bearing down upon them in order to implement their will and their goals through the use of senseless violence.



## ALEXANDROS KOTZIAS

Alexandros Kotzias (1926-1992) is best-known for the novel *Usurped Authority* (1979) in which almost all the features of his writing come together: the polyphony of the heroes and the social classes depicted in his literary myth; the unfolding of plot in a variety of places and the use of multiple time levels. Kotzias sustains these features with equal passion and insistence throughout his oeuvre, from *Under Siege* (1953), *The Dark Affair* (1954), *Lucifer* (1959) and *The Attempt* (1964) to the *Fantastic Adventure* (1986) and the dramatic monologues of the tetralogy *The Children of Cronus: The Jaguar* (1987); *The Machine* (1990); *The Boxer* (1991) and *The Alley* (1993).

# DIMITRIS HATZIS

The characters of Dimitris Hatzis (1913-1981) are the products of society. His work bears the mark of classical economy and his technique clearly derives inspiration from Brecht. He moves his heroes onto the stage at the crucial moment of duress when the old has reached its resting point and the new is on the threshold, and thus reproduces the essence of the drama for the reader. Whether in *The Defenceless* or *The End of Our Small Town* the failure of the short story form is predetermined. But the poetics of this prose writer (who produced most of his work while in exile in Eastern Europe) allows him to explore 20th century Greek society to great effect. For Hatzis, political commitment, in its broadest sense, remains the sine qua non of his literary conscience, whether this results in awakening the class consciousness of his protagonists, or in admiration for the monumental achievements of the armed struggle of the Communist Party in the Greek mountains during the Greek Civil War, or in exploring the loneliness of the migrants, or in discussing the role and function of artistic form. His concern however is always the same: to demonstrate the road through which the political horizon will be made discernible and comprehensible. This path is never straight and rarely unbroken. Around the hard core of commitment the shifts are frequent and formidable, and through them the writer constantly interrogates both his positions and his modes of expression.



(Nikos Goulandris Archive)

## GREEK WRITERS IN EASTERN EUROPE IN THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES

Dimitris Hatzis and Melpo Axioti were the chief representatives of a school of Greek literature developed by writers on the left who were forced into exile in the Eastern Bloc at the end of the Civil War. Self-declared Communists left for the Socialist republics, where they tried to keep the memory of their native land alive, the land where they would face certain execution were they to return.



From left: Dimitris Hatzis, Melpo Axioti and Elli Alexiou at the Modern Greek Studies Conference, Berlin, 16-18 April 1957.

# POST-WORLD WAR II POETRY

## POLITICAL TRAGEDY AND EXISTENTIAL *ANGST*

Those who began writing poetry in Greece in the first two decades after the end of World War II had to contend not only with the nightmare of the Nazi Occupation, which was an experience common to almost all countries in Europe, but also with an entirely different set of circumstances whose influence was felt on Greek society for over a quarter of a century: first came three years of civil conflict between 1946 and 1949 directly following the end of the war, with thousands of casualties on both sides, leading to the final defeat of the Communist Party. The immediate result of this was the persecution of its members and their imprisonment or exile, while executions following summary court trials became a part of the daily agenda of public life in Greece. The extensive aftermath of these acts left their mark on the country until the fall of the seven-year dictatorship in July of 1974.

It was difficult for such empty horizons not to affect the vision of poets emerging on the scene, many of whom belonged body and soul to the Left. These same poets did not hesitate repeatedly to take the party leadership to task for the political and the physical annihilation to which it had condemned not only the party members but also the non-partisan population at large. And even those poets who did not belong to the Left and had no reason to expend their energies on internal factional bickering found it impossible to overlook the grave, far-reaching wounds inflicted on post-WWII Greece. Starting out, of necessity, from such a point, the new poets of this period (Aris Alexandrou, Manolis Anagnostakis, Dimitris Doukaris, Panos Thasitis, Michalis Katsaros, Kleitos Kyrou, Thanassis Kostavaras, Tassos Leivaditis, Yorgos Pavlopoulos, Titos Patrikios, Takis Sinopoulos) were quick to depict a vivid and extremely painful reality: the bleakness of the Occupation and the Civil War, the moral bankruptcy brought about on both the collective and personal level by the breakdown of social values, the thwarted hopes of the Left for a more just world, and also the belying of the widespread hope for a better future following the collapse of Nazism. Their guiding light in this regard, in so far as their language and the cast of their writing are concerned, was none other than the poetic model provided by George Seferis: low-key voice and abstract or elliptic forms of expression suggesting rather than revealing poetic states of being.

One must not draw the conclusion, however, that all poetry written in Greece after the end of World War II is exclusively based on war experiences. A notably important group of poets (Stavros Vavouris, Olga Botsi, Yorgos Geralis, Minas Dimakis, Aris Diktaios, Nikos Karouzos) adopt an existential approach in order to focus on themes such as the meaning of life and of death, the painful daily routine of the body or the mythopoeic function of memory. There is also no lack of a pure (almost impartial) strain of lyricism (Takis Varvitsiotis), of the magic of cryptic writing (Eleni Vakalo, Nikos Fokas), or of writing that occasionally reaches the expressionist howling of Ivan Göll (E.H. Gonatas), as well as various surrealistic treatments. As for surrealism in particular, one could say that it takes three forms. One of these (Manto Aravantinou, Nanos Valaoritis (see p. 184), Hector Kaknavatos (see p. 184), Yorgos Likos) tends towards replicating and partially renewing the dictates of Breton

in Paris during the period between the two World Wars – dictates that found their way into Greece at that time. The other two forms take us back in the general direction of post-WWII Greek poetry: one of them persists in putting forward distorted representations of the German Occupation and the Civil War, again with certain allusions to expressionism, this time through dialogue mainly with the writings of Georg Trakl and Dylan Thomas (Miltos Sachtouris, see p. 184); the other assumes a sort of ontological paganism, in which one can sometimes detect traces of the archaic music of pre-Homeric poetry (D. P. Papaditsas).

World War II touches no less the next generation, which involves itself too with issues of the Left, mindful, however, to focus interest more upon the social pathology and economic recession of the post-WWII period that is more or less realistically portrayed (Anestis Evangelou, Vassilis Karavitis, Byron Leontaris, Gerasimos Lykiardopoulos, Marios Markidis, Prodromos Markoglou, Tolis Nikiforou). Also in evidence, as a means of exorcising reality, are three other different devices: poetic puns and word-play (Tassos Denegris), the use of the

sub-standard speech of marginal groups (Thomas Gorpas) and the solace of a mythicised landscape (Markos Meskos).

New horizons were soon to open up in the 1960s, either through purely erotic poetry, which spoke frankly of passion and its pain (Andreas Anghelakis, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Tassos Porfyris, Christos Laskaris, Dinos Christianopoulos), or through poetry in an urban landscape that served as the showplace for erotic and existential deprivation (Nikos-Alexis Aslanoglou). In such circumstances it was easy, and more or less natural, for existential issues to surface again. Firmly based on reality, these issues deeply concerned many voices of the new generation (Orestes Alexakis, Zefi Daraki, Kiki Dimoula, Manos Eleftheriou, Amalia Tsaknia and Spyros Tsaknias). While they constituted one of the central themes of poetry during those years, they were soon to bring to an end a period that, so far, has not been revived in modern Greek poetry. The poets who emerged in the years immediately following were to imbue poetry with an altogether different character.

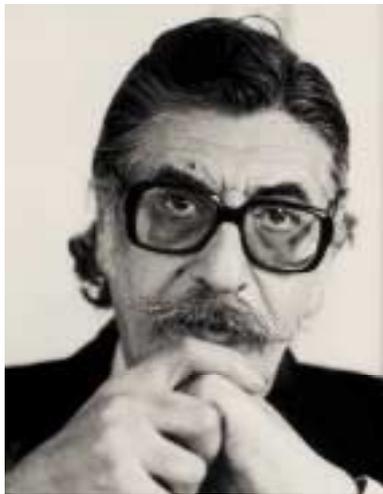


Photo by Stelios Skopelitis

### MANOLIS ANAGNOSTAKIS

Manolis Anagnostakis (1925-) one of the most prominent 'heretics' of the Greek Left, who never deserted its ranks, despite his bitter experiences of WWII and the Civil War. These experiences are given expression in his poetry.



Photo by Stelios Skopelitis

### TITOS PATRIKIOS

Titos Patrikios (1928-) is a poet whose main preoccupations are politics, love and everyday existence. In a clear, immediate and confessional voice he describes his troubled relationship both with the political Left and with post-war Greek society.



(E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

### TAKIS SINOPOULOS

Takis Sinopoulos (1917-1981). A poet with deep social and political concerns. His verse depicts desolate individual and collective landscapes which reflect the painful and far-reaching consequences WWII and the Civil War had for contemporary Greek society.



(Kedros Publications Archive)

### TASOS LIVADITIS

Tasos Livaditis (1921-1988) was involved in Left-wing politics from an early age, and it was his deep-seated social and political concerns that inspired him to write poetry. He later turned to pure existentialism, in which his childhood memories combine with discreet, rather obscure religious references.



Photo by A. Embiricos, c. 1955. (Agra Publications Archive)

### ELENI VAKALO

Eleni Vakalo (1921-) is a poet who writes in a profoundly cryptic manner and conjures a world which belongs to the realm of abstract intelligence. However, this does not prevent her from creating extremely moving situations, even when she does so exclusively through semantic and acoustic association.

