

The Religious Encounter Between Orthodox Christianity
and Islam as Represented by
the Neomartyrs and their Judges

NOMIKOS MICHAEL VAPORIS

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**"The Best Wall
To Hide Our Face Behind:"
An Introduction to the Poetry
of Manolis Anagnostakis***

DAVID RICKS

Let us begin *in medias res* with an initial attempt to peep behind the wall to which Anagnostakis refers in the phrase which forms this paper's title. The poem is a literally cryptic one, but let us try to make it out as best we can on its own terms, and as far as possible without presuppositions.

EKEI . . .

Ἐκεῖ θὰ τὰ βρεῖς.

Κάποιο κλειδί
Ποῦ θὰ πάρεις
Μονάχα ἐσὺ ποῦ θὰ πάρεις
Καὶ θὰ σπρώξεις τὴν πόρτα
Θ' ἀνοίξεις τὸ δωμάτιο
Θ' ἀνοίξεις τὰ παράθυρα στὸ φῶς
Ζαλισμένα τὰ ποντίκια θὰ κρυφτοῦν
Οἱ καθρέφτες θὰ λάμπουν
Οἱ γλόμποι θὰ ξυμνήσουν ἀπ' τὸν
 ἄνεμο

Ἐκεῖ θὰ τὰ βρεῖς

THERE . . .

There you will find them.

A certain key
Which you'll take
Only you will take
And you'll push open the door
Open up the room
Open the windows on the light
The dazzled mice will hide
The mirrors will gleam
The light bulbs will be woken by the
 wind

There you will find them

*This paper, which was prompted by discussions in supervisions with Ms Elsa Amanatidou, was first given at Columbia University, and I am grateful to the audience, and in particular to Professor G. M. Sifakis and Professor Karen van Dyck, for comments which have improved it. This being an introductory account, I quote in English only all but the first and last poems discussed and refer sparingly to the extensive secondary literature. (All works have Athens as place of publication unless otherwise indicated.)

Κάπου – ἀπ' τὶς βαλίτσες καὶ τὰ παλιοσίδερα	Somewhere – among the suitcases and old hardware
Ἄπ' τὰ κομμένα καρφιά, δόντια σκισμένα,	Among the snapped nails, fissured teeth,
Καρφίτσες στὰ μαξιλάρια, τρύπιες κορνίζες,	Pins in pillows, frames with gaps in,
Μισοκαμένα ξύλα, τιμόνια καραβιῶν.	Half-burnt bits of wood, ships' wheels.
Θὰ μείνεις λίγο μέσα στὸ φῶς	You will be left alone a little in the light
ῴστερα θὰ σφαιλίσῃς τὰ παράθυρα	Then you will shut the windows
Προσεχτικά τὶς κουρτίνες	And curtains carefully
Ξεθαρρεμένα τὰ ποντίκια θὰ σὲ γλείφουν	Growing bold the mice will start to lick you
Θὰ σκοτεινιάσουν οἱ καθρέφτες	The mirrors will grow dark
Θ' ἀκινήτῃσουν οἱ γλόμπι	The light bulbs fall still
Κι ἐσὺ θὰ πάρῃς τὸ κλειδί	And you'll take the key
Καὶ μὲ κινήσεις βέβαιες χωρὶς τύψεις	And with sure movements without remorse
Θ' ἀφήσεις νὰ κυλήσῃ στὸν ὑπόνομο	You'll let it drop in the sewer
Βαθιά-βαθιά μὲς στὰ πυκνά νερά.	Deep, deep in the thick waters.
Τότε θὰ ξέρῃς.	Then you'll know.
(Πατὶ ἡ ποίηση δὲν εἶναι ὁ τρόπος νὰ μιλήσουμε,	(For poetry is not a way to speak,
Ἀλλὰ ὁ καλύτερος τοῖχος νὰ κρύψουμε τὸ πρόσωπό μας.) ¹	But the best wall to hide our face behind.)

Here is a poem with a distinct tone and atmosphere, and in which the syntax is extremely simple: an exploration which is not exploratory in a syntactically involved or intricate way but deliberate, tentative. One short, plain line follows the last, and the sequence of events seems clear enough: we do not appear to be confronted with the challenging ellipses of, let us say, Sachtouris among Anagnostakis' contemporaries. At the same time, however, there is something deeply elliptical and reticent about the poem, and this quality is revealed by three formal aspects of it. As each has ramifications for what sort of poet Anagnostakis is in general, I shall – I hope not too pedantically – devote some space to them here.

¹ Manolis Anagnostakis, *Τὰ Ποιήματα 1941-1971* (1992) (hereafter "P" and page numbers) pp. 118-19.

First, the ellipsis in the title. This, on the face of it, might seem to be a hackneyed post-Symbolist gesture: the "..." in the title might seem to be hinting at the ineffable with some degree of wistfulness, "there" as "over there," somewhere unattainable. Yet such a description doesn't really seem to chime with the feeling of this poem. If we permit ourselves a glance at the context at this point, we will see that the majority of Anagnostakis' poems between 1949 and 1962 have this form of title, consisting of the first word or words of the poem followed by an ellipse. Cumulatively, this contributes to giving his work a certain character, though not one easy to define. There are of course earlier poets such as Karyotakis who have untitled poems which are then listed in the Contents by the first line in brackets: this is clearly a related category, but not identical, as Anagnostakis makes the title an integral part of the text. In other words, his poems stand apart from the characteristically untitled poem of the modern lyric sequence. In an older context, moreover, the poem left untitled or given the conventional title, "song," is lyric by definition – and yet Anagnostakis' poems, though existing in some relation to lyric poetry, are not themselves lyric.

On the other hand, by so often having titles of this non-traditional type, Anagnostakis is also cutting his poems loose from the title as label, even if often an ironic label. The possession of a title (before the Surrealists at any rate) creates a presumption that the poem will have a paraphrasable content – yet that too is a presumption that Anagnostakis wishes to frustrate (at least before his last collection). There is, in short, a deliberation with respect to the mode of title chosen which matches the deliberation of what this poem actually describes. That Anagnostakis has meditated closely on the issue of titles, indeed, comes out vividly in one of his short prose notes: "The titles in the Contents, when read in order, made up a new poem, the most beautiful of poems, without unnecessary words, without the literary, without cosmetics."²

Nevertheless, my comments so far may seem excessively finicky or simply roundabout. In order to justify the closeness of my approach I should dwell briefly on a related formal peculiarity of Anagnostakis' work in general which I have not seen discussed.

