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**MODERN GREEK STUDIES
(AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND)**

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The periodical welcomes papers in both English and Greek on all aspects of Modern Greek Studies (broadly defined). Prospective contributors should preferably submit their papers on disk and hard copy. All published contributions by academics are refereed (standard process of blind peer assessment). This is a DEST recognised publication.

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for his heroic efforts to make this journal readable.
This issue is dedicated to Véronica and Andras.*

ROMOS PHILYRAS (1888-1942)

My Life in the Dromokaiteion

(Translated by Andrew Mellas)

First Impressions

When I entered into the Dromokaiteion that first evening, I felt immediately my misery deepen, boredom with her black wings covering me entirely, all over my body and all over my soul.

I strode over its doorstep like a dead man, as I would stride with my feelings incorruptible over the threshold of Hades. The nurses and the doctors with their white camisoles who were coming down to the front gate to collect me and were searching me with their gaze, a gaze examining and amusing to my very bones, which unstitched seam by seam – *krak, krak, krak* – like the drill of the coroner my skin and my bones and was bringing to the surface with his fine investigating drill-point my heart and the recesses of my brain, gave to me the impression – I remember it as if it were now – of white-winged pall-bearing angels, who were weighing me on the dreadful scales of the implacable judgment, I wonder to which circle of purgatory or of hell they will have to classify me.

And the pale, spectral, nightmarish figures of the sick, who wander about on the grounds, seemed to me like ghosts, like incorporeal and elusive phantoms who roam about the shores of Arnos and where on the lips trembled, along with the unvoiced “welcome” the question: “What news from the world above, from the world of the living?”

It is beautiful that in here they behave towards us as if we were cognitive. We wake, we eat, we sleep in accordance with the rules. Emperors, Gods, Kings, we are obliged to get up at the time which the master nurse appoints. He does not ask whether we want to and whether we can interrupt our celestial mission. If this is the way it is, what is the benefit of our madness? And we slaves of human narrow-mindedness? The one next door for example is a man who travels. He travels the poor thing... Before we lay down in the bed chamber to sleep, he takes out from his pockets a whole bunch of old papers and endless balls of string, he packs up methodically his bed, the clothes, and his shoes and says to us instead of good night: “till we meet again”.

He travels; he goes to Leipzig, to Paris, to Berlin, to Egypt, the Indies, Morocco... Is it permitted, then, the first by chance nurse with a nudge to be waking and to be bringing back again to the Dromokaiteion the man who, with a few old papers and some string, was given to travelling like a bird and to making every night a divine journey? Oceans, gardens, churches, museums – and what does he not describe to us unrolling methodically his packed bed? All the day later he strolls stooping, speechless, searching for old papers. One time when the nurse woke him abruptly he shouted at him despairingly.

“Leave me, for God’s sake, I’m missing the train...”

Is this a system, a cure, for them to be taking the only happiness which remains for the madman? They are curing him they tell us. Well done... And when he becomes well will he make ever again the journey with a piece of string?

Long live madness! I, Romos, shout it. But unfortunately I do not reach to the height of some in here. You see, I still keep some logic and this belittles me. That is why I suffer, that is why when I see in the evening over there like a sea of happiness the golden lights of Athens, my heart breaks. Accursed logic which the ruthless spirochete left wholly somewhere inside me, when will he finally also take this? Yes. I want to become mad, to no longer feel anything. Long live madness! In the morning when God lights up the day it is as if all these divine, the great – not like me – but the superior lunatics rise to their throne of world domination.

We have here God. He puts on when he gets up his pants, a green shift, he ties around his neck a braid – which is, he says, a mystical symbol of his omnipotence – and... he rumbles brr, brr... his thunder. You speak to him and he does not give you an answer. He looks at you straight in the eye, who? me... Me who, anyhow, I am not though the least in here. I too am something. And yet he does not give me an answer. He turns his back, he abandons me in the lurch and once he starts walking he turns and... he resounds at me... Brr, kra, kra, boof... his thunder. Whatever I say it is nothing before this majestic phrase, my poems are worth nothing to me, I feel myself insignificant, overwhelmed before him. And that which matters is the general indifference of all in here.

Whatever you might say is does not make any impression on them. I spoke the first days. I said about Giolanta, about my throne... why bother. If the nurses were not there to hear me, without fail I would have ceased talking.

During the 26 months of my self-enclosurement I went through successively and proportionately to the phases of my sickness, all the rooms of the phrenological graduation, all the circles of purgatory and hell – to the room of the maniacs.

One night at the room of the maniacs – what an indescribable and ahistorical drama... A hazy, exceedingly faint light, like a sick discouraged moon, amongst the clouds. In its pale, flickering shimmer the horrifying disfigurements which madness and sickness scarified on the lymphatic, flustered faces, take on fantastical and implausible dimensions. All the nightmarish forms which human imagination dreamed, all the monstrous sketchings of improvisation blind and tangible, life, before harmony prevails, move and stir in the darkness.

Emaciated hands grope inside the mist as though they were chasing a fleeting deceptive ray, tortured bodies writhe on the beds, others are disturbed from spasms, they fly up like undissolved dead who leap up whole-bodied from their graves, the bones grind frighteningly while the nightmares and the terrors twist and turn on their steely toes... The eyes alive from the fever of frenzy like flames, augmented from the intensity, the excitement and the agony, spring up from the deep-set hollows of the sockets and cut with a sword the darkness with tremulous glimmers...

And suddenly they are jolted. As if to a command. When one begins, God help us... the whole dormitory is turned upside-down.

