

Cypriot Litterateurs in Egypt¹

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RÉSUMÉ

Pendant les dernières décennies du 19^e siècle jusqu'aux années 1960 la communauté grecque d'Égypte connaît un essor certain et met en évidence un très grand poète grec Constantin Cavafis. Dans les grandes villes d'Égypte, surtout à Alexandrie et au Caire, ont vécu et créé leur œuvre un grand nombre de Chypriotes, qui sont moins bien connus ou demeurent inconnus. Ils ont écrit de la poésie, de la prose, du théâtre, mais également de la critique.

ABSTRACT

The Greek community prospered and flowered in Egypt during the last decades of the 19th century up to the 1960s and produced one of the Greek language's great poets, Constantine P. Cavafy. In Egypt's major cities, especially Alexandria and Cairo, a large number of Cypriots, who are less known or still unknown, lived and wrote poems and prose theater, as well as articles and reviews.

“Cypriot litterateurs of Egypt” was the subject of a conference organized by the Cultural Services of the Cyprus Ministry of Education in April 1991.² The ever memorable novelist and essayist Yiorgos Ph. Pierides had previously published two noteworthy articles on the same topic, whereas more recent scholars (such as Dimitris Daskalopoulos, Yiorgos Kehayioglou, N. Charalambidou, Kostas Nicolaides et al.) looked into the stance of Cypriot *Aigyptiotes* [=Cypriots of Egypt] on the poetry of Constantin P. Cavafy, the question of “orientalism” or the image of the “other” in the work of Nikos Nicolaides and Y.Ph. Pierides as well as the intellectual and personal contacts between the older and by then acclaimed N. Nicolaides and the younger Glafkos Alithersis, Thodosis Pierides and Stratis Tsirkas.³ In this brief lecture I will refer synoptically to the *Aigyptiotes* writers of Cypriot origin, who lived and created their work in the Greek communities of Egypt – before they were forced to abandon the country of the Nile, mostly on account of

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the post World War II new order and mainly around 1960. I would like to concentrate more on the novelist Nicos Nicolaides, who has been for me an ongoing project since my graduate studies, also because this year marks the 50th anniversary of his death.

Let us now begin in due order with a few general points and information.

It is well known that the presence of a Greek community in Egypt (mostly in Alexandria and Cairo) is enhanced during the second half of the 19th century reaching its heyday over the first decades of the 20th century. It is then that the noteworthy literary journals *Nea Zoi* (1904-1927), *Serapion* (1909-1910), *Grammata* (1911-1921), *Argo* (1923-1927), *Alexandrini Tehni* (1926-1930), *Alexandrini Logotehnia* (1947-1953) etc. come out.⁴ It is also at around the same time that clusters of litterateurs live and produce their work, pivoting around the aforementioned journals. Quite a few things have been written with respect to these facts; still, much more must be done, not only about the most prominent writers (poet C.P. Cavafy and novelists Nikos Nicolaides and Stratis Tsirkas) but also about forgotten craftsmen of logos and art albeit of a lesser value.

Among other things, we should bear in mind that the Greek (and Greek Cypriot) Aigyptiotes lived in different historic and cultural conditions, in an Arab-speaking environment, taking great care to preserve their language and education, their religion and customs. In addition to this, it would be interesting to investigate whether and to what extent but also in what way the Aigyptiotes writers and artists incorporate the world of Egypt into their work, or if they look into the Arab culture at all. The general and perhaps temporary picture we get from sporadic studies conducted thus far is that, generally speaking, the Greek Aigyptiotes litterateurs do not draw their inspiration from the Egyptian environment or that when they do explore Egyptian topics they appear led by ethnic stereotypes and orientalist representations. There exist some bright exceptions but these topics require a more systematic investigation.⁵

Y.Ph. Pierides, who spent half his life in Egypt,⁶ remarked that the Greek Aigyptiotes men of letters adopted from the beginning “as a rule the stance of someone who is a foreigner to the reality of the place where they lived. Only a few among them attempted to ponder over Egypt and its people. And even these few, like Magnis, Vrisimitzakis and Tsangaradas [...] never reached the essence, but rather stayed on the surface of things, like foreign observers”.

Being very sensitive to this matter, the writer attempts to exemplify that this “wrongful” attitude of litterateurs was deterministically shaped as a

product of the historic and social reality. However, he goes on to point out that younger writers such as Str. Tsirkas (*Nuredin Bomba, Ariagne*) and even Y.Ph. Pierides (*Bambakades* – Cotton factory workers) change their attitude and look closer and probably without prejudice into the world of Egypt.⁷

Let us now focus on our topic, which is the litterateurs of Cypriot origin who lived in Egypt, attempting a grammatological overview of their work by genre.

