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

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CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-----|
| Gough Whitlam | Keynote Address – 5th Biennial Conference of Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand | 7 |
| Vrasidas Karalis | The Occluding Alphabets of a National Poet: The Case of Dionysios Solomos' <i>Reflections</i> | 19 |
| Dionysios Solomos | <i>Reflections</i> and Other Fragments | 41 |
| Katie Liakatos | Deity or Divine Sorceress: The Evolution of the <i>donna angelicata</i> in the Italian Works of Dionysios Solomos | 46 |
| P. D. Mastrodimitris | C.P. Cavafy and the Beloved City | 58 |
| Jen Harrison | Death and Salvation in Nikos Kazantzakis' <i>Captain Michalis</i> | 66 |
| Andrew Mellas | Manic Eroticism and Sexual Melancholia: Romos Philyras and the Aesthetics of Madness | 76 |
| Romos Philyras | <i>My Life in the Dromokaiteion</i> | 91 |
| Nasos Vagenas | Identity and Poetic Discourse | 110 |
| Steve Georgakis | T.S. Eliot, Giorgos Seferis and the Anzacs | 114 |
| | Sport and the Global Greeks | 118 |
| Michael Loosli | The Kallikantzari – An Image in Nikos Gatsos' <i>Amorgos</i> | 125 |
| | Nikos Gatsos: A Bibliography | 129 |
| Anne Reynolds | A Short History of Italian Cafés and Restaurants in Sydney | 136 |
| Vassilios Adrahtas | Socrates Christianus – Images of Socrates in Early Greek Christian Literature | 156 |
| Tim Buckley | An Ontology of Freedom in Proclus' <i>Commentary in Parmenidem</i> 1022:24–27 | 167 |
| J. M. A. Nijjem | Sources of the Word in Sikelianos, Seferis, Lawrence and Eliot: ὄργια, ekphrasis, anathematicity [PART ONE] | 184 |
| Andrew Itter | The Terror of History and the Mythical Paradigm of Existentialism in G. Seferis' <i>Mythistorêma</i> | 203 |

BOOK REVIEWS

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----|
| Despina Michael | Στάθης Gauntlett, <i>Ρεμπέτικο Τραγούδι, Συμβολή στην επιστημονική του προσέγγιση</i> | 215 |
| John Barnes | Dimitris Tsaloumas: <i>Stoneland Harvest: New & Selected Poems</i> | |
| | Dimitris Tsaloumas: <i>New and Selected Poems</i> | 219 |
| Martha Klironomos | Anca Vlasopolos: <i>No Return Address: A Memoir of Displacement</i> | 222 |
| Yiorgos Kalogeras | Helen Papanikolas: <i>The Time of the Little Black Bird</i> | 225 |
| Jen Harrison | Nadia Wheatley: <i>The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift</i> | 228 |

*The editors would like to express their gratitude to Andras Berkes
for his heroic efforts to make this journal readable.
This issue is dedicated to Véronica and Andras.*

KATIE LIAKATOS
The University of Sydney

DEITY OR DIVINE SORCERESS:
THE EVOLUTION OF THE *DONNA ANGELICATA*
IN THE ITALIAN WORKS OF DIONYSIOS SOLOMOS

“Rispettabile Signora!
Εἶναι ἀρχόντισσα γραζιόσα,
Εἶναι ποὶ καὶ generosa:
Vera dama! Τί γελᾷς;
Να μοῦ τηνέ προσκυνάς...”
Τό Ἰατροσυμβούλιο

“...l’anima sento per lo cor tremare,
sì come quella che non pò durare
davanti al gran valor ch’ è i llei dimostro.”
Guido Cavalcanti
*Io non pensava che lo cor giammai*¹