² Anagnostakis, *Τὸ Περιθώριο '68 - '69* (1985) p. 31. This remark should be related to a poem of 1963, *Ἐπιτύμβιο*, by Titos Patrikios, *Μαθητεία ξανά* (1991) p. 159.

I am referring to his line-beginnings, which are invariably capitalized. This is a general issue in modern poetry on which one longs for enlightenment (though line-endings have been illuminatingly discussed): there don't seem to be clear conventions here. An exceptional case is Thom Gunn, who prints metrical poems with an initial capital letter and free verse in lower case – a clear distinction, this, perhaps too clear.³ More typical would be another eminent poet, David Ferry, who published two excellent collections of poems a decade apart (and for the same publisher), the first with verses capitalized at the beginning, the second not.⁴ Among Greek poets, relatively few (I can think of Elytis and Engonopoulos) have used capitalized line-beginnings in some of their poems. But in any case, in a poem like this one, the convention has the effect of slowing the pace, and confirmation is to be found in the record of Anagnostakis reading from his work: he reads each line somewhat flatly and fast, swallowing it up rather, but then leaves a relatively long pause *between* lines.⁵ It's an audible indication that for him *par excellence* the space between the lines, the white space, is the real locus of interest.

Which takes me to my second visible formal point. The poem has a symmetry marked by white spaces. First, a one-line statement, then a blank, then a long stretch of lines broken by punctuation only in the visually widest section beginning Κάπου –, then another blank space followed by a second one-line statement. That would be symmetrical, but Anagnostakis has deliberately impaired the symmetry by appending a last two lines in brackets. He does this in no fewer than 21 poems, and it's perhaps his most insistently characteristic feature – but why?

Greece is even today a more oral-based, less print-dominated culture than the West. Poets of the earlier part of the century, poets as good as Palamas and Sikelianos, more or less left punctuation to the printer. In reaction, Cavafy and Karyotakis changed the rules of the game, making punctiliousness over punctuation a new duty for the poet. Karyotakis, in particular, is even flamboyant in his use of paren-

³ See Thom Gunn, *Collected Poems* (London, 1993).

⁴ David Ferry, *Strangers* (Chicago, 1983) and *Dwelling Places* (Chicago, 1993).

⁵ Ο Μανόλης Αναγνωστάκης διαβάσει *Αναγνωστάκης* (record, Dionysos 0861, 1977). The only remarks I have found on capitalization of Greek line-beginnings and its poetic effect are those by Giannis Dallas in his introduction to Andreas Kalvos Ioannides, *Η Ίωνιάς* (1992) pp. 212-13.

theses, sometimes putting the key part of a poem in brackets.⁶ A whole book, and a good one, has recently been written about the use of brackets in English poetry, John Lennard's *But I Digress*, and consulting it will give us some help, though unearthing no exact parallel to Anagnostakis' case.⁷

On the one hand, terminal bracketing looks like a resisting of closure. By its appearance alone, it tends to impart a somewhat provisional air to a poem. It is like a statement trailing off, an opinion uttered in a lower voice, perhaps not fully intended to be heard. And yet it is not simply like the trailing off marked by a poem's ending with an ellipse: brackets mark off the end perhaps more uncomfortably for the reader. (It's a bit like that moment when a television detective shuffles back through the suspect's door just when he's thought to have gone.) The effect of terminal brackets in Anagnostakis is in fact highly prickly and sententious, and we may relate and contrast the sole example Lennard gives of this phenomenon, from the work of Stevie Smith. She ends a poem about a woman who aborted her child on the grounds that the world is too awful to bring babies into as follows: "(As, item, That the arrogance of a half-baked mind / Breeds murder; makes us all unkind.)"⁸

I think this parallel helpful, yet at the same time not exact: Stevie Smith's *sententia* is structurally, if not rhetorically, separable from the body of the poem as Anagnostakis' is not. In the latter case, the last lines are a keystone: without that final statement we'd be unable to pin down the subject of the poem even if we were impressed by its mood. It is a mood of renunciation, about letting go: the gesture of throwing the ring into water is an archetypal one found in Herodotos' story of Polycrates. But what all this is doing doesn't become clear til the end. The poem ends as with the muttered aside of someone leaving a room and at last expressing his/her real feelings. And the fencing round of the last statement which comes out in the open is an indication of poetry's ambiguous status as between communication and refuge.

⁶ See e.g. K.G. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα και Πεζά*, ed. G.P. Savidis (1988) p. 82.

⁷ John Lennard, *But I Digress. The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse* (Oxford, 1991).

⁸ Ibid. p. 223.

But there is one final structural aspect of Anagnostakis' reticence here which is important, for without it we would find it hard to tie together the suffixed meta-poetic statement and the body of the text. The poem describes a search from the very first line: ἐκεῖ θὰ τὰ βρεῖς. But what is τὰ? We're never told. We might infer ποιήματα, but that would seem a little to misdescribe the poem, to make it too cut-and-dried. (Too like saying: if you look in the attic you'll find a chest of old poems.) The tone and the metaphor are in fact more clandestine, and were drawn on for precisely this quality by Jenny Mastoraki in a poem written under the Colonels.⁹

The whole poem is a study in reticence: it looks as if something will be found in the wreckage of life, as if there will be some flash of revelation - but then any such thing is stepped back from. The inhibitions felt by Anagnostakis whenever the possibility of poetic transcendence is raised are vividly described in the following prose note:

Now that I don't write any more and the distance of time helps, I see more clearly how often, indeed, *I choked my own songs in my throat*.

In the few poems which I have written over these twenty-five years and more, if I exclude my first and part of my second book, in how many of the rest did I not at the last moment erase words, alter senses, cut out whole verses because there were perhaps some things which should not yet be spoken? I wonder how many of those who have rightly found fault with my "looseness of expression," "deliberate obscurity," "indifference to form," suspected that I had almost always got hold of the right word, one capable on its own of recalling an entire meaning, of giving rise to an entire world - and didn't write it because I believed (or feared) that it shouldn't yet be written.¹⁰

If, then, poetry is "the best wall to hide our face behind," a place for concealment, how does this affect the rest of Anagnostakis' work?

⁹ Tzeni Mastoraki, *Διόδια* (1990) p. 33. On women's poetry of the period and on censorship in general, see Karen van Dyck, *Cassandra and the Censors* (Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁰ Anagnostakis, *Τὸ περιθώριο*, p. 9

Why has this path of self-denial been chosen? And how, if at all, is it compatible with publishing poems (albeit mostly in limited circulation) over many years?

