

# Modern Greek Literature's Intersections with Greek History and the Past: A Concise Outline

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Nektaria Klapaki, *University of Washington*

## *Abstract*

*The first part of this paper is a concise outline of some of the ways in which modern Greek literature has entered into a dialogue with Greek history and the past from the nineteenth century to the present by idealizing, Hellenizing, suppressing, inventing, negotiating, critiquing, or reinterpreting and re-inventing them. Along these lines, the paper weaves together different literary, ideological, and historical threads which help the readers realize that the topics examined by the ensuing papers of this Special Issue do not emerge out of a vacuum, but instead constitute responses to—or have been prompted by—concrete developments in the realms of modern Greek literature, ideology, and history. The second part of the paper delineates the Special Issue's specific focus, scope, aims, approach and methodology, while summarizing the main arguments and contributions of each of the individual papers.*

## *Keywords*

Modern Greek literature; ancient Greece; Byzantium; modern Greek history; modern Greek ideology.

Any attempt today to argue that a key feature of modern Greek literature is its persistent, almost incessant dialogue with Greek history and the past would amount to a cliché, in view of the considerable scholarly attention already given to the multiple manifestations, forms, and configurations of this dialogue. The imaginative recreation of specific historical periods, actors and events by modern Greek authors of historical novels; the endeavors of modern Greek poets to come to terms with the ambivalent legacy of the ancient Greek past and to re-imagine its significance for the present; the attempts of postmodernist Greek authors to recover periods of Greek history forgotten or suppressed from the modern Greek historical consciousness, and the engagement of modern Greek playwrights with different facets and periods of Greek history—all these are only some of the questions that have been extensively discussed in the relevant scholarly literature.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the extensive number of pages devoted to the various links, intersections and entanglements of modern Greek literature with Greek history and the past, the particular topic does not seem to have been exhausted—or, at least, not yet. On the contrary, it continues to attract scholarly and also artistic attention, as can be inferred from the recent publication of the fine collective volume entitled *Retelling the Past in Contemporary Greek Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, which was co-edited by Trine Stauning Willert and Gerasimus Katsan.<sup>2</sup> The particular volume focuses on cultural manifestations of the Greek historical consciousness since 1989. Its thought-provoking essays constitute a significant contribution to the existing literature on the cultural expressions of today's Greece, while the editors' and the contributors' preoccupation with questions of history and the role the past plays

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1 This literature comprises a copious number of monographs, edited volumes and articles whose review goes well beyond the scope of this concise outline. Some of the publications that appeared in the last fifteen years or so include, for example, the following: Dimitris Païvanas, "Ideology's Discontents in Thanassis Valtinos's *Data from the Decade of the Sixties*," in *Contemporary Greek Fiction in a United Europe: From Local History to the Global Individual*, ed. Peter Mackridge and Eleni Yannakakis (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), 134-49; Panagiotis Roilos, "The Politics of Writing: Greek Historiographic Metafiction and Maro Douka's *A Cap of Purple*," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 22, no 1 (2004): 1-23; Vassilis Lambropoulos, "The Rehearsal of Antiquity in Post-modern Greek Fiction," in *A Singular Antiquity: Archaeology and Hellenic Identity in Twentieth-Century Greece*, ed. Dimitris Damaskos and Dimitris Plantzos, (Athens: Mouseio Benaki, 2008), 163-71; Dimitris Tziouvas, "Reconfiguring the Past: Antiquity and Greekness," in *A Singular Antiquity*, 287-98; Vassiliki Dimoula, "The Nation between Utopia and Art: Canonizing Dionysios Solomos as the 'National Poet' of Greece," in *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism, & the Uses of the Past (1797-1896)*, ed. Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 201-10; Dimitris Tziouvas, "The Novel and the Crown: *O Leandros* and the Politics of Romanticism," in *The Making of Modern Greece*, 211-24; Michalis Chryssanthopoulos, "Autobiography, Fiction, and the Nation: The Writing Subject in Greek during the Later Nineteenth Century," in *The Making of Modern Greece*, 239-48; Yiannis Papatheodorou, *Ρομαντικά πεπρωμένα. Ο Αριστοτέλης Βαλαωρίτης ως «εθνικός ποιητής»* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2009); Gerasimus Katsan, *History and National Ideology in Greek Postmodernist Fiction* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013); David Ricks, "Lucretian Moments in Modern Greek Poetry," in *Re-imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*, ed. Dimitris Tziouvas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 252-65; Gunnar De Boel, "Rethinking the Greek Legacy: Dorians in Modern Greek Fiction," in *Re-imagining the Past*, 266-81; Marinos Pourgouris, "Yannis Ritsos, Marxist Dialectics, and the Re-imagining of Ancient Greece," in *Re-imagining the Past*, 282-96; Dimitris Tziouvas, "The Wound of History: Ritsos and the Reception of Philoctetes," in *Re-imagining the Past*, 297-317; Rowena Fowler, "Plato, Seferis and Heaney: Poetry as Redress," in *Re-imagining the Past*, 318-29; Gonda Van Steen, *Stage of Emergency: Theater and Public Performance under the Greek Military Dictatorship of 1967-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

2 Trine Stauning Willert and Gerasimus Katsan, eds., *Retelling the Past in Contemporary Greek Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).

speaks to the ongoing relevance of these issues to discussions about modern Greek identity, literature and culture alike.

