Nanos Valaoritis: The Cultural Cross-Breeding of a Cosmopolitan and Protean Writer

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Abstract

Nanos Valaoritis is considered an avant-garde writer chiefly owing to his role in promoting French surrealism in Greece and then in California. Parody, pastiche, collage, and effusive referentiality are ubiquitous in his work, but many of these elements could be considered the tools of postmodernism as well as surrealism. The attraction of two antagonistic poles reorients the poet, who turns toward structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstructionism, while blending easily such strategies as Bakhtinian dialogism and carnivalization. He continues to use intertextuality and theorization, ending up in narcissistic self-referentiality. The avant-garde classification is easily reversed by borrowing Valaoritis's absurdist syllogisms, so that this pioneer might just as well be the last of a group on the verge of extinction, waiting for the rebirth of yet another avant-garde.

> . . . ὡρισμέναι λέξεις, λέξεις-χρησμοί, λέξεις ἑνώσεως ἀψιδωτῆς καί κορυφαίας, λέξεις μέ σημασίαν ἀπροσμέτρητον διά τό παρόν καί διά τό μέλλον, αἱ λέξεις «Ἐλελεῦ», «Σέ ἀγαπῶ», καί «Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις», καί, αἰφνιδίως, ὡς ξίφη πού διαταυρούμενα ἑνοῦνται, ἤ ὡς κλαγγή ἀφίξεως ὁρμητικοῦ μετρό εἰς ὑπογείους σήραγγας τῶν Παρισίων, καί αἱ λέξεις: "Chardon-Lagache," "Denfert-Rochereau," "Danton," "Odéon," "Vauban," καί "Gloria, gloria in excelsis."
>
> —Andreas Embirikos, *OKTANA*, «Αἱ λέξεις», a poem dedicated to Nanos Valaoritis

Introduction

When the Greek poet Nanos Valaoritis emigrated to the United States, he was already a mature artist shaped by various foreign influences and considered an innovator. One may wonder what blend of cultures could

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result from the passage to America and how the authenticity of his voice was preserved. Moreover, does a pioneer in "the old country" retain his pioneering quality overseas? Can he truly be considered an avant-garde artist?

Valaoritis lives in California in self-imposed exile, a condition first caused by the colonels' 1967 coup in his home country. His American exile is interrupted by yearly visits to Greece; yet although he keeps planning the big leap back, he somehow never makes it. His cosmopolitan existence started with his birth in Lausanne. German, English, and Swiss governesses cared for him and left a deep impression. This cosmopolitanism continued with sojourns in Egypt, then in London, where he married, worked for the BBC, met many influential artists, and translated Seferis. It continued afterwards in Paris, where he met his second wife, an American surrealist painter who introduced him to André Breton's surrealist group. He remained in Paris so many years that his journeys to Greece now always involve a prolonged stopover in Montparnasse and visits to his friends there. With his feet in three continents, three cultures, and three languages, no wonder that this writer should show characteristics of a multiple personality.

Before the dictatorship of the colonels drove him out of Greece, Valaoritis was a living force among the Greek avant-garde. This is the aspect of his work we shall discuss here. The term "avant-garde" somehow smacks of exoticism, an enticing estrangement not unlike the poet's willful alienation. Originally a military term, "avant-garde" designates the troops marching in front (Robert 1971:1.357)—namely, the vanguard of an army, or of a political movement. Chateaubriand in France opposed it to the *corps de bataille* or compared it to a shield; other writers considered artists somehow predestined to become the avant-garde on account of the rapidity of their reflection of events and ideas, and because the role of art is to initiate (Weisgerber 1986:l.18–19). And the British magazine *Horizon* declared: "A literature without an *avant-garde* soon becomes a literature without a main body" (Weisgerber 1986:1.56).