The poem we have been discussing appeared in 1954 as the last poem in Anagnostakis' fourth collection. So far we have looked at it largely out of context, and it is important to note that there is disagreement as to what the proper context actually is. It is a fact that Anagnostakis' poems, written between 1941 and 1971, were composed at a painful period of Greek history, from the Axis Occupation to the Colonels' dictatorship; a fact too that the poet has been at the sharp end of events, taking part in resistance against the Germans, being at one point sentenced to death during the Civil War, and more recently risking his professional and personal security by protesting against the Junta. (He has also stood several times as a left-wing parliamentary candidate, without, however, any chance of being elected.) Once we know Anagnostakis' biography we might incline to see his work specifically in the light of what Maronitis calls "poetic and political morality," and this would certainly be borne out by his last collection from 1970/1971.¹¹ More recently, however, Nasos Vayenas has challenged such an extrapolation back from the end-point of the *oeuvre* to the beginning, pointing out with some justification that, for a politically engaged poet, Anagnostakis' references to politics are very few and far between.¹² (Contrast two very good contemporaries also discussed by Maronitis: Alexandrou and Patrikios; and note too that Anagnostakis acquired an early reputation from reviewers who didn't pick up on his political affiliations at all.)¹³ Where Vayenas is on shakier ground is in maintaining that, if a later generation doesn't notice or understand the political references, then they may be ignored as not integral to the poetic effect. For reader-response theory

¹¹ D.N. Maronitis, *Ποιητική και πολιτική ήθική* (1976), where brief biographical details are to be found; my debt to this study is pervasive. A newer study by Vincenzo Orsina, *Ὁ στόχος και ἡ σιωπή. Εἰσαγωγή στην ποίηση τοῦ Μανόλη Ἀναγνωστάκη* (1995) contributes less than might have been hoped.

¹² Nasos Vayenas, "Ξαναδιαβάζοντας τὸν Ἀναγνωστάκη" in *Ἡ εἰρωνική γλώσσα* (1994) pp. 125-32. This view of Anagnostakis as an existential rather than a political poet was first voiced by Alex. Argyriou in a review in *Καυνοῦρια Ἐποχή* 1.3 (Autumn, 1956) pp. 274-77.

¹³ See e.g. the reviews in *Νέα Ἑστία* by Aimilios Chourmouziou (no. 571, 15 April 1951, 563-64) and Andreas Karandonis (no. 737, 15 March 1958, 437).

of this type looks to me like a license for collective amnesia from which in the end poetry itself would surely suffer.

Reluctant to get impaled on the horns of this dilemma, I shall side-step it now with the assessment that the issue could only be taken case by case. Having warmed up with a look at "There . . ." we should now go on to other poems. But first a word on Anagnostakis' unusual poetic career will be required.

The study of the shapes that modern poets' careers take is of the greatest interest; and Greek poets' careers in particular often have very anomalous contours. If Cavafy is a late developer, and if Palamas and Sikelianos both start early and never quit, we are brought up short by a case like that of Solomos, who publishes up to the age only of 35, of Kalvos, up to only 34, and of course the suicide Karyotakis, up to only 31. And when we come to Greek poets operating in the 1940s and 1950s, further disruption to smooth progress is revealed. Orthodox Stalinists like Ritsos and Leivaditis keep going no matter what, despite personal hardships, but Seferis is silent for nine years, Elytis for fourteen. Left dissidents like Patrikios or Alexandrou either stop or dwindle in their thirties. Clearly the 1940s generated a sort of poetic traumatic shock syndrome.

Anagnostakis, seen in such a context, is both a steady poet, with eight short collections between 1945 and 1962, and new and collected poems in 1971, and also an arresting example of one who quite consciously stops publishing poetry. For since 1971 he has given us no verse *in propria persona*. True, we have had a number of interesting para-poetic texts. These include two short collections of personal notes of a reminiscent or reflective type with the indicative titles *The Margin* and *PS*; a spoof biography of a fictional alter ego, a *fantaisiste* poet called Manousos Fassis; and an anthology of lyric poetry from the interwar years called *The Quiet Voice*.¹⁴ The last two items reveal, both Anagnostakis' personal preference for rhymed and metrical poetry, and his mastery in writing it tongue in cheek – yet such modes he has renounced in his poetic work proper.

¹⁴ *Tò περιθώριο* was privately circulated in 1968-69, YΓ. (1992) in 1983. (Both works may be read as poetic texts, as proposed by Yannis Dallas, *Πλάγιος λόγος* (1989) p. 231. The spoof biography is *Ὁ ποιητής Μανούσος Φάσσης, Ἡ ζωὴ καὶ τὸ ἔργο του* (1987), the anthology *Ἡ χαμηλὴ φωνή* (1990).

Why is the vein of renunciation so to the fore? (The whole of Anagnostakis' work is a sort of crying wolf where he threatens to stop writing poetry and eventually does.) First, because the poet is a survivor of an afflicted generation, feeling a permanent burden of guilt, and, secondly, because he is far from convinced that poetry, other than of the most fastidious and self-conscious kind, has any place in post-war Greece.¹⁵ And in this century the poet, in many countries, has often wished for a literal wall to hide his or her face behind. Let me quote a note Anagnostakis wrote and circulated privately under the Junta:

In his study, the Poet is speaking slowly to a polite visitor about poetry's mission in our time, about the indifference of the young to language, about the complexity of the spiritual problems of our contradictory age.

Imagine another room with four by no means polite visitors whipping the Poet, stripping him, putting out cigarettes on his arms, throwing buckets of water on him so that he comes to and they can start over.

In which room is the true Poet to be found?

What, I wonder, would he think then about poetry's mission, about language, about the complexity of the problems of the age?

Under what burden have your shoulders given way, and what burden have mine?

What scales shall weigh us?¹⁶

A passage such as this speaks for itself. But it also becomes an interlocutor with a memorable passage Anagnostakis could not have seen. It comes from Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope*, which appeared in English in 1970:

The fear that goes with the writing of verse has nothing in common with the fear that one experiences in the presence of

¹⁵ The feeling is voiced by Patrikios in *Ὁφελή, Μαθητεία Ξανά*, p. 115. It is hard not to compare adversely the famous beginning of *Howl* by these poets' exact contemporary Allen Ginsberg: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness . . ."

