

MODERN GREEK LITERATURE

B. PROSE

LECTURE TO THE SCOTTISH HELLENIC
SOCIETY

GLASGOW

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A. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Professor Trypanis spoke to you some time back on Greek poetry. It has ^{fallen to you} ~~been~~ ^{your} task (and a difficult one at that) to follow him, and speak on another aspect of Greek literature - prose. Unlike Modern Greek poetry which to some extent, has broken through the area of the Greek speaking people and is edging appreciably nearer to the centre of the European poetic mainstream, Greek prose, besides containing notable exceptions, has not yet broken through.

We can now read in English - and in excellent translations too - two ^{complete} poems of Konstantinos Kavafis (C.P. Cavafy as he himself wanted to be known) of George Seferis, the only Greek Nobel prize winner, also many ^{poems} by Sikelianos, by Elytis, by Antonion, by Nicos GATSOS ^{we should} ~~translations~~ and in the past, here and there, ~~published~~ ^{published} in magazines and anthologies.

~~has had~~
published

translations of poems by Polomas,
Drosines, Skipes, Maviles, ^{30 poems} and
 others. We have had also
 studies of Modern Greek Poetry
 by Philip Sherrard by ^{professor} Jenkins,
W. H. Auden, ^{by} Mr. Marshal and a study ^{by} Prof. Manirotaki.
 There is an excellent and growing and accelerating interest
 in Greek poetry

2 What About Prose. Greek prose
 has not been so well ^{represented} by translations
 or presentation. Apart from KAZANTZAKIS
 who is on his way to universality no
 other modern Greek author has achieved
 recognition outside his country.

There have been translations, ~~true~~
 but only a few, ~~that's true~~, which have been
 moderately well-received, ^{but only a small amount of} ~~the~~ books sold
 - ~~there~~ had been ^{were}
 translations of novels by George Theotokas
 (Argo), by Stratis Myrivilis (The Schoolmistress)

(with the Golden Eyes) by Elias Venezis (Neolia)
 by Emmanuel Roidos (Popo Joan) by
 Angelo's Vlaches (Their Serene Majesty)
 by ~~Provelatos~~ (The Sun of Death) by ~~Roidos~~
 and ~~the others~~ by ~~Emmanuel Roidos~~ ~~Popo Joan~~
 Roidos ~~of the~~ ~~hope of~~ ~~Budizos~~ ~~etc~~
 These books have appeared, made
~~some~~ ~~out~~ of a splash on the surface of
 literary criticism, so to speak, and
 disappeared.

Most of them are out of print. You
 will hardly find any of them in public
 libraries, with the exception of the places
 where the Greek community is concentra-
 ted.

Here, you have had no study,
 critical or historical, of modern Greek
 literature in English.

As far as the English reading public
 is concerned, Greek literature, if ~~not~~ we
 ignore KAZANTZAKIS, does not exist.
Why is that?

Is it because Greek literature

inferior? It has nothing to say? It is parochial, narrow, fractious, eristic, unsophisticated?

Nothing of the sort. There are, of course, segments of it that are, but the best of it is well-worth knowing well-worth fearing. There are books by at least a score of authors which deserve to see the light in many tongues and at least six writers, I should say off-hand, who ^{were to be} translated widely would make a significant contribution to our general European culture. One or two of them, by their ^{intense} rigour, can even help us, I believe, to enlarge the area of our vision.

Why is it then that we know so little about it — so little comes our way? I venture to suggest that the reasons are mainly three and in the following order

- a) lack of enterprising publishers.
- b) lack of scholarly translators.
- c) lack of financial motivation.

Let me illustrate this ~~in a~~ more explicitly.

Of Kazantzakis, you know. Most of you must have read "Zorba the Greek" or seen the film.

I am not going to speak of the film net, at this stage about the book. Only about the mechanics of high success, of chance if you like which made the book famous, and helped to grow its stature, and has propelled ~~it~~ ^{him} into a world figure.

— Zorba was published in England in 1949 or thereabouts. It had hardly any response. (It was, in fact, ~~translated~~ ^{translated} from the French.) Publication America Success Encouragement to KAZANTZAKIS because of this encouragement he gave us a number of very important books (Christ Re.

crucified, Freedom & Death, the
last temptation, St. Francis of
Assisi, The Book Garden, Report
to Amico etc — all of
 which have been translated and
 eagerly read. Interest was aroused about
his old work.

