

VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS

# Literature as National Institution

*Studies in the Politics of Modern  
Greek Criticism*



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National Institution



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STUDIES IN THE POLITICS  
OF MODERN GREEK  
CRITICISM



Vassilis Lambropoulos

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For Artemis



# Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	3
1. Toward a Genealogy of “Literature”: The Institutionalization of Tradition in C. Th. Dimaras’s <i>A History of Modern Greek Literature</i>	23
2. Who has been Reading Masterpieces on Our Behalf? George Seferis, Makriyannis, and the Literary Canon	44
3. The Fictions of Criticism: The “Prolegomena” of Iakovos Polylas as <i>Künstlerroman</i>	66
4. Incompleteness as Damnation: The Poetics of the Romantic Fragment in Dionysios Solomos’s <i>The Free Besieged</i>	85
5. The Hermeneutics of Openness in the Novel: The Unsettling Modernism of Yannis Beratis’s <i>Whirlwind</i>	100
6. Writing Greek as the Only Language: The Impossible Postmodernism of Renos Apostolidis’s “The John of my Life”	127
7. What Makes Good Literature Good and Literature: The Politics of Evaluation Surrounding the Work of Yannis Ritsos	157
8. The Violent Power of Knowledge: The Struggle of Critical Discourses for Domination over Constantine P. Cavafy’s “Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400”	182

## CONTENTS

9. Encountering the Poststructuralist Challenge, or Beyond Humanism: The Paradigms of Contemporary Greek Criticism and the Languages of Theory	209
Postscript: <i>Peri Hermeneias</i>	236
Bibliography	251
Index	257

## Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK was written between 1981 and 1984 in Columbus, while I was working as assistant professor in Modern Greek at the Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures of the Ohio State University. Some of its parts appeared previously in earlier versions: chapter 1 in Margaret Alexiou and Vassilis Lambropoulos, eds., *The Text and its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature* (New York: Pella, 1985); chapter 3 in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 3: 1 (May 1985); chapter 8 in the *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10: 1–2 (Spring 1983); chapter 9 in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1985); and the Postscript in *Simioseis* 20 (February 1981). I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reprint. An earlier version of chapter 4 was delivered as a lecture at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, London, and Birmingham in 1982.

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Literature as  
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## Introduction

THIS IS A BOOK about literary criticism, about that critical discourse which deals systematically with texts considered literary. It is therefore twice removed from those texts. In this sense, it exhibits no immediate interest in textual features, characteristics, structures, and qualities—in either immanence or fullness; it is a work about, not of, literary criticism. It focuses on what criticism does with literature, on the organization by criticism of that realm of knowledge and experience commonly known as “literature.” This viewpoint marks the book as an exploration of literary status rather than style. I have sought to examine how criticism confronts, disseminates, and promotes literature—what kind of truth, according to criticism, literature possesses and provides.

For an inquiry about the truth of literature, the traditional romantic and postromantic practice has been to look into the “text itself” in order to describe its authenticity (variably understood as originality, literariness, reflexivity, rhetoricity, ideality, or iconicity). That ontological approach, oblivious of its own place in history and culture, disregards the conditions allowing for its own operations and perceives the object of its study as a work rather than a function. Thus it prioritizes and privileges the independent text—the written, the writing, the Scripture, the language of the Book, the always already and forever there. It is only recently that we have gained a broad historical awareness of the cultural situation of literature and have realized that it precedes and determines literariness. Institutional and ideological developments in the academic and other marketplaces have forced us to admit that a meaningful literary reading is performed and understood against a necessary background of literary training, competence, and a particular cultural literacy. Nothing

## INTRODUCTION

looks literary or is recognized as such unless we already know what literature is; we must already have been shown literary pieces, learned the proper codes, mastered the conventions, and followed the rules. Accordingly, the aim of criticism should be the definition and description of those conditions necessary for the recognition of "literature," for the production of appropriately literary texts. But criticism happens to be the very institution dedicated to this task of text construction, and this disqualifies the institution for such an investigation: the production of literature cannot become criticism's central object because criticism as an institution is itself housing literature's production.

