

Greek America: Literary Representations and Immigrant Narratives in Papazoglou-Maragaris and Petrakis

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Greek American literature has been dominated by the themes of immigration, assimilation and ethnic identity. Greek American authors have often attempted to understand the experiences of the community and their own place within its multivalent, often contradictory, permutations; for example, celebrated recent authors such as novelist Jeffrey Eugenides have continued the search for ethnic roots and the immigrant past that has forged the Greek American identity. At the center of even such very recent approaches to this issue is the immigrant generation that has come to stand as an origin myth of sorts. The main exponents of the immigrant generation in Greek American fiction have been Harry Mark Petrakis and Theano Papazolgo-Margaris, both of whom have been considered emblematic of Greek American literature in general. These writers often set their stories in the early days of immigration, or in the first generation, each feeling very keenly the burden of history and memory as they chronicle and thematize the experiences of the Greeks in America. Some critics have seen a tendency towards either a “maudlin nostalgia” or a mythopoeic quality that characterizes the literary work of Papazoglou-Margaris and Petrakis as they represent the immigrant experience.¹ This allows both authors, as Yiorgos Kalogeras puts it, to “capture the essence of the Greek American community which seems threatened by absorption into the larger American culture.”² Yet at times the complexities presented in the literary treatment of Greek America these authors produce can also be at odds with the realistic approach each tends to adopt.

Because so much of the work of Papazoglou-Margaris and Petrakis focuses on the themes of immigration and assimilation, in particular, their fiction has often lent itself to analysis by

anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists and ethnographers. Scholars in these fields have admirably examined these authors through the lens of their own research areas, and have employed their texts as evidence for broader arguments about Greek America as a whole.³ For example, in *The Greek Americans* (1984), Alice Scourby makes a general overview that serves to create her own “canon” of Greek American literature.⁴ Scourby often takes the fictionalized images of Greek America entirely at face value as examples reflecting reality. She organizes her discussion around themes such as the patriarchal structure of the family, gender roles and relations, authority, social boundaries, dislocation and assimilation, which relate to her broader description and commentary on the community.⁵ For Scourby Petrakis features prominently because of his ability not only to tell a good story, but also to both “embrace...and transcend ethnic boundaries.”⁶ Scourby suggests here that Petrakis, while intimately examining specific elements of the *Greek* experience, manages to capture something indelibly *American* about that experience also. The same might be asserted about Papazoglou-Margaris’ stories, for, like those of Petrakis, they participate in creating the broader ethos about American history and the valorization of the immigrant narrative itself as the form *par excellence* of the American experience writ large.⁷

Theano Papazoglou-Margaris is best known for her short story collection *Chronicle of Halsted Street* (1962), for which she won a prize from the Greek state. In that collection she turns her attention to specifically immigrant themes such as the “crisis of identity” and the problems of assimilation.⁸ Central to the collection is a focus on the experience of women as immigrants, which, as Ioanna Laliotou argues, makes Papazoglou-Margaris atypical of early ethnic literature.⁹ That she published exclusively in Greek, and her reticence to allow her work to be translated into English, which limited her accessibility to a wider American audience, suggests that she herself resisted the assimilationist forces she so frequently encounters in her fiction.¹⁰ She often conducts an indirect critique of the ways in which her characters react to or participate in such processes. As Kalogeras indicates, Papazoglou-Margaris moves beyond the mode of the “personal narrative” characteristic of early Greek American writing, whose focus appears to be more on the homeland left behind, towards the immigrant narrative, which focuses on the experience of the immigrant in the host country.¹¹ Employing a realistic style¹² that is incidentally and sometimes ironically imbued with a nostalgic tone, Papazoglou-Margaris nonetheless questions the absolutes that may accompany her characters’ conceptions either of

their own ethnic identity or of the realities with which they are faced, often creating a kind of existential angst, or, as Kalogeras posits: “she demonstrates the ambiguous relation of her protagonists to the Old World and New World by creating narratives whose realities are founded primarily on the imagination of the protagonists or narrators.”¹³ The opening paragraph of “*Ἦταν Ανοιξη*” (“It Was Spring”), illustrates this ambiguity of realities, and the ambivalence of the immigrant narrator towards the present:

Years have passed. But I remember him. And how can I forget?...I remember also that it was spring. The sun shone. The trees were full. The new grass, a deep velvety green carpet, tightly spread everywhere. The lilacs were blooming, and their breath, like a heavy narcotic, took me on a long journey in time and distance to where I first experienced that fragrance – far away! And nostalgia came like an iron hand and began to crush my very being!...I want to speak...to speak in my own language...in the language that in tender and carefree years united itself to me...I want to speak of those lilacs that were there, just so I can feel how in truth they existed once and are not a figment of my imagination or a dream that vanished as I awoke.¹⁴

Beginning with more or less concrete physical description, the sights and scents of a spring day cause the narrator to fade into a forcefully nostalgic reverie that leads to the attempt to recapture the reality of another time and dimension before her life is transformed as an immigrant, in order to verify that it in fact existed in the first place. Significantly, the passage highlights the importance of the language (Greek) through which these memories are united to form the very being of the narrator, and functions as the bridge between the reality of the Old World and that of the New. The act of remembering in this passage also illustrates what Laliotou has called the “simultaneity of time” that produces an image of the homeland as “a subjectively remembered nation” which often becomes idealized or “fixed and unchangeable” in the mind of the immigrant narrator.¹⁵