This Special Issue seeks to contribute to the critical discussion of the above questions, and to the relevant scholarly output. Its starting-point is the observation that while modern Greek literature's dialogue with Greek history and the past is by no means unique to it, even a cursory glance at the work of some of the major modern Greek authors suggests that their engagement with Greek history is more intense—and, perhaps, more intricate—than other writers'. This is evident, for example, in the almost compulsive preoccupation of several modern Greek authors with ancient Greek history and the ancient Greek past.<sup>3</sup> As a manifestation of the asymmetrical relationship between ancient and modern Greece that the western cult and idealization of Hellas fostered, these modern Greek authors' engagement with ancient Greek history and the past has left an indelible, deeply ambivalent mark on their work. On the one hand, their work suggests that they treat ancient Greek history and the ancient Greek past as assets for the modern Greek present. On the other hand, the same ancient history and past feature in their work as a lingering heavy burden from which they cannot free themselves, as they can neither surpass nor ignore such an internationally recognized legacy.<sup>4</sup> As a source of feelings of pride and glory, but also of anxiety and belatedness, the relationship of the modern Greek authors' work with the ancient Greek past is, in fact, not only ambivalent, but also inescapable, it seems. For regardless of whether they embrace and perpetuate or, by contrast, critique and reject stereotypes that constitute glorious ancient Greek history and ancestors as foils to infamous, degenerated modern Greek descendants, in one way or another their work ultimately gestures towards ancient Greek history and engages the ancient Greek past.

The modern Greek authors' nearly obsessive preoccupation with ancient Greek history—but also with Greek history, in general—should be attributed to the fact that for approximately two centuries many of the functions of modern Greek literature and its role in the modern Greek public sphere were refracted through its close links with the modern Greek nation state. The development of modern Greek literature into an institution in the early 1830s—that is, roughly at the same time when the modern Greek nation state came into being—had significant implications for both entities. Their co-emergence meant that they became mutually dependent on each other and bound to the same goals. These largely coalesced around ideals of (spatio-temporal) continuity; (ethno-cultural) authenticity, purity and uniqueness; and (national) homogeneity, alongside a belief in the modern Greek nation's providential mission and manifest destiny. This mutually constitutive, reciprocal relationship between modern Greek literature and the modern Greek nation state effectively turned modern Greek literature into a national institution with close ties to the modern Greek national ideology.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2, coined the term "ancestoritis" to convey in English the meaning of the Greek term *progonoplexia*, which suggests the modern Greeks' fixation on their ancestors.

4 Dimitris Tziouvas, ed., *Re-imagining the Past*, 1.

5 The implications of modern Greek literature's role as a national institution for modern Greek criticism have been discussed in detail by Vassilis Lambropoulos, *Literature as National Institution: Studies in the Politics of Modern Greek Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

As a national institution, modern Greek literature prioritized its engagement with Greek history for about two centuries—especially ancient Greek history.<sup>6</sup> This does not entail that the modern Greek authors were not interested in other periods, events or actors of Greek history. For example, some of the first Romantic novels of the modern Greek state are set in the early years of the independent modern Greek kingdom, while others focus on the history of pre-independence Greece.<sup>7</sup> Also, the period of Greece's Ottoman rule features in the work of several Greek Romantic poets, next to the Greek War of Independence and the first years of the modern Greek kingdom. However, even when the Greek Romantic poets reflected on very recent events of modern Greek history or events which were more or less contemporary to them, they still felt compelled to turn their gaze back to ancient Greek history in order to illuminate the more recent historical developments. Along these lines, the Greek War of Independence was primarily treated as an incident that led to the *palingenesis*—that is, the resurrection of *Hellas* in the form of modern Greece.<sup>8</sup> The “Hymn to Liberty” (1823) by Dionysios Solomos is a rather revealing case in point, for it depicts Liberty as resurrected directly from the bones of the ancient Greeks.<sup>9</sup> Such a revivalist approach to ancient Greek history informs nineteenth-century Greek poetry, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century, although manifestations of this impulse can also be found in the work of select twentieth-century Greek authors.

The Greek Romantic poets' revivalist approach to ancient Greek history should be seen as their response to the discourses of Romantic Hellenism and Philhellenism, which defined modern Greece as *Hellas* revived, but also to the modern Greek national ideology, which turned revivalism into one of its constitutive elements, especially during its early stages. According to Antonis Liakos:

During the foundation of the new state, the constitutive myth was the resurrection of the mythical Phoenix. Its significance was that Greece resurrected itself, like the mythical Phoenix, after having been under the subjugation of the Macedonians, the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Turks.<sup>10</sup>

A key consequence of the predominance of this ideology during the first half of the nineteenth century was the rejection of the post-classical periods of history as essentially non-Greek. The emphasis on the direct link between classical and modern Greece necessitated that the stages between these

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6 However, as Tziovas, *Re-imagining the Past*, 17-8, notes, a study by Alexis Politis on the use of ancient Greek themes in modern novels between 1790-1900 suggests that a noteworthy exception to this tendency is nineteenth-century Greek fiction, in which preoccupation with Greek antiquity in general is conspicuously absent.

