

premise of aesthetics that there is no market for the products of genius. Capitalist ideology in general is concerned with the other, the other side of the coin, its nominal value, oblivious to the fundamental double-sidedness of any currency and the inflationary nature of difference.<sup>8</sup>

Still, is there any point in rejecting this difference, in abandoning the search for identity which leads to the desire for the other? There appears to be a fatalistic consensus that, even though the quest for Greece produces only more versions of the non-Greek (from the Turk and the Slav to the Jew and the Yankee), it simply cannot stop. You have to talk about the other because you have to search for your same. This whole negative hermeneutic of bourgeois nationalism, though, leaves one wondering: what happens if you start looking directly for the other? not for the other of the same but for the other-than-the-same? for the alien, the extraneous, the disparate, the irrelative? What if there is a possibility to talk, not about the Greek or its supplementary other but rather simply about the foreign — say, the foreigner *in* Greece or the foreigner *on* Greece. What if the only Greece, the historical Greece, that is, the Greece of culture, is that of those who read and wrote it, of those who sold and bought it, of visits to the Acropolis by Renan, Freud, Hofmannsthal, and Henry Miller — the Greece of (its) foreigners? Let us not forget that what is foreign to both aesthetics and to the tautological ideology of Greekness is the practices of use and exchange, the labor of commerce. I am tentatively suggesting that there may be a way to talk about the foreigner and *his* or *her* Greece — the commerce with the stranger, its contact and contest; phrasing it differently, to talk about the political economy of the production of Greece: the hegemonic interests involved and the discourses of the resistance they encountered. Only then might we be able to approach identity not as a metaphysical human need or an aesthetic requirement for unity but as a relative and flexible local political strategy.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>On the interactions between literary and economic production, see Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore, 1978) and *Money, Language, and Thought. Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley, 1982).

<sup>9</sup>On strategy and power, see Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies" [1977], in his *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Harvester, 1980); Meaghan Morris — Paul Patton, eds., *Michel Foucault. Power, Truth, Strategy* (Feral, 1979); Ernesto Laclau — Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* [trans. Winston Moore — Paul Cammack] (Verso, 1985); Abdul R. JanMohamed, "Humanism and Minority Literature. Toward a Definition of Counter-Hegemonic Discourse," *Boundary 2* (12.3/13.1, Spring — Fall 1984); Mary Louise Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations. On Anglo-American Reader-Response Criticism," in Jonathan Arac, ed., *Postmodernism and Politics* (Minneapolis, 1986); Nancy Armstrong, "Introduction. The Politics of Domesticating Culture, Then and Now," in her *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford, 1987); Barbara Harlow, guest ed., "Theory and Strategy in the Third World," special issue (*Critical Exchange* 22, Spring 1987).

## On the Impossibility of Greek Literary History

GREGORY JUSDANIS

RECENT THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS SEEM TO INDICATE THAT literary history has fallen into a state of disrepute at least in Western Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup> The greatest achievements of literary history, according to Hans Robert Jauss, belong to the nineteenth century when the composition of a history of a national literature was hailed as a philologist's crowning achievement. The highest goal of scholars such as Gervinus, Scherer, De Sanctis, and Lanson was to provide an account of the development of a national literary canon towards self-realization.<sup>2</sup> The task of these scholars was not just to codify the literature of a nation but also to stabilize its identity. We, however, the inheritors of this identity have lost the urgency for such a nationalist enterprise. Furthermore, our distrust of what Jean-François Lyotard calls grand narratives has led us necessarily to question the very viability of literary history, that is, the possibility of representing the national identity of a people in the history of its literature.

