



## Literature as Consensus of *Now* Interpreters\*

JOHN CHIOLES

THESE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES FOR THE LITERARY ARTS, NOT ONLY because first rate work is hard to come by, but also because the critics and guardians of these arts are waging a costly war amongst themselves, thus ignoring the poet and rendering him irrelevant. To make matters even more confusing, it is suggested that many from the ranks of academic/theorist/critics are themselves poets manqué who, instead of writing an experimental novel, say, at a dull socio-cultural time such as this prefer to write a radical theory of literature that (along with Derrida who first began to mock the poets in this fashion) would compete with current novelists any day. What an aberrated reality we have shaped for ourselves in this discipline. And how little we understand that reality.

A brave book that stands to one side of that reality is Vassilis Lambropoulos's *Literature as National Institution: Studies in the Politics of Modern Greek Criticism*. Since it is a book that declares war, it *must* stand only to one side of reality where it mobilizes its forces for maximum danger to all other sides. Of course, the author will claim (and rightly for himself) that he beats the drum of war to wake us from our slumber rather than to force violence upon us. But can we, God fearing academics who know our aesthetics and our masterpieces and our great poets, afford to underestimate the enemy? That is the question, the question and the discourse that would be foisted upon Lambropoulos from the whole of the Modern Greek Humanities establishment. And the answer to that establishment is a clear "no," you cannot afford to ignore the danger coming from Lambropoulos; nor can you afford not to take him seriously.

In a dialogue with this uncanny book I intend to talk with him on his own terms, to carry some ideas as envoys to his own side — but at no time advocate for the Greek establishment, for that would be a contradiction in terms. To travel the distance to his side, to make the pilgrimage, so to speak, is respect enough and any objections, vehement

\*An "idiosyncratic dialogue" with Vassilis Lambropoulos's recent book, *Literature as National Institution: Studies in the Politics of Modern Greek Criticism* (Princeton, 1988).



or otherwise, are understood to begin from that point of respect for a fascinating (and often infuriating) book.

Many in Greek Studies will consider this book unnecessary. They are dead wrong. I can think of no more appropriate strategy to disturb the complacency of current literary criticism. The outrageous notion that Greek critics (modernists) have been voicing recently that the-Greek-identity-crisis-in-literary-production-has-barely-entered-modernism/how-can-we-accomodate-what-comes-after is precisely why we need Lambropoulos. And just as I am ready to say what may be unnecessary in his book is the incendiary rhetoric, I am reminded not only of the above notion of the modernists, but also of its diametrically opposite, an erratic brand of the postmodernist circle which bites its own tail in Greek words that intone the ever present French impressionism in the new Greek sociologists (e.g. G. Veltsos, *et al*, then I take my erasure and want to suggest instead that in fact Lambropoulos is not incendiary enough. Still, there are colossal problems of excess and duplicitous misbehavior in this book. I should like to ferret out some of these and show as well when they might be justified.

First, to the structure of the work: a good half, perhaps more, of its nine chapters, Introduction and Postscript have appeared before as articles. This explains the lack of apparant unity, though the ideology pervading the work is certainly sufficient unity for a book of this nature. The book is concerned with (1) Literary History (Chapter one directly, the rest of the chapters indirectly); (2) canon formation (Chapters two, five and six); (3) reception criticism (Chapters three, four, five, seven, and eight); (4) postmodernism/poststructuralism (Chapters six and nine); (5) what one might call "the poetics of negation" as a clever methodological afterthought (Postscript chapter.) The author states his position clearly enough in the introductory chapter, and it is best to let him speak with his own words:

Recent geneological research into the humanities has shown that the emergence of disciplines as we know them today, such as linguistics, folklore, history, archeology, philology, and philosophy, coincided with the development of a new political entity and reality, the national state. . . .

