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*Pages on Dionysios Solomos*

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

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# CONTENTS

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

## BOOK REVIEWS

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

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This issue is dedicated to Véronica and Andras.*



**VRASIDAS KARALIS**  
The University of Sydney

THE OCCLUDING ALPHABETS OF  
A NATIONAL POET:  
THE CASE OF DIONYSIOS SOLOMOS' *REFLECTIONS*

*The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real*

“H.P.B.”

The problem with national poets is that they demand our reverence – but almost always for the wrong reasons. Usually, most of them are bad poets and, in most cases, “collective creations”, imaginary epitomes of all virtues and vices exhibited by a certain community through time; as a result, their own identity, even their personal biography, is lost behind the rhetoric about their greatness. Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857), the national poet of Greece, is such a characteristic case; he is admired by Greek literary criticism for reasons not immediately apparent to readers from other traditions; and he is venerated unconditionally in the kind of worship we reserve for sacred figures, exotic idols or museum exhibits.

However, a close reading of his work reveals that it can not sustain the heavy critical armour employed in order to convince contemporary readers, unspecialised or professional, about his status. It is not simply the superstition of untranslatability that is always raised by his friends; if a poem can not be translated then nothing is said in it or nothing can be made out of it in another language – leaving aside also the crucial question of “who translates?”. What is crucial for the understanding of his adventure in poetry is his reliance on the romantic atmosphere and its necessary conditions: repressed desires, antithetical imagery, oratorical style, oracular pronouncements and all the other paraphernalia of that frame of mind, which make his work rather derivative, closed and self-referential to the degree of complete opacity.

In short, as shocking as this statement may sound, there is a lack of depth in his poetic vision – or at least in the way it has been presented by his friends. I have the impression that we have to *relocate* the centre of importance within his work and in the historiography of Greek literature. In his fine biography of the poet, Romilly Jenkins, full of ambivalent feelings about his subject matter (we must not forget that the book was first published in 1940), concluded with a comparison: “Byron’s ideal was an idealised Byron. Solomos’ ideal was Greece”<sup>1</sup>.

But if “Greece” was his ideal, what about his poetry? Paul de Man’s deconstructionist approach to romanticism or even Phillipe Lacue-Labarth and Jean-Luc Nancy’s ideas about the literary absolute have suggested that the emergence of literary discourse after the profound crisis in post-Enlightenment modern history was an offspring of brothers Schlegel and Immanuel Kant’s respective privileging of the literary and the poetic. It seems that Solomos more than anybody else writing in Greek during that period represented the figure who felt the crisis around him and struggled to impose a new semantic synthesis on the existing literary tradition. As a matter of fact, he invented literature as a distinct mode of writing with its own discourse and its own symbolic structures – within his work the transition can be seen from the polished and symmetrical artefacts of neoclassicism to the chaotic and polyphonic poetic loci of romanticism. Together with this transition, the reader can easily feel that Solomos’ mature romantic poetry is deeply disturbed by feelings beyond those of the usual romantic imagination, as though he had opened Pandora’s box and discovered in there many unimagined skeletons.

However, in the end, he was unable to complete the project of writing “literary texts”; not simply because of the potentialities latent in the language of his day, or the transitional nature of the existing genres; but mainly because of his own psychological formation, his personal relation to his representation as a poet, and his discursive choices that proved either unable to construct a coherent system of signifying structures or to amalgamate the possibilities into a national discourse during the early period of Greek ethnogenesis. We must not forget that even in the middle of the 19th century literary discourse was something of an innovation; as in many other European languages, there was not even a word for it in Greek. The commonly used term by critics was borrowed from rhetoric; it was called “logography” and included all forms of writing (only after 1854 was the term “logotechny” coined). The new form of writing introduced by Solomos, focused as it was on highly emotive, intentional, self-conscious poetic language, could not be immediately classified and validated within the system of existing discourses. But the absent validation could be felt by Solomos himself, who fell into a continuous aporia about what he was doing; and his inability to synthesise the existing discourses through his own structural re-arrangement is better expressed in his text entitled *Stocasmoi*“, translated in English as *Thoughts* (Jenkins), *Meditations* (Lambropoulos) or as *Reflections* in this essay.

Modern Greek literature begins with an interesting paradox; some of the best works by its national poet were written not in Greek but in Italian. Furthermore, they are all influenced by really opaque German idealistic philosophy which the poet read in Italian translations, prepared for him by his aristocratic, and extremely class-conscious, friends.

The text I will be translating and presenting in this essay is probably the most *emblematic* and at the same time the most *symptomatic* of the linguistic ambivalence of Solomos himself as poet and individual and can be considered as an outstanding example of semiotic collapse

in the signifying processes within any language. The text is emblematic insofar as it encapsulates the spirit of an age immediately after the polyglot cosmopolitanism of the 18th century; and is symptomatic in so far as it constructs in another foreign language (the language of a prior conqueror) the conceptual framework for an emerging national literature. Dionysios Solomos' *Reflections* express the ambivalent feelings associated with a sense of belonging to two cultures, and at the same time, delineate a rather unconscious dichotomy. The poet thinks and writes in Italian (sometimes in prose and sometimes in verse) and then translates such verbal structures into Greek – and a very peculiar form of the Greek language: dialectal, local and idiomatic. However, despite its peculiarities, what this language maps is a *terra incognita* of meanings, symbols and concepts never before found in Greek poetry. Indeed the concrete and objective diction of all poetry written immediately before him was abruptly replaced with a vocabulary of transcendental abstractions and idealistic notions never employed as poetic language, since Proclus and the Christian hymnographers.

It was an immense leap of faith into the new realm of modernity's self-questioning that threw Solomos into the Mephistophelian attempt to re-invent the language of the tribe and transpose it to the level of a new temporality. However, the general condition of the Greek language itself was rather too fluid or extremely diverse in order to become, through the efforts of one individual, so rigorously and systematically coherent; furthermore, how can one invent a new form of a language while thinking in another? This is the greatest paradox in Solomos' creative performance; he wanted to be the national poet of a country which existed only as an imaginary project for the future and simultaneously wrote most of his work in Italian, a language which had transformed him, as he wrote in a poem, from a barbarian to a civilised human being and yet, although for him Italian was the prestigious and privileged language of his aristocratic class, it was also neutral and emotively achromatic for the needs of a nascent national literary tradition – not to mention again the fact that it was the language of a former colonial conqueror.

