Transcending politics: symbolism, allegory and censorship in Greek fiction

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There is an established view that literature and politics should not co-exist. Politics has been associated with crudeness and conflict, literature with refinement and sophistication. Stendhal, for instance, wrote in *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) that "Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert; something loud and vulgar, yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention." It has also been claimed that "Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote an artistically weak, politically successful work in *Uncle Tom's cabin*, while Fyodor Dostoyevsky produced a politically unsuccessful, artistically enduring classic in *The Possessed*."[1] Does politics indeed undermine a work of literature or art? Does political art thrive in periods of uncertainty and turmoil? Can we turn to literature in order to comprehend politics? Do claims of literary representations of politics still raise instant suspicions of propagandistic intent?

The essentials of political fiction would seem to be the dominant presence of political ideas and of a political milieu. But some feel that the definition of the political novel is somewhat complicated by its close relationship to the social or even "utopian" novel.[2] The political novel cannot be said to represent a distinct genre since loose terms such as the political or the psychological novel "do not mark any fundamental distinctions of literary

[1] Joseph L. Blotner, *The Political Novel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company 1955), p. 3.
[2] Gordon Milne, *The American Political Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1966), p. 5.

form".[3] It has also been argued that literature can make the abstract ideas of political theory seem real or "come alive" for the reader, while the concrete individualist orientation of literature may act as a corrective to political abstractions.[4] Accordingly, Ken Kesey's novel *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* "can be more insightful and moving to political action than ten years of social scientific reports on the conditions in our institutions for the (judged) mentally ill".[5] George von der Muhll, a political scientist, has come up with the following definition of political literature: "a work of literature most fully contributes to understanding politics if it illuminates the felt experience of those who found themselves constrained in their interactions by a social logic emerging from pursuit of the power to determine collectively binding rules for whole societies or their fictional analogue."[6] He claims that this definition suggests certain criteria for identifying a distinctively "political" quality in literature.

In recent years various feminist and gay/lesbian groups have put forward the argument that "the personal is the political", thus rendering interpersonal relations and everyday human interaction political. In the 1990s it was claimed that the political novel had traditionally been seen as a male genre or, as Sharon M. Harris puts it,

> virtually all of the classic studies of the political novel, and contemporary studies as well, either address only texts written by white male authors or address women's contributions to the genre marginally [...]. Feminist theorists in many fields – history, literature, philosophy, political science, sociology,

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[3] Irving Howe, *Politics and the novel* (New York: Columbia University Press 1992 [first published in 1957]), p. 16.

[4] Joel Kassiola, "Political values and literature: The contribution of virtual experience", in Maureen Whitebrook (ed.), *Reading political stories: Representations of politics in novels and pictures* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield 1992), pp. 65-6.

[5] Ibid., p. 68.

[6] George Von der Muhll, "The political element in literature", in Whitebrook (ed.), *Reading political stories*, p. 31.

> among others – have challenged assumptions underlying narrow definitions of the political".[7]

In this respect, all human social experience could fall within the ambit of "political" literature.

It seems to me that the relationship between politics and literature could be defined in terms of three approaches: commitment, representation and resistance. In the first case we tend to think of the relationship mostly in ideological terms as a commitment of the latter to the former. In this case literature is subservient to politics, assisting a political cause or defending an ideological standpoint. Under these circumstances literature tends to be transformed into a normative political force or instrument with pedagogic and instructive aims. Normally this sort of literature is considered *engagé* and its appeal is short-lived. In the second case, literature tends to portray political events or revolutionary movements, or tries to capture the political temperature of a certain period without expressing a partisan view. It might also focus on the workings of power, influence and corruption or have as characters primarily politicians or the politically involved. The third mode of engagement of literature with politics involves resistance to political conditions, an attempt to transcend politics as a source of violent conflict or authoritarian oppression. Censorship tends to make literature and the other arts more allegorical, as can be seen, for example, in the case of Iranian cinema. In this approach, literature, through allegorical, allusive or imaginative strategies, tries to carve out a liberal niche which transcends the negative political situation and offers an alternative vision. What makes this category more interesting is its potential for universality and wider diachronic appeal by depicting moral dilemmas that arise from political conditions. Literature of this sort tries to avoid the pitfalls of commitment and is judged by the skilfulness and inventiveness with which it tries to put its message across. In this

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[7] Sharon M. Harris, *Redefining the Political Novel: American women writers 1797-1901* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press 1995), p. xiv.

category of writing the communal dimension of politics gives way to a personal stance against authoritarianism.

It has been suggested that the tradition of the political novel in Western Europe has died. Political writers comparable to Jean-Paul Sartre, André Malraux, Albert Camus, Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell or Ignazio Silone are no longer emerging and the best political fiction has appeared in societies suffering from political divisions or oppression. I am thinking of political writers such as Milan Kundera, Vaclav Havel and Alexander Solzhenitsyn writing on communist regimes in Eastern Europe, J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer on South African apartheid, Garcia-Marquez, Isabel Allende and Vargas Llosa on Latin American dictatorships or Chinua Achebe on corruption in Nigerian politics. Even in those countries the conditions, which gave rise to political novels in the past, have changed or receded and therefore one could still argue that the political novel is threatened with extinction. On the other hand, international terrorism or forms of racial, sexual and cultural exclusion may offer new opportunities for the writing of political novels.

The political effectiveness of Greek fiction has often been judged by its ability to represent social reality or to engage with major political events such as the Civil War. Any departure from reality was considered a form of escapism and a number of post-war writers argued that their involvement with political events and their efforts to represent the painful conditions in Greece after the Civil War singled them out from the cosmopolitan and evasive writers of the 1930s. They often contrasted their raw and strong language with the lyrical style of their predecessors.[8]

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[8] See the debates of Alexandros Argyriou, Alexandros Kotzias, Kostas Kouloufakos, Spyros Plaskovitis and Stratis Tsirkas, "Η νεοελληνική πραγματικότητα και η πεζογραφία μας", *Η Συνέχεια* 4 (June 1973) 172-9 and Alexandros Argyriou, Alexis Ziras, Alexandros Kotzias and Kostas Kouloufakos, "Το οδυνηρό πέρασμα στην πολιτικοποίηση", *Διαβάζω* 5-6 (November 1976-February 1977) 62-83, and the articles by Alexandros Kotzias, "Μεταπολεμικοί πεζογράφοι" (first published in *Γράμματα και Τέχνες* 55 (April-June 1988) 3-10), *Αληθομανές Χαλκείον: Η ποιητική*

This perhaps explains why there has been no strong tradition in Greece of a symbolist or allegorical political fiction, no Orwellian *Animal farm* or *Nineteen eighty-four*. In the first half of the twentieth century symbolist or allegorical political prose is rather scarce, traced in the reworking of ancient themes by Kostas Varnalis in texts such as *Η αληθινή απολογία του Σωκράτη* (*The true apology of Socrates*, 1931) and *Το ημερολόγιο της Πηνελόπης* (*Penelope's diary*, 1947). In the second half of the twentieth century novelists who to some extent practised symbolist or allegorical fiction included Nikos Kazantzakis, Rodis Roufos, Spyros Plaskovitis (with *Το φράγμα* [*The dam*], 1961) and Antonis Samarakis (with *Το λάθος* [*The flaw*], 1965) though the texts of the last two could be seen as allegorical in a broader sense. After 1974 allegorical and symbolist political fiction received new impetus with the highly acclaimed novel by Aris Alexandrou *Το κιβώτιο* (*The mission box*, 1974) and the earlier novel by Andreas Frangias *Ο λοιμός* (*Plague*, 1972). But as political conditions in Greece have improved, so political allegories have become less popular.

