

Critical Times, Critical Thoughts

Critical Times, Critical Thoughts:

*Contemporary Greek Writers
Discuss Facts and Fiction*

Edited by

Natasha Lemos and Eleni Yannakakis

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8274-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8274-3

*Dedicated to the memory
of Niki Marangou*

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PREFACE

The publication of this volume was inspired by and is partly based on a series of literary discussions organised by the Hellenic Centre in London between February and October 2011, about a year after the Greek crisis, which is still evolving today, had first impinged on public consciousness.

The Hellenic Centre is a cultural organisation whose aim is to promote Greek and Greek Cypriot culture not only to the Greek and Greek Cypriot diaspora but also to the multicultural public of London. The literary discussions were convened and chaired by Eleni Yannakakis. Two of the sessions were dedicated respectively to the “Other” and to the role of the historical novel in contemporary Greek fiction. Greek authors, critics and academics were invited to discuss how ethnic, cultural, religious or gendered otherness is handled in contemporary Greek literature as well as the development and the importance of the historical novel in it. Particular attention was paid to the development of these themes during the current economic crisis. In the third session Greek and Greek Cypriot authors, critics and academics discussed the representation of Cyprus in contemporary Greek literature.

The present volume is divided into four sections. Their subjects are the Other, the historical novel, the detective novel and aspects of Greek Cypriot literature. The detective novel, a genre of Greek literature that has boomed recently, was not discussed in 2011; however, as it appears to be the genre par excellence which deals with the crisis in Greece as well as what preceded and prepared the ground for it, it seems to us a very useful addition to the book.

By commissioning essays in the original Greek from the pens of major Greek and Greek-Cypriot writers and critics we hope to make available new insights into a crisis which the public has come to know primarily through journalistic refraction of the views of politicians, economists and international bureaucrats. Written mostly in 2014 the essays are “the latest” on the crisis not in the manner of a news bulletin from yesterday’s midnight meeting in Brussels, Athens or Berlin but in reflection on the underlying patterns that made the crisis possible and make it endure. The

essays are not only reflections on the crisis they are reflections of it and accordingly the conventional fatuity, that the views expressed are those of the respective author and not of the editors or the publisher, must be stated with added meaning. Each essay is in itself a separate document of the crisis and we have not attempted to impose any uniformity or consistency in style or content. Readers will notice this most obviously in the transliteration of proper names where we have allowed each contributor to present himself or herself in Latin script as he or she prefers. The only general rule we have imposed is to use English versions of names which have become common currency (e.g. Athens, Cavafy).

We were delighted that a writer as eminent as Niki Marangou participated in the session on Cyprus and we deeply regret that her untimely and lamented death has deprived readers of this book of what would undoubtedly have been an illuminating text. All the contributors heartily endorsed our decision to dedicate it to her memory as a mark of our common affection and respect.

We would like to express our thanks to Agathe Kalisperas, the director of the Hellenic Centre, and to the members of its Executive Board for organising and hosting the literary discussions, as well as to the Hellenic Foundation for its grant in their support.

The Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation responded speedily to our request to reproduce the artist's splendid "Thinker" on the front cover and we are grateful to Niki Gripari and Vaso Tzouti for their help as well as to Evita Arapoglou and Irini Geroulanou for their unhesitating assistance.

We would also like to express our special thanks to Edmée Leventis for her extremely helpful advice throughout the preparation of this volume as well as to Constantis Candounas, Nadia Haralampidou and Frangiski Ambatzopoulou. We are grateful also to Polymnia Athanassiadi for her kind assistance in the preparation of the index.

Particular thanks are due to George Lemos for his tireless support which included extensive discussion of knotty points in the text, assistance with the technicalities of word processing and help with the proofs.