Interestingly enough, Solomos does not see any antinomy in this. On the contrary, almost all of his personal documents (letters, notes, etc.) are written in Italian, as it was proper for his extremely militant upper class conscience. Only four letters from the early period of his life were written in Greek; and very idiomatic Greek, the dialectal Greek of his mother as a matter of fact. Even in his mature Greek works one feels the familiar intonation of Italian sounds and phonetic modulations. Furthermore, Solomos had invented, like Leonardo, his own phonetic alphabet, partly Greek partly Roman, to record his thoughts and poetic studies. Obviously such poetics of bilingualism did not influence him nor did they deter his friends and admirers from regarding him as the supreme national poet of Greece in its process of national liberation and nation-building – although the question of how Italian criticism would assess his work in that language remains unanswered.

The reasons for such nationalisation are rather numerous; first of all, Solomos, fiery, romantic poetry of the early period (1820-1830) coincided with the Greek Revolution (1821). His famous *Hymn to Liberty* (1823) is the national anthem of Greece to this day but, despite its nationalist kerygma, the poem itself is distinguished for its superb expressive virtues, the tone of delivering an urgent message to his fellow-countrymen and its excellent use of internal alliteration and rimming enjambments. It is extremely difficult to render the poem in other languages in a way that does justice to its enchanting oratorical style. Rudyard Kipling with his own rhetorical imagination has produced the most interesting poetic translation of the text:

*We know thee of old,  
Oh, divinely restored,  
By the light of thine eyes  
And the light of thy Sword.*

*From the graves of our slain  
Shall thy valour prevail  
As we greet thee again—  
Hail, Liberty! Hail!<sup>2</sup>*

In his translation, Kipling encapsulated the monotonous undulatory tone of the poem, which continues for 154 stanzas, some of them of extreme beauty and others of superb dullness. However, we don't feel the same if we read C. Trypanis' prose transcription: "*I recognize you by the fierce edge of your sword; I recognize you by the look that measures the earth. Liberty, who sprang out of the sacred bones of the Greeks brave as in the past, I greet you, I greet you*"<sup>3</sup>. The comparison of the translations gives a definite measure about the poem and of the metrical nature of its achievement. Solomos is a superb poet so long as a strong poetic form supports and sustains his poetic language; and yet, at the same time the new tonalities and innovations he introduces undermine the coherence of the existing literary genres so that they simply collapse under the burden of their own pattern. This can be seen in Solomos' second important poem of the period *Ode to the Death of Lord Byron* (1825) – a tribute which must be considered as Byron's second death.

Such asymmetry characterises almost the entire corpus of Solomos' work. Obviously Solomos struggled with language in a way that no Greek writer before him has ever done. All poets of the so-called anti-poetic 18th century exhibited a masterful easiness with language; they usually employed metrical forms which had been consecrated by great poets of the past or by considerations of accessibility to their audience while occasionally experimenting with its potentialities in many baffling and rather charming manners. Furthermore,

Greek writing of that period was deeply divided between two forms of the language; demotic and purist.

We believe that after the polemics of both sides have eased that we can revisit the so-called “linguistic question” with a fresh approach. To my perception, the conflict was predominantly between *orality* and *scriptibility*, that is, the urgent dilemma for the emerging public space of Greek society about which form of language should be privileged as the main strategy for nation-building; that of the everyday, oral, communication (the language of commerce) or that of the ecclesiastical and ancient Greek literary tradition (the language of the upper ruling elite). Of course, in practice, neither of them was touched by the functional effectiveness of the other in different contexts and registers. By the end of the 18th century, the demotic language was gaining recognition not simply because of its immediacy, directness and effective expression. Cultural and political factors can be detected also; for instance, the cult of the nation (ethnos) which became dominant after the French revolution together with the creation of a financially strong quasi middle-class elite in the periphery of the Ottoman empire should be taken into consideration as well.

The dominant elite of the Greeks under the Ottomans was a remnant of the old Byzantine aristocracy that had lived for centuries in the suburb of Phanari in Constantinople; its own dialect was rather mixed and totally idiosyncratic. It was a happy mixture of ecclesiastical, local and translingual loans (Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Italian and French). Peripheral centres, especially that of the Seven Islands (ruled by the Venetians, the French and finally by the English), wanted to stress their difference from the political leadership of the Phanariotes, since the latter were perceived as being part of the Ottoman establishment and therefore as representing the oriental, anti-western element amongst the Greeks (despite their Franco-philic education and social etiquette).

The dissemination of nationalist ideologies from the West and the gradual establishment of a wealthy local gentry in Greece proper created a dilemma of cultural orientation which can be clearly seen in the notorious linguistic question in Greece. Solomos appeared in the middle of the debate and in one of his early works (the so-called *Dialogue*) took up the banner of the demotic cause in a rather forceful and up-beat manner. However, in 1833 in his famous letter to his friend Giorgos Tertsetis, he stressed that: “The nation should take the language of the demotic (klephtic) songs as the basis for its national literature; it must use their essence not their form; Because it is good for anyone to follow these steps but one shouldn’t stop there; one should be vertically elevated [...] the nation asks for the treasures of our own individual genius, clothed in our nationality”<sup>4</sup>. Later in his life (1843), on the same issue, he uttered one of the pithiest dicta in Greek: “The nation must learn to consider as national everything true”, showing his further disassociation from his original cause or even having himself practically experienced the unfeasibility of a pure literary dialect based on an undiluted form of the vernacular.

So already by 1833, Solomos had realised the untenability of his early defence of an unadulterated (which was essentially another form of purism) demotic language. It is interesting again to note that, despite the *Dialogue*, all his other writings from this period are a curious mixture of Italian and Greek. This period coincided with a series of personal problems which left him totally disenchanted with the project of a Greek national school and totally frustrated with his private life. His mother was a maid at Solomos senior's aristocratic mansion. Obviously the old aristocrat was an extremely active womaniser as befitted his social class and his status as one of the most notorious money-lenders in the small island of Zakynthos (an occupation which brought immense wealth to the family and was carried on valiantly by the national icon himself and his brother). Aggeliki Nikle fell pregnant by him and succeeded in getting married only in 1807, several months before the aged aristocrat's departure from this futile and trouble-ridden life – especially after the arrival to the Seven Islands of the French republicans who abolished all titles of nobility and the privileges that Solomos' class had enjoyed for centuries.

