
National and Poetic Ethics: The Case of Cypriot Literature (1955-1988)

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IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, THE CONTENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT of what is called "national" and "political" poetics of nineteenth and twentieth century Greece have become a subject of systematic philological and, especially, critical research.

Although most of the publications deal only with the period leading up to 1974, in other words covering the period that ends with the dictatorship in Greece, today's readers have at their disposal some authoritative evaluations, as well as a satisfactory general outline that explains the historical course of such notions as "national poetry" and "national" or "political" poetic ethics. Some critical texts or books (as for example those by Professor D.N. Maronitis) go even further, attempting to also construct a "typology" for the poets named as "national poets" of Modern Hellenism, and a typology for their literary creations.

However, none of these attempts adequately covers the modern Greek "periphery" and the diaspora. Unfortunately, it so happens that even in the best "Histories of Modern Literature," from the end of the nineteenth century until today, the "periphery" and the diaspora are either not mentioned and not evaluated, or if they are mentioned they are mentioned for the sake of two reasons only: first, the settling in Athens of "peripheral" writers (as it happened, for example, with the writers from Constantinople, Asia Minor, Egypt etc.); second, and more rarely, the achievement of an international fame by "peripheral" Greek writers (as it happened, for example, with the Alexandrian Cavafy).

Nevertheless, the history and literature of Cyprus of the last 110

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years, and especially that of the 1950's, until today, is not at all marginal or negligible with regard to the whole of modern Greek political and cultural history, and in particular the last thirty-three crucial years which define, to a large extent, the fate of "metropolitan" Hellenism of the post-1974 period, that is the period of the "Second Greek Republic." Therefore, it would be wise to study, today, in a serious and analytical way the phenomena of contemporary Cypriot art and culture. We can no longer claim to be attempting an all-round research of contemporary Greek literature, if we do not also take into consideration the literary output of its most active "periphery," that of Cyprus, as well as the output of all the past and present modern Greek communities of the diaspora.

About two years ago, the Athenian newspaper *Ta Nea* published a press report together with a series of interviews which had the aim of finding an answer to the following question: Has modern Greek literature given us great creative compositions of "national" importance, after *The Free Besieged* of Solomos, or has it not? In other words, has it given us the *great* or *great* works, or not?

This question seemed to turn into a current issue the equally fruitless question asked by Yiannis Apostolakis in the period between the two World Wars. In other words, sixty years later, the questions Apostolakis asked became again contemporary, except that now they were being asked within an explicitly conservative critical framework which would reject the achievements of Greek Modernism in their totality, and even of all Greek literary history since the 1880's. This is the period which my former teacher, Professor G. P. Savidis, has rightly named "the golden century" of modern Greek literature and the epoch of an "unbroken chain of major writers."

Of course, the question as posed at this time had a specific nuance. As it would be difficult for anyone today to deny the indisputable blooming of Modern Greek literature in its totality, the dispute involved the following specific point: Is there, or is there not, any important Modern Greek "synthetic work," that has adequately expressed the struggles and visions of the nation and of the people, that, in other words, has assimilated artistically the great moments of Greek history and culture? I had tried, at that time, to give an extensive and positive answer. I would consider it useful to repeat some of the conclusions I had arrived at.

To begin with, I would note the keen sight and precision with which some leading researchers have stressed what we could name as "common places" of nearly all Modern Greek literature: its "acritic" and peculiar character, which does not reject the continuous renewal that is brought about by contacts with foreign civilizations (K.Th. Dimaras);

the inter-connection of literature with the "leaps" of a "national consciousness" (L. Politis); its resistive orientation (N. Svoronos; M. Viti); its struggle for dialogue and reconciliation with the ancient and medieval Greek tradition and, in parallel, its struggle to shake off the "burden of the literary past" (G. P. Savidis).

Then, I could point out that even a glance at Modern Greek poetry and prose of the last one hundred years would be sufficient in order to distinguish a large number of "classic" works, which perhaps would not have anything to envy from any other corresponding series of works in other contemporary literatures. Even if we limited ourselves to poetry, we couldn't avoid distinguishing the following important moments:

Firstly, the epic-lyrical *Dodecalogue of the Gypsy* and the satirical poems of Palamas in the first decade of our century, which sum up a historical and intellectual experience of about ten centuries, as well as the poetic ethics of national concerns current at the time.

In a parallel way, the symbolic, mythopoetic or realistic "work in progress" of the historical poems of Cavafy, where, with one thousand and one ways of an evocative "Shahrazad (Halima) of Hellenism" (as Seferis rightly has called Cavafy) the ancient Greek, the Roman, the Byzantine and the Modern Greek worlds are unified up to the day following the Asia Minor Disaster.

In quick succession, the "synthetic" or "non-synthetic" political and satirical poetry of Varnalis, which co-ordinates Greek with international social concerns of the period after the October Revolution.

The "political" poet Karyotakis, as one could see especially in his collection *Elegies and Satires*, at the end of the 1920's.

Simultaneously, the "historical" and the "mythical," lyrical or dramatic poetry of Sikelianos, who manages to become synchronized as a national commentator, beginning with the *Songs of Victory I*, during the Balkan Wars, up to his mature politically committed poems of the period of the German Occupation and the Greek Resistance.

It is perhaps less necessary to remind you of the persistence and long term attempts of the poets belonging to the "Generation of the 1930's":

The output of Seferis, from the poems of *Mythistorima* to the poems about Cyprus and the late mature texts he wrote during the dictatorship years.

The long compositions of Elytis, which observe not only the theme of a diachronic "Greekness," but also important moments of contemporary Greek history from 1940 to 1974.

The broad poetic chronicle of Ritsos, which refers to the national and social struggles, as well as the repeated attempts by Greek surrealists who tried to coordinate a Greek with a universal and cosmopolitan

element, and national freedom with social and artistic anti-conformism as in many of Embirikos' poems, Engonopoulos' *Bolivar*, or the poems *Amorgos* and "The Knight and Death" by Gatsos.

Moreover, the keen achievements of some of the post-war poets also move towards the same direction. Even when the preplanned great "compositions" are absent, the sum of the epic and lyrical poetry of the important post-war writers forms an invaluable testimony of both the individual and collective historical experience, as in Sinopoulos, Sachtouris, Alexandrou, Patrikios, Livaditis, and, also, in younger poets belonging to the so-called "Second Post-War Generation" and to the "Generation of the 1970's." We can therefore say that the work of all these artists has turned into monuments those moments of national reality that are worthy of note for Greece, and which cover the period from the Second World War to 1974.

Allow me, however, after this brief retrospection, to return to my main topic.

The history of literature in "peripheral" Cyprus during the British period (1878-1960) shows that in proportion to "metropolitan" Hellenism, a thread of "national" poetry connects the writers of the nineteenth century with the writers of the years between the two World Wars and the contemporary Cypriot writers. Indeed, a well informed and fair History of Modern Greek Literature up to 1960 would certainly have to be supplemented with the work of at least three major writers. These writers are, simultaneously, representative of three different types of "national" poets:

The first, Vasilis Michailidis, is a semi-educated poet of the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. He is in close contact with popular tradition and with everyday issues, and his work is composed in the Cypriot dialect, as well as in puristic Greek ("katharevousa"), and in the Panhellenic common demotic language. Michailidis, like other Cypriot backward romantic writers of his time, poets, prose writers and playwrights, represents the type of the national poet who belongs to the unredeemed "peripheral" Hellenism: it is a type who picks up and continues, for example, the tradition of Valaoritis, expressing the Cypriot ideology of Unification with Greece, an ideology which was, in its turn, a mixture of a much older Panhellenic national sentiment and of contemporary dreams of the Great Idea.

If we omit some lyrical and social poets like Dimitris Lipertis, Tefkros Anthias, and others, we could say that the second major poet of contemporary Cyprus is Theodosios Pieridis. He is consciously a politically committed left-wing writer of the period between the two World Wars, as well as of the two immediate post-war decades. Pieridis's experiences were not only a result of living in Cyprus but also

came from living in the diaspora, mainly in Egypt. He wrote his best works in the Panhellenic demotic language and he is the type of a national poet represented, for example, by Varnalis or, later, by some non-modernist aspects of Ritsos' poetry. There is a mixture of post-Palamas and post-Sikelianos "Greekness," but also a mixture of the anti-colonialist, internationalist and socialist conceptions about the fate of Cyprus, of Hellenism, of the Mediterranean region and of the whole world.

The third major Cypriot poet, with whom we reach today's Cypriot literature, is Kostas Montis. Aspects of his work will be referred to more analytically later on. For now it would probably be sufficient to say that, although he is a writer of almost the same age as Elytis and Ritsos, he has shown his literary personality only after the first postwar decades and he continues until today to be an active catalyst of the Cypriot literary life. Montis, the first great poet of the independent Republic of Cyprus, is mainly a poet, but at the same time he is an experienced writer of plays and of narrative prose. He is the man who founded a peculiar semi-modernist tradition in Cyprus. Montis wrote in a cultivated and, often, deliberately "learned" Panhellenic demotic language, and, on a smaller scale, in the Cypriot dialect. The type of a national poet that Montis represents is a combination of the examples of Cavafy and Karyotakis: a combination of the idealism for Unification with Greece, but also of an overall and cosmopolitan look towards History: a blending of popular, lighthearted lyricism, but also of a bitter, satirical, and ironic existential feeling about the liquidation and the alienation of contemporary human life.