POETRY. Glafkos Alithersis is our first stop in the field of poetry. Making his literary debut in 1919, Alithersis tried his hand at all forms of literary discourse. In his first collections, the large influence of Kostis Palamas and to a lesser extent of Angelos Sikelianos is quite obvious. Later he learns from the social poetry of Kostas Varnalis. Initially it appeared as though he was charmed by the poetry of C.P. Cavafy (in fact he initiated the first acquaintance of young Cypriots with Cavafy's poetry), still he subsequently moved onto the opposite anti-Cavafy side, which peaked with his exaggerated Cavafian monograph (1933). In all, Alithersis published nine poetry collections with quite a few undulations and lesser good moments, drawing his topics from personal, panhuman and collective subjects of his place and time. He gradually left behind metrical, traditional verses and wrote his latest books in free, relatively prosaic verses. It should be noted that Alithersis also took up literary translation. In two separate volumes, he published Rupert Brooke's collected poems and an English Poetry Anthology with samples from the work of the four most prominent representatives of English romanticism, namely Byron, P.B. Shelley, J. Keats and W. Wordsworth. In a cluster of poems included in his mature collection *Armogi aionon kai stigmon* [Linkage of centuries and moments] (1964) images and memories from the world of Egypt can be traced. The poet repeatedly expressed his sympathy for Egyptian mothers striving to provide for their family; his sympathy for degraded beings and unprotected children:

*Let me attest to what I see:
Half-naked children shivering
on pavements, in train stations and anyplace where
a cornice may somehow become a shield
against the rainfall...* (p. 36)

Thodosis Pierides is a more notable poet. He began publishing poetry since 1937, but his most mature work will come much later, in his books

inspired from the people and struggles of Cyprus. The poems he published in his Egyptian period are often bound to the principles of Left ideology; in these poems he seeks to explicitly respond to the current questions of his times, drawing lessons from the social poetry of Kostis Palamas, Kostas Varnalis and Yiannis Ritsos. Egypt is absent from Pierides' poetry. However, the Egyptian world takes center stage in his short prosaic texts that lean toward the category of prose poetry and are published in the *Panaigyptia* journal (1937). In these texts he consciously avoids submitting to the stereotypes of Orientalism and attempts to display images from everyday life in Cairo in unprejudiced manner and realistic style. Of course, Th. Pierides appears at his best in his mature poetic synthesis (*Kypriaki Symphonia* [Cypriot Symphony], 1956 and *Oneiropolisi pano sta teihi tis Ammohostou* [Reverie upon Famagusta's walls], 1965) and the melodic *Treis serenates sto feggari* [Three serenades to the moon] (*Fthinoporo* [Autumn] 1967). In his poetic syntheses that look into Cyprus' historic mishaps, the poet sings the passions of his native land, the simple primordial man who becomes identified with the waterless Cypriot land and resists colonists and all sorts of conquerors that raided the island:

*No, this land does not want you, it does not know you!
Everything here is ours! For, from every stone,
the ground, the tree, the water and the wind
our body took a trickle and became whole.
Our soul took a breath from each one of them.
Everything here is ours –but for you, always foreign!*

Evgenia Palaiologou-Petronda, who took permanent residency in Cyprus in 1960, is also worthy of note. From her life in Egypt, the collection with the Arabic title *Ihdaa* [Offering, 1956] stands out. Awarded by Nasser, the book includes fifteen poems, all with Arabic titles and one translated into Arab. The writer seeks to pay tribute to the “gentle” Egyptian people with humanitarian disposition as well as to utilize elements from the country's popular tradition, turning her attention to the distressed rural folk.

Other writers of Cypriot descent publish their poetry and prose poems during the interwar years or even later: Yangos Pierides (*Tis siopis kai tou salou* [Of silence and turmoil], 1919), Ayis Voreadis (*Anemones*, 1927), Polys Modinos (*Rythmikes Zoes* [Rhythmic Lives], 1927), Deimos Flegyas (*Ihoi* [Sounds], 1939 and four more subsequent books), Yiorgos Alkaios (*Sklira Tragoudia* [Hard Songs], 1939), Loukas Christofides (*Tefras Thymeli* [Ashes'

Altar], 1957) and perhaps others. In addition, Filippos Papaharalambous prints out populist poetry broadsheets around 1930.

Naturally, N. Nicolaides stands out in the prose poem genre. Anna Katsiyianni has placed three of his books (*Anthropines kai anthines zoes* [Human and floral lives], 1920, 1938; *O hrysos mythos* [The golden myth], 1938; *To biblio tou monahou* [The monk's book], 1951, 1955) in the category of prose poetry. However, it would be worth looking into the pertinence of his latest and more mature book with the category of (modern) novel, too. In *Anthropines kai anthines zoes*, N. Nicolaides' probing into estheticism and the esthetics of Oscar Wilde becomes more conspicuous: love for beauty, the decay of prettiness and the feeling of spleen, exoticism, paganism and the Orient's lure, worship of the form and the utilization of prose poem characteristics in terms of form (rhythmical verses and rhymes, repetition, circular development and symmetry, language plays and vivid iconopeia) rank among the collection's basic features. These luscious and rather mannerist miniatures could have come out a few decades before. But N. Nicolaides revisits this collection, enriching it with new texts, finally printing it out in a second, supplemented edition in 1938, wherein selected estheticism patterns (i.e. exotic and luscious imagery of the Orient, erotic encounters in an orgiastic vegetative environment, the ideal of self-cultivation, the wear and tear of things, pantheism of a pagan undertone etc.) are fused with elements of Nietzscheism (genital drunkenness, the Dionysian principle and the omnipotence of instinct, as well as woman's supplantation by man in order for him to be able to materialize higher ideals).