Until 1807, the young Dionysios was an illegitimate child (*uno bastardello*, as he would call himself ironically later in his life). However, the saga did not end with the death of the old aristocrat. Aggeliki, being young and full of life's impulses, fell pregnant again by another young man who used to frequent his father's home. Shortly after the death of the old man, Aggeliki married the new man in her life and had one more child with him. Dionysios with his other brother, as the only legally recognised children, remained the sole heirs to the paternal fortune and estate. Already by 1808, the first court-case had begun in order to give part of the inheritance to Solomos senior's other son from a previous marriage. The matter was settled but still the stigma of illegitimacy must have left its marks on the young man's mind.

However, around the end of the 1820s, Aggeliki tried to prove that her other son by her second husband was equally legitimate and had complete legal rights to the paternal inheritance. Such action had an immense psychological impact on the poet, whose *Hymn to Liberty* had gained wide critical acceptance and popularity by then. Both sides presented their arguments in a series of court cases that spanned five years; the poet finally won the case, after having proved to the court that his mother was essentially a whore (*una puttana*) without morals and credibility. He maintained the inheritance but all ties with his mother were severed for ever; until his death in 1857, the poet never met with her again and opposed any attempts for reconciliation. He even ridiculed, in a rather Freudian therapeutic manner, the maternal figure through some horrible caricatures of anonymous feminine personalities in a series of prose and poetic works (*The Woman of Zakynthos*, *The Hair*, etc.). Byron Raizis observes: "This five-year period was a critical one for Dionysios, as it would have been for any human being exposed to such a humiliating and scandalous experience"<sup>5</sup>.

At a deeper level, another tie had been cut for ever; his personal umbilical cord with the Greek language. His mother taught him Greek and her idiomatic style can be easily seen in her existing letters as a constant influence on Solomos' literary work. But since the maternal principle, the existential *arche*, betrayed him, he had to betray her as well. The presence of the elusive mother figure was totally expelled from his poetry after the end of the court cases in 1834. From that moment on, Solomos would portray only disembodied, transcendental and illusory feminine figures (*The Moon-clad Lady* or *the Magnanimous Mother*). Furthermore, as the years were passing and recognition failed to arrive from the Greek State, he became increasingly alienated from Greece and the Greek language. After the 1840s, he reverted to Italian again, wrote some extraordinary pieces of bad Italian poetry which, if translated into Greek, could have been really fine Greek prose-poems.

Already after the end of the legal battle with his mother, the poet had started to drink heavily; some would claim that he also used opium, the necessary accomplishment of every romantic imagination – but definitely wine and whisky never left his home ever after. His sexual life also became rather polymorphous, as in his stupor the guilt-ridden man is rumoured to have indulged in sexual misconduct of all kinds: records have not been preserved and could not have been preserved after his elevation to the status of a national symbol.

However, the idealised femininity in his work is an obvious case of misogyny: a profound rejection of feminine historicity, whose expression was given by Solomos in the bitterest satire written against women under the title *The Woman of Zakynthos*. Furthermore, in his most homosexualised poem (*Porphyras*), the youthful naked body of an English soldier is devoured by a shark rushing against him from the depths of the sea; a highly phallic symbolism is employed here (teeth, knife, weapons, dismembering, etc.) in order to describe that closeness of death and desire. Obviously, in Freudian terms the “death drive” possesses the individual; and as Richard Boothby observed: “‘Death’ is to be conceived in Lacanian terms primarily as a loss of an imaginary form and coherence”<sup>6</sup>. Such loss of imaginary coherence is obvious in the inability of the poet to poetically inhabit his own universe. From then on, a spasmodic revision of his early works was undertaken, but the body of writings was left dismembered and was scattered into inconclusive plans for something great, which was expressed through its absence and shadowy reflections. Beyond anything else, what characterised his creative life till his death was the incompleteness of his works as though his powers of representation could not sustain the ambiguities of the represented.

During the last decades of his life, Solomos lived in Corfu totally isolated from every kind of human contact and with his health in constant deterioration. His letters from this period exude the pessimism of someone tormented by his own conscience. Something tragic seems to occasionally emerge from his touching remarks to his friends. His confrontation

with his mother, and probably with his own femininity, led to the destruction of his creative impulse and ultimately of his life. And just as his own mother died alone, without financial assistance from him (although she had begged for it on many occasions), Solomos himself died “a victim to his own self-imposed abuses”, as a friend of his wrote, to the relief of his own class; but his legend was immediately born.

His closest friends, who were translating for him in Italian works of the most important German writers and philosophers (Goethe, Schiller, Klopstock, Hegel, Fichte, Herder etc.) searched for his works which he himself avoided publishing but which he had read or recited to them in private meetings. To no avail! Only fragments, isolated verses, loose sheets of paper without obvious connection – chronological or thematic. The most enthusiastic of them, Iakovos Polylas (1825-1896), decided to drastically intervene and offer the Greek nation its own much-expected and religiously anticipated Dante.

Two years after his death (1859), Solomos’ *Collected Works* appeared in Corfu. Polylas had collated, compiled and finally constructed a readable and cohesive body of works which, despite its frequent lacunae, satisfied the need of the nation for a great genius, a poet who represented “a moment in the unfolding of the Spirit” in its march through history. In this edition, Vassilis Lambropoulos detected “...one of the few real romantic novels in Greek and certainly the best, at least in terms of genre: a compact *Kunstlerroman*”<sup>7</sup>. After the annexation of the Seven Islands to Greece (1865), the *Hymn to Liberty* gradually became the national anthem of the Greek state in a gesture of generous acceptance of the centuries old aristocratic elite, which had to be assimilated by the ruling establishment of the newly-founded dynasty (1864).

For the collected works, Polylas also wrote a magnificent prolegomenon which posited the hermeneutics of Solomos’ work within the idealistic rhetoric of self-effacing sublimation. In one of his most interesting statements, which according to some foreshadowed the Flaubertian doctrine of the impersonality of art, Polylas stated: “...because [Solomos’] work in Art, as in his elevated oral conversations, was a spontaneous incessant effort to gradually extinguish his personality in absolute truth...”<sup>8</sup> Evidence of this was actually found in Solomos’ own poetic laboratory. In his edition, Polylas introduced Solomos’ most ambitious poem, *The Free Besieged*, which was about the most heroic incident of the Greek revolution, – the Missolongi Exodus, – with several pages of Solomos’ personal reflections about the composition of the poem. The poem itself was never finished; and although Delacroix’s painting depicted Greece expiring in the ruins of Missolongi, Solomos left behind three different studies of the poem written in different periods of his life – although recent scholarship tends to qualify further the period of creation of the poem.