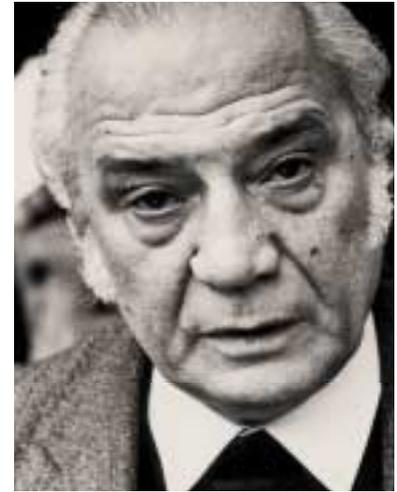


Photo by Stelios Skopelitis

### NIKOS CAROUZOS

Nikos Carouzos (1926-1991) began his poetic career with strongly Christian verse, only to become a committed apologist for a terrible existential void. His poetic language developed along the same lines, gradually abandoning religious symbols for a unpredictable language of resistance.



### KIKI DIMOULA

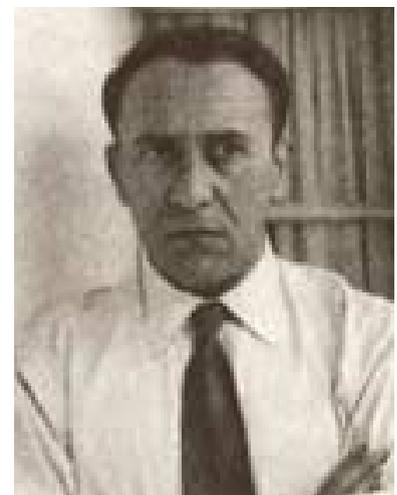
Kiki Dimoula (1931-) is a poet whose work draws thematically on the endless trials of everyday life, and transforms the abstractions of analytical discourse into the gestures of an immediate and intense confessional language, the mainstay of her poetics.



(Nefeli Publications Archive)

### NIKOS-ALEXIS ASLANOGLOU

Nikos-Alexis Aslanoglou (1931-1996) - a highly introspective erotic poet who projected the anxieties and fears of his persona in their search for a spiritual refuge onto the immensity of the city. Endless wandering through the urban landscape is a dominant motif in his work.



### D. P. PAPADITSAS

D. P. Papaditsas (1922-1987). The first phase of his poetic output bears the influence of Surrealism, but later progresses to a form of philosophical speculation which is dominated by word-play, frequently stretching language to the borders of silence.

# LITERARY REVIEWS OF THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES



(cover by Yannis Tsarouchis)

## EPITHEORISI TECHNIS

*Epitheorisi Technis* – ‘Monthly Review of the Arts’, ran to 146 issues, from Christmas 1954 to April 1967 when it ceased publication due to the dictatorship. Although supported by the political Left, the journal was never a party organ. It was run by an editorial committee, with Kostas Kouloufakos, poet, essayist and member of the then outlawed KKE (Greek Communist Party), playing a key role in its format, ideology and contents. The journal was receptive to all expressions of the Greek and European avant-garde, and often printed articles and reviews critical of the intellectual Left. During the difficult Cold War years the review initiated many young people into the world of the theatre, the visual arts, music and issues in education, giving column space to some of the most prominent Greek and foreign writers.



## EPOCHES

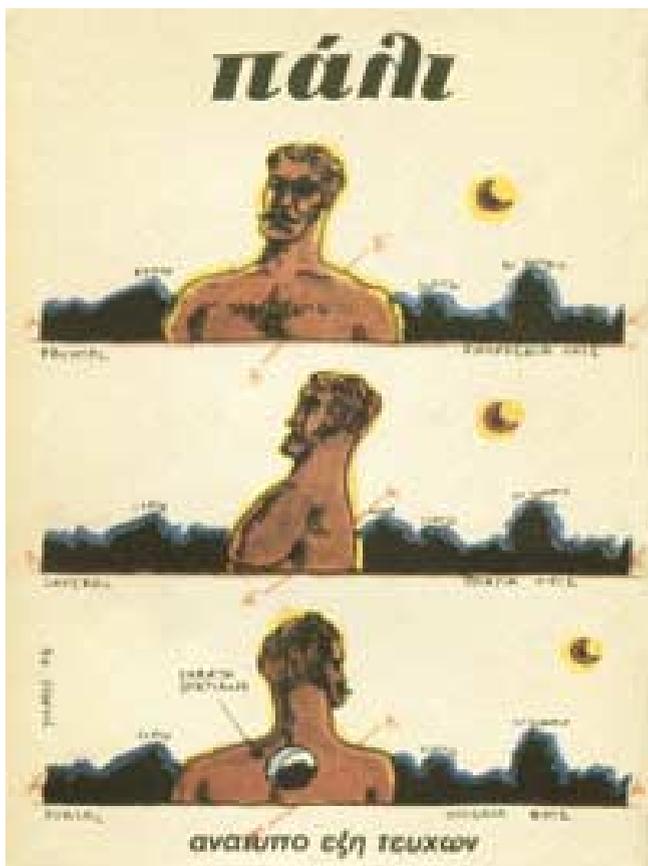
*Epoches* (Monthly Publication for Cultural and General Issues) was one of the most important periodicals of post-war Greece. It ran to 48 issues, from May 1963 to April 1967, when it was shut down by the Colonels. It was edited by the writer and dramatist Angelos Terzakis (see p. 205), and its advisory board included G. Seferis (see p. 170), G. Theotokas (see p. 205) and K. T. Dimaras. It published both classical and avant-garde pieces, high quality essays on art and the humanities, academic research, and articles on education, language, politics and philosophy, literary reviews, and articles on music, theatre, dance and architecture. In its day, *Epoches* played a vital role in defining the literary, aesthetic and philosophical tastes of its varied readership.



(cover by Karolos Tsizek)

## DIAGONIOS

*Diagonios* (biannual literary and artistic periodical) was published by the poet Dinos Christianopoulos (see p. 222) and designed by Karolos Tsizek. It was started by a group of young Thessalonica intellectuals and spanned four successful five-year periods: 1958-1962; 1965-1969; 1972-1976 and 1979-1983). *Diagonios* was an important forum for literary and artistic debate. The high standard of the contributions, the independent and critical stance of the editors, the quality of its format and appearance and its unbiased outlook made it one of the most valuable and reliable periodicals in circulation.



## PALI

*Pali* ran to six issues, from February 1964 to December 1966. It was headed by an editorial committee, but it was Nanos Valaoritis (see p. 184) who was mainly responsible for both the appearance and the contents of the journal. Its dominant aesthetic was surrealism, and it published the work of some of the most prominent Greek surrealists, including Nanos Valaoritis himself, Andreas Embiricos (see p. 178), Nikolas Calas (see p. 183) and Manto Aravantinou (see p. 221). Its stated aim was to open the door to the avant-garde, both at home and abroad. To this end, the publication included work by Allan Ginsberg and Tristan Tzara alongside its Greek contributors.



Athens at the end of the 1950s. Photograph by Elli Papadimitriou. (Benaki Museum Photographic Archive)

# FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY IN THE MODERN METROPOLIS: 1960-1975

The decade of the 1960s ushered in a new era in post-war Greek history. It was a difficult time, an era of emigration abroad, of internal migration to big cities, of endless reconstruction and great political instability. The memory of the brutality of armed conflict was beginning to fade, the extreme measures of law enforcement following the Civil War were being relaxed and a renaissance was in progress in the arts, in literature (poetry), music, the theatre and cinema.

At the same time a new crop of writers were making their appearance: Costas Taktsis, Yorgos Ioannou, Ilias Papadimitrakopoulos, Menis Koumantareas, Thanassis Valtinos, Christoforos Milionis, Vassilis Vassilikos, Tolis Kazandzis, Dimitris Petsetidis, Dimitris Nollas and others. They could be called the WWII generation; they were born during the 1930s and first appeared on the literary scene with books published between 1960 and 1975. They grew up under the German Occupation, the Resistance and the Civil War, without participating actively in these events. Judging from their work, however, the events of the period were indelibly engraved on their consciousness, so much so that they are one of the basic elements of their writing. Since most of these writers come from the Greek provinces, this particular element relates to the place where they spent their childhood. The other basic element has to do with Athens and with Thessaloniki, the two largest modern Greek cities and centres of consumer society, because all these writers, with the exception of one, eventually settled in a capital city.

Since the material from which the novels of these WWII prose writers are drawn grew, as already noted, out of the two historical elements of childhood and adulthood, there can, as a result, often be found in their work an informal dialogue between the past and the present. The past with its material privation, hardships and danger yet intensity of feeling, converses with the present, a time of prosperity but also of emotional despondency and emptiness.

It was most probably out of this relationship between the past and the present that the basic technique employed in the work of these WWII novelists evolved – a technique that joins traditional, or chronological, writing to modernist, free-associative writing. A given text may, for example, have its origin in the past and unfold chronologically up to a certain point, at which time some sort of association will intervene that takes the discourse back to the past, and we are similarly transported from the past back to the present, and so on. There are of course some works that refer only to the past or only to the present. At any rate, this type of fiction generally gives us an historical-social vision of reality.

Another of the features of this technique is that the writers are for the most part short story writers rather than novelists. Ioannou, Papadimitrakopoulos and Petsetidis have written nothing but short stories. The rest have written both short stories and novels. The short story has, as is usually the case in modern Greek fiction, the qualitative edge: short, succinct, lucid and poetically supported discourse is its distinguishing characteristic. In fact, since the historical-social orientation of these prose writers goes hand-in-hand with the corresponding vision of poets who are their contemporaries, we could say

that these two genres are moving towards common goals. It is probably the first time in modern Greek literature that such a convergence – at least in this sense – can be observed.

With regard to the subjects covered in their work, there is a clear tendency in these WWII novelists to have recourse to memory in order to portray events as they unfold and indirectly to criticise whatever is happening. This recourse to memory could be said to occur more frequently in their earlier works. World War II, the Occupation, the Resistance, the Civil War – all or some of these subjects are present in the novels *For a Little Self-respect* and *The Sarcophagus* by Yorgos Ioannou, in *Toothpaste with Chlorophyl* and in *Hot Sea Springs* by E.H. Papadimitrakopoulos, in *Discord* and in *Akrokeravnia* by Christoforos Milionis, in *Descent of the Nine* by Thanassis Valtinos, in *Old Miss Lisabet* and in *The Parade* by Tolis Kazantzis, and in *Twelve to Tuppence* by Dimitris Petsetidis. *Small Change* by Costas Taksis also takes place both before and after the war. Mention must be made too of Menis Koumandareas, Vassilis Vassilikos and Dimitris Nollas, whose work also contains childhood memories, although the memories are more diffuse than in the work of the other writers.