An anti-heroic and sceptic tone dominates most of Montis' work. Nevertheless, in his poems called "Moments" (which are short or even one-line poems with a dense and "momentary" or instantaneous philosophical, gnomic, witty or satirical content), as well as in his longer compositions, under the general title "Letters to Mother," it becomes apparent that the consciousness of the poet expresses the collective feeling of one people and of one "nation." Hence, it is not a coincidence that not only Greek scholars but also foreign readers and translators of contemporary Cypriot literature (as for example the editors of a recent Cypriot Anthology of poetry in German) have thought that the following verses by Montis constitute not only a Cavafy-type confession of a "peripheral" Greek mentality, but also a kind of an emblem for all modern Cypriot writers:

ΕΛΛΗΝΕΣ ΠΟΙΗΤΕΣ

Ἐλάχιστοι μᾶς διαβάζουν,

ἐλάχιστοι ξέρουν τὴ γλώσσα μας,

μένουμε άδικαίωτοι κι' άχειροκρότητοι
 σ' αὐτὴ τὴ μακρινὴ γωνιά,
 ὅμως ἀντισταθμίζει ποὺ γράφουμε Ἑλληνικά.

GREEK POETS

Very few people read us,
 very few people know our language,
 we remain unrecognised and unapplauded
 in this far off corner,
 but we have the consolation that we write in Greek.
 (trans. by Charles Dodd and Amaranthi Sita)

Having mentioned the case of Montis who acts as a kind of a literary bridge, we enter now into the heart of our topic. Looking at the more recent phase of Cypriot literature, which this year (1988) — I would like to repeat — reaches its "crucial" 33rd year (a number which, in terms of literary symbols, reminds us of Christ's age at crucifixion and his glorification), we will see how the "national and poetic ethos" takes form. In particular, we will see how this ethos is expressed through "self-referential" poems, namely texts which speak about the poet himself and discuss his position vis-a-vis his poetical material and historical reality, as well as his aims and the function of his art. In other words, we will see how "national and poetic ethics" are expressed in Cyprus through the so-called "poems about poetics" (ποιήματα ποιητικῆς). A brief survey of contemporary Cypriot poetry after 1955 must precede other comments.

This poetry is, of course, the end-product of a very long linguistic and artistic tradition. In modern times this tradition becomes apparent when the Modern Greek language of the island, namely the Cypriot dialect, begins to become systematically cultivated. Since the twelfth century the evolution of Modern Greek literature in Cyprus is continuous and unbroken. In poetry one can distinguish three branches. The first is the demotic/folk poetry. It keeps its pace with the development of the Panhellenic folk-songs, which developed during the preindustrial era and died sometime in the nineteenth century. The second branch is what is called rhymester-poetry (ποιητάρικη ποίηση), which is poetry composed in the Cypriot dialect by individual uneducated or semi-scholar and semi-professional rhymesters. The themes are drawn from the everyday important or exceptional events of contemporary life. This poetry appeared, according to sporadic testimonies, before or around the time of the final death of the folk song. Rhymester-poetry, which flourished mainly towards the end of the nineteenth century and later on, is still alive today. Finally, the third

branch of modern Cypriot poetry is the poetry that was written and is still being written by educated, individual artists in the modern meaning of the term. This branch followed the course of the broader Greek literature both in its dialectal and in its Panhellenic form (archaizing, puristic or demotic). It has survived without discontinuities until today. Naturally, since the second decade of our century, this poetry has been written almost exclusively in the Panhellenic demotic form.

From 1955 until today we will find that, on one hand, there is the creation of the rhymester-poetry in the Cypriot dialect with almost standardized themes and means of expression. This poetry appears in the countryside or in the rural and semi-urban small communities. On the other hand, there is the creation of poetry by individuals who exercise the art of the written literary language independently from or outside the traditional collective social stratum.

As to the question of contacts of modern Cypriot literature with other Greek literature and with foreign literature, we could note that Cypriot literature was always open, and accepted and assimilated influences in fruitful ways at most times. Thus, while in the past times it had utilized the Western European tradition of the later Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, since the beginning of the nineteenth century it has found correspondences with the literary trends of Europe and of "metropolitan" Greece, especially with romanticism, and later on with symbolism and the various forms of realism. This coordination with other literatures occurred sometimes very quickly, but more often with considerable delay. We must also note that during the period between the two World Wars and afterwards, distinguished Anglosaxon writers and a few other foreign poets also played some part in Cypriot poetry, along with the more significant models of Palamas, Cavafy, Karyotakis, Seferis, Ritsos, Elytis, and Anagnostakis.

The period since 1955 was, for Cyprus, very rich in political and cultural changes: There was liberation and anti-colonial armed struggle (1955-1959); the declaration of an independent and non-aligned Cyprus Republic (1960); intercommunal riots and the creation of the first Turkish-Cypriot "enclaves" and of the dividing "Green Line" in Nicosia (1963); unsuccessful Turkish attacks and bombardments in Northern Cyprus (1964); an extreme right-wing military coup by the Athens military junta and EOKA II against President Makarios followed by the Turkish invansion (1974); the capture and occupation of 40% of the territory of Cyprus by Turkish troops leaving many dead and missing persons, 200,000 Greek-Cypriot refugees, and with dramatic financial and social consequences; finally, there were successive but unsuccessful, at least until now, attempts for a political solution to the Cyprus problem.

All these events define an axis, around which the national issues of contemporary Cypriot art and literature evolved and are still evolving: originally, there was the struggle for Unification with Greece and, later on, for self-determination and independence; the formation of the consciousness of a people, through resistance and through contest; the heroic and leading personalities (dead fighters in the struggles, Archbishop Makarios, and others); the inevitable, yet often undesirable or painful social transformation; the decline and end of the rural economy and the loss of traditional values together with a drift of the population to the cities, followed by alienation; the political course and the internal contradictions of the Republic and the anomalous developments of the years 1967-1974 climaxing in terrorism by Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot nationalist organizations and in interventions by the Athens junta; the 1974 war and its tragic consequences and the attempts for reconciliation and understanding between the two communities; the change in the kind of life and the type of economy, especially after 1974, the turn towards emigration and the tourist industry, the selling off of the land and the glaring appearance of negative phenomena among the newly rich, and the slackening of the fighting and political spirit and the resorting to leisure; finally, the extensive crisis of ideologies, an increasingly critical disposition towards the Cypriot political, religious and intellectual leadership, and a spirit of doubt and negation.

During the period since 1955 there were three heightened historical moments which seem to define all these themes: the Struggle of 1955-1959, the first steps of the Cypriot State (1960 and after), and the Turkish invasion (1974). These moments seemed to have played a very important role in the formation of successive "generations" of Greek-Cypriot poets, too.

The first generation of the post-1955 period follows the older important poets of the 1940s and the 1950s (such poets as Montis, Pieridis, Kralis, Vrachimis, and Liasidis who wrote in dialect). Of the poets who appeared for the first time during the last fifteen years of British rule, and who heard the echoes of modernism in Seferis and T. S. Eliot, but matured themselves during the decade of the 1950s or afterwards, there are two poets who became distinguished later: Pantelis Michanikos (who died prematurely) and, especially, Theodosios Nikolaou (whose main work was published much later).

The next and second generation is numerous in representatives and richer in the variety of themes it explores and in its quest for new ways of expression. These poets became acquainted with the experiences of the 1955-1959 Struggle in their adolescent and youth years, and published their books mostly just after 1960. This generation, which is usually

called "The Generation of Independence" or "The First Generation of the Cyprus Republic," manifests itself artistically in the favourable conditions of the first years after independence. Most of these poets studied in Greece and were also aware of European and international literary and ideological developments. In their country they had the chance to obtain vital positions in the state mechanism, in the public service, in institutions, in the mass-media and in education. They also established intellectual and cultural organizations and clubs and magazines. In the beginning they felt that they were creating during an optimistic "Cypriot spring" and, later on, in a period of difficult transition, but, in any case, in a society that asked for their support and participation and for their constructive or strict critique. Thus, they very often became a kind of defendant-artists or artists-critics of the Cypriot State itself and of the organized political ideologies of the Cypriot people. Regardless of their personal beliefs and positions, they seldom hesitate to express their views about general issues. They very rarely closed themselves into a private area of personal existential and erotic concerns, which dominated a large number of poets in Greece during the same time. The Cypriot poets concerned themselves with national poetic ethics. After 1974 they complete or broaden their themes, widening their perspective and achieving greater maturity, thus providing several long poetic compositions about contemporary Cypriot reality. The eminent poets of this generation are: Kyriakos Charalambidis, Kostas Vasiliou, Andreas Pastellas, Michalis Pasiardis, Polyvios Nikolaou, Theoklis Kougialis, Fivos Stavridis, Dina Katsouri, and a number of others.