Which avant-garde? A multiple and dated vanguard

How does the word "avant-garde" apply to a poet who has dipped his pen in many inkwells? Metaphorically, the term currently describes "artists or works that give evidence of a will to radically break away from established traditions, conventions, schools" (Sourian 1990:208). Used either positively or negatively, it applies to a group giving itself a mission—namely, to reconnoiter new aesthetic fields, to experiment in them through revolutionary works, and mostly to defend such works

against detractors who remain faithful to academism, tradition, and order. The favorite conventions and processes of the moment are parodied in order to mock bourgeois art. A sociopolitical—even philosophical—content underlies the aesthetic; there is dynamism, radicalism, and trust in the future. In twentieth-century literature, the term designates futurism, dadaism, and surrealism. André Breton is deemed typical since creativity, for him, means struggle against all aspects of order. Although vague, ambiguous, and most often ignored by the creators themselves, the term is nevertheless thought to have rich content opening vast perspectives. Avant-garde artists are seen as dedicated to the concept of art as experiment and as revolt against tradition. Compare Ezra Pound's view that artists "are the antennae of the race," implying a duty to stay ahead of one's time (Baldick 1991:19–20). In sum, the audacities of the avant-garde literary movement enable it to claim the role of precursor.

The word came into English fairly late. Only the metaphorical sense—pioneers or innovators in any art in a particular period—now remains, pointing out the plurality of avant-gardes. Πρωτοπορία, the Greek equivalent for "avant-garde," also suggests the idea of pioneering. Elytis (1974:309) uses the term to underline Valaoritis's importance when he says that the young poet was destined to play ένα σημαντικό ρόλο στο πρωτοποριακό κίνημα in both Greece and Western Europe—was destined to become, in other words, a poet of the vanguard, a πρωτοπόρος.

The vanguard helps to modify public taste. Typically, it does this by initiating and circulating a magazine aimed at enlarging the public's perspectives. If we look at Romania, we find that one magazine succeeded another.[1] All contributed to the Romanian avant-garde movement until poets sought an atmosphere of freedom and serenity in Paris. Valaoritis, who met and made friends with one of these expatriates, Gherasim Luca, and was exposed to lettrism invented in Paris by Isidore Isou, founded the magazine Πάλι (1963–1967), which is cited in dictionaries of surrealism (e.g., Biro and Passeron 1982:193) and also by Mario Vitti (1989:378). He did so with the support of the surrealist poet Andreas Embirikos, who inaugurated Greek surrealism after living close to Breton in Paris.[2] Surrealism helped Greek poetry awaken from the slumber of a belated neo-symbolism. Most Greek surrealists were fluent in French and received their influence from the surrealists' group in Paris. The German occupation of Greece (1941–1944), with its suffering, induced Greek surrealism to achieve a more local focus (Weisgerber 1986:1.445–453).

The number of influences on Valaoritis is immense. Attracted to experimentation, he took part in many innovative trends. Keeping in

mind the avant-garde's foreign origin and its determination to oppose and make new—to "change life," to open vistas and to welcome hybridizations, influences, cross-breeding of schools, forms, and modes—, I shall not restrict my discussion of influences to Greece or to Greek surrealism. Furthermore, I shall not overlook the movement's relation to the visual and other arts, and therefore Valaoritis's comments (in *Terre de diamant*, for example) on drawings by his wife, a surrealist painter, as well as his own production of surrealist collages, mostly in *Páli*, but also in *Hired Hieroglyphs* (1970) and *Diplomatic Relations* (1971).

In order to explore Valaoritis's participations fully, I must of course note his experience in the United States, his balancing of Elytis's *Προσανατολισμοί* (Orientations) with "disorientations," as it were: turnings away from the Orient, from a unique place of reference. Just as the Greek surrealist poet Nicholas Calas went from Paris to New York, so Valaoritis and his wife Marie Wilson went from Athens to San Francisco when the repression of the junta put an end to the poet's activities in Greece. He feels that similar to his role in Greece as precursor at the time of *Páli*, his role in California was to promote surrealism there, where it was little known. His work was published in San Francisco by Kayak and Panjandrum Magazines and Presses and by Wire Press, as well as by City Lights Books, founded by the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, author of the surrealist novel *Her* (1960) and publisher of many Beat Generation writers, notably Allen Ginsberg. In Valaoritis's wake, the poet-*cum*-publisher Dinos Siotis, his junior by two decades, followed the same experimentalist trends that characterize avant-gardism and surrealism.

Parody, pastiche, collage, referentiality

We saw earlier that the avant-garde involves a parodic vein that derides bourgeois art. This element is present in Valaoritis, either through collage or in the bitterly ironic poems written against the junta and its exactions, arrests, imprisonments, and executions—for instance, "The Communicating Vessels of Freedom" (DR) or "Factual Poem II" (DR).[3] That vein is also found in the texts that reveal other influences either by referring directly to another writer or by slipping in a few hints meant to weave a web of connections between Valaoritis and the numerous other artists who have contributed to his way of thinking and tastes, shown the lead, or served as anti-models.