It could be argued that Greek fiction, though closely engaged with the country's politics, was not very successful in trying to capture the political ethos or the political developments of any given period. It was more successful, however, when it was trying through fantasy, allegory or metaphor to portray the frustrations, illusions and disorders of public life or to produce testimonies of oppression. Fantasy and allegory are useful tools to convey a dysfunctional public life. In this paper, I will look at how three Greek writers of different generations have tried to deal with political conflict and repression. Specifically, I will discuss the novels *The fratricides* (*Οι αδερφοφάδες*) by Nikos Kazantzakis, *Graeculi* (*Γραικύλοι*) by Rodis Roufos and *The stories of ordeal* (*Τα διηγήματα της δοκιμασίας*) by Christophoros Milionis. All three texts belong to the third category of political literature outlined

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ενός πεζογράφου (Athens: Kedros 2004), pp. 61-81 and Christophoros Milionis, "Η μεταπολεμική πεζογραφία: Πρώτη και δεύτερη μεταπολεμική γενιά", *Με το νήμα της Αριάδνης* (Athens: Sokolis 1991), pp. 31-49.

above, have as their theme personal freedom, and make extensive use of antithesis, symbolism or allegory, sharing images of devastation and arid landscapes.[9] In discussing the three texts the relationship of politics with religion, antiquity and censorship will be explored and the question of whether or not the writers compromise their art by dealing with political issues will be addressed.

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Kazantzakis decided, in the late 1940s, to deal with the Greek Civil War in his fiction though he himself had left Greece in June 1946 never to return. Living abroad and without first-hand experience of the events, he decided to engage with the Civil War covertly in his *Christ recrucified* (1948) and more overtly in *The fratricides*, a novel which, according to Peter Bien, "is *Christ Recrucified* rewritten in contemporary dress with the mythic element removed".[10] Kazantzakis wrote the first draft between December 1948 and February 1949, the second in March 1949, and returned to the manuscript in 1952, 1954, 1955 and perhaps even later.[11] The novel was published posthumously in 1963.

The action takes place in the fictional village of Kastellos in Epirus, which is controlled by government forces, while the nearby mountain is the territory of the communist guerrillas. The novel has been read as documentary and has also been described as "the most obviously symbolic of all his fictions",[12] characterizations which seem incompatible or even mutually exclusive.

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[9] According to J. A. Cuddon, "a symbol differs from an allegorical sign in that it has a *real* existence, whereas an allegorical sign is arbitrary"; see *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin 1991), p. 939. Normally an allegory is a narrative with a double signification and meaning: a primary signification or surface meaning and a secondary signification or under-the-surface meaning.

[10] Peter Bien, "Fratricides: interesting document, defective work of art", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 2.1 (1984) 1.

[11] Ibid., p. 6.

[12] Morton P. Levitt, *The Cretan Glance: The world and art of Nikos Kazantzakis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1980), p. 160.

Peter Bien identifies incidents or characters in the novel which coincided with the time of its composition and could be linked with historical reality. For example, the news that Chinese communists had captured Beijing and had driven across the Yellow River in January 1949 is mentioned in the novel. The issue of an autonomous Macedonia, debated among Communists at the time, also features in the narrative, further reinforcing the documentary aspect of the novel. Bien also associates the fictional Captain Drakos with Markos Vafiadis and Loukas, Diakos's second-in-command, with Nikos Zahariadis, arguing that "the rivalry between the two fictional leaders recalls that between the real ones during 1948".[13]

Morton P. Levitt, on the other hand, argues that each character and each act in the novel has its symbolic equivalent and Kastellos is a microcosm of the entire world. Indeed the gloomy and barren village could be seen as a metaphor for human suffering.[14] There is, he claims, a symbolic system and an underlying level of metaphor in *The fratricides* beneath its surface realism: "Every physical deed associated with Yánaros is similarly laden with symbolic potential, yet none is merely an abstraction."[15] The protagonist, according to Levitt, is a compelling character, able to unite the physical and symbolic worlds. Levitt also adds that Leonidas's role in the novel is "to complete our view of Yánaros as symbol and maker of symbols" and his narrative function is entirely symbolic.[16]

These two different approaches to the novel, the documentary and the symbolic, could be seen as replicating the antithetical structure of the novel and the dualistic mode of Kazantzakis's thinking.

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[13] Bien, op. cit., p. 17.

[14] The arid and rocky landscape of the Epirote village is in sharp contrast to the prosperous village of St Constantine on the shores of Black Sea where Father Yánaros was born, suggesting that physical descriptions in the novel are laden with symbolic potential.

[15] Levitt, op. cit., p. 165.

[16] Ibid., p. 170.

Father Yánaros, the main character of *The fratricides*[17] oscillates between wordliness and isolation. He tries, on the one hand, to be a pragmatist who identifies with the whole village and perceives Christ as an earthly figure (25/26-27) while on the other he is an exile, a restless loner with a constant desire to leave (52/53). His love of butterflies, described in the following passage, is indicative of his attempt to combine earthly pragmatism with Christian metaphysics.

> Of all the birds and beasts, this fearless firewalker loved butterflies the best – in them he placed his faith. It was only when he was once asked that he discovered why. "Because the butterfly was once a worm," he had replied, "a worm that crawled into the earth and emerged a butterfly when spring came. What spring? The Second Coming!" (74/75)

His association with *anastenaria* (ecstatic fire-walking) is suggestive of his ambivalence and the difficulty he faces in reconciling opposing forces. It is as if he is treading on burning coals.[18] The fact that Yánaros is Arch-Anastenaris (fire-walker) reinforces the image of civil strife as ritualistic drama, a kind of re-enactment of Christ's passion and a catharsis giving fresh impetus: "For thousands of years civil wars have come and gone, staining Greece with blood. Often – though the thought of it is terrifying – often, after such a fratricidal war, our souls soar and create great things. [...] Can it be that this war was necessary so that our souls might take on a new power?" (121/123). The Civil War is also presented as a re-enactment of the War of Independence: "Don't you realize that you've lost the game? That you're the Turks and we're the guerillas and rebels [*αρματωλοί και*

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[17] The editions used here are the following: Nikos Kazantzakis, *Οι αδερφοφάδες* (Athens: Ekdoseis Elenis Kazantzaki 1982) and *The fratricides*, trans. Athena Gianakas Dallas (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer 1967). After each reference or quotation the page numbers are given first to the English translation and then to the Greek text.

[18] The symbol of fire is not developed here, perhaps due to the fact that Kazantzakis could not sustain his own belief in creative renewal. See Levitt, op. cit., p. 171.

κλέφτες] and that we're the ones fighting for freedom? It's 1821 again, my fellow Turks!" (107/109). The Civil War is not seen as a war about ideological differences, but about basic human needs and the perennial struggle for freedom.[19] It is treated as part of the wider struggle between God above and the demons below (62/61), materiality and spirituality, body and soul, Heaven and earthly Paradise, as the work of devil (75-6/76-7). It could also be seen as a struggle between father and son, in view of the fact that Captain Drakos turns out to be the estranged son of Father Yánaros, a relationship which is only fully revealed towards the end of the novel, though it is hinted before this (83/84, 166/169).