It is, of course highly problematical
 to hang ~~at the success~~ all this, on
 the "accidental" success of "Zorba"
 in America. And yet one cannot
 escape ~~the~~ conclusion, that had
 it not been for this, KAZANTZAKIS
 would not have ~~been~~ written so many
 long novels, in such comparatively
 short time and the obscurity of
 his other works would have been
 a long and maybe, dubious affair.
 Kazantzakis has given us
 a lot — he opened also the
 door ~~for~~ a score a nations, ^{to pleasure} for Greek
literature.

This ~~has~~ ^{been} ~~an~~ achievement. Greek literature may not stand comparison with the massive literatures of the advanced countries but at its best it has something not insignificant to offer ~~to~~ ^{the} ~~our~~ ^{reader}. ~~It can be aesthetically moving, intellectually stimulating and morally uplifting.~~

3. The quotation from some.
 O O S A R U I R P T .

- light is the quality of Greek literature
- light can clarify the vision can give it plasticity but certainly disciplines the imagination.
- like Oscar Wilde I had to return to Greek - a few years back.

My first impression was the light for which Greek literature craved for, the light which beat down on it. Characteristics, like all art is, of course a reflection of something and expression of it, it is also an entity. It lives by itself, out of its own compositional elements because of the ^{power of its} discipline and the beauty of its form.

And if I were to give a schematic interpretation of modern Greek literature I would ~~define~~ ^{group} its

main compositional elements to form and divide as follows:

A. Light

b. ENVIRONMENT - historical, physical (explain) and spiritual (elaborate)

c. THOUGHT - Greek thought is reactive and speculative. It is not over-given to imagination or over-elaboration - more to simplicity and plasticity.

d. language - language and thought are of course, complementary. The one helps the other. The Greek language is un-rigid (~~not~~ deliberately, I don't use the word elastic) malleable and always capable of growth. In these three respects the English and Greek languages have are almost alike into use.

difference that our Greek is richer in adjectival colouration which can turn into a verbal phantasmagoria, while the English by the sheer virtuosity of its word structure and relative syntactical freedom is capable of unexampled imaginative responses and promptings.

~~It is~~ quality - archaic - curious in the one, imaginative in the other - are in the ultimate effort ^{of highest effort} capable of fuller play in poetry ~~than in prose~~ - It's not perhaps an accident that we have not a novelist in English of the ~~stature~~ stature of Shakespeare or Robert Burns, of Milton, or in Greece of the statue of Palamas, Sikelianos, Sefiris. Parallels, I don't mean of a fenced poet of the stature of Voltaire or Marcel Proust or of a Russian of the range of a Tolstoy or a Chekhov.

But language has been a difficult problem as far as Queer is concerned. The Demotic } the struggle between
 The Pure } the rears
 the struggle between and the essential success of the Demotic Psichari to Taxidi printed in 1888 was the high watermark. From then on the victory of the demotic in the arts has been assumed although it took a time to be completed.

INGREDIENTS

These are our many compositional elements.

The ingredients are the lives, the historical experience of our people, their social conditions, their labours, the climate of ethics, their aspiration.

If we take a few minutes at looking at them, perhaps we may gain a deeper insight into Queer literature.

1' Life = hard and unromantic
 Toil - soil; sea - emigration - hardships,
 poverty - patriotism - war.

2. Historical experience : Oppression
persecution (pariahisation)
 Here we must not also exhibit
 hope, and a limitless awoken
 of past glory.

Here we must distinguish, however,
 between two important things - the
physical & spiritual oppression and
persecution

Physical oppression - yes
spiritual, hardly ever

This to be elaborated. There has
 never been a system of spiritual control in
 Greece (in the ancient Pantheric
times - the Byzantine Theocratic
period ^{and now} where the Greek had
 lived within a spiritual wall, with
 his mind's vision cut from view of

the horizon and of heaven. His ^{beliefs} faith have always been — except, deplorably in politics — the broad accentuate of a faith and its outward trappings. That is not to say that he is not ~~sin~~ sincere in his faith — on the contrary, his faith and his life are inextricably bound together, even break so-called atheists go to church, have their children baptised etc — only that his faith never oppresses ^{him} ~~and that~~ the spiritual authorities ~~has~~ ^{even} embraced him as if in a cocoon. And any system which became overbearing, or threatened to engulf him... well, there was always an escape, the mountains and the sea. In a sense, there has been the main pillar of Greek freedom, throughout the ages.