7 For the Romantic novels' focus on the Greek War of Independence and on contemporary Greek history, see Henri Tonnet, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού μυθιστορήματος*, trans. Marina Karamanou (Athens: Patakis, 1999), 102-6.

8 On the ambivalent status of the Greek War of Independence in modern Greek historiography, see Elli Skopetea, *Το «πρότυπο βασιλείο» και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα: Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830-1880)* (Athens: Polytypo, 1988), 205-8.

9 Roderick Beaton, “Antique Nation? ‘Hellenes’ on the Eve of Greek Independence and in Twelfth-century Byzantium,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 31, no. 1 (2007): 85.

10 Antonis Liakos, “Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 204.

two periods did not constitute part of Greek history.<sup>11</sup>

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the dominant focus on the history of classical Greece that—alongside the intermittent interest in recent and contemporary Greek history—formed the historically oriented modern Greek literature started to broaden. Periods such as the Middle Ages, which were hitherto excluded from the official Greek national history and ideology, and from the various literary and cultural manifestations of the modern Greek historical consciousness, began to attract the attention of modern Greek novelists, who set their novels in this period. From Alexandros Rizos Rangavis's *The Lord of Morea* (1850) to Emmanouil Roidis's *Pope Joan* (1866), to mention only two examples, the Middle Ages started to feature in nineteenth-century Greek fiction, serving fairly diverse functions and aims which ranged from serious and nostalgic to satirical.

The shift to the Middle Ages in select works of modern Greek fiction coincided with a paradigm shift in modern Greek historiography that involved the appropriation and incorporation of the history of Byzantium into the national historical narrative. In response to Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer's *Geschichte der Halbinsel Morea während des Mittelalters* (1830), wherein he dismissed the racial and cultural origins of the modern Greeks in *Hellas* on the grounds of the extinction of the Greek element by the successive Slavic invasions during the Middle Ages, modern Greek historians proposed a model of historical continuity in place of the existing revival model.<sup>12</sup> As part of his attempt to reassess Byzantium by Hellenizing it, Spyridon Zambelios invented, in 1852, the term "Helleno-Christian." Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, on the other hand, with his voluminous *History of the Hellenic Nation* (1860-74), established a tripartite scheme of Greek history made up of three periods—ancient, Byzantine, and modern—which were viewed as parts of a single, continuous whole. As a result of the above two major intellectual developments, the proposed synthesis of Hellenism with Christianity and the theory of continuity became a staple of the official modern Greek ideology.<sup>13</sup>

From the 1870s onwards, other disciplines were also enlisted in the service of the theory of continuity alongside the discipline of History. Central among them was the discipline of Greek Folklore studies, which emerged, more or less, as a result of the efforts of a single individual, Nikolaos G. Politis. The epistemological model of "survivalism" that Politis introduced placed emphasis on the native oral traditions—folk songs, beliefs, fables, parables, and legends—customs, and ritual practices of the modern Greek people. All these elements of the modern Greek folklore were seen as "an indispensable link in the chain of cultural continuity that was perceived as stretching back to antiquity."<sup>14</sup> In referring to the modern Greek oral folk traditions, Politis used the phrase "monuments of the word,"

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11 In many cases, the systematic erasure of the marks of the post-classical periods of Greek history from modern Greek consciousness and public memory took the form of a state-sponsored process of purification. On the purification of the Acropolis, for example, see Effie F. Athanassopoulou, "An 'Ancient' Landscape: European Ideals, Archaeology, and Nation Building in Early Modern Greece," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20, no. 2 (2002): 273-305.

12 On Fallmerayer's theory, see Skopetea, *Το «πρότυπο βασιλείο» και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα*, 165-6, 171, 173-4.

13 On the role of historiography, and especially on the work of Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos, in relation to the theory of continuity, see Skopetea, *ibid*, 175-89.

14 Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 71. On Greek Folklore studies in relation to the theory of continuity, see Skopetea, *Το «πρότυπο βασιλείο» και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα*, 194-6.

a formulation suggesting that he treated them as relics of Greek antiquity which had survived in modern Greek folklore.<sup>15</sup> This approach was in line not only with Politis's archaeological approach to his material, but also with the archaeological orientation of Greek Folklore studies in general, which held the modern Greek folk present to be a reflection of Greek antiquity.