Publication of the present volume would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Hellenic Foundation for the translation from Greek to English by Liadain Sherrard and we thank them

both very much. To Liadain we owe the English of the entire book except the introduction and the chapters by Angela Dimitrakaki and Miltiades Hatzopoulos, which were the only parts originally written in English, and the chapter by Vangelis Hatzivasileiou which was translated by Eleni Yannakakis. But we owe much more to Liadain than the prompt delivery of idiomatic translations of sometimes allusive and difficult texts. Her attention to detail throughout the gestation of the book has been quite tireless and its production in every respect would have been impossible without her contributions. She fully deserves a place of particular emphasis in this record of our debts.

Finally we would like to express our gratitude to the authors of the chapters of the present volume who devoted their time and generously offered their contributions for this publication.

London 2015

INTRODUCTION

ELENI YANNAKAKIS AND NATASHA LEMOS

In 2004 one of the editors of the present volume celebrated the gradual Europeanisation and even globalisation of the Modern Greek literature and culture of the preceding two decades which appeared to be heading at full speed towards unification and convergence with a common European culture (Mackridge and Yannakakis 2004b); certainly this significant change, as it was interpreted at that time, was thought to be the result of many historico-political factors, not least financial. She and her co-editor wrote back then:

The two decades following Greece's official entry into the European Union have been marked by political stability and an unprecedented economic growth which to a great degree is the result of aid flows channeled into Greece through the Community Support Framework. This combination of political stability and affluence has resulted in a sense of well-being among Greeks, who have developed highly consumerist patterns of behaviour, manifested in the purchase of lifestyle goods, access to information from the internet and the international media, and the ability to travel extensively and to study abroad, both in Europe and further afield. These patterns in their turn reinforce Greeks' sense of feeling European through the adoption of a lifestyle that people in the West have or are assumed to have. It also reinforces their gradual move away from a traditional and typically Greek way of life in favour of more internationalised patterns of behaviour.

Ten years on this process appears quite different, if not already reversed. As the flow of affluence from Europe has frozen, the love-affair of the Greeks with Europe and the rest of the industrialised world seems to have entered an ice age too. In 2014 and amid the economic recession, which in 2012 had led to a near default of Greece, only 45% of Greeks felt themselves to be European citizens, 23% had a positive image of the EU and 23%, again, felt that their voice counts in the EU, as the blame for their recent financial misfortunes was directed entirely at Europe and those countries in particular which are at the centre of the Union's financial

decision-making (European Commission 2014). Despite all this, 63% of Greeks, according to the same survey, want Greece to stay in the Eurozone, apparently for reasons of political and national security (given for instance the century-long tense relations with Turkey and a history of dictatorial regimes during the previous century) rather than strongly felt cultural allegiances.

As loudly expressed by the recently elected leftist coalition government in Greece¹, free-market Europe is directly accused of a lack of understanding for the specific needs of the Greek people, thus emphasising the various cultural differences between Greece and (mainly) northern European countries in terms of institutions and value systems in general. As a renowned Greek novelist, Petros Markaris, put it as early as 2012 at the beginning of the Greek financial crisis because of “the austerity woes and credit support a common set of European values is being lost” (Shuka 2012).

The European cultural background

Greece’s cultural relationship with Europe did not start in 1981, when Greece became a full member of European Economic Community, or in 1974, with the termination of Greece’s last dictatorship. It has been a peculiar love and hate affair which goes back to the establishment of the modern Greek state in the early 1830s and even beyond. As a matter of fact the very establishment of the young Greek state itself was to a great extent brought about by two European countries, Britain and France in alliance with Russia; the ideological preparation for Greece’s war of independence from Ottoman rule originated on European soil among a Greek-speaking élite which either travelled or lived there and was substantially influenced by Western European ideas originating in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (Tsoukalas 1993).

