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Costas Montis' *Afentis Battistas etc.*: Narrative as a Defeat

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans son roman Le Seigneur Batistas et autres (1980) Costas Montis donne un caractère mythique à des vécus personnels et collectifs du monde de Chypre. En même temps, dans ce roman, il se mesure avec les possibilités de la narration; l'auteur narrateur a continuellement le sentiment que le récit lui échappe, qu'il est contrôlé par ce dernier. À la fin, il soumet au lecteur que son récit n'arrive pas à un dénouement, étant donné qu'il n'arrive pas à établir l'identité de ses ancêtres.

ABSTRACT

In his novel *Afentis Battistas etc.* (1980) Kostas Montis gives a mythical aspect to his personal experiences as well as the collective experiences of the Cypriot people. All the while, the author-narrator struggles with the possibilities of the narration and constantly feels that the narrative escapes him, that it is the one leading the writing. At the end, he admits to the reader that the narrative fails to reach an outcome since he, himself, has failed to establish his ancestors' identity.

Costas Montis' novel, *Ο αφέντης Μπατίστας και τ' άλλα* (*Afentis Battistas etc.*) is about the author's past: both the distant part of his ancestors and the more recent past of his childhood. It is also a novel about narration: its causes, its effects, its power.[1] It is to the act of narration that the very first phrase of the novel refers: *Even if afentis Battistas may not be the central figure in the narrative —I don't even know if there is a central figure* […] (p. 7[2]). Afentis Battistas, the grandfather of the author's maternal grandmother, is the scion of a Venetian aristocratic family, which, in common with many others, was dispersed at the time of the 1571 Turkish invasion, to avoid persecution. About three centuries later, the family has apparently retained its wealth and afentis Battistas figures in the grandmother's tales as extremely rich and

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generous to the point of indifference or even contempt towards his riches: when his granddaughter rushes to inform him that the coffer containing his gold is open, he replies: *If the coffer wasn't open, how would the gold see a bee buzz?* (p. 14) and fills the girl's jug to the brim with gold coins, as if they were pebbles. A few years later, the family has become impoverished: as a young girl, the author's mother works as an apprentice to a seamstress; their poverty is one of the reasons why her mother permits her marriage to a man fifteen years her senior, the author's father. The couple has six children of whom the author is the youngest. The two elder boys, Yiorgos and Nikos, die within three weeks of each other: Yiorgos at 21, Nikos at 16; of consumption and leukemia respectively. Four years later, the mother dies too.[3]

It is then that Costas Montis, thirteen years old at the time of his mother's death, becomes obsessed with afentis Battistas. Profoundly shaken by the four deaths (the first was his grandmother's), he harks back to a past when his family was whole and he, together with his siblings, was listening to his grandmother's tales. At the same time, his interest in a wealthy and powerful ancestor also derives from his family's disaster; he is probably trying to make up for a shattered present by recreating a golden past. Narration is therefore both a need and a cure; and the narrative needs a hero –afentis Battistas– even if it is going to talk more about the «et cetera»: the traumatic events of the author's childhood, the traumatic consequences of the 1974 Turkish invasion and occupation.

In this paper, we shall focus on the course of the narrative: the author's preoccupation with his narrative, his digressions, and the narrative outcome.

(a) Preoccupation with the Narrative

His grandmother's most faithful customer (p. 11), the author loses, at her death, a world of words. Mounting the stairs that led to her room, he used to *arrive* there triumphantly (*it's as if you climb and nail your flag to the tower*) and ask for her stories. After her death he misses this *arrival* :

Later, I have longed for it many times on a thousand occasions when I arrived but did not arrive, when I set off for grandma's room and there was no room, there was not even a signpost and there was no breath, no grandmother, no fairy tale to await me

(- Grandma? What grandma? We can't hear you. Fairy tale? What fairy tale? We can't hear you. You have made a mistake.) (p. 11).