Literary history, as we have come to realize, was based on the conception of history as a teleological progression towards maturity and perfection and on the belief that one could produce an objective and comprehensive narrative of its evolution. Yet, far from being all-inclusive, literary histories were quite often based on a canon which excluded the works of ethnic minorities and women. Although written in the name of a supposedly national identity, they were placed into the service of the dominant ethnic group or social class. By concentrating on the past, literary historians also neglected the present, the ideological and epistemological presuppositions supporting their discipline. They presumed uncritically a concept of literature and a system of aesthetic norms. This lack of reflection on the discipline's own

<sup>1</sup>For various perspectives on problems besetting current literary history, see the articles in the special issues of *New Literary History* 3 (1985) and of *Poetics* 14 (1985). For an investigation of the theoretical problems involved in literary history, see: Gerhard Plumpe and Karl Conrady "Probleme der Literaturgeschichtsschreibung" *Literaturwissenschaft Grundkurs* 2, eds. H. Brackert, J. Stückruth (Hamburg, 1981).

<sup>2</sup>*Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. R. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982), p. 3.

historicity, Peter Bürger observes, gave the illusion that their narratives reflected the real course of events and were not just fabrications amongst fabrications.<sup>3</sup> The decline of literary history as a discipline in literary criticism stems from scrutiny of the assumptions underpinning this critical practice.

While literary history in North America and Western Europe finds itself in a crisis of values and goals, Greece has witnessed during the last thirty years what K. Szabó characterizes as a "new wave of literary histories."<sup>4</sup> Literary history seems to be flourishing in Greece both in and outside the nascent institution of literature. It not only provides a genealogy for the canon but also continues to participate in the discourse on identity. Literary history still fulfills an indispensable function in the consolidation of both cultural formations, which to a large extent explains the spate of literary histories. The vitality of Greek literary history, in contrast to its decline in Western Europe, springs from differences between Greece and Western Europe regarding both the role of literary history and the position of literature in society. I wish in this paper to explore some of these points of divergence through a discussion of the historical development of Greek literary history. In arguing for this difference I do not suggest that Greek literary history is backward or irrelevant. I regard it neither as an ethnographic aberration nor as an imitation of Western models. Like the institution of literature, Greek literary history arose to meet the specific needs of the new nation. Its formation was the result of the demand to make this originally bourgeois European notion conform to the realities of post-revolutionary Greece.

As I argued in "Is Postmodernism Possible Outside the 'West'?: The Case of Greece,"<sup>5</sup> literary histories in the modern sense, that is to say, works which sought to delineate the historical development of exclusively literary works, were first published in Greece during the early part of the twentieth century. Their appearance manifested another stage in the institutionalization of Greek literature. In the nineteenth century scholars did not address the historical evolution of literature. This category of writing had not been conceptually isolated as an autonomous subject. Scholars were interested less in creating a separate category of writing than in outlining for the new nation its grammatological heritage. Works such as Yeorgios Zaviras' *Nea Ellas ή Ελληνικόν Θέατρον* (1872, posthumously published), Iakovos Rizos-Nerulos' *Cours de Littérature Grecque Moderne* (1827), Andreas Papadopoulos-

<sup>3</sup>"On Literary History," *Poetics* 14 (1985) 203.

<sup>4</sup>Eine neue Welle in der Neugriechischen Literaturgeschichtsschreibung," *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis* 4 (1976) 81-91.

<sup>5</sup>*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987) 69-92.

Vretos' *Νεοελληνική Φιλολογία* (1854-57), and Konstantinos Sathas' *Νεοελληνική Φιλολογία. Βιογραφίαι των εν τοις Γράμμασι Διαλαμψάντων Ελλήνων* (1868) were often catalogues of Greek writing or Greek authors. These works devoted no space to what we understand as literature. Creative writing constituted one, but not necessarily exceptional, dimension of textuality. In short, scholars of this period neither treated literature as an object of knowledge nor conceived of genres like poetry and drama as distinct from other types of writing.