The fictional portrayal of social developments and also of personal adventures is of course likely to come across better in more complex works, in novels such as Costas Taksis' *The*

*Third Wedding*, Menis Koumandareas' *The Glass Works*, Christoforos Milionis' *Westside Neighbourhood*, Thanassis Valtinos' *Data from the Decade of the Sixties* and Vassilis Vassilikos' *Glavkos Thrassakis*, and in the novellas of Dimitris Nollas. But short fictional works also succeed in portraying, through the two-way relationship of past and present, the changes in post-war life within and beyond historical events, such as internal urban migration. Some of these works are in this respect true masterpieces, such as *The Sole Inheritance* by Yorgos Ioannou, *Rosamunde* by E.H. Papadimitrakopoulos, *Kalamas and Acheron* by Christoforos Milionis, *The Last Refuge* by Tolis Kazantzis, *Epilogue to Snow* by Dimitris Petsetidis and *Our Best Years* by Dimitris Nollas.

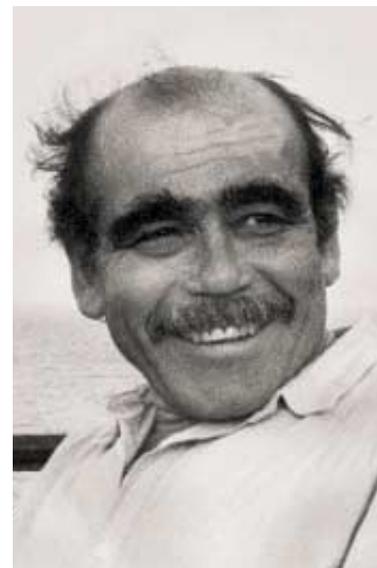
Criticism of the action recounted in these novels centres on political events: the Civil War from 1943 to 1949 and the military dictatorship imposed from 1967 to 1974 by a group of colonels, dashing the hopes for renewal that had been in the wind during the best part of a decade. The criticism even extended, more and more in fact, to life's less pleasant aspects in the big modern metropolis, with its high-rise apartment buildings, television, material well-being and psychological alienation. The melancholy novels of Menis Koumandareas, such as *Koula*, *The Barbershop* and *The Handsome Captain*, but also *The Glass Works*, form a vast and varied tapestry of scenes of the renewal of the now booming metropolis of Athens.



(E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

#### COSTAS TAKSIS (1927-1988)

Hovering between realism and lyricism, the vile and the pure, the lowly and the lofty, Costas Taksis' *The Third Wedding* is the outstanding novel about the modern Greek bourgeoisie. At the same time it was also the model for the Greek multi-voice novel in so far as its middle-aged heroines all incessantly recount the adventures of their families including their love life, their marriages, divorces, deaths, financial ruin and life's little pleasures. In spite of the misery, there is a rhythm, an energy and a *joie de vivre* springing from its pages that made *The Third Wedding* a great commercial success during the 1980s.



(Agra Photographic Archive)

#### THANASSIS VALTINOS (1932-)

In his novel *The Book of the Days of Andreas Kordopatis*, which first appeared in 1972. Thanassis Valtinos recounts the adventures of a Greek villager who, at the beginning of the century, attempts to emigrate to America, works there illegally and is finally deported to Greece against his wishes. The versatility and the down-to-earth immediacy of the plain language used by the uneducated, pure-of-heart and forthright Andreas Kordopatis (whose real-life model has spent the greater part of his years in southern Greece), make of him an archetypal hero. This novel, in the form forged here by Thanassis Valtinos, is an expression of the collective consciousness of an important social group at a specific time in Greece's history.



(D. Milaraki Archive)

### YORGOS IOANNOU (1927-1985)

Yorgos Ioannou first made his emotion-charged, low-key, confessional voice heard in his novel *For a Little Self-respect*. Published in 1964, it introduced a completely new form of short story into the Greek literary scene. *The Sarcophagus*, *The Sole Inheritance* and *Our Own Blood*. This Greek writer was to remain throughout his life a victim of the war. Fuelled by some insignificant detail from the essentially joyless daily existence of an adult, he is led through association back to the past, to the difficult moments of adolescence and to the years of brutality – filled nonetheless with intense experiences and emotions – during the German Occupation and the Civil War in Greece.



Photo by Yorgos Pavlidis

### SPYROS PLASKOVITIS

Spiros Plaskovitis (1917-1999) established his reputation both at home and abroad with the publication of *The Dam* (1960). In it Plaskovitis gives voice to the fear and insecurity of the post-war individual at the end of the Nazi era in Europe, and posits through the allegorical and symbolic prose of *The Dam* a pertinent ethical problem: Who can guarantee personal and political freedom in a world which could at any moment be transformed into the victim of uncontrolled technological developments and of unofficial power, power beyond the reach of state mechanisms?



Photo by Dimis Argyropoulos

### ANTONIS SAMARAKIS

Samarakis (b. 1919) is one of the most widely translated of contemporary Greek authors. His books have been published in no less than 30 languages. One of his novels, *The Mistake*, won a crime fiction award in France in 1970. His prose, simple and intelligible, touches on a range of current issues in Greek political and social life, while he maintains a critical eye on the world, exposing the evil of the violence and tyranny that has characterised the modern state. While he frequently expresses profound concern about the role and place of the citizen in modern political society, his works usually end on a positive note, as he envisages a better and a more just world.



Photo by Yorgos Pavlidis

### VASSILIS VASSILIKOS

The oeuvre of Vassilis Vassilikos (b. 1934) numbers some 90 books embracing practically every type of literary genre, many of which have been translated and published in other languages. His most famous novel, *Z* (dealing with the murder of the left-wing MP Grigoris Lambrakis and the events that led up to the military dictatorship of 1967-74), is a kind of 'fictional documentary', a type of writing that Vassilikos is particularly interested in: a combination of reality and invention. His diverse authorial personae, the various guises of his heroes, his symbols and fascination with the changing face of society make his work varied and complex. At the same time, his large readership is evidence of the fact that his works are accessible, enjoyable and readable.



Photo by Stelios Skopelitis

### MENIS KOUMANDAREAS (1931-)

Athens of the 1960s and the 1970s is in the midst of a building boom and the economy is developing at a galloping pace. In spite of this, people are dissatisfied and indecisive because, instead of leading to creative fulfilment, the new ways of life are merely aggravating the alienation and psychological emptiness. The many attempts made by the heroes of Menis Koumandareas' novels, from sexual promiscuity to professional and financial ventures, are in this way doomed from the start. An atmosphere of estrangement and deterioration pervades as youthful dreams of revolution crumble, not only because of the autocratic, freedom-curbing state but also because of deeply felt boredom and stifling social and familial compromises.



### ALKI ZEI

Alki Zei is another writer who grew out of the experience of the Second World War and the German Occupation and spent many years in the former Soviet Union. Her first novel, *To Kaplani tis Vitrinis* was published in 1964. In this work, the narrative world is set around the titanic struggle between the forces of Good and Evil, on an island in the Aegean during the pre-war dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas. A clear voice of the political Left, Zei recreates the turbulent atmosphere of the period and introduces her readers to its fascinating characters, something she continues to do in her subsequent novels. She has also written an impressive number of children's books.



(Kathimerini newspaper – Photographic Archive)

### NIKOS BAKOLAS

Nikos Bakolas (1927-1999). The early works of this Salonika writer develop primarily through stream of consciousness, maintaining the episodes and action he presents under the surface of the discourse. But with *Mythology* (1977) Bakolas turns to a different mode, raising plot and action to the surface in the context of the history of his native Macedonia, which is interwoven irresistibly with the writer's family history. With the quasi-epic works which follow, such as *The Great Square* (1987) and *Endlessly Written in Blood* (1996) as well as a number of novellas, Bakolas' exquisite technique and unique prose style secured his position as one of the most prominent fiction writers of the post-dictatorship era.