Lambropoulos is, of course, speaking of Greece. But he suggests that the case of Greece, though extreme, is not unusual in state (and literary canon) formation since the Enlightenment. And he continues;

. . . These disciplines, therefore, did not develop as fields of study for given realms of human experience; rather, they were established

to produce the respective aspects of an alleged national experience and thus analytically compose its identity. Literature, in particular, far from expressing the collective soul portayed by humanistic criticism, became the textual category which philology constructed when called upon to provide a local, native writing tradition (p. 9).

I take this to be a superb characterization of a cultural/national identity which the author calls Greekness, not without a touch of irony, as all the critics he critiques have done before him in earnest. But as with so many introductions this too is written after the collected articles turned chapters, and such it stands more as a wishfulfillment, at best as an implicit thrust, rather than an explicit statement of what is to follow. Thus the superb analysis of Greek identity, culture, and nationalism is lost amid the morass of contentiousness, the twisted arguments of violent negation, and the highly politicized fending in shadow-box that follows nearly everything after the Introduction. Let's however allow Lambropoulos to speak at length in this excellent vein while this beginning of his lasts:

Thus, I show that the discourses of criticism have constructed texts invariably as artworks, employing as a measure of aesthetic and ultimately moral merit the Greekness of the literary sign, the ethnic authenticity of literature. If that is the case, I contend, it is pointless for specialists — critics, reviewers, scholars, philologists, professors — to continue interpreting more works, since they can only strengthen the existing critical tradition, conconsecrate the established canon, and preserve nationalistic fantasies. Greekness works essentially as a valuation of institutional authority since it is a concept of exclusive power. It is particularly suspect and dangerous because much more than just literature or art comes under its decisive jurisdiction; membership in a community, social status, and political recognition are also included. By designating true identity, it legislates the rights of any citizen. In our specific case, designating literary quality arbitrates aesthetic merit and artistic status, intellectual importance, readership, prominence, availability, and influence. These are potentially oppressive functions that criticism was called upon to fulfill (p. 13).

This is all to the good. It places criticism in the arena of politics and gives the critic special powers; in other words, the critic becomes the watchdog for the state. Does Lambropoulos suggest that like a task master, a capo, the critic keeps the writer in line in terms of his output? Though a critic himself and profoundly aware of his power, he



does not go that far but deals instead a more subtle blow of contempt to the writer. However, since academic critic/theorists have for the last two decades been establishing their supremacy in the field, suggesting always that the poet is no more than the innocent (sometimes mad) figure of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, we have no choice but to give Lambropoulos this point in establishing his own and his colleagues' power if we are to understand him on his terms.

But lest this giving in to the critic/theorist get completely out of hand where we commit ourselves to the fact that only the critic/theorist exists in the politico-cultural arena (as the philosopher-king), let us rehearse a different argument in simple terms: If you march to the town assembly to lodge a complaint or raise an issue, you perform a political act. If you write a poem or paint a picture, you express a part of the same self that performs a political act. If you are a person who is socio-politicized enough to take part in the workings of an assembly, you are a person with a language which is the archetypal social-political tool. Any aspect of storytelling through the writerly function therefore is *ipso facto* a political act, no different in kind from the intervention in the assembly. And not only is it a socio-political act, this literary project, it is also a historico-cultural one as well. If it were ever otherwise, if art for art's sake intervened to this function of the literary project, it was an ill-advised act, unworthy even of Plato's *Republic*. When the modern Greek state was being formed, a political consensus seemed to mobilize its creative output toward a national identity. The problem with this political consensus was that it nurtured no critique, no alternative writing, if there were a possibility for such. So the act of bringing up an issue to critique the assembly was unthinkable in literature. We ought to be clear: when we speak of political acts in literature, we mean acts against the *status quo*. . . . And as a coda to the argument: is there literature which is not against the (writerly even) *status quo*? Who are these poets who reject the political consensus? Who are the critic/theorists who in guarding their supremacy could never name these poets? . . . But let us leave Lambropoulos to his own devices, grant him his political power, try to understand and query his arguments.