His second book of prose poetry, *O hrysos mythos*, could also be read as a creative parody of myths from the ancient Greek, demotic and mainly Christian tradition. The writer approaches standardized myths in subversive mood, aiming at shedding light on, elevating and praising man in his diachronic passions and mishaps. Therefore as early as in the first text of the collection, he purges the Original Sin and glorifies Adam and Eve for having abandoned heaven's given blessedness in order to throw themselves into the "Life of Free Action"; or he attributes an entirely human dimension to the myths of Narcissus and Ariadne, or in moments from Christ's life and popular tales. The writer does not hesitate to recast Christ's figure. The use of the Biblical myth of Salome could be read in comparison to Oscar Wilde's same-topic play. Along general lines, in *Hrysos Mythos*, divine and sacred figures become humanized and demythologized while at the same time the joy of life, power of love and eros are exalted alongside free man's will to

resist to standardized and “golden” (or gold-filled and eventually fake) myths and institutes weighing down upon his life.

With his last book, *Tō vivlio tou monahou* (1951), N. Nicolaides seems to arrive at a precipice: This heretic book is surprising both on account of its typographical appearance (the writer’s Byzantinish writing style is reproduced throughout the volume) and of its genre identity and content: it is comprised of prose-like poems that combine elements of (neoteric) novel. The book’s 173 small numbered parts pivot around a common thematic axis, the monks’ life. Placed in one single space, the Agelasti Moni [Unsmiling Abbey], it features recurrent and elusive figures of monks with passions and human weaknesses. Applying a strategy of irony, satire and parody, the writer approaches with understanding the world of the monks while at the same time exposing pretense and hypocrisy, the flesh’s humble and hidden passions and their effort to touch on divine perfection. It appears that the writer studied the monks’ behavior closely and very carefully during his stay in Christian monasteries in both Cyprus (Stavrovouni) and Arabia Petraea (mount Sinai). Still, Nicolaides is not an atheist; and he’s only in part anti-ecclesiastical and anticlerical. He does not put on the persona of a moralist satirist in order to reprimand and laugh openly at the monks’ world. He points the arrows of irony and satire not so much towards his suffering heroes but rather towards the regime of monastic life. The *Vivlio tou monahou* is the apex of Nicolaides’ ironic poetics; in it, his ironic style appears quite sophisticated and often covert, even though it is not devoid of clear and intense satirical moments.

Some of the aforementioned poets, such as Gl. Alithersis, P. Modinos, N. Nicolaides, Y. Pierides and L. Christofides got to personally meet C.P. Cavafy and his poetry; sometimes they are appreciative of it and other times they look at it with embarrassment or even reject it. In all, they are not in a position to utilize his poetic example. With the exception of N. Nicolaides’ more complex case, the rest of them mainly tend toward Kostis Palamas’ poetic model or reproduce the thematic motifs, rhetorical ways and psychic dispositions of neo-romantic and neo-symbolic poetry.

PROSE. Compared to poetry, the production of *Aigyptiotes* of Cypriot origin in the field of prose appears more important in terms of both quality and quantity (obviously, with the exception of N. Nicolaides’ prose poems). As early as 1889, Theodoulos Ph. Constantinides printed in Alexandria the first part of a long narrative entitled *Apomnimonevmata didaskalou* [A

teacher's memoirs], wherein he used delicate humor to narrate the mishaps of a teacher in mid-19th century Turkish-occupied Cyprus, dispersing fictional episodes throughout his narration. Constantinides also translated Hugh Conway's novel *Dark Days* (1884: Alexandria, 1885) whereas the same year marked the publication of Camille Paganel's philhellenic narrative *Le tombeau de Marcos Botsaris* in Greek translation by Nicolaos Pilavakis. As we shall see further below, Th.F. Constantinides became more widely known for his plays. Another earlier writer, Nearchos Fysentzides, printed in a single volume his short story *I megali Despoina* [Our grand Lady] (Alexandria 1916), which was later on (1920) launched in theatrical form.

During the thirty years of interwar, the case of N. Nicolaidis prevails with three books of short stories, two novels and a novella. The three series of short stories he prints during the 1920s endow him with wider acclaim. Both critics and litterateurs noted and praised his work for its pronounced introspection and dramatic elements, symbolistic hypobole, the psychographic probing of narrative personae and careful elaboration of the texts' form. On the other hand, some inhibitions and objections were raised either concerning the linguistic form and narrative structure of the short stories or the idiomorphic narrative characters and the use of a "frigid" – ironic narrator. In his best moments (i.e. in the short stories "O Skelethras", "Skrofa", "I paramoni tou Sotiros", "Ta koroida", "Oi ypiretes", "Sa skyli" etc.) the writer employs introspective techniques in order to probe into the psyche of his narrative characters, pulling dreams and fantasies out unto the surface, alongside unspoken thoughts and repressed wishes, metaphysical pondering and psychological impasses. In many of his texts he outlines decadent narrative characters who escape the limits of normality and the socially acceptable, reminiscent of Demosthenes Voutyras' marginal heroes. These divergent heroes, lingering between fantasy and reality, are sketched out in an elliptic and esoteric manner with the method of symbolistic hypobole and abstraction or with expressionistic introspections. As such, they become a cause for negative comments as early as the 1920s and later on.