«Later» probably refers both to a childhood deprived of his grandmother's stories and to adult life, in which the author experiences a lack of purpose or achievement (*I arrived and did not arrive*), possibly in connection with his writing. It is in his grandmother's stories that the author believes the seeds of his own poems or stories are to be found*: As I grew up, grandma's narrations acquired other dimensions inside me, stopped being seeds, brought forth shoots, became broader, got completed on their own* (p. 13). This is what happened to the story of afentis Battistas. Nevertheless, the grandmother's stories represented not only another world –of the past or of imagination– but also a sense of well-being and serenity in the family itself: her audience are the six grandchildren and her stories compete with those of the author's father. Recalling that feeling the author mourns its loss and abandons his grandmother's narrations to talk about the fate of their recipients, especially that of his two brothers, Yorgos and Nikos.

The father's stories belong to the same happy atmosphere, but differ from grandmother's in that they refer to more recent times (events experienced by the father himself). They are therefore connected with the family: for example, the father's beloved horse is named in honour of two famous bandits whose deeds the father narrates; and it was on this horse that he used to travel a long way to woo his future wife. The couple's romance and the first years of family happiness contrast sharply with the events that follow. The contrast is not only between happiness and desolation, but also between the controlled, logical sequence of narrative events and the absurdity of life itself, in which a feeling of helplessness prevails.

The author is thus unable (or unwilling) to follow the thread of his grandmother's or father's narration. His own narration consists of the contrasts mentioned above, while it also comprises his own childhood memories from before the disaster, but in the light of the disaster. Despite this, or because of it, he remains true to his aim: to continue a narrative which has been interrupted by life. He does not, however, stay with his hero for more than a few lines before the middle of his book. It is here that he states, once again, his preoccupation with his narrative, wondering about its title: a novel, a friend tells him*, allows decentralizations because in this way it broadens itself, it embraces its surroundings, it sheds light on life's inter-relations* (p. 112). Thus the author feels free to retain his title, *Afentis Battistas.*

I simply added: «etc.». I admit that some of the «et cetera»
was not distant as the mainspring was, nor did it emerge
from soulless papers. In contrast, it had much more direct

contact with me than afentis Battistas did; but, as I have said, afentis Battistas was the cover-story, even if it looks as though I am narrating the other things as side-issues (pp. 112-13).

The mainspring and a cover-story: afentis Battistas is the centre of a narrative that not only permits decentralizations, but consists of them. In searching for him, the author relates his reasons for doing so and his failure to capture his hero: in this way he loses a hero but finds a narrative.

(a) Digressions

Under the cover of afentis Battistas, the author's digressions constitute the greater part of the first half of the narrative (up to p. 116). The digressions are about the parents' past, about the family's losses, about characters from the author's childhood or adult life. These characters are mostly semi-crazy (*innocents*) or eccentric people; anecdotes about their behaviour constitute an oral, everyday narrative in the neighbourhood and, as such, finds their way into the author's narrative. Their infirmities, whether of body or of mind, render them tragi-comic figures. It is through them that the author chooses to refer to the island's recent history. He recalls, for example, an *innocent* who during the First World War used to become extremely upset whenever children taunted him: *«You are German». «I am not German! I am not German!»* he would scream. Women scolded the children, while enjoying the scene, and consoled the man: *«Don't listen to them. You are English»*. After the British and American collaboration with the Turks in the 1974 invasion, says the author, his guilt for that childish cruelty has somewhat faded: he can imagine the *German* fervently denying British or American identity: *«I am not English! I am not American!»* (pp.120-22).

Moving between past and present, speaking from the perspective either of a child or of an adult,[4] confessing his guilt for laughing at a mentally handicapped person, offering at the same time a glimpse of a society where people know and protect each other, however roughly, the author manages at the same time to talk about the open wound of the invasion and occupation of Cyprus (and of the powers behind it). It is typical of his technique that he only refers to this open in passing, as an afterthought to a digression. This is one of the ways in which digressions function in this narrative: it is through them that the most traumatic events or the most acute feelings are hinted at or confessed. The need to narrate stems from the author's losses; but his narrative

cannot focus on these. It must have a pretext: a distant hero, serene and untouched by calamities. In order to function, the narrative must have a centre which it will practically ignore. It can only refer to emotionally central things by pretending to be doing so by chance.