(1) Literary History. In his discussions in this area, the author gives a remarkable analysis of Dimaras's *A History of Modern Greek Literature*. He exposes the entire tradition of such writing and does open our eyes to how crucial and timely such an expose really is. Lambropoulos's work has come none too soon to forestall even more blunders in this area.

Still, with this first chapter, insightful as its initial thrust may be, problems abound. First off, we are faced with an essay style that is extremely unusual at best and one that becomes compounded in all

subsequent chapters: the pulling down of one or two names of philosopher/theorists, explaining segments of their theories that will be used, then proceeding to apply them, often in crude and uninteresting ways, sometimes with a leap that makes little sense. Let me pick out a paradigmatic case. Lambropoulos has ushered in the French social philosopher, Michel Foucault. The philosopher's work cited is on the various discourses as obeying certain rules in what he calls "the archeology of knowledge." Lambropoulos quotes the philosopher artfully and within a page he establishes a theory as shield (in the way we do in graduate seminar papers) to wield his power of ideas over Dimaras and the whole tradition. My question is, does he need Foucault, and if he does, must it be in such a short-shrift fashion where neither the philosopher nor the leap *out of* his ideas make much sense? Observe how the author does it:

" '[D]iscourse,' says Foucault, 'is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, insofar as they . . . can be assigned particular modalities of existence' and they 'belong to a single system of formation.' Therefore, we may 'speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse,' or literary and critical discourse" (p. 33).

Not quite. That is exactly what we may *not* speak of, literary discourse. It is the leap that has not been earned. Foucault's discourses have something in common; they are sciences which he has been researching. If 'literary' were equivalent to scientific, then the discourse would be of the same class and transference easy, but that is not the case and the proof for the viability to leap from one class of discourses to another should be laborious and complex, laying bare both the philosopher's notions and the critic/theorist's. The next step is to show how through Foucault's notion of the way knowledge is gathered we can understand "literature as an institution at a historical moment." This step too is telling for its leap: "Such an examination would resist the conventional tendency to deal with individual artist, analyze single works, or detect influences . . ." (p. 33). It would do nothing of the kind; it would not resist any conventional tendency; simply, the author would like it to be so — and he should say it, show why it would be important if it were so, etc., instead of implicating the philosopher who says nothing of the kind. If Lambropoulos as a consensus politician wants power, Foucault will be the last to come to his aid. It seems, then, the only argument the author is willing to make concerning the leap from Foucault's "discourses" to his position is the aggressive one: 'this is my historical time. I will simply appropriate scientific truth. And I will name



the discourses to be described. When I have done, works of art, artists, literary writing will not exist. I may be doing the author an injustice, but in effect this is what he seems to leave in place of an argument and not what Foucault might have sensibly wished: 'let's gather the discourses, the more the merrier; the paedec model type of analysis, the aesthetic, the perfectability needs of a nationalistic class that *buys* its art and its critics, etc., *all of them*. Who has the right to say we should leave *some* discourses out? Then, the critique on literary histories would be complete, showing *all* their sham rather than a biased one side of it. If nothing else the politics of the twentieth century in the West has shown us that nothing worth keeping gets done by decree nor by "consensus of interpreters," but somewhere there are checks and somewhere there are balances, and margin for error and always some corrective moves. . . .

(2) Canon formation. The Seferis/Makriyannis "Reading Masterpieces" chapter is arguably Lambropoulos's most fully accomplished piece. Here too he uses ready theories, those of Stanley Fish and Terry Eagleton, though more carefully this time. This chapter contains a bonus for reader, a kind of farcial, stymied and emotional conclusion: just as the author is claiming 'disinterest' in either Seferis or Makriyannis so far as their intentions or feelings go at one level, he is at a different level — fascinating this — working double time to bury both of them, but mostly Seferis. By the end of this chapter Seferis would need quite a bit of resurrecting before we can take him seriously again. And why not? The so-called generation of the thirties has come to be the anathema in all the arts in present-day Greece. Even painters have been violent in their response to that generation more recently. This is not different from the way T. S. Eliot had to be 'killed off' by most American poets and critics of the sixties. Of course Seferis was not doing anything more with Makriyannis's *Memoirs* than Eliot had done before with the 'recovery' of the Jacobean dramatists. But the case of Greece is culturally different than that of England or America: whereas Eliot exerted influence, Seferis was *in control* of the only game in town, as Lambropoulos shows so well.