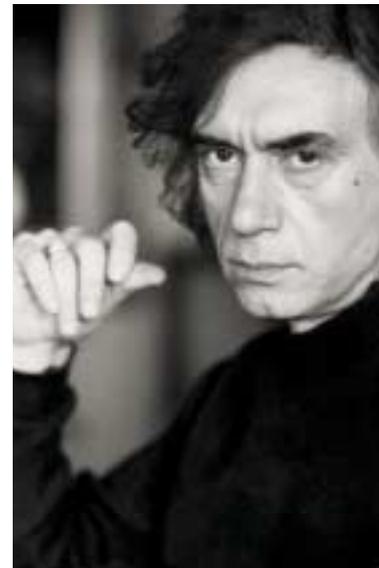


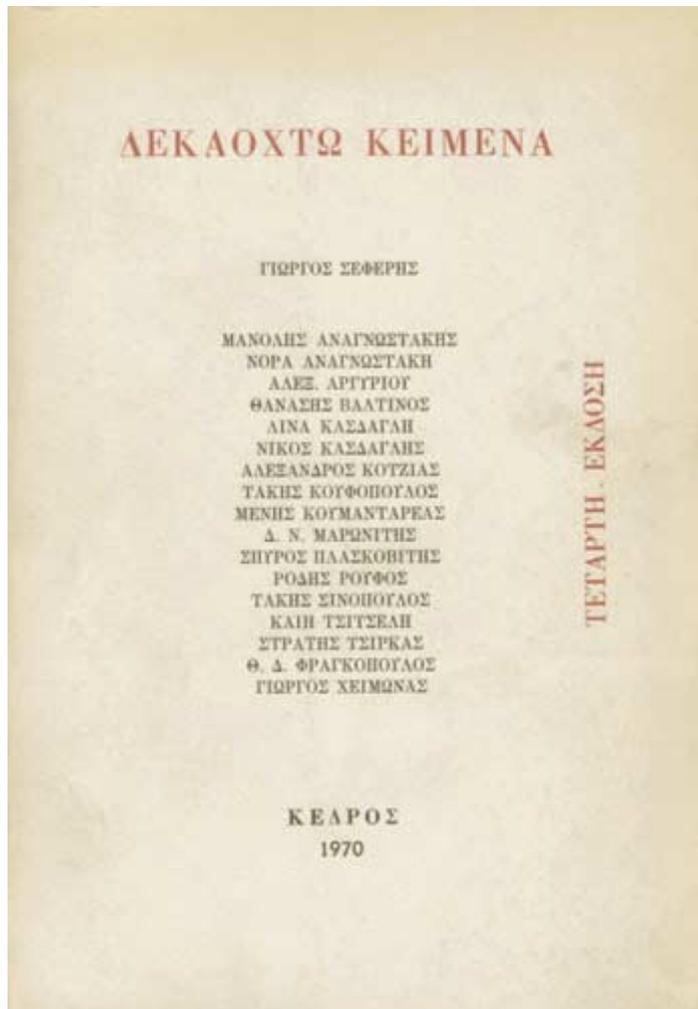
Photo by Stelios Skopelitis

### YORGOS HEIMONAS (1938-2000)

The writings of Yorgos Heimonas, including *Peisistratos*, *Doctor In-eotis*, *The Wedding*, *The Builders* and *The Poet's Enemy*, are an extreme example of modernism in the area of narrative technique. Heimonas' language is itself transformed into word-experience; it is at once the container and the contents, the vehicle for ideas and the idea itself, the activator and the action. Because of their intentional unfamiliarity his writings defy a complete analysis by any method and set traps for the reader, because they are at once meaningful and subversive of meaning.



Fassiános, *Tweet-tweet*, oil on canvas, 1976. (Private collection)



## SEFERIS' STATEMENT AND THE *EIGHTEEN TEXTS*

George Seferis' public statement of March 1969, in which he denounced the military dictatorship as anathema to all the ideals which the world went to war over in WWII, and in which he attacked the 'compulsory torpor' it relied on, cleared the way for Greek intellectuals to break their collective publishing silence.

The following month, 18 Greek writers signed an anti-dictatorship declaration, part of which was published on 8 May in *Le Monde*. The subsequent abandonment of this pre-emptive form of censorship a few months later heralded a new intellectual climate: in 1970 the collaborative volume *18 Texts* was published, with Seferis' poem, *The Cats of St Nicholas*, as its frontispiece, a work which makes oblique reference to the political asphyxiation of the period. This volume, which was soon (1971) followed by two further publications in the same spirit (*New Texts* and *New Texts II*) included contributions from several younger poets, writers and essayists exposing the anti-democratic nature of the Colonels' regime.

Seferis' death in September 1971 provided a further occasion for the expression of the common concerns of the Greek intelligentsia. The poet's funeral took on the proportions of national mourning, as a form of political protest. Two years later the torch of political protest was taken up by the team producing the journal *Synechia*, which in turn was followed by many similar publications.



George Seferis' funeral, Athens 1971. Photograph by K. Megaloeconomos. (E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)



Alexandria in the early 1960s. (E.L.I.A. Photographic Archive)

## STRATIS TSIRKAS

### *DRIFTING CITIES*, A Greek Novel

Stratis Tsirkas was born in Cairo in 1911 and died in Athens in 1980. He is considered to be one of Greece's outstanding post-WWII prose writers. His work is increasingly imbued with recent Greek history and its attendant political and social complications and shifts. A Diaspora Greek, born in the same city as Cavafy (of whom he has in fact made a noteworthy study), Tsirkas belonged to a dynamic new school of modern Greek prose writing developing outside of the capital. A cosmopolitan, an impassioned idealist and intellectual Leftist heavily involved in anti-fascist activities, with a critical spirit and a predisposition towards argument and dissent, he began his career as a poet and later wrote short fiction. His major work, however, is the trilogy *Drifting Cities*, comprising three novels: *The Club* (1961), *Ariagni* (1962), and *The Bat* (1965). In them he has succeeded in presenting a dynamic depiction of World War II, at least as it evolved on the Middle Eastern front and in Africa, and in describing the onset of the Greek Civil War, while at the same time delving into the

human emotions displayed in the face of love and of death, and the conflicts and disagreements over legitimacy and entitlement to power.

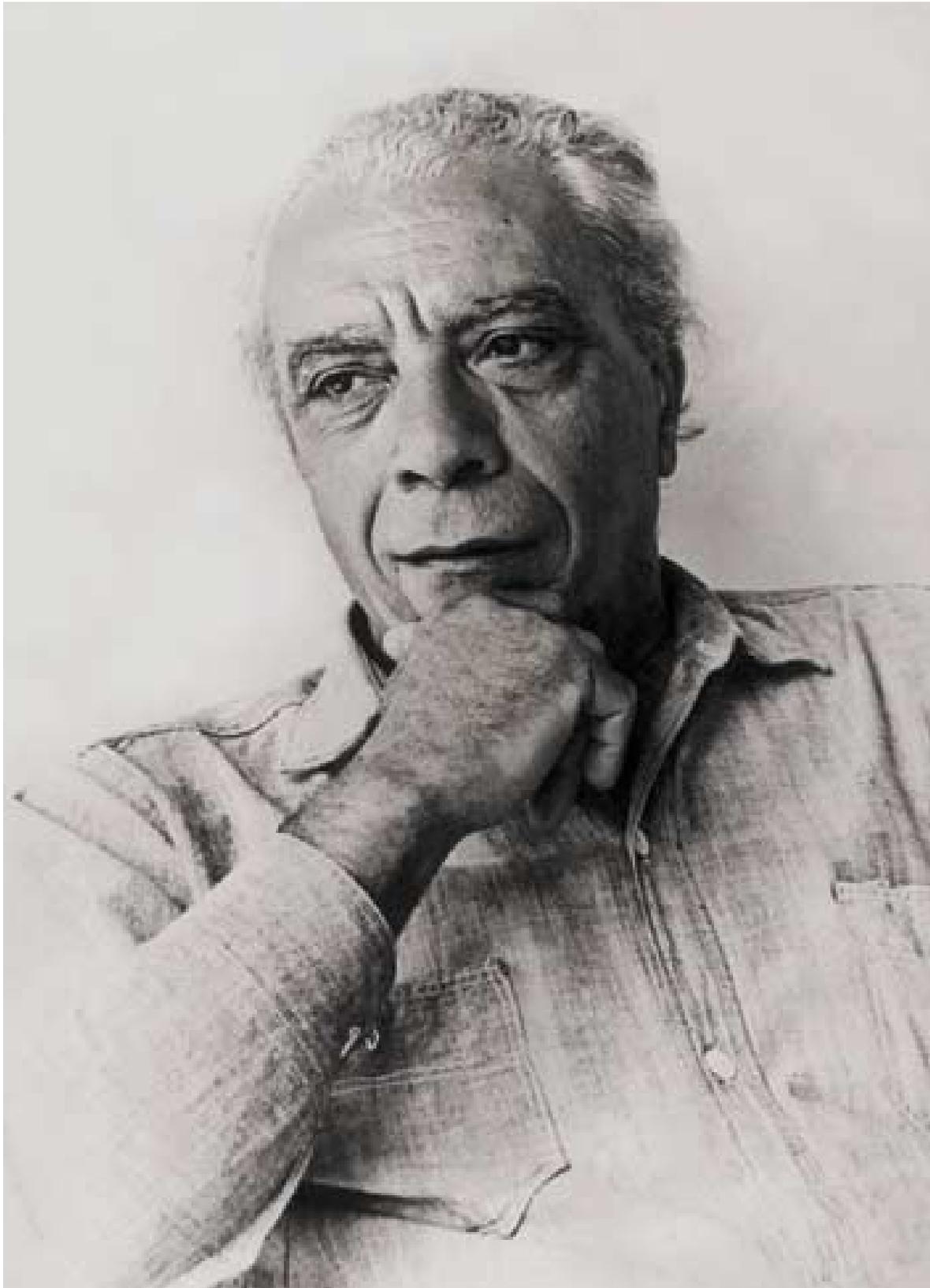
The universe of *Drifting Cities* is made up of a vast human mosaic comprising almost everything: the political and moral resistance to Nazism, the inter-party differences of opinion and disputes of the Greek Left; the dramatic course of ideas and of the arts during a notably transitional and as yet unshaped era; the greatness of soul of the common people; intriguing and dangerous women; corrupt political ambitions and interests but also grand visions; as well as the heterogeneity of the population, with its inherent contrasts and often antithetical differences and similarities.

*The Club* is set in Jerusalem, after the fall of Tobruk. There Army units, allied political administrators, politicians, diplomats, adventurers, refugees and members of the Greek Resistance Movement all converge. In this climate of dispersal and uncertainty the humanistic values of a group of intellectuals appear as fixed points. Housed in a single pension are the most important persons in this disparate group made up of different nationalities, cultures and characters, whose destinies and ambitions vary greatly. Among them is Manos Simonidis, the main character of the trilogy, a reserve officer on the Albanian Front who has retreated to the Middle East in order to continue the war. A communist and an intellectual,

he is faced with the dilemma of either following the abstract humanism preached by his “Eliot-inspired” friends, or aligning himself with his active but alienated party comrades, the “Talking Heads”, as he calls them, and the “Little Man”, their most typical representative.