While the conception of the homeland via “subjective memory” can be problematic for Papazoglou-Margaris’ characters in many of these stories, in others sometimes it is the only thing that makes the immigrant experience bearable for them. One example of this “problematic” memory can be found in what has perhaps become her most well-known story, “Suspended Souls” (“*Αιωρούμενοι*”).¹⁶ The story concerns a character, Leo, who clings to idealized and sentimental memories of Greece while his relatives in Greece have also retained an idealized memory of Leo, and do not recognize him when, after thirty long years, he returns a changed

man. Leo must confront a Greece and a family that has also changed in his absence. The irony of the scene between Leo and his mother, when she curses America, questions his identity, and mourns her lost son who has been replaced by a “stranger” as if he were a sort of changeling, creates a bathos at the center of the story that reflects the ambivalence of *nostos*. His return to Greece is thus rendered entirely incomplete and unsatisfactory, and he suddenly realizes that he might have indeed become the “American of the Midwest” who feels sad and nostalgic about leaving America earlier in the story.¹⁷ He finds that he is torn between his *longing* for the homeland, which sustained and nurtured him for so many years abroad, and his *belonging* to the Greek American community, where despite himself he has put down roots. Moreover, he is no longer sure which country is in fact his homeland. This small story is a minor masterpiece of the immigrant narrative, evoking as it does what Moskos has called the “dilemma” of the immigrant.¹⁸ Leo is caught in a dismal cycle, unable to return, unhappy to stay, suspended not just literally in the air during his flights back and forth between the two countries, but suspended psychologically and spiritually between his Greek and his American sensibilities.

As in “Suspended Souls,” the “problematic” notion of subjective memory applies to the Greek American community itself in the title story of the collection, *Chronicle of Halsted Street*. If, as Laliotou argues, subjective memory can be employed to create an idealized version of the homeland in the formulation of the difference between the pre-immigration experience of the homeland and the post-immigration experience in the host country, here Papazoglou-Margaris presents us with a vision of Greek-town as a transposed homeland that operates in the psyche and identity of the immigrant community in a similar way.¹⁹ The story begins with a highly idealized description of Halsted Street and the immigrant communities of Chicago. Along this vibrant thoroughfare various ethnic neighborhoods thrive and live together in what sounds like an immigrants’ paradise. The narrator touts the harmony, the racial integration (without need of governmental intervention), and the tolerance that exists amongst the honest and hardworking immigrant classes. This nostalgic paean ends abruptly as the narrator suddenly discounts all that has been said and asserts exceptionalist views about Greek-town:

But for us Greeks of Chicago, all of these good and bad things (however you take them) of Halsted are nothing! For us Halsted is only that triangle where Halsted crosses Harrison Street and Blue Island Avenue. All the others are cold and faded next to our Halsted, which is something warm and sweet – a little motherland!²⁰

Thus, the old, pre-war Greek-town is imbued with the qualities of the homeland, and its inhabitants exhibit a kind of extreme “nationalism” about the neighborhood, which produces “the best Greeks in America” (τα καλύτερα ελληνόπουλα της Αμερικής).²¹ Oddly, in her attempt to display the “greatness” of the Halsted Greeks, the narrator instead shows the divisiveness within the Greek community and the imposition of social hierarchies, where infighting and snobbery seem to be the main characteristics. Given these examples, one could argue that Papazoglou-Margaris is, in fact, criticizing the views of the narrator, treating them with a subtle irony. Here the author’s realistic approach unflinchingly “documents” the real attitudes of the immigrants.

As the story proceeds, the narrator describes in detail the deep connection the Greeks have to their neighborhood. The characters are torn between the impulses of assimilation and their devotion to the community. When they prosper, they begin to be affected by visions of the “American dream” of buying a house in a “nice” suburban neighborhood and leaving the “shabby” ethnic enclave, only to feel isolated and exiled in a way that replicates their original immigration experience. Most of those who try to leave Halsted Street for the quiet and respectable suburbs end up returning to its bustle and vitality. As one character puts it: “Πρώτη φορά νοιώθω...τόσο ξενιτεμένη κι έρημη στην πλάση...θέλω εκείνες τις φωνές και το θόρυβο του Χώλστεντ και ας με ξεκούφαιναν καμιά φορά...” (For the first time I feel...so exiled and lonely in the world...I want those voices and the noise of Halsted, even if they deafened me once...).²² In this episode Spyraina, the social-climbing wife of a small shop owner who has moved away from Greek-town, and who profoundly misses the old neighborhood, becomes hysterical when she believes or imagines the house is being invaded by a person of color “ένας αράπης.”²³ She eventually goes mad and must be confined to a sanatorium. Nevertheless, the scene serves to reinforce the intense emotional connection of individuals to the old neighborhood, even if it presents an extreme and melodramatic reaction to the separation from it.

The previous passage also is considerably disturbing in the xenophobia and even open racism depicted in the characters, yet Papazoglou-Margaris does not shy away from examining the realities of ethnic and racial strife. She returns to this theme in the episode of the Good Friday “riot” between the Italians and the Greeks that centers on the traditional procession of the *Epitaphios* through the streets of the city. The Catholics object to having the procession block the streets and sidewalks in front of their homes and businesses, while the Orthodox take it as a sign

of their “decline” that they can no longer parade beyond the boundaries of the churchyard. A seriously violent clash is narrowly averted when secular authorities intervene.²⁴ This scene is yet another that undermines the idyllic ethnic harmony of the story’s opening description.