Wrongfully underestimated is the extent to which the feminine sublime pervades the collective literary compositions of Dionysios Solomos, from the poetic productions of his youth to those literary projects undertaken in the years preceding his death. Indeed, the expanse of Solomos’ literary works are meticulously laced with transcendental female figures, Christ-like divinities rather, radiating a supernatural aura of which the surrounding cosmos in its entirety is in awe. Gradually discernible becomes the fact that Solomos’ divine, ethereal woman is a ubiquitous, potent force whose successive evolution is not only proof of its dynamism, but of its indisputable eminence in the works of a poet to whom this woman’s presence is, in no uncertain terms, indispensable. Due to obvious restrictions of space, I have chosen to focus upon the development of the transcendental female form in Solomos’ Italian works, after all, it is in those Italian poetic compositions of his youth, specifically those which comprise the *Rime Improvisate* (1822), that the *donna angelicata* makes her first of a multitude of appearances.

Not surprisingly, a question of this woman’s identity is instantly posed in Sonnet III – a recurring consideration which will remain all-pervasive, yet strangely elusive. Solomos, it seems, wishes to emphatically reaffirm this being’s identity, which is unbeknownst even to her – “*Se non conosci te, fra tutte bella... Donna vestita di tutta beltate...*” (Solomos 1968: 96). Despite the ambiguity with which she is blanketed, this woman is undoubtedly the very carriage of Beauty, a divine figure engulfed by a celestial aura – a verity which is further impressed upon by her prospective appearance at the first light of dawn. It seems she is

endowed with the ability to herald the new day; she is synonymous with light and beginnings – a notion analogously highlighted by the essence captured within her eyes – the only specific physical delineation of this female’s characteristics:

*Tutta leggiadra è la pupilla, e in essa
Lume brilla più bello assai del sole...*

This unknown creature exudes a radiance more brilliant than the Sun itself. Her beatific nature is gradually established and reaches its culmination through the reactions excited within those surrounding her, as the poet declares – “*Seguiranti i pastori...*” Indeed, implicit in this conception of devout worship, potently highlighted by the sharp emphasis placed upon the act of ‘following’, is a somewhat religious feeling or fervour. The hallowed nature of the woman in question is now indubitably confirmed, as the elements of worship and faith so unmistakably related denote an almost Christ-like reverence of this divinity.

While Sonnet III tends to foreground the effect of this saintly being on her fervent worshippers, Sonnets XI and XII constantly highlight this woman’s godlike deeds, particularly in relation to her rapport with the physical world. This divine goddess’ identity nevertheless continues to remain unspecified, as both poems begin by posing the following question with succinct precision: “*Chi è costei...?*” (Solomos 1968: 102-103). While specific palpable traits and delineations of this woman are virtually absent, Solomos does, however, establish her possession of certain qualities by means of comparison with varied elements of the natural world. Considering both poems, it is maintained that this woman walks like Dawn itself and sparkles like the star of day-break. Most noteworthy however:

*... di candide stille i campi irrorà;
Sì che in vita ogni morta erba risorge (XI), and also –
... perpetua versando eterea stilla
I fiori, e le appassite erbe rintegra (XII)*

In contrast to Sonnet III, wherein this divine female’s Christ-like qualities are implied through the presence of those who devoutly worship her, the woman of Sonnets XI and XII is granted the ability of resurrection; she exhibits a Christ-like transcendence in her life-giving abilities, as is forcefully conveyed by the verbs “*risorge*” and “*rintegra*”, strategically placed at the close of each stanza. This celestial giver of life also shares certain qualities with the moon, offering solace to the darkness of the night. Her Christ-like control or rather, modification of the natural world, is properly confirmed.

In a reflection of Sonnet III, so too in these particular poems, this unknown mystical being grants the promise of light and life. Serving to impress upon her Christ-like actions, it is monumentally implied that she is the Creator:

*Eletta come il sol, che mentre bea
Il cielo, della terra li deserti
Scalda, avviva, rallegra, anima, crea. (XI)*

In a most godlike fashion, this woman definitively bestows upon Nature its ultimate needs – she is the provider of life; affirmations which, despite their profundity, do not as yet provide sufficient clues to dispel the mystery of this celestial being, which certainly does keep us wondering: “*Chi è costei?*”