The idea of recurrence is conveyed in the novel by the description of the whole world as Pompeii on the verge of eruption. A cycle of exhaustion and regeneration suggests some sort of mythical pattern: "Whatever culture those generations had, they used up creating a great civilization – ideas, painting, music, science, deeds; but now it has been exhausted; and they are in their last phase – to disappear. Let the barbarians come and open a new path to culture" (91/92). Are the guerillas the new barbarians? Such an analogy could be in line with the conception of the Greek civil war not as a unique historical event, but as part of a recurring cosmic rhythm of conflict and warfare as described in the following extract from Leonidas's diary:

> Some invisible power, which I cannot name, plays on us, holding us in its fingers, and I still don't know whether that force is blind and senseless or full of vision and wisdom. I've been thinking about that force since the other day, and sometimes I call it fate, sometimes, need; sometimes I call it a blind, evil demon, and sometimes, God. This power governs and turns all; once it uses peace, once war – whichever is more suitable – to serve its purpose. [...] Should we submit and co-operate with

[19] Women in the novel do not become involved in the action, but they could be seen as a kind of chorus. Their symbolic role is evinced in the following passage: "And suddenly, as he watched these five bereaved women, they seemed to be the five great Hellenic mothers – the Roumeliote, the Macedonian, the Epirote, the Moráitian, and the noble mother of the islands" (151/153).

> this terrible force, or should we protest and resist it? My mind stands helpless at these crossroads, not knowing which way to turn; and yet on this decision rests the happiness and the success of man. I believe the ancient Greeks took the first road – the one of harmony – which took them to the miracle of absolute beauty. The Christians took the second path, which led to the mystic glory of love and kindness. Is it possible then, that no matter which path one treads, he can accomplish the miracle of man? (120/122)

It is not so much social conditions or ideologies that motivate the main characters as dark, inner impulses and primitive, ancestral voices. Drakos, for example, is an unpredictable rebel motivated by inner voices (199/2004) rather than an ideologue. Despite occasional references to Lenin, the motivation of the guerrillas tends to be poverty and hunger, not ideology.[20] People are presented as eternally innocent children who need new stories and prophets in each historical period ("Today, Mohammed is called Lenin", 192/197). Communist ideology becomes another myth, a new story in the history of humanity. For Yánaros the Communist guerillas are concerned primarily with material things; they are not interested in anything spiritual.

Kazantzakis appears to divest the civil war of any political or ideological background and to present it as part of the wider eternal struggle between animality and humanity.[21] War is seen as

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[20] See pages 41/42, 79/80, 107/108. For Yánaros there are no ideas which are not embodied by people: "Ideas do not exist, only people who believe in them; for ideas take the form and the body of the men who nurture them" (207/213).

[21] "You go out to fight saying, 'I won't degrade myself. I'll remain human even during the slaughter; I don't hate anyone.' And I go off to battle with compassion in my heart. But the moment you realize that your life is in danger, that they want to kill you, a dark hairy thing suddenly leaps from the depths of your inner being – an ancestor that was hidden inside of you whom you did not suspect, and the human face you had disappears, and you seem to have sprouted sharp, pointy teeth, like a gorilla; and your brain becomes a jumble of blood and hair. You scream, 'Forward! attack, men! We've got 'em!' And the cries that come from your lips are not your own; they can't be yours; they're not human cries; and even the apeman disappears, frightened away; and from within

a regression to bestiality. The survival instinct brings the animal in us to the surface and the civil war is seen as releasing of a deep-seated, almost primordial, hatred among people. It is not the result of conflicting ideologies or interests, but of instincts which are awaiting violent expression.

> Their life is an unceasing battle with God, with the winds, with the snow, with death. For this reason the Castellians were not surprised when the killing began, brother against brother. They were not afraid; they did not change their way of life. But what had been simmering slowly within them, mute and unrevealed, now burst out, insolent and free. The primeval passion of man to kill poured from within them. Each had a neighbor, or a friend, or a brother, whom he had hated for years, without reason, often without realizing it. The hatred simmered there, unable to find an outlet. [...] Murder, that most ancient need of man, took on a high mystic meaning. And the chase began – brother hunting brother. (8/10)

Kazantzakis's dualistic mode of thought is expressed in animal terms as becomes clear in the following thought of Father Yánaros:

> In this world, he thought, you're either a lamb or a wolf. If you're a lamb, you're eaten up; if you're a wolf you do the eating. My God, is there no third animal, a stronger, kinder one? And a voice inside him replied, "There is, yes, there is, Father Yánaros; be patient. Thousands of years ago it set out to find us, to become human; but it hasn't arrived yet. Are you in a hurry? God is in no hurry, Father Yánaros." (86/87)

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you leaps not your father, but your grandfather, the gorilla. Sometimes I am overcome by the desire to kill myself – to save the man within me, to save myself from the beast. But you keep me alive, Maria, and I wait. 'Hold on,' I say, 'one day soon this brother-killing is bound to end.' I'll cast off the gorilla skin – the khaki, the boots, the rifle – and I'll take you by the hand, my darling, and we'll go to Sounio together, and we will speak again Homer's immortal lines" (99/100).

By presenting animality as an earlier stage of evolution and humanity as the present unsatisfactory one, Kazantzakis could not develop a third utopian category which could capture the imagination of his readers and act as a convincing alternative. A third animal or a third way to transcend this dualism is not visualised in the novel. That such a third way has not yet opened up is stated again by Yánaros later on in the narrative:

> What third road? There is no third road! It hasn't opened yet. We have to open it with our labor, pushing onward to make it a road. And who are the "we"? The people! This road begins with the people, goes ahead with the people, and ends with the people. Many times lightning tears through my mind. "Who knows", I say, "perhaps God is pushing us to the edge of this tragedy to force us to open this third road – whether we want to or not – to save ourselves." (155/157)

It is not clear in the novel whether this third way will be a reconciliation of the opposites or their symbolic transcendence through the idea of freedom. Father Yánaros seems to be the symbolic embodiment of God and opens up a path with no certain destination:

> "This very moment that I speak to you my children," he shouted, "God stands pleased, beside me; none of you can see Him, only I, your priest. Trust me; have faith! Between the two devils – the red and the black – and ahead of them God opens a path and He beckons to us. 'Come,' He says." (222/230)

Yánaros helps to highlight the oppositions by standing in the middle and preaching love and reconciliation as a *modus vivendi*, but does not seem to represent a clear ideological position which could act symbolically. He cannot offer a way out of the conflict, a symbol of transcendence of the differences troubling his fellow countrymen. The transcendence of conflict is not possible because it is presented as abstract and primordial and not rooted in specific historical and social conditions.

Father Yánaros with his naïve idealism cannot serve as a symbol. His stance is rather erratic or idiosyncratic, and therefore

he fails in his role as a social leader. It is not clear whether he stands for Christ or freedom. Freedom for Yánaros has no worldly purpose and is not found on earth. The struggle for freedom is the struggle for the unattainable (69/70). His desire for freedom is too abstract to permit of outlining a clear course of action for achieving it or offering a model of reconciliation. Hence, it cannot develop into concrete symbolism. He claims to be the last free man (249/260), but his death in the end undermines his value as a symbol or a source of optimism. In fact, his killing could be interpreted as the death of the idea of freedom; in other words the symbol is destroyed before it has been developed.[22]

The ritualistic aspect of the novel is emphasized by the fact that it takes place during the week leading up to Easter. Christ and Greece become inseparable for Yánaros (128/129, 145/147, 160/163). Christ's resurrection could be seen as the resurrection of the whole country, though elsewhere Yánaros himself is identified with Christ (147-8/149-50, 159/162). Given that the symbolic re-enactment of Christ's resurrection in the Easter mass is postponed by Yánaros, there is no hope for Greece either: "All I know is that two devils have divided Greece, two devils, curse them! One is red, the other black – neither is a Greek. [...] When are we going to be free of those two devils, so we can remain masters in our own homes? Damn it, aren't there any Greeks we can leave Greece to?" (219-220/227-8). Neither Greece nor the Greeks can emerge as the benign force, the superior agent above the two evils. No symbolic exit from the impasse of the conflict is envisaged in the narrative.