The end of the story is dominated by the inevitable destruction of the old immigrant neighborhood due to modernization and the “progress” of urban renewal, the construction of the new university and various freeways. The narrator keenly laments the loss of the old neighborhood. Even moving the “center” of Greek-town to another location a few streets away cannot replace what Halsted Street had come to represent for the immigrants. So traumatic is this “uprooting” that it is compared (perhaps rather hyperbolically) to the Asia Minor Catastrophe: “A greater crime than the one when the Turks uprooted us from the land of our fathers.”²⁵ The tragedy of this loss is coupled by the double-edged success of the second generation, which does not exhibit the same trauma over leaving Halsted Street, and ultimately embodies the “American dream” fulfilled. If the ending of *Chronicle of Halsted Street* is nostalgic and bittersweet, the author has, nonetheless, portrayed the community realistically, with all of its quirkiness, its emotions and obsessions, its strengths as well as its weaknesses.

Papazoglou-Margaris returns again and again to memories of the past that often serve to ameliorate the pain of the immigrant experience, as she does in *Δυο Κόσμοι* (Two Worlds), a later collection of stories published mostly in the popular press and written between 1960 and 1991. One of the most striking in the volume is an ostensibly simple little piece called «Κουβέντα με το “Σεβρολέ Μας” (“A Chat with Our Chevrolet”). In it the narrator speaks tenderly to her shabby, dilapidated and mechanically troublesome car, enumerating its virtues despite its imperfections. The narrator espouses a symbol of American modernity, but not for its shiny newness or as a marker of material progress, status, or assimilation to American ways. Rather she valorizes it for its usefulness in helping her escape the reality of her life in Chicago by taking daytrips to the shores of the “sea” of Michigan, which reminds her of the Sea of Marmara:

Forgive me if I call the lake “sea.” It is because its vastness fools me and I think it is the sea. I think it is that sea of ours, there faraway, our beloved Propontis. And if I see upon her waters those vessels, or some little boat, then I feel as if I find myself on the shore of my lost homeland, and my mind leaves behind my current troubles.²⁶

Rather than becoming simply a nostalgic reverie, the memory of the “lost homeland” merges with the vision of the current homeland. As she remembers Asia Minor, the narrator notices and valorizes the beauty of Lake Michigan and its surrounding landscape; in a sense she transposes her feelings for the past, for that which is lost, onto her feelings of connection to America. She enumerates America’s virtues despite its imperfections. While this is not “assimilation,” it allows the immigrant narrator to feel at home, and perhaps find some comfort in a different landscape. Thus, the Chevrolet has served two purposes: escape and reconciliation. The narrator’s escape from the city, from her own troubles, leads via her memories and the beauty of the physical landscape to a reconciliation with the notion of America as homeland, and thus makes the loss of the old homeland more bearable.

Similarly to Papazoglou-Margaris, Harry Mark Petrakis has taken a realistic approach in his depiction of Greek America, although one can say that his brand of realism is much more “gritty,” laconic, and much less sentimental than that of Papazoglou-Margaris. Also like her, he employs the Greek American community of Chicago as his main inspiration for settings, archetypes, and themes. Petrakis’ relation to memory and history is not one that attempts to fully valorize the past, even if at times he has a tendency to create unrealistically “heroic” characters. Yet, it is because he chooses to realistically examine the Greek American ethos and history, warts and all, that Petrakis has often focused on “troublesome” themes, characters, and situations. At times he has been criticized for this approach by the Greek American community.²⁷ In much of his work Petrakis thematizes many of the problems he sees within Greek American society, such as racism, classism, poverty, exploitation, the plight of women – especially either as widow-figures or daughters within the traditional family structure – the gap between the immigrant generation and its children, and many others.²⁸ Its specific characteristics and permutations notwithstanding, the Greek immigrant experience in Petrakis’ fiction can be seen as an analogue for a wider American one; the standard narrative where the struggle of all immigrants to survive, to thrive, and to keep some semblance of their ethnic identity and their dignity in the face of extremely difficult conditions and the forces of assimilation, inevitably and positively strengthens America itself. As Yiorgos Anagnostou posits, Petrakis often operates as a “vested critic,” creating through his prose a “plea for generalized ethical responsibility for ethnic and post-ethnic America,”²⁹ and for this reason his stories often contain an earnest moral dimension. Yet Anagnostou rightly points out that much of Petrakis’ writing also contains a

powerful “counter-narrative” to the rhetoric of the standard narrative of the American dream and its mythology of modernity, redemption and acceptance; rather it is “an indictment” of an ideology that often served to mask racial, ethnic and social hierarchies, exploitation, alienation and injustice.³⁰ In this respect, Petrakis indubitably comments on the Greek community’s acquiescence to and participation in that ideology. Petrakis’ career has been long and prolific, beginning with his early short stories such as the now classic “Pericles on 31st Street.” While his stories are frequently humorous and what, on the surface at least, seem like light-hearted expressions of Greek America, for the most part they also manifest very serious themes and are at times extremely pessimistic, reminiscent of the deep naturalism of Karkavitsas, Theotokis, or even the later Papadiamantis.³¹