¹⁶ *Tò περιθώριο*, p. 24.

the secret police. Our mysterious awe in the face of existence itself is always overridden by the more primitive fear of violence and destruction. M[andelstam] often spoke of how the first kind of fear had disappeared with the Revolution which had shed so much blood before our eyes.¹⁷

Now why Mandelstam under Stalin and Anagnostakis under the Colonels thought like this is easy enough to see. But how did the Greek poet arrive at this self-searching view? And how did his self-imposed sense of the difficulty of poetry evolve?

Here of course Anagnostakis has his precursors, and both Cavafy and Seferis are explicitly cited in a poem at which we will look later. These two have in fact set the terms by which the difficulty of writing poetry will be seen by a Greek poet today, and I briefly allude now to two bench-mark poems. First "Darius" (1920). There Cavafy shows us a poet, Phernazes, who is producing an epic on Darius for his supposed descendant, Mithridates King of Parthia. But with the Roman invasion the epic looks like a bad bet indeed: Phernazes will lose a patron and possibly his life. The epic never gets written, we infer, but the poet comes to understand the vanity of rulers, and indeed his own vanity. If that were all, Phernazes would be presented in the poem as an outright loser, yet the poem admits that "in all his confusion and his straits/insistently the poetic idea comes and goes." Phernazes has found some poetic wall to hide his face behind – or rather, it has found him – despite the fact that his city Amisos is not well fortified.¹⁸

In 1942, Seferis seems to quote Cavafy's poem in the penultimate line of his poem, "Stratis the Seaman among the Agapanthi." The dislocation of being in the Greek government-in-exile in a very un-Greek place, South Africa, seems to be frustrating the poet's oft-essayed communication with the dead; yet the poem ends with a disjointed and desperate attempt to evade the present by recourse to words of the past. Seferis quotes first the plea, *βοηθήστε μας* ("help us") from Cavafy's poem, and then ends with the opening line of Solomos' famous epigram on the massacres of Psara: *Στῶν Ψαρῶν*

¹⁷Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, trans. Max Hayward (Harmondsworth, 1979) pp. 99-100.

¹⁸C.P. Cavafy, *Ποήματα*, ed. G.P. Savidis (1978) 2, p. 18, and the classic discussion by D.N. Maronitis, "Υπεροψία καὶ μέθη, Δεκαοχτὼ κείμενα" (1970) pp. 135-54, now in *Ὁροι τοῦ λυγρισμοῦ στὸν Ὀδ. Ἐλύτη* (1980) pp. 129-51.

τὴν ὀλόμαυρη ράχη ("On Psara's blackened ridge"). The last two lines of Seferis' poem are fundamentally ambivalent, yet they suggest some sort of clumsy wresting of victory from defeat. But this only poetically, for the content of the lines of the dead poets quoted is very bleak; much as the fate of Greece appeared in 1942.¹⁹

Yet both Cavafy and Seferis, writing in wartime as they both were, were further from conflict's immediate consequences than was Anagnostakis in the 1940s, and this comes out clearly in a much-anthologized elegy he wrote for one of his Resistance comrades:

HARIS 1944

We'd all be together tirelessly unfolding our time
Singing quietly of the days which would come laden with
colourful visions

He would sing, we would fall silent, his voice would awake little
fires

Thousands of little fires igniting our youth
Day and night he played hide-and-seek with death on every corner
and in every alley

Would get out of breath oblivious of his own body that he might
give others a Spring.

We'd all be together but you'd think he was everyone.

One day someone whispered in our ear "Haris is dead"

"He's been killed," or something like that. Words we hear daily.
No-one saw him. It was dusk. He'd have had his fists clenched
as usual

Indelibly engraved in his eyes was the joy of our new life
But all this was simple and time is short. No-one's in time.

... We're not all together. Two or three went into exile
A third went off far away with a vague air to him and Haris was
killed

Others left too, and came back to us new, the streets are packed
The crowd pours out unrestrained, flags once again flutter
The wind lashes the banners. In the chaos songs flapping.
If among the voices which of an evening pitilessly pierce the
fortifications

You pick one out – it is his. It lights little fires

Thousands of little fires igniting our unbridled youth

¹⁹George Seferis, *Ποήματα*, ed. G.P. Savidis (1982) pp. 196-97. On Anagnostakis' borrowings from Seferis see Orsina, *Ὁ στόχος καὶ ἡ σιωπή*, pp. 65-6.

It is his voice buzzing round in the crowd like a sun
Embracing the world like a sun slashing through grief like a sun
Showing us like a bright sun the golden cities
Spreading before us bathed in Truth and the clear light.²⁰

This is the penultimate poem of Anagnostakis' first collection in 1945, and the original has a bouncing, even ecstatic rhythm found nowhere else in the poet's work, and very different from that of the first poem we looked at. Yet the poem is at the same time terribly retrospective: the colour of the events has already faded, obscured by the false impressions of the Liberation, and the poet's ability to memorialize the dead seems only fleeting.²¹ Nor does the speaker involve himself in the events at all, though the poet himself was so involved at great personal cost. A prose note, of wonderful compression, gives us an idea of the sort of subject which Anagnostakis has felt obliged to exclude from his poetry as unfitting:

We were keeping lookout, the three of us, on the corner of Arrian Street and Olympus Street. We were each holding his revolver tight, hand in the wide pocket of a jacket bulging just as in the latest George Raft film. At eight on the dot there could be heard a burst of machine-gun fire, and shortly afterwards scattered shots. At five past eight Galanis came to tell us to disperse. I went with him as far as Egnatia. "Easy job," he said. "When we went into the den we found them all lying on the rug, not moving, as if they didn't hear us come in. We shouted to them to get up. They didn't get up, they were completely stoned. We opened fire just as easy as that, with one burst. Not one of them moved, not a squeak, eight of them. Now the neighbourhood can breathe again, with Kiorpis' thugs out of the way." "Take the revolver," I said, "I don't have anywhere to put it tonight." I noticed my voice. Galanis noticed it too. "I understand," he said. "You're not used to it yet." "That too," I said.²²

²⁰ Χάρης 1944, *P*, pp. 37-38.

²¹ How Orsina, 'Ο στόχος και ή σωπή, p. 51 can see an "elegiac rhythm" here escapes the present writer. On the Cavafian tinge to the poem see Kimon Friar's introduction to his translation, Manolis Anagnostakis, *The Target: Selected Poems* (New York, 1980) pp. viii and xxiii.

²² Τὸ περιθώριο, p.33.

It is in fact in the very poem that follows "Haris 1944" that Anagnostakis indicates that he is already struggling with the issue whether poetry is legitimate at all in such times:

THE NEW SONG

N.M.