A space for literature began to be cleared in treatises from the latter part of the nineteenth century: Rudolf Nicolai's *Geschichte der Neugriechischen Literatur* (1876), Alexander Rangavis' *Histoire Littéraire de la Grèce Moderne* (1877), and Karl Dietrich's *Geschichte der Byzantinischen und Neugriechischen Literatur* (1909). In these works a compression occurred in the semantic range of "literature." While the previous generation of scholars aspired to record and codify the entire corpus of Greek writing, these authors began to focus their attention progressively more on imaginative or fictional texts. Their interest had narrowed from the broad field of Greek textuality, down to belles lettres and then to "creative" writing. This contraction in the range of the meaning of literature appears to have reached its completion with D. C. Hesseling's *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque Moderne* (1924), a translation by N. Pernot from the original Dutch text (1920). Hesseling's work is perhaps the first historical account of the modern Greek literary canon, with exclusive attention paid to literature: poetry, drama, short stories, and novels.<sup>6</sup> This new type of literary history appeared a few years later in Greece with the publication of the *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* by Ilias Vutieridis (1924-27). Although published after Hesseling's work, Vutieridis' book is actually more significant here because it represents the earliest self-consciously historical account of modern Greek literature to appear in Greece. While the four works examined above were written either by Greeks living abroad or by German and Dutch critics, Vutieridis' literary history was composed by a Greek residing in his homeland. As such, it attests to the radical transformation in the conception of the literary in Greece.

Vutieridis discussed in the prologue the differences between his work and previous histories. In compiling a history of modern Greek literature, the author noted, he limited himself to imaginative and creative works. For this reason he excluded philosophical, theological, and scholarly texts. An examination of such works, he observed, does not

<sup>6</sup>For a critical bibliography of the modern histories of Greek literature, see Giorgos Kehagioglou, "Οι Ιστορίες της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας," *Mantatoforos* (15 Mar. 1980) 5-66. See also Richard Clark, "Modern Greek Literature: Bibliographical Spectrum and Review Article," *Review of National Literatures* 5.2 (1974) 137-59.

belong to a history of a literature since modern literary history chiefly addresses "genuine literary works."<sup>7</sup> He conceded that this was not the practice of his predecessors who, as philologists, regarded as literary all the texts they taught and wrote about. His volume, however, concerned not φιλολογία, writing in general, but λογοτεχνία, the accepted modern Greek term for literature which Vutieridis used in his title.

It is significant that Vutieridis felt compelled to add this qualification in his prologue. Although it may seem superfluous to us today, it was necessary for him to define his conception of the literary and to differentiate his history of literature from his precursors' catalogues of Greek writing. The fact, however, that a comparison between his work and that of his predecessors was possible shows the degree to which the concept of literature had been contracted to signify only fictional writing. Vutieridis may have not sufficiently distinguished φιλολογία from λογοτεχνία, but he was consistent in his effort to outline a history of modern Greek literature from 1453 to his present. He reminded his readers repeatedly that the subject at hand was the literary. He emphasized, for instance, that he would discuss the demotic songs "as literary works [λογοτεχνήματα] and not as folkloric monuments," in contrast to the usual strategy followed by his predecessors and most of his contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> He referred to the *Erotocritos* as a "literary" work, the beauty of which had been appreciated by countless readers.<sup>9</sup>

Statements such as these suggest that both a new concept of the literary and a different methodology had been introduced into Greece. Both the object of study and the ways of studying it were changing. This does not mean, however, that literature had evolved into an autonomous institution; in Greece literature became the sole property of aesthetics only in the 1930s. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries literature was discussed and written about less as an end in itself than from the perspective of Greekness. That is to say, critics were drawn to literary texts not because they were dazzled by inherently aesthetic features but because they could use them in the ideological battles of the day, such as those concerning identity and language.