This impulse of Greek Folklore studies implicitly or explicitly informs late nineteenth-century Greek literature, especially the realist short stories with contemporary rural settings that were written between roughly 1880-1900 in the mode of writing known as "ethnography." Several of the representatives of this mode of writing, which gave rise to the eponymous school of writing, responded to an 1883 announcement by the periodical *Estia* which solicited authors to write stories whose "subject will be Greek, that is, will consist either of the description of scenes from the life of the Greek people in any of its historical periods, or of the narration of an episode of Greek history."<sup>16</sup> While *Estia's* announcement invited authors to draw their inspiration from any period of Greek history, the majority of those who responded to the periodical's call wrote short stories inspired by their contemporary rural Greek communities. They did so, however, with an eye to the distant past, depicting in the process the modern Greek folk with its oral traditions, mores, and customs as static and unchanged over time; namely, in terms similar to those Politis envisioned it—as a frozen relic of Greek antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

Like their contemporary short story writers, many poets of this period were also inspired by the modern Greek folkloric material, although some of them went beyond this material by drawing their inspiration from other periods of Greek history. Of these poets, Kostis Palamas wrote poetry that juxtaposes and also synthesizes different periods of Greek history—notably ancient and modern—alongside different cultural traditions, especially the classical, the Byzantine, and the modern Greek folk tradition. This impulse informs, for example, his long, epic-scale poems *The Dodecalogue of the Gypsy* (1907) and *The Emperor's Reed-Pipe* (1910). Inspired by tenth- and thirteenth-century Byzantine history, the latter poem points to a fusion of paganism with Christianity, while offering an imaginative synthesis of ancient, Byzantine, and modern Greek history.<sup>18</sup> The large-scale synthesis Palamas proposed was taken up by several of his poetic successors. One of them was Angelos Sikelianos, whose first attempts in this direction were the first four "Consciousness" poems of the *Prologue to Life* (1915-17) and the unfinished *Easter of the Hellenes*. These early endeavors were continued in the 1930s with a series of shorter poems, such as the "Sacred Way" (1935) and "In the Monastery of St Luke" (1935), which bring together ancient, medieval, and modern Greek folk elements and combine them with religious and mystical undertones.<sup>19</sup> An impulse towards a synthesis of ancient, Byzantine, and modern Greek elements also informs Kostas Varnalis's *Pilgrim* (1919), while three years later *The Burning Light* (1922) builds upon the same idea to suggest that the pagan gods and

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15 On Politis's phrase "monuments of the word," see Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, *Η θεωρία της ελληνικής λαογραφίας. Κριτική ανάλυση*, 3rd ed. (Athens: Etaireia Spoudon Neollinikou Politismou kai Genikis Paideias, Idrytis: Scholi Moraiti, 1986), 66-7, 89, 97, 158-9.

16 Beaton, *An Introduction*, 70.

17 Cf. Tonnet, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού μυθιστορήματος*, 150.

18 Beaton, *An Introduction*, 86-90.

19 Ibid., 90.

the Christian God are nothing more than the imaginative constructions of men.<sup>20</sup>

The synthesis put forward by Palamas and his successors was characteristically eschewed by C. P. Cavafy, one of Palamas's contemporaries. While a sizeable part of Cavafy's poetry was inspired by Byzantine history and culture, Cavafy's attraction to Byzantium, unlike Palamas's, did not serve the goal of a large-scale synthesis of Greek history. As a poet of the Greek diaspora who spent most of his life in Alexandria, Egypt, Cavafy did not draw his inspiration from the classical age of fifth-century BCE Athens, which inspired several of his Athenian contemporaries who were associated with the national center of Hellenism. Rather, Cavafy was interested in the span of Greek history approximately between the conquests of Alexander the Great and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, although his preoccupation with these periods did not revolve around historical "facts." As has been suggested, "what is represented, questioned, and constantly examined in Cavafy's historical poems are not the facts of history ('What happened?'), but history itself ('How is history made?')."<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Cavafy's historical poetics differs significantly from the poetics of his Greek contemporaries, while anticipating questions of history that inform historically oriented postmodernist Greek fiction. The orientation of Cavafy's work towards specific historical periods and its eschewing of a large-scale synthesis of Greek history distinguishes his poetry not only from the works of Palamas and his poetic heirs, but also from that of the major representatives of the so-called "Generation of the Thirties."

The ancient Greek past that was shunned by Cavafy informs, for example, George Seferis's work, beginning with *Mythistorema* (1935), which encompasses both references to material aspects Greek antiquity, such as fragmented statues, and allusions to ancient Greek myths. Other poets of this generation, who drew on various aspects of Greek antiquity and the ancient Greek past, are Odysseus Elytis, Nikos Engonopoulos, and Andreas Embirikos, to mention a few. On the other hand, the Byzantine past features in the work of some major novelists of this generation as, for example, in George Theotokas's *Argo* (1933, 1936) and, more extensively, in Angelos Terzakis's historical novel *Princess Ysabeau* (1938/1945), which focuses on the thirteenth-century battles of the Greeks against the crusaders.<sup>22</sup> Other novelists of this generation, particularly those associated with the so-called "Aeolian School," directed their gaze to more recent historical events, such as the First World War and the Asia Minor Catastrophe, in order to preserve what they deemed as historically significant collective experiences. From Stratis Myrivilis's *Life in the Tomb* (1924/1930) and *The Schoolmistress with the Golden Eyes* (1933), to Elias Venezis's *Number 31328* (1924/1931) and Stratis Doukas's *A Prisoner's Story* (1929), these and other literary testimonies of the Generation of the Thirties bear witness to major traumatic events in twentieth-century Greek history while pointing to modern Greek literature's role in serving as a repository of Greek collective memory.<sup>23</sup>

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20 Ibid., 115.