Nearer still; and your bonds will never be broken if they don't
break now
We shan't be able to ask our thirsty expectancy:
Why do they never die now, the days which have ransacked
us so?
Or in the year we started to love like men and girls would tug
away a hand without knowing why
And yet, perhaps, it might have been fine, like an open book,
had the hours passed noiselessly surrounded by security
And if we could forget death, we who envied the butterflies
of our summer memories.

One day I shall write the history of my times
A garden with unready roses pointlessly picked
A sea on which ships sail with no destination
People squandered just when they had succeeded in lightly
touching a carefully hidden side of us
People whose affection was a wound in us; I'll write this down
for you.
Meanwhile on the banks of the noonday rivers pale Narcissi
are no longer sleeping, they and their sensitive souls
On the park pond children are no longer sailing their fresh
daydreams on their little paper boats
I remember our secret expectancy: the tightening-up at the
sight of the first yellow leaf leaving an unrelievedly bitter
taste in the mouth.

That's enough of the days that tired us so
(Painful bodyings-forth of immaterial visions)
That's enough of the azure Aegean sky with poems sailing to
insignificant islands to awaken our sensitivity
Of girls falling in love with their own form in the mirror and
waiting to dandle their delicate dreams
In big cities people love impulsively and die

They run, their words grow prematurely heavy, their hearts
hammer away like metal
In the noisy harbours I went and breathed a chest-full of mist
at the docks which are unwilling to grow old
I came down to bring you the love I sought so intensely from
you and I search for it breathlessly
On the dark ships dropping anchor, laden with maritime im-
ages and coal
In the low-ceilinged rooms of the great tall buildings which
hold fire and mystery
And the clocks beat rhythmically. I haven't time.
Sole vision of my expectancy.

On the thresholds of demolished houses defeated soldiers
await their homecoming without hope
In their empty skulls war-cries wander
The horror of pointless battle kills their nightmarish time
Pale words compose wounded elegies
And I am dreaming of one day trampling on my dead verses
in order to make emphatic in red letters (victorious trum-
pets) my new song.²³

If "Haris 1944" took to itself something of the qualities of song, this poem, though called a song, could hardly be less like one. Rather, it anticipates, in the most circumspect manner, some song's being composed some day in the future. In the poem's third section there's an undisguised attack on what is seen as the escapist poetry of the previous generation exemplified by the early Elytis in particular; but Anagnostakis, unusually (and, one may add, with precocious maturity) does not boast that his generation will put something better in the earlier poetry's place - or, at least, not without cost.²⁴ This comes out clearly in the last, very long verse:

²³ Τὸ καινούριο τραγούδι, *P*, pp. 39-41.

²⁴ We are speaking here of the Elytis of *Προσανατολισμοί* (1940), but it is possible to infer reservations about the later Elytis from an interview by Anagnostakis in Andonis Fostieris and Thanasis Th. Niarchos, *Σὲ δεύτερο πρόσωπο. Συνομιλίες μὲ 50 συγγραφείς καὶ καλλιτέχνες* (1990) p. 26. Anagnostakis' precocity is shown by his publication of his first poem in 1942; see Alex. Argyriou (ed.), *Ἡ ἐλληνικὴ ποίηση, ἀνθολογία - γραμματολογία, τόμ. 5. Ἡ πρώτη μεταπολεμικὴ γενιά* (1990) p. 208.

Κι ἐγὼ ὄνειρεύομαι μιὰ μέρα πατώντας πάνω στοὺς
νεκροὺς μου στίχους νά τονίσω μέ κόκκινα γράμματα
(νικήτριες σάλπιγγες) τὸ καινούριο μου τραγούδι.

The brackets which surround the "victorious trumpets" look both emphatic and perfunctory, suggesting the very insincerity of the aspiration to a new song; the red letters in context look bloody and associated with the Stalinism from which Anagnostakis has already dissociated himself.²⁵ And the dream of trampling one's own verses (the word kept late in the sentence so that we at first think dead bodies are involved) makes the role of the poet seem one of complicity. The title, then, alluding to Psalm 98: "O sing unto the Lord a new song" - only the first of a number of Biblical references we shall note - looks highly ironic.

To write of such a period as the 1940s at all might seem in itself callous, even impious: in a well-known poem, "Poetry 1948," the Surrealist poet Nikos Engonopoulos suggested precisely that. While seeing the rationale, Anagnostakis felt obliged to make a riposte in the following short poem in an idiom much like that of Engonopoulos:

TO NIKOS E . . . 1949

Friends
Leaving
One day disappearing
Cries
At night
Faraway cries
Of a mad mother in the empty streets
A child's crying unanswered
Ruins
Like tattered rotten flags
Nightmares,
On iron beds
When the light dwindles
At dawn.

(But who shall speak with pity of all this?)²⁶

²⁵ Anagnostakis was expelled from the Communist Party of Greece in 1949 but did not divulge this at the trial at which he received a death sentence in that year; see X.A. Kokolis, *Δώδεκα ποιητές τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης 1930-1960* (Thessalonike, 1979) p. 134.

²⁶ Στὸν Νίκο Ε . . . 1949, *P*, p. 76; compare Nikos Engonopoulos, *Ποιήματα Β'* (1977) p. 157.

The word "but" here (Greek *Má*) conveys a strong sense of exasperation, yet is a somewhat muffled cry, bracketed as it is at the collection's end (a collection itself called *Parentheses*).

The last poem of the next volume, *Times 3*, in turn appears to be an envoi to poetry. It is called "Epilogue" and is separated from the other poems by a blank page. Its ten shapely iambic lines, with a hint of rhyme, embody a sort of musicality familiar from Embiricos but which Anagnostakis normally only admits in broken form.²⁷ Yet the music here is at the service of an act of renunciation, as a lost generation takes its rightful place:

EPILOGUE

It may be that these verses are the last
The last among the last that will be written
Because the future poets are no longer living
They who'd have spoken all died young
Their forlorn songs turned into birds
In some sky elsewhere with a foreign sun
Became wild rivers coursing to the sea
Whose waters you can never separate
In their forlorn songs there took root a lotus
That in its juice we might be born more young.²⁸

Significantly, Anagnostakis gave his next collection the title, *The Continuation, or The Next Instalment* (1954), and the opening poem responds directly to the previous collection. For the ghosts of the past will not just dissolve into the surrounding world; they cannot be kept at bay but will make their unexpected incursions:

YOU CAME WHEN I . . .