Indeed, the question “*Ποιά είναι τούτη...*” is immediately posited by Solomos in a Greek poem of the same time-span, which warrants a brief mention. In the same manner that Sonnets III, XI and XII of the *Rime Improvisate* express a degree of bewilderment at the concealed identity of the heavenly creature in question, so too the aptly entitled ‘*Η Αγνώριστη*’ instantly addresses this concern. In an attempt to unravel the threads of mystery blanketing this ‘unknown woman’, Yiannis Apostolakis considers ‘*Η Αγνώριστη*’ one of a number of poems based upon non-fictitious events – “...στήν ‘*Αγνώριστη* κρύβεται, φαντάζομαι, κάποιο συναπάντημα του ποιητή μέ κάποια κόρη” (Apostolakis 1923: 129). Not surprisingly, such assumptions are analogously echoed – “Who is she, indeed? A friend, a wife, a lover, a daughter...? Solomos kept his audiences in purposeful suspense.” (Raizis 1972: 72). It would not be fallacious to impress upon the fact that up to this point at least Solomos’ transcendental female figures do not possess palpable identities. Indeed, it becomes necessary for these nameless, ‘faceless’ women to be recognised by means of minimal physical idiosyncrasies, such as their movements. The tangible, forceful, in short, recognisable character traits of these women thus far, however, centre upon their effect on the outside world – the surroundings with which they come into contact and, of course, the way in which they are received by the elements of the outer, and in almost all cases, natural world.

It is these factors which dominate Sonnets III, XI and XII of the *Rime Improvisate* and are undoubtedly brought to the fore of ‘*Η Αγνώριστη*’, as the presence of the woman clothed in white (“*ή άσπροεντυμένη*”) effectuates the decisive metamorphosis of certain elements of the natural world – “*Τώρα πού τούτη / Η κόρη φαίνεται τό χόρτο γίνεται / Ανθι άπαλό...*” (Solomos 1993: 63). Once again, a woman of Christ-like force possesses the inherent authority of life-giving. Moreover, “*Κι έρωτεμένο / Νά μή τό άφήση, / Νά τό πατήση / Παρακαλει*”. Although an undeniably hyperbolic depiction, it would seem that the elements of the natural world surrounding this divine woman are transformed to function as a shrine, where she can be devoutly worshipped. The grass pleads with her to adorn it with her touch, thereby reaffirming the intimation that her identity encompasses Christ-like, holy traits.

The fact that the grass described is decidedly personified (“*άνοιγει τά κάλλη*”; “*τό κεφάλι / συχνοκουνει...*”; “*...έρωτεμένο... / Παρακαλει*”) enhances the forcefulness of this woman’s worship and, in turn, her Christ-like, redeeming qualities. (The intimations of

worship in Sonnet III are quite evidently echoed). The first and last stanzas it must be noted, not only establish an ambiguous tone, but are expressed with a kind of reverence, even – “Ποία εἶναι τούτη / Πού κατεβαίνει / Ἄσπροεντυμένη / Ὅχ τό βουνό;”. This reverent fervour is most certainly the result of witnessing the emergence of this saintly figure from the depths of Nature itself – a spectacle connoting to the conception, or rather the virtual certainty of her being a product of the natural world. She is the maiden of Nature – a fact which explains her wondrous intuition with the natural world, her Christ-like reign over its elements and their perpetual, devout worship of her – all of which one is in awe.

The fervent worship of this maiden of Nature is faithfully mirrored in Sonnet 7 of what are termed Solomos’ Zakynthian poems, in which the lady in question lays sleeping, like a priceless treasure on display:

*Deh venite a guardar la mia diletta...
Che come il giglio appar della convalle...
Vè’ dorme...* (Solomos 1968: 118-119).

