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MODERN GREEK PROSE
THE GENERATION OF THE '30s

AN ATTEMPT FOR A DEFINITIVE EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

In other eras, calmer, more balanced — I might say more certain of themselves — art for centuries at a time followed a straight course in its development. In our own days, when calm is wanting, balance is destroyed and the old certainty is lost, art progresses and develops in a zigzag line, in a fashion that is breathless, anarchic and beyond all forecast.

In other times means of expression were more or less settled; every artist tried to communicate with his contemporaries, in order to raise their cultural, moral and aesthetic level by means of traditional forms. This held true almost up to the end of the Enlightenment. The whole nineteenth century was a very uneasy period. It was then that there began to appear the first cracks in the old serenity, which widened with the passing of the time. And the world continued in this way until the middle of the second decade of this century, a century extremely iconoclastic — that is, until the beginning of the First World War.

This first great war not only left a million dead on the battle-fields and much devastation in the warring countries; it did something far worse. It destroyed all the values upon which man had for centuries based his life. This collapse of values in Greece became especially strongly felt after the Asia Minor disaster. This completed what Pandelis Prevelákis has called the death of the old myth¹.

Another of our prose writers, Nikos Kazantzákis², speaking of the same sad event in world history and echoing, at this point, the views of Oswald Spengler, emphasizes that in our times we are becoming eye-witnesses to the end of a great civilization. A whole cultural cycle is moving towards its close and a new and different world is about to be

1. P. Prevelákis, *Ὁ Ἄρτος τῶν Ἀγγέλων* [*The Angels' Bread*], Athens 1966, p. 188.

2. P. Prevelákis, *Ὁ Ποιητὴς καὶ τὸ Πόλημα τῆς Ὀδύσσειας* [*The Poet and the Poem of the Odyssey*], Athens 1958, p. 105 ff.

born. What form this world will take we cannot, of course, foresee; but we may affirm that every day new powers enter man's service and change not only his way of life, but his way of thought and his mode of action.

A Chinese proverb says that a man born in an interesting era is unhappy. And our era is without exception the most interesting in the history of mankind so far.

A knowledge of history helps us to understand what the people of the Roman decline could not: that we are living today on the boundary where two worlds meet, the departing one, into which we no longer fit, and the approaching one, to which we do not yet belong. We are swimming in turbid water, like that at the confluence of two great rivers. That is why we are unable to see the world around us clearly. Everything is confused, unstable, uncertain and in a continuous state of flux. Man, in our times, is a man without his own *persona*; I might say, without identity.

This antinomy takes the form in most men of difficulty in adapting to new ideas and to the means in which these ideas find expression. This difficulty in adapting springs from many causes, psychological, religious, sociological and political, the investigation of which falls outside my province. But it is from here that the aversion of many men towards new forms of art begins; since they have no picture into which to fit them, they jeer at them, disapprove of them and finally reject them.

But the art of our age could not be different from what it is. The artist—every artist—as the sensitive receiver *par excellence* of new messages and the competent interpreter of completed transformations, feels the earth shaking under his feet much earlier than ordinary, common mortals, and, full of fever and agony, rushes to set signs on the road that today's world is taking. By this I mean that the artist actually does nothing less than mark out each successive moment in time, and we others, as if we were travelling by car along a national highway, pass by the road-signs at high speed. We must view in this way the tumultuous developments that can be observed in these days and are expressed in art by successive and revolutionary changes in means of expression—which means, finally, in ideas. When will all these contrivances stop? We cannot tell.

One old critic, Pétros Spandonidis¹, writes that all developments in Greek intellectual life used to have the character not of spontaneous generation, but of artistic participation, something which shows that our country, at least as far as literature is concerned, was until very recently a province of France. I shall not here examine whether this view is correct, either in its entirety or to any greater or lesser extent. What I want to note at the moment is that the changes I have mentioned are taking place in our land as well as outside it, for it is, of course, impossible to cut off our land from the rest of the world. The fate of the whole world today is common. However, many of the fermentations and developments occur first elsewhere, where more favourable ground exists and are then transplanted here. Our local conditions cause others, but they are quickly assimilated by the general climate and the all-pervasive atmosphere.

This is the historical and ideological framework within which modern Greek literature has travelled since 1922—that is, since the Asia Minor disaster: and on one level it expresses the pain, the agony of the man whose roots are in those lands and who is fighting to live and survive; on another level it expresses the pain of the whole world and the common agony of all men, wherever they may live on earth, wherever they may struggle to earn their daily bread and cherish their visions of a juster, freer, more human world.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there had developed, in the general atmosphere of Europe and the particular climate of Greece, romantic prose, represented by a series of historical novels, mainly inspired by the recent Greek past. Towards the end of the century the influence of French naturalism and at the same time the study of the various manifestations of Greek popular life led our prose-writing in a new direction, towards the *genre-story* (ἡθογραφία). It is usually stated that this type of writing draws its subjects from the unchanging, patriarchal, idyllic life of the Greek countryside; but one wonders about this. Did the life of the not yet existent urban centres of Greece differ at this time from village life? There are still men alive, though very advanced in years, who remember the vineyards and fields that used to lie a few yards beyond Omonoia Square and Syntagma Square in Athens. The boundary of the *genre-story*, therefore, must be more general if

1. P. Spandonidis, *Ἡ Νεώτερη Ποίηση στὴν Ἑλλάδα* [Modern Poetry in Greece], Athens 1955, pp. 8-9.

it is to be more accurate. Our *genre*-writing describes the simple, idyllic way of life in Greece during the last decades of the previous century and the first decades of the present one. I use the term «describes» of *genre*-writing because in fact the various works of this kind are most concerned with description, and the world they give us is flat and two-dimensional. It lacks the third dimension: the depth of the human soul. Exceptions to this rule are A. Papadiamántis' *The Murderess*, (1903), A. Karkavítsas' *The Beggar* (1895), and the short stories of G. Vizyínós (1849-1896).

The successors of *genre*-writing may be seen in the prose writers who were in their prime in the first decades of this century, Gr. Xenópoulos (1867-1951), K. Chadzópoulos (1868-1920), and K. Theotókis (1872-1923). The first of these fashioned the type of prose which is the main characteristic of the generation of the '30s, the urban novel; but the bourgeois world represented in Xenópoulos' works is usually that of the Ionian Isles, which, as we know, came from a different social and cultural tradition from the rest of the Hellenic world. Chadzópoulos and Theotókis, who throughout their studies in Germany came under the influence of that country's flourishing socialist movement, have given us works that are basically *genre*-stories but also emphasize social problems. Chadzópoulos in *The Castle of Akropótamos* (1909), for example, puts before us, with a literary power and lucidity unusual before that time, the sad destiny of the girls of a *petit bourgeois* provincial family, who, unable to accept their fate and reconcile their dreams with reality, sink into a moral and social wretchedness. The atmosphere overburdened with eroticism and the purely Mediterranean tension of passion in this novel remind one very much of Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*. Theotókis, for his part, traces the inevitable decline of the old aristocratic houses of Corfu. The nobles, lacking the ability to adapt to continually altering social and economic conditions, lose ground, and the populace steadily gains it. Theotókis' prose writings, stylistically disorderly, are of great interest from the psychological and sociological viewpoint. We should note here that Xenópoulos' novel *Rich and Poor* (1919), mediocre as a work of art, is concerned with social antitheses. The central point here, however, is rather in the psychological analysis of the characters than in the sociological analysis of the conditions. This is the general picture which modern Greek prose-writing presents until 1922: sparse in works and with narrow limits.