You came when I was not expecting you. As every night
Burning the memory of grievous deaths
Feebleness of old age, terror of birth,
In dark caverns, in the loop of pleasure
Beyond the empty plains of fragments
You came when I was not expecting you. Oh how you would

²⁷ See especially Andreas Embiricos' ten-line poem 'Hχώ, 'Ενδοχώρα (1974) [first pub. 1945] p. 16.

²⁸ 'Επίλογος, *P*, p. 99.

have lived
You and I in times like those
Rotten fruit in the hold of a
Drunken ship on which everyone is dead
Sinking, thousands of holes in our bodies
Dim eyes insulting the light
Stray mouths on the rind of life
Burning the recollection – Dead men
In a period of irrevocable death
You came when I was not expecting you. And not a gesture
A word, like a bullet in the mark on the throat
Not a human voice because no
Voice had yet been born
The wild river had not yet been born
Which flows to the fingers' ends and then falls silent.
Recollection of a life – when will you start
So that I unscrupulous and mild of manner may hold forth
May utter at the cenotaphs lamentations
Worn by the obsolescence of the vocables
And you locking away tiny pleasures
Not trampling on your dead verses
Because if there are bones, love-affairs, and one-storey houses
With the blanket hung in the front doorway dividing the world
In two, hiding the spasm and the despair
And, outside, passers-by chanting in defiance of the faithful
In defiance of the sick child and the winter
Oh how you would have lived in times. And he unscrupulous,
Time, shattering thought
Fixed plans and violent decisions
Hovering whys, damp smiles
You came when I was not expecting you. Do not deceive me
These are not the thresholds I have knelt at
These crypts in which the rodents shiver
Have nothing of the taste of mud
Or of the soft touch of the dead in our dreams
Because something is left – if it is left –
Beyond death, perishability, words and action.
Imperishable in this ash I burn
As every night the memory of deaths
Of grievous and inexplicable deaths

²⁹ 'Ηρθες ὅταν ἐγώ . . . *P*, pp. 103-04.

Writing poems without sounds or words.²⁹

In this poem even the ironically expressed wish to trample on one's dead verses is repudiated. Instead, the process of inspiration is as involuntary as that which takes place in Cavafy's "Darius:" the poet here conducts a largely unconscious sort of necromancy well conveyed by the disorientating switches of person and an elliptical syntax at odds with the line endings. The whole poem culminates in a pregnant statement of poetics: Γράφοντας ποιήματα χωρίς ήχους και λέξεις. The gesture possesses both modesty and a high-flown Platonic notion of poetry. To my mind, it is the high point of Anagnostakis' career, exploiting the power of poetry even as it fences it round with so intense a degree of introspection; and the mode it initiated seems to have inspired another magnificent poem, Takis Sinopoulos' *Nekrodeipnos*.³⁰

But by 1962 and the collection, *The Continuation 3*, Anagnostakis' work is becoming ever more puritan, disavowing the poetic altogether. It is as if he is acting on the injunction of Ecclesiastes 5.2: "Let thy words be few." Take this continuation of an earlier train of thought:

BARER AND BARER

Barer and barer
More and more inarticulate
Not phrases now
Not words now
Symbols for letters
Instead of city, stone
Instead of body, nail
Or even: a bloody
Murdered stain
Under the microscope.³¹

It is poems such as this which have led some readers to feel that Anagnostakis has by now – albeit on principle – emptied the baby out with the bath-water. I suspect indeed that the poet might have signed off from poetry at this point had not events once again intervened.

²⁹ Takis Sinopoulos, *Nekrodeipnos* (1972) pp. 17-22.

³¹ "Όλο και πιο γυμνά . . . P, p. 148. *Let Thy Words Be Few* was the title of the last (and posthumous collection) by another master of reticence, J.V. Cunningham (Los Angeles, 1986).

The dictatorship of 21 April 1967 roused him to one last flurry, through the collaborative volume, *Eighteen Texts*, issued as a protest against the Junta in July 1970.³² The opening poem gives a sharp idea of the tone of Anagnostakis' last collection, *Ό Στόχος* (*The Aim / Target*):

POETICS

– There you go betraying Poetry again, you'll say,
The most sacred manifestation of Man
There you are using it once again as a means, an instrument
Of your dark purposes
In full knowledge of the damage your example
Is doing to the younger generation.

– You tell me what you have *not* betrayed
You and your kind, year in year out,
Selling off your possessions one by one
In the international markets and the neighbourhood bazaars
And you are left without eyes to see, without ears
To hear, with sealed mouths, saying nothing.
In the name of what that is sacred to man do you imprecate us?

I know: more preaching and rhetoric, you'll say.
Well, all right then! Preaching and rhetoric.

Words need to be nailed down like *tacks*

Not to be gone with the wind.³³

Back in the late 1950s Anagnostakis had violently attacked the *engagé* poetry of orthodox Communists, but here he takes on a self-appointed spokesman for the autonomy of art.³⁴ The attack is conducted in language of deliberate clumsiness and at the extremes of the con-

³² Relevant here may be Anagnostakis' preoccupation in the intervening years with criticism, especially through his journal, *Κριτική* (1959-61).

³³ Ποιητική, P, p. 159. (All of the collection appeared in the collective volume, *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα* in 1970, with the exception of the two most inflammatory poems, *Απολογία νομοταγούς* and *Προσχέδιο δοκιμίου πολιτικής αγωγής*.) An illuminating comparison of Anagnostakis' poem with poems by Alexandrou and Leivaditis is made by Dimitris Tziouvas, "Η ποιητική της ένοχής και το ύλικό σθένος των λέξεων," *Ποίηση* 3 (Spring 1994) pp. 89-107.

³⁴ See e.g. Manolis Lambridis in *Κριτική* 1.3, 127-28 and Anagnostakis himself, now in *Τά συμπληρωματικά* (1985) p. 33.

ventionally anti-poetic: repetitive, emphatic (three underlinings), and ending with a homespun comparison. But the word "preaching" (κηρύγματα) should alert us to a Biblical allusion which gives depth to the poem's austerity. The first of the interlocutors speaks pharisaically of Poetry as a sacred thing; the second replies with apostolic zeal. If there is a Temple of poetry, it has long been occupied by the money-changers, who must be driven from it. Yet these money-changers, the false artists, have themselves become idols, in an echo of Psalm 135.15-18 (cf. also Psalm 115.6-8):

The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not;

They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths.

They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them.