Two short stories are emblematic of Petrakis’ approach. One of the more pessimistic stories in the naturalistic vein is “The Waves of Night,” in which Petrakis describes the life of a weary parish priest. At the center of the story Father Manos questions his own sanity, his faith, but also the apparent meaninglessness of his work as a cleric. Caught between his mundane duties to shallow and selfish parishioners and his waning faith, he seeks guidance first from the cynical and hypocritical Father Grivas, and then from the devoted and earnest Bishop Okas, neither of whom provide much comfort. Ultimately he resigns himself to his fate, determined to plod through life doing the best he can to battle the hypocrisy and meaninglessness of this world, and finds some solace when, while comforting his sexton he undergoes an *anagnorisis*, realizing he is not the only man to live in fear.³² In contrast to the dark and bitter tone of “The Waves of Night,” is one of Petrakis’ “lighter” stories, the well-known “Journal of a Wife Beater,” which humorously takes on the issue of domestic abuse, and plays with traditional beliefs about marriage and gender roles. The protagonist, Vasilis, decides he must beat his wife in order to “improve” her.³³ When his wife unexpectedly fights back against his unjust violence, he at first assumes she must have gone mad. Consultation with the parish priest only serves to reinforce the traditional patriarchal stance, and he resolves to “teach her respect.”³⁴ When she defends herself and he ends up in the hospital, Vasili comes to the conclusion that she cannot be a mortal woman, but must be a goddess, and as she is thus “worthy” of him, he will no longer beat her. In this way Vasilis deludes himself that he has not been “vanquished” by a woman, and is able to maintain his patriarchal beliefs; Nitsa, for her part, has asserted her own agency in the marriage, and has effectively countered those beliefs. As in the conclusion, throughout the story Petrakis

employs the mythological to comic advantage; Vasilis dreams of himself as a Homeric hero, and describes the situation in epic terms, as if it were the war in Troy. The tumid diction and tone of the story amplify this ironically heroic treatment. Vasilis' pomposity and arrogance drive the commentary that Petrakis makes about the main theme of the story; despite the comic treatment of the protagonist that might lend itself to a sympathetic understanding of him, the story effectively criticizes the social mores that lead him to beat her in the first place, for he does not do so out of evil motives, anger, or malice, but because of a misguided notion of what makes an "ideal marriage" and an obligation to asserting traditional conceptions of manliness as the head of the family.

Yiorgos Yiannaris notes the heavy influence of Kazantzakis in the work of Petrakis, and points to Petrakis' Cretan roots as a source of energy and material, both via the old Cretan immigrants whose stories captivated him, but also in the folk culture and the ancient mythology of Crete.³⁵ This is perhaps most evident in the novel *Days of Vengeance* (1983), a story about vendettas and honor killings. The narrative begins in Crete and follows its characters through their immigration to America, where their lives are transformed by their experiences in the harsh and often inhumane environments of immigrant labor such as railroad work camps and tenement slums. Stelios, the murderer, becomes a respected and courageous leader of the labor movement worthy of marriage to the daughter of Father Basil, while Manos, the avenger, softened by his love for Vasso and by a mystical understanding that somehow Stelios has merged with the spirit of Aleko, the murdered brother, ultimately "forgives" the vendetta and refuses to kill Stelios.³⁶ Kalogeras reads the novel using much the same approach as in his analysis of Papazoglou-Margaris: the transformation of the characters grows out of abandoning the ethos of the Old World and adopting those of the New. In this case, individualism trumps familial connections or obligations and *philotimo* drives a new "anthropocentric" relation to the community.³⁷ Taking up a similar approach towards Old and New World discourses, Anagnostou argues, however, that *philotimo* as a cultural trait carries "fixed, immutable meanings" that would necessitate that it "be redefined within the moral coordinates of the New World moral community."³⁸ Anagnostou proposes instead that the novel can be understood as an "endorsement of a certain kind of immigrant morality" that "presents a model *of* and a model *for* a humanist(ic) diaspora community in the New World."³⁹ This new paradigm, he explains, is achieved through a series of "displacements" of the characters – either physical and geographical or psychological – that

allows a “moral catharsis” which creates a new moral order marking a shift from an “immigrant” to an “emerging” ethnic community.⁴⁰ For Petrakis, in this novel at least, the meaning of the immigrant experience as an originary moment has to do with the forging of a Greek America that, while remaining connected to the ethos and the mores of the homeland, becomes something distinctive, with a new set of understandings of that ethos and those mores within its American context. Whether that means the “new morality” of an ethnic community must of necessity conform to larger hegemonic discourses continues to be a source of contention, both within the community and in Petrakis’ fiction.⁴¹

Petrakis attempts to work through many similar issues in the novel *In the Land of Morning* (1973). Returning to the fertile ground of Chicago’s Greek American community, this ambitious novel sets out to examine several important themes: the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the experience of returning veterans; the decay and dissolution of the old ethnic neighborhood (its literal destruction due to gentrification), and the effects of these processes on the Greek community itself; the role of the Church in the community and in family life. Petrakis peoples the bleak Chicago landscape with his usual assortment of Greek American types: gamblers, bravos and underworld figures, sensual widows, cantankerous and lecherous geezers, bakers, restaurateurs, the immigrant urban working class, all-too-human priests and their fecund wives.⁴² At the same time, some critics have seen the novel as a re-working of the *Agamemnon*, in which the themes of justice, retribution, revenge and honor all play a significant role.⁴³