This is a book, then, about the institutionality of literary criticism—literary criticism as a cultural and national institution with its own sites, mechanisms, and jurisdiction, which produces, safeguards, and propagates the truth of literature. This vocabulary may perhaps sound familiar in the late 1980s, but its relative popularity does not, as yet, reflect many dramatic changes in the prevailing modes of reading. Although it has become quite appealing and fashionable among scholars to employ literary criticism as an indication of liberal disposition, its persistent applications to canonical texts (with the suspicious aim to "reread" the classics) and mainstream (or "commonly taught") languages serves only to confirm their status, affirm the allegedly boundless self-reflexivity of the masterpiece and reinforce the violent supremacy of Western civilization. I purposefully decided to refrain from this self-congratulatory and self-serving indulgence of the profession and concentrate instead on its critical practices: the modes of reading established by and constitutive of criticism. From this perspective, literary criticism becomes the institutional space where the application of acceptable reading tactics produces literary texts. For this reason, all the individual discussions of literature included in this volume start with a piece of criticism, rather than a piece of literature, thus emphasizing the aspect of production and displacing epistemological issues. I deal with productive or nonproductive readings, not with created texts.

## INTRODUCTION

It has been a strategic decision. By following this course, I wanted to establish some of the constitutive elements of literary production: the intertextuality of writing, the mediatedness of understanding, the formative role of reading expectations, the enabling presence of relevant literacy, the conditioning horizon of tradition, the institutionality of interpretation, and the economic character of axiology. It is both a refusal to grant literature independent existence and autonomous value and a choice to examine the economy of its constitution. Thus, throughout the book I discuss literature's natural public uses and the politics involved. If the political is the institutional and if production is practice, then criticism as an institutional practice serves the political production of a particular domain of knowledge—the truth of literature or truth-as-literature. I fear the rest is interpretive formalism and decadent ontology: aesthetics.

Aesthetics has evolved since the mid-eighteenth century as a secular hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of the profane medium rather than of the divine message. But it never outgrew its biblical faith and its protestant methods: from Baumgarten to Beardsley, from Bakhtin to Booth, and from Benjamin to Bloom, hermeneutics remained a search for deep meaning and revelation, an analysis of the book, and a negative eschatology of perfection; it saw writing as creation and reading as interpretation. Hermeneutics beautified the text and idolized its form. Furthermore, it provided grounds of legitimation for the author, the critic, the specialist, the scholar, the academy, the curriculum, the anthology, the journal, the conference, and the university press—all the roles and enterprises centered on what was most human in man, the humanities. The institutional procedures of constitution, circulation, and consumption of texts were rendered immune from doubt and protected by the theology of art and its rules, rites, and rituals. But this is no longer true, given deconstruction and the recent "confusion of theoretical tongues."

With deconstruction, the discourses of poststructuralist criticism committed the ultimate political hubris—the totalitarian aspiration of tyranny. The poststructuralists proclaimed criticism

## INTRODUCTION

as the highest stage of literature in the same way that the romantics had earlier proclaimed literature as the highest stage of language; and they argued aggressively for the superiority of the self-reflexive over the literary, while the structuralists had equated the two. Now all literature aspired to the state of self-reflexivity and criticism. What followed is common memory: criticism went bankrupt after trying in vain to prove that it was its own justification, contrary to all previous theory, which had accepted its subservience to literature; debates about political issues such as institutionality, tradition, canon-formation, evaluation, gender, race, power, and violence erupted everywhere. Soon, it appeared that two main paths were open to future research: pragmatist acquiescence, in the name of an agnostic realism, deals with problem-solving in the context of local communities; and political resistance, inspired by a historicist skepticism, opposes all impositions of interpretive authority.

This book follows the second path and deals with the discourses of literary criticism, the discursive practices of literary production. The perspectival methodologies of genealogical historicism inform the book, and it examines strategies employed in specific institutional sites and social contexts in order to produce certain cultural literary values. The text is seen as a product—a commodity and an exchange value whose circulation is regulated by mechanisms of distribution, exclusion, and imposition in a historically determined field of power forces competing for authority. I have chosen to look directly into the operations of literary criticism to undercut the artistic privileges of literature and the positivistic claims of scholarship. My effort has not been to stand outside the realm and attack it, but to expose its guiding principles by stressing their intrinsically political character. This is done in a sophistic spirit through direct agonistic involvement with the policies criticized. To the extent that my book debates legitimacy, contests power, and plays the only game in town—a town insistently viewed as a *polis* of competing interests, rather than a community of conflicting goals—it is a rhetorical enterprise.