The air of madness inflates like jibs the passions, the encephalic compressions disturb the bottomless depths of fantasy like tridents, thunder cuts across the interval, the delirious rage like

an ocean... In the darkness jump up hideous tragicomical masks, an entire frenzied troupe of tragical comedians...

First the man-trumpet, stepping on the pillow, releases a screeching voice which tears the ears.

Another one leaps up in the middle of the dormitory and howls: "Halt, regiments! Halt!"

Another raises up his hands desperately.

"Save be merciful, save be merciful..."

The tempestuous sea: weeping, supplications, deliria, curses, guffaws in the innermost beings of the lunatics, is disturbed, breaks out somewhere in a corner and the human pain, secret, which mania covers.

Someone shouts: "Mother mine, help, save me..."

And his desperate, sweet, human voice is lost in the howling... The man who thinks he is travelling – one short, former captain – rises up from his bed.

"Saint Nicholas... oh... oh... we are drowning, luff well, luff well..."

God – a type of megalomaniac – utterly enraged, incessantly tosses his thunder.

"Brr, kra, kra, boof..."

And all of a sudden another springs boisterous, unrestrained and quickly-quickly as if he were possessed by a terrifying nightmare screams.

"Careful! One minute! In one minute the world exists no longer. Careful. The chaos, the end, the everlasting fire... we are demolished.

And he falls to the floor foaming.

And I for the first time in there attempt to be forgotten, I wrap myself under my blanket and peek in the sorrowful light at the preposterous forms of the people which the tornado of madness spins. When someone knocks me on the shoulder.

"Get up son of God!"

"I am not the son of God," I say to him. "Leave me in peace, I beg of you."

"Save me, son of God, rise up..."

And the religious zealot in a delirium continues.

"You are My Lord Jesus Christ. Pity me in your glory, come, judge the living and the dead, for the time has come..."

I get up from my bed.

"Will you leave me in peace?"

Another annoyance this is... Nothing, he persists, he falls at my feet.

"Ah, oh, I am damned, pity me... The furnaces fume and they hide the road to go to Paradise, help me, son of God, send me to Paradise..."

I get angry as well.

"I will send you with... an aeroplane... get your hands off me..."

He looks at me in a fury and suddenly fulminates.

"O, oh, my God, I am lost, O, oh, with an aeroplane. And where are your angels, Lord, where are the swarms of Seraphim and Cherubim? With an aeroplane? You are the Antichrist, Satan, Beelzebub..."

And surely I had it bad from this maniac, if at that moment the nurses did not enter with the straitjackets and the syringes. They fall on him and battle in the darkness.

★

The nightmarish pantomime which is played out and the demonic frenzy which accompanies it has neither rhythm nor meaning.

Nevertheless I hear clearly the infinite chuckling of the gods dominate the pit and the pan-demonium high above the blue domes of eternity, like the “myriad mocking of the waves”...

★

In a little while a heavy immovable deadness prevails in the dormitory. The drugs give some rest to the tortured, a tranquility which resembles death.

And now nothing is heard, except the tragic monotonous tik-tok of the clock, the sounding of the regulation of time, the record of the hours which pass, the eternal soft whimpering which the unhurried arbiter of time quietly sings, the bell of this interval which passes and which others fill abundantly with the divine fruit of work and others poorly, while others leave it empty and unfilled – just like us – vain, unsweetened and chaotic. But what is the benefit for these people? The same time sounds for both mad and logical people in the clocks of all the madhouses and all the observatories of the world...

Now then, when I entered here, into the Dromokaiteion, a mournful afternoon, before twenty or so months, I had the impression that I was striding over to the doorstep of Hades alive.

And it was not the unusual sensation of a moment, a sickly hallucination of the mind. I had truly crossed over the threshold of another life, where nothing stirs except phantoms and shadows. And the more days went by, the more the impression of alienation from the world of the living became perceptible and painful. Nowhere else is the feeling of isolation so painful, so depressing, as in the mental asylum.

Whatever characterises madness is an absolute and innocent egoism which imprisons impassably the soul inside the dizziness of its subjective delusions.

Not one communication with reality, not one contact with the ‘others’, no means of understanding between one and another lunatic. Each one is a damned shadow, doomed to wander listlessly and ceaselessly in a type of dizzy whirling, around its egocentric axis. Each one, enclosed in himself. The madman does not know, does not hear, does not see anything but himself, reflected in nightmarish and monstrous spectres in the magnifying cracked mirror of their incandescent-from-neurotic-strain imagination. He ignores with simplicity the ‘phenomenon’ and he is entirely a stranger to what is happening around him. The fiercer impression from the outside world vainly collides with the locked-fast gate of his innermost world. Its point is blunted or shattered on the full-body armour of his insensibility and just as and with violence a fierce and sudden shaking can awaken for a minute his inactive senses. The megalomaniac rotates triumphantly and imperiously inside his rags which are for him the folds of his fantastical Caesarean purple robe, the degenerate even at the hour when the straps of the straitjacket make his flesh bleed, delightfully nonchalantly and blessedly in the orgy of his sensual visions, the manic rhetorician delivers a grandiloquent and smug harangue addressing himself to... a void and the tragic delusionals have nothing except to open and close their hands in the air in order to embrace their chimeras. Each soul lives and moves and flounders about in a deadlock in the region of its shadowy and dark world, as if the fearful curse of Jehovah were

beating down on it: “This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt...”. What a world my God... A world unhappy and... eerie. When you ask the nurses who is so and so or such and such lunatic, they answer you, without wanting it, without being conscious of it: “He was”. He was – he is not. No he is no one except the shadow of a man, a pale outline of a man, almost indefinable. Nowhere else does someone feel more vividly, more tragically, the feeling of human worthlessness. “What is a man? What is he not? Mankind is a dream of a shadow...”.