The treatment of the setting in the novel reveals much about Petrakis’ view of Greek America, and in a rather naturalistic sense serves to mirror much of the action in the novel. Set during the bleak days of autumn and early winter, here Chicago is a forbidding landscape of run-down neighborhoods and drafty working class houses, the leftovers of the old immigrant Greek-town that is slowly but surely being bulldozed into oblivion. Petrakis employs this motif throughout the novel to illustrate the change and the internal turmoil of both his characters and the Greek community, and is reminiscent in many ways of Papazoglou-Margaris’ treatment in *Chronicle of Halsted Street* without the nostalgic lament about the loss of the community. Early in the novel, for example, the protagonist – newly returned from Vietnam – finally reaches home after a long bus trip across the West; he observes the city with “coldness” and “apprehension.”⁴⁴

As a cab takes him from the bus-station to his old neighborhood, he notes the ugliness of a city being transformed by new construction and gentrification:

Alex saw the panorama of a familiar section of the city spread out below him, a desolate landscape of buildings, roofs, fire escapes, and vacant lots. In places whole blocks had been demolished, leaving only a bulldozed rubble of crushed brick and stone.⁴⁵

When he arrives in the old Greek neighborhood, the scene is even more depressing:

He began walking slowly up the street, passing a row of dilapidated, flophouse hotels, several shabby old men in overcoats sprawled in doorways, the wastements of empty wine bottles and crumpled paper bags about their scuffed shoes...Farther along there were wine and liquor stores, labor markets with boarded up windows and stickers with faded lettering...And passing the mouth of an alley between the ruined buildings he heard the rattle of cans and saw an old man burrowing like a rat among the garbage. I am home, he thought grimly.⁴⁶

In these descriptions Petrakis sets the tone for a frequently grubby story that does not portray the Greek community in very positive terms: Halsted Street has reached its nadir. Alex's mood is somber as he attempts to deal with his war experiences as well as his hostile familial relationships. Most of the characters, and particularly Father Naoum—a doppelganger for Father Manos of “The Waves of Night”—share the same gloomy, forlorn, even hopeless outlook. Even when Petrakis shifts the narrative point of view away from Alex to other characters, the downcast representations of Chicago remain consistent.

The general tone of the setting is reflected in the treatment of interior spaces in addition to the exteriors described in the passages above. Aside from Gallos' glittering Temple of Apollo restaurant and his luxurious apartment, the spaces the characters inhabit are shabby, worn-out dumps. For example, when Alex finally reaches his mother's house, where he grew up, he is filled with a sense of suffocation and foreboding:

He walked up the worn, uncarpeted stairs to the second floor and came to his door, the same battered entrance he had passed through so many times. He touched the grain of the panel and felt a throbbing near pain in his fingers...He listened for a moment and then stepped into the dark, cramped hallway, assailed suddenly by the stale scents of the musty rooms...each shrouded chair, lamp, end table like artifacts excavated from a tomb. And the mantel cluttered with the ornately framed photographs of old-country relatives, their figures grouped in the rigid postures of wedding and baptismal celebrations, glittering like relics from another age.⁴⁷

The return to this “dead” house deepens the feeling of dread Alex has regarding his family. His bitter and emaciated sister, Eunice, and his distant yet vaguely menacing mother, Asmene, seem as much a part of the setting as human characters in the novel. Appropriately, their weirdly antagonistic relationships play out in the dingy and dim rooms. A similar treatment is extended to Father Naoum’s house, where his hirsute son blasts rock music from the stereo and his porcine wife ceaselessly watches the insipid *Hellenic Hour* on television, and to his daughter Ellie’s apartment, where her soulfulness and beauty stands out sharply against the faded backdrop of threadbare furniture and drafty windows that cannot keep out the damp.

Moreover, neither is the Greek community as a whole spared in Petrakis’ caustic representation. An extended chapter in which Father Naoum must attend a community affair at the parish hall gives Petrakis occasion to describe the community in detail. The tired priest recalls the dreary repetition of such events:

The feasts following weddings and baptisms, the celebration of holidays, endless testimonial dinners (a cursed Greek affliction) and just plain eating and drinking, which could be a ceremony in itself. He had often approached these festivities with anticipation. Yet, in looking back, all he seemed able to remember was that too many people drank too much and ate to the point of gluttony (his own sins).⁴⁸

Petrakis is both amusedly good-natured here as well as pointedly critical. The narrative as told from the point of view of the priest paradoxically expresses an almost delicious self-loathing, in which typically he exposes the worst qualities of the community. As the chapter progresses, the reader is shown the entire range of Greek American types, or rather stereotypes, which paints a rather dreary (if also, one must admit, fairly accurate) portrait. Nevertheless, at certain moments, Petrakis also puts aside his sarcasm and corrosive rhetoric, as when Father Naoum reconsiders the members of his parish:

He looked with benevolence and affection at the faces of the assembled men and women...[T]hey were a vibrant and passionate people, warm, generous, sensitive to honor and pride, easily slighted, mordantly vengeful, destined to journey for as long as they lived along endless and repetitive paths of love, blood, and the haunted past.⁴⁹