The use of collage demystifies, questioning appearances in the name of a hidden truth. The dadaists were the first to employ this technique, the surrealist Max Ernst the first to show its potentiality (Biro

and Passeron 1982:98–99). It was also used by Eluard, Breton, and Prévert.[4] By resorting to photographs and advertisements, artists were able to make ironic or even sarcastic and irreverent references to sacrosanct works of art such as da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," whom Marcel Duchamp pictured wearing a mustache and a beard in his famous "Tableau Dada" for the cover of Picabia's magazine *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919). This version was called "corrected," "assisted," or "*ready-made*" (Lista, Lemoine, and Nakov 1991:65, 79). The desacralization was extreme because based on the best known, most reproduced works of art. Valaoritis brought a collection of old prints to America and used them for his collages. The prologue to his *Ο Έγχρωμος Στυλογράφος* is illustrated with a spectacle-wearing Mona Lisa entitled "the automatic muse or the great repertoire of pancosmic inspiration"! Sometimes the title bears no relationship to the object painted. *Páli* had collages as well as irreverent, bizarre, or naïve sketches. It also included the photo of a *décollage*, a technique in which superimposed advertising posters are ripped in order to obtain a different kind of collage.[5]

The visual manifestations of surrealism obviously serve to subvert present or past artistic practice, which is reappropriated. These manifestations highlight two aspects of Valaoritis's work: his use of visual images, parallel to his subversion of acoustic images, and his preference for cross-breeding, transformation, metamorphosis, alchemical and chemical concoctions, all derived from a constant appropriation of the surrounding material.

The term "avant-garde" cannot be applied literally to Valaoritis but only figuratively; indeed, as the years went on he was attracted by other schools or genres such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalization (the reversal of codified or natural roles), the last being especially favored because of its retention of the parodic, ironic, or satiric, and its questioning and destabilizing of accepted norms. But this avant-garde stream also carries along in its flow various mostly displaced elements torn away from its banks at different times.

Let us recall the provocative, insolent, and sometimes scandalous works by painters such as Picabia who reveled in nonsense. The dadaists used the currents of their epoch in their art of systematic derision in order to denounce contemporary chaos.[6] Surrealism is very much the product of human history (Béhar and Carassou 1984:6), but one needs to recall Breton's distinction between the surrealism practiced in France between 1924 and 1969, and an ahistoric "eternal surrealism" whose elements may be found in any culture at any time.

Two poles of attraction

Valaoritis is among a number of Greek poets who have been deeply and lastingly influenced by surrealism. Being at a crossroads, he needs to be linked to two poles. The first consists of the refugees in Paris who sought a nest for their revolutionary activities in French surrealism and in the French symbolists and surrealists—figures such as Isidore Ducasse, the comte de Lautréamont, Alfred Jarry, Breton, and Eluard, for all of whom he felt a strong affinity. The second consists of Greek surrealists such as Nicholas Calas (= Nikitas Randos), Odysseus Elytis, Nikos Engonopoulos, Nikos Gatsos, Miltos Sachtouris, and finally Andreas Embirikos, whose reading sessions for his friends in his home are described by Odysseus Elytis (1974:292).[7] And of course there was also a later affinity to poets such as Octavio Paz, who was accorded a place of honor in *Páli*.

One must always keep in mind Greece's position between the Occident and the Orient—or, rather, her closeness to both. The Greek literary atmosphere surrounding Palamas had consisted of rationalism, intellectualism, and scientism, but the generation following the Μικρασιατική καταστροφή—Greece's defeat in Asia Minor in 1922—declared traditional prosody obsolete and launched all sorts of experimentation. France and Greece shared a common interest in futurism, dadaism, and then surrealism.[8] The "hunting of words" characteristic of demotic poets corresponds to an attraction to folksongs,[9] the two poles being lyricism and prose. Even Seferis's poetry is said to have a French flavor issuing from Mallarmé and Valéry (Dimaras 1965:513), yet also involving two poles: his position as a Smyrniot on the dividing line between the East and the West, mysticism and rationalism, the rigor of form and the audacity of innovation. But is this not the essence of Hellenism at its best?