The events of 1974 and their direct consequences acted as a catalyst in the formation and appearance of a third and younger generation of poets. These are people who lived through the dramatic experiences of the 1970's while they were in their last years of childhood or in their adolescent and early youth years. In their first steps, some of these poets adopted themes similar to those of their colleagues in Greece of the same age who belong to the "Generation of the 1970's," as it is called. These themes were: a spirit of resistance and democracy during the years of the Greek dictatorship, anti-conformism, social and cultural doubt and revolt, and interest in some internationalist and Third World problems (Vietnam, Africa, Middle East, and others). However, the work of these younger Cypriot poets is indelibly sealed, later on, by the Turkish invasion and its consequences. This generation, which is usually called "The Generation of the Invasion" or "The Generation of 1974," competes in number of poets and publishing activity with its immediate predecessor, "The First Generation of the Cyprus Republic." In any case, only a few of the younger poets have preceded to compose long

"synthetic" works or a fully integrated work. Moreover, only a few poets seem to have crystallized their poetic doctrine, although they have defined at an early stage their position towards the great national and collective issues. The more mature poets are those who began writing a short time before 1974: Lefkios Zafiriou, Louis Perentos, Yiorgos Moleskis, Nikos Orfanidis, and others. Another and more numerous group, in which many female voices predominate, seems to have moved towards poetry through the personal experiences of becoming refugees in Cyprus, or of voluntarily leaving the island. These poets mainly express the adventure of the young in trying to adapt to new conditions, or a melancholic and bitter nostalgia. They are Frosoula Kolosiatou, Niki Marangou, Niki Katsaouni, Andriana Ierodiakonou, Eleni Theocharous, Panagiotis Avraam, and others. Finally, in a more peculiar position, there is a group of poets who in their majority have a clear or confused neo-Unification ideology and a strongly negative position towards most phenomena of Cypriot life after 1974. Amongst them, the theme of national and poetic ethics appears either as a radical negation of the establishment of the Cypriot State and of its realities, or as an anarchistic satirical conflict with what they consider as the "intellectual establishment" of Cyprus from 1960 onwards. They are Andreas Roditis, Savas Pavlou, Prodromos Prodromou, and others.

I think that this is sufficient as a historical summary of the principal poetical tendencies during the last thirty-three years in Cyprus. For the remainder, I will confine myself to presenting a series of "poems about poetics," which are indicative of a much richer material. I will also limit myself, with a few exceptions, to texts written after 1974, that year which has become a tone upon which the strength of the contemporary Cypriot poet is tested as well as his national and poetic ethos, and his value. Needless to say, this topic deserves to become the object of a special monograph.

If we wished to apply to modern Cypriot literature the saying "in Homer there is the beginning" ("ἀπὸ Ὁμήρου ἄρχεσθαι"), then, of course, we would begin with Montis. This is the case not only because he was perhaps the first in Cyprus to create the foundation and meaning for the type of poem we call "a poem about poetics," but also because, as G. P. Savidis has rightly said, we could not begin to imagine to how many of the younger Cypriot poets Montis has been a forerunner and a model, at least until 1974.

One of Montis' characteristics is that, on one hand, he nourishes a great dedication and trust towards poetry, while on the other hand he has the distinctive ability to view poetry in a prosaic, bare and de-mythologizing manner, quite often a sarcastic one. He senses how much

and of life, about which Montis has no self-illusions. Here is a one-line "moment" titled "Poetry":

Ἄν ἤξερε ἡ ζωὴ τί παιγνίδι τῆς παίζεις παίζοντας!

If life only knew, what a game you are playing with her, by playing!
(Yiannis Milides)

The worthy poet is usually the "annoying" poet (who annoys life and people), as Michalis Pieris has called Montis. This is the poet who becomes a persistent and ironic human insect which stings, which could seem weak, innocent or silly, but can hold in his hands the real strength that surpasses the repercussions of history and of life. This basic idea is often combined in the poems of Montis with the notion that poetic inspiration is a dictation, and the poet is a vessel or an echo of words, sometimes by default or without the poet's will.

Βρὲ παιδιά, γράφουμε στίχους ἔδωπέρα,
πὺ σιγά, σᾶς παρακαλῶ, δὲν ἀκοῦμε,
θὰ γίνη κάνα λάθος.

We are writing poetry here,
be quieter, we can't hear,
we might make a mistake.

(Yiannis Milides)

Συγγνώμη, στίχοι μου, ποὺ σᾶς ἔγραψα.

Forgive me, my verses, for writing you.

Εἶν' ἔτοιμοι, κύριοι, οἱ στίχοι ποὺ παραγγεῖλατε:
Τρεῖς μέτριοι κι' ἓνας βαρύγλυκος.
Παρακαλῶ.

The verses you have ordered are ready, gentlemen:
three medium and one very sweet.
Don't mention it.

(Charles Dodd and Amaranthi Sita)

At times Montis aims his sarcastic arrows at other, unworthy poets:

ΠΡΟΣ ΠΟΙΗΤΗΝ
Δὲν εἶχες τίποτα νὰ πῆς, κύριε.
Γιατί ἠνώχλησες τὶς λέξεις,
γιατί τὶς ἠνώχλησες;

TO A POET

You had nothing to say, Sir.
Why did you annoy the words,
Why did you annoy them?
(Yiannis Milides)

But the poetry which is related to truth, according to Solomos' concept of a "national poem," Montis confronts with another kind of poetry of heightened temperature, that is not sarcastic or ironic, but, on the contrary, serious, lyrical and sympathetic.

Αὐτοὶ οἱ στίχοι δὲ συμπληρώνονται ἐν ψυχρῷ,
αὐτοὺς τοὺς στίχους θὰ τοὺς συμπληρώσῃ ὁ ὑδράργυρος τοῦ
τελευταίου μας πυρετοῦ,
αὐτοὺς τοὺς στίχους θὰ τοὺς συμπληρώσῃ τὸ τελευταῖο μας
παραμῖλημα.
Ἐξηγήστε στὸν ἐκδότη.

These verses could not be completed in cold blood,
they will be completed by the mercury of our last fever,
they will be completed by our last delirium.
Explain this to the publisher.
(Charles Dodd and Amaranthi Sita)

The gamut of "national" poems by Montis also includes, of course, poems that date back to years much earlier than the Struggle of 1955-1959. Nevertheless, it is from this last period that the first two "synthetic" compositions of Montis emerge. They are the "Letters to Mother" (Mother being both his real mother, as well as Cyprus and Greece). There is also a series of short poems about persons, facts and happenings of the period 1955 onwards. One of these poems, which was published in 1962, refers to a very young fighter who was executed by the British colonial administration. The poem reminds us of the difficulty or even of the impossibility to express via the poetic act and sensitivity the *total* sense and ethos of an act of national significance.

ΙΑΚΩΒΟΣ ΠΑΤΑΤΣΟΣ

Ἐμεῖς; Τί εἴμαστε ἔμεῖς;
Μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ διαβάσουμε μὲ θλίψη (πολλή; Καλά, πολλή).
μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ συζητήσουμε μὲ πόνο (ἂν καὶ πόσο καιρὸ
αὐτό;),
μπορεῖ — οἱ πιδ εὐαίσθητοι — νὰ τ' ἀγρυπνήσουμε — (ἂν καὶ
πόσες νύχτες;)

μὰ τίποτ' ἄλλο.

"Ὅλα τ' ἄλλα εἶν' τῆς μητέρας τοῦ παιδιοῦ.

ΙΑΚΟΒΟΣ ΠΑΤΑΤΣΟΣ

We? What are we?

We can read it with sorrow (much sorrow? all right, much sorrow),
we can discuss it with pain (although for how long will it be?)
we can — the more sensitive ones — keep awake for it (although
for how many nights?),

but nothing else.

Everything else is for the child's mother.

(Yiannis Milides)

After the Turkish invasion Montis returns directly to "national" themes, with a series of bitter "Moments of the Invasion," and with a long composition, which appears to have remained incomplete, the melancholic *Third Letter to Mother*. Many of his poems evolve around a tragic contradiction, which was first pointed out in Modern Greek poetry by Palamas, in his prologue to *The Tomb*, which is a poetic composition on the death of his little son. There, Palamas points out that a tragic event is for an artist not only a source of unbearable personal pain, but also a very rich "mine of inspiration," with extensions that overcome the personal level. Let us hear how Montis becomes conscious of this through an imperceptible self-irony.

ΠΕΝΤΑΔΑΚΤΥΛΟΣ — ΤΟΥΡΚΙΚΗ ΕΙΣΒΟΛΗ

Κι' ἀπ' τὶς ἐκρήξεις τῶν βομβῶν ἀναπηδοῦσαν στίχοι!

PENTADAKTYLOS — TURKISH INVASION

And through the explosions of bombs, verses were jumping!
(Yiannis Milides)

Other "poems about poetics" by Montis are bitter comments. For example, some of them refer to one of his beloved places in Cyprus, referred to in his older poetry, but where, however, years later, the Turkish landing and invasion took place:

Πικρὴ θάλασσα τῆς Κερύνιας
ποὺ πρέπει ν' ἀποσύρουμε πιά
τοὺς στίχους ποὺ σοῦ γράψαμε!