Even in the attempt to find some positive attributes Petrakis cannot but dwell on the “destiny” of a community shackled by its traditional modes of being. Later in the novel, Petrakis returns to the use of setting as a commentary about the changes in the community, again from the

point of view of Father Naoum. As he wanders the streets, the priest ponders the end of his parish being literally destroyed by “urban renewal.”⁵⁰ More and more frequently, he presides over farewell rituals and gatherings as families are forced to move away from the old neighborhood, and the priest rather mournfully but also ruefully describes the dissolution of a tight-knit community he has served for many years. Unlike Papazoglou-Margaris, however, Petrakis does not allow his characters to sink into nostalgic reveries or lamentations; they must confront the painful realities and make the best of it. In its symbolic use of its settings, the novel suggests not only that change is inevitable, but also that there is an urgent need for change, however difficult that may be to accomplish. This change may entail leaving behind old, bad habits, traditions and family animosities, or leaving from the run-down immigrant neighborhood, to something new, wholesome, humane and enduring. Father Naoum expresses this when he visits his daughter’s apartment: “He rested his arms on the threadbare covers of the chair, moving his fingers restively along the cloth. Everything in the place is shabby and worn, he thought with irritation, everything needs to be changed and nothing will be replaced before I die.”⁵¹ In a sense the old immigrant generation and its mentality must be put to rest before the community can be transformed.

The motif of change extends from the individual characters into a commentary on the way the community presents itself and is perceived by others. Alex exemplifies this when he recounts one incident during his time in Vietnam when some army buddies ask him and a fellow Greek to “perform” their Greekness by dancing to the famous music from *Zorba the Greek*:

The poor damn Greeks and Zorba,” Alex sighed. “Every Greek male, whatever his temperament, has to live up to that image of a man living only for wine, dancing and love... One night some guy back from R. and R., you know, rest and recreation, had gotten hold of the Zorba record to play on our phonograph. They asked Cleon and me to dance.... Neither of us could dance a step of any Greek dance,” he said ruefully. “My father had taught me when I was very young but I had forgotten. Anyway, all the guys were disgusted, as if we had been deceiving them by telling them were Greek.” He grimaced. “So much for Zorba.”⁵²

This scene works on several levels: as a criticism of non-Greeks whose only perceptions of Greek identity come from stereotypes, it also criticizes the way the Greeks themselves have allowed their culture and image to be perceived in this stereotypical way rather than controlling that perception, and perhaps Petrakis sees this as a symptom of Greek America’s inability or

unwillingness to change. At the same time, this is also paradoxically an oblique criticism of assimilated Greeks, especially the second generation, who have lost their connection to their roots, to their culture, to the past, and to their traditional identity. Ironically, Alex does not really seem to care that this is the case, dismissing the entire notion of the “Zorba problem.”⁵³ At the end of the novel, after having participated in Zervas’ vengeful murder of Gallos and then having been unable to kill his own mother either because of pity or of understanding, Alex embodies his own version of positive change by rejecting the old community and his family, starting a new life far away, in Phoenix. Finally, this passage may also be seen as bit of self-irony from Petrakis, who has himself often created Zorba-like characters such as Matsoukas in *A Dream of Kings* (1966). In the creation of Alex, at least, Petrakis has moved on from the larger-than-life figures of the immigrant past, exploring a character who has had other problems and other experiences, and who has a new and different outlook because of them.

The literary representations of the Greek American community in Papazoglou-Margaris and Petrakis suggest a highly complex and variegated understanding of the processes and effects of the immigrant experience on its formation and its sense of identity. If each author approaches the immigrant generation at times with a mixture of awe and nostalgia, their realistic approach also examines many of the community’s problems and less positive attributes. On the one hand, they valorize the ability and the endurance of the immigrant generation not only to survive, but also to forge a vibrant and powerful community in America that has successfully negotiated the obstacles and the discourses of assimilation, traditionalism, the preservation of connections to Hellenism, and the illusory promises of the American dream. On the other hand, they also exhibit a sensitive knowledge that change is inevitable and inexorable. While Papazoglou-Margaris seems to lament the loss of the old communities, seeking to ameliorate the pain brought on by the growth and the continued assimilation of Greek America, even as she attempts to find stronger connections to her adopted homeland, Petrakis seems to embrace transformation as a positive moral force that is not only beneficial but imperative. That the transformation and its discourses may be contested and contentious, painful and traumatic, yet also full of hope, is only natural.

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¹Yiorgos Kalogeras, "Suspended Souls, Ensnaring Discourses: Theano Papazoglou-Margaris' Immigration Stories." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 8:1 (1990), pp. 85-96. Many critics have noted this penchant for the mythological treatment of the Greek American experience. See: Keller (1995), Kalogeras (1986), Yiannaris (1985), Karanikas (1978). Dallas-Damis (1982) dwells on "Greek Heritage" generally as an indelible feature of Greek ethnic writers.

²Yiorgos Kalogeras, "Disintegration and Integration: The Greek-American Ethos in Harry Mark Petrakis' Fiction." *MELUS* 13:3/4 Varieties of Ethnic Criticism (Autumn-Winter 1986), pp. 27-36.