21 Roderick Beaton, "The History Man," in "C. P. Cavafy: Special Double Issue," ed. Margaret Alexiou, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10, no. 1-2 (1983): 31.

22 On Terzakis' historical novel, see K. A. Dimadis, *Δικτατορία, πόλεμος και πεζογραφία (1936-1944)* (Athens: Estia, 2004), 53-92.

23 On the above literary testimonies of Doukas, Venezis, and Myrivilis, see Mario Vitti, *Η γενιά του Τριάντα: ιδεολογία και μορφή* (Athens: Ermis, 1989), 244-67.

The fairly long lives and publishing careers of several members of the Generation of the Thirties meant that they had first-hand experience of the major events of twentieth-century Greek history, on which their work reflected. Several poets of this generation drew on their experiences of the Second World War in their imaginative representations of this event. From Odysseus Elytis's *Heroic and Elegiac Song for the Lost Second Lieutenant of Albania* (1945) to Yiannis Ritsos's *Romiosini* (written 1945-7; published 1954) and George Seferis's *Log-Book II* (1944) and "Thrush" (1947), to mention just a few, the work of these poets imaginatively revisits and recreates the Second World War's dire historical realities.<sup>24</sup> Very often, the above poets' work combines wartime events with elements of Greek tradition as a way to offer a message of hope and redemption through which to overcome the harsh conditions. During the war years, the voices of the members of the Generation of the Thirties were joined by those of older poets, such as Sikelianos with his collection *Akritika* (1942), as well as those of younger ones, such as Manolis Anagnostakis, Titos Patrikios, Tasos Livaditis, Aris Alexandrou, and other poets associated with the Greek Left. Unlike their senior counterparts, however, the younger poets depicted the harsh realities of the Second World War in their so-called "social" poetry without turning to tradition or attempting to offer messages of hope amidst the crisis. When the war was over, the poets of the Generation of the Thirties turned their gaze to earlier periods of Greek history—such as the Middle Ages, as in the case of Seferis's *Log-Book III* (1955)—or took the idea of synthesizing different Greek historical periods, first put forward by Palamas, in new directions. Some prominent examples of this impulse include, for instance, Odysseus Elytis's *Axion Esti* (1959) and Seferis's "Engomi" (1955). By contrast, the so-called "social poets" continued to reflect on the Second World War and the ensuing Greek civil war in their poetry by employing the same unadorned, factual style they had previously adopted.<sup>25</sup>

Both these events featured prominently in the fiction published between the 1940s-1960s. Continuing the Aeolian School's interwar legacy of literary testimonies, the fictional testimonies of this period also blur the dividing line between fact and fiction. At the same time, they take the legacy of the Aeolian School in new directions through their engagement with different historical periods and events, and also through their development of new techniques. This is evident, for instance, in the development of the "documentary" testimony in Yannis Beratis's novels *The Broad River* (1946/1973) and *Itinerary of '43* (1946/1976), which respectively draw on the author's wartime experiences in the Albanian front and Epiros as a member of the National Republican Greek League (EDES). After Beratis, authors such as Rodis Roufos, Nikos Kasdaglis, Alexandros Kotzias, and others also explored the possibilities of "documentary" testimonies. Of the testimonies about the Second World War published in the 1960s, Stratis Tsirkas's trilogy *Drifting Cities* (1960-5) offers an account of the war from the perspective of the Left, while Thanasis Valtinos's novella *The Descent of the Nine* (1963) focuses on the civil war. Valtinos's work is an example of an "oral" testimony, like Dido Sotiriou's *Bloodied Earth* (1962), which focuses on the events of 1922-3 and the Anatolian campaign of the Greek army.<sup>26</sup>

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24 On the Second World War in relation to the poetry of Seferis, see Roderick Beaton, *George Seferis* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1991), 53-4.