At the same time, digressions constitute an escape at points where the narrative touches on the author's deepest feelings or most painful experiences.[5] One of these is his mother's tuberculosis (mentioned on p. 99). As soon as she is diagnosed, the father takes his only remaining son to Lefkara, to protect him from infection. Lefkara offers the author a first way out of relating his mother's illness and death: a flash-back to family vacations in the same village. He returns to his subject only for a few lines (p. 101); father and son await news of the mother every day, hoping against hope for a miracle cure. News is brought by Hoppas' carriage. Mentioning this offers the author a new way out: for the next few pages he talks about Hoppas' bad temper and adds some anecdotes concerning other characters.

The mother's death is not the only painful thing he postpones narrating; there is also his guilt for being the unwitting cause of his parents' separation during his mother's last days.

Avoiding, postponing and confessing are all parts of a narrative based on digressions. The events of the mother's death are related in a digression from the main topic, afentis Battistas; and are in their turn postponed in the narration because of other digressions. Their narration contains two difficult confessions: that of the author's guilt and the fact that his mother, like his eldest brother, died of tuberculosis: until this book was published, Montis had followed his sister's advice: afraid he would be avoided by friends and girls, he had lied about the cause*: it is only now, it is only from this narrative that my wife, my children and my friends will learn that [...] I came from a consumptive family.* (p. 107).

These confessions could perhaps be considered to be a necessary part of the narrative, and therefore almost inevitable from the moment the author decided to include a digression about his mother's death. However, it would be difficult to argue this about other confessions. For example, when talking about friends avoiding him after Yorgos' death for fear of tuberculosis, he digresses into a confession of his own cruelty to another boy whose father was in prison: One day, during a fight,

> *I shouted: «You go and find your father in prison!» He left, his head lowered, without answering [...] For half a century the wound I inflicted on him has been on my conscience. A wound that became*

> *more painful when, about fifteen years after that event, I heard he was in the asylum. I went to see him. I found him in the yard, gentle as a lamb, building little clay houses. I spoke to him, he did not recognize me. […] I realized there was no longer any way for me to soothe my conscience.* (p. 99)

It is the act of narration itself that compels to the truth. We can perhaps argue that the need to confess leads to the narrative; but it also works the other way round. Montis himself acknowledges this interrelationship between authorship and honesty in connection with his poetry: *Couldn't you at least imagine that one of your sons might perhaps write verses and how could he avoid issues, how could he suppress them?* (p. 32).[6] The question is addressed to his dead father (*I was thus opening a painful subject, I was opening a wound for an unimaginably beloved father, years dead now*; Montis' father died in 1930, when the author was 16 years old). At eighteen the father had enlisted in the British army and fought at Transvaal –*he was, he said, in dire need of money and had also been misled by British propaganda.* His sergeant, a cruel man, used to kick little Zulu children until they bled. *«Was it these children you had come to kill, father, these eyes you had come to shut?»* the author asks years later when on a visit to South Africa, the memory of his father's stories strikes him afresh. Writing verses or stories, the author is unable to suppress; but he needs to find his own way to confession.

Digressions, then, serve a multiple purpose: they postpone the narration of painful events; they include painful events as if by accident, and they offer glimpses of the author's conscience or of the island's history that need to be voiced. Digressions, however, become less frequent in the second part of the book, when the author finally embarks upon his subject: Battistas. This means that they are also connected with a narrative hesitation, which in turn constitutes an important theme in the story. Their overall function is to decentralize the narrative; and this function is crucial to a narrative that is seeking a centre, while at the same time it stems from open wounds at the centre of the author's personality.