Kazantzakis presents the human being on an ascending curve from plant to animal to human being (92 in the Greek text, this passage is missing from the English translation), a struggle involving constant transformation, moral improvement and freedom

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[22] Morton P. Levitt rightly points out "that each persona in *The Fratricides* fails in his task, that none leaves behind him a meaningful legacy: that the young Royalist soldier does not achieve manhood, that the middle-aged guerilla captain is turned on by his own people, that the old village priest is killed at the command of his son" (op. cit., p. 171).

(98/99). Though regression to bestiality is the result of the breakdown of this process, it is not clear what constitutes its ultimate higher aim and achievement. God, freedom, or a higher form of the human being? The novel fails to give a clear and convincing answer to this question and thus to articulate the symbolic culmination of this process. *The fratricides* suffers from defective symbolism. It is a novel which could not realise its symbolic potential and in which the absence of symbolism could be seen as absence of hope. Kazantzakis did not develop the metaphorical and symbolic aspects of his story as he had done in *Christ recrucified.*

In *The fratricides* Kazantzakis neither achieves a synthesis of the opposites nor their symbolic transcendence. He cannot overcome his dualistic mode of thinking and representing the world; therefore he cannot offer a position for his readers to identify with. He does not show how the conflict might be resolved and his narrative ends with death and despair. Structurally too the novel has loose ends. For example, the internal dispute within the Red Army, epitomised by Drakos and Loukas, does not lead anywhere. Perhaps the author's failure can be explained by the fact that he departed from the historico-mythical method and did not exploit the ability of myth to convert historical events into timeless symbols.[23]

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Rodis Roufos was more successful in drawing symbolic parallels: in his case between ancient history and the contemporary world. His novel *Graikyloi* (first published in April 1967 and reprinted in 1971 and 1999) is one of the few fictional representations of antiquity in post-war Greek prose and the author's most accom-

[23] As Peter Bien points out, the mythic method is "defined as a technique for going beyond present dissolution to the intimation of future reconciliation and synthesis; it is the aesthetic correlative to hope" (op. cit., p. 2).

plished novel.[24] Though not experimental in narrative terms, it represents a subtle allegorical handling of history with a measured balance of fact and fiction. Roufos liked to draw parallels, either between earlier periods (particularly post-classical) and the modern era or between imaginary countries (like Boliguay in his unfinished novel *Viva Boliguay* and in his allegorical story "Ο Υποψήφιος" ["The candidate"] published in the volume of *Eighteen texts* [1970][25]) and the situation in his own country, particularly under the Colonels.

In an essay which preceded the publication of the novel, Roufos took issue with the treatment of the Hellenistic period as a period of decline and argues that it was a period of maturity rather than old age. It was a period that centred on the individual or the wider world and no longer on the city and thus promotes cosmopolitanism, individualism, scepticism and the questioning of traditional beliefs and values. The modern antipathy towards mature periods such as the Hellenistic, Roufos points out, is psychological because the post-classical period presents some analogies with the present. It is a mirror of the modern world, something that Cavafy perceived clearly and used creatively. Roufos notices a modern nostalgia for primitivism or an appreciation of archaic art and a reluctance or fear to look into the mirror of the Hellenistic age lest we recognise features of the present.[26]

Perhaps this explains why Roufos chose Athens during the first century B.C. as the subject of his novel and relied on the ancient sources to give the reader a detailed and accurate picture of the period. The novel drew on Roufos's research for his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne which he started in 1961, after being appointed to the Greek Embassy in Paris in 1960, but which was

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[24] Dimitris Daskalopoulos shares this view in his introduction to the section on Roufos in the anthology *Η Μεταπολεμική Πεζογραφία*, Vol. 7 (Athens: Sokolis 1988), p. 21.

[25] See Rodis Roufos, *Επιλογή: Λογοτεχνικά κείμενα* (Athens: Kedros 1973).

[26] Rodis Roufos, "Η απολογία μιας 'παρακμής'", first published in the periodical *Εποχές* in 1966, reprinted in *Οι Μεταμορφώσεις του Αλάριχου* (Athens: Ikaros 1971), pp. 89-138.

never completed due to his recall to Athens and the Greek Foreign Office in 1964. In his authorial note he recommends from among the ancient sources Plutarch's *Life of Sulla*, Appian's *Mithridatic Wars* and Athenaeus's *The Deipnosophists* and from modern studies W. S. Ferguson's *Hellenistic Athens* (1911) and Théodore Reinach's *Mithridate Eupator: Roi de Pont* (1890). He also states that in his novel he followed the sources meticulously and only where they had gaps or there were different interpretations did he rely on Ferguson or use his own imagination.

Indeed the novel presents a historically accurate picture of Athens during the critical years 88-86 B.C. In the preceding years Athens had been a prosperous city, had enjoyed peace for a number of years, and her philosophical schools were renowned. As Claude Mossé points out, this state of affairs concerned only a rich minority and there is no information about the rest of the population, the mass of poor citizens who made a meagre living from their land or their craftmanship: "Texts and inscriptions acquaint us only with the minority of rich and influential men who governed the *polis*. The others remain hidden in total darkness. They were to emerge from this suddenly on a summons from the King of Pontos, Mithridates Eupator."[27] Mithridates VI Eupator was an ambitious and ruthless monarch, who managed to increase the territory of his kingdom and to win prestige throughout the Greek world.

In the late spring of 88 B.C. Athens decided to break its alliance with Rome and side with King Mithridates who in the previous year had made significant gains in Asia Minor against the Romans. For the first time in more than a century the Athenians turned against Rome, which had helped them when they were threatened by Philip of Macedon. Historians have raised a number of questions: why did the citizens of Athens suddenly find their staunch ally Rome so repellent? Why did they find Mithridates so attractive? Was this due to his family's reputation as admirers and defenders of Greek culture, as suggested by the contemporary

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[27] Claude Mossé, *Athens in decline 404-86 B.C.*, trans. Jean Stewart (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1973), p. 147.

historian Posidonius, or because he could offer a solution to the pressing debt problem faced by some Athenians in hock to Roman creditors?[28] In other words, were the reasons for the Athenians' attraction to Mithridates cultural or social? Was he the saviour of the debt-ridden or just an admirer of Greek culture? Neither history nor the novel gives a clear answer to these questions. An allegorical social reading of the novel with reference to the modern period could see Mithridates as a social revolutionary or a Communist, while a cultural reading would stress the perennial cultural prestige of Hellenism.

The novel portrays Athens as being divided between the democrats, who aspired to get rid of the Romans with the help of Mithridates, and the oligarchs, who supported the rule of Rome. Even the philosophers were divided in their support.[29] Philon, director of the Academy, is presented as a friend of Rome, and, according to his rival the Peripatetic philosopher Apellikon, is concerned primarily for his own social and economic success.[30] The Academicians and Stoics tend to be conservative and support the Romans, while those who belong to the Peripatetic school, like Apellikon, are democrats and look favourably on an intervention by Mithridates. Mithridates is presented as the champion of the poor (49) while the Romans are presented as greedy creditors (42, 52). Roman tax collectors and money-lenders were loathed in

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[28] Christian Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Antony*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (London & Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press 1997), pp. 297-301. Rodis Roufos himself points out that all the historical sources of the period and particularly Posidonius, being friendly to Rome, were rather hostile towards the Athenian revolt (Roufos, "Η απολογία μιας 'παρακμής'", p. 134).