25 For a more detailed discussion of these developments, see Beaton, *An Introduction*, 180-98.

26 Several of the above testimonies are discussed by Peter Mackridge, "Testimony and Fiction in Greek Narrative Prose,

In the 1970s and the 1980s, the theme of the civil war was taken up again by such works as Aris Alexandrou's allegorical tale *The Box* (1974) and Alki Zei's *Achilles' Fiancée* (1987), which covers historical events up until the Colonels' military dictatorship. However, the events that occupied center stage in the historically oriented fiction and poetry of this period were the military dictatorship and the Polytechnic episode. From Margarita Karapanou's *Cassandra and the Wolf* (1977) to Maro Douka's *Fool's Gold* (1979) and Alexandros Kotzias's *Usurped Authority* (1979), among others, and from Jenny Mastoraki's *Tales of the Deep* (1983) to Maria Laina's *Hers* (1985), the novels and the poetry of this period do not only deal with very recent historical events but also give prominence to the voices of female protagonists, in line with the forceful emergence of women's writing in Greece after 1974.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning in the early 1980s, the historically oriented Greek fiction embraced the mode of "historiographic metafiction," which it combined with other postmodern techniques, questions, and concerns in a full-scale Greek postmodernism, especially from the 1990s on. Novels such as Yorgis Yatromanolakis's *History* (1982) and Rhea Galanaki's *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* (1989) are some early examples of this mode of writing, and were followed by such works as *I Shall Sign as Louie* (1993) and *Eleni or Nobody* (1998) by Galanaki, and *A Cap of Purple* (1995) by Maro Douka, to mention just a few. This development had significant repercussions on the ways in which Greek postmodernist fiction perceived its relationship with the modern Greek nation, its history, and the Greek past, broadly speaking. The modern Greek nation and modern Greek history feature in Greek postmodernist fiction, yet they are treated from a perspective that questions accepted notions about them. For example, the idealization of and fixation on ancient Greek history and the ancient Greek past identified in the work of Romantic and modernist writers is absent from Greek postmodernist fiction. When the postmodernist Greek authors engage the ancient Greek past, they do not idealize it or treat it as evidence of the nationalist ideology of Greek historical continuity, but instead treat it as a mere allegory for the contemporary Greek historical realities their work explores. Along these lines, Greek postmodernist fiction has avoided the near silencing of certain historical periods that characterizes the work of those modern Greek authors who embraced the nationalist ideology of historical continuity. Aware that certain eras have not received the same attention like others, the Greek postmodernist authors revisit neglected periods, such as that of Greece's Ottoman rule, challenging in the process accepted notions of Greek national identity and debunking official Greek history. Another ideology that is critically approached by the Greek postmodernist authors is Marxism. Leftist postmodernist authors employ the mode of historiographic metafiction to question not only the Right's but also the Left's interpretations of the history of the Greek civil war, thus addressing the larger postmodern question about the uses of history and the meaning of historical knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

All these developments from the 1980s, and especially from the 1990s on, suggest that modern Greek literature is gradually but steadily emancipating itself from its close connection to the modern Greek nation state. According to Vassilis Lampropoulos, from the late 2000s on modern Greek

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1944-1967," in *The Greek Novel: A.D. 1-1985*, ed. Roderick Beaton (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 90-102.

27 On the above works of Mastoraki and Laina and, more generally, on the poetry of the Generation of the 1970s written by women, see the study by Karen Van Dyck, *Cassandra and the Censors: Greek Poetry since 1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 175-256.

28 On the above and other aspects of Greek postmodernist fiction, see the study by Katsan, *History and National Ideology*.

literature is no longer a national institution tied to the ideology and the goals of the modern Greek nation state.<sup>29</sup> This development is closely connected with the fact that contemporary Greek authors are not interested in exploring aspects of the homogenous, pure, unique, authentic, modern Greek nation, or in underscoring the ideology of Greek historical continuity. Instead, they are interested in recovering the voice of the Other within the modern Greek nation and in examining the modern Greek nation's diverse and heterogeneous character through the use of mixed literary forms that draw on and combine various literary genres.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, after assuming the role of a national institution for approximately two centuries, modern Greek literature no longer entertains such aspirations, its relationship to the modern Greek state having come full circle. This development opens up new horizons for contemporary Greek literature, offering the possibility of a different relationship with the modern Greek nation which reflects the diverse, multicultural realities of today's Greece.

### ***About this Special Issue***

The above concise outline of some of the ways in which modern Greek literature has entered into a dialogue with Greek history and the past by idealizing, Hellenizing, suppressing, inventing, negotiating, critiquing, or reinterpreting and re-inventing them is by no means comprehensive; nor does it aspire to be such, not least because all the topics discussed only cursorily here have already been examined in detail by the relevant scholarly literature. Also, the concise character of this outline does not permit me to even briefly touch upon certain facets of modern Greek literature's engagement with Greek history and the past, such as its relationship to collective Greek memory. In selectively focusing on certain aspects of the topic under examination, the modest aim of this outline is to provide a rationale and a context against which the papers of this Special Issue should be read. Along these lines, the outline weaves together different literary, ideological, and historical threads which help the readers realize that the topics examined by the individual papers of this Special Issue do not emerge out of a vacuum, but instead constitute responses to—or have been prompted by—concrete developments in the realms of modern Greek literature, ideology, and history.

The chronological scope of this Special Issue stretches approximately from the early 1820s to the late 2000s. Even though this span is fairly broad, the focus is on some key historical periods and events of modern Greek history that serve as pivot points around which the individual papers revolve, while some references are also made to periods of Greek history outside this chronological framework. Similarly, the papers included here do not cover manifestations of modern Greek literature's entanglement with Greek history and the past from all its periods and movements, but instead examine their dialogue through a series of select case studies.