Nicolaidis' first novel *To Stravoxyllo* [The short-tempered man] (1922) was a juvenile, experimental and unequal text; yet, it is interesting from various points of view. As correctly pointed out by Str. Tsirkas, this narrative may be considered the first attempt within the Greek area to write a novel of personal development (Bildungsroman). The writer sets out to detail how "a human being [the adolescent Yiorgis in his tender teens] is molded". The initiation of the book's teenagers into forms of love or the concept of death,

the relation between disruption from or compliance with their social environment and the disposition to escape, the esoteric and exoteric learning journey, self-realization and self-determination that contribute to their psychological development, contact with nature that sometimes functions as a means of initiation into the concepts of *eros* and *thanatos*, the protagonist's wavering between binaries such as village/city, family/society, life/art, sexual love/idealized love etc. justify its association with Bildungsroman and especially with its subgenre: the novel of artistic initiation (Künstlerroman). The adolescent Yiorgis begins to realize and manifest his artistic inclinations (painting, music, storytelling), despite being mocked at by his social surroundings. Besides, it is here that the writer reveals in a more systematic manner his attempt to escape the clichés of traditional narration and try his hand, even in spermatic form, at new narrative techniques, with which he seeks to illuminate his heroes' (mostly Yiorgis') inner world. Critics like Stavros Karakasis and Stratis Tsirkas traced many autobiographical elements in this novel. Still, N. Nicolaidis rushed to reply that this was not an autobiographical novel: "Not even one episode is real. However, this is how I would have felt and behaved if the circumstances and episodes I present as occurring to Yiorgis had been brought on me. Everything is transubstantiated, transformed."⁸

In his other lengthy prose pieces, the novella with the Nietzschean title *Per' ap' to kalo kai to kako* [Beyond good and evil] (1940) and his mature novel *Ta tria karfia* [The three nails] (1948), the writer attempts on the one hand to display the catalyst influence of society over the formation of his marginal and at the same time tragic narrative characters and on the other the will and the heroes' desperate efforts to resist "Social Fate" and "be redeemed" in the eyes of the world, even if they are forced to pay a high price. The novella is situated in 19th-century Nicosia (with references to old neighborhoods such as Rogiatiko and Tahtakalas). The title, *Per' ap' to kalo kai to kako* (referencing Nietzsche's homonymous book) appears to pre-signify the fortune of the two unfortunate heroines, Foteini and Chrysoula, both thrown into a desperate struggle to find themselves a husband who will make "decent women out of them" in compliance with social morality. In their endeavor, first the bolder Chrysoula and subsequently the more conservative Foteini step out of their own selves, transcend "bad fortune" and move beyond good and evil, ending up mad. The writer appears to recount the story of the two sisters, while at the same time making sure to imply his distance from the "plain" islanders' storytelling. The two heroines'

psyche is internally outlined in a series of episodes with introspective techniques. Just as Alexandros Papadiamantis' *Fonissa* [Murderess] reaches her own personal rationalization before setting out to murder little girls, the two unmarried women are similarly seen to "elevate their minds" in order to cancel or transcend the chains of dominating morality and common sense, by now ridden by madness.

In a somewhat analogous manner, N. Nicolaides works on the story of Kassianos in his following novel, *Ta tria karfia* (1948), again situated in 19th century Nicosia (from the end of the Turkish occupation up until the first year of the British rule). From the start, the writer-narrator is separated from the simple islanders that are supposed to have told him this story, in order to push aside the "legend's veil" and shed light on his hero's tragic persona. Step by step, using introspective techniques and successive episodes, the writer is observing the three nails that carve the face and life of Kassianos, who was "Branded by Satan": initially, the country boy drudges for fifteen years in the capital, in order to save enough money to open up a haberdashery and gain financial independence. Next, he endures loneliness and isolation, stigmatized by the relentless critique of the neighborhood "chorus" and peoples' mockery – as they treat him suspiciously identifying him with the Jew penny pincher. Eventually, after a failed marriage to the ever virgin Yiasemi, he weds the man-eater Andriana and on his deathbed he is obliged to recognize his wife's bastard son as his own. Financial security did not endow the stigmatized hero with social acclaim. On the verge of dying, pressed by the women's chorus and crushed from the "Social Fate" Kassianos compromises and makes the "bastard boy" his heir, since he had not been able to have a child of his own and secure the legacy of his name. The book's epilogue contains some interesting self-referencing comments. The writer-narrator confirms his intention to probe into the abyss of human psychology, especially of his hero. Yet, at the same time he remains doubtful of the artistic merit of his endeavor and points out that he does not feel redeemed. With this conclusion, the writer had obviously wanted to illustrate that Kassianos was no longer an isolated individual case; he became a generic, representative human type, since every society breeds its own "Kassianoï".

Aside from N. Nicolaides, other Cypriots that lived in Egypt during the interwar years worked at creative prose, sometimes with success and other times less effectively. Glafkos Alithersis published two books of unequal short-stories (*O gymnos anthropos* – The naked man, 1924 and *Arachnes* – Spiders, 1936),

wherein he appears to utilize, among other things, the example of D. Voutyras. The writer attempts to renew his narration by persistently interjecting self-referencing comments or loosening the structure of his texts. In his best moments he ponders over social questions with nonconformist intention or sketches up marginal narrative characters (“O Tsikinis”, “I Romanina”).