But these are not the sole Biblical echoes in the poem, which is, so to say, nailed together, in however clumsy-looking a fashion, by a closing recollection of the final chapter of Ecclesiastes 12.10-11:

The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.³⁵

Yet Anagnostakis' poem turns back on itself in the final line, where my translation "not to be gone with the wind" is designed to echo the Greek title of the famous film. For the poet, like Patrikios, sees the cinema in post-war Greece as the very type of the "bread and circuses" for which Greeks have sold out their lives and beliefs.³⁶

In a poem such as this Anagnostakis seems consumed with an al-

³⁵ I am tempted also to adduce Thoreau, who speaks of one of his country friends as follows: "he nailed words to their primitive senses, as farmers drive down stakes in the spring, which the frost has heaved."

³⁶ See Patrikios, Στὸν κινηματογράφο, *Μαθητεία ξανά*, p. 56.

most Tolstoyan zeal to repudiate art in the name of something overwhelmingly important which can be expressed only in the language of Judaeo-Christianity. Such abstract thoughts take on a bit more color and emotion in this next poem:

THESSALONIKI, DAYS OF A.D. 1969

In Egypt Street – first side-street to the right –

There now rises the headquarters of the Bank of Exchange

Travel agents and emigration offices

And the small children can't play there any more for all the traffic
In any case the children are grown up, those times you people
knew are over

They don't laugh any more, don't whisper secretively, don't trust
each other,

Those who've survived, that is, for since then grave sicknesses
came on

Floods, drownings, earthquakes, armoured soldiers;

They remember father's words: you will know better days

It's not to the point whether in the end they did know them, they
repeat the lesson to their own children

Always hoping that at some point the chain will stop

Perhaps with their children's children or their children's
children's children.

For the moment, in the old street we were talking about, there
now rises the Bank of Exchange

– I exchange, you exchange, he exchanges –

Travel agents and emigration offices

– We are emigrating, you are emigrating, they are emigrating –

Wherever I travel Greece wounds me, the Poet said

Greece with the lovely islands, lovely offices, lovely churches

Greece of the Greeks.³⁷

The title alludes to Cavafy, but in a Seferian mode, the reference being to the present rather than the past.³⁸ The quotation from Seferis towards the end of the poem, however, is hard to assess: if it is not a direct reproach to the older poet, then the capitalized Poet, if we link

³⁷ Θεσσαλονίκη, μέρες τοῦ 1969 μ.Χ. P, pp. 162-63.

³⁸ Seferis, *Ποιήματα*, pp. 191, 208.

him with the prose note we discussed earlier, is such as to make us suspicious.³⁹ (At any rate, Anagnostakis seems not to be reading Seferis' "In the Manner of G.S." as the self-parody it is.) I suspect that the poem is trying to do too much here, and the final reference to the Colonels' 'Ελλάς 'Ελλήνων Χριστιανῶν would have sufficed. It could once again be argued, however, that the poem needs to be interpreted with reference to a Biblical source: the mention of plagues visited on successive generations alerts the reader to this dimension. Such references also give point to the mentioning of the place in the title, for Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians (5.1) says: "But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you." What power this poem has in fact comes from its specifically Thessalonian setting and its cross-reference to earlier poems in the *oeuvre*: Egypt Street, as well as fitting in with the Cavafian title, has appeared twice before as the locale of prostitution in the War years – an understandably unspoken-of tragedy of the 1940s.⁴⁰

All the old memories, though, have now been devalued by consumerism; as Anagnostakis bitterly concludes another poem of the group:

(I keep on relating, in my excessively blunt way, things you
all know
Which I've said and other people have said before me much
better than me
Boring stuff, which doesn't spark your interest at all now
Unlike e.g. the murder of Sharon Tate or Jackie's wedding or
a Kelvinator fridge.)⁴¹

The frustrated expectations of the increasingly affluent post-war years, and the ways in which they frustrate poetic discourse in turn, are neatly brought out in the following little poem, "If," its title in English being taken from Kipling's famous poem:

³⁹ See the discussion by D.N. Maronitis, "Ποίηση και ιστορία. Μ. Ἀναγνωστάκης, 'Θεσσαλονίκη, μέρες τοῦ 1969 μ.Χ.'," *Διαλέξεις* (1992) pp. 99-118.

⁴⁰ See the poems 'Ο πόλεμος (with the whole phrase Στη . . . δεξιά) and "Όταν ἀποχαιρέτησα . . ." *P*, pp. 35, 128. On the historical circumstances see Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece* (New Haven, 1993).

⁴¹ Αίσθηματικό διήγημα, *P*, pp. 170-72.

If – I say if . . .
If everything had not happened so early on
Your expulsion from High School class five
Then Haïdari, Ai-Stratis, Itzedin,
If at 42 you weren't suffering from arthritis
After twenty years in jail
With two expulsions from the Party on your back, one declartion
Of renunciation when they got you on your own in the
Psychiaric Clinic
If – today a clerk in a food business –
Useless now to anyone, a squeezed lemon,
A burnt-out case, with ideas long obsolete,
If, as I say if. . .
With a little good will things had turned out differently
Or through some chance incident, as with so many, many
Classmates, friends, colleagues – I'm not saying with their
nose clean
Anyway . . .

(That'll do. Poems can't be written out of that sort of stuff.
Don't keep on.
They need another air to them in order to please, another
"tranfiguration."

We've really gone overboard writing about subjects.)⁴²

The poem looks like a straightforward slice of life till the last (once again, bracketed) lines, in which the poet announces his inability to keep slogging away at such material. Things have come full circle: now in the 1970s, as once in the 1940s, people still see verse as the domain of escapism. Wallace Stevens once said to Robert Frost with some *hauteur*, "You write on subjects" – a claim Anagnostakis would avow with pride.⁴³ His ultimate idea of what he has tried to achieve is set out in the poem "Critique," which, like an earlier poem by Karyotakis with the same title, casts a notional critic's aspersions in

⁴² If, *P*, pp. 168-69.

⁴³ Robert Frost, *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* (New York, 1995) p. 878.

his teeth:

... And basically, there's a lack of any further dimension

That beguiling obscurity which gives rise to
Second levels and unforeseen perspectives
Which affords subjects for interpretation, discussion,
Reveals latent structures and uncovers essences
There's a lack of that virgin quality of expression, of that
something else

In short of the prismatic quality of things – as if
You people have a hammer in hand and like the gypsies
Just keep bashing away without letting up on the same old
anvil.