Valaoritis has occasionally been criticized for his heterogeneity. One must acknowledge the existence of at least two complementary *oeuvres*, one in Greek and another in English, each conveying a substantially different sense. He tended to become impregnated with the "spirit of place," to borrow his friend Lawrence Durrell's title (1969); his work bears the colors and marks of each separate soil on which it was written. Therefore, to study his possible relationship to the avant-garde will necessarily involve awareness of a number of models or father-figures, either revered or (affectionately) mocked. These models are either inherited from a long tradition beginning with classical Greece or borrowed from the different sources from which the poet gathered examples in his foreign peregrinations, particularly surrealism, which he deems as fleeting and difficult to grasp as lightning, and defines as

follows: «δεν είναι ούτε "δόγμα" ούτε κλειστό φιλοσοφικό σύστημα αλλά μία ανοιχτή και αέναα αναπροσαρμοζόμενη "μέθοδος" σκέψης και αντιμετώπισης της ζωής» (1990a:24–25; it is neither a "dogma" nor a closed philosophical system but an open and perpetually readjusted "method" of thinking and of facing life).

The debt to the ancients; traces of a classical education

Homer is the supreme model for Valaoritis, who, boasting mockingly about his classical education, claims that he read the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in ancient Greek, then in Spanish, and asserts that salacious, untranslatable jokes circulated in Homeric jargon when he was young. Indeed, he claims that he was forced to learn the Homeric epics by heart, and that the lines clung to his memory, accounting for the Homeric insertions in his own poetry. But these insertions are a parody of Homer using an invented "Homeric dialect" that is an amalgam of French, Greek, and Latin (1990b:11). Sometimes Valaoritis writes under Homer's magic dictation, for he is his "reincarnation"; at other times, imagining his literary afterlife, he dictates to a living poet from the tomb (1990b:86).

What can ancient Greece, classicism, and surrealism have in common apart from borrowings such as the Minotaur story from mythology—for example, Picasso's imagining the monster's various animalistic and human aspects? In Valaoritis, the Minotaur theme inevitably alludes to Picasso's illustration in the famed surrealist magazine bearing that title. Valaoritis plays with the assonance between this name and others, such as Minos. Oedipus and Eurydice now form the Minotaur ("Orpheus and Eurydice," DR), hiding mythology behind a psychoanalytical veil applied by the surrealists. In addition, automatic writing, allowing authors to imagine themselves in communion with the spirit of a long-dead person, enabled Valaoritis to commune with his ancestor Aristotle, and others. Among protean incarnations, Penelope knits socks and then undoes them, a Centaur appears but with a Cyclops' ears (1980:82), and Pandora carries a camera that "will . . . reveal the holographic record of my voice" (1980:111). An Odyssey takes place, avoiding the clashing rocks and the sirens—not to mention the sirens of the "SS Rotterdam." Ithaca proves to be New York, where the Statue of Liberty has been removed from its pedestal and America is characterized by survival of the fittest, natural selection, and death in a future era ("A Fabulous Crossing," DR). The poem-list "Endless Crucifixion" uses real and mythological characters such as Empedocles, Plato, Socrates, Hypatia, Peregrinos, and Icarus as counterparts to a list of other characters from all ages and categories—be they Christ, Hitler, or

Marilyn Monroe—that convey a general sense of turmoil, anarchy, and chaos.