A Lunch of Visions

At 12 o'clock precisely the bell sounds for us to eat. At the hearing of this every time the religious zealot takes it for a church bell and begins immediately endless prostrations. From the edge of the garden runs also another prophet shouting: “The hour has tolled... Careful, the end... we are demolished” and he collapses regularly by himself frothing to the ground.

In this way they receive the hour of food in here. The rest show no interest and the nurses have to gather them one by one. And, indeed, one who has a persecution complex, as soon as he hears the bell he leaves post-haste.

I got into a conversation with him to ask him why, in the end, he does not mean to put a morsel into his mouth.

He said to me secretively: “You too be mindful, they want to poison us, do not eat.”

“But the others who eat do not suffer anything?”

“Ha... ha... Do you not understand how they have... a steel larynx?”

“How do you know?”

“I saw it.”

It's hopeless.

“Milk?”

“Asbestos, I do not drink it.”

“Omelette?”

“It is sulphur, ah, ah, you want me to die...”

“Meat?”

“It is leather from... a pharmacy.

“Beans, soup, purees?”

“Poisonous liquids, solids, poisons...”

And this is not his only oddity.

Do you stand near him? You undermine his existence. You want to kill him, to strike him, to burn him, to eat him whole.

You look at him, he asks you.

“Why do you look at me with your eyes?”

“With what would you have me look?”

He angers.

“Leave from here, sperm of Satan, who puts on spectacles, in order to conceal the murderous knives of your eyes... leave.

Shortly after I see him again at the table, the nurses brought him through force. We sit around about ten of us. And we do not... eat.

That is to say my table companions eat a little and through force. But each one of us eats with his madness. The megalomaniac imagines that he is being served with plates trimmed with gold and crystal cups. Our most commonplace table he sees covered with lacework, he is indifferent to the wooden spoons and our drab pannikin-like food. He raises his glass every time.

“I drink (water of course) unto the health of the emperor who offers this sumptuous feast...”

He lives and eats (until there lasts the comforting madness) wonderful dishes in his divine dream of his megalomania. The religious zealot puts in his mouth methodically the daily bread, drinks quietly quietly as if he is... partaking of holy communion, it is not permitted in his ecstasy to trouble himself with such mundane and tasteless foods. The manic rhetorician – something like Dellapatrides – terrifying and irrepressible makes a speech. We are, he says, four hundred in number, sitting next to each other, all important politicians, scientists and he delivers his address. Only the persecution maniac has his face down at every plate that is served... He sees his death, visions, snakes and poisons.

But he will eat under compulsion.

The nurses patient, untiring, the head Mr. Giannires very paternal and present everywhere, they will in the end persuade him to eat without fail. And this is repeated every day.

Hours of Dejection

A voice from my chaos, from inside the mental asylum, a voice of a grave, a shout of agony, cracked from sickness and overwork...

I came here too. Locked up here all alone I saw life like a tragic game of Fate. Withdrawn from worldly things, hurt and laughed at by all. Life tricks us – Wilde said it too from the tragic prison of Reading – with vain cheerless forms, deceptive unkind beauties, momentary pleasures, doll-like fame and glory. Here dawn comes more sorrowful than our tiredness, our languour and our futile fixation with devastating soul-destroying musing – the lot of the poets and the fate of the disturbed. Here night falls giving an indefinite hope that we will supposedly have peace.

Alas. A line half-lit is inscribed across the strain of our brain. And we see, we hear, sleeplessly. The grievance of the old man who they left desolate, of the young man who dies, loves, romances, torments which endlessly sing dirges, incoherent deliria beside me the lunatics – people who have been hurt. And why do they keep vigil around us the nurses? It resembles irony, like the ‘guards be watchful’ of the guards. Be alert that no one chances to escape you... That it does not come about that they lose the game out in this absurd world. What reason... As if there is a chance we may sometime win? That is why I say and say again to the distant sad night the divine “until we pay back evn the last penny”, that is to say here until the end... Here at least we even become gods: our imagination creates cosmogonies and like thunder they tear across the space the encephalic compressions which submit the end, the second coming. Here we love – alas – life more. Because we lose it and we find it again by chance, when the paroxysm passes or the drug which leads us to our living death. The drill of the injection, the battle of the bacteria, the visions, neither hashish nor opium were I to drink.

Recollections

And why all these things? The sleepless nights of my life as a journalist, a series of insomnias of one month during the September of 1927, which although had the character of a pleasing reverie they sent me off to the mental asylum. I remember I used to take my little overcoat from the little hotel "Thessaly" near Monasteraki, I went downhill to Theseion where like a hooligan, free, carefree, I went on strolls all the night until morning...

I kept vigil lying down on the ancient monument looking for hours at the sky. That is where I could be found when the various people at Constitution Square did not see me. Because my life was no longer one. No one knew what Romos did by himself. There outside I felt for the first time I was becoming an instrument and victim of delusions. However I had not completely lost my senses. Because from then on I too had ascertained the filth which is prevalent in the neighbourhoods of Athens and the unhealthiness in general of the city since even Theseion despite all its vast and open horizon I did not feel it as being that healthy, a smell of mildew, something diseased in the air was accompanying me everywhere. Perhaps because I was not well. Because even all the faces that I happened to meet appeared to me pale, dying.