The eager, almost reverent enthusiasm with which these words are expressed are reminiscent of the awe one feels in a place of worship or in paying homage to a shrine. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine a line of onlookers in awe of this sleeping beauty, fixing their loving, tender gaze upon her. Words of caution are advised to those surrounding her:

*Vi scongiuro...
Lasciate infin che vuol che si riposi.
I passi vostri risvegliarla ponno...*

What is of striking importance is the way in which Nature itself worships this maiden, as particular elements of the natural world accommodate her needs. It is discerned that the vine arbour “protects” her, and that Sea and Air modify their functions, so as not to disturb her sleep:

*Tacciono intorno e l’onde e i zeffiretti
Che temono turbarle il suo bel sonno.*

Respectfully, Nature ceases its natural functions – it is reverently silent as this seraphic figure sleeps to her heart’s content. Fundamental is the fact that this maiden is in a position to exercise firm control of the forces of Nature, in comparison to Sonnets XI, XII, as well as ‘Η Αγνώριστη’. In contrast to these poems, however, Sonnet 7 strikingly delineates the image of an accommodating Nature, regulated by a woman engaged in the most peaceful slumber.

The forcefulness of this divine woman's presence is absolute – indeed, it is ubiquitous, as is her profoundly Christ-like effect on the natural world. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that Solomos continues to present this woman, whose precise identity remains unknown, definitively transcending the bounds of the natural world, which she has the ability to regulate and modify. Employing his characteristically beautiful, serene images of Nature, Sonnet XIV of the *Rime Improvvise* sees Solomos rhythmically escalate to the climax of the poem, which candidly states that none of these breathtaking components of the natural world can compare to this woman and, in particular, her vocal attributes:

*Suon di limpido rivolo che casca
Dalla molle di fresche erbe collina,
Aura che va parlando colla frasca...
Vigile capinera che s'infrasca
E previene col canto la mattina;
O qualunque altra sia cosa mortale...
In confronto alla tua voce non vale.* (Solomos 1968: 104)

The qualities ascribed to this ethereal being definitively transcend the surrounding natural cosmos – indeed, all that which is ephemeral. This woman's position in the non-ephemeral and thus divine realm of the universe is in turn lucidly implied.

Solomos' utilisation and acute focus upon the auditory sense is quite striking. Words such as “*suon di limpido rivolo che casca*”, “*Aura che va parlando colla frasca...*” are not only atmospheric, but serve to further expatiate upon the sublimity and magnificence this woman decisively transcends. Solomos' (successful) employment of auditory images does not end with Sonnet XIV, as he focuses his attention once again on the vocal attributes of a particular woman in the eighth sonnet of the Zakyntian collection. The effect of her voice however, is particularly consequential–

*Esce viva d'accenti aura che scende
A far di gioia gli animi tremanti;
Da esso l'occhio innamorato pende
Che vede sorger fiori e frutti santi.* (Solomos 1968: 119)

Analogous is the hyperbolic depiction previously related in ‘*Ἡ Ἀγνώριστη*’, wherein a personified grass-land pleads with this goddess to set foot on it, at which point it is transformed into a flower-bed. In an almost identical description, Solomos focuses upon the hyperbolic effect the goddess Aphrodite excites in his improvised twelve-stanza *Ode a Venere* – “*Esce... / e tutti gli animi... / Dal piacer fur quasi esanimi... / L'erba infiorasi sui monti*” (Solomos 1968: 148-151). Images centering upon the auditory sense, coupled with similarly hyperbolic

depictions of certain elements of the natural world, highlight the striking effects of Aphrodite's laugh in the eighth sestet–

*Era tal, che data calma
Dell' Averno avrebbe al piangere;
Ogni loco orrendo e tristo
Fronde e fiori a dar fu visto.*

An almost identical impact is imposed upon the natural world by the actions and mere presence of the angelic being centred upon in Τό'Ονειρο, a (Greek) poem of Solomos' youth, which is particularly noteworthy. What begins as a tender moment shared by the poet and the object of his affection is transformed into a hyperbolic sequence of events – “Κάθε φίλημα, / ὅπου μῶδινες γλυκιά, / Ἐξεφύτρωνε απλό ρόδο / Ἀπό τήν τριανταφυλλιά.” (Solomos 1993: 51-53.) Aphrodite's heavenly, divine giggle is mirrored in this particular poem, with repercussions of similar proportions. Solomos' constant appeals to the auditory sense, coupled with the frequent utilisation of hyperbolic images, forcefully and indeed, successfully emphasise and finally confirm the transcendental qualities of these heavenly beings. The effect of these women on that with which they come into contact is undeniable confirmation of their immortal attributes.