One of the aims of this Special Issue is to highlight—to the extent possible—the diversity of the authors, texts, genres, cultural and geographical settings that make up the historically oriented modern Greek literature. In view of this aim, the individual papers explore texts of diverse genres that range from drama and poetry through fiction and are set in varied geographical and cultural backgrounds.

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29 Vassilis Lambropoulos, “*Η ιστορία απέναντι στη λογοτεχνία*,” *Vivliothiki*, the weekly literary supplement of the Greek daily *Eleftherotypia*, February 8, 2008, 17.

30 *Ibid.*, 18.

At the same time, the papers included here focus not only on the work of canonical authors who have occupied a central position in the relevant critical discussions, but also examine the work of less well-known authors who have not received adequate consideration hitherto.

In revisiting the subject of modern Greek literature's dialogue with Greek history and the past, this Special Issue adopts a comparative approach. Thus, one of the papers included here (Kayalis) places the text discussed within a comparative literary context, while another paper (Grammatikos) focuses on two British Romantic dramas inspired by the Greek War of Independence. In this way, the Special Issue combines perspectives from within and from outside Greece to highlight the topics discussed. In addition to adopting a comparative approach, this Special Issue tackles the topics examined from an interdisciplinary perspective. The individual papers draw on various disciplines (philosophy, history, psychoanalysis), fields (Holocaust studies, memory studies, trauma studies), and theories (postmodernist theories of history and poststructuralist analyses). The postmodernist theories of history, which form part of the "History turn" in the humanities, tend to stress the provisional and uncertain nature of historical knowledge; to question the presumed objective status of historical "facts" established by the nineteenth-century tradition of positivist historiography; to examine the historian's role in the selection, interpretation, and even invention of historical "facts"; and to reveal the close ties between history and literature. All these and other insights animate the interpretations of the literary texts put forward by the contributors to this Special Issue, who are scholars from North America, Europe and Australia specializing in the fields in which their respective papers fall.

The Special Issue opens with a paper by Alexander Grammatikos entitled "Staging Transcultural Relations: Early Nineteenth-Century British Drama and the Greek War of Independence." The paper focuses on two fairly unknown British Romantic dramas, George Burges's *The Son of Erin or the Cause of the Greeks* (1823) and John Baldwin Buckstone's *The Maid of Athens; or, the Revolt of the Greeks* (1829), which castigate British apathy towards the Greek War of Independence by featuring Irish and British characters in Greece supporting the Greek cause. Grammatikos's paper argues for the existence of a dialogic, reciprocal relationship between British Romantic drama, the Greek War of Independence, and the political realities in Greece and Britain during the 1820s. According to Grammatikos, the two British authors did not only seek to influence their audiences' views in support of the Greek War of Independence; in focusing on revolutionary Greece, the authors also sought to sway their audiences to critique the British political establishment during the 1820s. By intertwining political and cultural aspects of Romantic Hellenism, Grammatikos's paper thus shows how a major event in nineteenth-century Greek history is appropriated by British Romantic drama in ways that come to bear not only on modern Greek history and the fortunes of the emerging modern Greek nation, but also on the political realities of nineteenth-century Britain and Europe at large.

Grammatikos's paper is followed by Takis Kayalis's paper entitled "Cavafy's Historical Poetics in Context: 'Caesarion' as Palimpsest," which is a contribution to discussions about Cavafy's historical poetics through a new, original reading of one of the most well-known poems of the Cavafian *oeuvre*. Kayalis's paper opens by refuting previous biographical readings of "Caesarion," arguing instead that Cavafy's source of inspiration for this poem was the historical study *The Empire of the Ptolemies* (1895) by the Irish classicist, papyrologist, and professor of ancient history, John Pentland Mahaffy. Through a close analysis which reads a series of tropes informing "Caesarion" against the passages and tropes in Mahaffy's book, Kayalis's paper demonstrates that Cavafy's poem constitutes

an extensive, complex, and radical revision of its source text. The second critical cliché dismantled by the paper is the view that Caesarion was a rather obscure historical figure ignored by modern historians and writers alike. Through a survey of the multiple fortunes of Caesarion in modern European literature, Kayalis sketches a modern genealogy of Cleopatra's son, showing that he was not forgotten at all by European authors in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. The paper closes by suggesting a possible link between Cavafy's "Caesarion" and Caesarion the historical figure as featuring in select early twentieth-century cinematic re-workings of Antony and Cleopatra's story.

