symposion itself conjures up many an ancient scene of banqueters in the palaces of epic heroes, in the halls of the ancient lords whom Pindar describes (*Olympion* 12-17; *Nemean* 19-24), and, of course, in the brilliant milieu of Socrates and his friends. The formulaic phrase ἀγλαὰ δῶρα (26-27) and other stylistic features found in epic poetry (e.g., use of uncontracted forms, a fondness for parechesis)[18] also bring to mind the world of Homer and his heroes. Finally, such words as εὔσπλαγχνον (10) and δοξολογοῦνται (27) evoke Byzantine church liturgy and the Divine Presence. All of these connotations place the people of Parga on the lofty plane which the poet considers appropriate for them.

As his contribution to the European debate over poetic diction, Kalvos in these odes presents his case for archaism and eclecticism: The vocabulary of ages past is most conducive to the writing of inspired verse. Furthermore, the poet is not bound by considerations of dialect and period. He chooses the appropriate words from the wealth of his language. If the needs of euphony, image, or meter require it, he even makes a new word or form. As a Greek, Kalvos wished to illustrate that the Greek language from Homer to his day was one and the same, just as the modern Greek heroes of his poems were following the example of their illustrious ancestors. As the bard who uses this language he depicted himself as soaring above the ordinary flow of life to preserve and transmit his country's sacred traditions.

[18]Cf., e.g., the Homeric ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα, λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, καλὰ πέδιλα, ὄνδε δόμονδε, and the uncontracted forms ἔπεα πτερόεντα, τεύχεα, νεμέρτεα, φιλήσεαι, Ἀτρεϊδάο, ποθέω and the like.

Papadiamantis and His National Literary Conscience

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ALEXANDROS PAPADIAMANTIS (1851-1911) was a great and decisive presence in modern Greek literature of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. He was both a traditionalist and an innovator. He kept his roots deep in Greek soil and life, while clearly defining the national literary conscience of his time and expanding its possibilities into the basic elements of the Greek psyche and into new fields of literary endeavors. Thus, Papadiamantis emerged as a true representative of his time, but also as a positive factor in revitalizing and reshaping the national literary conscience and in influencing its creative process.

But to speak intelligently about the development of a national literary conscience by Papadiamantis and his impact on Greek literature, we have first to bring to our mind the historical, social and intellectual background of Greece during the nineteenth century.

Many decades after its liberation, Greece was still struggling for national and financial growth and stability, and for social and cultural development. Greece's population during the nineteenth century consisted mainly of farmers and shepherds, seamen and fishermen, merchants and landowners, soldiers and public servants, and some intellectuals. Real bourgeoisie and urban life had not yet started to develop; they were,

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however, little by little appearing and differentiated. Financially Greece was weak, exhausted, and unorganized. External pressures in the political and financial fields were very strong and painfully evident, and consequently, external influences were tyrannically prevalent in the political and intellectual fields too.

Throughout the nineteenth century, modern Greek literature attempted to find its way and to establish itself by depicting the life and by expressing the aspirations of the Greek nation which was gradually and painfully being liberated. But there were several obstacles to the development of a true national literary conscience and of satisfactory cultural pursuits; such obstacles were, for instance, the long enslavement of the Greek people, the lack of widespread education, and the poverty of the country. Moreover, the awe with which nineteenth-century Greek writers and poets viewed the literary glories of ancient Greece hindered the creativity of modern Greek literature. Also, the glittering achievements and fashions of contemporary European literature very often overwhelmed modern Greek literature to the point of blind imitation. Even the instrument of its literature, the modern Greek language, was a tantalizing problem that vexed the Greek nation in general and modern Greek literature in particular. On the one hand, there was the archaic (*katharevousa*, purist) language which was used in varying degrees of archaism according to the erudition of the writer; on the other hand, there was the vernacular (demotic), the living, spoken language of the people. The fight over them was long and bitter, but by the end of the nineteenth century the *demotic* was accepted as the language of creative literature.

