

Marios Vaianos, an Ambassador of Greek Letters

Marios Vaianos was born in 1905, in Cairo, where his father, a Chios cotton merchant, had settled. When Marios was only 3 years old, the Vaianos family left for Chios. Marios completed elementary school and part of his secondary education on the island before moving to Piraeus at age 17. He arrived in the port city in 1922 along with thousands of refugees fleeing the Asia Minor Catastrophe. After finishing high school, Vaianos enrolled in pharmacy at the University of Athens. He soon began his many cultural activities, however, and did not finish a university degree.

Early in 1923, Marios Vaianos started the *Acropole*, a cultural association. He then began to frequent the Athenian literary crowd of the day. One of the personalities, Tellos Agras, put Vaianos in touch with the Educational Association (Ekpaideutikos Omilos), a progressive group which played a vital role in reforming Greek education. Soon after Vaianos founded the literary magazine, *New Art* (Nea Techni) which also had a progressive and modernizing mission. Along the way, Tellos Agras introduced him to the poetry of Constantin Cavafy, an Alexandrian poet as yet unknown in Greece. Another intellectual, I.M. Panagiotopoulos furthered Marios' appreciation of Cavafy by showing him the poems printed on the single leafs that circulated in those days. At that time, Vaianos also happened to read the important and prophetic article about Cavafy by Grigorios Xenopoulos in the cultural magazine *Panathinaia* (1903).

Vaianos' admiration for Cavafy's poetry incited him to write to the poet at the end of 1923. Cavafy replied and thus began the correspondence between the young Marios Vaianos and the Alexandrian poet. Vaianos did all he could to promote Cavafy's work. He went to meet him for the first and last time in 1932, when the poet came to Athens to be treated for the cancer that was slowly ravaging his body.

Now, Cavafy has become not just a great Greek poet but an internationally well-read and acknowledged poet. Marios Vaianos has been forgotten while others claim to have helped Cavafy earn his status as one of the immortal writers. There are, however, a few authors such as Stratis Tsirkas, a fellow member of the Greek-Egyptian diaspora, who have recognized Vaianos' efforts to promote not only Cavafy but also other Egyptian writers working in Greek.

Many of Cavafy's letters to Vaianos were printed in a variety of magazines

such as the *Philologiki Protochronia* (1964). Others were presented to the public in an exhibition that Vaianos organized in April 1964, at the Cultural Cooperation Agency (Praktoreio Pneumatikis Synergias) which he had founded.

Vaianos' cultural activities are obviously not limited to Cavafy. Once he had created the above-mentioned agency, he undertook to meet and promote writers throughout the diaspora. His agency served as a crossroads between the diaspora and mainland for many artists. Dozens of diaspora authors would pass through the doors of his agency where they found what they needed to promote their work. Cypriot writers also received a warm reception at Vaianos' agency. Among the well-known Cypriots who visited the agency are Kostas Montis, Kypros Chrysanthis, Antis Pernaris, Yiannis Katsouris. During the sixties, Kyriakos Charalambidis, Anthos Lycavgis and Stephanos Constantinides were among the many young Cypriot students in Athens who frequented Vaianos' agency. Other regulars were Loukis Akritas, Melis Nikolaidis, Pavlos Krinaios and Avgi Shiakalli - all Cypriot authors living in Athens. Also in attendance were Greek authors such as Yiorgos Theotokas, Stratis Myrivilis, Ilias Venezis, Alkis Thrylos, Evangelos Papanoutsos, Photis Kontoglou, Kostas Varnalis, younger ones like Vassilis Vasilikos to name but a few and painters such as Kontoglou, Tsarouchis, Gounaropoulos, Bouzianis and others. The same agency occasionally served also as a gallery.

More than a meeting place for literary types, Vaianos' agency was a hub for actors, reporters, politicians, professors and even ecclesiastics. The most famous man of the cloth was George Pirounakis, a progressive priest who was subsequently tried for his ideas by both the official Church and the Junta.

Throughout the years, Vaianos was in touch with several neohellenists around the world. They were able to have books by Greek authors through his agency. In this respect, he created an international network for the promotion of Greek letters around the globe. With his limited means and frugal existence, Marios Vaianos managed to succeed where the Greek state had failed. Indeed, to survive Vaianos worked occasionally as a journalist and turned part of his agency into an art gallery. A few benefactors also helped him get through particularly hard times.

Although he was a poet himself, Marios Vaianos focused on the work of others rather than on his own. Various texts by Vaianos may be found in newspapers and literary journals in Greece and the diaspora. Some say that

he was going to draw upon his rich archives to write a book on Cavafy; however, no such manuscript was found after his death. He did claim to be preparing his own “Literary Memories”, but only a few scattered notes were ever found. Vaianos’ vast, rich archives also scattered after his death in 1976. Perhaps it would be fitting if the dozens of writers in Greece and the diaspora who benefited from his generous spirit could honour his memory with testimonials and the publication of the correspondence that he maintained with them.¹

Stephanos Constantinides

NOTES

1 This short piece was prepared by someone who knew Marios Vaianos from 1960-67. In fact, during those years, he was a young student warmly received by the generous man of letters. He has based this text on his memories of that period. Some of the biographical details do come from the book by E.I. Moschos, *K.P. Cavafis Epistoles sto Mario Vaiano* (C.P. Cavafy Letters to Marios Vaianos) published by Estia, Athens, 1979. The letters from Cavafy to Vaianos put as an appendix, do come also from the same book.

APPENDIX
Letters from Cavafy to Vaianos

2
 Αλεξάνδρεια
 23 Αυγίου 1924

Σίγχε κ. Βαϊάνε,

Έχετε ~~με~~ βράματα τις 1^η
 Αυγίου, και κελόν τις 11^η, και
 σας εύχεστώ.