The next paper by Anthony Dracopoulos, entitled "Reading Andreas Kordopatis, Understanding History and Fiction in Thanasis Valtinos," is devoted to an early text by Thanasis Valtinos, *The Book of the Days of Andreas Kordopatis* (1964), and probes its relationship to history and fiction by addressing questions pertaining to the perception, construction, and representation of history. Drawing on postmodernist conceptualizations and understandings of the relationship between literature and history advanced by Hayden White and other historians, Dracopoulos opens his discussion by drawing attention to the affinities of history and literature which stem from their use of common narrative practices. Turning to the experimental forms of Valtinos's literary narratives, Dracopoulos then goes on to posit that Valtinos's narratives blur the distinction between literature and history by pointing to the raw materials of history. The author's search for new narrative forms is attributed to his (post-modernist) skepticism towards traditional narrative forms and grand metanarratives, which marginalize or omit altogether aspects of historical experience addressed by "micro-history." This explains, Dracopoulos argues, Valtinos's interest in facets of modern Greek history, such as migration, which inform *The Book of the Days of Andreas Kordopatis*. The novel's unusual narrative form, which blurs the boundaries between literature and history, allows Valtinos to capture Kordopatis's voice and thus to convey the experiences of thousands of anonymous Greek immigrants without necessarily making claims to historical truth. Dracopoulos's paper ends by suggesting that this early work of Valtinos can shed light on his mature novels about the civil war. These, according to Dracopoulos, do not express right- or left-wing politics, as critics have argued, but instead focus on anonymous individuals' subjective experiences of major historical events.

Dracopoulos's discussion is followed by Gonda Van Steen's paper, entitled "Of Pretense and Preservation of the Self: Theater, Trauma, and (Post)memory in *The Mother of the Dog* by Pavlos Matesis." Van Steen concentrates on the above 1990 novel by the Greek playwright Pavlos Matesis, which is set in Greece during and after the Axis occupation—although some of the events it describes take place between the 1950s-1980s. Van Steen's paper offers an original reading of the novel centering on its themes of trauma and (repressed) memory in relation to its central female character Roubini (or Raraou) who is an anti-heroine. Drawing on the field of Holocaust memory studies, Van Steen employs Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" to discuss Raraou's personal testimonies as ambivalent (post)memories connected to her mother's traumatic wartime experiences, especially the incident of Asimina's public shaming by the villagers after the end of the war. According to Van Steen, through these two female characters, and especially through Raraou's acts of pretense and subversive performativity, Matesis casts an ironic glance on Greek history and the grand narrative of modern Greek nationalism, subverting and rewriting them, as it were, from the perspective of its female victims. By allowing their voices, which are ignored or suppressed in official historical narratives, to

be heard, Matesis's novel fills in the gaps of the official Greek history, as it were, and can therefore be read *as* history, Van Steen suggests. It is noteworthy that although Matesis's novel does not blur the boundaries between history and literature in the way Valtinos's text does, *The Mother of the Dog* seeks, nonetheless, to recover the ignored and silenced voices of the humble, anonymous individuals of history, just as Valtinos does in *Andreas Kordopatis*. Van Steen's paper concludes by pointing out that through Raraou's sustained acts of pretense, Matesis's novel offers a socio-economic and political critique of mid-twentieth century Greece which extends to the harsh sociopolitical realities of today's Greece.

Following Van Steen's discussion is the final paper of the Special Issue by Angie Voela, entitled "History, Fidelity and Time in Rhea Galanaki's Novels." Voela concentrates on three of Galanaki's novels: *I Shall Sign as Loui* (1993), *The Century of the Labyrinths* (2002), and *Fires of Judas, Ashes of Oedipus* (2009). Through an interdisciplinary analysis that combines the perspectives of philosophy and psychoanalysis by drawing on the work of Alain Badiou, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jacques Derrida, Bernard Stiegler, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan, among others, Voela shows how different aspects of subjectivity in Galanaki's novels lend themselves to political, ideological, aesthetic, and philosophical analyses, which are particularly significant today, when individuality is countered by the rising ideologies of populism and neoliberalism. Voela's analysis centers on such themes as history, time, memory, forgetting, misogyny, racism, and xenophobia, which Galanaki's novels use to explore a variety of tensions: the individual versus the society, past versus present, Romantic idealism versus collective trauma and suffering. In Voela's reading, the various facets of the past depicted by Galanaki's novels invite a re-examination from the perspective of the present and for the sake of the present historical moment. One must not seek to gain any tangible knowledge from history and the past, Voela posits, precisely because the past must be accepted as an "impassable truth"; that is, as something akin to a labyrinth, which is impenetrable. Such an understanding of the past reveals it to be fragmented, split and disjointed; however, its acceptance precisely *as such* allows one to come to terms with it instead of inventing defensive ideals. Voela concludes her paper by suggesting that the re-examination of the past from the perspective of the present is a multiple endeavor, at once personal, political, ideological, cultural and aesthetic. This endeavor ultimately presents one with the ethical responsibility to stay grounded in the present moment while living an affected life and accepting the past for what it is—past, fragmented, and impenetrable.

As is clear from these brief synopses, the papers included in this Special Issue embrace distinct authors, texts, methods of study, and theoretical orientations—and this lack of uniformity is germane to this project, as we have envisioned it. In presenting this material at this juncture, our hope is not only to contribute to the relevant scholarly literature but to also generate further discussion about the relationship between modern Greek literature, Greek history, and the past, since there is still much to be said and written about it.

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