## INTRODUCTION

Clearly and openly this political book subscribes to the ethics of resistance and deals with the institution of literary criticism—its principles, operations, and products; and it opposes that institution as a cultural establishment. By “institution” I refer to any concrete and recognizable organized element in a society, a social formation that includes an organization and its respective laws and customs. Therefore, “institution of literature” denotes a particular system of reading and writing practices, with its own set of rules, code of values, and cultural space, where texts are treated in terms of inherent meaning and artistic quality. I do not oppose those who happen to control it or even their methods, and I do not seek a better or different criticism. The target of my critique is criticism itself, and the argument is about its dispensability and disposability. I believe that criticism—literary or other—has run its historical course, as an institution, and has exhausted its cultural services. I need not necessarily appraise this overall phenomenon, at least not here. But the demand of the times, in the wake of poststructuralism, is no longer to change criticism but rather to abolish it. In the studies that follow I mean to contribute to this goal. An investigation into the politics of criticism can only take another step toward its abolition, a political step against and beyond the limitations of aesthetic understanding. As for the question that may be raised about the future of literature and art in a world without any grammarians or custodians of beauty, the answer can only be direct and simple: what “literature” or “art”?

FOR THE PURPOSES of such a political and antithetical approach to criticism I was fortunate enough to choose, for reasons not altogether voluntary, the realm of modern Greek literary studies. I do not think that another area could have proved more suitable for my explorations or more challenging to my ideas. Here some explanations are in order.

Contemporary Greece as a state and as a country, as a political entity and a historical experience, remains the most spectacular and interesting construct of idealism. Conceived by romantic

## INTRODUCTION

Hellenism, established by the most intricate and paradoxical interplay of international political, economic, and ideological forces, and sublimated consistently by all subsequent quests for the true origins of Western civilization, it continues to exert an incessant fascination on our imagination, for it is presumed to be a unique case of historical, racial, and cultural continuity. The reasons behind this still popular image are multiple and complex. It may suffice at this point to paraphrase a platitude and note that, had it not existed, Modern Greece ought to have been invented. Indeed, perhaps it was. All that can be said with certainty is that the inhabitants of the ancient place, starting in the late eighteenth century and especially after the successful revolt against the four-century-old Turkish domination, found themselves under immense external pressure to respond adequately to the inflated expectations and to adjust properly to the exalted demands of European and American romanticism which, from Goethe to Beethoven and from Shelley to Delacroix, needed to affirm and satisfy its classical yearnings. This pressure to be true Hellenes was presented to the Greeks as their only way or chance to define an acceptable identity and justify their political claims. The choices were limited and the time for reflection unavailable; after much hesitation, they, and especially those who considered themselves "victors," opted for cooperation.

Among the numerous priorities facing the liberated nation as it tardily entered the scene of modern history, a rejuvenated culture was one of the most urgent: the country had to start immediately creating its autochthonous monuments and showing that the ancient spirit was still alive and flourishing. Literature, in particular, had to be cultivated and promoted, so that linguistic and intellectual continuity could be eloquently attested. Intellectuals in the West were already looking into the folk songs for signs of a lingering spiritual vitality. Thus, Greek writers started reading and writing in the glorious shadows of Homer, Aeschylus, Thucydides, and Plato. The unparalleled models were still there, but were their inheritors worthy of that treasure? Foreigners and Greeks of the diaspora alike asked this question, and

it had to be answered both positively and expeditiously. Before long, the romantic anxiety of belatedness took over all the creative forces of the nation and directed them to a single, obsessive purpose: ancient idioms, styles, genres, and themes were emulated, similarities between past and present were sought, old traditions and institutions were revived, even puristic purges—for example, linguistic, thematic, ideological—were conducted on a large-scale effort to prove and guarantee continuity, coherence, and commensurability between classical and modern literature. At issue was not quality but identity; they sought authentic Greekness.