Greece’s relationship with Europe, not so much on political as on cultural grounds, can be likened to a pendulum constantly swinging from the position of an allegiance to whatever Europe represents to a position of aversion and thus a turn towards the East, which in a Greek context refers historically and culturally to the Byzantine and the Greek Orthodox tradition; this latter Eastern orientation had been cultivated and fed on an

¹ This coalition, though, includes ANEL, a nationalistic right wing party.

irredentism directed towards Greece's Eastern and Northern borders. The irredentist ambitions of that time, however, were conclusively ended in 1922-3. Greece was heavily defeated by the Turks in Asia Minor and recognised the results of that defeat by the Treaty of Lausanne which set its geographical borders approximately where they are today.²

Soon after, Greece decisively turned towards the West culturally and this was marked by the publication in 1929 of a booklet by the European-educated intellectual and novelist, George Theotokas, in which he loudly urged the Greek and the young generation of his time to reject the nationalist ideals of the past and espouse Europe in both lifestyle and modes of writing and art. Thus, it is not accidental that the literary production which followed in the first half of the 1930s, apart from being truly important for the whole of Modern Greek literary history, has also been by far the most "European" production--though not so much in the spirit as in the letter. This pro-European attitude showed signs of reversion, in the second half of the 1930s and chiefly after the imposition of Metaxas's dictatorship in 1936, because of reactions from certain Greek intellectuals and calls for a redefinition of Greek cultural identity (Vitti 1982; Beaton 1994; Tziouvas 2011). This ideological reversal consequently yielded a body of literature inspired in its entirety by Greece's local historical past. This inward tendency continued and became even stronger during the 1940s.

In the post-war period and during the Cold War Greece was polarised again between these two ideological and cultural orientations, because of a series of local socio-historical events (the Greek Civil War, the Greek-Cypriot fight for liberation from British rule and union with Greece). This very turbulent time, which culminated politically in the imposition of the Colonels' dictatorship between 1967 and 1974, certainly affected the general mood regarding these two possible orientations. More specifically the imposition of the dictatorship led to the isolation of Greece from Europe--Greece withdrew from the Council of Europe rather than face condemnation for human rights violations--and thus to an inward turn among the Greeks themselves. As a response to the imposed censorship leading writers initially stopped publishing while liaising with their European counterparts became really difficult. European contact was

² This defeat was followed by an exchange of minorities between the two countries in which about 1.5 million Orthodox Christian refugees ended up in Greece (Hirschon 2003).

restored after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 and was intensified after Greece joined the European Economic Community in 1981.

The recent crisis seems to have closed a 40-year parenthesis of a close Greek-Europe relationship which opened in terms of both literature and broader culture in 1974.

The literary background: Greek literature before the Crisis

No discussion of contemporary Greek fiction can ignore the impact of 1974, the year when democracy was restored in Greece after the last of the dictatorships which were imposed on Greece during the 20th century. This year was both an ideological and an aesthetic turning point not only for the Greek novel but also for Greek culture in general. Greek fiction during the thirty six years between 1974 and 2010 was considerably different from that of the pre-1974 period; during the longest ever period of democracy, and particularly after Greece's admission to the European Union in 1981, Greek literature gradually became dynamic, outward looking and, most importantly, in closer communication than ever before with contemporary ideas and movements outside the Greek borders, a trend that has lasted until very recently (Yannakakis 2012).

A defining characteristic of post-1974 Greek fiction is its gradual depoliticisation, as compared to the fiction of the 1940s and 1950s for instance, which can be partly explained anthropologically and sociologically by the rise of individualism in Greece in recent years. Greek society became increasingly more atomised; its ideological perspective changed and collective ideals gave place to more individualistic objectives. The focus shifted to personal well-being and self-interest at the expense of interest in public affairs and politics (Tziovas 2004). According to this view the rise of individualism in contemporary Greek society was in its turn partly attributable to the waning role of the nation-state in Greece and elsewhere due to globalisation and also to the decline of the Greek Left, which favoured collective ideals and promoted "a sense of duty toward it [the people] as the ultimate moral principle for ensuring social solidarity and ideological conformity" (Tziovas 2003: 216).