Bitter sea of Kerynia,

that we must now withdraw
the verses we offered you!
(Yiannis Milides)

The poetic ethics of Montis, and his fervent ideological orientation toward Unification of Cyprus with Greece, are shaken in 1974, but they are not modified. Besides, he himself had earlier expressed an ambivalence in the soul of Cypriot people and of Hellenism living outside Greece. On one hand, there is a feeling of trust and attachment to the so-called "national center."

Καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάδα τελευταῖος θάμνος στὸν γκρεμό,
νὰ τὸν κρατᾷ ἡ λευτεριά νὰ μὴν πέφτη.

And Greece, the last shrub on the cliff,
the last support to help liberty from falling.
(Yiannis Milides)

On the other hand, there is a reverse feeling of oppression and displeasure and also the need for creative competition.

Δὲ μπορεῖς νὰ γεννιέσαι μὲ τὴν Ἀκρόπολη ἀπάνω ἀπ' τὸ κεφάλι
σου,
δὲ μπορεῖς νὰ ᾄδεις ἰσοβίως τὴν Ἀκρόπολη ἀπάνω ἀπ' τὸ κεφάλι
σου.

Λοιπόν, πολὺ κάθησε ἀπάνω ἀπ' τὰ κεφάλια μας ἡ Ἀκρόπολη.

Μ' ὅλο τὸ δέοντα σεβασμὸ
ἔχουμε σοβαρότερα θέματα ἀπ' τὴν Ἀκρόπολη.

You can't be born with Acropolis over your head,
you can't have for life Acropolis over your head.

Well, it has sat over our heads for too long this Acropolis!

With all due respect
we have more serious themes than Acropolis.
(Yiannis Milides)

Something along similar lines occurs in the poetry of Montis after 1974. He expresses both an unavoidable crisis and decline of unsuspected "ethnocentrism" and, even more strongly than before, a need to

to a Panhellenic common denominator. This is particularly apparent in the incomplete as yet *Third Letter to Mother*.

Being an authentically popular poet of the years between the two World Wars and of the first post-war decades, Montis is not the poet who would write systematically on the analogous dilemmas of national and poetic ethics. Even in "metropolitan" Greece, the "poems about politics" multiply only with the "First Post War Generation" and, especially later on, during the years dominated by the "Generation of the 1970's." Thus, the poets who are younger than Montis are the ones who search, in a more extensive way, the possibilities of "self-referential" poetry.

Theodosios Nikolaou is a poet who writes less, has a broad scholarly education and a deep religious sentiment. He has gradually created a multi-sided output of purer "poems about poetics." They are texts which speak, for example, about the job of the poet, and from which, seemingly, any connection with contemporary historical issues is absent.

Η ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΟΙΗΤΗ

Ὅταν ἐπιτέλους κλείσουν τὰ μάτια τῶν ἀγγέλων
Καὶ οἱ φλόγες τῆς ρομφαίας κοιμηθοῦν
Ὁ ποιητὴς ποὺ σ' ὅλο τοῦτο τὸ διάστημα ἀγρυπνᾷ
Ντύνεται τῇ στολῇ τοῦ κλέφτη.
Δρασκελᾷ τὸ κατώφλι
Καὶ ἐπιδίδεται στὸ δυσχερὲς
Καὶ ἀνόσιο ἔργο του.
Ἐπιστρέφει ὁμως
Τὴν ὄραση ἔχοντας ἐμπλουτισμένη
Ἀπὸ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὸ χρῶμα τῶν πραγμάτων.
Εὐδαίμων μέσα στὴν ἄβυσσο τῆς ἀγνωσίας του
Χαμογελᾷ
Καθὼς μιὰ καλὴ οἰκοδέσποινα
Ποὺ στιλβώνει ἓνα χάλκινο σκεῦος.

THE WORK OF THE POET

When, at last, the eyes of the angels are shut
And the flames of the sword are asleep
The poet who in all this time is aware
Wears the dress of the thief.
He steps over the threshold
And commences his difficult
And unholy work.
Yet he returns
Having a richer vision

From the shape and colour of things.
 Prosperous in the abyss of his ignorance
 He smiles
 Like a good house mistress
 Who polishes a copper utensil.
 (Yiannis Milides)

Elsewhere, Theodosios Nikolaou composes a whole treatise on poetic ethics, which perhaps would have been unthought of without the experience of 1974 and without the misfortune of "beloved Cyprus." Moreover Nikolaou is aided by the poetic example of Seferis (as, for example, in Seferis poem: "Euripides, Athenian"). In the poem which follows, one could say that in the paradigm of Thucydides and the disastrous Peloponnesian War the tragic history of modern Cyprus is being summed up, starting with the Renaissance chronicle of "The Sweet Land Cyprus" by Leontios Machairas up until the days after 1974. The narration does stifle neither a gnomical-parabolic nor a didactic tone.

Ο ΠΑΛΑΙΟΣ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟΣ

Αὐτὸς ποὺ ἤξερε πῶς ἀνάβει μιὰ φωτιά χωρὶς χέρι
 ἀνθρώπου νὰ τὴν ἀρχίσει
 Καὶ ἤξερε ἀκόμα πῶς ἀνάβει μιὰ φωτιά μὲς στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν
 ἀνθρώπων ποὺ χέρι ἀνθρώπου δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ σβήσει
 Κάθισε στὴ σκιά τοῦ δειλινοῦ
 Ἐκεῖ ποὺ σμίγει ἡ σιωπὴ τῶν τζιτζικιῶν
 Μὲ τίς κρυστάλλινες καμπανοῦλες τοῦ νεροῦ
 Καὶ στὸ νοῦ τοῦ ἔφερε καὶ πάλι τὴν ἀγαπημένη.

Πετοῦσε τὰ ἱμάτιά της ἕνα ἕνα, ὥσπου
 Φάνηκε ἡ κοιλιά της φουσκωμένη κι ἐπάνω
 Στὴν κοιλιά της βαρεῖα πεσμένα τὰ κόκκινά της στήθη.
 Οἱ κνήμες της πρησμένες σὰν νὰ τὴν κέντρισαν χιλιάδες σφήκες
 Αὐτὴ ποὺ κάποτε ἦταν τόσο ὠραία καὶ ἀξέχαστη.
 Καὶ μέσα στὰ ὕδατα γύρευε
 Νὰ βρεῖ λίγη ἀνεση, λίγη παρηγοριά.

Νὰ γράψεις . . . Τί νὰ γράψεις;
 Ὅταν συμβεῖ τὸ κακὸ εἶναι πιά ἀργά
 Καὶ τὸ κακὸ εἶναι ἀνεπανόρθωτο.
 Τὸ πάθημα τὸ δικό σου
 Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ τὸ ἀλφαβητάρι τοῦ ἄλλου
 Καὶ τὸ μονοπάτι τὸ βλέπεις ὅταν πιά εἶσαι ἐπάνω στὴν κορυφή
 τοῦ βουνοῦ.

Ἡ σοφία εἶναι ἕνας καρπὸς ποὺ δὲν ὀριμάζει στὴν ὥρα ποὺ
 πρέπει.

Ἡ συγγραφή μπορεῖ νὰ διδάξει
 Πῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ καθίσει
 Πάνω σὲ μιὰ καρέκλα ἢ σ' ἕνα πεζούλι γιὰ πολλὴ ὥρα
 Καὶ ν' ἀπολαύσει ἕνα καφέ ἢ τὴ φωνή
 Τοῦ βασιλικοῦ μέσα στὸ σούρουπο.

Δὲν ἀπελπίστηκε ὁμως. Ἀπὸ ὠραία λουλούδια
 Ποὺ μάζεψε δροσερὰ μέσα ἀπ' τὸ καμῖνι
 Ποὺ ἔκαιγε εἰκοσιεφτὰ χρόνια
 Ἕνα στεφάνι ἐπλεξε γιὰ τὴν ὁμορφιά ποὺ ἔγειρε στὴ γῆ.
 Περίεργο! Πέρασαν χρόνια, πέρασαν αἰῶνες
 Καὶ δὲν ἔχασαν τὴ μυρωδιά τους ἢ τὸ σχῆμα τους
 Τὰ ἄνθη τὰ ἐξαίσια τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου.

THE OLD HISTORIAN

He who knew how a fire is lit without the hand of man starting it
 And even knew how a fire is lit in the men's souls which the hand
 of man cannot extinguish
 Sat in the shade of the late afternoon
 There were the silence of the cicadas mingles
 With the crystal chimes of the water
 And again brought back to mind the beloved one.

She threw off her garments one by one, until
 Her bloated belly appeared and above
 Falling heavily to her belly her red breasts.
 Her legs swollen as though stung by thousands of wasps
 She who was once so beautiful and desirable.
 And in the water she searched
 To find a little comfort, a little consolation.