(b) Narrative Outcome

Narrative hesitation is resolved in the second part of the novel, when the author, after extensive research in historical archives, hits upon a new *mainspring* (p. 111): another Battistas who lived in the 1700s. No explanation

for this change of focus is offered except that of importance and, perhaps, ancestry: *I could see now that the mainspring of the family was another; a mainspring of which grandma did not know so as to narrate it and make our childish eyes four times larger, make our breasts burst and completely wipe out father's stories* (p. 111). Thus the author enters a family competition: if his grandmother's stories captivated the audience more than his father's did, the author as an adult wishes to triumph over her as well.

This, however, is not the only reason behind his choice; but before we consider his reasons we have to look at his new heroes. Battistas, the author tells us, was proud of his Venetian origins. He refers to Venice as his homeland even though he is discovered towards the end of his life to neither speak nor understand the language. Because of his proud origins and his wealth, he is regarded as the unofficial leader in his village (he lives in the Troodos' Krassohoria). This role he tends to emphasize by assuming responsibilities pertaining to the whole village such as the relations with the neighbouring Turkish village Klavia. Lots of his fellow-villagers work for him on his estate, but his prestige is not only due to financial superiority. Hinting at high friendships in Constantinople, he is tolerated, even respected, by the Turkish authorities of the area. He has, however, a price to pay to maintain his position: conversion to Islam. The greatest part of the narrative concerning him moves around this event: the changed, hushed atomosphere and the strange comings and goings of his wife's family before the decision is taken; the villagers' reaction; the local priest's forced visit to him.

Although the author has found very few facts during his research in the historical archive and fills the rest of the story using his own imagination,[7] he tells us nothing about Battistas' feelings. We have only glimpses of unhappiness in the family (his wife's prayers and tears) as well as resentment and conflict – a few words that escape his son. We can, however, assume a deep undercurrent of bitterness by the fact of his re-conversion to Christianity on his death bed: a decision attributed to him by his son, although the readers are not allowed inside information about it.

The author's hero –the new mainspring that fulfills his initial aim of talking about a powerful ancestor of Venetian origin– is not, after all, a glorious figure. He is, rather, a compromised person maintaining outward dignity but experiencing isolation (the villagers, though in awe of him, judge him and keep their distance) as well as helplessness when confronted with real power.

Where the father compromises, the son rebels –and is defeated. Battistas' son, Antonellos, the other central figure of the narrative, epitomizes the ideal

hero: brave, handsome and just, he is admired by his friends and adored by the girls. He often assumes the role of protector; he forgives workers fired by his father for various misdeeds and sends them back to work without even consulting or informing his father, who tries to save face by pretending it was his own decision. Admiration and love for Antonellos create, in their turn, a protective net around the family: his friends offer moral support to his mother during Battistas' illness while Antonellos is in Venice, and they allow no insulting hints concerning Battistas' conversion. Antonellos' story looks bright and full of promise until a little before the end. Married to a beautiful Venetian girl,[8] he assumes control of the estate, refuses the Hodja access to the dying Battistas, assumes responsibility for Battistas' Christian burial and is the acknowledged head of the village. Battistas' earlier half-hearted attempts to place him, too, under the protection of Islam have long since been defeated: Antonellos had been made to put on a fez, as a first step towards conversion; on his return from Venice the fez has vanished. His independent spirit provokes the authorities' displeasure. The Turks of the neighbouring village are allowed to steal land belonging to the estate and the Pasha's doors are closed to Antonellos when he tries to protest. Still, this is to be expected and can perhaps be dealt with. Defeat for Antonellos comes in the form not of inimical manipulations or veiled threats but of an open struggle, unavoidable because of Antonellos' pride and dignity: Alis, a childhood friend and the son of a local aga, provokes him in the village square by putting a big dirty fez on Antonellos' head (*you forgot it in Venice*, p. 222) and throwing another one at him: *and this for your father, Turkobattistas', tomb*. Antonellos attacks and kills Alis on the spot, despite the villagers' cries: *Don't, Antonellos! Think of your mother, your wife, the child.* The last reported words of Antonellos before he and his family flee the island for Venice (with the Pasha's tacit consent) are: *Forgive me, father, I didn't manage until the end* (p. 223). This sense of failure probably refers to the role of village leader, inherited by Battistas, and at the same time to the family's position: led by his pride and free spirit, Antonellos has destroyed all his family's aspirations in Cyprus.