And one evening at midnight as I was returning I entered into a quarrel without reason with a resident of the district beyond Asteroskopeio who was passing by, a fair-haired, lean young man, a sailor in the wireless telegraph. He seemed to me so pale, so sickly the poor man, that I wanted to persuade him to go home at once to fall into bed, to take care of himself who I felt to be in such a horrid state. He did not want to listen to me on account of any reason. We came to blows and... we led each other into the police department of Theseion. There we did not manage very well to get the two sergeants of the service to understand what we were seeking and why we had made the effort to appear at the department. That man was saying that I took him under the pretense that he was not well in terms of his health. Truly I was saying to him on the road that because... I perceived (without being a doctor) that he is not well but a little dizzy (something which even I was) he had to be looked after. That man however persisted that only I was dizzy, which is possible, but that man was more dizzy according to my perception. In which case it was necessary, I considered seriously inside myself as a responsibility (irrespective to him of whether I too was not well) for the unlucky young man to receive care and to be nursed fully in a hospital if he does not have a home.

The idiotic sergeant could not understand anything from this tragic story. He turned us away from the department with the convenient explanation that we were both drunk. When we were separated I broke into tears that the unlucky man would fall further down onto the road and I fell, like a log with a terrible clamour in my head...

When I came to – some passers-by gathered me up – staggering I made for my hotel. From then I understood that I had delusions. And I came here to the Dromokaiteion with every intention of becoming well.

And now inside here I feel more deeply the infinite tragic solitude because I am not alone, because like vain chimeras ungovernable lamenting shadows encircle me which remind me of the man, the warm, old acquaintance of happier times. And yet how more superior to you, my old acquaintance, are these new companions.

Their divine, artless game how much purer, more honourable than yours which has a theatre in society – the society which I came to know. Here each one is enraptured with the tragic breath of the horrifying march which plays creating and destroying outside of conditions, laws and spectators, the utopian world of a life of dreams.

O sublime, unique monologues, deliria, pains and guffaws of the unaccountable... How much more noble you are than the assembled dialogue of logical people. Your voiceless, sad glance how guileless, unaffected.

But I am alone, forgotten by my companions here who are closed in their own worlds, forgotten even by my acquaintances.

Because, in truth, why do you become bittersweet you who I came to know from outside?

Did you ever come any of you to bring me the warmth of your gaze where the holy (!) light of logic flickers.

Beautiful Athenian ladies, worldly ladies, you who I extolled in my poems and always remembered your name when I was to write the society column in the newspaper, did you ever remember Romos?

And most of all you who I loved first and sang to you as a child on the stand of Neo Phalero, where you imperiously strolled about... Do you want me to repeat the old song?

*The last light was trickling
down the angered wave
and you in a vision
regulating the stride
were passing and storming
the bright seashore
and I was saying how in so much light
night would not appear.
And the divine rhythm was enslaving
the wave of your flesh
and love was tying me with you
where the virtue your rhythm
and the oars of a little boat
triumphantly raised
I was saying something arrogant
that they took from you.*

Abandonments

But why should anyone begin with lyricisms and be saying his pain in a wild reality, in a season when he no longer has soil to blossom and even this great and wonderful poetry has become debased?

We even see it in here where like a magnifying mirror every epoch the tragic and newly-beautiful icon of the season and of society is reflected.

In our era the present lunatics in their deliria dream and you hear – gun-powder... monopolies... wines... stock market, palaces, automobiles. Some remnants of the European war: soldiers and kings always erase before the modern types of megalomaniacs which the epoch disembarks to us.

Formerly people had some respect and at least truly sensed what poetry means. And again no longer does anyone remember you.

Indifferent as to whether you placed all of your soul in some of these existences, indifferent as to whether your being stormed and quietly sang at their passing. So many things, what became of them? I was certain Romos, Romos who cried out at Constitution square his affection and love, that is why no one picked out the secret pain of this herald who sang loudly and publicly.

Did any one ever become concerned with seeing what was happening deeper in Romos's soul who loved so much and was loved by no one? Because, where is this crucial time one of the many?

In such a way my final consolation was fateful, the last which remained, to be cleared up in here. Neither the chimera of one someone's be it even distant thought nor one of those golden lights of Athens does not flicker for Romos when the terrible night falls – the night of the madmen.

Death

The only one who remembers us often is death. He hears our mystical invocation, in the slow, never-ending counting of the indolent moments of our despondency, our voiceless prayer from the depths, and over our troubled sleep he comes, comforter and swift-hearing bringing his supreme gifts, his mellow powerful balms, which bestow on us whatever veronal and chloral could never give us, neither any drug nor any anodyne..., the final, supreme calmness..., the sweet, invigorating redemption... How often do they not dream of him in their sleep, the much-tormented puppets of psychoses, in their tragic luminous interludes, how many times do they not dream of him smiling at them, like a dazzling hope of daybreak, between the mists and the gloom which covers their agitated senses...

And they know that their sweet dream, the hope and the sweet-expectation of the tormented slowly or quickly come true at one time. This too is a comfort, our sole comfort inside here... Even if everyone forgets us, he will remember...

Death amongst the psychopaths generally is something accustomed...