At this point it is necessary to refer to another very important fact.

For a century, from 1821 to 1922, Hellenism had been passing through a period that I shall call, with some diffidence, *Sturm und Drang*. It had been struggling with all its powers for its restoration as a nation and for the liberation of the Greek lands from the Turkish conqueror. This was the age of the *Megali Idea*, which crystallized into an official Greek ideology and policy about the middle of the nineteenth century. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 and the landing in Asia Minor in 1919 represent the peak of the *Megali Idea* and the final desperate attempt to realize it. The Asia Minor disaster of 1922 is the great boundary-stone dividing modern Greek history into two. Modern Hellenism emerged from this misadventure broken and exhausted. With the destruction of the *Megali Idea*, it was stripped of its ideals and its national ideology, and this was the greatest loss that it could have suffered. The blow was severe for everyone; but for men of intellect it was fatal, especially for the new generation, who suddenly found themselves without an ideology and an orientation. It is sad to record that this void created in our national life has never been refilled. Various *Weltanschauungen* and ideologies have gradually spread over Greece, but Hellenism remains without definite aims and without a charted course. The *Megali Idea* was the «water of life» to modern Hellenism.

Thus, in the cosmogonic chaos brought by the Asia Minor disaster, various writers tried to find some new fixed point of reference, and each slowly began to find his own way, a way of pain and responsibility. It is not a coincidence that Nikos Kazantzákis wrote his *Saviours of God (Asceticism)* in 1923, intending it to be used as the foundation of a new world, a world that would fight heroically for the final victory over Nothing, simply and solely for the dignity of man; nor is it coincidental that Kóstas Várnalis turned to communism and Kóstas Karyotákis blew his brains out with a pistol.

But the Asia Minor disaster had its good effects too. Hellenism might have been pruned geographically; but thus the central national trunk strengthened, and the refugees, with their progressive spirit and their indefatigable activity, gave a new impetus to the Greek economy. The presence of the Asia Minor *littérateurs* was of equally decisive importance in the change of the whole climate of our intellectual life. Until 1922 the leading figures on the literary scene were the poets and prose writers from the Ionian Islands, the Peloponnese and, most of all, the Roumeli (Southern Central Mainland Greece). After 1922 a host of writers came from Asia Minor, to change, with the strong accent of their

personal views and the weight of their work, the course in which the sluggish and scanty waters of modern Greek literary creativity had eddied until then: G. Seféris, G. Theotokás, E. Venéziis, F. Kóndoglou, K. Politis, Thr. Kastanákiis, Str. Myriviliis, Str. Doúkas, and others.

Along with the Asia Minor *littérateurs*, an important Helladic group of this generation helped to compose the many-faceted mirror in which the modern Greek spirit could recognize its image: J. M. Panayotópoulos, A. Terzákiis, P. Prevelákiis, M. Karagátsiis, Th. Petsáliis, G. Abbot, and others.

It remains now to give what the prose-writers of the generation of the '30s found—in the field of their art, that is. When we say the generation of the '30s, it must be remembered that we are using a conventional term, for many of the writers belonging to this generation appeared in modern Greek letters long before 1930 and some of them, the longest-lived, continue their activity even today, although in the meantime younger generations have appeared—the generation of the '40s, of the '50s, etc.

Our prose-writing moves still in the realm of the *genre*-story, but now renovated; as we see, for example, in the works of Chadzópoulos, Theotókiis, and so on.

Our prose-writing still uses unwrought linguistic material. The so-called epigones of the *genre*-story cannot be viewed as exemplars of style, except perhaps Chadzópoulos. On the other hand the attempts of the generation of the '80s, that is, of Palamáis and his contemporaries, to form an adequate instrument of expression have not been completed.

In the first period of literary demoticism there was an erroneous impression that the artist legislated in language. This was a mistake. The people are the legislators and they make the language. The artist stabilizes it, codifies it in some fashion, refines it. Let us take as an example Palamáis' story *The Death of the Young Man* (1901). While as a work of art, judged from the point of view of the history of our literature, it has never ceased to be of interest, linguistically it revolts, because it is covered in wrinkles and make-up. If we now compare it with another work, which contains much the same story, Myriviliis' *Vassiliis Arvanítiis* (1939), the difference in literary language between 1900 and 1940 becomes palpable.

By all this I mean that the generation of the '30s began under the worst possible assumptions from every aspect; and if we can speak today

of modern Greek «prose»-writing, we owe it exclusively to this generation.

Their first task was to «work» the language; and there were writers who gave us important examples of style, struggling with sometimes unwrought, sometimes half-wrought material. Examples are Myrivilis and Prevelákis.

One might also easily divide the writers of this generation into two groups: first, those who actually continue the tradition of the *genre*-story, on, of course, a much higher plane, like Myrivilis and Venézis. They do not feel very comfortable in the world of ideas, but they are story-tellers of merit. They set out to tell a story, and their only concern is how to tell it well. This means that their chief effort is concerned with language and style. The curious thing is that the writers of this group often produce works which are more succesful from an aesthetic point of view.

There are, certainly, learned writers who are very well-versed in the literary movements and well-informed about the history of ideas, such as Theotokás and Terzákis; but they, in their ambition to give us great novels of ideas, achieve the opposite end, and give us, finally, works of challenging thought but often of mediocre aesthetic result.

Almost all the writers of this generation use all the common forms of writing —drama, essay, poetry, short story, chronicle, travel account, novel etc. Of special interest is the urban novel in which the attempt is made to cut deep into Athenian bourgeois society at the time when Athens is rapidly transforming itself from a provincial European capital into a big city.

All of them, too, especially those from Asia Minor, give in their work pictures of the Greek life in the great urban centres of Asia Minor (Constantinople and Smyrna), before and particularly on the very eve of the disaster (Theotokás, Polítis, Kastanákis, Tatiána Stávrou); or pictures of the disaster, of captivity, uprooting and flight (Myrivilis, Venézis, Polítis, Doúkas, etc.). In the work of the mainland writers, the enormous moral and social problems created by the arrival of the thousands of refugees in the small and poor land that Greece was in 1922 are only touched on at suitable times. However, no-one has yet given us a great composite work on the Asia Minor disaster, the greatest suffering Hellenism has undergone in the three thousand years of its historical life.