³ The analyses of these literary texts within the specific parameters of a given field have yielded fascinating, insightful and nuanced readings that are invaluable to understanding the texts as well as their position within the structure of Greek American culture. Often, however, and quite naturally, these scholars seem more interested in the literature as a cultural or ethnic "artifact" that can be analyzed to "tell something true" about the Greek American community or provide evidence of the existence of a specific quality or phenomenon, rather than as literary texts in their own right. Notable exceptions here are Anagnostou (1993 and 2009) and Laliotou (2004).

⁴ As in all questions of canon, determining a canon of Greek American literature is problematic at best. In addition to his copious articles on Greek American literature, Kalogeras (1996) has produced a valuable encyclopedic entry in a volume on immigrant literatures. The inclusion of Greek America as a category appears in the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic Literature*, with articles on fiction, poetry and autobiography, as well as entries on individual authors (see Gemelos and Stefanidou, 2005). On the genre of the novel, Yiannaris' work (1985) is also an invaluable resource. Karanikas (1981) attempts an all-encompassing project to include every text published that mentions Greek characters or themes, however major or minor. Others limit themselves to texts obviously produced by members of the Greek American community itself, but do not often provide a clear rationale for their choices of inclusion or exclusion beyond that broad marker.

⁵ For similar discussions, see Moskos (1980); Papanikolas (2002); Weinberg (1976) and White (1995).

⁶ Alice Scorby. *The Greek Americans*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984, p. 115.

⁷ Yiorgos Kalogeras has written extensively on the immigrant narrative in both Petrakis and Papazoglou-Margaris' work. Ioanna Laliotou. *Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism between Greece and America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, also conducts a careful and useful analysis of the structures of immigrant narratives.

⁸ Michele Gemelos. "Greek American Fiction." In *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic Literature Vol. 2 (D-H)*, Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005b, p. 874.

⁹ Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects*, p. 115.

¹⁰ Yiorgos Kalogeras. "Greek American Literature." In *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literary Heritage*, Alpna Sharma Knippling, (ed.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996, p 275.

¹¹ Kalogeras, "Suspended Souls."

¹² Moskos, Charles C. *Greek Americans: Struggle and Success*. Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1980, p.98 and Gemelos (2005b: 874) characterize Papazoglou-Margaris' writing as "photographic realism" – making a connection to nineteenth century models of realism – but do not offer specific textual examples to illustrate this assertion. Perhaps this term implies the large amount of concrete physical descriptions in the stories.

¹³ Kalogeras, "Greek American Literature," p. 275.

¹⁴ All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Πάνε χρόνια. Μα τότε θυμάμαι. Και πώς να τον ξεχάσω;...Θυμάμαι και πως ήταν άνοιξη. Ο ήλιος έλαμπε. Τα δέντρα φουσκωμένα. Το νιό γρασιδί καταπράσινο βελούδινο χαλί απλωμένο τέζα. Οι πασχαλιές στο άνθισμα τους, κι η ανασαμιά τους μαύρο ναρκωτικό, και με πήρε ταξίδι μακρινό μέσα στο χρόνο και την απόσταση, και με πήγε κει που πρωτόνοιωσα αυτή τη μοσκοβολιά – μακριά! Και ήρθε σιδερένιο χέρι η νοσταλγία κι άρχισε να σφίγγει όλο μου το είναι!...Θέλω να μιλήσω...να μιλήσω στη γλώσσα μου...στη γλώσσα που σε τρυφερά και ξένοιαστα χρόνια ενώθηκε μαζί μου...Θέλω να μιλήσω για κείνες εκεί τότε τις πασχαλιές, έτσι για να νοιώσω πώς στ' αλήθεια υπήρξε μια φορά και δεν είναι γέννημα του νου μου κι όνειρο που χάθηκε σαν ξύπνησα. Page 83.

¹⁵ Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects*, p. 118.

¹⁶ Moskos, *Greek Americans*, p. 99 provides the standard interpretation of this story. He translates the title as "The Suspended Ones," but I have preferred to adopt Kalogeras' more poignant rendering (1990).

¹⁷ Theano Papazoglou-Margaris, Theano. *Χρονικό του Χώλστεντ Στρητ: Ελληνοαμερικάνικα Διηγήματα [Chronicle of Halsted Street: Greek American Stories]*. Αθήνα: Φέξη, 1962, p.186.

¹⁸ Moskos, *Greek Americans*, p. 99.

¹⁹ Lialatou, *Transatlantic Subjects*, p. 117.

²⁰ Όμως για μας, τους γρεκούς του Σικάγου, όλ' αυτά τα καλά και τα κακά (όπως τα πάρετε) του Χώλστεντ είναι μηδέν! Για μας Χώλστεντ είναι μονάχα αυτό το τρίγωνο όπου σταυρώνουν το Χώλστεντ με το Χάρισον Στρήτ και το Μπλού Αϊσλαντ Αβενιου. Όλα τα άλλα κρύα και ξεθωριασμένα μπρός στο δικό μας Χώλστεντ πούναι κάτι ζεστόυλικο, κάτι γλυκό – μια πατριδούλα! p. 197.

²¹ Theano Papazoglou-Margaris, *Χρονικό του Χώλστεντ Στρητ: Ελληνοαμερικάνικα Διηγήματα [Chronicle of Halsted Street: Greek American Stories]*, p.199.

²² Ibid, p. 203.

²³ Ibid, p. 202.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 208.