Nevertheless, if for Antonellos the end of his Cyprus story is bitter, for the author who writes during another Turkish occupation, it contains glory, hence his preference for Antonellos stated on the last page*: We did not know then about Antonellos to ask grandma of him; of him only* (p. 224). Unlike the compromised Turkobattistas, Antonellos can be the aim and centre of a narrative looking for a heroic figure to atone for the family's decline as well as for the pain and loss which life has inflicted on the author. Pain and loss fall

to Antonellos' share too, but they are not arbitrary: he loses his homeland because he has refused to be a slave. He is therefore a person on whom the author can focus: a worthy ancestor, *foretelling our Yorgos* (it is with Yorgos the author identifies Antonellos, p. 180), while he is himself foretold by another ancestor painted by Turkobattistas – a portrait that provokes the Pasha's displeasure: a Venetian officer (p. 159), probably of the time of the fight against the Turks, who bears a striking similarity to Antonellos. Moreover, like the author himself, Antonellos bears the weight of having to continue the family, as the only male offspring; the author feels this weight crushing him after the deaths of his brothers. For all these reasons, the narrative seems to have finally found its focus and its centre. The snatches of an autobiographical novel and the snatches of a historical novel can finally merge into each other and be rendered whole in the figure of this ancestor.

There is, however, a major snag: at the end of the novel, we are told that Antonellos had to leave, with his family, for Venice, where presumably his children grew up and stayed.[9] This means that there is only a very remote connection between him and the author's family: great-great-grandfather Battistas must have descended from a different branch from that of Turkobattistas and Antonellos.

The author had been warned before he embarked on his historical narrative:

a friend at the Centre of Cultural Research disappointed me: «You are trying to squeeze blood from a stone. Turkobatttistas was different. And you chose now, when the Turks are here once again, to butt in!» (p. 118). The author himself has doubts: *Was it another family or was it the same river that surfaced in such an unorthodox way, not at the river-mouth but high up in the Troodos Krassohoria? If it was the same family, there is some cohesion in this narrative. Otherwise, you have two narratives, two units, I don't know* (p. 118). Despite his doubts, the author begins his narrative immediately after his friend's castigation. The end necessarily confirms his doubts: Antonellos' story is fascinating and moving; it cannot, however, be the story of an ancestor.

The novel ends with an imaginary dialogue between the grandmother and her audience: *We did not know then*, says the author, *about Antonellos, to ask her [...] «Antonellos? What was he to you, grandma?» «Antonellos? What Antonellos?»* Grandmother's imaginary question recalls that other one posed by invisible voices near the beginning of the novel when the author, having lost the sense of *arrival* he used to experience as a child on reaching his grandmother's room, says*: and there was no grandma, nor fairy-tale to await*

me (-Grandma? What grandma? Fairy tale? What fairy tale? We can't hear you. You have made a mistake). There is no *arrival*, then, for the author who has finished his novel. The end does not correspond to the beginning, and the ideal ancestor who would have served as a consolation or a refuge has not been found.

The question is why: why has the author chosen to drive his narrative to this non-arrival point? Why has he undermined its very centre after it took him so long to find it? The answer probably lies in his initial needs and aims. The grandmother's afentis Battistas was a successful and serene figure: rich and detached from his riches, he ruled, austerely but benevolently, over his fellow-villagers, foresaw his own death and used this knowledge to cancel everybody's debts. He died at peace with himself, the world and God. His story offers the impoverished family a sense of a prosperous past, and the atmosphere it creates matches the serene atmosphere of the author's family before they were hit by illness and death. Having become obsessed with that Battistas because of these factors, the author abandons him for the self same reasons. His family's and his homeland's disaster render a story of success and serenity irrelevant.