This we can see in Aristos Kambanis' *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας*.<sup>10</sup> The author concentrated for the most part on literature which he understood as incorporating imaginative works. Nevertheless he smuggled in such non-literary texts as a modern Greek

<sup>7</sup> (Athens, 1924-27), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> 2nd ed. (Alexandria, 1925).

grammar by Sofianos (1534), the *Tourcograecia* (1584) by Martin Crucius, the books of the French scholar Du Cange, as well as the perennially ambivalent authors, Adamandios Korais and Yannis Psiharis.<sup>11</sup> On the whole, Kambanis remained faithful to the modern notion of literature but, like his precursors, his aims were not purely literary. While he wanted to provide an account of the development of Greek literature, his more pressing goal was to intervene with this history in the linguistic controversy. Kambanis' overriding concern lay with "demotic literary production" rather than with the general field of Greek literature.<sup>12</sup> As a demoticist, he composed a very selective history, discussing solely those authors who wrote in the vernacular. He hailed, for instance, the demotic epic, *Erotocritos*, as the most significant linguistic and literary monument of the pre-revolutionary period; of its author, Kornaros, Kambanis claimed that no other poet contributed so much to the formation of the Greek language.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, he condemned the purist poets of the Athenian school for having introduced a "Byzantine scholarly tradition" into Athens. Specifically, he dismissed the literary worth of the work of Alexander Sutsos, arguing that it was of little interest to literary study.<sup>14</sup>

Kambanis, like most literary critics and historians of his time, was partisan in the linguistic debate and the general struggle for the demarcation of Greek identity. For this reason he was interested in outlining the evolution of demotic literature while simultaneously debunking the purist tradition. It was essential for him and other demoticists, as Dimitris Tziouvas has argued, to demonstrate the existence of a demotic literary paradigm in order to prove the authenticity and viability of the demotic language and the image of Greece it necessarily projected. Although Kambanis worked with a circumscribed notion of literature, he neither conceived of this as an autonomous object nor did he see the critic as a disinterested observer of literary texts. His book is very interested, its ideological position unambiguous, and its politics

<sup>11</sup> Nikolaos Sofianos was a Renaissance humanist and polymath amongst whose many works is the first study of the modern Greek (demotic) language. Martin Crucius, one of the first European scholars to take an interest in modern Greece, sought manuscripts in the modern language and collected information on Greece and its culture — largely through his correspondence with Greek clerics in Constantinople — which he incorporated in his multi-volume *Tourcograecia*. Du Cange (1610-1688) wrote a history of Byzantium and of Constantinople but his most lasting contributions are the glossaries of Classical Greek and Latin. Both Korais and Psiharis are ambivalent as regards literature because they wrote some texts which are clearly scholarly, others that are considered literary, and others still that straddle both categories. Literary historians must always grapple to find the most appropriate classification for both writers.

<sup>12</sup> *Ιστορία*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 112, 116.

unabashedly explicit. Kambanis could not have conceived of literature as a *Ding as sich* because it would have been epistemologically impossible for a scholar at that time and perhaps later to write a history or any treatise on literature with the sole intention of exploring the aesthetic qualities of the texts. Aesthetics, of course, was taken into account but it in no way represented the dominant concern. When critics wrote about literature they necessarily discussed questions of language and Greek identity. The purity of the literary text did not arise as a serious issue. Literary value could be perceived only through the ideological spectacles of Greekness.

Such was the view of modern Greek literature for years to come even held by such celebrated critics as K. Dimaras in *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας*.<sup>15</sup> Dimaras' history of Greek literature is the most successful and influential in Greek criticism, having not only established a paradigm for future work but also partaken in the redefinition of the literary canon. It is hailed in Greek studies as a model of literary history yet, ironically, it is not a history of literature (in the way that Vutieridis' and Kambanis' are) because its subject is not literature but writing in general. While twenty years previously Vutieridis limited the concept of literature to purely imaginative texts, Dimaras extended it again to encompass the "totality of all written monuments."<sup>16</sup> Dimaras' conception of literature incorporates fictional works as well as texts of a scholarly or theoretical nature, a fact which makes his history, as he himself admits, overlap such areas as the history of culture. Literature for Dimaras does not signify one group of texts, possess its own inherent properties, nor occupy its own space but constitutes a branch of writing, a dimension of grammatological history. This writing, and not the circumscribed notion of literature, is his notion of study.<sup>17</sup> In a sense his work resembles the histories of letters published in the nineteenth century in that much of the volume is devoted to non-literary issues as language, scholarship, education, rhetoric, the Church, printing, and historiography.