Cairo is the second “drifting” city of the trilogy. Refugees are returning there from Palestine after the Allied victory in Libya (El Alamein) and in Russia (Stalingrad). Ariagni – from whose name the title is drawn – is a Greek-Egyptian woman, a kind of Mother Courage, unhappily married, with many children and a resourceful nature. She stands by her own peo-

ple, and she gives refuge to the fugitive Simonidis. From the biblical atmosphere, the elitism and the enraged passions of *The Club*, we are transported to the realism of life in a Middle Eastern capital city, where Greeks, Englishmen and other Europeans, exiled politicians and military personnel from the home front live alongside the local population. We are witness, on the one hand, to the political manoeuvring and machinations between the Greek royal family and Greek liberal politicians, and on the other to their joining forces against the Greek Leftists, who are in control of two brigades and are urgently requesting an Allied landing, with their own participa-



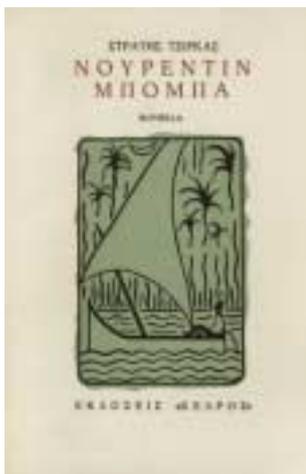
Stratis Tsirkas  
photographed  
by Antoine  
Vitez, 1970.  
(Chryssa  
Prokopaki  
Archive)

tion, to liberate Greece. In the emergent disunity and the impending civil rift the extremist “Talking Heads” are heavily involved. The British military leadership seizes this opportunity to purge the Greek units and imprison the most active communists in military camps, while the Greek brigades are subjected to an exhausting ten-day march through the Syrian desert. The cosmopolitanism of behind-the-scene politics and diplomacy is counter-balanced by the atmosphere of the working-class neighbourhood where the families of Ariagni and of the Egyptian Yunes and the children in the Arab slums reside. The cultural and other differences and the racial prejudices that separate, into almost air-tight compartments, the local population from the foreigners, are breached by the show of solidarity between Ariagni and Yunes, who keep their love hidden until the very end.

*The Bat* takes us to Alexandria in 1944. Churchill’s post-war plans for Greece and traditional Greek political party alignments provoke the militant Leftists into a conspiracy and uprising that lead nowhere and end in humiliating surrender and disarmament. At the same time scores of central and secondary characters move about on many levels of intrigue. In the foreground, standing apart, are Simonidis and Nancy – the former wife of Campbell, a diplomat. Dominating the world of the Leftist movement is the figure of the organisation’s secretary, Fani, while a new narrator, Paraschos – a cousin of Manos Simonidis – reinforces the multiplicity of voices by inter-

posing his own nostalgic tales. From these memories and from the story told by one of Nancy’s ageing maids, the dual story of *The Bat* (of mother and daughter) is pieced together – a story full of sensuality, fantasising, magic and boundless evil. The Alexandrian landscape, with its harbour and its hinterland, is the main setting for the action. The dramatic ending of the mutiny aboard Greek warships presages the post-war tragedy of Greece, which is sketched out in the book’s epilogue.

Twenty years after his death, this novelist of the Greek Diaspora remains a pivotal figure, timeless and alive. His trilogy in particular is considered to be a classic work in as much as its underlying meaning, as of all of the author’s writings, can be said to be man’s perseverance on his strenuous and obstinate passage through the reef-infested seas of history. At the same time there is a foreboding of the end of colonialism and the old world, but similarly exposed are some of the consistently enduring features of the modern Greek identity, with a strong Cavafy-esque appeal. Today *Drifting Cities* seems to be on a new course with new dynamics. After the critical uproar levelled against the Trilogy, particularly by the official Left of the 1960s, and its universal acceptance during the post-dictatorship years (1974 and afterwards), it is now entering a more mature phase – one where it is read carefully and fairly, having been re-evaluated without prejudice, and it continues to enjoy well-earned recognition and acknowledgement.



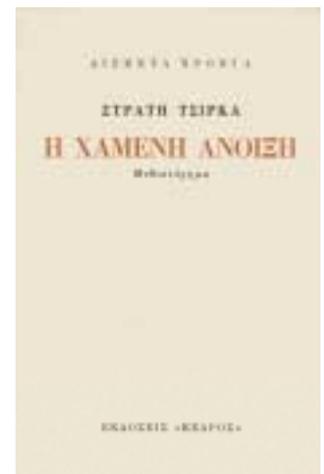
Greece 1957



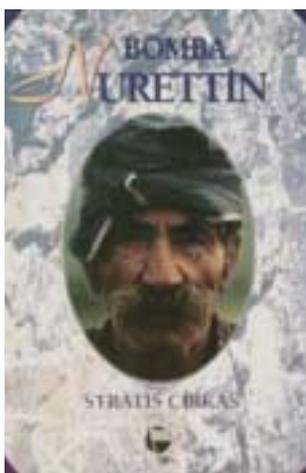
Greece 1960



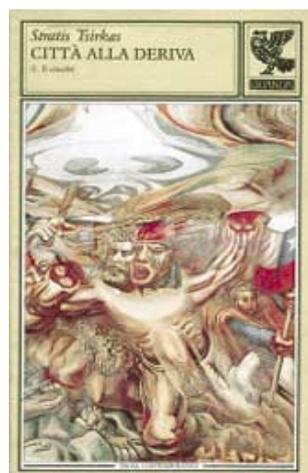
Greece 1965



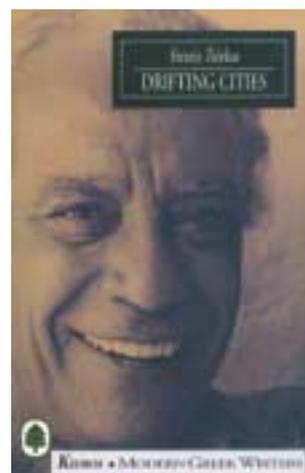
Greece 1976



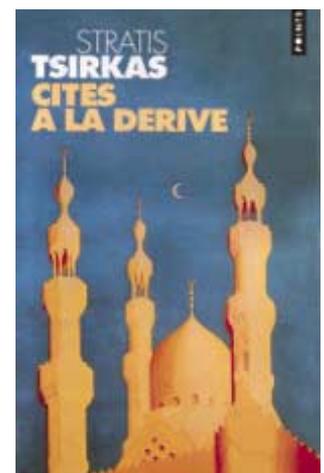
Turkey 1977



Spain 1984



Greece 1977



France 1999

# ASPECTS OF MODERN GREEK DRAMA



Photo by Stelios Skopelitis

Iakovos Kambanellis.

Modern Greek dramaturgy was shaped by various factors. The struggle to establish the popular language (the demotic) in literature, translations of foreign classic and modern authors in a vivid, working language and the attempts of Greek playwrights to face and expose contemporary reality, either under the guise of comedy and satire, or under the new conditions of social drama, are the elements from which contemporary Greek drama has emerged. Comedy of manners, satirical revue and realistically expressed social drama have been the forms favoured by contemporary authors.

GREEK COMEDY in its various forms as well as works aiming at social realism and psychological drama succeeded in presenting a wealth of popular characters, a critique of situations and behaviour typical of the Greek bourgeoisie and a satire of political actuality. Works originating from the 19th century were impressively staged anew during the 20th century, such as Vyzantios' *Babylonia*, Chourmouzis' comedies and Dimitrios Koromilas' comic idylls. The scene of bourgeois drama was further enhanced with works by Grigorios Xenopoulos (see p. 133), Pantelis Horn and Spyros Melas. The 19th century *Vassilikos* by Antonios Matesis continues to be performed today in contrast to the works of Yannis Kambysis.

HISTORICAL DRAMA, introduced in the 19th century and focusing on themes from Byzantium and the Greek Struggle for Independence, endured for about a century. It includes the classicist works of Dimitrios Vernardakis with his approach to 'national drama' in the mid-19th century, as well as the plays of Nikos Kazantzakis (see p. 158) at the end of the 1920s with their historical and philosophical content. Tragedy written around Byzantine or modern Greek historical topics flourished again during the period between WWI and WWII in works by Angelos Terzakis (see p. 205) and Vassilis Rotas. Dramatic works by Kazantzakis and poetic dramas by Angelos Sikelianos (see p. 154) were produced after WWII, quite some while after they were written. The poetic drama *Trisevgeni* by Kostis Palamas (see p. 134), written in 1903 and containing elements of realism and symbolism, reached the stage only in 1915 on the initiative of the director Thomas Economou.

CONTEMPORARY GREEK DRAMA found its way to the stage thanks to the determined support offered by certain theatres and directors after WWII. The director Karolos Koun and his 'Theatro Technis' (Art Theatre) succeeded in attaining, during the '50s and afterwards, a wider recognition of important dramatists, such as Iakovos Kambanellis, Dimitris Kechaidis or Loula Anagnostaki, while simultaneously encouraging a larger public to accept the new styles of modern Greek drama.

The National Theatre's 'New Stage' under various directors as well as smaller theatres in different Athenian neighbourhoods also played an important part in regularly presenting new authors.

Modern Greek plays of the post-war period at times depicted the sad aspects of a cheerless life, the suffering and passions of simple, poor folk within a suffocating routine, or presented their own poetic idioms, creating extraordinary and unrealis-



Photograph by Yorgos Georgas

Loula Anagnostaki.



(Kedros Publications Archive)

Dimitris Kechaïdis.