Although politics continued to dominate fiction for some time after 1974, the writers who made their debut after this year began to treat the politics of the immediate past more subjectively: thematically a hostile

political environment formed the background against which the developing consciousness of the characters was depicted. As early as only one year after the restoration of democracy the displacement of the political by a more personal and subjective perspective is detected in Aris Alexandrou's seminal novel, *The Mission Box* (1974), in which subjection to any (political) ideology was radically challenged. A similar perspective was adopted by other authors, such as Maro Douka in *Fool's Gold* (1979), the first novel to deal with the problems of the so-called "Generation of the Polytechnic", which includes young people, mainly students, who in 1973 revolted against the military regime and paved the way for the restoration of democracy in Greece (Tziovas 2003).

Till approximately 2010 there was a gradual erosion of political consensus among the Greek reading public. Readers did not necessarily follow the political and historical views expressed by an earlier generation of fiction writers. Thus, writers had to address a readership that became not only depoliticised and individualised but also more diverse in cultural, ethnic and/or religious terms. Greek fiction had to adapt to these new conditions. Writers who first appeared in the 1980s dealt almost exclusively with themes of a personal and everyday nature. This tendency became even more pronounced in the 1990s. Such novels are: *The Prank* (1982) by Ersi Sotiropoulou, *The Cicadas* (1985) by Vangelis Raptopoulos, *Beast's Heart* (1987) by Petros Tatsopoulos or *The Voice* (1998) by Christos Chomenidis. Politics, if mentioned at all, either functioned as a purely decorative element (an indicator of locality, for example) or was presented negatively. The recent "personalisation" of literature resulted in a body of fiction with a thematic focus on the everyday, the private and the ephemeral in most cases.

Despite the fact that realism, a major feature of the pre-dictatorship novel, still maintained its grip on post-1974 fiction, these novels appeared increasingly multiform in the sense that Modernism (with its techniques of interior monologue, free indirect speech, self-referentiality and the non-realistic functioning of time and space), thought to have been introduced into Greece in the 1930s, was here combined with forms usually encountered in postmodern fiction, such as the transgression of traditional boundaries between different genres, media and modes of discourse, and the construction of parodies, fantasies, utopias and dystopias. Other significant changes in post-1974 fiction include the predominant use of first-person narrative, as one might expect in fiction of a subjective, often autobiographical nature (autobiography itself has been a rapidly growing

genre in the last twenty-five years); a narrowing of the gap between narrator and characters; the use of real or invented historical or journalistic documents, and the use of email and other forms of web communication.

There also seems to have been a radical shift in the use of language: Greek fiction abandoned the embellished prose of inter-war Modernism, in favour of a representational, journalistic type of discourse that emphasised the “what” rather than the “how” of narration. This tendency began to emerge in the 1990s and continued through post-2000 fiction. Here the referential use of language can be partly explained by the fact that younger generations of writers (the generation of television and the internet) have had less exposure to the older Greek literary tradition and its linguistic usage and more to foreign, particularly American, fiction (quite often read in the original) and also to the culture of the screen image. Thus, some writers used a form of discourse based on oral communication, in which common colloquialisms were juxtaposed with the idiolects of specific social groups or with different Greek dialects while the use of a non-Greek (mainly English) vocabulary became more and more frequent on the assumption of Greek readers’ familiarity with other European languages.

The settings of the stories also changed: from a recognisably Greek setting in the fiction of the post-war generations, there was a move to a kind of cosmopolitanism, especially after the beginning of the 1990s. This new cosmopolitanism was very different in nature from the superficial, undigested and largely decorative depiction of “abroad” in the (Modernist) fiction of the early 1930s. It now derived rather from the globalisation of culture but also from a general affluence, mainly the fact that both actual long-distance travel and virtual travel on the open highways of the web became ordinary activities amongst almost all social strata in Greece (Mackridge and Yannakakis 2004b).

An opening-up of the geographical space of narrative fiction often coincides with more frequent representations of the national or ethnic Other. In most contemporary Greek fiction, the Other, particularly when s/he comes from the Balkans, Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union, has been portrayed in a non-stereotypical way. Wherever immigrants arriving in Greece are depicted, the reader is frequently invited to share the perspective and emotional world of these characters in the course of their interactions with native Greeks, who are often portrayed as treating them in a far from friendly manner. Examples are novels such as *Kilroy Was Here* (1992) by Dionysis Haritopoulos, *Broken Greek* (2000) by Thanassis

Cheimonas, *Mirupafshim* (2000) by Christos Voupouras and Yorgos Korras, *God Tells Them* (2002) by Sotiris Dimitriou and *On the Opposite Shore* (2009) by Tilemachos Kotsias.

