

obscure as is the establishment of a garrison in Itanos, perhaps by Ptolemy II Philadelphos, or its activity in the following century. From the limited but direct notices of the historians and the slight and indirect texts of the inscriptions a series of events, persons, and situations can be made out, which, when discussed this way and that, illustrate both the dependence of Cretan events on the actions of the greater powers of the second century and the probability of a corresponding influence of some Cretan events on larger movements. But there is not enough evidence to yield a narrative history.

In such a situation the historian has little reason to speculate about causal connections of the facts. In pointing out the geographic advantages of the region of Itanos for the Ptolemaic policy in the Aegean, Spyridakis cannot go wrong. Moreover he will probably not strain the reader's credulity if he finds the clues to the causes of domestic warfare in Eastern Crete, even as late as the second century B.C., in the presence of Eteocretan as well as Cretan cities, in the unintelligible inscriptions of Praesos, in the disappearance of the civilization of the Bronze Age and the subsequent Hellenization of Crete, or in the inevitability of armed conflict between neighboring people of different language and culture. But the merit of this book lies rather in the clear statement of evidence newly assembled from scattered sources.

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A Review of *Agenda*, Winter 1969, Greek Poetry Special Issue, edited by Peter Levi, SJ.

*In His Editorial* to this special issue, Peter Levi rightly observes that "from such a wide field, any particular selection of pieces is bound to look a bit ragged." Having pointed this out, however, he goes on to make claims for an over-all cohesive plan behind this present anthology. "We wanted to show," he continues, "modern and ancient Greek in some kind of living relation, and to understand them both in English terms."

The collection contains some interesting items, each of which could be discussed on its merits. But since the editorial exists hinting that we should look for a relation between the different contributions, we cannot ignore it. This is unfortunate because "to show modern and ancient Greek

in some kind of living relation" is very difficult even for Greek writers writing in Greek; to add to this the task of "understanding them both in English terms" is to render the whole enterprise virtually impossible—all the more so when confined to a periodical of only ninety or so pages.

"The influence of Greek poetry in modern English is not the mainstream of our development," writes Father Levi in a masterly understatement. It most certainly is not, as he himself demonstrates with some far-fetched examples: "Shakespeare's Greece was an imaginary country... Milton nearly became the father of Greek archaeology... Alexander Pope once projected a visit to Greece, and the midshipman poet Falconer seems to have been shipwrecked off Sounion..." (What he means, incidentally, by calling Pope "the great alternative to Shakespeare in English poetry," heaven only knows.) He is happier when he comes to Shelley and Byron.

Certainly a lot of English poetry owes a tremendous amount to that almost extinct phenomenon known as a classical education, of which ancient Greek literature (not only poetry) formed an important part. It would be absurd to deny the extensive use which English poets have made of ancient Greek writers, but we ought not to forget that their material came to them coloured by the Western ideas of the Renaissance and always inextricably bound up with Latin literature as well.

Curiously enough, although Father Levi talks of "English terms" and "modern English," he cites Ezra Pound and Robert Lowell, not to mention the americanised Auden and the American *manqué* Eliot. But American cannot possibly be lumped in with English literature. The use which Ezra Pound makes of Sophocles, for instance, is interesting and significant just because the Americans (even if their Greek is sometimes shaky) can come to immediate grips with the ancient Greeks without falling over all the splendid but cumbersome impedimenta which strew the way of the English (or indeed the European) writer—dictionaries, grammars, graduses, manuals on prose composition, indices to the tragedians, encyclopaedias, pages and pages of *apparatus criticus* and all the rest.

On the other hand, if English poets cannot always discern the wood for the trees, Americans sometimes seem so far away that they cannot see the wood at all. A case in point is the extracts from Robert Lowell's *Prometheus Bound* which read like parts of the scenario for a film which wants to seem highbrow, yet at the same time feels it ought to apologise for its egg-headedness. This sort of writing reflects a modern trend (not only American) towards a kind of literary tourism. One 'does' Europe in

seven days and on returning cannot quite remember which works go with which writers or which countries the latter belong to. In fairness let it be said that most of the contributors to this *Agenda* are not tourists, but one still senses a certain casualness, a superficiality of approach which one would never find in a similar compilation of, say, German, French or Italian literature. G. H. Hardy, the distinguished mathematician, wrote: "The Greeks first spoke a language which modern mathematicians can understand; as Littlewood said to me once, they are not clever school-boys or 'scholarship candidates' but 'Fellows of another college'." It is high time those who deal with literary matters followed the lead of the mathematicians.

Perhaps we can understand ancient Greek poetry "in English terms" (if we can first understand what Father Levi means by that expression), though whether it is profitable to do so is another question. But Byzantine and modern Greek poetry can surely only be understood in Greek terms. The West in general and England in particular are not yet sufficiently familiar with this new (perhaps a better term than 'modern' to be used in contrast with 'ancient') Greek poetry to be able to view it from the perspective of their own heritage. Even in translation, paradoxically enough, poets from Kassia the nun to Sepheris the diplomat can only be really appreciated by foreigners who know either modern Greece or modern Greek or, preferably, both. It is at best misleading, at worst downright dangerous, to approach a translation of, say, *Axion Esti* by Elytis in the same spirit as we (ie. English readers) would approach, for instance, David Jones' *Anathemata*.