In 650 sick people, alternating according to a two-year period and according to an intermediate average, sick people who are subjected to violent spasms, to thunderous paroxysms, to fatal encephalic congestion – it is natural for them to succumb to sudden decimation or to the slow decay of the sickness, at least 100-150 per year. Then the far away, near Saint Barbara, graveyard of the Dromokaiteion, whose earth has covered our own Vizyenos and Metsakes and so many others still, and where it is so small, such that every two to three years the older crosses are taken out so that the new ones can be put in, it accepts the funeral hymns of every priest and chanter, and the mournful and small accompaniment of the nurses. Then the small chapel of the

Holy Unmercenaries – which is decorated with icons and wall-paintings by the artist Mr. Kontopoulou and through the expenses of the lover of art Ms. Calliope Giannires, who allocates for this reason all the proceeds from the canaries which she keeps and feeds here – becomes a theatre of shocking performance, where the heart-rending suffering of humanity of Aeschylus almost pale before the simple but tough mercy and terror of the spectacle... Here the funerals are done as if in secret and are ignored by the other world. They are followed by few or one-two close relatives and at times no one, when the death is unexpected or when they cannot be bothered coming from Athens, those who know the... inglorious deceased...

Here death is revealed in all its horrid grandeur – like both guffaw and lamentation... Here we hear the stirring eloquence of the funeral hymns, like birds which sing on the pine-tree, and in our ashen soul, the hope of an undiscovered joy...

“He who is made of clay has turned black; the vessel has been shattered; now the sinister festival of life dissolves...”

And the curtain falls on the greenness and the ashes both... What remains?... Not even a narrow opening.

The hour of the morning visit of the doctors – what a silly and pointless fuss. So pointless that I ask myself sometimes if it is really necessary except that the doctors enrich their observations and nothing else. Because I do not understand their perseverance to cure us no matter what.

To cure us! Firstly it is not that easy. And moreover is it essential?

My new companions, birds of the beyond which stripped naked of heavy most-sad matter, you flutter out of place and time in your divine dream, if only you knew what the white camisoles that lean over you every morning are seeking.

Close your eyes tightly, tightly your soul at the spectacled searching gaze which comes over you. It is the doctors.

They want to make you well. Woe to us, there reaches the folly of the rational.

Just as well, that is to say for you to return outside to the ashen reality, to see again with the judgment of an unblemished brain the most unbearable, the most arranged frenetic logic of life which kills the human heart. I who remember gain, I who still examine critically, know well what this means. And I see the dressed-in-white group as an enemy.

He leans over the one enraptured with god-like arrogance, with religious mania, over the one who has visions here in the dormitory every evening of his whole-bodied, palpable God. He leans over him with the scalpel of pitiless logic.

“You are mistaken, no god descends here.”

The eyes of the poor man are riveted entreatingly on the face which utters such a terrible truth and infuriated is seized by his madness – his own logic.

“Lies, I saw him I tell you, he came hear close to me... all night... and if you do not believe, behold, he also gave me this.”

Such a small piece of fabric which his hands barely keep hold of trembling out of such emotion. His triumphant appearance is illuminated by an inexpressible joyful smile, they cannot not believe him...

And yet, the scientist who coldly, pitilessly struggles in the name of the other logic gives the appropriate answer.

“An old rag...”

And the religious zealot triumphantly:

“And this letter... his own which is phosphorescent?”

“An old piece of paper.”

They want to take away his God who accommodatingly descends every evening. The ideal which no one, none of us was ever made worthy to see and for which he struggles desperately.

“Lies, lies, leave from here...”

And this story is repeated, hackneyed and irritating, every evening.

And what will you put in the place of this great vision you people of reason?

Later they over another, over the ‘richest man in the world’, the man who day and night cuts us cheques, who appoints half the ships of... the world, who has as his doorman the King of England, in order to persuade him that he has to become poor, penniless on some road of Athens. Egad!

“What... I do not have money? I who could buy and sell all of you together... Money... Here, take sovereigns...”

And he showers them with old papers, which the nurse quickly sweeps up.

Down there unmoving, pale the manic-depressive is indifferent. What of it if the compassionate doctors make him well...

Who knows which incurable history – outside there where they want to send him back – awaited him again.

He looks intently at the doctors with his firm, dark eyes and says to them frantically: “No... No...”

And here is my turn; they come to me.

“Well-intentioned doctors of mine, if you insist on curing me from something, cure me from logic...”

From the logic and the memory which abides in me, so that I may not remember again the immeasurable yearning of life, the free wandering in divine places.

Here, come close to me, psychiatrists who are dressed in white.

Lean over me: because I remember.

There exists, alas, a far more tragic case in this dormitory, which no one else remembers aside from me...

Glimmers

The hours slide by, the days pass, the years leap for us too, they ebb away, they settle down little by little into the great crucible of omnivorous time...

But what is rain to a bird, when it knows it has wings and can fly?... Fate strikes like a catapult but above the debris which chaos piles up, the poet, a divine nightingale, sings the lost hopes, the unspeakable woes which the light did not see, refreshing and nostalgic idylls which did not take flesh, juicy, warm and beautiful moments which I never lived.

What significance does today and tomorrow have, when we can still live the dream, and taste like in bygone days the holy sensation of the moment?...

All pains are forgotten, here in the remote workbench of solitude, as I inhale the intoxicating sultry fragrance which the first downpours emit and I hear the sparrows without a care enraptured in song atop the purple oleanders.

My soul blossoms again like a flower on a withered branch, together with them peaceful, cool and breezy... And suddenly, as if in the very depths of my being an infinitely refreshing vein burst, deep, my first song in here gushes out like a jovial hymn of gratitude.

*At daybreak in the utterly green
trees the chirping birds
the azure sky like a drowsiness
the time after the rain cut like a sword
with their wings the twigs
impatiently, fairies
of the pure morning dew
sparrows twitter.
As if a sword had shone forth
utterly naked in the leaves
from the dew your steel
rugged shimmering
and in the most trembling sensation
was scattering shivers
thus like relief
polished and curved.
And one sparrow had a very
crisp trill,
its most sweet inflection
reminded us of the nightingale
and in this way smoothly and playfully
it flew – a curse on it
because inside us troubles ceased
and pains were shrinking back...*

The 'Quiet Ones' Make Merry

Sweet breeze of spring, soft rustlings, lulling chirping, divine peacefulness...