Although the case of contemporary Greece was extreme, it was far from unusual. Recent genealogical research into the humanities has shown that the emergence of disciplines as we know them today, such as linguistics, folklore, history, archaeology, philology, and philosophy, coincided with the development of a new political entity and reality, the national state. These disciplines were established to serve the quest for the state's own unique identity, and they were soon integrated in an institution that became the repository of national self-knowledge, the university. The ideological positions and fundamental presuppositions of the disciplines originated with the concrete political needs felt by the first nations of the eighteenth century: a distinct origin, history, language, and tradition that would together define a native ethos and justify the claims to autonomy and independence of that entity. These disciplines, therefore, did not develop as fields of study for given realms of human experience; rather, they were established to produce the respective aspects of an alleged national experience and thus analytically compose its identity. Literature, in particular, far from expressing the collective soul portrayed by humanistic criticism, became the textual category which philology constructed when called upon to provide a local, native writing tradition. In that distinctively historicist sense, this category remains bound to the broader one of the nation; all literature is national, and there is nothing but national literature. As such, it serves a specific political purpose: it ascribes

to certain texts and modes of writing an ontological character, that of artistry; it defines their cultural constitution in terms of an indigenous origin; and by so doing it contributes to the effective demarcation of a unique national identity. This insight helps us realize that beauty is after all an ethnocentric notion, the author a chauvinist of writing, and artistic quality a national property.

These basic aspects of the literary enterprise can be clearly recognized in the tasks prescribed to the modern Greek writer. His work had to fulfil two requirements: to be literary and to be Greek. To satisfy the first requirement, stemming from the romantic and realist tastes of the nineteenth-century, the literature had to present important ideas, deep feelings, rich characters, and intense experiences through artistic means (that is, through a refined and affecting linguistic expression). According to the other requirement, the work had to reflect the Greek reality in a total way—in terms of language, subject, style, structure, and message. Of the two, the second was the stricter and sterner because of its critical importance: Greekness could possibly exonerate the absence of some literary qualities, but no artistic merit could compensate for its lack. A work exhibiting no concern about, or sense of, national identity was worse than just bad: being one of no justifiable interest to the nation, it was simply irrelevant. Literature had to be national, or be nothing at all. Hence, two roles were available to the author: that of the mirror, which depicts by reflecting, and that of the seer, who guides by prophesying.

It was never easy, however, for the aspiring writer to comply with the demand for Greekness, since the meaning of the concept has been always fiercely debated. Its essence has been a subject of persistent and all-encompassing controversy, and conflicting descriptions of its contours have been given. Obviously, on this issue depends much of the future course of the country and the self-understanding of its people. Every writer must first decide about Greekness and then create accordingly while, of course, simultaneously defending his choice. Consider a simple example, the perennial "language question." It was agreed that a

work ought to be written in the truly Greek idiom. But a debate has been raging for more than two centuries about the precise character of that idiom between purists, who propose ancient (classical or Hellenistic) models, and the demoticists, who promote the commonly spoken language. Thus, any writer's decisions about personal expression entail taking sides on this controversy, and the Greekness of his idiom still cannot win unanimous acceptance. The same should be said about the other aspects—subject matter, style, structure, and message; their selection and development must conform to a comprehensive model of Greekness, but there is always more than one available and claiming supremacy. Involvement in larger issues is unavoidable: any choice shall be inspected and judged; but at least the basic commitment must be made and convincingly shown.

Greekness, then, as the highest criterion and as an explicitly ideological principle raised unequivocally to the ultimate literary standard, has retained its prestigious, unassailable position since the 1830s, safeguarded by critics and observed by authors. But neither historical chance nor patriotic provincialism prevailed. Significantly, Greekness has also been the exclusive measure of merit for almost all non-Greek students of literature. Even a hasty look at the reception of Greek literature abroad reveals that the extraordinary appeal of writers like Kazantzakis, Vassilikos, and Samarakis, and the prestigious international prizes won by Seferis and Elytis (Nobel) or Varnalis and Ritsos (Lenin) have been openly explained and justified by the Greek character which foreign audiences discovered in their work. This response has further reinforced the conservative attitudes of Greek critics and has helped their ethnocentric concerns survive intact. Criticism, it seems, has trapped Greek writing in an endless, irredeemable quest for national authenticity; it has defined its duties in exclusively nationalist terms. Its mission is to support the claims and care for the interests of the modern state, which is projected as the benevolent, eternal motherland bestowing existence and identity.