To write . . . What to write?
 When the bad happens it is too late
 And the bad is irreparable.
 What you suffer
 Cannot be a lesson to another
 And you see the path when you are already at the top of the
 mountain.
 Wisdom is a fruit that does not ripen when it should.
 Writing can teach
 That a man cannot sit
 On a chair or a wall for a long time

And enjoy a coffee or the voice
Of basil in the dusk.

He did not despair though. From beautiful flowers
Which he gathered fresh from the furnace
Which had been burning for twenty-seven years
He plaited a crown for the beauty which bent to the earth.
Strange! Years passed, centuries passed
And they did not lose their perfume or their shape
The splendid blossoms of the Epitaphios.
(David Bailey)

The poem belongs to the poetic collection by Nikolaou entitled *Proceedings*, which includes poems composed both before and after 1974. This idea of continuity and unity of the historical fate of Cyprus in the whole period since 1955 is something that is found also in young poets, like Andreas Pastellas. The following poem by Pastellas, written in 1970, has an almost prophetic conclusion about the events of 1974 and afterwards.

ΤΟΙΣ ΕΝΤΕΥΞΟΜΕΝΟΙΣ

Ἡ Ποίηση δὲ γράφεται ὅπως θέλουμε
μ' ἄστρα, πουλιά, βεγγαλικά,
φωνὲς ἐξαίσιες μουσικέες.
Κάποτε ταραίζει τὸν ὕπνο μας
τὴ θύρα μας κρούει βράδυ μεσάνυχτα
κι' ἐμεῖς σπεύδουμε περιδεεῖς κι' ἀνήσυχοι
νὰ τὴ συναντήσουμε
κι' ἐκείνη ἔχει φύγει.
Ἄλλοτε μᾶς βασανίζει πολλὰς μέρες
κρατώντας μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια μας ἓνα ἀνοιχτὸ λογαριασμό
καὶ περιμένει νὰ ὑπογράψουμε
κι' ἐμεῖς δὲν ἔχουμε καιρό.

Ἡ Ποίηση δὲ γράφεται ὅποτε θέλουμε.

Μεγαλώνει μέσα μας
μὰ δὲ γράφεται,
ἀνασαίνει μέσα μας
ὅπως τὰ δέντρα κι' ἡ χλόη στὴν αὐλὴ τοῦ σχολείου
ὅταν φεύγουν οἱ μαθητὲς γιὰ τὶς θερινὲς διακοπές,
ὅταν ἀδειάζουν τὰ γήπεδα
ἀπὸ τὶς φωνὲς καὶ τὰ σφυρίγματα τῶν διαπληκτιζομένων θεῶν
κι' ἐμεῖς βρίσκουμε τότε ἓνα ἥσυχο σπίτι
νὰ ξεκουραστοῦμε καὶ νὰ κουβεντιάσουμε.

Ὅπως καὶ νὰ τὸ κάνεις
ἡ Ποίηση εἶναι μιὰ θλιμμένη ἀδελφὴ
ποὺ κάθεται στὴ γωνιά τῆς ἀμίλητης
δὲ γελάει ποτὲ
ἢ κλαίει χωρὶς δάκρυα στὴν ὄχθη τοῦ Σκαμάνδρου
τὴ χαμένη νιότη τοῦ Ἑκτορα
ποὺ ἀπὸ χρόνια τώρα πολεμάει σ' ὅλα τὰ μέτωπα τοῦ κόσμου
κι' ὅλες τὶς μάχες τοῦ τίς χάνει
καὶ τὸνομά του συχνὰ στὶς στήλες τῶν ἀγνοουμένων εἶναι
κι' ὅλο τοῦ πλέκει τὴ φανέλλα ποὺ θὰ φορέσει
χωρὶς ἐλπίδα ποτὲ πὼς κάποια μέρα θὰ γυρίσει.

TO THE READERS

Poetry is not written as we desire
with stars, birds, fireworks,
exquisite music voices.
Sometimes it disturbs our sleep
it strikes our door at evening midnight
and we hasten fearful and restless
to meet her
and she has gone.

Other times she torments us for many days
holding in front of our eyes an open account
and she waits for us to sign
and we don't have the time.

Poetry is not written whenever we desire.
She grows inside us
but isn't written,
she breathes inside us
like the trees and the grass in the school yard
when the students leave for the summer holidays,
when the football grounds are emptied
from the shouting and the whistling of quarrelling spectators
and we find then a quiet house
to rest and to converse.

Whatever you do
Poetry is a sad sister
who sits silent in her corner
she never smiles
or she cries without tears on the bank of Scamander
the lost youth of Hector

who has been fighting for years now on all the fronts of the world
and he is losing all his battles
and his name is often on the lists of missing persons
and she is always knitting for him the jumper he will wear
without a hope that he will ever return.
(Yiannis Milides)

But let us return to Theodosios Nikolaou. There is a third category of his poems, many of which are included in his second collection, now being in press, entitled *Icons*. These poems appear as a kind of apology for art, which "supposedly" does not express directly (that is, loudly) the participation of the artist in historic and national experiences. The poem that follows is typical of his work during the first years after 1974, and it stands out, given the plethora of artless or very weak literary works which were written by many writers in response to a pure or artificial need to emotionally express the events of 1974.

ΕΚΘΕΣΗ ΖΩΓΡΑΦΙΚΗΣ

Οἱ ἐπισκέπτες τριγυρίζουν μὲς στὴν αἴθουσα
Βλέπουν στοὺς τοίχους τὶς εἰκόνες
Συνομιλοῦν καὶ σχολιάζουν.

Ὁ τεχνίτης πρέπει νὰ δίνει σάρκα καὶ ὅστ' ὅραματά του
Ἀπὸ τὸ ἔργο ἀπουσιάζει παντελῶς ἡ φρίκη τοῦ θανάτου.
Τὶ θέση ἔχουν τὰ πουλιά, τὰ δέντρα, τὰ τοπία αὐτὰ
τὰ εἰδυλικά
Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἡ βία ὦμῃ περνᾷ καὶ μᾶς καταπατᾷ;».

Μὰ ὅταν τὸ βράδυ σβήσει τὰ φῶτα ὁ φύλακας
Καὶ στερεώσῃ τὸ μοχλὸ στὴν πόρτα
Ἀνοίγουν τὸ ράμφος τὰ πουλιά
Καὶ ἡ ἄδεια αἴθουσα ἀντηχεῖ ἀπὸ ἓνα κλάμα.

Σὰν νὰ μοιρολογοῦν ὅλα μαζὶ τὴν Ἀντριάνοπολη
Κι ἀκόμα ὅταν σηκώνεται ὁ ἄνεμος τὴν νύχτα
Τὴν αἴθουσα αὐτὴ δὲν ἀγνοεῖ. Πνέει
Καὶ σείει τὰ φύλλα τῶν δέντρων στὶς εἰκόνες
Ἕνας στεναγμὸς ἀκούεται μέσα στοὺς τέσσερις τοίχους
Ἰδιος μὲ τὸ θρῆνο τῆς Ἑκάβης
Ποὺ μαζὶ μὲ τὶς ἄλλες Τρωαδίτισσες ζητοῦσαν
Μέσα στὴ λεηλατημένη Τροία τὰ παιδιά τους.

Φαίνεται δὲν ἔχει σημασία τὸ τί ἀλλὰ τὸ πῶς.

PAINTING EXHIBITION

The visitors are walking around the hall;
They look at the pictures on the wall
They converse and they comment.

"The artist must give flesh and bone to his visions;
The horror of death is fully absent from the works.
The birds, the trees, these idyllic landscapes, what place do they
have
When raw violence is passing by and steps upon us?"

But when, in the evening, the guard turns off the lights
And secures the lever on the door
The birds open their beak
And the empty hall echoes a cry
As though all of them are lamenting Adrianopolis
And even when the wind is rising in the night
He doesn't ignore this hall. He blows
And shakes the leaves of the trees in the pictures.
A sigh is heard between the four walls
The same as the lament of Hecuba
Surrounded by the other Trojan women asking
In the plundered city of Troy for their children.

It seems there is no significance in what but in how.
(Yiannis Milides)

It is not strange that poets even younger than Nikolaou, with a very different and more activist temperament, felt the need to reprobate the deviations and deteriorations in the national and poetic ethics. For example, Dina Katsouri does that: Katsouri is a socialist poetess belonging to the "First Generation of the Cyprus Republic," who follows the simple techniques and the unaffected diction of the political writers of post-war poetry in Greece:

ΠΡΟΣ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΗ (1)

Τί νὰ σοῦ πῶ.
Νιώθω ἓνα ρίγος νὰ μὲ διαπερνᾷ
σὰν θυμᾶμαι ἐκεῖνα τὰ πράσινα περιβόλια
μὲ τὶς πορτοκαλιές καὶ τὶς κίτρινες ἀνταύγειες,
νιώθω μιὰ ἔξαψη νὰ μὲ κυκλώνει
σὰν θυμᾶμαι τὰ χρώματα τοῦ ὀρίζοντα
καὶ κεῖνες τὶς θαλασσινὲς διακυμάνσεις,

νιώθω ένα παράξενο τρεμούλιασμα
 σὰν θυμᾶμαι τὶς γήινες μυρωδιές
 καὶ κείνο τὸ καφετὶ χῶμα,
 ὕγρὸ ἀκόμα στὶς παλάμες μας,
 νιώθω θυμὸ
 καὶ ἀπελπισία ἀπέραντη
 καθὼς ἀναλογίζομαι
 πόσοι καὶ πόσοι ποιητὲς ἀσέλησαν στὸ ὄνομά της,
 πόσοι καὶ πόσοι ποιητὲς ἐκτονωθήκανε στὸ ὄνομά της.
 Μὰ κυριότερα,
 πόσοι καὶ πόσοι ποιητὲς ΔΕ θὰ ἀντισταθοῦν στὸ ὄνομά της.

Καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς: Ἀμμόχωστος.

TO THE READER

What can I tell you
 I feel a shiver piercing me
 when I remember those green orchards
 with the orange and the yellow reflections,
 I feel a heat encircling me
 when I remember the colours of the horizon
 and those fluctuations of the sea,
 I feel a strange trembling
 when I remember the earthly smells
 and that brown soil,
 still moist in our palms,
 I feel anger
 and endless desperation
 as I bethink myself of
 how many and many of poets have committed debauchery in her name

how many and many of poets have calmed themselves in her name

But mainly
 how many and many of poets WILL NOT resist in her name

And the name of her: Famagusta.
 (Yiannis Milides)

With Pastellas and Katsouri we enter into the period of the 1960s and afterwards. The most dynamic, productive and original poet of the period was Kyriakos Charalambidis. Like Montis, Charalambidis surpassed the boundaries of Cyprus a long time ago. His long compositions of the last fifteen years show that he has already reached the level of a major

Greek poet of our century. Simultaneously, his brief prose essays, which are very dense in content, and have not, unfortunately, been collected in a volume, make up, I believe, some of the best Greek prose pieces ever written by a poet, after *Dokimes (Essays)* by Seferis.

In his five poetry books up to 1988, Charalambidis has not only assimilated the examples of Cavafy, Papatsonis, of the Surrealists and of other great writers of Greek and world literature; he has also created a unique and unheard of Greek literary language. Since 1974 he has deliberately chosen to be a poet globally expressing the historical course of his country. The formation of this type of consciousness is already expressed towards the end of 1974, in his speech during the ceremony of being granted the State Literary Award for his third poetry collection.

How is a Cypriot poet to receive his prize in 1974? With the sadness of the last Byzantine emperor? With the feeling what we live in a sinful and tragic place that is in a process of collapse? [. . .]

Suddenly my mind turns to the power of the word. It occurs to me that if we studied words, their mysterious origins and the changes they have undergone, we would not feel so sinful and desperate. [. . .]

For centuries now we have survived here in this island as a result of these words and meanings. We say that we are Greeks, that we have a history and tradition and ancient civilization. Sometimes we contrast our Greekness with the Turks or any other nation and distinguish the special significance of this fact, gaining a greater insight into the nature of our identity.

But words evolve along with history and along with things themselves. Since July we have felt the bitterness of knowing that parts of the island that we love have been given foreign names. Yet there is no terror in that, because our words will answer this violation with their own form of resistance. "The bitter bread of the ages, the bitter bread of generations," as Seferis puts it, has not changed the natural course of our language. And then again the language, in its great wisdom, replenishes words with new wine, gives them new life in a way that ensures their survival in time. And we in turn react to these words in a new way, we suddenly receive light from them, light from words such as "peace," understanding, good faith, moral order, internationalism, the universe. This is what helps us to go beyond the fact of an untimely death. And there remains the value of life as life, expressed through art, the distinguishing mark of which being absolute insistence on the truth.

Finally, I should like to point out that it is the duty of the artist

to choose his course according to the time and place in which he lives. The most basic element in an artist's make-up is the extent to which he feels this duty. When I say that words can save us, I realize, being myself concerned with the business of words, that my sense of duty must develop in this environment . . .

Towards the end of 1978, Charalambidis' new consciousness has completely matured, as it is revealed by a clear statement of his views in another public address:

Since the military Coup and the Invasion, time has changed; the man who inhabits this place has also changed, and, with him, the nature of his vision. There is a new conception of the world, and alas to whoever hasn't realized this. Cyprus is at this moment an endless place of tragedy; all dramas have concentrated and culminated here in a unity of place, time and action. There is ground for big decisions, for a great contribution and for a great change. The world is becoming open to us from the beginning. Art claims its political role and wants to state her presence [. . .] It is the moment of self-knowledge both for the poet and for his country. Our motherland is our body, on ourselves we bear the stigmas of her wounds.

From 1979 until today, the long ambitious and exceptional compositions of Charalambidis become his expression of national and poetic ethics. One of these compositions has already been published in 1980 under the title *Famagusta Regina*, which, rightly I believe, must be recognized as the best Greek poetry book of that year and as one of the most important achievements in Modern Greek poetry after the poem *Axion Esti* (*Worthy It Is*) by Elytis. Another at least, three, collections are awaiting publication (1988). One of these, which is now in press in Athens, entitled *Vault*, evolves around the complex issue of the Greek-Cypriot missing persons of the 1974 war. Another collection of his focuses on the mountain range of Pentadaktylos which has become a fundamental theme and symbol for contemporary Cypriot art. A third collection consists of various poems on historical, political and social issues of the last few years.

The number of "poems about poetics" by Charalambidis is a large one and their quality unquestionable. These poems are not included only in his longer works; they begin much earlier than 1974. But let me refer you to a poem written in 1975: the symbolic character of the pure and intelligent Rimako embodies the poetic ethics of reconciliation and love towards Turkish-Cypriots. The character or persona

Rimako is a blend of ancient Chinese political and literary wisdom and of the pastoral love of the reformed Makarios. Such a poetic position has, in the eyes of the second speaker of the poem, all the brightness of sacrifice and bravery.

ΕΙΣΒΟΛΗ — ΕΚΒΟΛΗ

Ένα καράβι μπήκε στη στεριά
καὶ προχωρεῖ με θάλασσα ἀπὸ πίσω.
Σιγὰ σιγὰ τ' αὐλάκι μεγαλώνει
καὶ κάνει δυὸ νησιά — κακὸ καράβι.

«Αὐτὸ ποὺ μπήκε ἀνάμεσά μας, φίλοι,
νὰ τὸ λαλεῖτε φίδι, νὰ τὸ κλαῖτε.
Ἡ θάλασσα ἔχει τὸ νερό, ἐσεῖς τὰ μάτια,
τὸ δίκαιο τὴν ἀλήθεια· τί ὠφελεῖ»;

«Ἄ, νὰ σοῦ πῶ!» πετάχτηκε ὁ Ριμάκο,
«ἐκεῖ ποὺ ψήνεις τὸν καφέ σου ἀπόγεμα
μπορεῖς νὰ φτιάξεις κάτι παραπάνω
γὰ τὸ νησι ποὺ γίνεται στὰ στήθια σου.

Οἱ ἄλλοι ἄς λένε· τὴν ἀγάπη ἐσὺ
ἀπάντεχε τὸ γιόμα, κοίταζε καλὰ
τὰ δέντρα, χαρουπιές, ἐλιές, ἀστάχια,
βουνὰ πολύχυμα, δρόμους στριφτούς.

Αὐτὰ μαζὶ με κείνο τὸ ποὺ πλέκεις
ἐνδυμα τῆς ζωῆς σου, καλοσήμαδε,
φωτίζονται ἀπὸ σένα ποὺ σηκώνεις
ἀπάνω σου τὴ χάρη τους, ἀνδρεῖος».

INVASION — EJECTION

A boat has entered the land
and moves with the sea behind it.
Slowly the ditch extends
and creates two islands — evil boat.

"What came between us, friends,
call it a snake, and be sorry.
The sea owns the water, you have your eyes,
justice owns the truth; what's the use?"

"Ah, I will tell you!" shouted Rimako,

"while you are making your coffee in the evening
you can make something more
for the island that is formed on your chest.

Let the others gossip; for yourself expect love
in the afternoon, let yourself observe well
the trees, the carob-trees, the olive-trees, the wheat,
the sappy mountains, the turning roads.

All these, together with your knitting
for a cloth in your life, man of good signs,
are lit by you while you are carrying
their grace, like a brave man."

(Yiannis Milides)

Even if we confined ourselves to Charalambidis' collection *Famagusta Regina*, we would find rich material, because this book is much more than a poetic re-creation of the city and the area of Famagusta, the place where the poet has lived throughout his childhood and his adolescent years. The thematic spectrum of the "relationship between the city and the poet is very wide. Through lyric, narrative, dramatic or almost essayist poems, the poet observes the history, the topography, the anthropology and the psychology of the city and its people, from the time of its mythical origins until the Invasion, the evacuation and seizure, as well as her conversion to a ghost-town and to an object of political bargaining. The city and its people and the poet take hundreds of appearances and qualities. The writer, for example, is or becomes a child-poet, an adolescent, a lover, a cheat, a husband, a hunter, a player, an excavator, a researcher, a visitor, a traveler, an orator, a prosecutor, a healer, a mourner, a visionary, a magician, etc. So, we are not finally seeing only "an erotic-idyl" between the poet and his place-of-birth, the "woman-queen" of his heart, but also a more complex relationship which goes through various and often dramatic changes. The poet matches two inter-connecting roles: the poet as a shield (the poet as a *genius loci* of his city, the emblematic poet of the State, the poet of the ancient and modern history) and the poet in the role of an erotic or visionary doer or instrument (in other words the poet of an experiencing and dictating poetic magic).