The story he focuses on instead contains failure and compromise as well as boldness and independence. Turkobattistas and Antonellos are chiefly presented through their relationship to the Turks. The author chooses to talk about them precisely because *the Turks are here once again*, as his friend remarks. Father and son offer two different options concerning stance towards the rulers: compromise or rebellion. Neither solution is a happy one, as we have seen, and neither is total. Battistas secretly sides with Antonellos in his abhorrence of the fez (when sending Antonellos to study in Venice, he surprises him: *there you can throw the fez away!*, p. 185). Antonellos, on the other hand, is tolerated by the authorities because of his father's conversion to Islam. It is only after his father's death that he is unprotected and threatened (*Two years went by. Various signs assured Antonellos that the Turks were playing with him as a cat does with a mouse*, p. 220). Neither Battistas' nor Antonellos' route leads to any happy or permanent solution. There is no way to maintain both one's integrity and one's peace under the oppressors. This bitter conclusion seems to underpin the novel.

There is, therefore, no way for the historical past to serve as balm for the painful present. Moreover the attempt at a historical novel has failed, because history tends to repeat itself; not only does the mixture of compromise and rebellion towards the Turks recall Montis' father's stance towards the British rulers of his time, for whom he used to feel a deep hatred

(p. 33), but also, with *the Turks here once again*, the necessary distance between today's readers and the heroes of the novel has been obliterated. At the same time, both the autobiographical and the historical part of the novel narrate disaster stories. If the past cannot serve as balm or refuge, neither can the narration: it does not take the author (and his readers) to the safe realm of fairy-tales; rather it reopens wounds, siding with reality.

Having lost half his family and half his homeland, the author loses also, on purpose this time, the narrative he initially planned. As we have seen, narrative compels to the truth. Not only does it extract confessions but it also demands truth for its own sake. A story about the grandmother's Battistas would have been false, not because of any invention of facts but because it would not have corresponded to the author's reality, whether external reality or his inner world. The relationship between the author and his narrative is, it seems, far from simple. Being its creator does not mean that he can either lead it to the end he desires or that he can use it to serve his own purposes, as a refuge, for example, or as a consolation.

A similar process occurs in Dimitris Hatzis' *Double Book* (1976).[10] Here, the *Author* (one of the two central figures in the narrative) purports to create a story that will reveal the essence of Greece: its recent history, the poverty of its people, their resilience. He chooses a hero, Kostas, an immigrant to Germany, whom he asks to narrate his personal history. This will be both complemented and generalised by the *Author*: historical and social background appertain to him. The plan fails as the *Author* gradually becomes involved in the narrative (and his hero's life). Unable to preserve his detachment, he does not achieve the novel he had planned (a totality consisting of a specific example and general conclusions) but ends up with a shattered narrative he fails to complete. It is his hero, Kostas, who, having matured through the narrative process, assembles the pieces and concludes the story. For Hatzis, as for Montis, narrative does not conform to plans or goals; not because it is written independently of its author but, on the contrary, because it is profoundly linked to the author's real self. Plans and goals, whether to console oneself or to capture the essence of one's homeland, belong to the surface self. Narrative changes its course because its very existence pierces the surface and reveals inner reality, even if this course proves self-destructive for the author.

In Hatzis' novel, the *Author* dies with his book unfinished. Costas Montis finishes his narrative, but opts for defeat too: that of the author in his endeavour to tell the story of important ancestors; that of his heroes in their

effort to preserve at the same time their integrity, their family and their homeland, and that of the narrative in its attempt to offer an escape and an *arrival*. Encompassing past and present, snatches of collective life and private feelings; alternating between detachment and involvement; sketching in the figure of Antonellos a portrait that can function as an *aim and guide* (p. 194), the way the Venetian officer's portrait functions for Antonellos himself according to the Pasha's correct suspicions, Kostas Montis creates, as Lefteris Papaleontiou has pointed out, the novel of the «world of Cyprus»[11]. If this is his victory, it is, like Antonellos' own, a bitter one: «Cyprus? What Cyprus?» we can imagine invisible voices echoing. The author depicts a defeated world; his achievement is, therefore, his non-*arrival* (and vice-versa); an inevitable defeat, to which he is led through the reality and truth of his narrative.