– Like the gypsies
we just keep bashing away
without letting up
on the same old anvil.⁴⁴

Two formal features of this poem permit the inference that it takes a cue from a 1959 collection of Aris Alexandrou, now in exile in Paris: the beginning with the ellipsis and the staggered verses of the ending. The former carries the strong implication that the first voice in the poem, the critic's voice, goes on and on: wherever the tape is cut into, so to speak, you will find the same running off at the mouth. (So that, despite his pleas for complexity, the critic, as much as the hostile poet, is tied into an inveterate way of seeing things.) The technique is here used against the Right, but Alexandrou had earlier turned it against the Stalinists, in his poem, "Theoretical discussion, *à la manière de Jdanov*."⁴⁵ The second feature appears in several poems of Alexandrou but most memorably at the end of "Meditations of Flavius Marcus", where it suggests the dogged deliberation the Roman translator enjoins on himself.⁴⁶

I believe that these connections with Alexandrou illuminate Anagnostakis' poem and the stance it takes, but connections of an

⁴⁴ Karyotakis, *Κριτική, Ποιήματα και πεζά*, p. 77.

⁴⁵ Aris Alexandrou, Εισήγηση, *à la manière de Jdanov, Τα ποιήματα 1941-1971* (1991) p. 73 (the opening poem in the collection).

⁴⁶ Alexandrou, Φλάβιος Μάρκος εἰς ἑαυτόν, *Τὰ ποιήματα*, p. 113.

openly acknowledged kind appear in the second and last of Anagnostakis' poems with the title "Epilogue." In this envoi, Anagnostakis quotes a poem from 1963 by his almost equally disillusioned friend Titos Patrikios:

ΕΠΙΛΟΓΟΣ

EPILOGUE

Κι ὄχι αὐταπάτες προπαντός.

And above all no self-deception.

Τὸ πολὺ-πολὺ νὰ τοὺς ἐκλάβεις
σὰ δυὸ θαμποὺς προβολεῖς
μὲς στὴν ὀμίχλη
Σὰν ἓνα δελτάριο σὲ φίλους ποὺ
λείπουν μὲ τὴ μοναδικὴ λέξη: ζῶ.

At the most conceive of them as a
pair of dim searchlights in the
fog
As a card to absent friends with the
single phrase: I'm alive.

"Πατί," ὅπως πολὺ σωστὰ εἶπε
κάποτε καὶ ὁ φίλος μου ὁ Τίτος,
"Κανένας στίχος σήμερα δὲν
κινητοποιεῖ τίς μάζες
Κανένας στίχος σήμερα δὲν
ἀνατρέπει καθεστῶτα."

"Because," as my friend Titos once
so rightly said,
"Not one verse today sets in motion
the masses
Not one verse today overturns
régimes."

Ἔστω.

So be it.

Ἀνάπηρος, δεῖξε τὰ χέρια σου.
Κρίνε γιὰ νὰ κριθεῖς.⁴⁷

Cripple, show your hands. Judge
that you be judged

The object of τοὺς isn't initially clear, but we later see that it must be στίχους (especially as Patrikios' poem is called *Στίχοι 2*) and, as with τὰ in the poem we began with, it adds complexity and an interrogative note to an otherwise plain poem. The final verse, moreover, contains three last Biblical allusions which leave the poet's stance delicately poised. It may not be too fanciful to infer that "cripple" echoes Acts 14.8-10, where the cripple has faith to be healed, and is told to stand up by St Paul (who will in ch. 17 arrive in Thessalonica). The showing of hands as testimony of identity is carried out by none other than Christ after the Resurrection (Luke 24.40, John 20.20); while, finally, the poem's last phrase inverts Christ's "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7.1) in such a way as to suggest that the poet's judgements are made precisely in the hope that he will in turn

⁴⁷ Ἐπίλογος, *P*, p. 176; see Patrikios, *Στίχοι 2, Μαθητεία ξανά*, p. 97.

be judged, will be called to the tribunal of poetic morality.

Anagnostakis' work affords – or indeed imposes – many opportunities for reflection, and I have concentrated on just one aspect of it, though I believe it to be the central aspect. What I have attempted to illustrate is how, having at an unusually young age opened up an unusually deep vein of reflection, and an exacting sense of the responsibilities of poetry, Anagnostakis gradually came to put up the shutters on his inspiration, for reasons that will always remain in part obscure, and which certainly cannot be explained in terms of (to quote Karyotakis), “a milieu, an epoch.”⁴⁸ As time went on, Anagnostakis' poetry came more and more to expose or even espouse an absence; and more recent interviews with the poet reveal a sort of nostalgia which is itself close to escapist.⁴⁹ Yet his path towards silence is carefully laid with poems which reward closer attention than space here permits.

⁴⁸ Karyotakis, “Όλοι μαζί, Ποιήματα και Πεζά, p. 103.

⁴⁹ See e.g. the interview, “Δέν είμαι ποιητής,” in *Τὸ γιοφύρι* (Sydney) 13 (1993) pp. 5-8.

Nature, Love and the Rhetoric of Justice in Modern Greek Literature

CONSTANCE V. TAGOPOULOS

The body is not blind unwrought
material when bathed in Greek light;
it is suffused with abundant soul . . .”

(N. Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*)

A burning problem in the hearts of men of all times is the problem of justice. In our modern societies, justice is understood, predominantly, as a socially elicited response which functions on the basis of fair laws established by society to safeguard a person's physical integrity and well-being. In modern Greek literature, however, the concept of justice seems to transcend this narrow social dimension and to assume an ontological meaning that echoes the pre-classical emphasis on balance, measure, and reciprocity, which sustain the natural and moral order of things. In this context, nature and love come to reflect moral justice and the human soul. They become the figurative means that help the poet bring an abstraction to the level of the personal and the tangible. Through this rhetoric of justice, the poet articulates his quest for something permanent to counteract change and decay. This is a longing deeply rooted in the Greek soul and profoundly felt at times of social and moral instability.

I will look into representative works of Greek ethnography, such as Papadiamantis' *The Murderess* and Karkavitsas' *The Beggar*, on the one hand, and poetry, mainly the work of Seferis, on the other, with the purpose of gaining insight into the way the rhetoric of justice functions, through the metaphors of nature and love, toward (a) articulating these writers' quest, (b) bridging ancient and modern Greek thought, and (c) constituting our current sense of justice. But before turning to our authors, it is necessary to trace the evolution of the idea of justice back to its earliest conceptualization in ancient poetry and philosophy for the purpose of establishing its diachronic meaning.