Yangos Pierides had been a more systematic prose writer. He lived in Alexandria until 1933 and between 1927 and 1970 he published seven books of short stories and novellas as well as a novel. This forgotten novelist is one of the few writers who approached the world of Egypt with sensitivity and an unbiased gaze, not only in his fictional pieces but also in commentaries and other journalistic texts that he published with the pseudonym “Skaravaios” in Alexandrian journals in the 1920s. For instance, in the lengthy narrative “Oi sotires” [The saviors] he does not hesitate to showcase how the Greeks took advantage of the Egyptian natives.⁹

Maria Roussia published four books with commentaries, short stories, novellas and one traveling narrative on Cyprus during the period between 1942-1956. Her probably unfinished novel *To saraki* [The woodworm] (1982) was published post mortem. From her prose pieces, “Cypriot” short stories as well as the narratives and novellas that pivot around the life of *Aigyptiotes* during the hard years of the Second World War and the first postwar years stand out. Especially in her novella “O Xenos” [The Foreigner] (1951) she outlines the alienation of a community Greek, as he feels torn between two homelands and perceives the negative development of political and social matters which will eventually lead to the great “exodus” of Greeks from Egypt. Her antimilitarist narratives (“Alites!...” – Punks!..., “Sto N. tou N.”, “To paidi tou anthropou” – Man’s child), are also interesting as she uses them to outline with compassion soldiers suffering in war fronts and concentration camps in the Middle East, or their slow death in some Egyptian hospital, pondering over their pointless sacrifice. Also notable are some of her short stories containing Cypriot themes, in which she outlines beleaguered women living and suffering in the patriarchal rural society of Cyprus.

Around the same time, Y.Ph. Pierides publishes two books referring to the Egyptian period of his life: In the compartmentalized novella *Oi vamvakades* (1945) he handles with Doric frugality yet critically the relation between the Greeks and the Egyptian natives, not hesitating to display both a relation based on exploitation as well as images of harmonic symbiosis in a cotton processing factory in Upper Egypt (where the writer himself had worked). In the short stories of his second book, he ponders over the

misfortunes of Greek soldiers locked in prisons of the belligerent Middle East. In addition to that, in two mature books (1986 and 1995) he deposits “memories and stories” from Egypt either in the form of a chronicle or employing the fictional element. Certainly, the most notable aspect of Y.Ph. Pierides’ prosaic work is probably the four collections of short stories now coexisting in the volume *I tetralogia ton kaiiron* [Tetralogy of the times] (1989). As commented on by Yiorgos.P. Savvides,¹⁰ in his mature short stories, the prose writer evolves into an anatomist of Cypriot urban society: Inspired by simple and authentic individuals of a long gone era, he denounces the behavior of arrogant bourgeois and those who are caught in the cogwheels of a party ideology. At the same time, he suggests and summarizes the historical mishaps of the newly established Cypriot Democracy within the personae of his central characters.

It should be noted here that Yeorgios Kitropoulos, Deimos Flegyas, Evgenia Palaiologou-Petronda and perhaps others too, published prose works during their stay in Egypt or later.

THEATRE. From early on, two preceding writers who had spent part of their lives in Alexandria, Yeorgios Sivitanides and Th.K. Constantinides worked in playwriting and more especially in the writing of historic dramas, embracing their era’s romantic spirit. In Y. Sivitanides’ play *I Kypros kai oi Naitai* [Cyprus and the Knights Templar] (Alexandria 1869) the principal focus is the rise of Cypriots against the Knights Templar’s tyrannical rule in Easter 1191, which led the latter to sell the island to the Lusignans. Even though the text falls short in terms of dramatic and staging appeal, it has been repeatedly staged; in 1931 it was republished in Nicosia, during a period of intensified ethnic demands.

Th.K. Constantinides wrote three plays, two of which draw their topics from the history of Cyprus. In the first one, the king of Cyprus Peter I Lusignan (1358-1369 AD) is depicted with the pronounced characteristics of a romantic hero: tyrannical, womanizer, violent, brash, hubristic to the divine but also human, with intense psychological shifts; in the end he appears crushed and full of remorse for the victims of his passions. This is probably the most well-staged Cypriot play of the 19th century, wherein the story of king Peter I – known to earlier Cypriot chroniclers – is recreated and utilized with relatively simplified language, effortless dialogues, dramatic tension and suspense, even though romantic exaggerations (ghosts, tragic coincidences, emotional perfusions and big talks) have found

their way into the play.

Th.K. Constantinides' second play, *Kucuk Mehemet i To 1821 stin Kypro* [Kucuk Mehemet or 1821 in Cyprus] (after its first publication in Alexandria, in 1888, it was republished twice in Nicosia, in 1895 and 1927) places its action in the years of Turkish occupation. The play was successfully staged, initially in Alexandria (1887) and subsequently in Cyprus, in repeated performances. The writer transcends official History and applying anachronisms and imaginary episodes he presents Archbishop Kyprianos organizing a revolution against the Turks, in cooperation with the dragoman Hadjiyeorgakis (who, however, had already been extinguished by the Turks in 1809). The play was completed one year before Y. Kepiades' *Apomnimonevmata* [Memoirs] came out and appears to have been one of V. Michaelides' sources for his thematically similar poetic synthesis.