I said above that the representatives of this generation set out to create works under the most adverse conditions of every kind. It

should be added that they also set out each on his own with different assumptions, and further that they moved in different directions. The term «generation of the '30s» has, then, a very general sense: it covers all the artists as far as time goes, but does not express their variety and their individual natures. We are not dealing with a school of common ideology or of common aesthetic principles, but rather with a group of highly talented writers determined to produce literary works of great responsibility and merit. Finally, we are dealing with a generation which has a consciousness of itself and of its historical mission.

The first productions of the generation of the '30s appeared as a continuation of the Greek prose tradition until then; that is to say, the writers had not yet become conscious that they really belonged to a different generation, which had a different view of life and was trying to change the world, to improve it and to take it a step further forward. After all, as has been noted elsewhere, some writers continued the tradition of the *genre-story* and moved in this ideologically limited realm; but alongside them gradually appeared the representatives of the new generation, who felt they were suffocating within the closed horizons of Greek intellectual life and raised a rebellion against the various «intellectual militarisms» of right and left. For they saw that traditional forms not only deprived them of the appropriate channels of expression, but condemned them to intellectual vapidness and stultification.

At this crucial time (1929) occurred an event of decisive importance: the publication of a book by a new figure, *Free Spirit* by Oréstes Digenis—in fact George Theotokás. It is a polemical, but not negative, work of criticism of the shallowness till then inherent in Greek intellectual life. Even today, the reader is still struck by the clear vision and correct posing of the problems of our intellectual life, by so young a man—when he wrote it he was just twenty-four years old.

Theotokás does indeed express his own opinions in this work, but the reader understands that he speaks as a representative of the «new generation», which at this time had just made its appearance and was seeking to find its way. Theotokás, then, stands as a severe but at the same time just critic of the previous generation: «*Those writers of today who bind themselves to times past and fill themselves with sentimentalities cannot create, because they refuse to try life. Creation is not accomplished in the margin of life; it is conceived in the heart of life and flows from a man like a superabundance of life*». And he states bitterly: «*It seems that*

it is difficult for the Greeks today to enjoy life without the counsels of the dead)¹. Theotokás did not condemn his predecessors; on the contrary, he tried to understand them, but also to make his own position and that of his generation different from theirs, since he knew that in the meantime the course of the world had changed. He realized that the generation before his own was a defeatist generation, which had emerged from the wars and the Asia Minor disaster with its wings clipped and its ideals ruined. «*Our elders saw scuttled in Smyrna harbour not only their powers, but also their ideals and their self-confidence. In 1922 they ceased to have faith in Greece. From then till now our land has lived without brave and noble feelings, without the need to excel itself, without any fervour. The disaster stifled every breath of idealism*»².

His own generation, meanwhile, viewed life optimistically and wanted to make use of its own power, to live its own life and to work out its own destiny. This is neither the thoughtless conceit of a young man, nor disrespect towards his elders; it is recognition of the crucial time and consciousness of the need for change. «*Our generation*», he confesses, «*will have far greater demands than those of previous Greek generations. Times are difficult . . . Whoever the coming youth may be, whatever paths they may follow, they will immediately feel, if they are true artists or true thinkers, that their first duty is to raise the level of our intellectual life. They will bring us a wider, deeper view of the problems that beset us. They will speak a more cultivated, more substantial language than that employed in Greek conversation today*»³. The change that Theotokás envisaged must not, however, be seen as a denial of tradition, nor as an uncritical acceptance of every innovation. He stresses that «*it is a dangerous mistake, just as attachment to the past is dangerous . . . to attach ourselves to everything new, purely and simply because it is new*»⁴. Elsewhere he proposes, characteristically: «*It will certainly be vandalism to wipe out in blind hatred all the work of our old prose-writers . . . but it is also essential that we break the tradition. It has been turned into a routine of Greek prose, a status quo with defined boundaries and defined standards . . . We seem intransigent and perhaps ungrateful to the older writers, but it is for the good of our generation, because the rights of youth must*

1. G. Theotokás, 'Ελεύθερο Πνεῦμα [*Free Spirit*], Athens ²1973, p. 25.

2. G. Theotokás, 'Ελεύθερο Πνεῦμα, p. 63.

3. G. Theotokás, 'Ελεύθερο Πνεῦμα, p. 55.

4. G. Theotokás, 'Ελεύθερο Πνεῦμα, pp. 25-6.

come first. *With every sacrifice the young must gain broad horizons and breathe fresh air*)¹.

If I have persisted somewhat in the analysis of Theotokás' views and in quoting certain apposite excerpts from this early work of his, it is because I consider that it constitutes a milestone in our intellectual life in the period we are studying: a boundary in the sense of the demarcation of fords through which a whole generation of intellectuals passed. At the same time it does not, of course, fail to be an enlightening work on Theotokás views on art and on the problem of the creator, for we can see in it where, in the last analysis, the source of Theotokás' merits and shortcomings as a writer lay. One may at this point recapitulate what Kazantzákis says about the position that his *Saviours of God (Asceticism)* has in all his work. Everything written by Theotokás after 1929 is in fact a comment on *Free Spirit*. On Theotokás' creative work, however, fuller mention will be made later. I would only like to add here that Theotokás, before the crystallization of his ideas on the responsibility and place of his generation in our intellectual life, as expressed in *Free Spirit*, had made certain of his views more widely known in an article with the title «Some remarks on Psycháris and Dragóumis», which was published in the periodical *O Aghón ton Parision [The Struggle of Paris]* of 25.8.1928. «From this very article», K. Th. Dimarás remarks, «emerges something like a consciousness that he belongs to a definite generation, which has appeared with a mission; perhaps, indeed—although I put forward this conjecture with great hesitation—perhaps we may see here outlined for the first time the meaning of the generation of the '30s: a parallel and an echo: our purpose is to redo, a hundred years afterwards, the destructive yet creative work done by the youth of Europe in 1830»².

Theotokás' *Free Spirit* caused much discussion immediately after its publication, and was finally termed by his contemporaries as the «manifesto» of their generation.