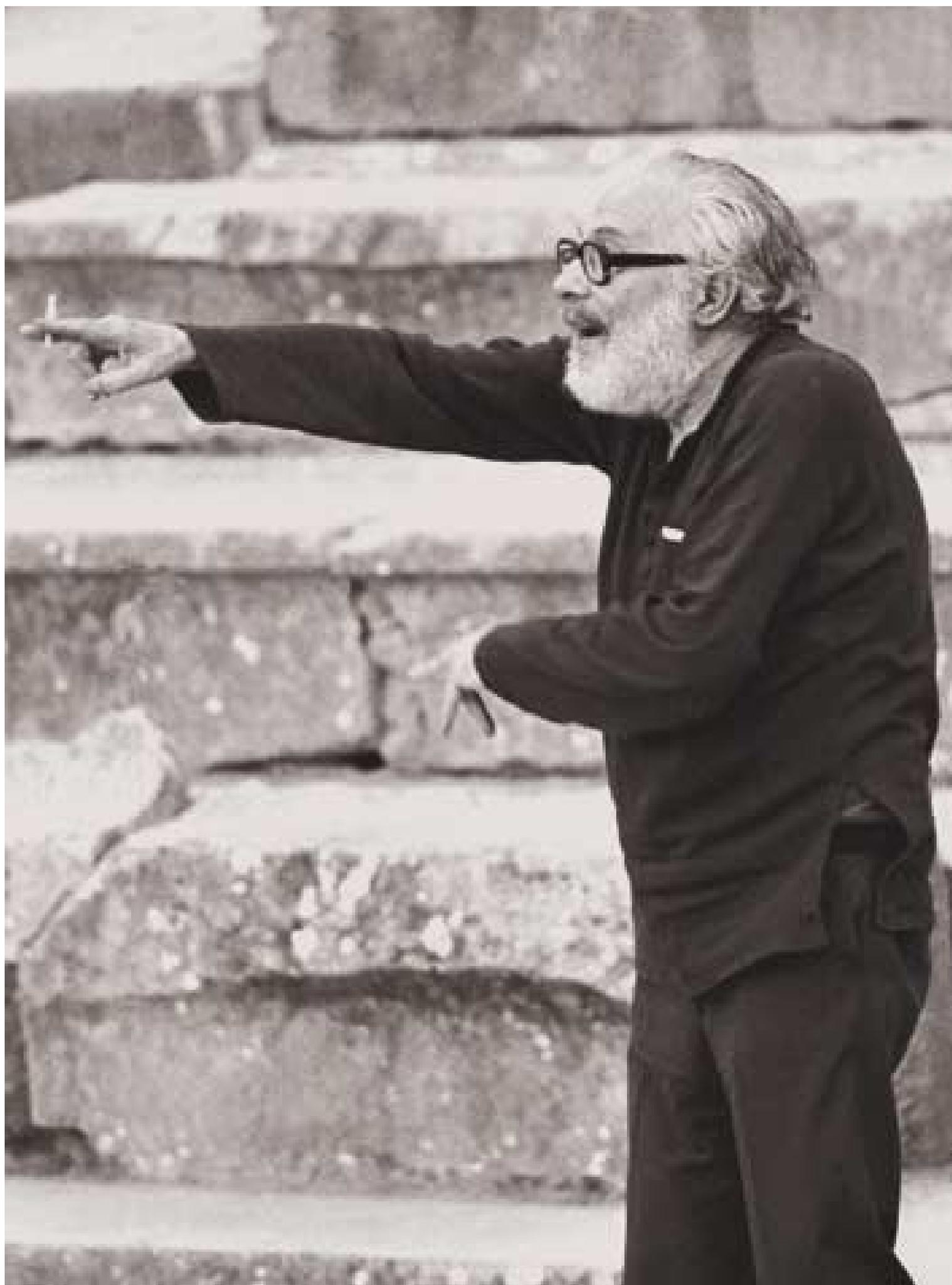
tic worlds inhabited by disturbed characters or seekers of the unattainable. Their authors were susceptible to the ‘unmistakable charm’ of two sirens: the one was low comedy, with its explosive comical situations and its brilliant characters, whose brilliance was further enhanced in the film versions of the plays; the other was revue, where the numbers and sketches satirising political and social actuality thrilled the audience with their brio and biting wit.

In his play *Yard of Miracles*, Iakovos Kambanellis addressed the everyday human being beset by life’s woes, day-dreaming in the humble courtyard outside his house: a picture of the lower social strata with their wounded collective memory of the past, bearing the misery and pathology generated by the blind alleys of daily life. The author scraped the bottom of the barrel of Greek society within the confines of the yard, a gathering place of typical humans, a public spot inviting variety of versions of private attitudes. It is not a tragic scene, it is bitter and sweet, painful and emotional. The courtyard, a picturesque and familiar place, traditional and well known from previous works, was revived again to form the setting where the Greek’s dream fails to materialize and post-war illusions evaporate. The *Yard of Miracles*, produced by Koun’s Art Theatre in 1957, became a classic and a point of reference for authors depicting daily life and problems of identity or adaptation to the harshness of reality.

Other works were set within a social *milieu* inspired by rural and urban life, by marginal groups and idiomatic language. Everyday life is the setting common to all those plays which for the past forty years, despite differences in style and intent, have dealt with the fall and denigration of the individual in situations determined by poverty, interest in profit and power. These plays have also confronted the problems of language and identity induced by suffocating family and social structures.

After producing *The Fair* – a family drama set in the fields of Thessaly, a story of human pain, parting and self-delusion in the rural landscape that is slowly dying (1964) – and the one-act plays *The Wedding Ring* and *Backgammon* (1972), Dimitris Kechaïdis delved deeper, together with Eleni Haviara, into the climate of other territories. In their works *Laurels and Oleanders* (the Greek word for ‘oleander’ is ‘bitter laurel’) and *From Kifissia with Force* (1995) the dialogue reveals ulterior motives and commitments, intrigues and unsurpassable weaknesses lurking beneath the surface of the words, a way of life in which the characters are trapped.

In Yorgos Sevastikoglou’s *Angela*, written during the ’50s, we find a feminine environment with maids gossiping on the iron stairways at the back of post-war apartment buildings where petty rivalries and passionate love affairs flare up. Since then, many playwrights have focused on illuminating the falsity, rawness and cruelty of social reality and of various social groups in a biting, critical and ironic attitude (Yorgos Skourtis, Marios Pondikas). Kostas Mourselas has looked at the bourgeoisie through a satirical, penetrating lens, identifying comic and ridiculous strains behind good-mannered conduct, law-abiding comportment and relations among friends (*Friends*, *The Aquarium*). Yannis Chryssoulis deals with the colourless aspects of daily coexistence, with its subcutaneous and dis-



Karolos Koun. Photo by Dimis Argyropoulos.

guised violence, in what he has written since 1979. Yorgos Maniotis, in his work *The Pit*, intruded into the forbidden territory of transvestites and hauled his flaming, provocative language out of this “damned” *milieu*. While constantly changing his style, Maniotis uncovered many another abyss, one of which was maternal oppression (*The Football Match, Common Sense*). Yorgos Dialeghmenos is an author who thoroughly analyses every slice of life he decides to deal with from psychological and linguistic angles. His idiosyncratic naturalism, distilled in the two works for which he has been acclaimed, *Aunt Unaccounted for. Stop.* (1973) and *Mother, Mom, Mama* (1980), was not expressed as a photographic depiction of a particular reality but as a striving to expose the details and development of a situation through voices and characters which would otherwise pass entirely unobserved. In such a manner, the marginal characters of *I Kiss you in the Face* – ragpickers, murderers and prostitutes – are projected in a prismatic way, while in *The Night of the Owl* the past recurs as a memory laden with the shrapnel of experienced time and with a tempo corresponding in nature to that of the death rattle.

The subject of reality was later replaced by dream and nightmare, by the absurd and the uncanny. The forms employed were inspired by elements of the grotesque, expressionistic deformation, sarcasm, derision, delirious speech and surrealist images. The dramatists of poetic theatre moved in different directions and displayed a variety of lyric qualities. For Margarita Lymberaki, even tragedy was a form necessary to express vital existential issues and to bring History and the great myths of the past on stage.

Following his caustic farces and “unpleasant comedies” castigating bourgeois life-concepts (*Antigone’s Matchmaking, Easter Games, The Comedy of the Fly*), Vassilis Ziogas formulated, during the ’80s, a lyric style full of symbolist elements and surrealist images. Introducing mysticism and transcendence, he evokes metaphysics, archetypes, philosophical and scientific reason, the language of the subconscious and psychoanalysis (*The Mountain, Philoctetes, The Big Bang*).

The poetic works of Stelios Lytras are set in dreamy, fairy-tale landscapes and resort to the world of symbols and pageantry (*The Garden of Separated Lovers*).



A scene from *The Yard of Miracles* by Iakovos Kambanellis produced by the Theatro Technis of Karolos Koun, Athens, 1957-58.

Pavlos Matesis had a long career that led him from caricatures and bourgeois satire to a cataclysm of the poetic “Self” by the phantasm of mythical antiquity. Yet both his earlier cartoon depictions of bourgeois phobias and wretchedness and his more recent works are based on surrealist and ritualistic elements (*The Ghost of Mr Ramon Novarro, The Buzz*).

Dimitris Dimitriadis’ plays convey a poetic vision with frequent outbursts of hyperbole. Baroque language and ritualistic staging unfold extreme images deriving from collective historical memory and originating in the reservoir of personal experience and mythology (*The Beginning of Life*, 1995).