The critical system informed by such ethnocentric concerns is

## INTRODUCTION

the focus of this book. My purpose is to present the range, ideological character, and typical manifestations of those concerns through a selective examination of representative critical approaches. I argue that Greek philology and criticism have always viewed the artistic text as a transparent sign developing out of the national roots, whose signifier is the form of the work, its artistry, and whose signified is its very Greekness, its identity. Critics have traditionally examined the two concepts in their interdependence to see how they match, how they fit together, and especially if the artistry of the text provides a faithful and powerful picture of its identity. Thus, writers have responded dutifully to the ideological demands of the modern Greek state and have served its political exigencies by supporting, in the realm of culture, its assertions about the generating power of the national roots; in other words, they have contributed to the legitimization of state authority by inventing one of its cultural achievements, literature, and naturalizing it as an expression of the ethnic tradition.

One might perhaps object that this kind of book should not be the first priority for Modern Greek Studies; that a more introductory one is still needed, one continuing the groundwork started some twenty years ago by familiarizing the English-speaking audience with major Greek authors and works through surveys, translations, and monographs; or that this volume is probably too advanced for that audience, to the extent that it presumes some familiarity with the field, including works not yet available in foreign editions. These arguments, however, might apply if it were part of my purpose to endorse the critical tradition established so far and adhere to its doctrines. That is obviously not the case. My completely different, even antithetical approach is directed against that very tradition and its humanistic epistemology. In this book, I am not dealing with Modern Greek Studies but with a broader set of issues in whose context the very category "Modern Greek Studies" is symptomatic of a wider problem.

By addressing myself to critical rather than literary, to theoretical rather than artistic, issues, I want to achieve two supplemen-

## INTRODUCTION

tary goals: to examine the ideological inclinations of Greek criticism and to highlight the necessity for an informed and skeptical historical awareness in literary studies in general. My discussions of Greek criticism purport to show how the field emerged in response to concrete political needs in the realm of culture as the new state had to prove its national composition, purity, continuity, and autonomy. The individual chapters analyze specific acts of literary production and describe the mechanisms, discourses, and strategies involved. These acts are each time situated in the area of criticism as a cultural practice.

Thus, I show that the discourses of criticism have constructed texts invariably as artworks, employing as a measure of aesthetic and ultimately moral merit the Greekness of the literary sign, the ethnic authenticity of literature. If that is the case, I contend, it is pointless for specialists—critics, reviewers, scholars, philologists, professors—to continue interpreting more works, since they can only strengthen the existing critical tradition, consecrate the established canon, and preserve nationalistic fantasies. Greekness works essentially as a valuation of institutional authority since it is a concept of exclusive power. It is particularly suspect and dangerous because much more than just literature or art comes under its decisive jurisdiction, membership in a community, social status, and political recognition are also included. By designating true identity, it legislates the rights of any citizen. In our specific case, designating literary quality arbitrates aesthetic merit and artistic status, intellectual importance, readership, prominence, availability, and influence. These are potentially oppressive functions that criticism was called upon to fulfill.

Furthermore, I have dealt with Greek criticism as an outstanding and exemplary case of modern literary criticism in general. At least in the small but developing field of Modern Greek Studies, nationalism is often admitted and talked about openly. Things seem much worse in the so-called advanced fields, where ethnocentric compartmentalization reigns supreme, as evidenced by divisions in departments, centers, journals, conferences, book series, and fields specializing in national cultures. There the

## INTRODUCTION

autonomy and uniqueness, if not the supremacy, of one particular nation goes unchallenged and rather defines the scope and approaches of research. Needless to add, questions about the nationalistic origins of modern concepts like tradition, culture, art, or literature are simply inconceivable to those who have dedicated themselves to their protection.