1. G. Theotokás, *'Ελεύθερο Πνεῦμα*, pp. 55-6.

2. G. Theotokás, *'Ελεύθερο Πνεῦμα*, p. 43.

P A R T I

WRITERS COMING FROM ASIA MINOR

STRATIS MYRIVILIS (1892-1969)

Myrivilis came from Mytiléne, and Mytiléne has belonged since ancient times, both geographically and culturally, to Greek Asia Minor. He too, therefore, is one of the Asia Minor writers of the generation of the '30s. He entered on his career very young and began writing *Life in the Grave*, in 1917, in the trenches during the First World War. *Life in the Grave*, regarded as the most important book of the generation of the '30s, is one of those pieces of prose over which people hesitate when trying to assign them to the usual categories of prose writing, although Myrivilis as an author keeps exclusively to the realm of traditional narrative. It must be noted, however, that with his strong talent and peerless mastery in the fashioning of the language he contributed to the renovation of modern Greek prose, albeit within traditional forms. I think that at this historical point only this was possible. *Life in the Grave*, which is strongly reminiscent of the corresponding work of the Hungarian A. Látzko, *Menschen im Krieg*, is neither a novel nor a collection of stories. We have to deal with a series of narratives which can be read independently of one another; indeed, some of them—for example «The Wood»—constitute novellas in their own right. There is, however, a connecting tie which binds them all together—the unity of subject and the identity of the narrator—so that the reader should not lose the feeling that he has before him parts of an organic whole. The subject here is the war and the narrator Sergeant Kostoúlas, who writes from his trench endless letters to the girl he loves in Mytiléne. In these letters Kostoúlas recounts in great detail the day-to-day life of a warrior who rots in a trench fighting an invisible enemy, surrounded by barbed wire, minefields and sandbags.

Kostoúlas' letters are written to be read later, when the soldier returns to his island in time of peace—if he ever does. The dispatches from the front, therefore, have the character of a diary: in them, side

by side with the important and insignificant details of everyday life, there are pages in which the writer, using the «flash-back» technique, returns, full of deep yearning and nostalgia, to his island and the blue Aegean, to remember moments from his past happiness.

I have already said that Myrivilis was not a modern writer in the sense of the *avant-garde*, as were his contemporaries Proust and Joyce in French and English prose respectively; but of all modern Greek prose writers, he is the most contrapuntal. He uses counterpoint frequently, and with such skill as to make one feel that it is this that constitutes his chief boldness and virtue in narrative, besides, of course, his other ability, that of taming and adding lustre to the rough and recalcitrant material of the language. This is the centre of the mystical charm radiated by Myrivilis' prose, but also the uttermost limit of his province as a writer. He can go no further.

From the point of view of subject, he represents an extension of *genre*-writing. When he is not speaking of the war, he describes the provincial Greek world. He collects the tiniest details, even those hidden in the shadows, and passes on the world surrounding him with the fidelity of a camera-lens. There is no place in his work for the problems of his era, an era of catalysis in which there had begun to appear the first cracks in the previously solid structure of western civilization. The world of Myrivilis is narrow and static, does not develop and does not struggle to take a step forward. For him there only exist, at bottom, his island and its traditional—I might say Elysian—way of life, which he is trying to keep alive in the pages of his work.

Myrivilis' work—particularly at the time when he was writing *Life in the Grave*—does not of course lack a certain youthful enthusiasm and mood of revolution against the hypocrisy and rigidity of the Greek establishment. Thus he appears, in his first major work, anti-royalist, anti-militarist, anti-clerical etc.; and it was these revolutionary elements which gave to *Life in the Grave* the genuineness and persuasiveness that any work of protest against the barbarism of war must have. These elements remained the steadfast marks of *Life in the Grave* until 1930, until, that is, the appearance of its second, «definitive» edition.

Meanwhile Myrivilis had settled in Athens, found a reading public and renown, and became bourgeois. He made his target the Academy of Athens, of which he became a fellow, however, only in 1958, twenty-eight years later. No «revolutionary» could get into the Academy of

Athens, even a dried-up one like Myrivilis. Thus we may follow the gradual transformation of *Life in the Grave*, the last (seventh) edition of which (1955) is widely different from the first of 1924. All the «antis», which for years had prevented him from taking his place among the «immortals», have been removed from it. But if Myrivilis remains in the history of Greek letters, it will not be due to the fact that he became an academician; his work is what will give him merit in the minds of those to come. The writer's compromise with the *status quo* and the fading of *Life in the Grave* from the remains of a youthful revolutionary passion can be seen today as the betrayal of the elements that made up Myrivilis' very identity.

At all events, whether because he very quickly became a comfortable bourgeois or because his literary background was inadequate, Myrivilis did not move very freely in the world of ideas and ideologies. This is shown very clearly by his novel *The Schoolmistress with the Golden Eyes* (1933). This book, with all the disciplined structure of a classical novel, constitutes, in a loose yet clear way, the sequel to *Life in the Grave*. In it the central figure, Leonis Drivas, first seen in the cyclone of events of the Great War and the Asia Minor disaster, returns to his island and attempts to forget the horror of death and to be reconciled to life. He passes through a profound inner crisis, finally being released through artistic creation and love.

The Schoolmistress with the Golden Eyes is a work of atmosphere. Not in the way that we understand the term when we speak of atmosphere as an element of suggestion in a symbolist novel. Apart from the composite relations and the internal and external contrasts between the central characters, Myrivilis succeeds in presenting us in excellent fashion with the natural and social environment of the provincial Greece of fifty-odd years ago, immediately after the Asia Minor disaster. All the characters, who represent a provincial *petit bourgeois* community trying to live on Athenian models, are no more than common and insignificant men. Leonis Drivas' sensitive nature is tormented in this stifling environment, but this is the world which gave him birth and to which he belongs. As I mentioned above, Drivas is a soldier trying to recover from the concentrated experience of death, which he has collected inside himself while fighting for years in the trenches of the front line, and agonizingly facing the problem of whether it is permitted him to fall in love with the wife of his dead comrade. In his mind there is no room for other problems, even though his country is at the time passing through a tremendous moral and social crisis, brought on by the refugeism of the

Asia Minor disaster. Is Drivas, then, a narrow-minded egocentric man, concerned only with his personal emotional problems? A. Karandónis writes about him: «*I have never managed to feel any sympathy for Leonis Drivas, nor to believe that he is a superior man, a true thinker, a responsible and sincere judge of the life he faces around him. If Myrivilis had created him to mark out and satirize the intellectuals of post-war Greece, perhaps he would have a true representative character*»¹. I think that Karandónis here misinterprets Myrivilis' intentions and fails to see Drivas correctly as a separate individual and a social integer. Elsewhere in the same article Karandónis notes that «*when Myrivilis is present, the intellectual is absent*». Leonis Drivas is first of all a human being, not a philosophical proof or a puppet. I would also say this: Leonis Drivas is Myrivilis himself. That is, he represents the average Greek in the period between the wars, a man endowed with intelligence and sensitivity, not lacking moral and political consciousness, but without the proper education. He has not learned to think and to conceive problems in their whole extent and depth. He is made of sound but unwrought human material. He is not without a reflective disposition but his intellectual background is meagre, and he is therefore unable to hold firm in ideological conversations and disputes. The only point in quite a long novel when Drivas takes part in a conversation concerning ideology at all is when a group of students with revolutionary ideas come to the island; and this conversation lasts no more than ten minutes—two pages of the text.