Είσα, οί σοι νιός τις ουλεθίας
 τις ~~Αγίας~~ ^{Αγίας} τον ηίδαν οίο κενω ημερῶν
 σπῆ με, οί ενδομείτε να' χεβλε
 λα' ~~φύλλα~~ φύλλα δὲ πτεροειδῶν των, και
 με' εἶσαν οίο δὲ σας λα' ολίγων.

Σας εἶμαρ εύρωμων με' τὴν
~~καρτερία~~ ἰσχυρῆ σας οίον διαμαρτυρία,
 και με' τὴν φορτίδα σας εἰ οχίον
 με' εἶδῆν. Έρεφε οίον κ. Πααδῶν
 και τὸν εύχεστώμα εἶμαρ. Η' διαμαρτυρία
 κελωριστῆ εἰς τὸ "Σινεμά" τις 19^η
 Αυγίου. Ο' κ. Σλίβενος Πάργας ταν
 εἶχε ταντε πρὸ δημοσιεύων και
 προλίδελα να' σας βράφει. Ποχὸ' εἶχονα
 διαβῆσθας εἰς ἰσχυρῆς, και βεῖσθας

ὄχι ἔχω ὁκλαί Ἀθήνας ~~ὡς~~ ἰδίους
 καλοῦ φίλους - καὶ τοῖς εὐχαριστῶ
 θερμῶς. Σὰς παρακαλῶ, πῆτε εἰ
 μένως μὴ εἶναι κ. Βουλφοῦ ὄχι μὲν
 περὶ τοῦ διπλοῦ ἢ ἑξαμηνίως ἡμῶν. ἔως
 τοῖς κ. Λαυραδιώτῃ εἶμαι πολύ
ὕποχρεωμένος καὶ μὰ τοῖς εὐγενεῖς
 ἡμῶν γράμμα ὑπὸ "ἔθνος" ἡμῶν 10.^η
 Ἀποφασίζω, καὶ μὰ ἄλλην φοράν πρὸς
 ἑκδύμω μὲν ὑπεσθῆσθαι.

Προσφέρετε, σὰς παρακαλῶ, ἡμῶν
 χαρῆς ἡμῶν μὴ εἶναι κ. Δρακοσάδου,
 καὶ πῆτε ἡμῶν ὄχι ἡμῶν θερμῶς πάντα,
 καὶ τοῖς γὰρ εὐχαριστῶ συγκεντρώσεις
 ἡμῶν ὅταν ἦσαν ἔδω.

Σὰς εὐχαριστῶ εἰς τὴν μὴ τὴν
 φίλῃ ἡμῶν.

Μὲ πολλὴν ἐκτίμησιν,
 Κ. Π. Καβάφης.

4 'Ιουλίου 1925

Αθήνα

10 Rue Lepsius

Φίλε κ. Βαϊάνε,

Σας έσωχίω ούτω άντίλωα
εύκολον τών σοι ποιημάτων μου —
"Τι 25^{ον} έτος τού βίου σου" και
"εις 'Ηγεμίν στρατίαν" — τα
όσα έβίωσα τίν περικομίν
Teily.

Είδα τίν έβραβεύσα "Αθήνας"
(21 και 29 'Ιουλίου)
* σοι έπαινα του Κορομηλά περ
των τών ποιημάτων μου.

Σας έγραφα λεπτοτάτον τίν
25^{ον} 'Ιουλίου.

Με πολλήν ευτίμησιν,
Κ. Π. Καβάφης.

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Αγελίντσια
10 Rue Lepsius
1 Ιουλίου 1928

Φίλε κ Βαίανε,

Έλαβα το γράμμα σας της
24 Μαΐου.

Θα σας δώσω μερικά στοιχεία
ποιημάτων ^{μου} με τον Μαρτυρόν, τον
θαυμάσιον αυτόν ποιητή. Η οργάνωσις
που έχει διημι ο Μαρτυρόνς με τα
ποιητά μου με είναι μερικά ποίητα
ικανοποιήσις = να τα δώσω πάλι αυτό, ~~αλλά~~ σας
παρκαλώ.

Έλαβα έρωτες από σας από
την Αγγλία την οποία έχω ποίησει
με τα οργάνωσις με λίγους και τα
ημερομηνίες του 1928.

Έλαβα τα βιβλία του Καστωλίου.

Έλαβα επίσης και τον Πάνην
Σιδετή με "Τραγουδιές". Εδωκετέ μου
έναν μετρώ μεν, παρκαλώ.

Ποχὸ χαιρέσαι ὅτε δὲ εἶδεν ὁ
Ὀμήρου. Περὶ γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον οὐ
ἀνείηκε δὲν τέρμα δὲν ἀλλοφ' ἔω, ὁ
ὅσοις μὲ εἶπεν ἴσως ὅτι ἐκείνῳ
ἔδεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς.

Ἐπειδὴ ἀπὸ τῆν Πίκα Σεκουόχου
ὅτι ἐράφατε ἐπιστολὴν μα' μὲν ὅτι
"Ἰωάν". Σας ἴσως δευτέρω ἐρώτησεν.
Ἀλλὰ μὲ ἀσπείρω μὲν περὶ τὴν πᾶσαν
ὅτι δὲ τῆν ἐπιστολὴν ἢ "Ἰωάν". Ὁμοίως
ναί τῆν ἐπιστολὴν. Σας ἔραφε ὅτι τῆν
ἢ Πίκα Σεκουόχου.

~~Περὶ τῆν~~^{εἶτα} ὅτι "Journal des
Hellènes" καὶ δὲν "Ἰωάν Κρέστα" μὲ
πῶς εἶπα μὲ ἐράφατε.

ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐπιπέμων,
Κ. Π. Καβάφης