Dimaras' expansion of literature's definition indicates that even by the mid-twentieth century the boundaries of this notion were unclaimed; they were still available for radical appropriation. Literature was not yet recognized as an isolatable category in the modern Greek episteme. Although such a conception of the literary had been proposed earlier

<sup>15</sup>(Athens, 1948-49).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. p. i.

<sup>17</sup>Vassilis Lambropoulos argues in "Toward a Genealogy of 'Literature': The Institutionalization of Tradition in C. Th. Dimaras" (1988) that Dimaras, a leading spokesman of the generation of the 30s, opened up the notion of literature so as to incorporate more easily the revaluations of the canon introduced by this group of artists, critics, and intellectuals. Only an extended notion of literature, for instance, could accommodate the memoirs of General Makriyannis which previously had not been classified as literary.

by a few scholars like Vutieridis, assumed by modernist poets like Cavafy and Kariotakis, and promoted by some critics such as Alkis Thrilos and Telos Agras, it was far from being universally accepted. Of course Dimaras' extended notion of literature was not the only one available to his contemporaries. Many poets and critics of his generation worked with a more formalist understanding of the literary. But Dimaras' expansion of literature's boundaries, in what has proven to be the most authoritative Greek literary history, demonstrates that only a radical minority regarded Greek literature as one of the arts. In Dimaras' time the still dominant question seems to have been not, "What is literature and how can we best compile its history?" but rather, "What does the Greek written tradition contain and how can we make it reflect the individuality of the Greek nation?" The question of ontology was not as pressing, and, hence, preceded the historical one. It would be posed only after the politics of the second question had been resolved.

Judging from subsequent literary histories a resolution did not occur until the last two decades. The relatively recent *History of Modern Greek Literature* by Linos Politis,<sup>18</sup> for instance, still posits the literary experience in a political, social, and cultural context. It follows Dimaras' precedent in expanding the grammatological horizons of literature to such an extent that it is also as much a history of written culture as it is of literature. Politis, as he admits in the Preface, is a demoticist. Even as late as 1973 the literary historian still insists in acknowledging his position in the linguistic question. His view of the development of modern Greek literature is determined by the presuppositions of this discourse. This holds true for two earlier histories, the *Ιστορίας της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας 1453-1962* (1962) by Yannis Kordatos<sup>19</sup> and the *Νεοελληνική Λογοτεχνία* (1962) by Spiros Mellas.<sup>20</sup> Both writers feel it necessary to affirm the existence of demotic culture and defend it from its detractors. Although the issue of language was not as urgent in the 1960s as it had been at the turn of the century, the position statements of all three critics suggest that the question of national individuality continued to shape the configuration of the literary. Even during the last two decades literature was still a by-product of the ideological foundry molding Greek identity.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>(Athens, 1983).

<sup>19</sup>(Athens, 1962).

<sup>20</sup>(Athens, 1962).

<sup>21</sup>This goes to show that the conceptual isolation of the literary had not been unanimously accepted by all critics and intellectuals even at this date. It seems that literary histories resisted the jettisoning of literature's ideological baggage. Although the conception of literature implicit in these works departed significantly from previous models, its semantic range was still circumscribed by the questions of language and identity.

Only those Histories written by foreign critics and published abroad seem to have abandoned the political and economic model: André Mirambel's *La Littérature Grecque Moderne* (1953), Bruno Lavagnini's *La Letteratura Neoellenica* (1954), Börje Knös' *L'Histoire de la Littérature NéoGrecque*, (1962), and Mario Vitti's *Storia della Letteratura Neogreca* (1971), translated into Greek in 1978. These texts are of course products of Western European literary criticism in which literature has for two hundred years been differentiated from other discourses. The four critics remain faithful to the assumptions of aesthetics. They isolate literature, treat it as art, analyze the aesthetic and literary qualities of the texts, and trace their historical evolution. The Greek critics may also have had these aims but for them literature, in the extended or limited meaning, was still part of the nation's politics, in both the real and metaphorical sense.

