

## Preface

*The origin of language is in essence mysterious. And this means that language can only have arisen from the overpowering, the strange and terrible, through man's departure into being. In this departure language was being, embodied in the word: poetry. Language is the primordial poetry in which a people speaks being. Conversely, the great poetry by which a people enters into history initiates the molding of its language. The Greeks created and expressed this poetry through Homer. Language was manifested to their being-there as departure into being, as a configuration disclosing the essent.*

*Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics*

Three years ago, and with the prospect of the change-over into the new millennium, *Gramma's* editorial board decided to dedicate its issue for the year 2000 (number 8) to contemporary Greek poetry. Its motive was to present to the international public—already familiar with the great poets of modernism, Cavafy, Seferis, Elytis, Ritsos—the unfolding of Greek poetry in the last thirty years, coming into terms with a postmodern present.

In order to facilitate the reception of the articles in this volume by an audience that would not be familiar with the Greek language, we decided to transgress the general editorial policy established so far of publishing in both Greek and English; hence, all essays were originally written, or subsequently translated, into the English language. But there was also a second diversion from the usual practice of publicizing the special topics through an open call for papers, as has been the *Gramma* practice so far; instead, special invitations were issued to poets with a critical practice or academics working in the field of contemporary Greek poetry, the reason being to guarantee a substantial contribution (in quantity and quality) from the experts in an area of research whose “currency”, “immediacy” and “timeliness” often operates as an intimidating factor. Although some of the initial positive responses did not materialize into “flesh and blood” articles when the deadline bell for submission rang, we were lucky enough to make new contacts, to collect unexpected offerings, and to finally complete our project with the present collection of critical thought, sensitive appreciation and imaginative interpretation of the poetic scene in Greece today.

Modern Greek poetry—*on the edge*: the title was literally dictated to us by the material at hand, the ten essays which, when read intertextually, reveal those connecting links that are the delight of the editor. The two axes that emerge through the multiple texts collected, written by poets and scholars varying in nationality, sex, or age, yet sharing the same cultural and temporal background

(our common world on the edge between two centuries) are those of “history” and “language”—Greek poetry (and literature in general) measuring itself against its past and testing its linguistic competence, and performance.

The papers collected have also charted the shape and structure of the volume which is divided roughly into three sections. Section one comprises the blended voices of four contemporary poets and literary critics, D. Kapsalis, K. Anghelaki-Rooke, P. Boukalas, and S. Gourgouris, articulating their views on modern Greek poetry (panoramas not necessarily focusing on their own poetic productions, though inevitably conditioned by their poetic premises and practice). Dionysis Kapsalis, in dialogue with T.S. Eliot, tackles the issue of the relationship between illusion and reality in poetic discourse. Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke problematizes another linguistic turn that is characteristic of Modern Greek poetry and articulates the tendency towards an encounter with the self foregrounding loneliness. Pantelis Boukalas’s panorama of the poetry of the last quarter of the twentieth century conceptualizes “suffering” in juxtaposition, of course, to “joy”. Stathis Gourgouris thinks aloud on the issue of political commitment and poetic appreciation, in dialogue with Yiannis Ritsos and Aris Alexandrou.

Section two includes four papers by E. Douka-Kabitoglou, K. Van Dyck, L. Sakelliou-Schultz and C. Dokou, and A. Karavanta, either examining the general parameters of Greek poetry today and giving a more detailed account of its practitioners, or even concentrating on the work of specific authors or groups of authors—and certainly highlighting the special problematics (female, feminine, feminist) and conditions of poetic production faced by women poets in Greece. E. Douka-Kabitoglou takes up the issue of the the “double bind” of the woman writer and the cultural construction of femininity, K. Van Dyck deals with Greek American cultural production and especially the work of Olga Broumas and Iriani Spanidou, L. Sakelliou-Schultz and C. Dokou analyse the poetry of Eleni Vakalo and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke as an *écriture féminine*, and A. Karavanta approaches the poetry of Haris Vlavianos, with a particular focus on *The Angel of History*, and emphasis on the marginal and the superfluous.

Section three, comprising two papers by S. Chatziioannidou and V. Calotychos, bears a more challenging relation to the topic of the volume, dealing as it does with two contemporary novelists, Yiorgos Heimonas and Thanassis Valtinos. Yet the irrelevance is only apparent since Heimonas is indeed “a poet” by virtue of his narrative style and linguistic violations, let alone his theory of language and protagonist poets—or their enemies; and Valtinos’s fictional account of painful, and so controversial, events in recent Greek history, which have dominated poetic discourse as well, gives us the “other” image in a text fully conscious of the poetic powers (and dangers) of language.

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