The first was composed somehow like a bucolic idyll in a flippant rhythm and jocular rime – it was easily discarded as not “lofty” enough. The second was composed in rimmed

couplets and is distinct for its admirable imagery and aural associations. But it was also abandoned. The third is by all means one of the best poems written in Greek since Sappho. Solomos discarded rhyme and rearranged the traditional metrical forms in a rather experimental and idiosyncratic way. Bold associations and adventurous similes constructed a very strange textual space: verses undulating in the number of words from seven down to three are punctured by lacunae which disrupt the reading and puzzle the reader. Furthermore, thick units of verses are followed by blank spacings that “occlude” and destabilise the internal coherence of the text. As John Sallis noted: “The release of spacings opens reason beyond itself, disrupting that pure self-identity, self-recoverability, self-presence, by which spacing would be, was to have been, superseded, suppressed. It spaces reason out into a field, into various fields, for instance, those of sensibility and even of history”<sup>9</sup>.

So, such an interchange of words and silent rhythms detemporalises the actual language and abstracts it from its own associative function; as a consequence, the poet who wanted to immortalise the real historical event of a national sacrifice transposed its subject-matter poetically onto the transcendental plane of a conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, humanity and nature. So the actual text of his poem is in a state of constant self-erasure, never to be finished since it creates its own reality while at the same time destroying all traces that could guide the reader to reconstruct its creative process in reference to something outside its own textual space.

Obviously his *Reflections* follow only loosely the internal self-erasing/self-creating development of the poem together with the inner changes in the poet himself. Jenkins wryly observes: “As a literary credo the *Thoughts* have been gravely over-valued by certain critics: they are interesting only as throwing light on a phase – an unhappy phase, it is feared we must call it – in the poet’s spiritual development”<sup>10</sup>. As we have it today, the text is without specific order or any kind of notes about when it was composed and what it is referring to. It is another orphan text, like almost everything by Solomos.

*Reflections* unfold some loose co-ordinates of a poetic territory without any further specifications. Some critics believe that they represent “programmatic” expressions of his poetic intentions (Giorgos Veloudes, Linos Polites). Others believe that these thoughts refer to a cluster of poems and poetic experiments within the span of twenty years (roughly 1825-1845). We can’t be certain about either. They might as well represent notes or comments kept by Solomos when he was reading the translated texts by Hegel and Schiller; as a matter of fact, some of these reflections are mere paraphrases of Schiller’s essay *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*. We must stress the *exploratory* character of this text, its groping towards a territorial imperative of some sort, where the *will* to create takes initiatives which disturb and upset conventional practices – and of course the articulator of such conventions, the poet himself.

Of course today, Solomos' utterances sound like sibylline oracles of the most obscure kind (and this must be one of the reasons why Greek postmodernists have passionately embraced the text). However, this text represents the most spectacular announcement of the individual will to disrupt the spatio-temporal continuum of its own constitutive culture at a particular period in history. Therefore, we must situate it in its own contextual realities and try to understand the need for the establishment of new discourses within a tradition totally afraid of innovations and most repelled by the emergence of the individual conscience.

Greek society did not participate in the great upheavals that fragmented and dismantled the subjective universalism of the *ancien regime*. It remained alien and even hostile to the changes that relocated the centre of tradition from the community to individual conscience. Furthermore, under Ottoman rule, the Orthodox tradition constructed an almost atemporal cyclical sense of time axonised around the fixities and the firmities of the ecclesiastical calendar. Around this calendar the individual experienced a primordial time, a time which existed before its birth, and was consecrated by the symbolic names of ancient philosophy and the icons of Church fathers.

Within this spatio-temporal continuum the individual had to re-affirm what was given and what should be delivered to the new generations: a specific sense of time which redeemed history from its contingency. The symbolic networks of the Orthodox tradition placed the individual in a kind of unfulfilled historical unfolding: at the centre of this symbolic universe the cathedral of Christendom, the Church of the Divine Wisdom in Constantinople, was waiting for its *apokatastasis*. Only then would the individual feel redeemed from the trauma of a great symbolic loss that had destroyed its cultural and spiritual centre.

With Solomos' *Reflections* an alien sense of time entered Greek language; through his prestige as the national poet, his idiom superseded those of all other writers and, despite the suspicion of the intellectuals in the newly founded capital city of Athens, his poetry had been accepted as that of a "great ode-maker" (Alexander Soutsos) by 1833. Such "greatness" almost concealed the fact that some of his poems had as subject-matter some very morbid Byronic incestuous motifs. *Lambros* the only poem whose fragments were published during his lifetime (1834), for instance, is about the story of a fierce revolutionary fighter who, having lost his daughter during the war, fell in love with her years later and had three children with her. The moment of recognising their kinship becomes the moment of insanity: she drowns herself and *Lambros*, her father and lover.

Such a theme had been totally unknown to Greek poetry until then; with the exception of two demotic songs which talk about necrophilia, there is no tradition of such thematic discourse in the language. With Solomos' work a new theme emerged in Greek literature; that of the *guilty conscience*, as a matter of fact, the reality of guilt as an existential dimension.

Eastern Orthodoxy had never accepted the concept of the original sin in the same way as Western Christianity after Augustine; on the contrary, guilt is totally absent even from the vocabulary of Eastern Orthodox theology. In its place the milder notion of *remorse* appears, however, not associated with the carnal existence of humans but with the god-given energies of individual conscience on the way to its own self-understanding.

With Solomos that dimension of existential *anomie* becomes a strong motif of poetic discourse. The poet feels that his own creative impulse is a death-drive, meaningless and amoral; and he himself is nothing more than an illegitimate presence, a gaze without a body, someone who shouldn't be there because he doesn't have the right to exist. Thus he becomes able to adopt what he calls "the characters of great criminals who are powerful" (*il carattere dei grandi scelerati che sono potenti*)<sup>11</sup> in order to depict the annihilation of meaning around him. Such self-invalidating drives can be detected in Solomos' writings and can also be seen in his fragmentary *Reflections*; as a matter of fact, herein lies the reason for their very fragmentariness.