The final verse of my song stirred up half-finished still in my pondering, when suddenly a deafening noise breaks out behind me, like a mocking guffaw, and awakens me from my poetic reveries. It comes from the side courtyard enclosed with railings, where the lunatics pass their time playing cards... They slam their fists on the bench, they shout, they shriek like demons. I look from inside the bars.

Wild, enraged forms wrestle around the ripped, scattered playing cards. My ear drums are ready to rupture. I close my eyes and block my ears.

The nurse which escorts me, strolling a little away from me, but always keeping a fixed distance, as soon as he sees me distressed, from the disagreeable surprise which interrupted me in my heaven-sent ecstasy of inspiration, rushes to soothe me.

“It is nothing... It is the... quiet lunatics who are having their fun.”

“How? The quiet ones?”

“Yes, and with them they will put you, I think.”

I had not recovered from the reassuring response of the polite nurse when a second surprise awaited me.

I lose the nurse from right in front of me and I hear him shouting: “Hindeburg... Hindeburg...”

What, is this really the nurse?... But no. By the sound of things a stumpy, shaven pot-bellied man presents himself and salutes. It is the one who goes by the name Hindeburg – Mr. Thanases, of Peiraeus.

“Hindeburg, burn Paris...”

Huh? What was that? To burn... The sane people have been infected too. Woe is me...

Running with comically small strides, the remnant of the European war, the stumpy Mr. Thanases Hindeburg, is lost deep in the garden.

In a little while a mechanical synchronised movement, a puff, pouf, puff, pouf... comes to our ears.

Precisely five minutes and in the general pandemonium follows also this distant petty noise.

Suddenly in a resonant “Cease fire...” of the nurse, the soldier with the same small strides is revealed and again he salutes, puffing.

“What happened,” I ask the nurse.

“Nothing, the reservoir filled.”

“The reservoir?”

“Yes, certainly, because Paris was the reservoir, the pump was the canon and the soldier was filling it...”

And he fills it every morning to to the brim in five minutes of the hour...

And my heart cracked as I saw the exquisite queen of freedom, the divine unruly madness, to be trapped in this way by the satanical artifice of the practical spirit, to work for the demon of utility and to fall again, alas, to the plane of logic...

From the dormitory of the maniacs, where I remained 300 never-ending, noisy nights, 9 whole months, they guided me to another circle of damned deceit, there where the terrifying, not-yet-unleashed mania, wraps with a shrouds of petrified silence the still bursting with life sorrowful people who suffer from the so-called senility. Faces, pallid, empty, with always the same rigid grimace, with the same unchangeable twitch, with the same lymphatic, persistent expression, with the same blank stare from inside the dark sockets of their eyes they regard you petrified in supreme expression of pain, like ancient, faded, clay masks. Vainly sound knocks on their ear drums, time with its wonderful play passes by their blank eyes in vain.

Their attention riveted somewhere and immovable, they hear only sad trickle of a persistent idea seeping into their dismal soul, which regulates slowly-slowly into an eternity, the passing of time, here in the dormitory of the ‘quiet ones’. And I who so many nights am sleepless in this

uproarious dormitory of the enraged sought in vain to calm down, anyhow I saw coming like salvation, the hour when I would, after my tragic nine-month vigil, die.

But had not scarcely passed even a quarter of an hour when I was wrapped with the blanket directly over my head – in accordance with my old habit from the dormitory of the maniacs in order to not see and to not hear every frenzied evening festival – when suddenly some small noises, some half-mumbled sounds and groans from various corners, just like a small orchestra prepares itself, they began to jolt my hearing.

A shy monologue, something like a grievance, begins first and little by little rises, in the sorrowful half-darkness, a mute, endless crying breaks out somewhere and two-three hollow moans... The sad, restrained sordino of the unexpressed, horrifying witness of still madness.

The air fills with sorrowful small noises. I guess that little by little the irrepressible, monologic prattle of the manic-depressives stirs not like a fulminating but like a swampy surface.

Others sing the monotonous song of their sadness, others mumble their incoherent, tragic monologue, the open-eyed fixed vigil of the others revolves around the same motif of the persistent delirium and the psychosis of another dissolves into a synchronised plaintive ululation: “Oh... Oh...” which will return sadly, exasperatingly all night, the night where I was expecting like redemption, after waiting for many hours, the day I would sink soaked with chloral into the affectionate embrace of a frantic Morpheus.

Here worse even than the dormitory where the deranged frenzy breaks out and rabidly froths, this soft drawling perpetual, gentle drizzle of human pain incites me and flustered, distraught, I spring up from my bed of anguish and make tracks:

“I want to leave, to leave...”

The night-guard nurses seize me.

“Where are you going?”

“Let me go and find peace, unhand me, in God’s name so that I may return... to the dormitory of the maniacs.

Our Society

The society of mad people, just like the society of logical people, has its social classes, its social rankings, depending on the... madness of each person. It has the patricians and tycoons and its despised, faceless masses, its noblemen and its townfolk, its plutocrats of madness and its anonymous proletariats...

I belong, unfortunately, to the last...

And my place in here is... lamentable.

I feel myself humbled, overwhelmed, ruined by the supreme grandeur of the others, trivial before them, unimportant...

I am the scapegoat, the lost sheep, the object of common contempt...

God, barely deigns to cast me a glance full of pity from his throne of awesome omnipotence beyond the clouds.