An ambiguous ancestry

Derision does not entirely mask Valaoritis's pride in a distinguished heritage. The poet plays with the ambiguity of homophony, for example concerning his great-grandfather Aristotle Valaoritis (1824–1879), who criticized Solomos for his ignorance of demotic Greek and wanted to create a true national poetry (Vitti 1989:220–221). These allusions to his ancestor appear even in his English texts, where they are probably not caught by Anglophone readers, all the more so owing to the inevitable ambiguity regarding his forebear in antiquity. The poet is thrilled by the hybrids formed by this and other dual references that bridge the centuries. He facetiously recreates the myth of Cronos and Zeus while ridiculing the contemporary Greek habit of giving one's progeny first names drawn from mythological figures or philosophers of the golden age: "My mother's name was Hellas. . . . [H]er husband Eros . . . tried to devour me. But I gave him small change in manuscripts to eat instead. He still asks me for more. That is why I keep on producing." Like the pound of flesh in *The Merchant of Venice*, writing is exacted as a ransom as dear as the poet's very life. But let us complete the family: "I had a bearded uncle called Demosthenes, a great-uncle called Xenophon and a plain uncle called Aristotle. With so many classical names in my family, how could I ever go wrong" ("A Classical Education," 1990b:12). The poet goes on to say that he derived no benefit from this heritage. His style came mostly later, instilled by waiters and prostitutes, whose eloquence reminded him of the ancient Greeks. However, he acknowledges a debt to the Greeks for teaching him to write in balanced sentences. Placing Aristotle against Nanos (which also means "dwarf") underlines the diminutive of Ioannis ("The Voice of Artaud," AP). The poet becomes "a totally insignificant Greek poet" (1980:34); he even metamorphoses into Kostis Palamas, the patriarchal poet of the demotic language, who must make a speech to the senior Valaoritis's offspring (1982c:23). Valaoritis's peroration and sophistries about Parmenides (1980:137; 1982b:94) are sometimes hardly less intricate than Plato's in the *Theaitetos* or the *Parmenides*, and his endless revolving around nothingness (1990b:77) comically boils down to nothing.

Surrealistic manifestations

The surrealistic paraphernalia of incongruous situations includes bird-feathers solemnly served in a restaurant: "They serve us those downy

morsels with cold formality" (FB). The surrealistic images that Breton—quoting Lautréamont, Aragon, Robert Desnos, Philippe Soupault, or himself—soberly analyzes as "naturally lending the mask of the concrete to the abstract, or vice versa" (1983:52–53) are legion with Valaoritis. For example, a poem entitled "The 'Complete' Works of Marcel Duchamp" (1970:36) treats the invention of the sort of surrealistic objects that are kept in museums or are recorded in dictionaries of the movement: "An eye-sharpener for short-sighted people / A sound refresher for the deaf / A novel-reader injection with all the classics in the form of liquid peptide memory cells . . . / A laugh-grinding machine." Once in a while the surrealistic objects in Valaoritis's texts recall similar objects that had already appeared in surrealist art—for example, a chair covered with fur, recalling Meret Oppenheim's bowl covered with fur called *Déjeuner en fourrure* (Biro and Passeron 1982:122).

Breton declared that the fauna and the flora of surrealism are "unavowable," quoting "the soluble fish" and "the elephants with women's heads and the flying lions" (1983:55); he and Eluard used the *oiseau-lyre* as a starter for imagining other fantastic species. In "The 'Complete' Works of Marcel Duchamp," Valaoritis's bestiary is a game employing exotic species (all of which, however, actually exist in Australia)—for example, the "lyre-bird," a loan translation from French *oiseau-lyre* mentioned above, "a kookaburra bird," "a snoring bower-bird," "a lung-fish," mixing both their improbable and authentic names with the imaginary "antelope fish," "barking spider," "air-breathing spider," "magnetic ant-hill," "giant earthworm," "cycling lizard," "six-inch marsupial-mole" (1970:36). One is reminded of Hans Arp's whimsical "bestiary without a first name," where the lion wears a mustache in pure flamboyant gothic and the snail wears a golden hat, a laughter of flora, and a gelatin gun (Breton 1966:365–366).

Metaphors are twisted: "A sad expression on the persona's face provokes autumn weather" (1980:87). Animate features are attributed to inanimate objects; several pages of equations animate the inanimate or render the abstract concrete («Μεσσαλίνα», 1982a:51–55). This is a metamorphosis that Breton used, with furniture getting changed into lions in whose manes chairs are consumed (Breton 1950:106). The intangible assumes a palpable shape: thought is identical to hair (Valaoritis 1980:107); a voice materializes into a tree that, losing its foliage and branches, changes color with each whispered word. Frontiers between categories are arbitrarily crossed. Most often, no deep meaning is contained within these slips of the tongue, these dislocations of the sequence of speech; yet some images are surprisingly innovative and original—for example, "in your eyes young gods come down to drink water" (1977:9).