Solomos' text is inhabited by shadows of other texts without which it would be unable to articulate any significant statement of its own. Its fragmented state indicates a fragmentation in its signifying processes; the poet was trying to construct a running commentary on his experience as he was writing his poem. But his readings overpowered and almost annulled the validity of his own aesthetic configurations. So the tone of these notes wavers between admonition and imperative command. The poet talks to himself: "Implement", "Think", "Let this be", "Beware" – and most importantly, a term which constantly appears in his personal notes "condensare" (= condense).

The text is also interesting for its multiple "transcendental" expressions; the absolute, generality, idea, spirit – all of these terms indicate Hegelian metaphysics but appear without plan or even some kind of justification. Its lapidary and hasty tone indicates a second level of signification; the intertextual references reframe the notes in a way that aesthetises the text instead of giving it some kind of philosophical gravity. Unquestionably, Solomos does not know how to deal with philosophy. He discovered his aptitude and dexterity in bringing latent meanings out of the potential of his language but the overall connecting thread of meaning which would have configured the text into a body of meaningful statements is markedly missing.

No doubt, the poet was thinking about the process of writing his poem but he had not made up his mind about what sort of poem he wanted to write. There is another confusing parameter for him; the literary genre of the poem, its generic location which would give to its structure some formal affiliations and a specific habitus within the emerging new functions of literary writing. Obviously in the first draft of the poem, the genre chosen trivialised the topic. In the second, it superseded its material. In the last draft the exploration of newly dis-

covered potentialities in language simply destroyed its formal unity; there are so many different versions of the same verse that it is impossible to understand what the whole thing is about. By experimenting, Solomos dissolved the formal cohesion of his earlier poems and created a verbal space of aural effectiveness where nothing is actually said.

The poetic landscape that we reconstruct or infer from his previous drafts has now disappeared. The poet has been subdued by his ability to experiment with language; and as the process continued he simply succeeded in de-realising and de-constructing his initial poetic vision. Even if we think of this poem as a work in progress, as an on-going process of self-questioning and self-refashioning, the end result is still dubious: we don't know which specific text we are talking about. His text somehow remained a perspective project and not a constantly revised text, as is the case with Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. In Wordsworth's case, however, there is a marked change in the mind of the poet between 1805 and 1850; the poet is not revisiting his initial experiences or ideas in order to re-write the poem. He simply talks about his new experiences by absorbing the qualitative changes that had happened around him and had been in one way or another internalised by his creative imagination. The poem itself is called "the growth of a poet's mind" because there is growth, both aesthetic and intellectual. As it has been noted, in 1805 both Wordsworth and Coleridge were:

Prophets of nature, we to them will speak  
A lasting inspiration, *sanctified*  
*by reason and by truth.*

But decades later in 1850, they have both changed:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak  
A lasting inspiration, *sanctified*  
*By reason, blest by faith.*<sup>12</sup>

This is not simply a change of emphasis; on the contrary it is a radical transformation in the perception of the creative act itself. We should also say that there was also a change within the individual, a new orientation, some sort of religious repentance; more importantly, however, this is a new theme added to the palimpsest of textual memory which subverts the original idea of the poem and yet confirms its intention: the poem changes together with the poet – the enemy of writing is immobility. But this did not occur with Solomos as a person or with his poetic thematology; and we don't know if this was due to a kind of morbid perfectionism or to his maternal abandonment, or even to his aristocratic slothfulness, as some of his friends insinuated. Polyas understood this incredible disunity of stagnation, the senseless repetitions which invalidated all poetic intentions and proved Solomos' inability to

grow organically as a poet; and as the editor of his work, he tried to fill the gaps with prose comments or exegetical references. Furthermore, he introduced himself into the production of the poem, by explaining that the poet is employing *prosopopoeia* in one passage, or plain narrative in another and inserting his own translations of texts written in Italian. Polylys tried to diminish the nebulous character of these verses by creating a *scenic stage* where the complete story would have been enacted; essentially, he invented the missing narrative justification not simply for the poems but even for the *Reflections* themselves.

For example, Solomos talks about the “*bodiless soul of the poem which emanates from God and ... returns to God*” (IX2a). For him the poem exists before language, and even before its own language as textualised on the page. It is as though the poem is taken captive by language and is made out of disembodied great ideas that exist before language and struggle to become present only in their complete and absolute plenitude. What the poet is trying to do is to create for the first time in Greek the romantic sublime by crosspollinating genres, transposing practices, formal conventions, and, finally, by following an unpremeditated line of composition. If the poets of the previous century were mainly guided by the musical potentialities of metrical forms, Solomos is guided by the inaudible resonances of the phonetic value in his words and by some pre-linguistic intuitions. Polylys tried to prove that this happened not because of his linguistic dichotomy but because of his “inner” sense of beauty and of his aesthetic sensibility.

Another friend of the poet, the composer Nikolaos Mantzaros (1795-1872) who put *Hymn to Liberty* to music, wrote in Italian an incredible study of subtle musical analysis on Solomos' poems. Mantzaros observes that Solomos created his verses “*out of instinct through song, by improvising melodies which echo the true expression of poetic conception belonging to the spirit of music*”. And he adds immediately: “*Myself, who personally heard him many times composing in this manner, realised that he formed his poetic harmonies by successive notes which he articulated using an admirable and harmonious variety of cadenzas. From such articulations simple words were generated, the only capable of expressing appropriately the rhythm, idea and harmony of verse*”. Mantzaros stresses an extremely oral and incantatory quality in Solomos' verses. He praises his “*intuizione musicale*”, his originality and imagination. And finally emphasises the importance of all these innovations; it seems to him that Solomos' poems are “*totally new in the until then known art*” (*tutte nuove all' arte nota fin oggi*)<sup>13</sup>. Solomos expressed the same feeling by stressing that his poems were beyond the known horizons of both romantic and classicist poetry. In fact he even thought that he was beyond Shakespeare and Homer, by struggling to compose a new “*mixed but legitimate*” (or genuine) mode (VIII4) which was to complete or even perfect the poetic testimonies of both his predecessors.

In such Promethean megalomania we can easily detect Solomos' implied fear of the completion of his project. *Reflections* express beyond anything else that personal sense of time,

the feeling of an individuated, almost private language which communicates with other secret or arcane texts but fails to accomplish its own self-disclosure. Maternal rejection (these notes are written during the most critical period of the final court-case) is now identified with alienation from the maternal tradition. Language, the bond of community life, estranges and defamiliarises the poet from his community. Probably for that reason, Solomos never allowed any one of his texts to be published after 1834. They were to remain private traces in his confrontation with a language that did not want him.