It is the second goal of my critique of Modern Greek Studies as a field to indicate the nationalistic fallacy inherent in the enterprise of literary criticism as it has developed since the mid-seventeenth century into an interpretation of great artistic texts. The significant fact that the emergence of the Greek state, criticism, and literature coincided, illustrates in the most graphic fashion their close mutual dependence: how criticism constructs the literature needed by the state of the industrial age, thus participating actively in the invention of a national identity. In the case of Greece, this interdependence between state, criticism, and literature, established at the point where the industrial age and the romantic spirit—history and the individual, revolution and belatedness, progress and apocalypse—converged beyond disentanglement or reconciliation, can be seen in disturbing clarity. But, in fact, such interdependence supports any critical enterprise, any interpretive reading, and any institutional practice related to the artistic text; moreover, it effectively conditions its production and consumption. Here again, modern Greece, kept safely at the periphery of contemporary culture, can be found at the center of the ethnocentric politics which produces the discourses of cultural domination.

ACCORDING to the antifoundationalist view propounded here, literature does not inhere in texts but is produced by the application and interaction of established reading techniques. To analyze it we must look into those cultural practices that make it possible and meaningful. We need to see how the game of “reading literature” is played, how the relevant rules are authorized, who can participate in it, where it can take place, and also what is at stake. The most interesting space to be investigated is

## INTRODUCTION

naturally the institution of criticism, the official site for games of reading and the authorized arbitrator of literary taste. Under its jurisdiction, literature was naturalized when reading as an act of private recovery was sanctioned. The individual chapters of the book examine the conditions, the powers, and the effects of this jurisdiction. At the end of the book, in the Postscript, by exceeding the realm of Greek criticism I have attempted to interweave the various findings of this examination and indicate paths toward an alternative system of rules and practices. I repeat that my interest is certainly not oriented toward a better or enlightened criticism, rather, it is explicitly aimed against criticism, which I see as a romantic bourgeois institution, and in favor of sophistic inventions and rhetorical uses of texts—any texts. Once we reach a political understanding of the discourses that produce literature and of the practices of interpretation involved, it is a matter of intellectual integrity, I believe, to discontinue our commitment to the respective exercises of authority and to look for other sources and forces of power.

The first essay deals with questions pertaining to the writing of literary history. It focuses on the first paragraph of the “Preface” that C. Th. Dimaras wrote for his *History of Modern Greek Literature* and examines its epistemological and methodological assumptions. Enterprises like this have seemed so far quite unproblematic since they claim to record a tradition. But I show here that in fact they monumentalize a canon, a particular selection of literary masterpieces. What is more, the literary canon itself is a national monument and the apotheosis of a projected indigenous culture. Dimaras, like the rest of his colleagues who have labored on a similar work, reified and reaffirmed a national culture: he wrote a history of Greekness in literature, a Greekness whose version had already been formed by a discourse—critical, philosophical, political, legal, sociological, historical—that emerged in the 1930s as a reaction to a threatening atmosphere of despair, defeat, and disbelief that followed World War I. To his project, I counterpropose a genealogy of literature, a study to

## INTRODUCTION

investigate how and why certain texts have been privileged with aesthetic values and incorporated in a dominant canon.

The second essay moves from the broader issue of how a total and native tradition is canonized to the more narrow one of canonic reading. Here I draw from the skillful reading by George Seferis of *The Memoirs* of General Makriyannis as a work of artistic prose, which established that warrior of the 1821 Revolution as the major writer of Greek prose. It is an intriguing case of ingenious invention: a sophisticated author with modernist affections and affectations reads superb literary qualities in the reminiscences of a freedom fighter, who acquired his literacy to publicize his experiences. His argumentation is based on a clear-cut conception of Greekness: what inspires, justifies, and elevates this confessional writing is its authenticity, its firm grounding in the national soul. Thus, a successful performance in the game of reading literature yields a spectacular result: an old but so far neglected masterpiece of folk literature, a new addition to the national treasure. I conduct my analysis of the strategies employed in the context of the politics of interpretive communities and intend to show how invested interests are served by text productions. Such communities, I imply, have achieved authority when they can participate successfully in the formation of a canon engraved and stored in the national unconscious.