Dreams, dear to surrealism, are also present. Rather than appearing as premonitions as they do in Greek myth, they are Freudian symptoms manifesting the subconscious, which is why Breton recorded them so scrupulously (1981:31–33, 71–74). Valaoritis utters a telling Hellenism (or is it a Freudian slip?) when he employs the normal Greek idiom "I saw dreams" instead of the normal English "I had a dream" ("Nameless Being," DR), making dreams resemble visitations, visionary projections, visual apparitions. Moreover, dreams are castrating: the poet is "emasculated by dreams" (1980:40). We have come far from Raymond Queneau's poster, "Not to dream is prohibited" (Bedouin 1964:230).

Eccentric aberrations also occur with regularity. "Gerard de Nerval's eternal challenge as he walked to the Palais Royal with a lobster on a leash" reappears in Sinclair's keeping a shrimp on a leash (1980:111). Sometimes the monochrome underlining the nonsense recalls Beckett denouncing the absurd boredom of daily life: "It has been raining all day. The doctor cannot come tomorrow. Today is not Friday. It will be Friday in two days. When the rain stops I will go and visit my aunt" ("English Composition 3," 1990b:75). It is as if the ceaseless rain had leveled all sensations to an apathetic, anaesthetizing formlessness.

The poem-list "Endless Crucifixion," mentioned earlier for its syncretic amalgamation of real and imaginary characters, seems to have been built on the pattern of one of Breton's syllogistic demonstrations regarding the surrealistic vein in most writers of the nineteenth century, whom he views as unconscious precursors of the movement (Béhar 1984:113–114). The litanic permutations provoking endless repetitions can almost be compared to what has been called "tychosyntax," in which purely conjectural techniques are employed (Weisgerber 1986:2.929–930).

One easily recognizes some additional tropes of surrealism—for example, hypertrophy of the metaphorical, multiplication of "isotopies" (isotopic planes),[10] exacerbation of the polysemy of the trope, and treating figurative language as literal. The verbal becomes real, the connative denotative, and vice versa. The reversibility of planes creates the illusion that they have been abolished.

Ludicity and metamorphosis

The word "surrealist" is sometimes "in shackles" (1970:33), or "written with lacteous letters of cosmic matter on a sky of black ebony," or "raising its transparent head" (1970:24) after being submitted to all kinds of refined, exotic, hypnotic, or hallucinogenic treatment. But

surrealism is far from being just a word or a twist of the face. It often marries other trends quite naturally. Its ludic element spawns experiments as though it were a playground retaining the games without bothering to sweep up the false starts. Sometimes the linguistic distortion mimics the children's game in which one child whispers a phrase in his neighbor's ear, the neighbor repeats the phrase in his neighbor's ear, and so forth until the end of the chain is reached, by which time the repeated phrase bears little resemblance to the original. The same happens with objects; they are transformed and metamorphosed until they become unrecognizable: "I lent my kidney for a week to C" ends with the kidney being transported, restored, sold, resold, and finally turned into a liver ("In the Clutches of Frugality," 1980:29). "Anastronomical Details," beside the portmanteau word, is a one-page text bearing no trace of any pause for breathing except for a few semicolons (which in Greek are question marks!). Syntax is destroyed when pronouns have no antecedents and nominalized phrases are embedded in a web of intricacies that cannot be disentangled. The absurdity of the content is heightened by punctuation meant to lead the reader astray, losing him in a labyrinth of words and finally abandoning him with the three dots of an ellipsis. "Descriptive Refusal to Describe a House in a Garden" (FB, 93) follows the pattern of the nursery rhyme "This is the house that Jack built" in that the details get enmeshed in a network of linkages. Written entirely in telegraphic style, "Too Much" (1980:123) describes a nervous wreck of a man under pressure, a man so overwhelmed that he throws a syncopated sentence like a bone to whoever will catch it. We are reminded of the traditional form in Attic comedy called τὸ πνῖγος, "the strangler," a sort of patter song recited without a breath and thus liable to "strangle" the actor reciting it (Cuddon 1979:515). But then did not Breton urge his disciples to write without rereading their work and without using punctuation, which interrupts the flow? He invited surrealists to break silence by resorting to the arbitrary: "Trust the inexhaustible character of murmuring" (Breton 1983:43, "Secrets de l'art magique surréaliste").

Postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction

Surrealism is now dated. Gazing in the mirror, Valaoritis observes with consternation his own change from classical Hellenism to surrealism: "My face this morning has a surrealist twist to it / What has happened you might ask to that classical / Quality for which it was known?" (FB) The poet talks of the present as a post-surrealistic era, a post-Apollonian one. In conversations with me in 1983, he maintained that there reigns

such a lack of continuity in Greece, such a climate of nihilism and uninterrupted chaos, that one's philosophy needs moderation and reflection.

As a literary influence after the historical movement subsided, surrealism has remained mainly in novels. But it has also led to schools such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and Derrida's deconstructionist theory:

> Postmodernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random swirl of empty signals. . . . [T]he post-modernist greets a certain numbed or flippant indifference, favouring self-consciously "depthless" works of fabulation, pastiche, bricolage; or aleatory disconnection . . . playing with contradictory orders of reality and the irruption of the fabulous in the secular world. (Baldick 1991:174–175)

It seems that postmodernism has caught up with Valaoritis. The fragmentary, the disconnected, and the incoherent are constantly described by him as his love of the anacoluthon, a breach in syntax and meaning (1990b:12, "A Classical Education"). As evidence for postmodernism in Valaoritis we have his unreal images, pastiche, parodic vein; his collage of bits and pieces of quotes, ideas, names, allusions; and his references in words, not only in images. The fabulous constantly intrudes upon the most ordinary, trite, and banal aspects of daily life. These surrealistic characteristics of his prose are akin to the characteristics of postmodernism elaborated above. The poet himself indicates that his narrator in *Ο προδότης του γραπτού λόγου* is a postmodern character *par excellence*, one who dissolves the modern character, for he employs all the styles that appeal to him, writing first a poetic tale, then a realistic one in a consciously shocking manner. The cause is not any incapacity to compose in a unified, homogeneous style, but the desire to take advantage of the freedom that postmodernism provides to move about in all genres (Hatzidaki 1983:71). Sometimes this narrator goes so far that he can no longer decipher his own writing or make sense of it.

Poststructuralism includes the philosophical deconstruction advocated by Jacques Derrida and his followers, who "emphasized the instability of meanings and of intellectual categories (including that of the human 'subject') . . . favoured a non-hierarchical plurality of 'free play' of meanings, stress[ed] the indeterminacy of texts" (Baldick 1991:176), and considered totalitarian any theoretical system claiming universal value.

To show the impact of Derrida's deconstructionist theory on Valaoritis, one might recall a few key catch-phrases in the philosopher's anti-system. Derrida claims that an amount of "madness" must preside over thought (Ewald 1991; Rorty 1991). How could this not enthrall a poet who keeps celebrating his own folly and humanity's universal madness? Derrida defines "deconstructions" (which he puts in the plural) as dislocations that repeat themselves regularly wherever there is something rather than nothing—in any text, any experience. Each deconstructive reading offers other landmarks. Deconstruction is a force that unknots conventional bonds and allows the construction of unheard-of relationships. Its joyful relativity and its misalliances serve to carnivalize the text, overturning codified or natural roles (Bakhtin 1970:170–180). For Bakhtin, Socrates was a deconstructionist when he "recontextualized" Homer. Has Bakhtin not assimilated Socrates to dialogism, the constant hiatus between two languages that refuse to come to terms with each other? In other words, was not even deconstructionism first taught by the ancient Greeks?

Valaoritis's motto, "Styles must be forgotten as soon as they are learnt" ("Coming Attractions," AP), encourages him to break personal styles, to change styles continually, thanks most basically to his voracious reading and to the enticing attraction of the new and the exotic, as if they were a way to reactivate his "otherness." One school yields to another; imagists are replaced by glossocentrists; the poem becomes an object as it was for dadaists. The Beat Generation and Allen Ginsberg contribute in a manner not altogether alien to surrealism. The novel *Απ' τα κόκκαλα βγαλμένη* alludes to the linguistic manifesto against Yannis Psiharis as an example of grotesque intolerance: the refusal to change styles.[11]