The same general climate holds in *The Mermaid Madonna* (1949). The central point here is the crippled emotions of the heroine, Smaragdí, the result of a traumatic experience in her childhood years: still at an innocent age, she was rudely dragged out of it in an attempted rape by her stepfather. The personal drama of the girl lies in the fact that she cannot respond to the love of the young men of the village, but dedicates herself devotedly to the worship of the memory of Lámbis, who killed himself from *filotimo*² and shame when they humiliated him in front of her; for the dead boy is to her an ideal lover, unable to touch her physically. A whole world moves round Smaragdí, the deprived,

1. A. Karandónis, *Πεζογράφοι και Πεζογραφήματα τῆς Γενιᾶς τοῦ 30* [*Prose-Writers and Prose-Works of the Generation of the '30s*], Athens 1962, p. 43.

2. *Filotimo* (φιλότιμο) is a word that cannot be translated into English. It expresses a special sense of honour and pride or of moral obligation which functions in modern Greek society.

tortured, death-afflicted world of refugees who come to put down roots in new, more friendly, more peaceful soil. But we are basically faced by a love story which gives us a composite picture of provincial Greece, where the atmosphere used to be taut and electric, as far as love was concerned. Among the most beautiful scenes in Myrivilis' prose work and in all our literature are the scene of the death of the faintly-drawn grandmother, Permachoula, in *The Mermaid Madonna*, and the corresponding scene of the death of Second Lieutenant Stratis Vranas, in the Second Transport Hospital at Eski Sehir, in *The Schoolmistress with the Golden Eyes*. Especially in the latter scene, Myrivilis presents to us, in very fine-wrought fashion, the gradual disorganization and discompositon of a human personality: the young man, Vranas, is afflicted by gangrene and finds himself already in the shadows of death.

But Myrivilis gives the true measure of his worth as a prose writer in the novella *Vassilis Arvanitis* (1939). This young man represents a kind of bravery and manliness well-known and deeply honoured in the East; he has his own moral code, and is capable of the most audacious and unlikely feats on the spur of the moment. On present-day criteria, Vassilis Arvanitis could be set down as a young man in revolt against the system, from his deeds alone: for instance, he blocks the road to the Good Friday procession and refuses to let it pass, he lives with two sisters who are both passionately in love with him, and so on; events, unthought of and heard for the first time in provincial Greece, of a vague and legendary, but not very far-off, period, when everything followed a strict, indolent, fore-ordained course. Myrivilis worked on *Vassilis Arvanitis* with unimaginable longing, and revealed his furthest limit as a writer, the point to which he could stretch his power in the happiest moments of his literary creativity.

ELIAS VENEZIS (1904-1973)

The Aivaliote Elias Venézis is in many ways like Myrivilis. The relation between the authors is not confined to the fact that they are of the same generation and come from Asia Minor. Myrivilis considered Venézis his pupil, something the latter, when he achieved recognition and success, was unwilling to accept; and this ingratitude on the pupil's

part embittered the preceptor. When Venézis settled in Mytiléne after the disaster, it was Myrivílis who persuaded him to write the account of his captivity and who, as he characteristically said to show the decisive manner in which he had contributed to Venézis' development and training in authorship, taught him to hold the pencil in his hand.

When Venézis died in 1973, he left a rich harvest; but from all the mass of literary production stands out his trilogy about the Asia Minor disaster: *Number 31328* (1931), *Calm* (1939) and *Aeolian Earth* (1943).

Number 31328 (part of which was first published in 1924 in *Cam-bana*, the Mytiléne newspaper edited by Myrivílis in which the latter's *Life in the Grave* was also first published), is a potent work of youth, springing from the author's burning personal experience in the Turkish concentration and forced labour camps in the interior of Asia Minor, and is his best work. In it his material was such as not to permit him cheap emotionalism hence the narrative has muscle and heart; but later, in his other works, such as *Calm*, on the resettlement of refugees in new lands with all its sorrows and torments, and *Aeolian Earth*, the author's idyllic childhood years on the property of his grandfather Yannakós Bibélas in Anatolia, beneath the Kimidénia, Venézis created a kind of prose laden with sentimentalism and lyricism, which in the end is reduced to mannerism. As J. M. Panayotópoulos once said, when Venézis created his heroes he had by him a pan of syrup which he poured over them, so that in the end he made candy-sticks instead of men. These words may be a slight exaggeration, but they nonetheless typify the mannerism into which Venézis' prose little by little slipped.

Basically Venézis, like Myrivílis, moves in the realm of developed *genre*-writing, although in his work the scene changes and we are transported from Mytiléne to the Anatolian lands across the straits from it. Venézis' significant contribution as a prose writer lies in his expressive power. He has the ability to create a light, tender piece, out of even the heaviest, hardest linguistic material. He aspires to, and works hard at, telling us a story well, and he is an unrivalled story-teller.

However, his works lack any intellectual or ideological questioning at all, a lack which also characterized Venézis as a man. I was lucky enough to meet him frequently during the period of his stay in London, where he had come to take a cure for the cancer that had struck him and was slowly killing him. At first, while his powers endured and his morale was high, we used to spend hours in conversation on a variety of intellectual topics. These conversations used to stay at a high temperature for ten minutes or so; then they would degenerate into cheap

behind-the-scenes gossip on our literary life.

I think that the parallel study of Venézis and Myrivilis is not only inevitable, but vital. The two have much in common. From such a comparison, certainly, Myrivilis' crushing superiority appears, because the way in which he worked the language marks him out as a great teacher, and because his works are more solid and more complete. Of all Venézis' work, I personally believe that only the trilogy I mentioned above will survive the test of time. Too much writing and journalism afflicted him, as before they had afflicted Xenópoulos; but the latter could plead that he lived by the fruits of his pen. Venézis' frequently insignificant newspaper writings spoiled and cheapened a genuine and important prose talent. If Venézis had devoted himself to serious literary activity, he would have given us other remarkable works. He was, as those who knew him well affirm, a man of firm will-power and decisiveness; but he could never resist the temptation to indulge in the limelight, at one time with endless travel impressions in the newspaper *Acropolis*, at another with articles in *To Vima*. He wanted recognition and popularity while he lived, which indeed he gained; and he allowed a higher goal to escape from his view: that of lasting fame and immortality.