I think that it is worth looking to at least one of the poems of the book *Famagusta Regina*. The poem "Ardana," especially in its conclusion, is certainly a "poem about potetics." It is also a poem about the artist's kind of concern and his responses towards collective experience and current issues.

ΑΡΔΑΝΑ

Καὶ τὴ μισὴν αὐλὴ τοῦ ἀπὸ ἴνα μέρος
ποῦ δὲ φαινότανε ἄλλοτε μιὰ πέτρα τῆς
θωροῦσε μὲ τὰ μάτια τοῦ τυφλά.

Τὸ θάμα ἦτανε στ' ὄνειρο, ἀλλὰ μισὸ κι αὐτό.
Γιατὶ ὅπως ἦταν κάτω ἀπὸ κληματαριὰ
καλοῦ γειτόνου κι ἔβλεπε πρὸς τὴν αὐλὴ
τ' ἀγαπητοῦ σπιτιοῦ του, πῶς νὰ προχωρήσει
ποῦ ἔχανε στήσει γλέντι καὶ χορὸ
στὴν ἀπλωσιὰ τῆς κάτι ξένοι.

Καὶ τὸν κοιτούσανε ὅλοι, τὸ πηγούνι τους
σηκώνανε κατὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ
καὶ σημαδεύανε συνέχεια ὄχι.

Μιὰν ἄλλη φορὰ πάλι τὰ κατάφερε
καὶ μπῆκε ἀπὸ σκισμὴ τ' ὄνειρου τοῦ στὸ σπίτι.
Βγαίνοντας στὴν αὐλὴ τοῦ ἀπ' τὴν καμάρα
τὴ βρῆκε τὴν Τουρκάλα ποῦ ἔβγαζε νερό.

Οὔτε ποῦ σκέφτηκε νὰ τὴ ρωτήσῃ τὸ γιατί.
Μονάχα πῆρε τὴ γνωστὴ τοῦ μαντιλιὰ
τὴν οὐρανια καὶ σκούπισε τὸ πρόσωπό του.
Ἐκείνη γύρισε ἀθόρυβα, χωρὶς μιλιὰ
καὶ κάνει κάπως ἔτσι (κίνηση χεριῶν)
σάμπως νὰ τοῦ ἔλεγε «δὲ φταίμε μεῖς,
καὶ δηλαδὴ τὰ βρήκαμε, δὲν τὰ πειράξαμε.
Τί νὰ σοῦ κάνω; Ἄν θέλεις κόπιασε νὰ φάμε».

Αὐτὰ σημαίνουνε, Κυριάκο, εἶπε στὸν ποιητὴ
ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποῦ μπῆκε στὴν αὐλὴ τοῦ
πῶς δὲ θὰ πᾶμε πίσω στὸ χωριό μας.
Ναί, εἶναι τραγικό, μὰ κάλλιο νὰ τὸ ξέρουμε
παρὰ νὰ ζοῦμε στὸ σκοτάδι ἀλλιώςτικῆς ἐλπίδας.
Ζύγωσα στ' ὄνειρό μου κάμποσες φορὲς
τὸ σπίτι μου καὶ στ' ὄνειρό μου βρῆκα
τὸν τρόπο νὰ διασπάσω τὴ γραμμὴ — πῆγα πετώντας
ἴσαμε κεῖ, τὸ εἶδα ὡς δὲ θὰ τό ἔβλεπα
σ' εἰρηνικοὺς καιροὺς καὶ μετρημένους.

Ἄλλὰ συνέχισε πῶς κάποιον τὸν μοδιζαν
νὰ μπεῖ, τὸν ἀποτρέπανε: «Σὰν ἔφτανε ὡς ἐκεῖ

νὰ προχωρήσω ἐκεῖνοι δὲν μ' ἀφήνανε.
 Κι οὔτε νὰ φύγω πάλι τὸ μπορούσα.
 "Ἐξοδος δὲν ὑπῆρχε στ' ὄνειρό μου
 κι ἄλλο δὲν εἶχα παρὰ νὰ ξυπνήσω».

Ὁ ποιητὴς τὸν ἄκουσε μὲ προσοχὴ
 καὶ χαμογέλασε μὲ λόγια μετρημένα.
 "Ἄν τὴν Ἀμμόχωστο, εἶπε, τὴν ἀφήκαμε
 μὲς ἀπ' τὰ χέρια μας νὰ ξεγλιστρήσει,
 μιὰ μέρα θὰ τὴν πάρουμε στὰ σίγουρα
 μὲ ὄρους ταπεινωτικούς· αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀλήθεια.
 Νὰ ξέρεις τοῦτο μοναχά: "Ἡ τὴ βλέπεις
 καὶ νὰ τὴν πάρεις δὲν μπορεῖς στὰ ἴσια
 ἢ δὲν τὴ βλέπεις κι ἔχεις τὴν ψευδαίσθηση
 πὼς τὴν βλέπεις, ἐπειδὴ ἔτσι φαίνεται.
 Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ χειρότερο. Κοίτα, σὰν νὰ 'ναι
 οἱ φύλακες ἐκεῖ καὶ σ' ἐμποδίζουν
 νὰ μπῆς μὲς στὰ λαγούμια τῆς ἀνάμνησης,
 ἀπαγορεύουνε θαρρεῖς τὴ δίοδο
 ἀκόμα καὶ στὸ πέταγμα τοῦ νοῦ.
 Ὡστόσο τὸ φτωχό σου τὸ χωριὸ "Ἀρδανα,
 πλαγιὰ Πενταδακτύλου, ἄς τὸ ζαλίσουμε,
 κύρ Τόμπυ, στὸ κρασί τῆς Ἰλλυρίας.
 "Ἄς πιοῦμε στὴν ὑγειά του, ὅσο κρατεῖ
 στοὺς ὧμους του τὴν Οἰκουμένη ὁ "Ατλαντας.
 Γιατὶ ὁ καιρὸς περνᾷ κι ἡ φύση χάνεται.
 Ἡ θάλασσα ποὺ τώρα λιώνει στὸ μετᾶξι
 σὰν αὐριο θὰ γενεῖ θεριό, φυλάξου.
 Τότε μπορεῖ κι ἐγὼ νὰ τρελαθῶ
 καὶ σὺ νὰ μπῆς στὸ σπῖτι τὸ δικό σου.

ARDANA

And half of his house-yard from a near-by spot
 where of old not a single stone of it could be seen
 he viewed with his eyelids shut.

The miracle uncloaked in a dream, but half of it only.
 For as he stood under the vine-arbour
 of a respectable neighbour and looked on to the yard
 of his sweet home, how could he step forward
 when some strangers were merrymaking and dancing
 in its open space.

And they all looked up on him, their chins
 raised towards the sky
 indicating no, repeatedly.

Another time again he managed
 to slide through a split of his dream into the premise.
 As he walked through the arch into the yard
 he confronted the Turkish woman drawing water.

He didn't even think to question her why.
 But only reached out for his familiar napkin,
 the bluish one, and wiped his face.
 She turned softly and without breathing a word
 moved thus (gesture of hands)
 as though she would say: "we offend not,
 that is, we found them, we did no harm.
 What can I do for you? Come and join us, if you please."

By this, Kyriakos, I gather, the man who
 got into his yard said to the poet,
 that we shan't return to our village.
 Yes, it is tragic, though it is best for us to know
 than to indulge in ignorance and hope for the opposite.
 In my dreams I came close to my home
 several times and in my dreams found
 the way to break through the line — I flew over
 there, and saw it as I couldn't
 in peaceful and moderate times.
 Though, he continued, some people stood
 in his way and frustrated him: "On my arrival
 they would permit not a step forward.
 Neither could I retreat.
 Apparently in my dream there was no exit
 and had no greater good than to awake."

The poet listened to him attentively and
 smiled with prudent words.
 If, he said, we've left Famagusta
 slip off our hands
 we shall, one day, regain her, be sure
 on humiliating terms, no doubt.

But know this for good: You either see her
and cannot take her at once
or you do not see her and you've got the illusion
that you see her because it so appears to you.
'Tis most disagreeable. Behold, 'tis as though
the watchmen stand there, and impede you
glide into the corridors of memory
as though they prohibit access
even to flashes of the spirit.
However, your humble village Ardana
of Pentadaktylos' slopes let us red-nose it
Sir Toby in the wine of Illyria.
Let us carouse to its health as long as
Atlas bears the globe on his shoulders.
For time flies away, and nature does vanish.
The ocean that is silk now dissolves
one day shall become a monster, take heed.
Then I too may fall in a trance
and you may cross the threshold of your home.