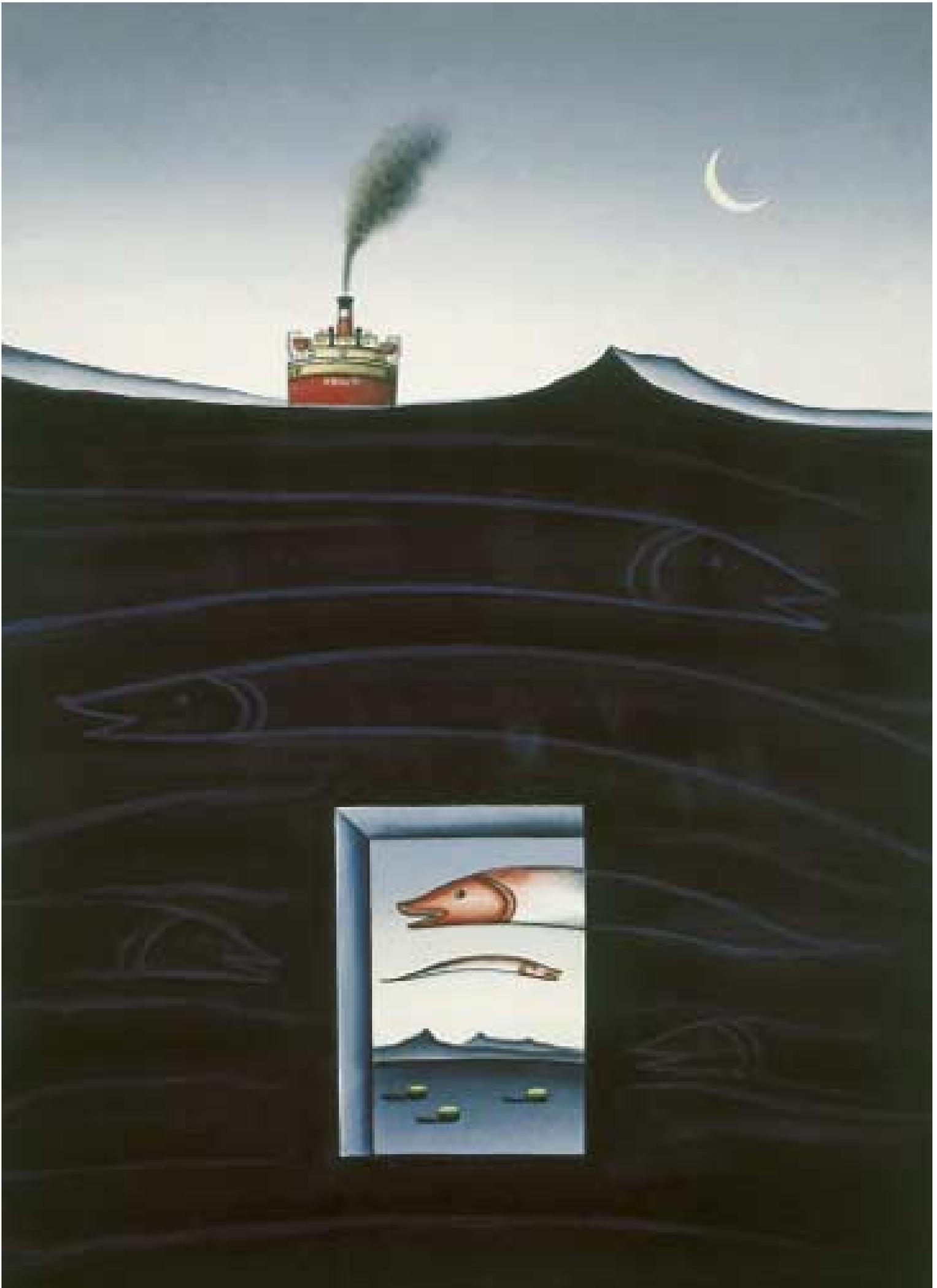
Rhetoric is the theme of all of Andreas Staïkos’ works, where life, history, politics are observed through the mirror of theatre with all its tricks, techniques, masks and self-referral. In his lyrical post-modern play *The Curtain Falls*, a stage fantasy inspired by the meeting of Greek author Constantine Christomanos with the Austrian Empress Elisabeth, Staïkos deals with the ghost of creation and beauty.

As themes change, style also changes, entering different dramatic fields and creating new patterns. In the dramatic works of some playwrights one recognises significant divergences between various periods. For example, Kambanellis, after the *Yard of Miracles*, used elements of satire, parody and allegory in his plays. He became involved in musicals and mixed styles. He explored patterns containing the phenomenology of the contemporary Greek family and society, measuring the effects of social change on the human soul, or wandering in the internal reality of mind and soul (*The Invisible Troupe*).

The case of Loula Anagnostaki is a special one, in the sense that already in the ’60s she was focusing on achieving a synthesis of the utterly private and intimate dimension of things with that of the collective. Fantasy and mystery were permanent features of the historical and social background she portrayed of her approach to everyday life and her realistic dialogue. Anagnostaki developed not only the problems of communication among the characters of her plays, but also the quandaries of the OTHER and their effect on space, action and people. She wrote elliptically in a poetically flowing style, endeavouring to fathom the depth of things, her writing full of nuances and musicality (*Nike, The Sound of the Gun, Diamonds and Blues, The Distant Trip, The Purple Sky*).



A scene from *Laurels and Oleanders* by Dimitris Kechaidis produced by the Theatro Technis of Karolos Koun, Athens, 1979-80.



D. Yeros, *Window of the Space Below*, watercolour, 1995.

# SNAPSHOTS OF THE PRESENT

The year 1974 was an important political and social landmark for Greece. The dictatorship of the Colonels fell and democracy, which was to establish itself with little delay and secure its place as an institution, put an end once and for all to the extreme disturbances that had troubled the public life of the country till then. The external interventionism and internal unruliness and instability that had plagued Greek society for sixty whole years became, after 1974, things of the past, giving way to stable economic development and a consequently significant improvement in the standard of living – something which, as would reasonably be expected, dramatically changed people's concerns: political conflicts and the struggle to survive were no longer pressing priorities, and everyday life soon became the setting in which the comedies and tragedies of the last quarter of the 20th century were played out.

Naturally, this new atmosphere could not help but influence literature and also determine to a large extent the directions it would take. The prose writers appearing on the Greek literary scene in the middle and towards the end of the decade of the '70s had not yet cut themselves off from politics, but they had certainly found a very different meaning and context for it. For most of them politics was now simply a starting point, an excuse to move from an immediate, or realistic, representation and interpretation of reality to a symbolic and codified transcription taking many forms. A host of things can be included here: the struggle between the personal and the collective within a constantly changing social universe; the ironic acceptance and promulgation of the formerly strong tenets of activism; the recourse to traditional archetypes; the escape to the virtual universe of the futuristic novel, as well as the device of digging up known or obscure facts available through historical research.

It is logical that such a mediated picture of politics as that subscribed to by these earlier writers would exclude from the arena those younger writers who, first published in 1980 or later, turned their attention, through a kind of simplistic realism that could even border on moralising, to the many, even inexhaustible, aspects of daily life: to sexual and family relationships in the closed, confined atmosphere of the provinces, to the linguistic idiom and behaviour of younger more colourful social groups. Daily life is, however, only one of the themes that emerges from the prose writing of the past two decades in Greece. A large number of writers left behind both politics and daily life to embark on an intensive pursuit of new forms and genres – a pursuit which enabled them to digest not only those techniques handed down to them but also the entire gamut of European and American modernism, eventually leading to clearly post-modernist trends. And at the point where we are today, one can find practically anything: dream-like or hallucinatory writing, elliptical or fragmented narrative, the interweaving of oral vernacular with learned discourse, the essay with fiction-based action, and also the parodies and caricatures of the conventions of urban realism; and then there is magic realism, the historical or pseudo-historical novel, the fantasy novel, short fiction, horror fiction, the fiction of lists and documentary fiction.

This same assortment of techniques – one which has been on the increase in recent decades – can be seen also in Greek

poetry of the past twenty-five years. The poets who took their first literary steps shortly before or after 1974 were influenced initially by the radical political climate of May 1968 in France or by the artistic experiments of Gruppo 63 in Italy. Clearly intent on denouncing accepted social values, the first thing they did at this stage was to express outrage at the levelling effect of capitalistic ideology and its predominant model of prosperity, and to speak out against every form of authority. These actions are reflected in their writing by the rejection of lyricism and by the avoidance of ornate language. The rejection of the polished form and the systematic use of material from popular culture (including everything from imitating the slang of marginal social groups to reproducing the contents of various advertising slogans) prevalent in so many of the collections of the younger writers of this period goes back of course to pop art and to the *arte povera* movement, which were both at their zenith at about the same time, or slightly earlier, in America and in Italy.

Let us not imagine, however, that all this will last for long. As these young writers inevitably approach maturity and in as much as they are in any event abandoning their American and European models, the landscape changes and the tendency towards a plurality of forms will not be long in making its appearance among this group as well. Outrage and controversy are beating a slow retreat and allowing the emergence of more inwardly-focused (and sometimes purely introverted) concerns, such as existential self-observation, the passions of love and the anxiety of death, the fictionalisation of the countryside and the tyrannical functioning of memory. And very close to these concerns we will soon find literary recreation pure and simple: aestheticism, intertextual creations, new linguistic practices, the personalisation of space and of objects, and the many forms of dialogue with the poetic past, together with a return to traditional metric verse.

The ground for those who will follow has now been well prepared in every way. The poets of the decade of the '80s will continue in the same direction, their only common point of reference now being complete individualisation. Their world is one of absolute heterogeneity: from confession, low-key narratives and autobiography to the morbid perception of deterioration, to the climate of decline and to visionary revelations, and even to the portrayal of physical decay, the geography of the body and the fragmentary language of frenetic modernist methods and the resurgence of folk themes and the reinstatement (once again) of rhymed verse.

At the outset of the new century, Greek literature is trying to find its identity within its many voices and many facets. It is difficult for anyone to determine here and now how it will evolve over a given period of time – over, say, one or two decades during which today's transitional phases will in one way or another have acquired a definite form and crystallized. It is even more difficult for titles and names to be singled out at a stage when the literature in question is discovering and at the same time shaping itself. As epochs pass and time goes by we can see only the flux of things: their birth and their transformations in a place and in a universe that are changing at a startling pace every day.



Yannis Gaïtis, *The Idol*, oil on canvas, 1979.