The poet had only one solution: to advise himself. “*Stay firm*”, he says to his poetic ego, “*in that high position. Only then will the Great Essences emerge*” (XI). There is a strange sense of self-alienation in this text which has passed unnoticed by criticism. As though there is a double personality or even a pseudo-identity hiding and appearing and conversing with the poet about his own discoveries. Obviously, Solomos is in a dialogue with someone; and he is engaged in a continuous discussion with another voice within him. Is this the result of solitude or narcissism? Is the poet simply struggling to establish a personal locus within a language which was negating and expelling him? Or, finally, is there a kind of extreme fear in the face of innovation, in front of the rupturing of all rituals that held the nation together?

Probably, it is a mixture of all of the above. Solomos was tormented by the guilt of his own individuation; of his separation from the community of people, ideas and practices that rendered everything meaningful and semiotically active. His *Reflections* do not simply construct a poem *in abstracto* but also *in vacuo*, where no correlations could be drawn or correspondences be inferred. His text is surrounded by silence and formlessness and in its attempt to shape a territory of meaning and signs Solomos simply fails to find or maintain his own voice. What is finally produced is a highly aesthetised form of apractic philosophy, a philosophy which was ineffectual and could not create the conditions for poetic praxis. In his *Reflections* he expressed his total *aphonia* in front of his own discovery, and, by paraphrasing W.B. Yeats’ statement about Ezra Pound “when I consider his work as a whole I find more style than form”, we can claim the same about his final achievement.

In these scattered notes there is a constant deviation in stylistic self-indulgence although the most persistent intention of the poet is to construct a form and thus create the morphological matrix for the emerging nation and for his own uncrystallised poem. However, the whole project disintegrates into amorphous and spasmodic axioms; the reader can not really see the depth of the exploration. The poet has probably also lost sight of the most critical factor of poetic creativity; its meaning-structuring character.

Many scholars in Greece have drawn analogies between Solomos’ silence and Stéphane Mallarmé’s later nihilistic philosophy of writing. The radical difference between them is that Mallarmé was extremely aware of the ritualistic character of writing and of the book as a fetishistic quasi-sacred object in modernist societies. Solomos didn’t belong to Greek society

but to a distinct elite class that was refusing to follow the changes of the imaginary institutions shaping the newly established nation-state. Interestingly enough, the national poet himself refused to accept that literature had become one of the most important galvanising factors of nation-building and identity construction in Greece.

Solomos definitely understood this in his early work; the Greek Revolution made him aware of the changing larger picture and of the rise of new centres of power and signification. The fiery revolutionary spirit of his youth was tempered and totally subdued after the end of the Revolution, which also occurred almost simultaneously with the tragic conflict with his mother. So the meaningful coincidences of the early 1820s were transformed into meaningless occurrences at the end of the same decade; the poetic self withdrew into an isolated self-sufficiency following his gradual transformation into a guilt-ridden motherless conscience.

His *Reflections* express a continuous process of self-occlusion and self-concealment, which later became the most obvious characteristic of his writing. In this self-concealment we can easily detect his attempt to locate himself not in a conflictual “anxiety of influence” with the past masters but in an increasing sense that he was re-writing literature from the start. The sense of existential *anomie* that he derives from his poetry brings Solomos closer to the other romantic poet of the same period, Friedrich Hölderlin, whose self-occlusion led to madness. But, for the aristocrat of Corfu only the intoxication of his conscience and the mystification of history, as something incomprehensible and inexpressible, could appease the feeling of estrangement from his society and language. Solomos is probably the first poet to introduce the feeling of existential anxiety into the Greek language and make it a critical factor of its literary function. We can feel that he himself struggles to impose a new unity upon his poetic ego, by re-deploying the traditional means of expression and deferring meaning; so his project disintegrates into an exercise in silence. Probably in Solomos' work, Jacques Derrida's “*differance*” as a language spoken without words and as a writing without its alphabet finds an early embodiment.

In his work the split subject of modernity appears to have created a poetic mode of self-invalidation. Solomos' manuscripts construct a visual space where the dichotomised and bifurcated subject reveals itself through erasures, self-comments, transpositions, reversals and strong denials; its own visual space exists in a kind of suspended atemporality without the ethical validations of historicity. Especially in the last period of his life, Solomos revised all his early writings, by adding to his manuscripts some of the interesting comments of the scatological sublime. The art that made him a national icon was then perceived by him as “*crap*”, “*insane*” and he equated his verses with a word that expresses the frozen desire of his personal frustration: “*shit, shit*” – one of the few Greek words repeated constantly in his self-comments on his manuscript of *Hymn to Lord Byron*.

His revolutionary fervour became then the excremental rejection of an aborted vision. To the end of his life, Solomos simply wrote in Italian personal letters and some “sacred sonnets”, as he called them, dedicated to a certain *Donna Velata* or *L’Albero Mistico*. Everything had to be with its eyes closed; the secrets of a self-concealed personality had to be thrown into oblivion, since the nation needed its “great personality”. It is interesting to read one of the last poems written by Solomos, a satire against the historian Andreas Moustoxides:

*Nel corse di sua vita tutta quanta,  
Dall’ età di sett’ anni, oggi settanta,  
L’opra di Mustoxidi ed il pensiero  
Fu di far vero il falso e falso il vero.*

which translates as follows:

*“Through the flow of his whole life,  
from his seventh year to his seventies,  
Mustoxidi’s work and his mind were on  
how to make truth out of a lie, and a lie out of the truth”<sup>14</sup>.*

If this is the predicament of every poet, then Solomos is the greatest example of both possibilities; he created poetic truth out of the ideologies of his age and a national ideology out of the truth of his life. In his *Reflections* we find the transformative practices through which concrete and objective verbal structures relapse into irrelevant generalities and vague abstractions, just as in Holderlin’s late poetry<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, we must see these notes as an attempt of his crumbling subjectivity to symbolically extend the realm of his immediate reality and re-invent his own self in another dimension of being, in a home where his mother-language wouldn’t be Greek or Italian, but imagination itself; in the imaginary realm demarcated by his poems he could live without the phobia of castrated masculinity and could experience an existence within a community not punctuated by the nostalgia for grand maternal or paternal narratives. Jacques Lacan talking about Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” stated in passing “...that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive of the subject”<sup>16</sup>, since only in the order of symbols, and, more particularly, linguistic symbols, that the subject restores its lost or desired integrity. Solomos’ *Reflections* represent his struggle with meaning, his effort to create a signifying structure that could sustain the dream or the illusion of a national literature, without individual subjectivity.