NOTES

1. Cf. Maria Herodotou's observation: the beginning of the novel poses questions pertaining to the narrative process and shows the author's critical stance towards the prerequisites for novel writing (Μαρία Ηροδότου, «*Ο αφέντης Μπατίστας και τ' άλλα* του Κώστα Μόντη: ένα Διπλό βιβλίο», *Ακτή*, έτος Ε΄, τ. 20 (1994) 506.

   Cf. Also Lefteris Papaleontiou's remark: «the meagre fiction is substituted by the adventure of narrative»: «*Ο αφέντης Μπατίστας και τ' άλλα* του Κ. Μόντη. Μυθοποίηση της προσωπικής και συλλογικής ιστορίας» [1999], now in L. Papaleontiou's book: *Όψεις της ποιητικής του Κώστα Μόντη*, Αθήνα, Σοκόλης, 2006, p. 124.

2. All references are to the edition: Κώστας Μόντης, *Ο αφέντης Μπατίστας και τ' άλλα*, Αθήνα, Ερμής, 1980. There is, as L. Papaleontiou mentions, a translation of the novel into English (2006), but for the purpose of this paper, the translations of the passages cited are my own.

3. For dates and events in Costas Montis' life, see Θεοδώρα Μυλωνά-Πιερή, «Σχεδίασμα εργοβιογραφίας Κώστα Μόντη», *Η λέξη* 152 (1999) 472-78.

4. For view-point changes and their narrative consequences, see L. Papaleontiou, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-37.

5. «In some cases, especially when the author is talking about successive deaths or the island's historical adventures, he inserts funny, humorous stories which frequently serve as relieving intervals and alleviate the heavy atmosphere»: L. Papaleontiou, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

6. Michalis Pieris points out that a subject central in Montis' poetry is «the dignity that emanates from a full, outright exposure of our real selves»: «Κώστας Μόντης. Ο 'ενοχλητικός' ποιητής» [1979, 1981], *Από το μερτικόν της Κύπρου (1979-1990)*, Αθήνα, Καστανιώτης, 1991, p. 22.
7. Kyriakos Charalambides remarks that Montis creates his ancestor «in accordance with the myth of his own soul and his own personal history»: «Στιγμές του αφέντη Μπατίστα», *Η λέξη* 152 (1999) 325.
8. As L. Papaleontiou points out (*op. cit.*, pp. 126, 137), Montis refers to marriages or love-affairs between Greeks, Venetians and Turks during the long occupations of the island, thereby reassessing the questions of identity and otherness and trying to go beyond national stereotypes.
9. *Cf.* L. Papaleontiou: «the novel does not reach a positive 'solution' with regard to the roots of the Battista family, which are lost in the mists of time. The figures of […] Turkobattistas and his son Antonellos remain an unsolved riddle», *op. cit.*, p. 125.
10. Maria Herodotou points out some very interesting parallels between Montis' and Hatzis' novels: that some of the chapters could be said to form autonomous stories; that both books revolve around a double, tormented individual and a national quest; that both books are preoccupied with the process of writing. Both have been castigated by critics for compositional inadequacies, whereas in both cases we can see a modern novel, de-composed. Montis' book can be characterized «a double book» because it combines elements of a conventional and a modern novel. It was Montis himself, M. Irodotou says, who spelt out his debt to Dimitris Hatzis' book (M. Irodotou, «Ο αφέντης Μπατίστας…», *Ακτή* [1994] 502, 504, 507.
11. L. Papaleontiou, *op. cit.,* p. 137 – a phrase obviously referring to Adamantios Diamantis' well-known painting, «The World of Cyprus».

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