Another successful act of invention but of a different nature and scale is presented in the next essay. While Seferis's approach was that of literary interpretation, this one follows a more philological path, the critically annotated edition. Iakovos Polyas, a critic and translator, edited the manuscripts of the poet Dionysios Solomos after his death and prefaced them with a biographical essay. That volume introduced the work of the poet to the public, which so far knew only very few of his early compositions, and confirmed his reputation as the bard of the reborn nation. But what was presented and still is viewed as a mighty piece of scholarship is essentially a literary work: Polyas used the conventions of a distinctively romantic genre of fiction, the *Künstlerroman*, which presents the spiritual growth and intellectual peregrina-

tions of an artist, to fashion the figure of Solomos as a national poet. The ideological emergencies of the times demanded and soon welcomed the construct. The editor's device proved a salutary choice: the scattered fragments that he inherited were painfully unsuitable for the publication eagerly anticipated by the Greek audience. By editing and arranging them according to rules provided by a respectable genre and by responding sensibly to a set of fixed literary expectations, he achieved an artistic effect that has not yet outlived its political purposes.

Chapter 4 moves from the use of Solomos to the poet's own readings of his work. This shift should not be surprising; critical discourses operate not only in public but also during processes of composition, thereby drastically affecting both critics and writers. Solomos is a case in point. The desperate fragmentariness of his output is usually attributed or even credited to a noble perfectionism that allegedly molded and inhibited his creativity. But a careful look at his aesthetics reveals that his idealism was the constant cause of self-destruction. This idealism should be understood as both philosophical and patriotic, directed to both the Hegelian idea and romantic Greece. His search for the absolute in art, or rather his affliction by this critical standard that he gradually absorbed and internalized as his basic working principle, damaged all attempts at completion. Solomos hoped that Greece, as the Mother and Muse of writing, would bless his work with the true national identity, blending and fusing signifier and signified and turning unobtrusively the verbal sign from a literary to a natural one. Witnessing his desperate struggle against the perils of signification and the arbitrariness of language reminds us of the extent to which the institution of criticism not only produces literature but also influences any attempt to create it.

A detailed reading of an unfavorable book review that objects to the indeterminate structure and character of a novel follows. We saw earlier how Polylas achieved an effective closure on the fragments of Solomos and offered the result to the national culture. Here, a critic is unable or unwilling to do that; on the contrary, he criticizes the novel *Whirlwind* by Yannis Beratis for its

unsettling openness, which leaves the reader suspended between fiction and truth, imagination and reality, impression and belief, beginning and end. The review itself does not mention any requirements with respect to the national genuineness of the work, but we can understand its failure to produce a satisfactory result only by referring to certain effects of that criterion. The power of the concept of Greekness to ascribe aesthetic quality and status prevented Greek literature from developing any awareness of its own institutionality: "Greekness" presupposes a transparent, unproblematic signifier which points to a signified essence; it also demands that literature play a missionary role in cultivating and distilling the national psyche. Therefore, it has conditioned the reading expectations, or the literary competence, of the audience and has reduced its involvement in the realm of fiction to acts of realist recognition. Ultimately, only what has been already prescribed by the principle of Greekness can be read positively as literary.

The pervasive and imposing presence of this principle is examined next in its application to literary language. The discussion begins with a description of Greek modernism in Linos Politis's *History of Modern Greek Literature* but centers on a postmodernist story by Renos Apostolidis. Through narrative analysis, Politis shows that, despite a few exceptions, a Greek postmodernism is structurally impossible because the tradition never really experienced the turmoil of the avant-garde. Without such an event, the nomothetic authority of romantic aesthetics prevails unquestioned. Authors have always written Greek as if it were the only language, a natural medium of expression, and only rarely and temporarily have some of them suspected its conventionality. Dissenting voices were quickly suppressed on grounds of national psychological and moral health and never allowed to suggest that the authentic might be after all a fantasy or a fallacy. Thus, radical experimentation has been indefinitely suspended since only the exalted voice of lyricism and the faithful mirror of realism are accepted as trustworthy vehicles of Greekness. As long as literary language may aspire to nothing but imitation, Greek writing