The Field-Marshal, at the hour when he takes off his many-holed shoes – for him they are polished boots with spurs – throws them right at my face:

“Polish them well...”

The All-Terrible-Monarch of the globe, as soon as I open my mouth, turns with an imposing and haughty air, and shouts at me:

“Hush...”

The Padishah – that is how they baptised him; a type of womanizing profligate, who in his harem has thirteen thousand odalisques – takes me protectively aside:

“Not to fear, I am looking after you... I will marry you with one of my... slave girls.

The religious zealot of the unearthly exaltations watches me with indescribable repugnance, with contempt and repulsion:

“Begone from before me..., satan..., hypocrite..., anti-christ..., sperm of Lucifer..., reptile of hell...”

Here too is the billionaire, supercilious and blissful, ready to degrade me with his mythical wealth. He has a hundred thousand houses in Paris, towers in Spain, villas in the Cyane Coast. He is spendthrift, generous, magnanimous and philanthropic.

Every summer he sends all the staff of his mansion – porters, servants, chambermaids, cooks – to enjoy the countryside of Dauville. And he passes the summer here. My logic, this most natural thing, finds it absurd...

“How does it happen, that if you are a millionaire you spend your summer here?”

“Take thirteen million, wretched Jew, rascally miser... and get out of my way...”

And he turns his back to me.

The ‘Savior-Vivre’ of the Mad

My movements, my gesticulations, the answers which I give, the questions I make, my general conduct in here, has something of the ingenuous and amazing awkwardness of an uncouth provincial, who found himself suddenly in a magnificent company of nobles. I make blunders one after the other. I see the superior faces and the things of the kingdom of madness from inside of the diminutive light of the lamentable feebleness of logic and I become the object of ridicule...

I ask, for example, with idiotic simple-mindedness God number-two – all things in here are profuse – the Rank-god, as he calls himself, who I see with his head bandaged:

“Rank-god, your blessing first... with which boulder did you collide?”

“My curse, beast, you who do not even have a grain of sense... What relation could I have with boulders and the cornerstones of the earth?... I hit it against... a heavenly chamber.

I ask, with the same dim-wittedness, Croesus with the fifteen thousand villas, who girds himself with a cord and allows it to hang.

“How do you gird yourself with a cord, my dear fellow, since you wade in gold?”

“Foolish man... where do you see the cord? It is the wireless telephone of the pocket... I am making a telephone call to Paris and my staff arrives immediately with the automobile of three thousand horsepower which I bought for them... Listen! (He lifts the end of the cord and puts it in my ear.)

“I do not hear anything”

“Are you making fun of me, idiot?”

And he turns his palm upside down so that he may bestow on my naked baldness the loud award of my improper behaviour.

The same with the others.

I take the cherubim for birds, the green angels for shrubs, the imperial robes for rags, the cauldrons of hell which smoke for laundry boilers.

“Put on your glasses, poor-sighted man...” shouts at me as I carelessly pass close to him the inventor of the automobile with one wheel, three thousand metres in diameter, which will be radio-controlled and will transport us, in only two minutes, from here to... Peking.

“Do you not look, my dear fellow, in front of you... a car that big...”

I look at the car – a box of candles – and I cannot keep from laughing.

The God, who watches over everything, sees me from his throne – an old petrol tin – and he motions me to come closer.

“Now listen here,” he says haughtily and peevishly..., “you have to learn to behave. I give you two days time.”

“What must, if it is permitted, your almightiness, I do in two days?”

“Not to pass us for lunatics...”

The hours pass, they leave as yesterday, as today, as tomorrow. The day will fade away slowly, slowly... In the golden, gently trembling dust a final glimmer kindles down nearby Athens.

Athens... In a little while will come on the countless, which I sort out one by one every evening, martyric, all-golden lights. In a little while here the nightmarish darkness will fall, there it will be poured out over verdant roads, abundantly refreshing gardens the evening, carefree Athenian life. In a little while, when here the maniacal frenzy will erupt into my ears, over there breezy, harmonic music will put into rhythm the delicately dancing pairs. In a little while, when here more unshakeable than even a gravestone will fall my epitaphic, definite solitude, which Romos became familiar with once upon a time...

Delirium

Rhymes, figures, silhouettes, names, recollections... they come and leave again and are lost like uncertain, opaque visions, like elusive deceiving rays – but one name comes and always comes again, it twirls in my nightmarish vigil, like the persistent, perpetual monosyllable of those who soliloquise, like the synchronised ululation of the manic-depressives:

“*Thalia, Thalia...*”

My song begins again in my sleep and in my wakeful and cracked from pain being:

*You were a paradisial freshness
in my life's callous sweltering heat,*

*a rosy, sweet, beautiful dawn,
 a flower full of fragrant seeds.
 You were a smooth-tongued little girl,
 a ditch of infinite comfort
 you rolled about in the moss, butterfly
 and adorned with gold the most bitter poison.
 But in my sorrow I did not see you
 coming again like my old friend
 in my darkness a brightly shining ray.
 To make my lips become joyful
 and life-giver of a lost health
 my redeeming angel to become.*

★

However you come into my dream to torment me like a persistent nightmare. You came yesterday and the day before yesterday. And you came again tonight...

You were undressing. Your windows, the grille and the rose curtain closed.

And frightening down to the road the clinks and rustlings of the things, of the garments which were leaving from on you: Here the one ring and afterwards the other, there the double bracelets which were resting on the crystal of the toilet. And the slippers which were coming off and the dress next together with your belt on the chair...