Another noteworthy feature of post-1974 Greek fiction is the unprecedented rise in the number of women novelists appearing on the literary scene. The general boom in the Greek publishing industry leading to a huge increase in the number of fiction titles published every year, which lasted until the emergence of the financial crisis, meant that there were more opportunities for women writers to secure publishers. It has also been the case that the majority of today's consumers of fiction are women. Women writers, who were clearly aware that they had a greater likelihood of being read by women than by men, were bound to choose their themes accordingly: for example, women readers might have a preference for fiction about family life or personal and love-related problems. But, irrespective of any such market-driven choices, women's writing worldwide tends to be more subjective and personal than men's, which may in itself account for the recent significant rise in this type of fiction (Tziovas 2003). An increasing number of Greek novels written by women have adopted a particular gendered and very often feminist perspective, as in *Kassandra and the Wolf* (1976) and *Sleepwalker* (1985) by Margarita Karapanou, *I, the Sun, Am Going Down* (1997) by Maria Mitsora, *Eleni, or Nobody* (1998) by Rhea Galanaki and *Inside a Girl like You* (2009) by Angela Dimitrakaki.

Some mention should be made of the revival of genres such as the historical novel and detective fiction in post-1974 fiction and particularly in the early 1990s and after. The historical novel can be seen as an indirect return of the political and collective spirit, in the sense that writers are re-evaluating the historical past (sometimes as far back as antiquity) from a contemporary ideological and theoretical perspective, in order to comment obliquely on the present. This approach, which is discussed in detail by some of our contributors, manifested itself in two kinds of novel. The first scanned an entire period (when important historical events may or may not be happening) as the socio-political background of the novel's plot and fictional characters. The second offered a fictionalised or wholly fictional biography of greater or lesser historical figures. One example of the latter is Rhea Galanaki's *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* (1989) regarded as inaugurating the revival of the historical novel in post-1974 Greek fiction. Other such novels are *Captain Agras's Sound-Novel* (1994) by Panos

Theodoridis, *Come Forth, King* (1995), *Innocent and Guilty* (2004) both by Maro Douka, and *The Pencil Factory* (2000) by Soti Triantafyllou.

What is interesting about this turn to the past is the modern ideological perspective from which it is presented. At a time when history itself is increasingly viewed as historiography and Greek society has grown almost completely free of the ideological polarisation which had kept it divided until the 1970s, perspective has become paramount: fictional representations of the past have started showing an awareness of their own relativistic and often biased nature. As is the case in other contemporary literary genres, it has become increasingly irrelevant for the authors of these novels to take a position on one side or the other of ideological or cultural conflicts such as those of Muslim versus Christian, left-wing versus right-wing, Greek versus non-Greek, man versus woman, even though they attempt to depict as faithfully as possible the historical and cultural reality of a past in which such conflicts mattered. Examples of such novels are *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* by Rhea Galanaki, *The Waters of the Peninsula* (1998) by Theodoros Grigoriadis and *What Do the Barbarians Want* (2008) by Dimosthenis Kourtovik.

Detective fiction, previously regarded as rather a minor and “inferior” genre, has recently witnessed an unprecedented rise especially since the 1990s. Interestingly, contemporary Greek detective fiction represents everyday social reality, as well as offering social and political commentary more accurately and extensively than any other current genre. In contemporary Greek detective novels greater emphasis seems to be given to the creation of well-rounded characters and the elucidation of the motives (social, political or psychological) behind their actions than to the solutions of the crimes themselves (Yannakakis 2012). It is considered the most “appropriate” genre for the representation of the current crisis, as the contributors to Part III of this book also point out. Examples of such detective novels are: *Night News* (1995) and *Core Shareholder* (2006) by Petros Markaris, *Goodbye Thessaloniki* (1999) by Filippos Filippou, *The Belated Regrets of Mr Marios* (1999) by Marlena Politopoulou and *Black Beer* (2011) by Vassilis Danellis.