It would be unfair to say that this special issue has failed to understand modern and ancient Greek poetry in English terms, since the task was an impossible one anyway. What about its other avowed aim — "to show modern and ancient Greek in some kind of living relation?" The anthology fails here too, because success could only have been achieved by a much larger and, above all, by a much better balanced selection. If we remove the editorial with its grandiose claims, we are left with nothing more or less than a version of that peculiarly English institution, the School Magazine.

The contents of school magazines are inevitably esoteric, of uneven quality, and utterly unrelated to each other. This one is no exception. There are items by various pupils at the school, from the Head Boy down to the small fry of the first forms. Certain past pupils and members of the

staff have also made contributions. Certain others are conspicuous by their absence – Romanos the Melodist, Solomos, Palamas, Sikelianos, Kazantzakis (have any of his shorter poems, apart from the one at the end of *Report to El Greco*, been translated?), as well as several living poets. Indeed, not a single nineteenth century writer makes the grade, while the whole of Cretan poetry is represented by a short, unattractive extract from the *Erotokritos* which conveys nothing of the original at all. (*Erotokritos*, of course, was written in the middle of the seventeenth century and so could hardly have been published, as a footnote informs us, in the sixteenth century).

Bearing in mind that the editorial is obviously a try-on and that, in fact, Father Levi (doubtless only after considerable activity and editorial labour) is presenting here such Greek bits and pieces as he could get hold of in the English language, we can now turn to those bits and pieces to see what they are.

Most of them are translations of poetry ranging, chronologically, from Peter Jay's renderings of four Homeric Hymns to a poem by Nikos Gatsos dated 29th September, 1968. This range in other terms is rather more limited. Out of 57 pages of poetry, Sopheris and Elytis share 33, while eleven other named poets plus several anonymous ones crowd into the remaining 24.

The translations are nearly all adequate, but they are also unexciting. They lack the spark of their prototypes. Kathleen Raine's sensitive version of the Hymn of Kassia is perhaps the only piece where we feel that the translator has really experienced and reproduced not only the explicit meaning of the original but also the feeling behind it. Otherwise we are given the impression that most Greek poetry down the ages has been written in fairly uniform *vers libre*, though Peter Jay from time to time breaks into hexameters of the down-in-a-deep-dark-hole-sat-an-old-sow-munching-a-beanstalk type. This alarming sameness extends to the language too and, far from revealing some wonderful, mystic relation between all the poets, only shows that none of the translators possesses that sheer pleasure in words that is a feature of most, if not all of the originals. But who can blame a translator if he fails to transfer living demotic verbs, nouns and adjectives, bathed in sunlight and sea, into a language whose demotic is moribund and wreathed in that notorious fog, one of the two characteristics of the English scene about which every Greek knows?

Apart from the poetry, there are some jottings by Sepheris called *Conversation with Fabrice* (a pseudonym for George Theotokas) anonymously and inaccurately translated — eg. Ion Dragoumis becomes 'the Ionian Dragoumis'; a review by Peter Levi of Ezra Pound's translation (*sic*) of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*; an extraordinary piece entitled *The Irrelevance of Incest to Oedipus* by N.K. Sandars who appears never to have heard of Claude Lévi-Strauss; a review by J.B. McLaughlin of Sir Maurice Bowra's *Pindar*; a long, useful essay on *The Literary-Historical Back-ground of Modern Greek Literature* by Robin Fletcher; and, of all things, some notes by Ghika on his translation into Greek of Edward Lear's nonsense poem *The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo* which, without the poem they refer to, are merely tantalising. (Incidentally Ghika's translation has now been published with the very same cover as adorns this issue of *Agenda* and is described rather ambiguously as having been "drawn specially by N.H. Ghika").

It can be seen, then, what a complete hotch-potch this Greek *Agenda* is. As was intimated at the beginning of this critique, provided we forget any pretensions to an over-all theme or purpose, this collection of oddments is not without value. It would be unlikely to enlighten any reader previously unacquainted with Greek literature or one conversant only with ancient Greek writers who was curious to see what course the literature had taken in more recent times. But for those who are already at various stages along the path towards initiation, it provides some useful clues as to the nature of the mysteries.

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Kosta St. Pavlovich, *Razgovori sa Slobodanom Jovanovicem, 1941-1945*. (Conversations with Slobodan Yovanovich, 1941-1945) Windsor Ontario: Avala Publishing Co., 1969. Pp. 102.

This small volume is in fact the political diary of the Chief of Cabinet of the Royal Yugoslav Government-in-exile under Prime Minister Slobodan Yovanovich. It deals essentially with the reasons which led Churchill's Government to abandon the Serbs and their leader, General Mihailovich, and to side instead with Tito's guerrillas in the 1941-1945 civil war in occupied Yugoslavia. It reveals for the first time in print the