These problems, however, did not prove to be insurmountable for poetry, as can be seen in the very important modern Greek poetry of the nineteenth century with poets like Dionysios Solomos, Andreas Kalvos and Aristotelis Valaoritis. But throughout the greater part of the century, prose was less fortunate, although occasionally some glimpses of good and genuine Greek production appeared. During the last quarter of the century, however, there was a wholesome reaction

against the previous sterile admiration of ancient literature and the blind imitation of foreign literatures. First, the studies of Greek folklore by Nikolaos Politis and, later, the language revolution of Yiannis Psycharis marked a turning point in self-knowledge, in the understanding and appreciation of the real "Greekness" of modern Greek people. Self-knowledge brought to them self-respect and self-reliance. As a result, the novels and short stories of the late nineteenth century began to use almost exclusively modern Greek themes, taken from the life in the country-side particularly, because Greece had not yet developed a strong urban life. Most of the writers of that time were contented to describe faithfully the simple rural and maritime life of Greece. Thus, their works (to which the term *ethographia* was given) were interesting documents describing a given life at a given place and time, but usually lacked vision and were narrow in outlook.

Within this painful but fertile period of Greek experimentation and achievements Alexandros Papadiamantis lived and worked. He had in himself the creative elements that were essential to intellectual growth and literary development, and used them systematically and properly in his work. If after the great poet Dionysios Solomos a distinct literary conscience was developed in modern Greek literature by another writer, that was evidently done by Papadiamantis. He was a lonely, unique and fascinating creator of incomparable works which were richly endowed with Greek and Christian substance. On the national literary level he gave an example not easy to be followed but apt to be superseded. For his work was a landmark noted by the strictly personal characteristics of its author, a solitary landmark of high achievement in the almost barren—then—field of modern Greek prose writing. His contemporary and later Greek writers looked at his work as a starting point towards different directions: they opened other, different paths in order to reach their various literary aims.

It is generally admitted that Papadiamantis introduced the religious short story in modern Greek literature. He is also distinguished for the peculiar conception and presentation of his themes, the clarity of his descriptions, the sincerity and

psychological insight of his characters, his interest in dealing with social and moral problems and with sea themes, the power and tenacity of his ideas, and his charming personal style.

Under the influence of romanticism of his time, he started his career by writing historical romantic fictions (*The Immigrant Girl, The Merchants of Nations, The Gypsy Girl*). Those fictions were not significant literary creations. They show, however, that even then Papadiamantis was deeply interested in some basic problems of Hellenism, mainly in moral and religious problems affecting the Greek world in the course of its history. It was apparent that from the beginning his literary conscience was oriented towards national and religious horizons. He was also interested in depicting psychological conflicts. From another point of view, his strong descriptive ability was evident even since then.

But soon he abandoned romanticism and historical fiction and applied naturalism and realism in his short stories, that became his main vehicle of literary expression. He wrote more than 180 short stories. In them he vividly presented the simple, unaffected life of common Greek people, especially the people of the island of Skiathos, his birthplace. Living most of his years in Athens, Papadiamantis remembered his beloved island with sweet pain and nostalgia,—he remembered it as a dreamlike world, as a paradise, that sustained him in the turmoil of the city. He recollected the places and people he saw and knew there, the stories he heard, and his pilgrimages around the island during his boyhood and in his later visits. And he re-created them thoughtfully and artfully, in charming narratives full of realism and poetic disposition.

Through his short stories—which have themes chiefly connected with the holy Christian feasts—the simple and picturesque people of Skiathos are parading in all manifestations of life, with their sorrows and joys, their virtues and vices. They are young and old people, priests and sailors, shepherds and workers; they are the island's women with their hopes and sufferings, with their dreams and disillusions. And they move and live and act amidst their natural surroundings: the shores

and mountains of Skiathos, its plain houses and old chapels, its valleys and castle, all of which Papadiamantis described vividly and in impressive details. He was especially interested in the religious life of the people, in the observance of traditional rituals, and in the popular beliefs and superstitions. And he presented them in a series of colorful pictures, framed in suggestive symbolism and obvious conservatism. His religious stand is one of the main reasons of his didacticism that not infrequently characterizes his work. As John Zervos wrote: "Papadiamantis described and sang Greek Orthodoxy not as an idea or dogma but as a social factor and as an agent in people's life."[1]