It is their rapport with the outer world in fact – the effect and reactions instigated – by which these divinities are characterised and identified. Specific distinguishing (physical) features (which would grant these women an identity) in Solomos' early Italian poetic compositions at least, are rather scanty. They are by no means non-existent – they are not, however, consistent. Solomos is quite reluctant to provide these women with an identifiable visage – with a complete physical identity.

One of the more detailed descriptions Solomos grants his reader is that in Sonnet 7 of his Zakyntian collection. For the first time, there is a cautious mention only of this woman's luscious tresses and of her shoulders, which are dramatically likened to the brilliant hue of ivory. The whiteness of her skin is, however, suggested by Solomos' initial declaration of his lady's beauty – a beauty to which Nature only can compare – “...come il giglio appar della convalle, / A cui solo accarezza ala d'auretta...” (Solomos 1968: 118-119). Solomos' likening of his lady to the lily not only serves to emphasise the whiteness of her skin (enforced by the subsequent mention that the vine arbour “protects” her from the rays of the sun), but her striking beauty and grace as a whole – qualities with which the lily is synonymous. Ultimately and most fundamentally, however, the lily does of course connote to the innate treasures of purity and majesty (as does also her ivory skin). The subtle inference of chastity is further detectable in the depiction of the way in which the breeze “solo accarezza” this lily of the valley.

One particular conception which is quite profusely and consistently developed in Solomos' early Italian works is that of the Sun – the representation of which implies, in every circumstance, the divine, celestial nature of the lady in question. This empyrean goddess adopts the qualities of this ball of fire and energy and radiates its brilliance – she is the embodiment of light and warmth. It has previously been mentioned that she exudes a brilliance superior to that of the Sun itself. In yet another instance, the Sun and the elements of Nature fuse to create a similar, strikingly vibrant image, centred in this case upon the lady's lips:

*Sono le labbra tue come la scorza
Di melagrana, che per entro sente
Tutta del sol prolifica la forza.* (Sonnet 8, Zakynthian collection)
(Solomos 1968: 119)

Just as the energy of the Sun is encased within the pomegranate, so too this divine being encapsulates the same fruitful dynamism. The radiant force with which she is emblazoned is quite vividly impressed upon in the concluding tercet:

*Colui che fiso ha in te lo sguardo ha vera
Scorta, per girne al lito ov'è lucente
Laurora ognor che non avrà mai sera.*

In the same way that she is impregnated with the energy of the Sun, she is also quite naturally, the embodiment of light. The onlooker of this transcendental female is navigated towards peace and serenity; they are blessed with the eternal light of a perpetually dawning day. It is of particular significance to note the way in which certain atmospheric images connoting to the Sun and accordingly, to forms of energy and heat, pervade the poem in its entirety – "...s'accende / Il color delle tue labbra fiammanti..."; "Esce viva d'accenti aura..."; "Tutta del sol prolifica la forza"; "lucente / Laurora ognor."; "non avrà mai sera". These conceptions successfully relay the luminosity of the Sun and consequentially mirror the intensity and radiance emanating from the depths of this woman – a woman within which reverberates a divine, celestial glow.²

Curious and uneventful it may seem to liken Solomos' transcendental female to an artist's untouched canvas, eagerly awaiting its transformation – the prospective infusion of the breath of life. The gradual evolution of the feminine sublime in Solomos' literary productions, however, cannot be afforded a more striking comparison. The *donna angelicata* of the poet's youthful Italian compositions is just that – an immaculate, essentially unblemished canvas, with sundry sketches and marks of experimentation. Any physical delineations which would appease the curious mind and construct an identifiable visage for this woman are

rarely provided, as Solomos acutely focuses his attention upon her transcendental qualities and Christ-like regulation of the surrounding cosmos. Striking, though perhaps not surprising, is the analogous ambiguity, indeed reticence, which characterises the seraphic beings in those works produced in the last decade of Solomos' life (1847-1857), despite the fact that the majority of the women focused upon are ironically, non-fictitious personages – predominantly acquaintances of the poet, who suffered a premature death.

