

George Valetas, *Τῆς Ρωμοσύνης: Δοκίμια* [On Romiosýne: Essays], Athens, "Pighi", 1976, pp. 230.

Veteran literary scholar, creative writer, and cultural historian of New Hellenism George Valetas must be congratulated on his inspired, articulate, and challenging articles titled, *On Romiosýne: Essays*.

Written during a period of constant crises and turmoil in Modern Hellenism, 1943-1960, and first published in magazines and newspapers, these ten short studies explore, analyze, and present various aspects of Modern Greek life and culture, in a semi-independent and informal manner, as they form an organic if flexible whole by their thematic concentration on the many facets and manifestations of *Romiosýne*, or Modern Greekness.

Their titles suggest their particular concerns: 1) "The Resurrection of Romiosýne", 2) "Cavafy, the Rhapsodist of Romiosýne" (The Antiochean Cavafy, Cavafy's Antioch, the Hellenic-Byzantine Cavafy), 3) "*Levendía* and *Pallikariá*", 4) "Early Spring in the Heart of Pedantry", 5) "Meditation, the Fundamental Source of Artistic Creativity", 6) "*Meráki*", 7) "*Kéfi* in Our Life," 8) "The Solitude of the Artist", 9) "The Beauty of the Idea", and 10) "Epistolaria". The collection has an Index of Names, a Table of Contents, and a ... blank page where a "Bibliographical Note" is mentioned (p. 226).

At a first glance the reader realizes that these essays fall into some categories, more or less, though no such organization is suggested by the arrangement or order of the articles. Thus, essays Nos. 3, 6, and 7 deal with idiomatic, colorful, and untranslatable words of colloquial Modern Greek whose origin and usage Mr. Valetas discusses with the zeal of an erudite philologist and the enthusiasm of a folklorist, both of which he is. For instance, he traces the word *μεράκι* to the contacts of the Greeks, not only with their glorious past, but with Arabs, Moslems, and Eastern-Mediterranean cultures for centuries, and adds that *meráki* "leads us to the original sources of art and of the various forms of the worship of beauty, perfection, correctness and distinction" (p. 145). He then draws examples from mythology, folklore, history, classic and recent literature, and folk wisdom to illustrate his statements.

Essays Nos. 5, 8, and 9 are concerned with aesthetics, especially with truth that does not derive from the perusal of philosophical treatises, but comes as a seasoned intellectual awareness and conclusion—as a result of a long life spent studying, contemplating, and enjoying various forms of art. Mr. Valetas recalls Solomos's sentence, "Nobody really lives, unless on his own", and uses it to embark on a profound discourse on the importance of solitude and quiet as prerequisites of creativity (p. 192). In the same spirit he discusses the function of the artist's mental faculties, the process of gathering one's thoughts and meditating for long and exclusively on the object or person that he is contemplating to conceptualize into an art form be it a poem, a statue, or a painting. Again providing numerous examples from famous writers, Mr. Valetas explains the dual nature of *διαλογή* (meditation) as an inner activity of the creative artist that involves all mental and emotional resources at their highest intensity (p. 131).

Studies Nos. 2, 4, and 10 focus on cultural history and literary criticism in a combined, rather than separate, approach or method—as many Greek scholars are wont to do. In No. 10, we read about *Epistolaria*, the Renaissance guides and models for letter writing, which were revived and flourished among the Greeks in the 1800s. For a few generations their cultural value was comparable to that of oratory for the ancients, or the knowledge of foreign languages and communications skills for us. Article No. 4 reveals Mr. Valetas's Solomos-like feelings of impatience with, and indignation at, the curtailment of learning and artistic expression that the sterile *λογωπατισμός*—with its artificial and ossified "purist" language and ancestor worship—had caused to the captive Greek nation. The excesses and ridiculous practices

and beliefs of pedantry are singled-out by means of scholarly allusions to a plethora of authorities and texts. It is worth noting that Mr. Valetas considers the years c. 1848-1863—King Othon's rule—as marking the climax of *logiotatismós* as well as the natural reaction against it, primarily in the activities and writings of Heptanesian intellectuals (Solomos, Valaoritis etc.) and statesmen before the Union with Greece. After 1864, the enemies of pedantry spread their gospel in all of Greece, and by 1880 *logiotatismós* began to decline.

George Valetas sounds very convincing in his insightful discussion of strong elements of *Romiosýne* in some fine demotic poems by Constantine Cavafy—a poet that some pedants had tried to monopolize and claim as their own on account of his classic, Hellenistic, and Byzantine scholarship, and his frequent use of *katharévousa* diction and forms in his lyric utterance. Concentrating on historical, linguistic, and folkloric features in Cavafy's 1921 moving demotic poem "Taken" (Πάρθεν), Mr. Valetas stresses that "Cavafy's demotic and deeply ethnic consciousness is manifested in the impact caused by the archaic Pontian local dialect, the demotic of the Threnody for the Capture of Constantinople, and in what he says in the first three lines about demotic songs and the wars and exploits of the klephts" (p. 51). With equal sensitivity the author, by examining and evaluating the Antiochean and other cultural allusions in Cavafy's lyrics, elaborates on the oversimplified popular notion that Cavafy wrote mostly under a Hellenistic *persona* living in a specific locality, Alexandria.

In the first and longest essay, "The Resurrection of *Romiosýne*", Mr. Valetas traces the Romaic element in Modern Greek literature since the time of the early Byzantine revival of learning. Mentioning practically all major poets in the process he defines Modern Greekness (*Romiosýne*) as a "sonorous and rich-in-meaning word that ... fills the mouth and the soul of every Greek; it is the ethnic and national consciousness of New Hellenism. It marches together with Faith. It is ethnicity in its racial and psychological dimensions" (p. 7).

If this definition sounds complex, let us remember that it took several hundred lines for Yannis Ritsos to define this term and the cultural phenomenon of Modern Hellenism in his celebrated 1945-47 poem "Romiosyne", thus contributing to the arduous process of dignifying this word which, like *Romiós*, had been loaded with derogatory connotations, implying mostly negative aspects in the Modern Greek character and attitude toward existence, ever since the time of well-meaning satirist George Souris.

Published after the official acceptance—though belatedly—of the demotic as the national language (1976), and after the inevitable collapse of the ideological and cultural sterility propagated by the bombastic Junta, George Valetas's book, *On Romiosýne: Essays*, brings a fresh breath to contemporary Greece's intellectual scene and, hopefully, marks the beginning of a long-awaited cultural and social progress toward a Neo-Hellenic Renaissance.

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Constantine C. Papoulidis, *Τὸ κίνημα τῶν Κολλυβάδων* [The Kallyvades Movement], Athens 1971, pp. 111 ["Ecclesiastical Publications for the hundred and fiftieth Anniversary of the Nation", no. 7] and *Μακάριος Νοταρᾶς* [Makarios Notaras], Athens 1974, pp. 155 [same series, no. 14].

The reason we are concerned with the above books of Mr. Papoulidis (who used to teach modern Greek ecclesiastical history at the Orthodox Theological Institute of St. Sergius in Paris, and is now a staff scholar of the Institute for Balkan Studies) in the same series is two-fold: partly that they came from the same pen, and partly that they are so closely related in