And in this we have the paradox between what appears to be and what is. A man is slave to a town, to thought, to an ideology, to

Commissioner, to political systems, only, if
 in the last analysis he wants to be oppre-
 sion and tyranny and totalitarianism can and
 do, great harm, & but they never really
 touch anything from within.

For four hundred years the Greeks
 lived under a harsh, alien despotism - the
 Ottoman one, which was also of different
 religion. But surprisingly enough they were,
 in themselves, free.

In song, and dance and prayer, they
 bewailed their fate - never accepted it.
 In the last resort life can be the will to
 individual integrity can be asserted only death.
 (Dostoyevski plunges into his soul to
 escape from the remorseless envelopment.)

3. His taboos are honour (sex ^{honour}
 as well) and filofimo (a haunting
 and delicate form of self-respect, which
~~goes~~ they cannot be equated with

Fouchinen). It gives man pride. A self-respect. Saves him from the iron of thralldom or poverty, entering his soul or of destroying his integrity.

Filotimo is the apex of the essential unity of the individual - It is a shield, and ~~an offensive weapon~~ a club at the same time it is also a protection against one's own ~~essence~~ self-diminution within one self.

Apart from filotimo, patriotism, ferocious political beliefs and love of ^{abstract} justice which to the Greek has always been something divine something about the law, practically everything else he is ~~practically~~ ~~permissiveness~~ ~~permitted~~ - it may be ^{wrong and can become} punishable ~~and~~ as if arraigned before a court but not morally self-lacerating. There has always been a tradition of freedom of expression - four letter words and all - and it's only the peculiar climate of permissiveness which may or may not

allow their public broadcast.

Aspiration to a peak can be expressed in a single word - height.

It has been surrounded by mountains. None of these are forbidding or inaccessible - a first ^{height} height does not imply dizziness or terror, or the culmination of an effort - but broader field of vision, wider horizons, liberation.

A Greek congratulating some one upon a success or an appointment he wishes that - kai is another - to get higher. A child shows promise - it will climb high. Some one reaches the high-water-mark of his glory, or of his achievement, or a national endeavour, or political campaign ^{is} now at the summit height ^{of} these are enough to indicate deliberate ambition meaning.

In other words the Greek's eye is not level, but usually at an angle of 25 to 45 degrees upwards. This is not both a view, a glance and an aspiration.

Because of these compositional elements
~~these~~ so-called ingredients ~~make~~ ^{is on the whole} ~~of the~~
 whole, Greek literature healthy and
compact. They don't necessarily, make
 it a good literature. That depends
 on the genius which ~~also~~ ^{breathes} life into
 it. But they definitely make it
^{and} joyous, despite the Greek predilection
 for tragedy, energetic, and hopeful.
 But perhaps here these adjectives
 may be a bit misleadingly, they
 denote ~~a~~ positiveness, ~~with~~ ^{an intentional} ~~as~~
 or even unintentional positiveness which
 is lacking. Perhaps it will be more
 accurate to say that in Greek literature
 there is a noticeable absence of careless
depression and definitely, as yet,
 not that overpowering urge towards
 that kind of intestinal fermenting
 for the traumas of the psyche, which
 in so many forms of literature has
 become an end in itself.

4

Modern Greek prose-writing has no verifiable prehistory. Some Greek literary historians begin to trace ^{it} from Byzantine times and through the Apparat writers Mecharios and Yonstinos.

But these ^{two} were chronicles. KORAE In fact there is no prose writing particularly in novel form if we except Adamantios Korais Poypatochas, set well after the liberation of Greece.

Literature in its novel form suffered considerably because of the linguistic conflict.

L A N A U A G E

Already in 1836 Demetrios Byzantios in his famous dramatic work Babylonia by showing the misunderstandings between Greeks speaking various ~~languages~~ dialects was indirectly

emphatically the need for a Koiné (Koeni) or common language as an organ of expression and a means of communication.

- Some were for the language of the people
- others were for the provincial, or the language ecclesiastical writing desirable for antiquity.

Gradually position became hard and extreme: Provincial almost became an otic dialect, and koeni degenerated into something ^{not} ~~at~~ the beginning was indistinguishable from obscure

Here is not the place to elaborate this theme. Sufficient to note that still wee has two languages:

- a) the language of the state, of the clergy of ~~the~~ law and of the newspapers and

of scientific publications which
are wholly or principally in the
prose &
the language of literature which
is wholly now in the demotic.