It is in these compositions that the *donna angelicata* returns to perform her final, yet impressive encore. Perhaps it is not coincidental that at this stage the poet utilises once again the language which he had effectively abandoned since those poetic compositions of his youth. With reference to Solomos' linguistic preferences, however, Polyas is careful to interject a verity of weighty significance – “Ἡ ἰταλική σύνθεση, εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν ὁ ποιητὴς ἐργάζετο μὲ ἀπίστευτην εὐκολία, δὲν τὸν ἀπόκοβε ὅμως ἀπὸ τὴν ἑλληνική” (Solomos 1993: 39). Hence, the creation of a plethora of poetic and prose works in both languages – some complete, some fragmentary, and others outlines or drafts of intended poetic projects. It is of especial noteworthiness however, that Solomos' *donna angelicata* is most prominently, and thus most frequently materialised in those compositions of the Italian language.

Characteristic of this period's fragmentary works are two solitary Italian tercets which seem to be, as Politis quite soundly postulates, the concluding verses to an unfinished sonnet (Politis 1985: 308) – more specifically, an elegy or funerary ode:

*Vide il mondo con gaudio e con amore
L'orma tua santa, e vi spargea la lode,
Dell'umana parola inclito fiore.
Ma chiamata ah! ben presto ad altra palma,
Sol sospirando e lagrimando or gode
Coprime il gel di tua virginea salma. (Ἀπόσπασμα Χωρὶς Τίτλο)
(Solomos 1968: 224)*

Although the fragmentary nature of this composition precludes an exhaustive interpretation, the beatific essence of the maiden in question is irrefutable. In an image certainly Christ-like in its origin, the saintliness of this maiden is almost immediately ascertained, as intimations of worship are simultaneously foregrounded. It seems the surrounding populace is in awe of this heavenly lady's “*orma...santa*”, responding accordingly in a manner reserved for the likes of a saint. Indeed, her swift departure from these earthly bounds – her transcendence of ephemerality – was certainly intended, however premature. It was intended for this saintly creature to dwell in the heavens, her Christ-like ascension ensuring her eternal existence. It is of particular consequence to note that on Solomos' manuscript are added the following lines – variations to the original fragment – “*Vieni, o suora, dicea l'angel*

custode.” The indisputable affiliation of this maiden with the angelic beings residing in the heavens above lucidly illustrates her ethereal, other-worldly qualities – as a result of which she too was intended to reside amongst these most celestial of beings.

An identical fate was destined for another young maiden whom Solomos chose to glorify in his verse. A clearly non-fictitious personage, Emily Rodostamos, member of an aristocratic family of Corfiot descent, who died in December 1847 at the tender age of 21. In the same manner as the aforementioned maiden, so too upon her death, Emily Rodostamos returns to the abode which should always have been considered home – the empyrean regions. In the Italian prose draft entitled *Εἰς τὸ θάνατο Αἰμιλίας Ροδόσταμο*, the pain and grief caused by this angelic creature’s hasty departure is somewhat eased by the knowledge that she was destined to transcend those boundaries by which her mourners continue to be subjugated. Indeed, the heavens resound at her long-awaited arrival, and premature as her death is considered by those bound and constrained by a transient existence:

...nelle auree parti della onnipotenza, molti spiriti antichi, molti spiriti nuovi stanno aspettando per dirti che tu aggiunger tardasti. (Solomos 1968: 235)