[29] In Athens there were four famous schools of philosophy which flourished throughout the Hellenistic period: Plato's Academy (founded in 387); its offshoot, the *Peripatos* of Aristotle (founded in 335); Zeno's Stoa (founded in 306) and the "*Kepos*" (Garden) of Epicurus (founded in 301). After the destruction of Athens by Sulla in 86 B.C. the philosophical schools were in decline. See Habicht, op. cit., pp. 105-11.

[30] Rodis Roufos, *Γραικύλοι* (Athens: Okeanida 1999), p. 26. Henceforth page numbers will be given in a parenthesis.

those parts of Asia and Greece which they controlled.[31] In this respect, the conflict in the novel between democrats and oligarchs, and by extension Mithridates and Rome, acquires a social and political dimension which could be translated in modern terms as a conflict between capitalism and socialism.

Athens during the spring of 88 B.C. was ruled by Medeius of Piraeus, who was *eponymous archon* for an unprecedented fourth term, a clear indication that the constitution had been suspended. He must have requested the intervention of Rome but in the years 90-88 B.C. the Senate had been fully occupied with the Italic war.[32] Medeius believed that Rome was a global power which could unite the world under its leadership, and which stood for order, as opposed to Hellenism, which represented clear thinking and the creation of beauty. (81). Though Medeius was pre-occupied with the future of Hellenism, his younger followers cared more about their own profit. With the exception of Medeius and Kalliphon, who belonged to old Athenian families, the new oligarchs are *nouveaux riches* and not aristocrats, who were not concerned about the glory or the independence of the city (107).

The Athenian *demos* revolts against Medeius while Athenion, a philosopher from the School of Aristotle, on his return from a trip to Asia Minor as head of a delegation, claims that he has established contact with Mithridates and he is poised to intervene, which forces Medeius to suggest to his ruling elite that they should leave the city. Athenion is then elected hoplite general by the citizens, who empower him to nominate all other officials. Some oligarchs immediately switch sides and become democrats. The island of Delos defects from Athens and Apellikon leads an Athenian expedition against the island. Lefkios Orbius, a Roman businessman on the island, manages to defeat the Athenians and Apellikon accepts responsibility and flees before he can be finally accused. The island is seized shortly afterwards by Archelaus, Mithdrates's general, with the loss of thousands of Italian lives

[31] Habicht, op. cit., p. 302.
[32] Ibid., p. 302.

and then presented back to Athens. Reportedly, Mithridates ordered the replacement of Athinion by Aristion, an Athenian Epicurean philosopher who had accompanied Archelaus and who was to become the new ruthless "tyrant" of Athens.[33] By that stage nobody feels secure and many are arrested as Roman sympathizers. Athinion himself ends up in jail without his wife, Lyssipe, knowing what has happened to him.

Meanwhile Archelaus tries to secure his rule in the rest of Greece while Cornelius Sulla assumes power in Rome. The latter arrives in Greece in early 87 B.C. and besieges Athens and Piraeus. During the siege the Athenians suffer a great deal due to shortage of food and when Sulla enters the city during the night of 1 March 86, he orders a massacre to teach the Athenians a hard lesson. Later on Sulla repents and puts a stop to the massacre and thus the author has Dion narrowly escape death. Praising the Athenians of former times, Sulla says he is sparing a few (living) for the sake of the many (dead).

The central character of the novel is the fictional Dion who is 32 years old, single, and has studied medicine. His father has been killed 15 years earlier during the suppression of the workers' uprising at Laurion and his mother has died while he was in Alexandria. His younger brother Glafkos, an oligarch-sympathizer, has settled with his wife Chloe at the family estate in Dekeleia, after having enjoyed life in Athens.[34] Dion is a democrat, but avoids extremes or taking sides, and does not wish to see Athens a colony of Mithridates (220). Eteoklis, a sculptor, tells Dion that he cannot find a fixed point in his character because he oscillates between philosophy, medicine and aestheticism and argues that it is time to understand that the role of art is to deal with manly things and the hard life of the majority of people (21). These kinds of references

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[33] It has been suggested that the same man may have been called Athenion by Posidonius and Aristion by Plutarch. See Mossé, op. cit., p. 150 and Graham Shipley, *The Greek world after Alexander (323-30BC)* (London: Routledge 2000), p. 390.

[34] Dion might be identified with Plato, considering that both have a brother called Glafkos/Glaucon.

at the beginning of the novel help to mark Dion out as an eclectic, unbiased and uncommitted character who does not take sides in the political power struggle, unlike Eteoklis, for example, who is a democrat and hates Rome, considering the Romans to be interested only in looking after the interests of the rich.

Dion lives together with his young Jewish slave Ruth, whom he has bought in Delos. She is to become his lover and later they have a son called Harmides. Through their relationship Roufos introduces a cultural antithesis between Hellenism and Hebraism, presenting Dion as the embodiment of Greek rationalism and Ruth as the representative of Hebraic religiosity (419-20). Their relationship in the novel does not seem to play an important role in terms of the plot, but it serves as an argument for the cultural superiority of Hellenism through the representation of Dion as a humane and open-minded individual. This suggests that the novel works on two levels: a cultural one (as a reflection on the role of Hellenism) and a political one (through the conflict with Rome). The political message of the novel is not entirely clear and its political allusions can be read on different levels: local, global, social or ethical.

The situation in Athens during the period 88-86 B.C. and the struggle for power between democrats and oligarchs could be seen as an allegory for political instability and destruction caused by civil strife (a possible allusion to the Greek Civil War). Aristion, for example, in his funeral oration for some Athenian democrats who have died in an ambush outside Athens tries to shift the blame from the foreign powers to his Athenian opponents.

> "Don't ever forget, citizens, who turned out to be the murderers of our people in this battle. It was not the Romans, nor was it their foreign allies. It was the Athenians, double-crossing oligarchs, the same who for so many years oppressed you, and now they are fighting again to subjugate you. They lifted sacrilegious weapons against their homeland, they treacherously murdered your companions. I ask you: are these people, and those who collaborated with them in any way whatsoever, worth any kind of pity or mercy?" (262)

Later on, however, Aristion himself orders an attack by his Cappadocian archers on a delegation of Athenian priests and members of parliament who were seeking a negotiated surrender of Athens to the Romans. A number of Athenians, including Kleinias, lose their lives before Aristion orders his Cappadocians to cease fire (369-376).

Though the conflict in Athens between democracy and oligarchy appears to be ideological, there are characters in the novel who are motivated by greed. Sarapion and Diodoros, supporters of Medeius, are primarily concerned with profit (82), and they easily switch loyalties when the democrats come to power (114). However, in the end they do not manage to save their skins and end up being executed because suspicion and fear rather than ideological debate reign in the city.

It is hard to tell whether this situation in Athens represents an allegory of the situation in Greece after the Second World War, though Roufos in his authorial note at the end of the novel states that the reader should judge whether the period he had tried to "resurrect" offered any didactic message to his own. It has been suggested that the food shortage in Athens during the Roman siege has some analogies with the famine during the German occupation of Athens.[35] The analogies with the post-WWII era are reinforced if we see the struggle for global supremacy between Rome and Mithridates in modern terms.

