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DISASTER AND FICTION

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Koumendareas was born in Athens of Spartan parents), each was more free to pick out what was relevant to the story he wanted to narrate from the complex social background of Asia Minor. Writers from Anatolia, in fact, have tended to be overwhelmed by the actual experience of the Disaster, and to feel that they have treated it sufficiently after simply recapitulating it. Of the nine novels in our first category, "The Fiction of History," six were written by Anatolians, one – *The Mermaid Madonna* – was written by a novelist with strong Anatolian identifications, and only two were written by non-Anatolians with no Asia Minor past at all. In "The Fiction of Myth," on the other hand, of the five works treated, only one – *At Hadzifrangos's* – was written by someone with an Anatolian past.

The Multi-Level Plot – Man in linear time and direct historical causality has been, up to this point in our study, the major concern of writers. Fixed in a stable world that gradually became distorted by horror and the Disaster, the characters of the previous works and the world they inhabited looked forward to a "future" which they, like all men, could not know until it occurred; rooted in time, they needed to wait for its fullness to see their fate. When they recalled it as the "past," they needed to review it in strict chronological order, unable for some reason to break into its sequential flow. Even those fictional works that resemble parables subscribe rigidly to the impression of time's inviolability and uniqueness.

Yet there were works of fiction whose execution demanded a rejection of the demands of realism. The effects they strove for and which, once achieved, became their unique characteristics, were gained by the deliberate destruction of linear time and the unitary plot. Realism was viewed not merely as inadequate for the writers' purposes, but as inhibiting, if not imprisoning. The effects the novelists aimed at would have been muffled and

obscured without the varying chronological perspectives and the conflicting psychological states represented in *The Garden of Princes* (1966) by Nikos Bakolas, *The Dreams of Angelika* (1958) by Eva Vlami, and *At Hadzifrangos's* (1962) by Kosmas Politis.

Far from employing a clear, direct, and rational view for the events they wanted to narrate, these three novelists seem deliberately to have placed obstacles in the way of the reader's comprehension of the events, to have distorted the precision of the focus, and to have insisted, therefore, on the irrationality that underlies much of human life. These techniques are not used with full success in the three novels in question, but it is clear that all are attempts to undermine the belief in the ultimate rationality of things implicit in realism. By plunging into the irrational, they hoped to treat the Asia Minor theme in a way that realism could never have done.

The events of the Asia Minor expedition and personages from the Legend of Troy are combined in a fascinating but unsuccessful attempt to modernize the Oresteia plot in Nikos Bakolas's *The Garden of Princes* (1966).[26] As an artistic whole the novel fails because of its overriding ambition, for Bakolas wanted not only to unify two exciting historical events whose conclusions were totally divergent – the Trojan War and the Greek Expedition in Anatolia – but also to experiment with fictional form by employing the techniques of interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness. But the experimentation, as we shall see in this section, is not obtrusive, nor is the difference in Greek fortunes in the Trojan and Greco-Turkish Wars at fault. The core problem in *The Garden of Princes* is the writer's inability to employ, in a clearer and more universal way, the psychological insight that pervades the characters of his novel.

Cassandra, a girl from Asia Minor, with a brother in the

26. *O Kipos ton Prinkipon* (Thessaloniki, 1966).

Evangelical School of Smyrna, begins to relate, in 1922, her love affair with a Greek staff officer, Agamemnon Iatridis; it is a complex and interlocking story that is continued and elaborated on by others. In a madhouse, Orestes Iatridis adds to the narration in 1933 and 1935; Aegisthus, awaiting trial in 1924, shows his contempt for the reporters who badger him for information, but is unable to disguise his plan to use Clytemnestra's sexual attraction to him to revenge himself on Agamemnon for what he had done to Theano, his sister, in 1919. It is through Clytemnestra that we see her lover kill the returning Agamemnon, who is described as "a ragman from Asia Minor, without boots or garrison cap."[27]