Crisis and Literature

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the (Greek) word crisis is defined as “a time of intense difficulty or danger” and more specifically, as “a time when a difficult or important decision must be made”; also as

“the turning point of a disease when an important change takes place indicating either recovery or death”. With the Greek financial crisis still unabated we cannot predict when and if a decisive step will be taken or what the final outcome will be; certainly this is not part of the scope and intention of this volume, particularly as this crisis is not a unique and solely Greek malaise. Crisis talk started in the United States in 2007 with the sub-prime housing crash followed by the 2008 Lehman Brothers collapse and its spread to Europe, with Greece and some other South European countries being seriously affected from 2009.

Though not originating locally it tapped specific weaknesses in each of these countries and thus resulted in a full-blown recession across the whole of Europe. Analysing the causes, global and domestic, of this recent and still ongoing problem is beyond the scope of this book. However, at least in Greece’s case we can say that the crisis was not merely a matter of finance but had deep political and cultural causes whose imprint we might expect to find in creative literature. The purpose of this book is precisely to investigate how writers and other intellectuals have perceived the crisis and, when possible, how it is reflected in their works. Nor should we forget that literature may not be limited to reflecting the culture and politics of the society in which it was created but may also have, whether deliberately or not, a transformative function.

Historically crises in the past have led to literary masterpieces in many countries; we can think at once of Doblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) among several others. An example of literature’s reverse role in its transformative function altering the fate of peoples and societies is Ayn Rand’s novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), whose praise of laissez-faire economics is thought to have influenced Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve between 1987 and 2006; his policies in turn are considered by many to have contributed to the housing bubble whose puncture brought about the subsequent global financial crisis (Brokaw 2012).

Talking in 2008 about the current Spanish crisis in connection with literary production, the Peruvian novelist Vargas Llosa was reported to have pronounced it “very stimulating” for literature and to have predicted a “good period” for literary creativity (Latin American Herald Tribune 2008). On a similar note, Joan Ramon Resina sees in literature “a logbook of past crises, both individual and collective” as literature shows:

not by way of example but by way of presentation, countless dramas and reactions to physical or moral ruin, and may actually strengthen the individual's capacity to weather them (Goldman 2012).

On a different note the Greek novelist Petros Markaris sees it as the duty of the intellectuals to act in such a way that via their work they help with bridging the cultural chasms created between individual European countries due to the crisis; otherwise, he says: "we'll get over the crisis, but be so apart from one another, that we can no longer find each other again." (Shuka 2012).

On the other side of the Atlantic, the current crisis has even yielded a new literary sub-genre already according to certain critics: it is named "credit-crunch", "post-crisis", "post-crash" or even "post-Lehman's novel" and aims to act as a seismograph of the repercussions and traumas of the financial crash on individuals and social groups, from financiers and politicians themselves to families struggling to survive and young people failing to find a job.³ This new genre is considered a sequel to the "post-9/11 novel" which was the immediate reaction of literature to the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York.⁴

There seems to be no equivalent genre name in Greece at the moment despite the fact that critics have already started speaking vaguely about the novel of the crisis in very broad and unsystematic terms (Boura and Chartoulari 2013). The recent recession did not only alter the Greeks' feelings towards Europe and their lifestyle, as we discussed above, but to some extent, as a result, the themes and ideology of contemporary Greek fiction. Though it is too early for literary critics and researchers thoroughly to assess the new works and reach sound conclusions, it is obvious that substantial changes have already taken place.⁵

As observed in connection with the non-Greek post-crisis novel, there have been some reservations regarding the quality of this fiction. These are

³ Such works of fiction are, Don DeLillo's *Hammer and Sickle* (2010) (short-story), Leah Hager Cohen's *The Grief of Others* (2011), Christina Alger's *The Darlings* (2012), as well as two by British writers, Sebastian Faulks's *A Week in December* (2007) and John Lanchester's *Capital* (2012).