Papadiamantis drew his religious and social themes not only from Skiathos but from other Greek places too, particularly from Athens. He wrote more than forty short stories with Athenian themes. Those short stories are again populated by simple and humble persons, the destitute and common people whom he knew well, because he met them regularly in the chapel of Saint Elissaios, in taverns which he frequented, and in the poor neighborhoods where he lived. In his Athenian short stories primarily, but in many of his other stories too, Papadiamantis displayed a harmless irony, which however often became a biting satire of social, moral and political evils,—particularly of *xenomania* (admiration or imitation of foreign things and ideas) and of religious tepidity. This was another reason and source of his obvious didacticism.

Of course, the strongest motive in Papadiamantis' literary production was his religiosity. His religiosity was not motivated by any metaphysical anguish. It was the feeling of sincere piety of a simple faithful Christian; it was the unquestionable acceptance of the Orthodox Church's tradition in its totality, acceptance that was nurtured by heredity and strengthened by habitual practice and regular study. Thus his work and life were deeply imbued with genuine Christian belief and use, so

[1] A. Papadiamantis, Ἡ Φόνισσα: With a Critical Biography by John Zervos (Athens, 1930), p. 27.

much so that he is rightly acclaimed as "the saint of Greek letters." He followed the Byzantine Christian tradition even in his literary style, using an ecclesiastical, somehow erudite, language in his writings, yet without ignoring the vernacular altogether. In fact his language is his personal one: it is an ecclesiastical *katharevousa,* but it often has a simplified construction, enriched with words from ancient Greek, the Bible, the Byzantine and from the contemporary living language. The dialogues in his short stories are always in the dialectical idiom of Skiathos or in plain demotic. But, although he wrote one or two short stories in demotic, he never acceded to it; in fact, he was against the linguistic change introduced by Psycharis. One may rightly observe, however, that his themes and the way and disposition with which he worked them out, made his ecclesiastical "katharevousa" sound rather appropriate and not out of tune. It endowed his style with a peculiar but congenial charm.

Some of his critics have accused Papadiamantis that he did not pay proper attention to a well conceived plan for his short stories; that he was unable technically to control his narrative, he did not know how to design and compose a story, nor how to start and finish it properly. Thus, his critics contend, most of his short stories were written hastily, and haphazardly, and were badly composed and badly constructed.

But we know that he often wrote again and again his short stories and worked them out carefully and laboriously. In fact, there exist variant forms of some of his short stories.

His technique at first sight appears simple and artless, unaffected and unsophisticated, but a closer look proves the opposite to be true. Indeed, we may rightly presume that Papadiamantis consciously worked out his short stories in such a way that they appeared untidy and loose. The fluid, lyrical disposition of his stories favors such explanation. "I'm writing as it comes to me," he once said. And as Palamas put it succinctly: "Papadiamantis' art is to show no art, not only in his speech, but often in the composition of his works too."

One may really say that Papadiamantis—if he was not the direct precursor of the consciously untidy planning and loose

style of modern prose writing—strongly reminds us of many contemporary short story writers who do not feel bound by the so-called "rules and regulations" of "classical" short stories if there are such rules. He is not a lesser short story writer because of his seeming or real "untidiness" and "looseness." In fact, today with the lyrical character of the prose of several modern Greek writers who belonged to the generation of the Thirties, and of many more prose-writers who appeared later, we are able to understand and ready to appreciate fully that kind of "untidy" writing: it appears regular and fluent but fluid too, with "vacuums"; realistic but suggestive also; full-fledged but elliptical too; hence, it is really poetical, lyrical, not artless and prosaic.