Still, there is an aspect of his argument in this chapter that leaves the author at a disadvantage. His (3) Reception critique delivers another of those 'disinterested' smokescreens. Here Lambropoulos claims to be interested in the critics of Beratis's *Whirlwind*. But in fact he attempts to do — more crudely than Seferis — something similar for Beratis as was done for Makriyannis. He works indirectly and by suggestion, but to no avail. The novel is simply mediocre in every respect (and not because of its politics, which if anything make it a bit readable.) Still, the critics deserve the bashing they get from Lambropoulos —

mostly Raftopoulos and the hordes of potential readers who never bought the book. I suppose the fact that the work was used as an excuse for a highly intelligent discussion on openness and closure in fiction may constitute its most important function to date, and it may well be remembered only for that.

The author's next area (4) The Impossible Postmodernism is in one very important respect, the political one, a very unsettling experience. Lambropoulos has chosen to compare (no less) Renos Apostolidis and Italo Calvino — even if only their structural aspects. Apostolidis's story "The John of my Life," a negligible piece, is brought into the same breath with Calvino's brilliant comic novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. But that is not in itself the dilemma. What we have here is a serious critic inventing a postmodern fiction writer. Has Lambropoulos chosen him for his politics? Apostolidis used to publish at will long pieces as centerfolds in various popular magazines during the late 1960s — early 1970s; he used to take his coffee with George, in his words (George, the military dictator of those years); and when he and George had a falling out, he took some of his students and marched to the steps of the Parliament building and got himself briefly arrested. . . . A time when the works of others were censored, a time when others were maimed in serious resistance movements. Is Lambropoulos so young as not to know these things, or is he sold on the image of "anarchist writer" so let's make him into a postmodernist? Does he not know that it's the equivalent of a political scientist taking Patakos as a pere Ubu postmodernist politician? Has Lambropoulos done this to mock Apostolidis? or perhaps to mock postmodernism . . .

Of the names the author mentions as adhering to postmodernism, only Nanos Valaoritis could be seriously considered as a conscious poet in this direction — and he is out of San Francisco rather than Athens. Aristinos and Yatromanolakis have made notable attempts as fiction writers in a postmodernist mode; but perhaps their positions are not yet developed sufficiently for Lambropoulos. And there is, of course, the problem of distinguishing between the many avant-garde movements of this century and a clear new beginning that we've come to call postmodern.

I sympathize with Lambropoulos's dilemma. But there simply are no writers there to fit the bill and authenticate his argument. In fact, he has scraped the barrel with Beratis and Apostolidis. And he ought to ask himself what is he doing different with these two authors (among others he mentions) than Seferis did with Makriyannis. Are they not both making discoveries guru-like? But one will say, and if they are so what? Precisely. Next step: we pass to the armies of the interpreters for consensus. Their texts, those of the authors "recovered" by the critics Seferis and Lambropoulos. Now, we may all be suprised. But



the rude shock may belong to both Seferis and Lambropoulos. And so the tale ends tellingly for gurus — only religion does well by its prophets.

I will now turn to a less direct way of raising certain notions that deeply implicate the author's work.