FOTIS KONDOGLOU (1896-1965)

Fótis Kóntoglou, also an Aīvaliote, is an «idiorythmic» writer of this generation. By this term I do not mean that Kóndoglou was a difficult, eccentric man —he was not— but that he obeyed his own inner rhythm, and had different goals from those his contemporaries had set themselves. Kóndoglou is a curious mixture of a Byzantine monk, brought up on the popular lives of the saints, the «vigilant» treatises of the anchorites of the desert and the sermons of the Church fathers; and at the same time, a man of action and of danger, excited by the feats of the pirates, the smugglers and the brave young men of Asia Minor. Within him lives the world of Anatolia, simple, solid, eternal, slow-moving, real; a world untainted by western culture or western rationalism. I remember a chance meeting with Kóndoglou in the spring of 1957 in the Byzantine Museum in Athens, where there had been organized an exhibition of copies of Ravenna mosaics. After looking at the huge copies

for a long time with obvious contempt, he shrugged his shoulders and said without anger:

— Exercises in sensitivity and dexterity. Nothing else. Think of the Byzantine mosaics, where the agony of God burns the flesh and tortures the spirit!

And it is well-known that Kóndoglou, being an artist himself, knew Byzantine art and Byzantium generally as no-one else did.

It is, then, from the world of Anatolia that Kóndoglou's work springs; a series of prose works that immediately show their author as great yet modest, and above all sure of himself: *Pedro Kazas the Corsair* (1920), *Famous Men and Forgotten* (1942), *Kónanos the God* (1943), *Story of a Ship* (1944), *Greek Seafarers in the Southern Seas* (1944), etc.

Kóndoglou immediately took first place in our literature with his work *Pedro Kazas the Corsair*, which was first published in 1920 in Aivali. It is one of the finest works in modern Greek prose. Although the work of a young man, it is astonishingly mature in language, structure and ideology. The narrative is in first person; the narrator is a Portuguese: Vaca Gavro, a distant descendant of the seafarer Leocantio Calvo, who must have been buried alive by the Spanish corsair Pedro Kazas at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This Vaca Gavro, three centuries later and entirely coincidentally, took revenge for the death of the unfortunate Señor Leocantio by killing Pedro Kazas. Thus the restless spirit and tormented soul of the Spanish adventurer at last found rest in death. The language of the book is robust, manly and solid, the kind of language that simple men know how to speak from deep inside themselves; men who do not try to lower things' quality with impermissible flowery speeches. And this language serves the narrator well. He wants to tell us a story, certain from the start that we shall not believe him; the story of the corsair Pedro Kazas, who must have lived for three hundred years or so, or have been spewed up again by Hades refusing to accept his sinful soul.

This is Kóndoglou's magic world, where miracles continue to happen, where the tale is truer than truth itself, where things are clean and beautiful, as they came from God's hand on the first day of creation, and where man journeys in peace, sure of this life and the next.

I remarked above that Kóndoglou is an «idiorrhythmic» writer. What I meant by this term has now grown clearer: that Kóndoglou lived and worked in the unbreakable realm of tradition, untouched by the *mal du siècle* which has made our world rot.

STRATIS DOUKAS (b. 1895)

Stratis Doúkas is another Aivaliote. He comes, more precisely, from Moschonisi, the large island that lies, curled up like a faithful dog, at the threshold of Aivalí.

He is in many ways alike—though different in as many—to Fótis Kóndoglou, with whom he attended High School, being, like him, an artist and a prose-writer. St. Paul the Apostle says: «*Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*» (2 Cor. 3.17). Kóndoglou followed the inclination of his heart and the instigations of his art for freedom in the spirit of the Lord, as the Byzantine tradition conceived and crystallized it. Doúkas nourished his heart and his art on the cultural heritage of the Orthodox East, but he was at the same time excited by the intellectual ferment of the West. He took the messages of modern times that came from the West, decoded them and proceeded to compose a more personal view of the world which he bore within him. Today we may see this as much in his artistic work as in his prose. About the former, of course, I shall not write, as it falls outside my province; but the latter must concern us to the degree that its inner worth compels us.

It would be a great omission at this point to fail to mention the fact that Stratis Doúkas was also the editor of the *avant-garde* magazine *To Trito Mati* [*The Third Eye*, 1935-37], which was to our intellectual life between the wars what the Thessaloniki magazine *Kochlias* [*The Snail*, 1945-47] was in the years after the war: the bridge over which passed restlessly, currents and ideologies from the outside world into Greece.

Doúkas' purely creative work as a prose-writer is restricted in its extent, but a wider or narrower range does not constitute a determinant of quality. In 1929, in the same year as Venézi's *Number 31328*, *The Story of a Captive* was published. The narrative of this work is in the first person, and the narrator is Nikólas Kozákoglou, a refugee from Aídini. Doúkas withdraws discretely into the background, and appears to play an auxiliary part, that of a man moved by a feeling of responsibility for history and the mankind, who tries to write down a testimony: the shattering calamity suffered by one more of the countless victims of the Asia Minor disaster. At the end, as if it were a legal document, the validity of which had to be ratified, Doúkas makes the narrator, the man of the people, confirm with his signature that the deposition is genuine:

«When he'd finished telling me, I said to him: 'Sign your name'. And he wrote 'Nikólas Kazákoglou'»¹.

Nikólas Kazákoglou, along with many other Greeks, was taken prisoner by the Turks. The prisoners' journey from Smyrna to Magnesia and from there to Ahmetli is reminiscent of the corresponding journey in the interior of Asia Minor described by Venézis. The setting of bestiality and barbarism is the same, the difference is only in the external details: hunger, thirst, hardship, degradations in human dignity that raise the victims to the choir of the saints and reduce the perpetrators to the level of animals. But the people say that man's soul is buried very deep, in the very roots of existence. It does not come out easily. The reader is moved as he follows the struggle of these unfortunate people to hold on desperately, as long as any spark of hope for life is left in them.

Kazákoglou escapes from a Turkish village where he and some of his companions have been handed over to the *muhtar* for menial tasks. For months he lives like a troglodyte, hiding in caves and feeding on greenstuff and whatever he can loot. Eventually, however, his endurance begins to weaken, and he decides to pose as a Turk and seek work. Posing as Bekhçet, a refugee from Macedonia, he enters the employ of a rich and good Turkish *kehaya* called Hadjimemétis. When, after some time, he gets the chance, he sets off for Constantinople with false papers; and, as soon as the boat reaches Mytiléne, he presents himself to the captain, reveals his true identity and gives himself up to the Greek authorities. One small bitter episode in a great tragedy.

Doukas' *The Story of a Captive* is a short, concise work, compact and full of vigour. The narrator's simple character admits no chinks in which learned elements may, in unliterary fashion, hide themselves. The narrative nowhere slackens. It has all the power and truth of popular speech, which alone can find the essence of things through the wisdom of instinct. By this work alone Stratis Doukas made certain his place in the history of modern Greek letters.

Doukas' other works, those that are not artistic criticism, have either the character of biography (*The Life of a Saint*) or the form of an itinerary (*The Traveller*).