The opposition between Rome and Mithridates could be treated as a metaphor for the political conflict between East and West, Communism and capitalism. There are incidents in the novel which point to this parallel. For example, the poet Amyntas, presumably modelled on Cavafy's Fernazis, tells Dion that the lesson to be learnt from Mithridates's East is that the individual self cannot survive in the presence of a strong leader who embodies the dreams of the people (122). The idea that democracy is the suppression of individualism alarms Dion, sounding more like

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[35] Vasos Varikas, "Αναφορά στο σήμερα – Ρόδη Ρούφου: *Οι Γραικύλοι*", first published 16 July 1967, reprinted in *Συγγραφείς και κείμενα, Β, 1966-1968* (Athens: Ermis 1980), p. 164.

the barbarism of politics. Is this a form of idealism or escapism? Although in earlier novels Dion also appears to be the author's persona,[37] taking a similar liberal stance and articulating similar views to those in *Graikyloi*, it should be stressed that Roufos himself was not a withdrawn or ivory-tower man.[38]

Though culture and aesthetics might offer a way out of political conflict, the novel does not end on an upbeat note, since the fall of Athens to the Romans and the subsequent defeat and death of Mithridates brings to an unsuccessful end the last resurgence of Hellenism. Hence, the defeat of Hellenism represents a defeat of culture. Yet this rather pessimistic ending is not reflected in the thoughts of Dion who passionately believes in the eternal Hellenic ideals of spirit, truth and beauty.

> Here came the lesson of the preceding hours, the truth that had emerged by reading *Phaedo*: there are other dimensions to greatness and glory, apart from political power. There is spirit, truth, beauty. We Greeks can be the scholars, artists, thinkers of

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[37] See his trilogy *Το Χρονικό μιας σταυροφορίας* (*Η ρίζα του μύθου* [1954], *Πορεία στο σκοτάδι* [1955], *Η άλλη όχθη* [1958]) and his novel about Cyprus *Η Χάλκινη Εποχή* (1960, available in English translation as *The Age of Bronze*, London: Heineman 1960). Roufos's trilogy has been criticised for its anti-Communist content and as a result the writer, who gradually adopted a more conciliatory approach, made some modifications, removing passages and toning down its anti-Communism in the second edition (1971). This trilogy together with the work of other "testimonial" writers of the period is discussed by Peter Mackridge, "Testimony and fiction in Greek narrative prose 1944-1967", in: Roderick Beaton (ed.), *The Greek novel AD1-1985* (London: Croom Helm 1988), pp. 90-102.

[38] Though Roufos was not among the exponents of *littérature engagée*, he wrote essays on ideological issues such as the one on modern Greek conservative ideology (first published in the periodical *Νέα Εστία* in 1956 and reprinted in his book *Οι Μεταμορφώσεις του Αλάριχου*, pp. 16-44). He was a fierce opponent of the military regime in Greece and wrote anonymously *Vérité sur la Grèce* (Lausanne: La Cité 1970), translated into English by Richard Clogg (*Inside the Colonels' Greece*, by Athenian, London: Chatto and Windus 1972). He also contributed an essay on "Culture and the military" in Richard Clogg and George Yannopoulos (eds.), *Greece under military rule* (London: Secker & Warburg 1972), pp. 146-62.

> the new world. Hellenism will not be wiped out, because it is a concept which transcends the shifting fortunes of races... A way will be found to co-exist with Rome. But could we ever come to a true understanding with these people who were so different from us? (434)

The novel urges readers to see it as an allegorical commentary about the modern period, and particularly the period of the Cold War, with its descriptions of power struggle, intrigue, and torture. The novel could be read both on a national level as a reference to the Greek Civil War and the political instability that followed as well as on an international level as an allusion to the clash of superpowers and the parody of independence for small nations.[39] On both levels the message is the same: there are no political saviours.

The aim of the novel is summed up by the last lines of the epigraph from Polybius quoted at the beginning of the text: "the purpose is not to please readers temporarily, but for them to see sense and not make again the same mistakes". History for Roufos offers a lesson for the modern reader, but this lesson could be interpreted as a rejection of crude politics in favour of aesthetic humanism.[40] In the end Roufos's novel is as much an allegory about the political developments of his time as an exaltation of art and culture over the barbarity of politics.

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Art as antidote to repressive politics is arguably the message in some of *The stories of ordeal* (*Τα διηγήματα της δοκιμασίας* [1978]) by Christophoros Milionis.[41] Most of these stories were

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[39] Dimitris Daskalopoulos (op. cit., p. 20) points out that in the novel one can find some analogies with the "lost spring" of the early 1960s.

[40] Left-wing critics such as Dimitris Raftopoulos (*Οι ιδέες και τα έργα*, Athens: Difros 1965, pp. 289-96) have criticized Roufos's first novel for its lack of realism and for an aestheticised treatment of reality.

[41] Christoforos Milionis, *Τα διηγήματα της δοκιμασίας* (Athens: Kedros 2001). Where page numbers are given they refer to this edition. For

first published during the military dictatorship (1973-74) in Greece in the periodical entitled *Ordeal* (*Δοκιμασία*), alluding to the difficult conditions under the Junta. The author uses the medium of the short story rather than the novel because his aim is to provide snapshots of a disordered public life, not to articulate an alternative political vision or a model of political behaviour as Roufos did with his character Dion. By using meticulously detailed descriptions, little action and no characterization, the stories highlight a sense of imprisonment and desolation, thus creating an atmosphere of fear, intimidation or sinister anticipation. In this way they draw attention to the oppressive nature of the regime while at the same time skilfully circumventing censorship.[42] Though Milionis is basically a realist writer and the rest of his fiction relies on his personal experience with references to historical events and his native region,[43] these stories stand out as they represent an appropriation of the techniques of the French *nouveau roman* not for the sake of formalist experimentation or literary imitation, but as a form of cultural resistance.[44] Political

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further bibliographical details see Dimitrios H. Sklavenitis, *Χριστόφορος Μηλιώνης: Χρονολόγιο – Βιβλιογραφία – Ανθολόγιο (από το 1954 ως το 2002)* (Athens: Sokolis 2003).

[42] For the impact of censorship on Greek poetry see Karen Van Dyck, *Kassandra and the censors: Greek poetry since 1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1998).

[43] For further information on Milionis's fiction see G. D. Paganos, *Τρεις μεταπολεμικοί πεζογράφοι: Χριστόφορος Μηλιώνης – Νίκος Μπακόλας – Η. Χ. Παπαδημητρακόπουλος* (Athens: Nefeli 1998), Spyros Tsaknias, "Χριστόφορος Μηλιώνης" in *Μεταπολεμική πεζογραφία*, vol. 5 (Athens: Sokolis 1988), pp. 254-329, Yorgos Aragis, "Ο διηγηματογράφος Χριστόφορος Μηλιώνης: Τα *Ακροκεραύνεια*", in *Προσεγγίσεις* (Athens: Patakis 1997), pp. 126-38 and Alexandros Argyriou, "Ξαναδιαβάζοντας το *Καλαμάς και Αχέροντας* του Χριστόφορου Μηλιώνη", in *Οριακά και μεταβατικά έργα Ελλήνων πεζογράφων* (Athens: Sokolis 1996), pp. 213-33.

[44] In his essays Milionis demonstrates familiarity with the work of Nathalie Sarraute and Alain Robbe-Grillet (see "Διαχρονική και συγχρονική πεζογραφία" (1975), *Υποθέσεις*, Athens: Kastaniotis 1983, pp. 25-30 and 40, and *Με το νήμα της Αριάδνης*, Athens: Sokolis 1991). It should be noted here that Milionis's wife Tatiana Tsaliki had translated and published in a single volume in 1970 Sarraute's *Tropismes*

oppression gave Milionis the opportunity to put a self-referential mode of writing to a new use, in order to overcome censorship and to express himself freely.[45]

Milionis adopted the modes of the *nouveau roman* to react to an authoritarian regime and not to a literary tradition or an established fictional practice as French writers such as Natalie Sarraute, Claude Simon, Robbe-Grillet or Michel Butor had done.[46] The impersonal style and the overuse of description do not aim primarily to reveal the formal devices and the artificiality of writing as in the case of *nouveaux romanciers*. Instead they draw attention to the impersonality of the regime and its oppressive practices. Lacking characters, Milionis's stories are not anthropocentric and seem to follow Robbe-Grillet's recommended technique that "to describe things, as a matter of fact, is deliberately to place oneself outside them, confronting them".[47] Hence, they could be defined as a "littérature objective", a term used by Roland Barthes for the narratives of Robbe-Grillet.[48] Through a visual narrative full of meticulous description, Milionis maintains a critical distance from what was going on in his country at the time. The objectivity of

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(1939) and Robbe-Grillet's *Instantanés* (1962). She also translated and published in 1969 Albert Camus, *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1945). At that time no publisher wanted to undertake the publication of this translation due to its anti-fascist character, and, therefore, she published it privately with personal permission from Gallimard. In the early years the military Junta in Greece had imposed preventive censorship on all publications, which was lifted in 1970, and this allowed the *Eighteen texts* to come out.