## 2

Art should not be exalted at the expense of other cultural activities. This was the position of Kenneth Burke, and it was shared later by Ronald Barthes. And they both rejected the easy solutions, that is, vulgar sociology and the various erratic techniques therefrom. This position was not exactly a single-handed revolution; it was the sensible road of the thickets of New Criticism, New Formalism/Historicism, or Encyclopedic Criticism (Frye, etc.). Until a newer generation of critic/theorists emerging mainly out of foreign language (not entirely disinterested in their academic careers) began to use the above position as an overblown single-handed revolution. The position belonged to Burke, the discourse came from France, carefully attired to seem more than what it was. Much of the revolt was against imaginary positions on the other side (a side and a generation that was fast moving out anyway.) Now, perhaps fifteen years later, even though there is no enemy, the discourse that is still coming down the academic tubes continues to be a war of rhetoric. Perhaps this is intended only for Greek studies where the first wave of the revolt never quite made its dent, only perhaps; for it's not always to our advantage to excuse things on that basis. Of course, on the American scene there is a residue of modernism, one that may be picking up momentum as a reaction. But they know culture and history is against them. So, the poststructuralists are wasting their time on a phantom war.

Our real dilemma is that we have forgotten how to be radical. With the advent of Derrida we have wandered into a California supermarket and began "writing between styles" (in order to prove that we forgot that writing is a private affair), then proceeded to put into our basket a number of designer products (affirmed by consensus), arranged in the now famous *bricolage* (imported, crazy-quilt style). Yes, for sure, there's nothing undecidable about the fact that we have forgotten how to think radically. Of course, on the other side of the shopping center (to follow this painful metaphor) are the new new critics and the modernists who have yet to figure out the kinds of questions to ask, looking perplexed, asking themselves what they've done to necessitate the onslaught from the green beret theorists. These birds across the way have been self-satisfied with pedagogic devices of literary analysis for so long that they cannot figure out what is that which is left over in

writing after their analysis. The dust from the words after their analysis settles like a sheet over them and erases them. And they haven't a clue. The same "leftover writing" which the Derrida industry cannot account for. And I call it an industry because Derrida himself is too clever to have left such loose ends. In his (literary) *Glas* the opaqueness of his vision, amounting to an inspiration (as Hartman has said), accounts for *his own* leftover writing. But what his armies think is another matter. I suppose the question is: can literature afford not to ignore the designer *bricolage* (jeans) in favor of the radical cultural discourse (of Levis)? Would we have a Raymond Carver or a Richard Ford or an Ann Beattie if the story-telling art had sold out to the streamlined "designer consensus"? Well, at least radical thinking can (and must) ignore the slow death taking place inside consensus art, an art that is advocated as much by the modernists/formalists/socialist realists as by the armies of Derrida-aspiring philosopher-theorists in the American academies. One may hope some Americans will continue to remember how to think (and, yes, to write) radically, facing the dangers of writing head-on, not fearing it and thus attempting to reduce it to "voice."

The carefully contained anger and contempt with which critics and theorists are nowadays savaging the poet and his work — egged on by the poet's self-appointed, reactionary, modernist defenders — often turns into a travesty of misreading, not of literary texts but of theories of knowledge. Both current theorists and their modernist foes are engaged in a struggle in the absence of poet and poem. And if this state of affairs should melt down to a picture, it would be that of Herakles in combat with death over Alcestis. The irony of a luring eros toward knowledge and understanding collapses the whole edifice of the epistemic tradition (they dare call it that) in literary studies. The literary theorist, more often than not, falls into a masochistic metaphysical trap (and who will rescue him or her) from which he/she claims to be running away? He/She steadfastly refuses a concern with the poem before it is established that the word poem does not differ, say, from the word "toy" and is to be found like a toy as a cultural emergent and discarded. Then the theorist will be concerned with the object itself. (Except, of course, for that visionary genius Roland Barthes — but we mustn't say that, we must give Barthes the "apostolic look," for as a community of NOW interpreters for reading/understanding, we may not admit to the existence of visionaries, genuises, artists, Feyerabends, or Wittgensteins. But we can admit, reluctantly, to the metaphysics of our own rhetorical strategies — such as the one in this parenthesis. Would Stanley Fish do as much?