Poetry has not suffered much from this.
The great poets - even when many of
them were writing the prose like the
~~two~~ Brothers Soutsos, Kalvos, Rangavis, A)
~~but~~ were asserting the demotic
Solomos among them and Vallavitis

The battle for the Demotic
was not finally won till the
1890's. Picharis' work Taxidi
was published in 1888. It was
instant admirers and detractors.
But it became a watershed. From
then on, gradually at the beginning
more confidently and vigorously later on,
literature found ~~a way~~ its appropriate means

of expression and began to develop
 out at an acceleration pace
Argyris Epifanotis, Alexandros Palkis, ? Psichari
Pre - 1900 literature were greater
 promoted for
 the Demotiki

But if we begin with the 1890s
 or the 1900's to count the value and
 viability of Greek literature we
 shall ignore a large amount of
 worth-while achievement and some of
 the chief glories of Modern Greek
 writing. ~~Reason our~~ Writers and
 books like:

- a) Emmanuel Roidos: Pope Joan,
 labels, and some superb
 critical studies, particularly
 on poetry.
- b) Pavlos Kalligas: who in 1855
 published his novel THE HANDS
VLEKAS considered by many
 to be the first novel on a
 feminine Greek theme.
- c) Pemetivas VIKELAS author of LOUKIS

LARAS and Papa-NARRISSOS
 (a study about the kindness of
 a priest), translator of Shakes-
 peare and promoter of Greek
 adult education inside Greece

d) STEFANOS XENOS (who like VIKELAS
 lived many years in England) author
 of the Heroism of the Greek Revolution,
The Devil in Turkey, Kivolelia,
 etc.

e) George Vizyinos author of some
 of splendid stories "The only
journey of my life" To a pap-
 a μπα να μωρο
The Sin of my Mother "Who
is my brother's assassin?"

F. Spyridon Vasileiadis a really
 excellent, very sensitive poet
 poet and dramatist, author
 of Galateia, ασχολια Βασιλειadis
 like his contemporary Demetrios

Paparrigopoulos (son of the famous
historian was a Shelleyan positivist
- had the loyalty of Shelley in his
poetry and the breadth of vision
of Leopardi) died very young
at the age of thirty

Or Demetrios Vernarolakis a great
literary figure whose raucous rhetoric
is saved from tiresomeness by
his deep thought capacity to penetrate
to uncommon intellectual depths. Otho
& the drama Faust are his some
most of his famous works.

H The satirist Sarcarios and
the comic writer Bambis Anninos
and above all

I. Alexandros Papadiamantis the
author of the "Merchants of Nations"
"The Gypsy Girl", the "Murderess" and
others like "Dream on the waves"
"Poor Saint", "The Nostalgic" etc

is an outstanding writer and belongs to the first rank of modern Greek story-tellers.

Not many of the above are read as they ~~ought to be~~ ^{ought to be} ~~novels~~ with the exception of Roides and Papachamantos. They represent, however, a solid Greek achievement upon which subsequent development took place.

Poetry in 19th century Greece had Greek beginnings, and although influenced by France & Germany, (very little from England) developed within the Greek climate. Prose and particularly novel-writing was very much a pale reflection of the French until well into the century. The writers we have mentioned helped to make into a Greek art what truly came into its own in the present century.

Perhaps a lecture on Greek prose should not omit essayists, critics, and belles-lettres and chronographers.

- Practically every poet of distinction has written also distinguished prose. Palamas, Sikelianos, ^{Prosinetis} Varhavis, Seferis ~~etc~~ Vrettalos, etc.

- Practically every writer of note has done exceptionally good work as essayist and belles-lettres writer or critic but also other like Emilios Hournouzios, George Theotokar, Petros Haris, E. Papanastros, Sabiniis, Spyros Melas, A. Karantonis, have contributed enormous quantities of illuminating studies. Chronographies - is another subject.

This a peculiar Greek genre appears in Newspaper & magazine. It is compounded of morality critique, politics, satire, wisdom.

and knowledgeability and to make an impact it must be of impeccable literary artistry. It is the artistic gem of journalism, the column that helps to lift up the ~~substant~~ ^{whole} quality of newspaper. There have been literally hundreds of chronographs. ~~Very~~ few have become outstanding and some of them are quite exceptional. There are on the ~~same~~ plane of Lucian - commentators without a personal or parti- san axe to grind, path critics of social, political and moral, ^{delinquency} evil, pathfinders. I mention here a few: Elena Vlachou, P. Palaiologos, Manolis Kanelis, D. Psaphas, T. Anninos, Spyros Melas, Parlos Nirwanas.

5 The modern Greek Writers