But he works at the same time—though not consistently—on short stories, with which he blazes trails in our prose-writing; and from this

1. Str. Doukas, *Ἱστορία ἐνὸς Αἰχμαλώτου* [*The Story of a Captive*], Thessaloniki 1969, p. 69.

point of view he may be seen as the forerunner of many writers of the generation of the '60s. George Ioánnou, for example, would not have reached his present maturity so quickly without Stratís Doúkas.

The stories, written in an elliptical style and in a kind of esoteric lyrical monologue, often have all the dramatic quality of the ravings of a man trapped in a collapsed mine-gallery, where the light of day is cut off and the air grows every minute scantier. Death from asphyxia.

In the work with the title «The Darkness of Jonah», the author muses: *«In my hell I find no rest. I stagger like a drunkard. I hit against the walls, which resound in the empty vaults. My eyes grow big from fear. Whispers and knockings frighten me. Where should I seek help? No one reaches here, no voice from anywhere.*

What trial shut me in this inescapable darkness, what demon, holding me here as a toy of its power? My mind is paralyzed. I struggle in vain. Everything will collapse in the end»¹.

These stories represent different stages in Doúkas' individual course as a writer and as a human conscience, and for this reason are very uneven. For instance, the sickly *genre*-story «Spring Concert» sounds very off-key in our ears, which up to this time have been accustomed to other, more dramatic, tones. Collected in one volume, under the title *Earrings* (1974), they are now available to a wider reading public.

The distance covered between *The Story of a Captive* and the stories in the collection *Earrings* is immense; and this difference shows that Doúkas' art and technique were not static. He moved along a broad arc, one end of which is set in solid traditional forms, the other lost in the fluid extremes of modern expression. This difference also shows the youthful vitality of the author, which has kept him always in the front rank: in the line of fire, where you give battle and either lose or win, where you play pitch-and-toss with your life at every moment.

KOSMAS POLITIS (1893-1971)

The prose-writers of the generation of the '30s whom we have looked at up to this point and whom we shall examine later move, to a greater or lesser extent, within the traditional forms of Greek prose. The one, how-

1. Str. Doúkas, *Ἐνώτια [Earrings]*, Athens 1974, p. 15.

ever, who stands out from among his contemporary fellow-artists for his utterly individualistic style and his own manner of writing is Kosmás Politis, who, though born in Athens, was really from Asia Minor, since he spent the years of his youth until the disaster in Smyrna. His narrative style is elliptical, and his heroes often have an unstable outward appearance, while, conversely, even their most imperceptible inner reactions, moods and changes of feelings are recorded; and this record is made in a lyrical, poetic fashion, a basic characteristic of the whole atmosphere created in the works of Kosmás Politis. Plot is basically absent or relegated to a secondary level, for the spotlight is continuously trained upon the human figures, which move in a realm often ill-defined but always charged with a latent eroticism.

We owe many important works to Kosmás Politis: *The Lemon Grove* (1930), *Hecate* (1933), *Eroica* (1938), *Three Women* (1943), *The Plumtree* (1955), *At Chadzifrangos'* (1963) etc.

The novels *Eroica* and *At Chadzifrangos'* are seen as stages in Kosmás Politis' creative course. Both of them belong to that type of prose which is usually called the novel of adolescence. The central figures are children, before whose astonished eyes opens the vista of a world which invites them to win it or lose it. Cloaked in a vague mist of deep mystery, their first erotic desires arise, disturbing their unforewarned souls. The heroes of the two novels, Loizos in *Eroica* and Pandelis in *At Chadzifrangos'*, are also akin in their reactions.

Loizos is a boy full of traumatic experiences who abandons his companions to follow a band of travelling players, in the person of whose mature leading lady he finds a substitute for the motherly love that he has never known; Pandelis is a timid youth who feels a strong erotic attraction towards the middle-aged lady Fióra. The psychological motivations which bring Loizos to the striking actress are at bottom the same as those which, gradually and without passion, lead Pandelis to the autumnal charms of the Jewess: a primeval feeling of insecurity and an obscure need for tenderness and protection.

Politis' last work, *At Chadzifrangos'*, was written when the author was approaching seventy. In this work, in which he succeeded in transcending his own limits, Politis gave us one of the greatest works in our literature, in a word a masterpiece.

The novel, which is dedicated *(to the jubilee of a lost city)*, is about a poor quarter in Smyrna at the beginning of this century, and at the same time recreates in masterly fashion the noisy, bustling, motley

life of that great Greek urban centre and port in Asia Minor. The central figures in it, as has already been mentioned, are the children who play in the vacant lot of Chadzifrángos; but around these children, not just as mere decor but as a part of real life, flows a whole world, with nothing to show that in a few years the great disaster will utterly destroy it.

In the middle of the work, with unusual daring, the story is cut into two, as with an axe, and a chapter entitled «Parodos» is interposed. The term is taken from the ancient Greek drama where the parodos is the entry of the chorus into the orchestra—the beginning of every tragedy. . .

In this interpolated chapter is given, by a leap forward in time, a horrifying description of the Smyrna disaster, by a man of the people, the gardener Yakoumis:

«Gradually there reached my ears a roaring, like a river over rough ground that's flooding over this way and gradually getting closer. And suddenly there burst out from the alleys a mob, headlong, panting, with packs on their shoulders, with babies in their arms, with pots or coffee-mills in their hands—any old thing; silent, not a woman screaming, not an old man groaning, not a baby howling—just the swishing and thudding of feet on the ground. Silent, headlong, with wild faces, they went on.

I put on a pair of trousers over my nightshirt and went down to the square. I fell with them.

—«Where are you folks going?»

They pointed forwards.

—«Stop a bit, there's nothing to be afraid of here, come into our houses, make yourselves at home. Come and have a rest».

They didn't answer, just kept going. They were coming out of hell, brown and red where the fire had caught them. Men are men, after all. You're not too fussy. But the women looked terrible, hair everywhere, covered with filth. One was holding a sieve, another was wearing a feathered hat and going barefoot, and another had loaded a clothes-chest on her shoulder—a young girl, it must have been her dowry. Some were carrying their grannies and grandads on their backs. Two had made a seat out of their hands and were carrying an old man—skin and bone, his chin sunk on his chest. A priest was leading a second group.

—«Where on earth are you going?»

We heard a rapid clatter of feet on some cobbles. The Turks»¹.

This chapter alone serves to enrol *At Chadzifrangos*' in the circle of these pieces of prose written with the motivation of the greatest tra-

1. K. Politis, *Στοιῦ Χατζηφράγκου* [*At Chatzifrangos*], Athens 1963, pp. 185-6.

gedy that Hellenism has ever suffered, the Asia Minor disaster. Along with Elías Venézi's *Number 31328*, Stratis Doúkas' *The Story of a Captive* and Eva Vlami's *Angelica's Dreams*, Kosmás Politis' last work makes up the important things given to us in this area by literature.