The reduction operates here in such a simplistic fashion: if communities of interpreters assemble to read/create literary texts by public discourse — whose rules and strategies and applications are public —



who will supply them with the texts to read? The New York publishers who receive hundreds of novels for each one they publish, the various theatre companies who read thousands of plays for every new script they produce, or will they be given the couple of thousand poetry collections published each year in Greece indiscriminately? For Lambropoulos speaks of the local, here and now discourses. Ah, but you'll say, the community considers and conducts a discourse about seasoned works in a social NOW context. Agreed. But the "natural (accidental?) selection" that has gone on for those seasoned works to reach us — who will take responsibility for that? Will we as a community of the ACADEMIC ELITE search the rejected novels and plays and if we find socially viable ones (preferably writing that talks about writing, in accordance with ALL the rules to please the academics) we will then rescue these while wrapping the knuckles of editors and producers for having missed them? Shall we now speak of CONSENSUS in the community of interpreters?

A thought of Wittgenstein's comes to mind:

Every interpretation according to the rules is an interpretation of the rules (or one more way of expressing the rules.) — *Philosophical Investigations* (201).

Here it might be instructive to interpose one of those singular aphoristic thrusts of Wittgenstein's:

Often, when I have had a picture well framed or have hung it in the right surroundings, I have caught myself feeling as proud as if I had painted the picture myself. That is not quite right: not "as proud as if I had painted it," but as proud as if I had helped to paint it, as if I had, so to speak, painted a little bit of it. It is as though an exceptionally gifted arranger of grasses should eventually come to think that he had produced at least a tiny blade of grass himself, whereas it should be clear to him that his work lies in a different region altogether. The process through which even the tiniest and meanest blade of grass comes into being is something he has nothing to do with and knows nothing about. — *Culture And Value* (pp. 19e-20e).

This reminds one of poetry conferences where all the mediocre poets (all that ever attend conferences) are constantly passing resolutions for "democratic" means of publication, founding new journals that will publish them according to their years of service in the "national product," the "bourgeois commodity" called poetry, all the while the poet who REALLY stands out (according to any and all the rules even up to next year's politics) retreats from their midst wondering what they're talking about. Something similar obtains with theorizing critics: every

so often an astute perceptive mind — say, Roland Barthes — comes along, gives a breathtaking reading — as he does in SUR RACINE — of a text (according to any and all the rules and politics and more), his text passes as one of a handful of seminal pieces in the field. . . . And all the while the armies of academics (the exegetical communities), managing an occasional footnote to the above reading, are forever asking for more involvement in communal exegesis. Well and good, but can we seriously talk about "disinterestedness" here? Such communal exegesis in our classroom is surely out. We are in perfect control there. Stanley Fish proves it. If he proves nothing else in beating the dead horse of aesthetics, he at least proves that much. Then we must mean communal exegesis amongst our colleagues. But which ones? This is a party politics and nothing less. Perhaps we should have "literatures" then, as we have political parties. And we ought to state this outright. (No, Stanley Fish is not stupid when he refuses to take the political step. As a Marxist, it costs him nothing. Communal exegesis is not on his agenda, not really).

All right, let's accept Lambropoulos's " . . . literature, the verbal art, is a national product and a bourgeois commodity whose value is established through the clash of critical discourses for exegetical authority" (p. 209). What does this acceptance commit us to do or believe? After aesthetics — and who would seriously argue that we are not now in a space "after aesthetics" — this position is a language game without special consequence, holding the same authority as other language games in its class. What we may not do is gleefully pretend that with this language game, AND WITH NO OTHER, we have invented the wheel. Certainly we can point to works which are "national products" and to works which are "bourgeois commodities." As to their value, there we will have to be shifting ground more often than not. If we go on inventing the wheel, however, and insist that ours is the only game in town, we will at least have to account for (Plato's ironic *Republic* notwithstanding) Socialist Realism. They did rush there before us. (Is it perhaps where Fish's wisdom lies in not taking the political step?)

(Of course my position is narcissistic. What are my choices? Dead modernism, the pseudo-epistemological poetics of the classroom of Stanley Fish, or the narcissistic politics of anarchy.)