[45] The Algerian novelist Rachid Boudjedra (*Topographie idéale pour une aggression caractérisée*, Paris: Denoël 1975) also adds a political dimension to what is usually seen as an apolitical style.

[46] For more details regarding the *nouveau roman* see Jean Ricardou, *Problèmes du nouveau roman* (Paris: Seuil 1967), Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A study in the practice of writing* (London: Elek 1972), and Ann Jefferson, *The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980).

[47] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a new novel: Essays on fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press 1965), p. 70

[48] Roland Barthes, "Objective literature" (1954), *Critical essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1972), pp. 13-24.

his style serves as a protest against the dehumanization caused by the authoritarian regime rather than a reminder that we are reading a linguistic construct.

The new novel highlighted the relationship of human consciousness with the world, and therefore narrative perspective became an important aspect of its practice, suggesting that truth and meaning depend on individual experience and not on a common understanding between writer and reader. "The objects in our novels", Robbe-Grillet argues, "never have a presence outside human perception."[49] Such a statement brings the *nouveau roman* close to existential phenomenology, but it also seems to contradict its objectivist tendencies.[50] John Sturrock, however, claims that there is no great difficulty in situating the action in new novels "in the reflective consciousness of the novelist" and that "the narrative tradition to which the *nouveau roman* belongs is therefore that of the interior monologue".[51] With reference to phenomenology and existentialism, the question as to whether the *nouveau roman* is subjective or objective has caused disagreements among critics, but in the case of Milionis things are slightly different. In spite of the objectivity of the descriptions, the subjectivity of the observer in his stories acquires particular significance and could be associated with the freedom of the individual and the primacy of an independent private consciousness over the constraints of an external world dominated by repression.

With the exception of the first story, none of the stories conveys a sense of the passage of time while the characters are nameless and seem impersonal. The stories tend to be inconclusive and open-ended. The narrator is a detached observer who does not reveal his views or emotions. What dominates the narrative is the repetitive description of space, whether of flats, roads, abandoned villages or wasteland. In two stories, "Imprisonment"

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[49] Robbe-Grillet, *For a new novel*, p. 137.
[50] Arthur E. Babcock, *The New Novel in France: Theory and practice of the Nouveau Roman* (New York: Twayne Publishers 1997), pp. 18-19.
[51] John Sturrock, *The French New Novel* (London: Oxford University Press 1969), pp. 19-20.

(Εγκλεισμός) and "The steps" (Τα βήματα), the sense of imprisonment and eerie expectation is built up through the painstaking description of the enclosed space of rooms while the repeated references to the sound of approaching steps, door bells, household appliances or insects suggest a tense atmosphere. The repetition of minute details of interior spaces emphasize the feeling of withdrawal, insecurity and isolation while the external world, represented in "Imprisonment" by the sound of military marches, represents an unidentified source of threat and fear. Perception of the external world is often fragmented or partial ("Through the drawn blinds of the French window one could see only strips of the external world as if it has been cut in ribbons", p. 23).

Even the stories which take place in the open air convey a sense of wilderness, of a desolate landscape with no human presence or movement. In the story "The two gendarmes" (Οι δυο χωρο-φύλακες), two country policemen patrol a road leading to a village. Everything seems deserted and there is no sound of animals, bells, or even the wind. The only rhythmic repetitive sound comes from their boots. On a branch of a tree something sparkles and they think that it is a piece of tin, reflecting the sun. One of them shoots at the sparkle, but nothing happens. The reflection of the sun is still there. Obviously the contrast between the deserted landscape and the sunshine is an allegory of resistance to the tyrannical regime and the desire for freedom. In this same story there is an allusion to the military coup of 1967 when the two officers visit a boarded up and deserted building, presumably the village school, which has above its entrance a sign reading: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – Founded April 1867 (Αρχή Σοφίας φόβος Κυρίου – Ανεγέρθη Απριλίου 1867)". The title itself is a play on words, splitting the word "χωρο-φύλακες" in two: χωρο (country) and φύλακες (guardians) and thus suggesting the policemen are guardians of the whole country rather than just the village. We find a similar word play in the story "At Katara" (Στην Κατάρα), where the word "Katara" is both a geographical reference to the eponymous

mountain pass between Epirus and Thessaly, and a word meaning curse and calamity.

In the story, roads are blocked by the snow at an altitude of 1700 metres. A few people are stranded in a wooden hut in the middle of nowhere with supplies of wood and lighting fuel running out. This could be read as a metaphor for Greece under military rule and the exhaustion of the gas lamp as symbolic of the darkness imposed by the junta. The allegorical contrast between light and darkness can be found in several of the stories while the transition from light to darkness acquires symbolic connotations and contributes to the gloomy ending of "Drive" (Διαδρομή). This story tells of a private car being kept under surveillance by the secret police, whose car is identified by its special three-figure number plates. The road is endless, the radio broadcasts military marches, and the chase goes on and on, suggesting that nothing will ever change.

The last two stories make some implicit connections between art and freedom. In the story "The poet or the tick-tock of the clock" (Ο ποιητής ή το τικ-τακ του ρολογιού) a couple sit in their flat around midnight. The man is reading a newspaper report to the woman about how two murderers have entered a flat, hidden in the loft and waited there until around midnight when their victim arrived. The murderers had made a number of phone calls beforehand to make sure that their victim would not be there when they arrived. The reading of the newspaper is interrupted a number of times by the ringing of the telephone but, when the woman picks it up, the person at the other end hangs up. The phone calls and the coincidence as to the time (midnight) invite the reader to draw a parallel between the murder as reported in the paper and the calls to the couple's flat. The unsettling atmosphere created by the report, the suggestive silence of the night and the spooky calls are all intensified by the ticking of an old clock in the flat. The repeated references to the clock heighten the sense that something sinister is imminent and time is ticking away.

The couple's sitting room is described in detail and some of the descriptions are repeated. The recurring descriptions relate to

Reproduced from Waldemar George, *Le Peinture Expressioniste* (Paris: Éditions Aimery Somogny 1960), p. 82. I would like to thank Christophoros Milionis for sending me a copy of the painting.

the clock and a painting by Francis Gruber (1912-1948) called "The poet" (1942), portraying a door half-open in the countryside without any walls around it, through which one can see a horse with its head lowered and a bird of prey on its back (see illustration). In front of the door on a dilapidated wooden bench a tired poet is sitting. The reader is invited to make sense of these disconnected images of the clock, the newspaper report and the painting. We may assume that what is involved here is a contrast between the atmosphere of fear and intimidation associated with the enclosed space of the flat and the sense of freedom represented by the painting. The painting here seems to be a symbolic representation of the freedom of art, offering a way out of the claustrophobia and intimidation. The boundaries between text and reality are blurred in this story as the reader is induced to anticipate something along the lines of the newspaper report happening again, suggesting that life imitates art and not the other way around. Art is identified with openness and freedom; real life with violence and fear. Though the poet in the painting appears vanquished, the story could be read as an allegory about the power of art to transcend political repression.