⁴ For example Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) or Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008).

⁵ An early conclusion though is that there seems to be an abrupt return to the ideology and values of collective sentiment and experience (Hatzivasileiou 2016).

attributable to the fact that the works in question are an immediate and undigested reaction to the crisis rather than the product of mature reflection (Ziras 2014; Hatzivasileiou 2016). An additional reason proposed by Gelinas is that the representation of the crisis cannot be adequate and persuasive, if the causes of the crisis are not up to now widely understood even by bankers themselves or by public American and British prosecutors, who find difficulties in bringing criminal cases (Gelinas 2012).

The approach of contemporary Greek writers to the current crisis varies in terms of themes, choice of a particular genre and modes of discourse: some of the writers describe in detail the new everyday struggle to survive financially in such a stifling environment, others try and detect some of the reasons of the local crisis (ie. corruption), some construct utopian fantasies, while yet others (the detective novel writers), like their non-Greek counterparts, attempt to delve deep into the social cause of the crisis by immersing themselves in the corrupt world of politicians or bankers--it seems almost the only category of novelists who employ local or international financiers as characters (Hatzivasileiou 2016).

The contributions to this volume

This is the first book in any language to offer such a timely account of the response of the Greek writers and intellectuals to the ongoing financial crisis. More importantly it is the first book to publicise the direct personal views of a representative range of very eminent literary figures in Modern Greek Literature on this challenging issue.

The four parts of the volume deal with representation of Otherness, contemporary historical fiction, the new detective novel and Greek Cypriot fiction, while the Introduction offers an overview of Modern Greek fiction and culture over the last 40 years.

In Part I Angela Dimitrakaki discusses her own ideological and thematic choices in the context of her view that deeply woven “discursive” fascism in contemporary Greek society constructs Others, first among the Greeks themselves (mainly the economic pariahs) and then among the racial, religious and gendered Others (mainly immigrants) in the Greece of the crisis; in addition, she points out that the media operate in a way which inhibits the active participation of intellectuals or indeed any dissenter. In a quite confessional mode, Grigoriadis discusses the stimuli behind his

own decision to write about--or include--the Other in his fiction; equally, he analyses the difficulties writers in general face in Greece when they decide to engage with Otherness but also the impact of the crisis on both the real and the fictional relationship with the Other--mainly the non-Christian economic immigrant. On the other hand, Tilemachos Kotsias, an ethnic Greek from Albania, gives an account of his own personal experiences as a double Other: first, in his native Albania, as coming from the “wrong”, non-communist family and then later in Greece as an immigrant. Not surprisingly, this double Otherness and the problems of illegal immigrants in Greece are the themes of his novels. Finally, Mikela Chartoulari casts light on the construction of the various Greek Others as a result of the crisis and how this is dealt--or not dealt--with in contemporary Greek fiction. As a critic she attempts to map the literary scene of contemporary Greek fiction with reference to the theme of the Other. She sees 2008 as a turning point in this type of literature. Before 2008 fiction aimed at re-negotiating any rigid (and racist) views of Greek society, while since 2008 it has become a protest against those who have been affected by the crisis not only financially but also politically (eg. by resurgence of violence).

In Part II, Rhea Galanaki wrote that literature is a source of knowledge so that writing about the past is a way of better understanding the present and more importantly understanding the “human tragedy”, which in her view is the ultimate aim of literature; in this light too a writer can turn to the past in order to talk about the current crisis, as working with history is, she claims, analogous to working with politics. In contrast, Yorgis Yatromanolakis argues that literature traditionally has dealt with crises (i.e. “damage”, “destruction”) and this is what his own fiction has been doing all along; thus, in his view, as today’s crisis is simply a more serious manifestation of the same old “disease” which Greece has been suffering, he cannot predict any abrupt change in the themes and orientation of Greek fiction being written currently and to be written in the near future. Along the same lines and going through her whole 40-year literary career step by step Maro Douka argues that she has been writing about several different crises all these years and more precisely about “how ideas get debased, how visions get sold off, about how people are terrorised, and subsequently corrupted”; she also delves deeply into the (mainly political) reasons why she decided to turn to historical fiction in the mid-1990s. Finally, Vangelis Hatzivasileiou, a critic who has dealt extensively with the Greek fiction of the current crisis, investigates the different trends of recent and contemporary historical novel in Greece (historiographic

