

The Fate of Cypriot Literature

Yiorgos Lyssiotis*

RÉSUMÉ

Dans son article, cet auteur considère que pendant les dernières années la littérature chypriote a été abordée de façon plus sérieuse en Grèce par des milieux académiques, en particulier par les professeurs Georges P. Savvidis et Georges Kehagioglou.

ABSTRACT

In his article, the author claims that Cypriot literature was tackled more seriously in Greece in recent years, especially by academics like George P. Savvides and George Kehagioglou.

In earlier times, Cypriot literature was unappreciated by or unknown to the cultural cradle of Hellenism. History books of Modern Greek literature have never ventured an evaluation of literary production in Cyprus. In fact, it used to be the metropolitan centre's unfamiliar and poor relation.

However, things have changed over the last few years, and this is owed to two Professors at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the dear departed George P. Savvides and his student George Kehagioglou. Moreover, some infrastructure works have recently been completed in Cyprus including the *Bibliography of Cypriot Literature* (2001) by Phivos Stavrides, Lefteris Papaleontiou and Savvas Pavlou.

In Cyprus, we may fall short in the novel genre but short story writing appears to have found fertile ground here. The basic representatives of prose in Cyprus are: Nicos Nicolaides, Nikos Vrachimis, Yiorgos Ph. Pierides, Costas Montis, Ivi Meleagrou, Christos Yeorgiou, Panos Ioannides, Yiannis Katsouris and others. Short stories by Nicos Nicolaides bear the vivid imprints of Cyprus and Greece, marrying ethnographic and psychographic elements with social speculation. Nikos Vrachimis was the first novelist to have managed to break the cluster of locality and broaden the cultural horizons of Cypriot prose by investing his texts with a European and universal character, marked by the persistent emergence of existential questions. Tassos

* Literary critic

Stephanides seems to follow on Nikos Vrachimis' traces. Heaving the inner conflicts out of the unconscious, he tries to depict the tragic inconsistency between inner and outer worlds. Yiorgos Ph. Pierides is the most pragmatic, the most humane short story author. He introduces us to daily routine so that we can live through it and identify ourselves with it. His work is devoid of elaborate fiction, effusions or ideological ruffles; there's nothing but realism, social realism. In fact, he is the short story author of the popular folk. Both in his short stories and his novels, Costas Montis outlines the ordinary man, the minor and humble moments in life, with poetic and emotive disposition.

Christos Georgiou concentrates on crime scenes and alienated human characters while, in point of fact, he ponders over the refutation of dreams for a prosperous life in the newly established Republic of Cyprus. Both in their short stories and their novels, Panos Ioannides and Yiannis Katsouris utilize the elements of irony, satire and humor in order to inflict individuals and attitudes in the modern society of Cyprus, or to reproduce more authentic forms of past life. Ivi Meleagrou's novels are more complex and elusive: through them she describes the political and social issues of the country employing innovative narration.

With regards to Cypriot poetry, means of expression are characterized by diversity. Some poets combine the traditional style with the modernistic one and others clearly introduce an innovative pattern. For instance, Manos Kralis, the first one to regenerate poetic discourse in Cyprus, sets out from neo-symbolism and ends up in modern style. Influenced by the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Arthur Rimbaud, he utilizes images and symbols in order to sketch out the universal tragic man. The vagrant poetry of Tefkros Anthias, who has made "a home out of the whole world and Universe", runs at a different level. Likewise, the poetry of Thodosis Pierides moves along the lines of social realism. The gnomic poetry of Costas Montis, reminiscent of the Socratic dialectic, also divagates. Pantelis Michanikos ponders over the issue of ethnic autognosis and the abortion of individual and collective expectations and visions. The poetry of Theodosis Nicolaou is par excellence anthropocentric, with fructuous elements deriving from the Greek and European poetical tradition. The stochastic "historism" of Kyriakos Charalambides stems from Cavafy and Seferis and ends up in Byzantine solemnity. Theoklis Kouyialis probes into the fog of a ruthless world in order to find the incorruptible man. Furthermore, Yiorgos Moleskis attributes a poetic dimension to nothingness, searching for missing gods who are being replaced by poets.

Over the last few years, many works of Cypriot literature have been translated into various languages and made it out of the narrow geographical boundaries of Cyprus. Still, a lot of work lies ahead. First and foremost, the best specimens of Cypriot literature should be selected and translated in the best possible way in order to touch the foreign reader.

During a visit to Cyprus, Odysseas Elytis stated that among numerous poetry collections he had the chance to read in the 1970s, he picked out merely ten, seven of which were works by Cypriot poets. Elytis' appraisal may be read as an indication of the high quality of Cypriot literature which is interlinked with the relentless historical destiny of the island stemming from its geographic location.