1919 sees the publication of Nicos Nicolaidēs' juvenile "lyric fabled drama" *To galazio louloudi* [The blue flower], staged in Alexandria in 1923 with sufficient success by the company of Aimilios Veakis. Drawing on his knowledge of demotic tradition and the world of the fairy tale, but also on lessons from scholarly tradition (possibly by D. Kokkos' and Dimitris Koromilas' *komeidyllia*, from Agelos Sikelianos *Alafroiskiotos* [The Shadow Whisperer] or specimens of European symbolism and expressionism; i.e. A. Strindberg's or M. Maeterlinck's expressionistic dramas, translated into Greek), the writer creates a dreamy and fairylike atmosphere in order to deal with the quest for human happiness. Perhaps the text's fabled setting, "daydreams", symbols and rhythmic verses appear somewhat naïve or outdated today; still, this juvenile endeavor does not lose its historic significance. The text's one-off publication generally received positive reviews but also a few objections; some traced in the text derivations from the poetics of symbolism or raised reasonable doubts (mainly in terms of the text's verses), or even called it an imitation of R. Wagner's works and a *mélange* of ancient tragedies chorals and folksongs.

Glafkos Alithersis' two plays, *O pyrgos tis Vavel* [Babel Tower] (1937) and *Arodafnosa* (1939) are also worthy of note. Both plays first appeared in the *Kypriaka Grammata* journal. The first is based on the Bible's well-known incident, yet the playwright advances to social speculations with proletarian messages. The second is located in medieval Cyprus and recounts the well-known (from the *Hroniko* tou Mahaira – *Chronicle* of Machairas) erotic scandals of king Peter I Lusignan and his family. In addition to that, the young Yiangos Pierides published the theatrical piece *Oi navagoi* [The

castaways] (1921), whereas Aimilia Oreinou published six plays during the postwar years (1949-1959).

REVIEWS – STUDIES. Yeorgios Kepiades is one of the earlier writers who produced work in Alexandria (where he had settled since the mid-19th century), with a series of historic and other studies. Among his books, the brief *Apomnimonevmata* is worthy of note, referencing Turkish atrocities against the Greeks of Cyprus in July 1821 (1888) as well as his study on the settling of Greeks in Egypt (1892). Evryviades Fragoudis and Y.S. Fragoudis also published historic studies on Cyprus. Other men of letters participated in the publication of periodicals mostly in Alexandria and sometimes in Cairo: N. Nicolaides joined the team of *Serapion* journal (1909-1910); Loucas Christofides published the journal *Foinikas* (Cairo, 1915-1916, 1918); Gl. Alithersis contributed to the publication of the journals *Skepsi* (1921), *Argo* and *Nea Zoi*, whereas subsequently, over the grueling years of the Second World War, Th. Pierides alongside Str. Tsirkas played a major role in the publication of the politically oriented *Ellin* journal (1942-1948).

Both N. Nicolaides and Gl. Alithersis worked (around 1920) as connective links for the first acquaintance of young Cypriot litterateurs and philologists with the poetry of C.P. Cavafy but also as good conductors with literary journals and personalities in Athens and Alexandria, such as Stephanos Pargas' noteworthy journal *Grammata* [Letters]. The journal publishes works by other Cypriots too, such as Yangos Eliades and Melis Nicolaides. At the same time, quite a few writers residing in Egypt, not only of Cypriot origin (i.e. Gl. Alithersis, Str. Tsirkas and Maria Roussia) enhance with their contributions the two basic Cypriot journals published on the island since the mid 1930s, *Kypriaka Grammata* [Cypriot Letters] and *Paphos*.

It was no surprise that both Gl. Alithersis and N. Nicolaides would be initially taken aback by the “new demons” born of Cavafy’s poetry. They would subsequently deal with it with embarrassment and silence, while later on they would either criticize or acknowledge it from the distance awarded by time.

In a special issue on Cavafy initiated by the *Nea Tehni* [New Art] journal (1924), N. Nicolaides avoids taking a clear stance on Cavafy’s poetry under the pretext that he is not a critic. Many years later, N. Nicolaides’ opinion of the poet Cavafy appears differentiated. In a later interview to E. Stamatiou, he states more clearly his revised opinion of the Alexandrian poet: he acknowledges remembrance as the “key” to Cavafian poetry; he even goes as far as placing Cavafy, alongside A. Sikelianos on the apex of Modern Greek

poetry. “Cavafy is Egypt’s greatest poet. He and Sikelianos occupy first place in the Greek poetry Parnassus. Cavafy and I used to be friends. In the beginning I could not grasp his work, I would actually fight it. One time, when he circulated a hedonistic poem in his familiar broadsheet form, I set out to ridicule him. I would keep it with me and read it to any acquaintance of mine I’d run into. I must have read it fifteen times. Then suddenly, on the sixteenth, I stopped. I had found the “key” to Cavafy’s poetry. It lies in remembrance!”¹¹ It is true that N. Nicolaïdes did not work in literary review; only in his youth had he published in the Alexandrian *Grammata* a few brief critical notes on books, wherein one discerns elements that coincide with the writer’s literary quests of the time but also more generally.