The lyrical disposition of Papadiamantis and the lyrical character of his writings, both in content and form, are evident throughout his work. He saw the world through his nostalgic dream of an ideal Skiathos and through his vision of exalted piety. But he also knew how to transubstantiate life into colorful pictures full of lyricism. He could transfer reality into the sphere of poetry, of magic and suggestion. His paganistic longings especially, although suppressed—perhaps because they were suppressed—led him to a fusion of life and dream, of man and nature, of reality and imagery. He was trying to escape from the drudgery and adversities of his actual life by wandering into the ideal world created by him with nostalgic memories of his island and with poetical feelings, musical in tone and earthly in flavor. Yet "Papadiamantis' art is convincing, because it is spontaneous; we approach it easily, because it is straightforward; it charms us, because it is innocent," according to Yiannis Hatzinis.

Papadiamantis was one of the foremost creators of the modern Greek short story. He gave it really Greek and Christian content. As G. Mylonoyiannis wrote: "The soul of the Greek people is always the dominant factor in his work and finds its justification in it and in his life."[2] He was especially

[2] *Nea Estia,* 30 (Christmas 1941) 161-62.

interested in the religious life of the people and in their strong belief in the Greek traditions. His work is full with the essence of the plain Christian soul and the light and frugality of the intellectual and geographical area of Greece. He, consciously or unconsciously, followed the precept of Solomos: "enclose Greece in your soul"; he did it, and, naturally and amply, he created a work teeming with Greek substance and forms. For that reason, perhaps, Charilaos Papantoniou wrote, with some exaggeration, that "Papadiamantis is the only writer after Homer who reproduced Greek nature and life with classical perfection." Papadiamantis was the first to introduce and bring to "perfection" the religious short story in Greece. He was the first to discover and emphasize the importance of sea as a basic theme for modern Greek literature. He was among the first modern Greek writers to introduce, and experiment successfully with, psychological and social themes (cf. *Phonissa*). He was also the first to actively resist the foreign influences upon literature.

Finally, he was influenced by none and did not exert creative influence upon anyone. When some critics likened him to Dickens, Poe, and other great foreign writers, he said: "Is it really necessary for me to resemble someone? But I tell you that I don't resemble Poe or Dickens, Shakespeare or Béranger. I resemble myself. That is not enough?" Of course it is enough! And because he was too personal, he was also difficult to be successfully imitated, although several prose writers have attempted to imitate him. However, Professor Mastrodimitris, writing about the ideological orientation of contemporary Greek literature, especially its religious tradition, states: "One might dare observe that a tendency, which was started by Papadiamantis, is still continued in some way in our literature," for instance in some of the works of Prevelakis and Pentzikis.[3]

[3]P.D. Mastrodimitri, *Introduction to Modern Greek Philology* (Thessalonike, 1974), pp. 108-09 (in Greek).

Although the historical background and intellectual environment of nineteenth century Greece seemed as not favoring the development of an independent national literary conscience, Papadiamantis accomplished just that. While the contemporary process of literary production took the form of action and reaction with little positive results by others, Papadiamantis' personal contribution was distinct and unique. By turning to the short story and adapting *ethographia,* he fully used and effectively projected the simple Greek people, their lives and beliefs, their customs and mores; thus his inclination as well as his material found the appropriate vehicle for literary manifestation in his short stories. His close links with the πάτριον soil, with his fatherland, were immensely strengthened. Gradually he and the Greek people, through their clear perception of the past and the present, and through their practical endeavors in life, reached a high level of self-knowledge and a powerful sense of Greekness. The descriptive representation of Greek land and Greek people, as well as the religious, moral and social pictures of his short stories, became the characteristic feature of Papadiamantis' art. There is a sense of Greek continuity in his work: there is an unconscious, reluctant but potent, continuity of the ancient, paganistic world; and, very consciously, there is a strong presence of the Greek Christian continuity through Byzantium to his days. This continuity appears even in his language which is very personal in form, embracing all stages of Greek language: more strongly the earlier ones, fairly well the contemporary popular idiom. His tenacity with indigenous values is attested by his rejection of any foreign influence concerning life and literature in Greece.

Therefore, Papadiamantis may be rightly considered as the *national* prose writer of Greece just as Solomos and Palamas its national poets: All three "are firmly rooted in the soil of Greece and in the soul of its people." The national literary conscience of Papadiamantis, which was developed gradually but steadily, is abundantly evidenced in his brilliant work.