And you were undressing. and a thousand loves were fluttering around you with small wings and I was seeing rose petals being scattered on your white sheets and myself upside down on your pillow to count the patterns on your ceiling until you came. Did you come? Let the music play the march of the great inspirations, let the hatred of those who live outside retreat.

★

And you were undressing. And around you began the dance of the furniture. And the mirror, the lover of the wardrobe, for years glued together with her, was speaking to the sleek and slender chest of drawers, and she, with her mouth the top draw open, was gaping. And the billowy mosquito-net was making courtesies to the stool of the toilet and the toilet was leaving, was sliding, was hiding, was coming back intoxicated with the jazz of grief. Gods...

Do we not all die? Will not this bed of pleasure and love become at some point a bed of pain? Will not the human race let out its final sigh here: tired, wrinkled, ailing.

O... Let the dance of the furniture cease. Let them all kneel down at the passing of the final One. Let mirror, toilets, beds, chairs kneel down. The King of furniture is passing. Moreas has nailed his nails, Palamas has cut his wood in the forest, the martyric Chopin cried at his consumption, Baciccia painted his uncanny roof.

And you were undressing. And you were wearing a fine-woven nightgown and I on the outside my grave-clothes. Your room noble, charming, small, aromatic and outside an infinite black road.

Now you sit down and go to sleep, I am off. Let the music advance. Let unknown worlds, dead stars, planets with golden tails, go to the fore.

Let the galaxy follow like a golden manifestation. Next let the cherubs of love array themselves. Then my war-horse.

And then I, dead.

Light in the Darkness

O most sweet priestess of my pain, incomparable apparition with your luminous eyes which ooze promises and drown in nostalgia, to you I dedicate these final lines.

You are the one who with the restrained erotic disposition and the polytonal recreations of your musical voice – sweet caresses like caresses of foam rose-petals – made me see inside here in the endless darkness of isolation, a little light, a little life...

You passed before me at the hour when alone, forgotten by all, with my wings broken, I was looking at my memories slowly going far away and slowly dying like dazzled visions.

You passed by and you caressed me with your gaze, you passed and I felt your breath anointing my forehead, you passed by and your passing by was gentle, most gentle, without even a rustling of your wings... You passed by at the hour when all were sad and my soul was weeping.

And for a minute you dried the tears from my eyes which with longing wanted to embrace you entirely without being blurred by the crying... You passed by and you whispered to me voicelessly, without even opening your lips in the corners, about all those things which I yearned to hear, all those things which are for me life and death. You passed by and my desolation was filled with mirthful, melodious voices and my night was filled with the light that knows no evening of paradise and a holy peacefulness was poured into my agitated soul, just as was passing by above in the ruins and in the tumult of the battle, beneath Ilium, your namesake, – oh sweetly enunciated name – Helene...

May you be blessed, priestess of my pain, celestial existence, thrice-noble and eminent soul, cultivated like a reseda – a lily of purity, a rose of sierra, transplanted rarely near the tropics, a landscape unknown to the masses, a diamond scarcely found in the deposits of dark slates, myrrh of memory and heart, psychic fragrance guarded by vulgar nostrils, worthy to be breathed only by supremacy and wonder... When I first saw you in the white camisole, between the white camisoles of the other doctors, I felt a sense of sublime joy surging in my veins and something incomparable, like a miracle-working balsam was circulating in my blood: your glance... my constitution absorbed it like a miracle-working balsam which still – alas – arrives late...

You looked at me as you never looked at any of the lunatics who were droning around me, like the waves of a furious sea which never calms... It was a time when I also felt other gazes resting on me, rapturous or curious gazes, with restrained erotic declarations. But from that time trying – innumerable – hours have passed, gloomy hours, filled with unsaid sorrow, replete with boredom and isolation. And now – after so long – now that grope all alone in the darkness of languor, seeking a fissure of joy, your divine gaze came to resurrect me.

It came like a drop of rain on one who is thirsty who has been burning for months in fever and in longing. Your gaze came to remind me that I live, that I exist, that I am Romos with the

erotothymic, and thirst-ridden heart. It came to caress me, to give me life, to comfort me on account of the infinite dereliction.

Afterwards you spoke. O divine, incomparable music of the angels with most sweet lyres... O unrivalled melody, cool like the rustling of a wind in the leaves of a eucalyptus. You spoke. And I ecstatic with a subdued soul and slowly-beating heart, was listening. ... Your voice was so sweet that it made me hurt.

And the pain was most sweet, filled with heavenly pleasure and filled with trembling.

When the visitation of the doctors ended you too left with the serious people with the white camisoles, who came to lull the tempestuous desires and to give the still life of logic to those privileged with madness...

You left, but your aroma remained for much longer to keep me company. It remained like something ethereal and inconceivable, like something which my constitution persistently sought after from the atmosphere. You left, but your glance remained in my veins, your voice, diffused in the air and inside the sanctuary of my being, rose up like a resurrectional hymn, my praise for you:

*You appeared in the darkness like the Resurrection
in the clamour of pain and in the bewilderment,
lofty and beautiful like a revelation,
with the golden head raised.
And a rhythm was governing your body
your embossed, alabaster body
and I was saying how some notes were awakening
while you were gently stepping on the earth.
And as if I knew much earlier
and I had lost you and I was enduring
I stopped, I looked at you, I kissed you
ecstatically as if you were some Muse.
And now when I hear your dear voice
I remember a forgotten tune
which died inside me and which in vain
I believe that as I hear you I resurrect it.*

Forgive me, o Muse, o incomparable woman, if my verses resemble sobs, if my praise resembles the deep resonant sigh of a shattered lyre...