

The Cypriot Generation of the Poets of the Invasion

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans son article, Alexis Ziras se réfère aux poètes chypriotes de la période de l'invasion turque de l'île en 1974. Il met en évidence l'influence exercée sur la poésie chypriote par les événements tragiques de 1974. Il cherche par ailleurs les particularités linguistiques et stylistiques de cette production.

ABSTRACT

In this article, Alexis Ziras focuses on the Cypriot generation of poets of the invasion. He refers to the historic tragedy of 1974 when Turkey invaded Cyprus, and its impact on Cypriot poetry. He also looks at the linguistic and stylistic characteristics.

The term “generation of the invasion” has been considered by grammatologists and historians of Cypriot literature as the most pertinent to describe and define mainly the poets and to a lesser extent prose writers who made their debut shortly before or shortly after the 1974 Turkish invasion. These litterateurs have incorporated in their early but also in their subsequent work the experience of the historic tragedy in the form of the personal or collective fixed sensation that transformed their lives.

Obviously, in the consciousnesses of all Cypriot litterateurs, the extent and depth of this experience possess more distinct and macabre impressions of a political or existential nature. But for the younger ones, those “of the invasion” who at that time were crossing over from adolescence to biological maturity, these impressions are more intense, owing to the fact that they were created during the period of their early molding. Therefore, to begin with a few primary comparisons, Greek poets of the 1970s present their poetry books rid of historic connotations from which the spirit of the age may be inferred, whilst their Cypriot peers unfailingly revisit the same source whence the trauma originated. It is precisely the memory of this trauma that

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often leads poetic imagination to restructuring and to the redefinition of political and physical pain.

Admittedly, poems written when the images of the 1974 catastrophe were still fresh rarely stand out for their technical completion or meticulous language. They are either polemics or poems of an explicit deposition of painful experiences; therefore, to a great extent, their form is defined by their sentimental load. In the main, it could be noted that in terms of means of expression they use the image or the finding but with an “in the heat of the moment wording” as their motive. However, before long, sarcasm, their apothegmatic style and elegiac rhetoric will in many cases become reminiscent of the sentimental redeployment and hollow rage of the post World War II poets – an amalgam of Cavafyan sophistry on the meaning of history and the lyric nostalgia of Yorgos Seferis and Yiannis Ritsos for the lost unity between man and world. Poets such as Andreas Sismanis, Yiorgos Moleskis, Demetris Gotsis, Louis Perentos, Savvas Pavlou, Stephanos Constantinides, Christos Mavris, Marios Agathocleous, Lefkios Zafeiriou, Nicos Orfanides and Andreas Antoniadis converge to a poetic locale that albeit shaped by different voices – proclaiming epigrammatism, didacticism, irony or an erosive satirical disposition – is patterned along the lines of heartache and the ripping of the young consciousness. Their common reference point is not war, as a bloody event, as much as the “aftertaste” of the passage of history, the almost connotative recourse of all of memory’s movements to the carving up of the country (and of the human body), something that has been unremittingly mutilating poetic imagination ever since.

Thematic references within Cypriot poetry, notes Nadia Charalambidou in her review of the Anthology of contemporary Cypriot poetry (1985) *are entirely different from the references of Helladic poetry, albeit relevant to them, owing to the special socio-historic conditions prevailing in Cyprus. [...] A careful, comparative look at the poems of both Cypriots and Greeks in the 1970s would perhaps display a few significant differences, not only in terms of viewpoint but also in terms of the employed poetic techniques. [...] Despite the use of irony on behalf of both generations in their poetry, the nostalgic nature [...] of most Cypriot poems collides with the cynical disposition that characterizes many of the poems of the Greek generation of the 1970s. Further, whilst many Greeks [...] appear to count on the ironic juxtaposition of specific and tangible images and on the extensive usage of colloquial discourse, with an extremely limited presence of abstract nouns and adjectives [...] most Cypriot poets appear to be much closer to the model of Seferis; in fact, they often reverberate Cavafy.*

Perhaps the element of cynicism in the form of poignant irony was not unknown to earlier Cypriot poetry – in fact, it is present in the work of Pantelis Michanikos, an emblematic poet of the period 1960-1980. Undoubtedly though, the sum total of poetry after 1974 is articulated along the lines of sarcastic and furiously ironic style. For a long period of time, at least until 1990, there seemed to be a bridgeless gap between the poets of the invasion and the poets that made their debut around 1960 – the year of Cypriot Independence. This gap is mostly discerned in the intensely critical attitude of the younger litterateurs toward the idealistic self-delusions of the past and the way this lyrical conceit was wrecked by various political diversions. Therefore, in the poetic discourse of Elena Toumazi, Michalis Zafeiris, Eleni Theoharous, Panayiotis Avraam, Doros Loizou, one may discern the feeling of despair – a precondition for Karyotakis' nihilism rather than traces of Seferis' composed poetic art, which looked to the integrated myth of man and space. In fact, the prevalence of a broken, inarticulate voice is partly due to the fact that many among the poets of the generation of the invasion coexisted with their 1970s Greek peers over the course of their studies in Greece, formulating a joint speech amidst the deadlocks of the time.