But even nations are made of human beings; and if one rejects his subjectivity in order to extinguish his self in the undifferentiated continuum of some collective mega-being, then inevitably his personal temporality, his very psychosomatic presence, reacts. Such reactions are represented in Solomos’ fragmentary *Reflections*; language is the symbolic space where the

process of individuation is ultimately crystallised or destroyed. In Solomos' *Reflections* this process transcends language and vanishes into the realm of the incommunicable singularity of a centreless individual. His idiom became too idiomatic and unable to sustain his own conceptualisations, or even to locate his poetic self within the symbolic networks of existing cultural practices.

Thus a unique and *hapax* case was invested in the prophetic charisma of a superior human being; he became the nation – or the nation became him. He was the embodiment of the demotic language and at the same time the incarnation of the perennial spirit of liberty originating in ancient Greece and then resurrected by his poetry. However his own *Reflections* on poetry deny the right of existence to his poetic work. The more he reflects, the less he manages to actualise. His reflections talk about the *how* and the *what* of a hypothetical potentiality, of a pre-poetic function of language which can not be activated through words. And as commentaries on such absent potentiality they can also be interpreted as attempts to find correspondence between visible signs and floating signifiers. But as Martin Heidegger states: “*Man dwells in what he builds*”<sup>17</sup> – and Solomos' great enigma constructs the dwelling for an “*essentialising shadow that will generate the bodies, through which she will be manifested, united with them*” (VIII3). But what kind of shadow can generate bodies? The de-realisation process of losing from your senses the very materiality of things perceived is not simply a psychological paradox, it is also an attempt to construct a statement about poetry that will always be absent.

Solomos' Promethean struggle to discover the sources of language made him forget the nature and function of language itself. When, for example, he admonishes himself: “Let the absolute existence of the poem have multiple meanings” (IX1), he suggests that his poem is a monosemantic fall from the meaningful multiplicity of the absolute existence of the poem, of the original “generating generality”. Obviously, he *wanted* to revert to some sort of pre-linguistic creative energy; his tragic battle with shadows, his mania before the fluidity of language, created the empty shells for verses that punctuated his originary and absolute poem. And such emptiness was extended to his *Reflections* in *statu nascendi*, as they were born – but finally they were not born.

So, as Jean Paul Sartre observed about Mallarmé's poetry: “His works will present their non-existence [of ideas] as a simple absence: they are absent from being, the way his dead mother is absent from the world”<sup>18</sup>. And yet Solomos' mother was still alive. The first text written by him that exists is a letter to her dated in 1815 and signed in Italian as “*Tuo vero figlio Dionisio*”<sup>19</sup>. And in his second and third letters to his mother (1816) he signed as “*il tuo affettuoso Dionisio*”; whereas an astonishing question in his third gives an indication of his anxieties at the time: “*Mi farai anche sapere quanti anni precisamente io ho*” (= I would like to know precisely how old I am)<sup>20</sup>. The one and only real and affectionate son of his mother does not know how old he is; that meant that his mother did not want him to know when or

how he was born. His birth was a nebulous event – and so too his own work had to become nebulous: his poesis-in-life was also another *mysterium nebulosum* without visible crystallisations of meaning.

In this question one can obviously feel what Sandor Ferenczi called “the great intimidation” of the adolescent period in one’s life; it is due to the “inconsistencies and follies” of adults<sup>21</sup>, which seem so incomprehensible to the developing mind, that a feeling of threatening numinous presence is cast over the adolescent and begins to dominate their formation. It was with this feeling of anxiety and phobia about his real origin that Solomos acquired the Greek language from his mother and the Italian from an Italian Jesuit monk; following Ferenczi we could claim that the “language of tenderness” belonged to the latter whereas the “language of passion” to the former. In the “language of passion” (*die Sprache der Leidenschaft*) Solomos struggled with his own masochistic and self-degrading memories; but in the “language of tenderness” (*die Sprache der Zartlichkeit*), he could convey “the clear-sightedness of the uncorrupted child”<sup>22</sup>, living in the blissful ignorance of his infantile paradise, and yet, it seems that the language of his passionate mother saved his memory from oblivion. Italian was the language of escape, Greek the language of his personal tragedy.

There is another interesting point in his early letters about his mother. He hadn’t heard from her for almost a year and, deeply upset, asked a friend to take his letters to Zakynthos; he stresses that he doesn’t have any “*notizie di mia madre*” and he is in deep grief: “*per il che la piansi piú d’ una volta come estinta*” (because I have cried for her as if she was dead)<sup>23</sup>. Such an image of a dead mother still living can be found in Solomos’ signifiers. They appear and disappear, they exist but can not be found, they relate to signs but no-one knows how. His fragmented *Reflections* do not have the self-sufficiency and completeness of Friedrich Schlegel’s *Critical Fragments*; the source of meaning in his language is not there in order to fill the lacunae of an imagined text. Rodolphe Gasché observed about Schlegel’s works: “Fragmentation is the concept by which Schlegel tried to conceive of this inevitable individualisation or singularisation in the becoming real of the absolute”<sup>24</sup>; and this is not the case with Solomos, even if this was his intention.

All of his reflections and symbols remained in the nebulous state of becoming singularities without ever realising their own potential. Even as texts their own semantic potential crumbles and vanishes under its own self-referentiality; the attempt to foreground a kind of “*constitutive metaphysics*”, common to all Romantics, as Morse Peckham noted, culminated in a “*supreme fiction*” of such metaphysics, a literary project of its own, without interpretive or even poetic claims. So, as Peckham continues, “*the Romantic artist does not escape from reality; he escapes into it*”<sup>25</sup>; that is, the artist places himself in the limbo of unfulfillable expectations and then plunges into the life of their negation. The Moon-Clad Lady is the other side of alcohol addiction:

*Methought I had seen her, way back in the past,  
 Perhaps in a church painted by an artist unsurpassed,  
 Or deeply carved in my memory, by my passion led,  
 Or in a dream, when by my mother's milk was I being fed;  
 It was a memory of old, sweet and almost faded,  
 That now stood in front of me with its force unabated.*<sup>26</sup>

In these verses, the poet's conflicts and confrontations with the mother-language seem to have found their ultimate poetic dwelling. The imagining subject has relived his infancy; so the individuation process has restarted by identifying his mother's milk, memory and art. Language redeemes his selfhood from the fall into the nightmarish history of adulthood and language acquisition is always linked with sexuality, with the libidinal world of unconscious desires, where there is no difference of gender or class, but the great "amphimixis", the fusion of uncontrollable eroticisms: everything that we really want but we can not articulate and, therefore, can not master. In the great church of art, there is no father and mother; only the elective affinities of individual choices – in there, where there is no time but only the sacred space of the *mysterium tremendum*, the self has established its own locus of fulfilled desires. Existential *anomie* and linguistic exclusion are simply annulled by the confirmation of subjectivity gained within art.