Gl. Alithersis is involved in literary review and study in a more systematic manner, displaying many good moments as well as quite a few mishits. As a loyal fan of K. Palamas’ poetry, he turned into an opponent of Cavafy’s poetry with his unjust book *To provlima Cavafy* [The Cavafy problem] (1934). Quite justifiably then, D. Daskalopoulos commented on this edition with the following: “One does reasonably wonder what his own anti-Cavafy book has to offer following the publication of Malanos’ book, which in fact he trails. It is actually more violent, flatly negative and surpasses Malanos in tone extremities.”¹² Gl. Alithersis approaches N. Nicolaïdes’ work on short-story writing in a rather contradictory manner, moving from juvenile enthusiasm (in a 1917 publication) to strong reservations and objections (in *Nea Zoi* article, 1927, published with very few alterations in *Nea Estia*, 1935). From the rest of his studies, his speech on K. Palamas’ “Foinikia” [Palm Tree] (*Nea Zoi*, 1927) where he comments on the poem’s symbolic character is worthy of note, as well as *Istoria tis neas ellinikis logotenis* [History of Modern Greek literature] (1938), which is neither very well-known nor especially noteworthy. In this monograph he places sufficient emphasis on demoticists and K. Palamas, with mentions of the younger A. Sikelianos, Kostas Varnalis, Kostas Ouranis, K.. Karyotakis, N. Kavvadias and even the more neoteric Yiorgos Seferis. In a supplement he refers to litterateurs of Alexandria, going past C.P. Cavafy in a rather hasty and depreciative manner, while insisting a bit more on N. Nicolaïdes. His brief monographs on Dimitris Lipertis (1934), V. Michaelides (1957), N. Nicolaïdes (1958), S. Skipe (1960), M. Malakasis (1961), R. Tagore (1961) and N. Santorinios (1965) are also noteworthy.

During the 1930s the little known Antonis Christodoulou publishes three peculiar books with the eloquent titles *Ymnos is tin oknirian* [A hymn to

sloth] (1933), *Don Kixotai epi pigasson* [Don Quixotes on Pegasi] (1934) and *O epistimonikos Theos* [The scientific God] (1933). In the preface of his first book, the author classifies it as being on the verge between a study and a draft literary piece. His two subsequent books are of a similar character. Drawing lessons from the satirical, playful style and witty and subversive spirit of E. Roides, A. Christodoulou ventures on a poignant critique of standardized values and institutions across religion, the Church, the arts and especially poetry. Among other things, he crushes poetry with provoking aphorisms such as: “Whoever has something to write about, writes prose. Whoever has nothing to write about, writes poetry”. “Poetry today has no reason whatsoever to exist; it comprises the lowest if not an inexplicable literary genre”. “Poetry was invented at a moment of boredom, just as painting and sculpting”. He claims that from the moment poetry became separated from music, the first ceased to offer something new or more essential than ancient poetry. He criticizes Dionysios Solomos’ *Ymnos eis tin Eleftherian* [Hymn to Freedom] (“a long-winded and in point of fact loquacious poem [...] it cannot even boast to have been created by a man employing his language esthetically and artistically”), as well as the demoticists’ poetry and the use of rhyme, while defending folk poetry.¹³

After World War II and mainly after leaving Egypt behind, the brothers Th. Pierides and Y.Ph. Pierides, Evgenia Paleologou Petronda, perhaps others too, worked on literary reviews and essays. The critical articles and essays by Y.Ph. Pierides on his favorite writers and readings (A. Chekhov, F. Dostoyevski, Guy de Maupassant, R. Rolland, J. Swift, L. Tolstoy, H.D. Thoreau, K. Varnalis, N. Nicolaidis and other *Aigyptiotes* litterateurs, the *Fyllada tou Megalexandrou* [Alexander the Great’s Pamphlet] and *Ta Paramythia tis Halimas* [Halima’s Fairy Tales]) have proven to be more mature and stronger to the test of time.

These texts enlighten from a different perspective the poetics of Y.Ph. Pierides the prose writer, who appears attracted by significant examples of realistic and humanistic prose as well as by the Orient’s folk and story telling. In contrast, Th. Pierides is rather guided (and often manipulated) by criteria of Leftist critique. His articles and notes on the *akritika* songs [songs of the border], poetry in general and P. Éluard, R. Rolland, W. Whitman, K. Varnalis, Andreas Kalvos, V. Michaelides, K. Palamas, A. Sikelianos et al. comprise interesting testimonies on the formulation of Leftist critique in the wider area of Hellenism and diaspora, revealing at the same time the poet’s literary quests.