Greek literary history has until recently been conscripted into the service of a nationalist ideology. In this task it shares many similarities with the original mission of literary history which arose in Europe in the nineteenth century as a result of a growing awareness of the distinctiveness of a people living within national boundaries. But the role played by literary history in the formation of a national self-image seems to have been forgotten in these well established literary traditions. As this identity became more secure (and as literature became more naturalized) the idea of national character ceased to be the guiding principle behind the writing of literary histories. Indeed the more literature and literary studies consolidated their place in society the more their originally political goals were suppressed.

In Greece the mission to forget has only recently begun to inspire scholars. For, even during the last few decades literature actively and consciously participated in the production of a national ideology. Critics such as Dimaras, whose *History of Modern Greek Literature* has repeatedly been reprinted and translated into other languages, attempted to chart out the literary heritage of the Greek people. His work sought to demonstrate the fulfilled moment of a national tradition based on the rebirth of the Greek language. Subsequent literary histories have followed the paradigm established by Dimaras.

In the twentieth century Greek identity was still in the midst of its political and ideological configuration. Greek literature played and continues to play a crucial role in this development. Even the modernists of the generation of the 30s, despite their experimentation, aspired to create an authentic Greek art. The surrealist poet Elytis dreamed of a day when an array of people "armed" with an international consciousness would lean towards the "native soil," adapt the "pure Greek substance," and create "a new and truly national

culture."<sup>22</sup> The generation of the 30s and their heirs have showed that even when literature had been irrevocably subsumed in aesthetics, it could still provide a forum for negotiations of Greekness but with a difference: whereas in the past Greece was understood as the signified, now it is appreciated as signifier; content has been superseded by form. The 1930s announced in Greek criticism the victory of aesthetics over politics. This of course does not mean that aesthetics is not a political practice — it is and suppresses this fact — but rather that a raw, conscious, and explicit political orientation, the willingness to see things as power relationships disappeared.

The formalization and aestheticization of Greek literature have continued unabated since the 30s to the point that literature has assumed many of the attributes of its Western European kin. With the language controversy largely resolved, there appears to be no major ideological issue to polarize Greek criticism as was true in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Now that literature has been admitted into the paradigm of the arts, criticism does not acknowledge any struggle for power. Critics may argue over the interpretation of a particular work or the place of an author in the canon, but they no longer have to fight over the appropriation of the literary. As a result Greek literature has become as natural as the (demotic) language. One does not question the former as one does not the latter. Literature now contains strictly fictional, "imaginative" writing which a critic interprets with equanimity.

But the history of modern Greek literature, having been so profoundly shaped by numerous physical and hermeneutic conflicts, was anything but a dispassionate affair. Since the struggles to found a Greek literary tradition seem to have ended only yesterday, they can remind us of the developments leading to the formation of the literatures in the West. The current institutionalized status of Literature should not deflect attention from the non-aesthetic factors propping up its edifice nor, indeed, its very un-literary beginnings. An examination of the genealogy of Greek literature can defamiliarize our perceptions of the literary and aesthetic. Even recent Greek literary histories seem somewhat strange and distant to those whose own histories of literature have long been purged of ideology, drama and conflict. As such, Greek literature can help us to reconsider the origins and function of Literature as an institution. Only after we learn that Literature has a recent past, that its configuration has taken place in the last two hundred years, and that its texts have been available for exegesis only in the modern

<sup>22</sup>Elytis, *Ανοιχτά χαρτιά* (Athens, 1974), p. 366.

age, can we first liberate ourselves from the fear of its indispensability, and then explore other ways of organizing written and oral artifacts and new modes (other than the interpretative) of approaching them.

*Acknowledgment.* I am grateful for a postdoctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which has permitted me to undertake the initial research for this article.

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