But, together with this feeling, the demoralising certainty of "the experience of partialness" emerges; that is, the experience of being totally alone in a universe inhabited by shadows, signs and symbols that indicate a lost unity. The origin of language is absent and yet her language is present. The poetic subject collapses because the polarity of absence/presence is inscribed within its very constitutive formation; it is inscribed in its very self-perception and therefore in its own self-representation. In every image the poet makes, there is an underlying strong signal of danger saying: "this image will devour you". So the poet can not experience either language or self without the other/mother being present – without his arche which has been transformed into his own undoing. So a world of hallucinations imposes on his language all these shadowy figures of veiled women, dead virgins and, even in his last Italian poem, the great symbol of femininity, *La Navicella Graeca* (The Greek Little Boat), as synecdoches towards a lost unity. As Leo Bersani reminds us: "Literature hallucinates the world in order to accommodate desire... The literary imagination reinstates the world of desiring fantasies as a world of reinvented, richly fragmented and diversified body-memories"<sup>27</sup>.

In Solomos' *Reflections* body-memories appear as emphatic descriptions of the "sventura" (misery, suffering) of the besieged; and suffering means self-oblivion and, at the same time, the nostalgic attempt to reconstruct the lost unity inside the psyche. Cornelius Castoriadis expresses this process of dissociation in an extremely apt manner: "Once the psyche has

suffered the break up of its monadic “state” imposed upon it by the “object”, the other and its own body, it is forever thrown off-centre in relation to itself, oriented in terms of that which it is no longer, which is no longer and can no longer be. *The psyche is its own lost object*<sup>28</sup>. Solomos’ quest is for his own self-occluded psyche in the primordial monadic state of unity with the oceanic gaze of an atemporal mother.

But between the mother and him, there was the Greek language, the Greek State, Greece, the Greeks themselves, the mythic event of the Revolution and his own ideal self as a national icon; in short, the excremental enthusiasms of his wasted youth. And behind them, the absent-name-of-the-father, remote, cannibalistic, indifferent: the “*Monarch hidden from the senses*” (II). The m/other is the sensible manifestation of the unknown and unknowable father, of the *deus absconditus* throughout his personal biography, the missing phallus in his “body-memories”. Lacan observed that that self-reflection of modernity began with the “social decline of the paternal imago” and ever since the Western world struggles hard to re-define such questions as “what is a father?” and “where is the name of the father?”.

Solomos, together with Hölderlin, is one of the first writers who collapsed under the quest for the paternal signifier; and since the paternal romance has been the main field of significative practices in the Greco-Occidental tradition, the absence of such a male signifier feminised nature and history and threw him into the broken chain of beings, unable to impose on them or institute through them any kind of unity and coherent meaning. In one of his letters Solomos indicated: “We only live well in loneliness. Since I was a little child I was always impressed by that lame God (Heaphestus), who was thrown down from heaven by his mother and who lived in the depths of the sea, working, without anyone seeing him, and without listening to anything else around his cave except the immense ocean”<sup>29</sup>.

Despite the strong Freudian symbolism, (sea/ocean, lameness/loneliness), the whole world remains de-verbalised and de-articulated for Solomos; there are no words and no signifying codes, since the paternal imago is nowhere to be seen or heard. In a draft of his satire *The Hair* (referring to some pubic hair, allegedly his mother’s), we find the real question underpinning his acosmic misanthropy: “But, you, my child, whose son are you? You will answer: “My father’s”. Well, I know that too – but who is your father? (*Matu, di chi sei figlio, mio caro? – Da mio padre, dirai. – Eh, lo so anch’ io; ma chi é tuo padre?*)”<sup>30</sup>. There is no answer to such a question by Solomos. The “invisible monarch” reigns supreme in the realm of history; but he is nothing but “exhumed remains of the dead thrown against the face of the living”<sup>31</sup> – invisible, imaginary, a dream-like creature who would legitimate his existence only through the death of his mother’s sexuality. With this gloomy vision Solomos entered the territory of the Moon-clad Lady, or the Magnanimous Mother, writing as a permanent exile from the letter of paternal historicity. His poetry will express the prolonged fixation to infancy; when mother, father and son were not yet separated by their individuality. Together with Solomos’

poetry Modern Greek literature was imprisoned in such unadventurous and amorphous infantilism.

For Castoriadis, the subject gains its autonomy and socialised personality only if it succeeds in creating representations of its own self which sublimate the various stages of its maturation process and its separation from the undifferentiated unity of its infancy. Only in such a manner, what is subconsciously formed socially transformed through imaginary significations into the concrete meanings of social life-world. But Solomos' thought remains attached to the state of loss and to the expectation of such loss: "Their affliction consists in recollecting their prior felicitous situation which was full of the benevolence of the land and which they will now lose" (XI). More than anything else, this is a sense of existential loss, of a paradise lost, constantly forcing him to be dissatisfied with his work and leading to what Vassilis Lambropoulos described as "...criticising his work with almost suicidal determination and integrity, trying to seize a grain of unadulterated meaning, a moment of linguistic innocence"<sup>32</sup>.

But where there is guilt there is no innocence; language is the very essence of self-hatred and rejection: the death of god has occurred:

*"The Saints are dumb and lifeless; no murmur  
Comes from the tombs; cried I till the midnight wild.  
Man (despite destiny's will and design), a cur,  
Is the only God of himself; he always excelled  
In time of utter wretchedness. Despair,  
Hide in my soul and rest for ever there."*<sup>33</sup>

This is the final universe of Solomos' poetry and reflections; divested of sacredness, devoid of god, a *phantasma*, the ghost of time lost. And within such desolation, a little child re-structures the alphabet; but no words are formed. The letters belong to someone else.

## NOTES

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