In a space after aesthetics we should have the grace to admit that history is only the presence of a map and a text, IN THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE. Historical criticism in the modernist mode foregrounded aesthetics. The New Historicism School of the poststructuralist mode will not be able to escape the metaphysical circle — then will the "New Aesthetics" be far behind, particularly since this school



is implicated in scientific research, e.g. social anthropology, sociology, etc.? If we're constantly banging against limits, if this is the question at hand: is literature simply scientific/is literature simply antiscientific? and by extension (whichever the case) is it the same for literary theories and for criticism? Then the answer can hardly be anything other: neither; none of the above; send critics, theoreticians, and scientists back to their drawing boards to figure out first of all THE RIGHT QUESTION TO ASK.

In the rhetoric of sophistic politics Lambropoulos offers the following as the belief of everyone who does not think like him, the position that most of his work is intended to attack; what follows is ironic:

The genius of the author. The writer is the ultimate source of literature: he is the gifted man who becomes master of the artistic means and creates verbal art. The work is his inimitable creation, and he takes full credit for the success of his efforts (pp. 22-23).

This is Lambropoulos' attributive strategy to get the maximum irony out of what he sees as one of the presuppositions of every literary movement from Romanticism to early structuralism (mainly in Greece, but one may assume anywhere). Let's scratch the author's wound on this point and see why he is so incensed, for it is safe to assume there's more than meets the eye, much more at stake than a critique of Greek criticism. First of all this statement would not be made by any serious thinker after about 1850, be he a romantic or a modernist. That it has been made many times as an inept rhetorical trope is of little consequence and hardly warrants its equivalent at the other extreme — in the ironic mode no less. It is hardly of any importance if we prove that the unthinking appreciators of art (or even poets for selfish reasons), the merchant class that buys the content of art for its own aggrandizement, would make such a statement. As for taking this for the presupposition of a wider class of thinkers, that's like showing intent and concluding guilt in each and every direction. Let's be serious: I'm an average intelligent reader (let's suppose), and no, I don't care about the genius of the author — I don't even want to know his measure IQ. Next sentence in the above quote: let's yank it out of its ironic mode and put it in the negative where it longs to be, then convert it to the positive where its aspirations lie. Like so: from the "The writer is the ultimate source of literature . . ." to "The writer is not the ultimate source of literature . . ." to "The writer is not the ultimate source of literature . . ." and finally in its desired trope, to "Culture, socio-political context, and historical moment are the ultimate sources of literature . . ." Good. As an average reader I should congratulate myself and Lambropoulos, for together we

have come up with a simple syllogism that no serious thinker would in 1989 view as anything other than a given — never mind the "paedagogic device gentlemen of the academies". I might want to ask though, what do we do with the writer? Do we subtract his byline from the text, can we say THE GREAT GATSBY by "Champagne and Caviar 1920s America," CAPTAIN MICHALES by "Cretan Machismo Before the Revolution?" No, that doesn't sound right, for Fitzgerald and Kazantzakis did in fact write those texts. But the milieu they were written in are more important than the writers? All right, why not? The politics and the cultural ferment of those historical times are more important for America and Greece — and by extension the texts that capture such — than are Fitzgerald and Kazantzakis? Most certainly, you bet on it. Now, why does the above statement and the subsequent discussion look and feel like we have invented the obvious? How can we shake Greek writers and critics from their Romantic slumber? For sure not by "profoundly inventing the obvious" for them — no matter how many heavyweight theorists from the French and the American schools we bring to bear.

Let's face it, Lambropoulos's syllogisms about literature are variations (straining to be *new*) on the old arguments for the proof of God. With this youthful book Lambropoulos may as well be Saint Anselm. His is a fairly good (and shrewdly unintentional?) re-reading of Plato. At any rate, his is more than a single footnote to Plato, commanding poetry to its rightful place: sociopolitical and cultural adherence *and nothing else*.