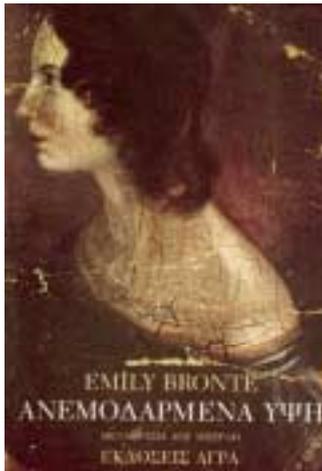


Fassiános, *La Très Belle*, oil on canvas, 1971. (Private collection)

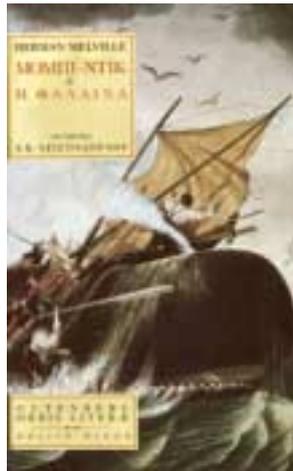
# ANNEXE

## TRANSLATIONS

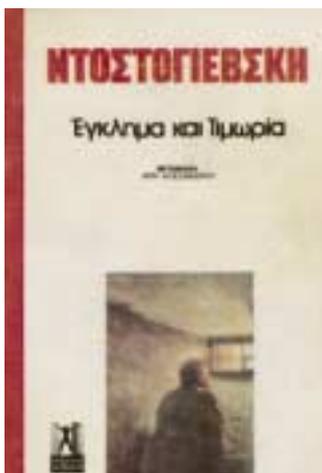
### THE PUBLISHING MARKET AND GREEK SOCIETY



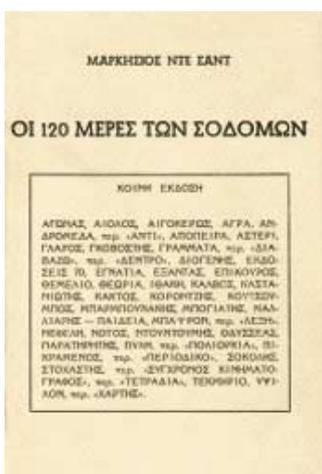
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Greek edition, 1995.



Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*. Greek edition, 1991.



Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. Greek translation of the 1950s.



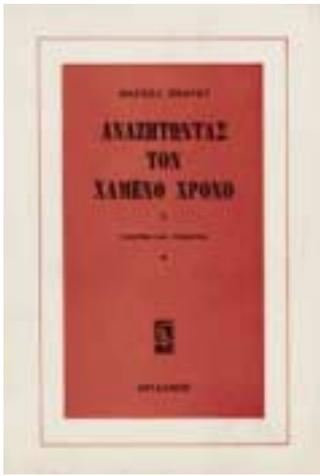
The translator Aris Alexandrou (see p. 219) began the long task of translating Dostoyevsky in prison after the Civil War, just like Pavlos Zannas, who started his translation of Proust's oeuvre in jail, during the Dictatorship in the late 1960s.

The last year in which a censorship trial took place was 1982, for the recently published *The 120 Days of Sodom*, by Marquis de Sade which, so the prosecution alleged, offended public morals. The publishers were ordered to withdraw the book from sale and it was not until another ten years had passed that the ban on its publication was lifted. To show their support for the publisher of the banned book, 47 publishers signed and published an edition of *120 Days* with a special, common cover, as a gesture of protest against censorship.

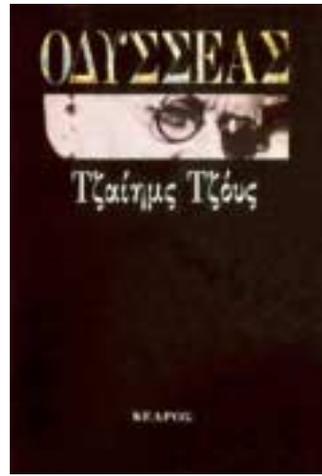
*Remembrance of Things Past* is a work that Greeks have been getting to know piecemeal during the last twenty years. Officially, translation of the entire work into Greek will be completed soon, almost eighty years, that is, after its publication. Proust is not an exception. Joyce's *Ulysses* was translated seventy years later, French surrealists began to be published *en masse* by Greek publishing companies only during the '80s, *Wuthering Heights* first appeared in a valid and commented translation in 1995. It took *Moby Dick* over a hundred years to be read by Greeks in their own language. This time span indicates two opposite trends: Greece's belated progress and its development. The expansion of the Greek publishing market during the last ten to fifteen years has rapidly and impressively changed not only the general reading climate but also the public's expectations. Whereas twenty to thirty years ago only a small portion of the latest international publications was translated into Greek and translations of major works of classical literature were still lacking, today it is considered natural that every new novel published in any country of the world and attracting public attention will in a matter of months be translated into the Greek language.

This recent development in Greece touches upon a whole sphere of production, claiming a share of the broader economic growth of recent years, while at the same time reflecting new social standards. It is of interest to examine the course of events from different angles, one such event being the creation of domestic demand. Today one may safely assume that Greece is an emerging market (if we accept this scale of grading maturity), containing specific niches of readers with a variety of experience and subject to different influences. In Greece today, just as in every European country, new books by Milan Kundera, Stephen King, Hanif Kureishi, Paulo Coelho, Philip Roth, Orhan Pamuk, Kazuo Ishiguro, John Grisham or Antonio Tabucchi have a public eagerly awaiting them.

Despite undeniable improvements in the Greek publishing sector, it would be misleading to jump to hasty conclusions. Instant translation keeping pace with international activity has long been the aim of the Greek market. One cannot say that translation shortages have been sufficiently covered, nor that the past was a period of darkness. Greece's peripheral location in the south-easternmost corner of the European continent determined the nature of its communication with the developed West from the very start of the country's existence as a restructured nation about 170 years ago. From the 19th century onwards, modern Greece's small urban society knew the works of writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Dumas, Dickens, Swift and Defoe. Either in cheap editions or translations of dubious quality, or more often in magazine instalments (a very common practice in Greece up to thirty or forty years ago), western romantic and epic literature exerted its influence on the ideological prototypes of Greek society. In Greece, as in every developing country in past decades, a large part of the bourgeoisie interested in literary matters spoke foreign languages and read foreign books in their original version. This particular social stratification, reflecting the anaemic economic structures of the past, played a role in retarding the production of literary translations.



Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*. Greek edition, 1971.

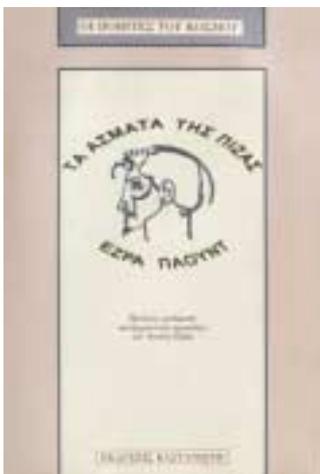


James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Greek edition, 1990.

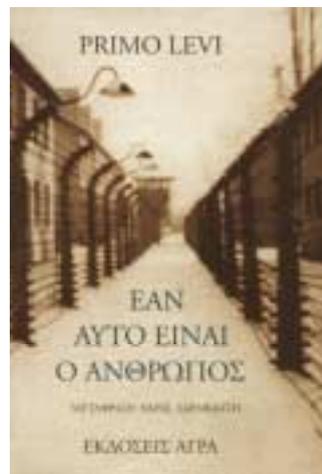
The range of Greek publishing activity began to change gradually after 1960 and more rapidly after the reestablishment of democracy in 1974. One need only compare 1980 to 2000 to assess the leap forward involving new capital investment, the growth of the reading public, expansion of bookstores, commissioning of authors and the increased number of titles being published. One thing led to another, the thirst for information prompted larger investments, a development that made books a focus of attention. This lively activity has many aspects. For one thing, it is not confined to literature. Translations of works in the fields of history, philosophy, science, art and economy, to mention only a few, are currently being produced in remarkable quantities and are following the pattern of literary translations, that is, new works are being translated at the same time as major works of the past. Although there still are important books that remain excluded from the Greek language, the fact is that the gap is becoming narrower and tending to disappear.

Further, the revival of the Greek literary scene during the past twenty-five years has set off new mechanisms of supply and demand. It is now a common occurrence for a modern Greek novel to sell 30, 50, 80 or 100 thousand copies (in a country of 10 million), to be adapted for television, or to attract imitators. This means that there now exists a suitable structure of support and dissemination of a local literary work, which in turn increases the desire for contact and information. Familiarity with foreign literature, international intellectual trends, stylistic influences and literary star systems is becoming more widespread and, therefore, more desirable.

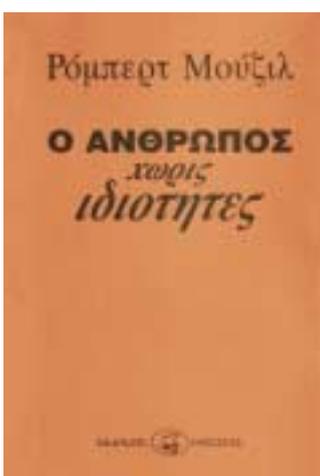
It may be claimed that the influx of foreign literature and international thinking into modern Greece is the result of growing extroversion among a large segment of Greek society. Greeks have begun to see themselves as members of a broader family, where they can now interact on an equal basis taking advantage of the benefits of intellectual curiosity. It seems that Frankfurt 2001 will corroborate this recent development of the Greek publishing market.



Ezra Pound, *Pisan Cantos*. Greek edition, 1994.



Primo Levi, *If this is a Man*. Greek edition, 1997.



Robert Musil, *A Man without Qualities*. Greek edition, 1992.



Hermann Broch, *The Sleepwalkers*. Greek edition, 1987-88.



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Fotis Kontoglou, *The Happy Konek-Konek King of Isprovana  
is Meditating on the Nature of Man*, detail, 1932.  
Fresco from the artist's home, today in the National Gallery, Athens.

# Ὁ ΦΤΥΧΙΣΜΕΝΟΣ ΚΟΝΕΚ-ΚΟΝΕΚ

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