The example of long, well-orchestrated poetic compositions by Charalambidis was followed by other contemporary poets. Among the best of them, Polyvios Nikolaou is a sophisticated, erudite poet. He has a theatrical sense of poetic plot and gives emphasis also to the sound prompting of language. His longer compositions and collections, *Draft for the Young Poets of Famagusta*, *Iskandarnama*, and *Makronisos* are examples of fruitful inoculation of the common modern Greek language with elements of the Cypriot dialect.

If in the "synthetic" attempts by Charalambidis and by Polyvios Nikolaou there is a summing up of Cyprus history covering the ten years that follow the Turkish invasion, other recent poets are influenced more by the stagnation of the Cyprus problem or by the gradual accumulation of negative political and social developments and side-effects. The wave of disappointment and doubt increases not only among the poets who appeared after 1974, but also among some poets of the "First Generation of the Cyprus Republic." A key issue of poetic ethics is the pressing dilemma: adaptation to the *faits accomplis*, or continuation of the struggle for fulfillment of their political and national claims. Satire becomes acute, its targets are multiplied, ideological crevices are extended. Some overcome the crisis, others do not. In either case, what is certain is that doubts about various aspects of Greek-Cypriot political and social life culminate. We observe this particularly in prose writing

but poetry does not fall behind. At times the de-mythologization of leading national figures of the past is used as a spear. At other times the target is wider: the behavior of opportunists, the citizen who rests assured or has compromised, the amoral behavior of the intellectual and the artist.

The "poems about poetics" of the period, say, after 1981-1982 are also colored similarly. The elegiac tone of self-contradiction and self-doubt is very frequent, as in the following short poem by Fivos Stavridis. Stavridis is an exemplarily honest, politically conscious, morally stable, and expressively thrifty poet who belongs to the "First Generation of the Cyprus Republic." He does not write long compositions, but all his poems in his two collections and subsequent sporadic publications are distinguished by an admirable unity and consistency of style. In his classic achievement "The Symmetry of the Cosmos," the fine irony reaches the drastic sarcasm of Karyotakis and Anagnostakis, and the tragic vision of Seferis, as the family and personal existence of the writer is connected inseparably, "symmetrically," with the unsolved collective problems of the Cypriot world. This is a social body which has suffered injustice, and it is the world of the refugees. This kind of existence is also connected with a feeling of political, social, and even poetic failure.

Η ΣΥΜΜΕΤΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ

"Όλα ἐντάσσονται στὴ συμμετρία τοῦ Κόσμου

Τὸ κόκκινο πουκάμισο τοῦ δειλινοῦ
μουσκεμένο στὴ δίψα τῆς στεριάς
πλάι σὲ γυμνὸ κορίτσι ποὺ λιάζεται

ἤχοι ποὺ ξεθυμαίνουν στὸ φῶς

αὐτὴ ἢ γιὰ ποὺ κάποτε πενθοῦσε τὸ γιό της
καὶ τώρα δὲν ἐλπίζει οὔτε στὸ θάνατο
κοιτώντας ἓνα σκυλὶ νὰ τριγυρίζει ἄσκοπα στὴ γειτονιά

τὰ χρόνια ποὺ δὲν περιμέναμε καὶ ἦρθαν
κι ἄλλα ποὺ περιμένουμε καὶ δὲ θὰ ρθοῦν

ψηφίσματα, ψηφιδωτά, ψιμυθιασμένα εἰδωλα
μῦθοι, πλεγγές,

τὸ ἴσιο καὶ τὸ ἀνάποδο
μιᾶς ἀνεπίδοτης ζωῆς

ἢ ἄφωνη κραυγὴ

ἡ πολυέλεη ἀνυπαρξία

ἡ Μιράντα, ὁ Χάρης, ὁ Στέφανος
κι ἡ παραισθητικὴ σφραγίδα τῆς δωρεᾶς.

THE SYMMETRY OF THE COSMOS

Everything is subsumed in the symmetry of the Cosmos.

The red shirt of the evening
wet in the thirst of the land
next to a naked girl sunbathing

sounds calming down under the light

this old woman who used to mourn her son
and now she hasn't any hope even in death
looking at a dog wandering aimlessly in the neighborhood

the years we didn't expect but came
and other years we expect and will not come

resolutions, mosaics, idols with make up,
myths, wounds,

the rectos and the versos
of an undelivered life

the unvoiced cry
the merciful non-existence

Miranda, Charis, Stefanos,
and the illusionary seal of donation.
(Yiannis Milides)

Another important poet of the same generation is Kostas Vasiliou, who has produced, more bitter and satirical in isolation, a substantial body of work. Three "synthetic" books and collections, *Porfyra*, *Pietà*, and *The Annunciation of Lygeri*, were all published after 1974. Emphasis is given to a symbolic, and sometimes allegorical re-creation of the divided and alienated political and intellectual Cyprus of the last thirty years, and especially since the Invasion. Behind some enigmatic poetic personae there appear seemingly opposing parties or tendencies but in reality, according to the poet, they are all equally responsible. The face of Cyprus, his motherland, appearing as the face of a mother

or of a maid, continues to be an open invitation and a challenge for the artist. This is the test of fire, where the hay is burnt and the gold shines. Under the fruitful influence of ancient Greek epics, of the Bible's style, of Greek folk-songs, of Solomos and of post-Cavafian realism, Vasiliou mainly develops the theme of history and of national fate as a poetic struggle of sacrifice and love. This is a struggle for people who would be sound in speech and pure in the heart.

Perhaps I should not conclude without referring to some "poems about poetics" written by even younger poets. Among the most important ones is Louis Perentos, who presents the most clear motifs of concern for Cyprus in the 1980's, in his poetical composition *Cypris the Inevitable* (1987). The style of Perentos, as that of Lefkios Zafirios, is not different from the style adopted by many of their contemporary poets, of the same age, active in Greece, their difference being mainly that most of the poets of the "Generation of the 1970's," in Greece, soon disconnected themselves from the collective, political and national issues of the 1967-1974 period and turned mostly to their private concerns.

Lately, several poets have appeared in Cyprus who are sharper than Perentos, or Zafirios. As already mentioned, these poets are armed with parody and a kind of total anarchistic negation of the Cypriot life of today. For example, the long composition by Andreas Sismanis entitled "Ode to Cyprus" (*Cyprus of the Heroes and of the Heroine*), is, among other things, an aphoristic satire of the "national poetic style" of Elytis and Ritsos, of the music by Theodorakis, of the poems written by many contemporary Cypriot poets, of the generally idyllic presentation of the "Island of Aphrodite," and of state rhetoric. It also puts in doubt the social status of literature and its institutionalization as a state instrument or accessory.

Nevertheless, if we ended with Sismanis' poetic position or with the work of a group of similar writers, we would take away a picture of this recent period of Cypriot poetry that would be misleading. The national and poetic ethics in the contemporary literary production of Cyprus continues to find other values, too; sometimes milder, yet equally constant and decisive. And although I find it just as fruitful to have in one country's literature a co-existence and dialogue of opposing or very different ideological and stylistic tones, personally, I would prefer to end my references to poetical texts with a sweet and more tender version of the Cypriot poet and of his position towards his era and his art. Therefore, I will end with a poem by another good young poet, Panagiotis Avraam:

Ο ΠΟΙΗΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΟΓΡΑΦΟΣ
Γράφει τὰ χεῖλη κόκκινα

τὸ πρόσωπο γαλήνιο
 λευκὰ τὰ μέλη του
 στὸ χέρι, γράφει του,
 μιὰ δέσμη ἄσπρες μαργαρίτες.
 Τοῦ ξέσχισε τὴ σκουριασμένη πανοπλία
 τῆς ἐχθρότητας
 καὶ τοῦ ἔβαλε λευκὸ χιτῶνα.
 Γράφει τὸ δράκοντα
 νὰ στάζει μέλι τὰ ρουθούνια του,
 τὸν Ἅγιο
 νὰ ξεπεζεύει τοῦ ἀλόγου του
 καὶ νὰ χαϊδεύει τὸ θεριό,
 νὰ σκύβει στὸ βρεμένο χῶμα
 καὶ νὰ προσεύχεται,
 γι' αὐτὸ τὸ τέρας: τὸν περιούσιο λαό του.
 Ἀπόψε ξέντυσε τὸ μίσος
 τ' Ἀη-Γιώργη
 τοῦ φόρεσε τὶς ἄσπρες μαργαρίτες
 τῆς ἀγάπης του
 καὶ τότε κατάλαβε·
 πῶς εἶναι πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα
 ποιητής.

THE POET HAGIOGRAPHER/ICONOGRAPHER

He writes/paints the lips red
 the face serene
 his limbs white
 in the hand of his, he writes/paints
 a bunch of white daisies.
 He has torn his rusty armor
 of hostility
 and has placed on him a white tunic.
 He writes/paints the dragon
 dripping honey from his nostrils,
 the Saint
 dismounting off his horse
 and caressing the wild beast,
 bending to the wet soil
 and praying,
 for this monster: his chosen people.
 Tonight he undressed the hate
 of St. George
 he dressed him in the white daisies

of his love
 and then he understood;
 that he is above all
 a poet.
 (Yiannis Milides)