Naturally, as when religion is read as "science," all this presupposes a "knowing confusion of realms": the world of the poem and the World as We Found It (to paraphrase Wittgenstein) are one and the same and Lambropoulos's school can go on using that fine Greek word "epistemology" as if it could be found casually in a poem. It is as if the audience in the second play of Pirandello's theatre trilogy suffered amnesia and never returned to their seats after they became embroiled in the action while in the lobby at intermission. Religion can be dangerous (and probably should be) but not when we prove *epistemologically* the existence of God. Literature, too, is dangerous; but not when we prove (God help our philosophical crudity) it — the poem — as *World*.

There must surely be other ways to counter the Romantic revolution and the modernists' puttering in the same muddle this last century without demanding that art answer to epistemology and without ourselves (in literature) proving the existence of God — in order to disprove Dada-like the existence of the writer.

To conclude, I should express a certain sadness about this book: that by the nature of its excessive thrust, it is doomed to remain on



the fringe as the avant-garde of critical theory (though I dearly hope I am wrong). Because, to say one of the two eyes on the human face doesn't exist is not to say very much about the human face — unless you happen to be Picasso; then you can picture two noses and one eye; then you will be saying more about a perceptive self as Picasso and much less about the human face and its future evolution. So, to construct such sentences as: "The artist does not exist" or "The work of art does not exist" — *whatever* the qualifications following such statements — is simply to re-write *Ubu Roi* in a humorless fashion, Impressionism turned Dadaism, and with all the political risks of being caught in a 1930's right-wing Europe. The mentors behind this book, the Stanley Fishes, the Terry Eagletons, or the Paul Feyerabendes are too clever to fall into the avant-garde trap. And they have and do influence the mainstream, for their ideas did not have to wait for Derrida to arrive on the scene. Lambropoulos is less fortunate. He has taken the step with their theories they would never dare take themselves. And what has yielded both good and bad results: good for the Greek literatti to hear these things, bad for the person saying them, for in his perceived (necessary?) excess he has brutalized himself politically and robbed himself of dependability as a theorist. And that is why it is a book fraught with ambivalence, which is a pity, for it has a good share of brilliant moments, moments of real insight into the vagaries of canon formation; there are here segments of sheer daring (and head-on) in uncovering the awful and uncouth mischief of philologists, literary historians, and critics of Greek literature. Yet one may hope that even though the Greeks have never taken well to the avant-garde, this book will find its audience; for it may, as the first of its kind, be a profoundly useful book.

---

## Contributors

---

Dr. John CHIOLES divides his time between New York University and the University of Athens. He teaches Comparative Literature and the Philosophy of Culture. He is a frequent contributor to the *Journal of Modern Hellenism*.

Dr. Christos HADZIIOSSIF teaches modern Greek and European History at the University of Crete. This essay was presented for the Queens College and Graduate School, CUNY Conference on Greece and the United States: Forty Years Since the Truman Doctrine, November 9-10, 1987.

Dr. Evie ZACHARIADES-HOLMBERG is Associate Professor of Greek, Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. She is preparing a major study on Venizelos' commentary on Thukydides.

Dr. Howard JONES is Professor of History, the University of Alabama. This essay was presented at the Queens College and Graduate School, CUNY, Conference on Greece and the United States: Forty Years Since the Truman Doctrine, November 9-10, 1987. It is adapted from the author's forthcoming larger work entitled *A New Kind of War, America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (N.Y. Oxford University Press).

Dr. Bernard M. W. KNOX is Professor emeritus of Classics, Harvard University and former Director, Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D.C.

Dr. Basil KONDIS is Professor of Modern Greek and Balkan History, the University of Thessalonike and has written extensively on the history and politics of the Cold War. This essay was prepared for the Queens College and Graduate School, CUNY, Conference on Greece and the United States: Forty Years Since the Truman Doctrine, November 9-10, 1987.

Dr. Mary LAYOUN is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Her *Travels of a Genre: Ideology*