metafiction, historical fantasy etc.) in search of some early indications of the impending crisis; he admits however that critics run the risk of a biased reading of all literature of the previous twenty years, if it is interpreted as predicting the crisis.

In Part III, Filippou Filippou goes through the stages of his own writing career and the reasons why each time he decided to focus on a particular theme and offers a contextualisation of the recent development of detective fiction in Greece. Seeing it as the genre which taps primarily into everyday reality, he believes that it is the best equipped to talk about the recent crises, as his own fiction does. Similarly according to Marlena Politopoulou detective fiction is thought to restore “order” in the readers’ minds but also by being closer to reality and realism than other genres it is, in her view, the right vehicle for writers to talk about the recent crisis. On similar grounds Vassilis Danellis, whose first novel came out at the beginning of the crisis, in 2009, believes that after the restoration of democracy and gradually in the 1990s art in general and serious literature moved from the margins to the centre, became part of the system and thus increasingly apolitical and cut off from the everyday reality of ordinary people; the vacuum that was left came to be filled by a newly booming crime fiction, a genre previously despised. Finally, the critic Yorgos Perantonakis attempts to draw a map of contemporary detective fiction in Greece; he claims that in contrast to the older and traditional detective novel where the crime was driven by personal motives, it now stems from a social malaise with the crime itself being only the tip of the iceberg; he calls it a “hybrid” genre as it now includes elements from other discourses such as psychology, philosophy, mathematics, politics, history etc.; the new detective novel has reintroduced the political aspect abolished in the fiction of the last twenty five years--a trend which has very recently been followed by the other genres of fiction in Greece, triggered by the crisis.

Finally, in Part IV aspects of Greek-Cypriot literature are discussed, an appropriate conclusion to our book’s themes of literature and crisis, as the literature of Cyprus draws heavily for its subject matter on the various crises the island has intermittently undergone. This inward looking tendency is perhaps one of the reasons that Greek-Cypriot literature has so far found few readers in Greece, Panos Ioannides notes. He further suggests that another reason might be a feeling of guilt for the role of Greece in events critical to the history of the island, its recent financial crisis included. Unlike the histories of the two countries which are intertwined through the centuries, it seems that the literatures of the two

countries have only recently started to become so. Greek literature is taught in Cyprus at schools and universities and is well known to the reading public of the island. However, Greek-Cypriot literature has yet to find the place it deserves in Greece. It looks as if Greek-Cypriot literature is one more “other” both at the academic table of discussion on the formation of the national literary canon and in its perception and reception by the Greek reading public: a double “other”, though, with the different “other” of Turkish-Cypriot literature “lurking” behind it. Niki Marangou, a characteristically Cypriot author, succeeded both in her writing and her living in bridging the gap which separates the multiplicity of “others” on the island, not just Turkish-Cypriots as seen by Greek-Cypriots and vice versa but also the refugees created by the partition of the island who became strangers in their own homeland and among their own community, as Frangiski Ambatzopoulou observes. Ambatzopoulou also notes that by drawing subject matter from her crisis-ridden native island and its capital, the only divided capital in Europe, Niki Marangou addresses universal problems among which those of the ethnic and economic migrant are currently so acute. And as her native island has inspired Greek authors, prominent among them George Seferis, so Niki Marangou’s “Cypriot voice”, as Miltiades Hatzopoulos remembers it in the dedication of his chapter, not only echoes in his own work but also articulates the concerns of contemporary Greek literature described in this volume.

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