The character upon whom the action of *The Garden of Princes* revolves is Agamemnon – not the triumphant King of Mycenae, of course, but an aging artillery colonel whose unchecked libidinal drives destroy what little domestic happiness his strange family might have been able to provide him. "At that time," Aegisthus says,

> Agamemnon threshed through Asia Minor a victor and triumphant, sending home countless snapshots of himself on a white horse, much before it was possible for him or me or Clytemnestra, or his general or even the staff back in Athens to know that a day was coming when he Agamemnon would have lost pride horse and maps lost battalion and machine gun, would have been left with ten men with weapons and sergeant abandoned to wander through burned villages and past blown-up bridges and slaughtered horses steers, in dug up fields, searching for the sea in despair, without time or the mood to take the honor of girls, cowering during the day, preferring the light of the stars, trying to save his skin.[28]

27. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36. Punctuation as in the original.

The attention of the reader is transferred from one character to another, each speaking as he thinks, confusedly, pursuing his own obsessions, without attempting to clarify story-line or motivation. Bakolas should have been aided in his uncompromising attitude toward technical purity because the basic outlines of his story are well known. The motivations of Cassandra, Agamemnon, Aegisthus, and Clytemnestra, however, are contemporary, permeated with overpowering sexual drives and jealousies. But this is a psychological world so indebted to Freud that the unexpected occurs: the Homeric framework emerges more as an obstacle to understanding than as a guide to fictional action.

The reader finds himself unable to forget the Legend of Troy in order to accept Bakolas's reinterpretation of it, unwilling to allow the characters handed down by tradition to be manipulated so freely. The central obstacle Bakolas faces and cannot surmount is that the writer's license to adapt mythological personages to his own purposes is not an unrestricted one. He can reinterpret, he can change motivation, he can substitute the heroic world view for another, but he is limited in the number of changes he can make in the actual plot of his story.

More familiar with American literature than most Greeks, Bakolas is clearly operating in the world of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra,* and he consciously uses the fictional techniques of William Faulkner, whose *The Sound and the Fury* he has translated into Greek. But these do not help him overcome the major weakness of his conception: a re-use of the Trojan legend forces upon him a series of events whose integrity must not be violated, no matter how much they can be reinterpreted according to modern tastes. By deliberately juxtaposing the legend of Troy to the Asia Minor Disaster but allowing himself to be drawn into a world of private symbols, Bakolas confuses the reader about his intentions while at the same time proving his competence as a creator of mood.

The Greek defeat in Asia Minor, as we have seen in Kostas Varnalis's *The Diary of Penelope*, precludes the extended use of the legend of Troy as a fictional point of reference. Parallels may be found to exist, but they prove valid only when not insisted upon by writers and only when they concern the anonymous, never the famed. Agamemnon, Orestes, Electra, Aegisthus, and Clytemnestra are names forever linked with horror and victory, never with horror and defeat.

It is clear that Bakolas, unlike the writers whose novels were studied in the previous category, wanted to break free of the hold realism might have exercised on him. He wanted a mythical framework in which to set the concerns he gave to his characters and freedom from the necessity to narrate his story in a chronological manner. The technique he used permitted him to experiment with time and allowed him to enter the thoughts of his characters at various junctures in their lives. This, roughly, is the freedom from the sequential plot we shall find in *The Dreams of Angelika* and *At Hadzifrangos's*, the other novels in this category.

It is only after he had achieved esthetic distance that the Greek writer was able to break the hold that the historical reality of the Disaster had exercised on him and to experiment with new techniques for relating the stories he needed to narrate. We have seen this in *The Garden of Princes.* In no novel up to this point, however, has the attempt to liberate one's preoccupations in order to discover the ideal vehicle for an esthetic vision found a more extreme, yet still successful, realization than in Eva Vlami's extraordinary *The Dreams of Angelika* (1958).[29] It is only in symbolic terms, by using interior monologue, by violating the sequential conception of plot and chronology, and by not compromising with her readers' historical ignorance of the period that she could possibly hope to do all she did in this novel.

29. *Ta Oneira tis Angelikas* (Athens, 1958).