It would be fitting to close this general grammatological review with words from Y.Ph. Pierides' later book *Mnimes kai istories apo tin Aigypto* [Memories and stories from Egypt] (1986), wherein the writer references his Egyptian life in nostalgic and self-critical mood:

I loved Egypt even when I lived there, in the same way that I love it now, but I didn't know it at the time... (p. 6). [In my youth] "the whole world" was to me the Greeks of the community. I had a peculiar perception of the existence of the others, the Egyptians; I would see them as part of my surrounding reality, as something tangible still irrelevant to "us", namely the immediate surroundings of my home, my friends, our church, our reveries. (p. 45)

The entire intellectual movement, our thoughts and actions were almost exclusively concentrated on Greek issues and problems. This did not stem from our negative disposition toward the country where we lived. Rather, it stemmed from the independence of the community's micro-society with which our whole social existence identified through the workings of causality- our national, familial, professional and intellectual existence. However this resulted in keeping us at a distance from our Egyptian counterparts. And it also kept them at a distance from us. (p. 89)

NOTES

1. Slightly modified speech delivered in the framework of the Greek Book Exhibition (Athens, 24 May, 2006).
2. *Cypriot Litterateurs of Egypt, Symposium Proceedings*, Nicosia, Education Ministry Cultural Services, 1993.
3. See mostly Y.Ph. Pierides, "Ta neollinika grammata stin Aigypto" [Modern Greek Letters in Egypt] *Kypriaka Chronika* 69 (1971) 11-22 [= *Stobasmoi enos anagnosti – A reader's reflections*, Nicosia, Union of Cyprus Writers, 2004, pp. 17-34] and "Oi kyprioi logotehnes tis Aigyptou" [Cypriot literary figures of Egypt] in the collective volume *Kypriaki logotehnia. Oi rizis* [Cypriot Literature. The roots] Nicosia, Union of Cyprus Writers, 1980, pp. 84-97. Dimitris Daskalopoulos, "Oi Kyprioi logotehnes tis Aigyptou kai o K.P. Kavafis" [Cypriot literary figures of Egypt and C.P. Cavafy], *Oi kyprioi logotehnes tis Aigyptou*, see above, pages 49-61 [= *Sympathitiki melani*, Athens, Ermis, 1999, pp. 51-63]. Yiorgos Kehayoglou, "Opseis tou neollinikou "Anatolismou": I symvoli ton Kyprion tis Aigyptou" [Aspects of Modern Greek "Orientalism: The contribution of Cypriots of Egypt]

Oi Kyprioi logotehnes tis Aigyptou, see above, pp. 29-48 and “Anatolismos apo proto kai deftero heri: mia endiaferousa logotehniki opsi tou “parepidimou” Nicou Nicolaide” [Orientalism from first and second hand: an interesting literary aspect of the “sojourner” Nicos Nicolaides] in the collective volume *Nicos Nicolaides o Kyprios (1884-1956). Mia epanektimisi tou ergou tou* [Nicos Nicolaides, the Cypriot. A reevaluation of his work], Athens, Bibliorama, 2007, pp. 55-77. Natia Charalambidou, “O ‘allos’ kosmos kai oi *Bambakades* tou Y. F. Pieride” [The ‘other’ world and the *Cotton Factory Workers* by Y. Ph. Pierides, *Oi Kyprioi logotehnes tis Aigyptou*, see above, pp. 197-214. Costas Nicolaides, “Nicos Nicolaides kai Glafkos Alithersis: I ekaterothen kritiki” [Nicos Nicolaides and Glafkos Alithersis: Critique from both sides”, *Oi Kyprioi logotehnes tis Aigyptou*, see above, pp. 117-130; “Nicos Nicolaides, Stratis Tsirkas, Yiorgos Filippou Pierides: Epalliles poreies kai diaplokes” [Nicos Nicolaides, Stratis Tsirkas, Yiorgos Filippou Pierides: Successive paths and conflicts], *Porfyras* 105 (Oct.-Dec. 2002) 331-350; “I eikona tou Nicou Nicolaide stin allilographia tou Thodosi Pieride pros ton Strati Tsirka” [The image of Nicos Nicolaides in the correspondence of Thodosi Pierides to Stratis Tsirkas] (published in this issue of *Etudes Helleniques / Hellenic Studies*).

4. With regards to these reviews, see mostly D. Daskalopoulos, *Sympathitiki melani*, pp. 123-164.
5. Relevant topics are investigated in the recent PhD thesis by Manolis Marangoulis, “*Kairos na syhronisthomen: I Aigyptos apo ti skopia tis aigyptiotikis dianois tis mesopolemou*” [Time to coordinate: Egypt from the point of view of the interwar Aigyptiotes literati], approved by the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of the University of Cyprus, Nicosia 2006.
6. Y. F. Pierides, *Stohasmoi enos anagnosti*, p. 27.
7. As above, p. 28.
8. Stavros Karakasis, *I zoi kai to ergo tou Nicou Nicolaide* [The life and work of Nicos Nicolaides] Cairo, 1953, p. 79.
9. For more, see. M. Marangoulis, as above, pp. 306-321.
10. Y.P. Savvides, *Ta Nea*, 16 March 1993 [= *To spiti tis mnimis* – The house of memory, Athens, 1997, pp. 125-126].
11. *Tahydromos*, Alexandria, 12 Sept. 1954.
12. D. Daskalopoulos, *Sympathitiki melani*, as above, pages 54-55.
13. See also Yiannis Katsouris, “Antonis Christodoulou. Mia prota prosengisi” [Antonis Christodoulou. A first approach] *Oi Kyprioi Logotehnes tis Aigyptou*, as above, pp. 163-173.