– a conviction, the essence of which is reflected in the Greek poem (dated to 1848, shortly following the death of this maiden) for which this prose draft was the basis. The sorrow and affliction of her untimely loss is in some measure consoled by the irrefutable, inescapable fact that “...*il cielo chiama a sè presto lo affine*”. The seraphic likeness of this young maiden, as well as the intimations of her saintliness, are rather frequently foregrounded by the repetition of the godlike dimensions of her physical attributes. Her possession of an innate affinity with God Himself is quite lucidly intimated – a maiden whose celestial nature and heavenly affiliation are boldly asserted by means of an image, a resounding echo rather, from Solomos’ earliest poetic compositions – the young maiden “...*lampeggiò come l’ Ara.*” (Or, in the variation of this particular conception – “...*lampeggia come l’ astro del mattino!*”)

The saintly essence of Emily Rodostamos – a star of the heavens – is cogently mirrored in the six-line epigram addressed to another non-fictitious personage – Francesca Fraser – daughter of Sir John Fraser, a dear friend of Solomos. *Εἰς Φραγκίσκα Φραΐζερ* (1849) is generally considered the “greatest Greek lyric of that decade.” (Raizis 1972: 121) In the same manner as the ethereal women preceding her emergence, Francesca Fraser is undeniably the embodiment of not only Beauty, but the essence of Purity – the substance with which Emily Rodostamos was similarly endowed. In effect, it is the essence of Francesca Fraser with which the poet is absorbed. While her beauty is of a calibre which cannot possibly be denied, even these physical gifts embodying perfection are unworthy of this “*Καλή*” – they cannot compare to the wealth within Her and which comprises Her actual existence – “*Ὁμορφος κόσμος ἠθικός ἀγγελικά πλασμένος!*” (Solomos 1993: 260)

The physical beauty of Francesca Fraser is definitively eclipsed by her “μέσα πλοῦτος”. In what is one of the first of a number of instances, Solomos’ customary praise of the outer, physical gifts of those ethereal maidens of his past (and thus, his intimation only of their inner endowments), is made to give way to the enthusiastic commendation of their moral beauty. Solomos’ *donna angelicata* is no longer extolled for her beauty and divinity alone – she is worshipped as a creature who radiates a moral aura; whose attributes are now foremostly measured by the treasures that are her soul.

This conception, which is yet in its infancy in Εἰς Φραγκίσκα Φραΐζερ, is most vividly and exhaustively materialised in an Italian prose draft (Σχεδιάσμα), wherein the tangible endowments of an unnamed maiden are definitively surpassed by the innate riches of her very being. Indeed, the crux of this prose piece lies in the absolute refutation of all that which is ephemeral. Even if the Sun,

...ornamenti e corone tributasse alla tua figura divina: se ad una ad una le stelle formassero voce e ti chiamassero a nome, e ti salutassero Regina della beltà e della grazia, non per questo pareggerebbero quant' io vidi cogli occhi dell' anima...
(Solomos 1968: 236)

In the event that the whole cosmos itself bestowed all imaginable earthly treasures upon this divine maiden, none of these are remotely comparable to her “μέσα πλοῦτος.” This inner wealth successively encourages and allows the poet himself to earnestly believe

... a cosa che è fuori di noi, e mi libera dall' abisso della materia, il quale non mi terrà più fra le sue strette onnipossenti.

This maiden “è fuori di noi” – she is on a plane which potently transcends all transient bounds. Indeed, Solomos unequivocally impresses upon a direct fusion between God Himself and this “*vergine delle vergini*”. Their innate affinity is no longer simply implied, as the poet lucidly states what he considers to be an absolute verity:

La Grazia cadde dal seno del Grande Artefice nel tuo, e dal tuo nel mio, ove s' introdusse ospite non atteso, e lo divinizzò.

Not only is this maiden quintessentially interconnected with God Himself – she has also been granted the position of His intermediary on Earth. A palpable, divine force is irrefutably exuded from the depths of that which is her inner wealth – a being so immaculately pure, she has been directly endowed with the gifts of God. It is her subsequent correspondence with Man – in the form of the poet – which may enable him to unearth and decipher that which has continually eluded him – the mysteries of the universe; a feat conceivable only for this messenger of God – His beatific mediator, His likeness.