However, even that period of coexistence was not void of differentiations. Certain thematic elements of contemporary Cypriots like the feeling of *nostos* [return to the homeland] and a number of linguistic ones like their dialogue with the idiom of folk poets whence stemmed a more robust and sturdy poetic speech, projected by implication the perception of a tradition that was different to that of the 1970s' poets. As a result, the identity crisis reflected on the poetry of the generation of the invasion after 1974 was much deeper and complete: it has been at the same time a crisis of collective consciousness and an existential crisis, a political crisis and a crisis of means of expression, hence the survival of elevated tone in their work over an impressively long period (the poetry of Kyriakos Charalambides is a representative example) but also cynical nihilism or dramatic elegy (in Theodosia Nicolaou and Costas Vasileiou). Refusal to compromise as well as the repudiation of venality in Cyprus that was nonetheless undergoing rapid changes, became standardized as rules of poetic ethics for many poets of the generation of Independence. Similarly, for numerous subsequent poets (Nasa Patapiou, Yiorgos Moraris, Andriana Ierodiaconou, Niki Marangou, Mona Savvidou), it is certain that the feeling of malaise in the present has contributed to the creation of poetic worlds, where the concept of homeland transcends history's restrictions and seeks itself or its mythical image in a

diachronic panorama of odors, tastes, touches and forms.

Setting as indisputable precondition the colloquial, everyday language, which in the first years after 1974 is driven by a combative disposition with sharp tones, thus personifying the collective experiences of Hellenism, along general lines the poets of the invasion collaborate, “consenting” over the use of a metaphorical discourse that, as the discourse of post-war poetry in Greece, looks to frugal expression, grounding of feelings and straightforwardness in the conveyance of a meditative meaning. As the years go by and the particularities of each voice develop, these “collaborations” become more and more rare. Around 1985 onwards, the abilities of each one of them to “diverge” from the current of common topics and shared discourse begin to surface, usually progressing from the unfurled epic-lyric rhetoric to the retrorse, meditative one. In that sense, poets such as Elias Constantinou, Christos Mavris, Marios Agathocleous, Yiorgos Kythraiotis, Frosoula Kolossiatou change their focal point, transforming their sharp, sarcastic or cynic look to a look that now stands questioning and investigating opposite the spiral movement of poetic imagination that a few years back identified the personal trauma with the collective one.

A characteristic indication of this change is the obvious withdrawal of fragmentation from the poetic rhetoric of the generation of the invasion. Fragmentation was almost completely interlinked with the enraged style, subversive disposition and asthmatic density that readily stood out in the verses of most poetry books.

The minimization of fragmented discourse was accompanied by the recurrence of lyricism – a contrary and supplementary phenomenon – and the renewal of the generation’s interest in eurhythmy and freedom in terms of the poem’s development. This so to speak restructuring of the way the poet’s imagination moves had among other things a very interesting consequence that in my opinion has completely changed the landscape of modern Cypriot poetry.

On the one hand, it meant the disengagement of imagination from the coincidental point in time – the present-day element – that would gradually and inevitably weaken the previous potency of the poetic discourse; on the other hand it opened to a broad temporal perspective. It is not by chance that a large part of Cypriot poetry today communes at the scale of diachronicness. As a pattern, diachronicness has contributed to the work of Cavafy, Seferis and T.S. Eliot. It enabled poets such as Nasa Patapiou, Michalis Pieris, Nicos Orphanides, Yiorgos Moraris, Mona Savvidou, Takis

Hadjigeorgiou and Niki Marangou to activate the mechanism of a pendulant that launches the connotative function of the imagination so that forms of different eras are intermingled: mental and geographical spaces, legendary and anonymous faces, the knowledge of a homeland through the surge of primary feelings or traumatic memories and the knowledge of the same homeland through historicized time.

All the above do not imply that the elements of neurosis, contempt for reality and subversive satire – the poetry of Savvas Pavlou and Lefkios Zafeiriou are evidence of this rhetoric form – have disappeared from many of the 1974-1990 poets. Nonetheless, the conversion of Cypriot poetry as a whole since 1985 has been undeniable.

In my opinion, the physical touching of the birth-land, a recurrent pattern in both earlier and contemporary poets has been empowered by the lessening of continuous references to the historic reality. On the other hand, the diachronic function of symbols has contributed to the synaeresis of poetic and political ethics, of the vision for a united Cypriot space and the sorrow or intensity of an erotic passion.

I have often witnessed all the above intercrossing in a palimpsest simulacrum of a poetry that lives through history and when it emerges from it, it does so in order to commune more freely with its inherited texts: from Dionysios Solomos, Andreas Calvos, Yorgos Seferis or Odysseas Elytis and its medieval forefathers, Leontios Machairas, Yeorgios Voustronios to the dialectal poets of the beginning of the 20th century, Vasilis Michaelides and Demetris Lipertis and of course their later sequel, Costas Montis.