In the evaluation of the total impact of the generation of the '30s, K. Politis stands out as one of its most dynamic, original and important representatives. I think that in future years his work will be still further exalted and will command respect as work of great inspiration and ability in composition.

GEORGE THEOTOKAS (1905-1965)

I wrote above about George Theotokás, on the subject of his youthful work *Free Spirit* (1929), which served as the «manifesto» of the generation of the '30s. Theotokás, who died relatively young, worked at almost all types of writing and left behind important literary productions in the form of poems, essays, travel impressions, plays, stories and novels.

At the time of this general review, Theotokás seems more important to me as an essayist. I think that a more severe critical view must be taken today of his creative prose work. For example, Theotokás is best known to the general public for his novel *Argo* (1936), a very ambitious and resounding work, in which the author attempted, through the account of the Notarás family, to set down all the ideological problems and turbulence of his generation. It makes, however, a mediocre work of art. In his other works, where the plot does not permit him to load the book with ideological views and arguments, the aesthetic result is far more satisfactory. These contain truth, or at least some semblance of it. By this I mean that these works lack the atmosphere that puts one in mind of a *salon of savants*; but this gap is filled by life itself, in its perpetual flow of great and small human dramas. The reader will understand the difference noted here if, after reading *Argo*, he tries *The Daemon* (1938) and *Leonís* (1940).

In *The Daemon* we have the Christophís family, all of whose members, the father Christóphoros, the daughter Iphigénia and the sons Romylos and Thomás, bear within them the spirit of genius; they stand

out from others and are unable to communicate with them, because they live in a world in which the measure of worth is different; and they destroy themselves. «I don't know», Romylos confesses, «at certain times I feel that a great force, above my reason and my will, seizes me and draws me along. And not just me, but all my family, each in turn . . . A daemon is playing with us—how very funny. It plays without purpose, it takes us, leaves us, takes us up again, pushes us here and there. He's depraved, and enjoying himself—having fun. Nothing will come of all this, I know. We're a group of failures, lost in the depths of an obscure provincial town»¹.

The work is well-written—better than *Argo*—but there is no truth in it, only the semblance of it. The young children, instead of making love, go up to the castle when the moon is full and act Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As you like it*, *Romeo and Juliet*. There is something cerebral about the work which keeps you at a distance. Iphigénia Christophis is, when it comes to it, an artificial human being, like Frixos Avgoustis in *Patients and Travellers* (1964).

Leonis, on the other hand, is a work that is not only well-written but also relieved from the above shortcomings. It contains many autobiographical elements, remoulded by the author's fertile imagination and nostalgia. In composing *Leonis* he returned to the carefree years when he divided his life between school and play, between the High School and the Taxim Public Gardens in Constantinople. Fears, dreams, love-awakenings, quarrels—this is the material from which Theotokás made his *Leonis*, his most complete work in terms of aesthetic result.

Theotokás last novel, which was published after his death in 1965, passed comparatively unnoticed. It is *The Bells*, whose hero is a self-made man who has succeeded academically, socially and financially; an economist of international standing, the director of a bank, who after

1. G. Theotokás, *Tò Daímónio* [*The Daemon*], Athens 1968, p. 51. See what Theotokás himself writes about his novel *The Daemon* and his main female character there Iphigénia Christophis: «Iphigénia Christophis has many counterparts in our midst unfulfilled, unadapting, and usually ruined—ruined as she is in my book. But she exists, I think, chiefly as a great possibility of the future. I will add, therefore, if forced to explain myself, that the goal of literature is not only to copy, with greater or lesser talent, of what exists in reality (as the army of realists and «naturalists» think), but, further, to express the hidden possibilities of reality, to attempt to bring to life what may exist later. In Iphigénia Christophis I tried to create a forerunning type, to forecast certain girls of the future». *Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς «Ἀργώσ» καὶ τοῦ «Δαιμόνιου»* [*Diary of 'Argo' and The 'Daemon'*], Athens 1939, pp. 64-5.

his marriage to a beautiful girl, the daughter of a professor of the University, entered Athenian high society. Everything goes well for Kóstas Filomátis, whose life is carried on with Prussian discipline under an austere work-programme. Then he suddenly returns radically changed after a trip to America. He has lost his old interest in his work, and worse still, his interest in life.

His wife explains to the psychiatrist on whose help she has staked all her hopes: *«It's incomprehensible. You'd think he has lost his self-confidence, his appetite for work, for action. All the great impetus that drove him continuously, every day, always according to the programme that was part of him, you'd say suddenly collapsed. As if he's in a decline, in doubt about everything, about himself, about his work, about his destiny. He goes on mechanically, half-heartedly, with what he's begun, but I can feel that he doesn't believe in what he's doing any more. He often gives me the impression that he's abstracted, that he doesn't follow what's going on around him. He doesn't even hear. Sometimes he weeps over unimportant things. Imagine, doctor, this strong, unbending man, so much in control of himself, a man who didn't cry when his parents died, weeping like a silly young girl at the cinema»*¹.

Kóstas Filomátis is a descendant; a descendant of a great civilization which is in continual decay. In the midst of the opulence and security that his place in the economic and social life of the country brings him he suddenly realizes that all mortal works are vain and that their fate is to be buried under a heap of rubble. In moments of hallucination he sees New York, Paris, Athens being razed to the ground, disappearing. Panic envelops him. He abandons his job, and his family, causes a scandal with a love-affair, not caring about the afterclap and the effects to his own life and that of others; he runs madly away, and finally reaches Mt. Sinai, where he dies on the Holy Peak after a further deep crisis.

The psychiatrist Dándolos, in his attempt to solve the mystery of Filomátis' life and death, visits Sinai and finds, in a manuscript notebook given to him by the monk Pachoúmios, the key to the interpretation of the causes of the change in the life and behaviour of a man who reached the extreme limits of his existence in an attempt to find an answer and a solution to his agony. Professor Dándolos says, sadly: *«This banker had the unbearable gift of conceiving the possibilities of the future through his malady —whatever that malady was, according to today's scien-*

1. G. Theotokás, *Oi Kampanes* [The Bells], Athens, no date, p. 17.

tific assumptions. In another age, we would have said that he had the gift of prophecy. What a terrible thought: to see what is to come. Not just to think it, but to live it in advance, with the senses, even though it's not real . . . We might say, in a general way, that he was given the ability to visualize the collapse of our civilization, which was Judaic, Hellenic, Roman, and Christian before it became European, industrial, and American. He listened to the bells ringing out danger, alarm, S.O.S., we might say»¹.

This novel too is uneven, or rather typical of Theotokás' merits and shortcomings as a writer. Well-written and interesting; but at many points the cerebral conception of conditions gives it something of the coolness of an essay. Nonetheless, as a witness to our era it remains a staggering work.

1. G. Theotokás, *Οι Καμπάνες*, p. 136.