Solomos' decided intrigue and exploration of that most elusive element – the Divine – does not end with the preceding (Σχεδίασμα), as it is once again palpably embodied by “...una Figura la quale, benchè velata, si manifestava divina in tutto...” – the cryptic subject of the celebrated *La Donna Velata*, an Italian prose draft of a poetic project which was never realised.

In a reflection of the non-fictitious personages previously extolled, and in most cases eulogised, so too it is believed ‘*la donna velata*’ refers in fact to a lady by the name of Adelaide Karvela – a woman with whom, it is believed, Solomos had fallen in love (Raizis 1972: 56). The lovely Adelaide died in middle age (1846) – *La Donna Velata* it seems, was composed with the intention of glorifying her divine form and perhaps, to tacitly divulge Solomos' love. Whatever the poet's reasons for composition, *La Donna Velata* remains an undeniably enigmatic prose piece, the essence of which is epitomised by ‘the veiled lady’ herself. In a manner immediately reminiscent of the earlier appearance of the ‘ἀγνώριστη’, so too this divine “Figura” is steeped in ambiguity. While exuding an aura of undeniable transcendence, so too she is engulfed by the ambivalence which blanketed and certainly characterised her Greek counterpart, both being the recipients nonetheless, of continual praise, delight and love – the finality of Death however, unequivocally withdrawing the veiled divinity from the loving gaze of her devout worshippers.

The potency of Death however, cannot completely extinguish the spirit of this divinity, as her beauty and her very being transcend the ephemeral restrictions of mortality. Her seeming defiance of the jaws of Death corroborates this divinity's beatific transcendence, so much so that, in a manner reflective of the actions of the godlike being of Sonnets XI and XII (*Rime Improvisate*) and most potently, of the unnamed messenger of God, this veiled figure is meticulously identified with Christ Himself, as her possible resurrection is succinctly intimated – “...forse domani risorgerà...” (Solomos 1968: 229-230).

Despite the existence of a myriad of allusions to this divinity's laudable physical traits, they are in no way granted precedence over the beatitude of her innate being – “...essa era ed è nella mia anima, quello che è l' anima nel mio corpo.” ‘*La donna velata*’ consumes the poet. Just as his own spirit is vital to his very being, so too she is indispensable, crucial to his existence. It is her “μέσα πλοῦτος” which is most highly esteemed and which transcends all ephemeral treasures;

Se tutte le grandezze fossero scese a' miei piedi, anche allora avrei cercato il bene solo negli occhi suoi.

It is only in the windows to this divinity's soul that goodness itself is embodied and attained. Such treasures can only be witnessed “μέ τά μάτια τῆς ψυχῆς.”

Unlike her Greek counterpart, the concluding lines of *La Donna Velata* see the veil of obscurity actually lifted to reveal the divinity in question – “...la Figura svelossi, ed apparì

l'amica glorificata e ridente." The beatific qualities previously related are now clearly tangible as this woman, saint-like and glorified in her depiction, is dramatically uncovered. The elevation of this veil of ambiguity, however, fails to completely assuage the curious mind. In much the same fashion as those angelic creatures preceding her, the godlike being extolled for the innate treasures of her soul, simply appears and does nothing but excite a plethora of unanswered questions.

NOTES

- 1 "...I feel my soul tremble within my heart, / Like one that cannot hold out in the presence / Of the great power that is manifest in her."
- 2 In *complete* antithesis to images such as these, we will observe Solomos dramatically shift his focus in the Greek poems of his youth and beyond, from the Sun to the elements of the heavens at night-fall. Solomos' transcendental females will no longer exude the brilliance of the Sun, but will encompass the shimmer of the stars and the luminosity of the moon. The poet's reliance upon the elements of the night-sky culminate finally in what are considered the greatest works of his maturity – "Οἱ Ἐλεύθεροι Πολιορκημένοι and Ὁ Κρητικός," wherein Solomos' transcendental female form, aided by the most celestial of elements, reaches the pinnacle of sublimity as the woman bathed or dressed in the light of the moon – an evolution which regretfully, can only be afforded a brief mention.

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