²⁵ Μεγαλύτερο έγκλημα κι από κείνο τότε που μας ξερριζώσαν οι Τούρκοι από τη γη των πατεράδων μας, Ibid. p. 210.

²⁶ Με συγχωρείτε, που λέω τη λίμνη θάλασσα. Είναι γιατί με ξεγελάει με την απεραντοσύνη της και τη νομίζω θάλασσα. Εκείνη τη δική μας, πέρα μακριά την αγαπημένη Προποντίδα, τη νομίζω. Και σα βλέπω πάνω στα νερά της εκείνα τα πλεούμενα, και κανένα καϊκάκι, τότε πια νομίζω πως βρίσκομαι στ' ακρογιάλι της χαμένης πατρίδας μου και φεύγει ο νους μου πια από τις σημερινές σκοτούρες. Papazoglou-Margaris, Theano. Θεανώ Παπάζογλου-Μάργαρη. *Δuo Κόσμοι [Two Worlds]*. New York: Pella, 1993 p. 148.

²⁷ Mostkos, *Greek Americans*, p.102 and Anagnostou, *Contours*, p. 132.

²⁸ For a complete treatment of Petrakis' themes, see Karanikas (1978), Yiannaris (1985) and Kalogeras (1986). It is notable that alongside his strong male characters, Petrakis creates equally strong female characters that go beyond

the stereotypes of the “good wife and mother” or the “dutiful daughter” and advocate, one could argue, for feminist issues such as equality, autonomy, and agency.

²⁹ Anagnostou, *Contours*, p.140.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 139. To be sure, here I paraphrase and extrapolate from Anagnostou’s commentary that concerns his interpretation of one specific story, “A Tale of Color.” In speaking of his own “project,” Petrakis has expressed similar sentiments in KJ Zarker, . “A MELUS Interview: Harry Mark Petrakis.” *MELUS* 17:3 Varieties of Ethnic Criticism (Fall, 1991-1992), p. 197

³¹ Petrakis has said that one of his earliest influences was Jack London, which may account for the “naturalistic” tone of much of his work. See Bernard F. Rodgers. “The Song of the Thrush: An Interview with Harry Mark Petrakis.” *Chicago Review* 28:3 (Winter, 1977), pp. 104-105.

³² Harry Mark Petrakis. *Collected Stories*. Chicago: Lake View Press, 1986, p. 219.

³³ Ibid, p. 29.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 34.

³⁵ Yiorgo Yiannaris (Γιώργος Γιάνναρης). *Οι Έλληνες Μετανάστες και το Έλληνο-αμερικάνικο Μυθιστόρημα* [*The Greek Immigrants and the Greek-American Novel*]. Αθήνα: Φιλippότη, 1985, pp. 18-19. Petrakis himself has often made reference to such influences. See: Rodgers (1977) and Zarker (1991).

³⁶ Harry Mark Petrakis. *Days of Vengeance*. New York: Doubleday, 1983, p. 264.

³⁷ Yiorgos Karlogeras. “Disintegration and Integration: The Greek-American Ethos in Harry Mark Petrakis’ Fiction.” *MELUS* 13:3/4 Varieties of Ethnic Criticism (Autumn-Winter 1986), p. 33.

³⁸ Yiorgos Angagostou. “Anthropology and Literature: Crossing Boundaries in a Greek-American Novel. *Fantasy or Ethnography? Irony and Collusion in Subaltern Representation*. Sabra Webber and Margaret R. Lynd, eds. *Papers in Comparative Studies* 8 (1993-94), p. 216n.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 198.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 211-12.

⁴¹ Anagnostou’s invaluable work on the subject, especially in *Contours of White Ethnicity* (2009) continues to explore the contested spaces and discourses of the Greek American community as it negotiates its own place within the landscape of a wider “ethnic” America.

⁴² See Karanikas for an exhaustive examination of Petrakis’ characters. Alexander Karanikas, *Hellenes and Hellions: Modern Greek Characters in American Literature*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1981 and. “Harry Mark Petrakis: A Study in Greek Ethnicity.” *MELUS* 5:1 *Critical Approaches to Ethnic Literature* (Spring, 1978), pp. 14-30.

⁴³ Petrakis comments on his use of mythological structures in his interview with Rodgers, claiming that ancient mythology is a kind of knowledge that is somehow acquired, via some form of national, cultural and environmental osmosis, “through the bloodstream” of the Greeks, which differentiates it from merely simple literary allusion Rodgers, “The Song of the Thrush,” pp. 102-04. While he tracks the various connections within the novel to the ancient myth, Yiannaris takes Karanikas to task on the notion that the novel is simply an “adaptation” of the *Agamemnon*. Rather, Yiannaris suggests that it operates more as a “source of inspiration” and thematic material that helps Petrakis create a “well structured, deeply psychological and original novel.” Yiannaris, *Οι Έλληνες Μετανάστες*, pp.57-58.

⁴⁴ Harry Mark Petrakis. *In the Land of Morning*. New York: David McKay, 1973, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 13-14

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 105.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 121-22.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 276.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 156.

⁵² Ibid, p. 127.

⁵³ Petrakis’ criticism of the younger generation extends to the characterization of Fr. Naoum’s son George, who stands in as a caricature of the “hippies,” a vaguely rebellious, long-haired pot-smoking rock ‘n roller who is completely inarticulate, and in his father’s eyes is the complete antithesis of traditional Greek manhood.