The antithesis between life and art is implied in the last story "Introduction to the French lesson (A Paris)" (Εισαγωγή στο μάθημα των Γαλλικών (A Paris)). Here a teacher reads a description of Paris by Anatole France, mentioning various landmarks such as Hugo's Notre-Dame, the Louvre, the quartier latin, the Sorbonne; it represents a stark contrast to the picture of poverty glimpsed from the rear window of the school, which is referred to twice. Another description, mentioned three times in the story, is that of a photograph of a man with slightly protruding forehead, thin lips and trimmed triangular moustache. This photograph, which is described as being on the wall of the classroom, seems likely to be an allusion to an omnipresent official photograph of the dictator Papadopoulos. The contrasts in the story are completed by a final one made between the slightly-built female teacher and the heavily-built school Inspector with a game leg, who has come to observe her class. One could argue that this story

is trying to contrast Paris as a symbol of enlightenment, art and freedom with the squalor and repression of Greece at the time of the military junta.

It could be claimed that the stories are based on much tedious description, very little action and too many forced contrasts which render them schematic and predictable. On the other hand, this kind of writing, with its lack of excitement, plot and causality, intrigues the reader, draws attention to detail and raises suspicions about the flatness of style. For example, in the story "The steps" the brands of domestic appliances are referred to more than once: the refrigerator is a Philips, the dish washer an Indesit, while other brands such as Candy and Hoover are also mentioned. One wonders what is the point of these details, but one could speculate that it is an allusion to the dependency of Greece on foreign imports or increasing consumerism among middle-class Greeks.[52] Milionis's style of writing cultivates an interrogatory stance on the part of the reader. The repetitions seem to be intended to excite the curiosity of readers, who are free to make their own associations, surmises or connections. Though the stories are about repression, intimidation and dehumanization, they are equally about the freedom of the reader to construct their own interpretation of the stories. The sheer objectivity of the descriptions conceals and reveals at the same time, inviting reflection and probing into their nature. The persistent descriptions and repetitions suggest some sort of freezing of time reflecting the deadlock into which the country has been lead by the dictatorship.

During the dictatorship allegorical writing was not uncommon. George Seferis wrote the poems "The cats of St Nicholas" (1969) and "On aspalathoi..." (1971), Thanasis Valtinos published in the volume *Eighteen texts* (1970) his story "Ο γύψος" (The plaster cast), and Spyros Plaskovitis wrote his

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[52] In the story "Cynicism" (Κυνισμός) two foreign tourists visit a desolate and scorched landscape which metaphorically stands for the whole of Greece. Their indifferent attitude to what they observe suggests that many foreigners were indifferent to the plight of Greece during the dictatorship.

stories *Το συρματόπλεγμα* (The barbed wire), not published until 1974. What singles out Milionis is that he was using *nouveau roman* techniques in an unpredictable and original manner and for a completely different purpose.[53] His stories articulate a message of resistance and at the same time give an idea of the conditions endured by people at the time. They are allegories of dystopia and freedom and metonymies of fear and darkness. However, their success lies not so much in their message or their atmosphere, but in their avoidance of censorship. By drawing attention to the art of writing, the stories seek to represent and at the same time to transcend the violence of politics.[54]

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The three texts by Kazantzakis, Roufos and Milionis discussed above could be judged in terms of what sort of alternative to conflict or tyranny they present to the reader. Kazantzakis's alternative, being clouded in metaphysics, is not clearly spelled out and this explains why his novel has been seen as flawed.[55] The aim of the novel is confused, being neither realistic nor symbolic/allegorical, whereas the narrative stresses personal salvation rather than offering a more general vision. Roufos's alternative is embodied in Dion and amounts to patriotism and liberalism, while his allegorical story makes few demands on the reader. Milionis does not seem to offer a clear alternative, since his main concern

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[53] For other practitioners of the *nouveau roman* in Greece see Ritsa Fragkou-Kikilia, *Η Κωστούλα Μητροπούλου και το Αντι-Μυθιστόρημα* (Athens: Theoria 1984).

[54] Unfortunately this collection of stories by Milionis received little critical attention. See Elisavet A. Kotzia, "Η κριτική υποδοχή της πεζογραφίας του Χριστόφορου Μηλιώνη", in Georgia Charitidou (ed.) *Χριστόφορος Μηλιώνης: Αφιέρωμα* [Βιβλιοθήκη της Πανελλήνιας Ένωσης Φιλολόγων] (Athens: Metaichmio 2000), pp. 56-7. See also her review ("Πειραματική δοκιμασία", *Η Καθημερινή*, 16 June 2002) of the second edition of the collection in 2001.

[55] Yannis Vasilakakos, 'Νίκου Καζαντζάκη *Οι αδερφοφάδες*' in *Ο Ελληνικός Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος στη μεταπολεμική πεζογραφία (1946-1958)* (Athens: Ellenika Grammata 2000), p. 272-3.

is to outwit tyranny by avoiding censorship. His demands on the reader are greater as s/he has to make a special effort to comprehend the connotations of the allegorical descriptions. Kazantzakis's novel is a failed religious allegory because it cannot offer vision or hope and abandons the mythico-historical method; Roufos's historical allegory, on the other hand, makes good use of this method inviting readers to draw parallels between antiquity and modern times, while Milionis's stories represent modernist allegories which rely on style, urging readers to empathise and reflect on the conditions of imprisonment.

What the novels by Kazantzakis and Roufos share is an attempt to transcend conflict and to promote liberalism and idealism through characterization. Father Yánaros does not succeed as a credible symbol because he becomes too involved in the conflict, while Dion enjoys the role of a detached observer and is able to emerge as a symbol of independence, humanism and optimism. In both novels politics is presented as greedy, dirty and bloody and therefore, to counterbalance this negative image, the texts have to set up an idealistic, selfless and humane paradigm. Thus, resistance to politics leads to literary manifestations of metaphysics, idealisation and abstraction. On the other hand, the fact that Milionis's stories lack rounded characters shifts the issue of symbolism from characterization to description. In this way he avoids the pitfalls of idealism which lurk in the creation of symbolic characters. His stories do not make implicit value judgements or put forward idealised models of behaviour. In trying to avoid censorship, he is able to maintain a subtle balance between politics and literature.

In the three texts religion, culture and art emerge as challenges to politics. Kazantzakis fails to offer a convincing symbolic alternative to political conflict, whereas Roufos and Milionis both manage to resist the violence of politics using the aesthetics of Hellenism and the allegories of writing respectively. These narratives represent, on the one hand, a defence of freedom and democracy and, on the other, a defence of culture and literature. They tread carefully between commitment and aesthetic autonomy,

social engagement and private withdrawal; they transcend politics by engaging in politics, thus offering a new perspective on the social role of literature without compromising its autonomy. It should be said, however, that this kind of writing could easily lead to literature and culture being elevated into idealised aesthetic realms cut off from social reality. Roufos manages to escape this pitfall by adding a national dimension to the political in the form of his character Dion.

In conclusion, it could be said that politics is not always detrimental to literature. It can often release a writer's allegorical powers and stretch his or her potential for invention, wordplay and new ways of representing the past. Symbolism and allegory can give an extended lease of life to political literature, but the devices used to avoid censorship or castigate tyranny may pose increasing challenges to readers in later periods. It seems to me that resisting both political oppression and ideological dogmatism can produce the most fruitful and rewarding engagement between literature and politics.