Humor, surrealism, dialogism, and carnivalization

Humor is one more element that must be taken into account by the critic reading Valaoritis. Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1966) gave a privileged position to the surrealists. Valaoritis is very much attached to humor. In a chapter entitled «Το χιούμορ στον ελληνικό υπερρεαλισμό» (1990a:151–172),[12] he reviews all forms of humor in the Greek writers who were not primarily surrealistic, suggesting that Seferis's humor might be called "Anatolian," "Smyrniot." He even relates practical jokes such as a hoax between Gatsos and Katsimbalis that he finds surrealistic in its reasoning (although a French reader might hear in it Pagnol's dialogue between Raimu and his pals). He argues that even *Amorgos* by Gatsos could be considered a piece of humor since its title is apparently meant to waylay the reader, given that

the island is never referred to. For him, the most amusing line in Engonopoulos is one that Engonopoulos once read in front of a small assembly: "Bolivar, you are as beautiful as a Greek." Valaoritis uses this line unchanged as a collage in his novel *Η δολοφονία* (1984). The humor derives from the sarcastic tone. Reviewing the humor of Greek poets, he concludes: "Paradoxically, the climate of surrealism is somewhat more general than what is believed." He also recalls the deep implications of laughter, which Freud viewed as "a manifestation of the subconscious or of the unconscious" (1990a:151).

This leads him to Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization, which he sums up as the intermingling of the serious and the humorous, the vision of life as a tragicomedy rather than either a farce or a tragedy. He links Bakhtin's theory of dialogism with Socrates' dialogues and Socratic irony (1990a:156). If one pays attention to literature written by Greeks either in Greece itself or in the diaspora, rarely does one find the absence of humor or even of the carnivalesque element. Let us mention just one Greek writer in America, Stratis Haviaras, whose novels include a marvelously exuberant, if sometimes desperate, carnivalesque streak that borrows from the dionysiac to enable tragedy to be transcended by comedy, celebrating life in the midst of death or other forms of nonbeing. Valaoritis pushes the conceit to the extreme; indeed, in some dialogues people become their own voices to such an extent that although the voices can be heard the people can no longer be seen. The reader becomes an acoustic voyeur of a private conversation for which the eavesdropping narrator acts as a not altogether objective or sympathetic filter and a foil for the couple's debates («Στην αναποδογυρισμένη πολυθρόνα καθισμένος» ["Sitting on an Overturned Rocking-chair"], 1982a:64).

We could even say that aphorisms,[13] syllogisms, poststructuralist parodies, and nonsensical distortions of logic are likely to fit into the dialogical vein. The reason is that the distorted product derives its humor from its implicit deviance from orthodox reasoning (which is absent). The double parody of "My love for sophistry is only equalled / by my sophistry of love" ("Advice to a Young Poet," 1990b:83–84) should be taken with a generous pinch of salt.

Intertextuality and theorizing

Theorizing about writing has its limits even though Valaoritis indulges in it, solemnly donning his professor's mortar-board even as he analyzes humor. It is conscientiously mocked in "To be wedded to ideas is an uncertain form of marriage" (1970:28–30). There, after a chaotic and anachronistic review of writers from Rabelais to Apollinaire and from

Socrates to Rimbaud, Valaoritis gives advice that is consistently negative, prohibitive, or designed to protect him from external influences that might be aggressive. Yet one movingly serious poem, «Ανώνυμο ποίημα του Φωτεινού Αγγιάννη» (1977), describes the poet's method—namely, allowing himself to be haunted by the words of those he admires until he starts the long process of reappropriation and transformation. By means of a complex assimilation of the material to be digested, he rewrites the others' words and makes them his own. The process seems akin to a communion, with the same profane and sacred elements, cannibalistic and eucharistic, respectively. "Transubstantiation" (1970:21) concerns the metamorphosis into a bicycle of an empty square, a perfect void, and the phantasms and refractions that accompany this process. "Grabouldiga" describes the eternal recycling of thoughts and words by someone who elsewhere ("Heresies and Other Heresies," AP) is called the "universal thief"; the poem describes the collector of others' waste as being the "reflection and the inventor / Of a general utopia in his mind" (1982b:57).

My purpose in this short article is not to quote every example of intertextuality; nor would that be possible, for the examples are so numerous. But let me note Valaoritis's frequent reference to the work of surrealistic painters such as Magritte and Dali ("The Hand of Fatima or the Stumbling-Block," AP; "Egg or Landscape," HPE). From Apollinaire he borrows several "calligrams"—e.g., "Tornado" and "Gasp," whose respective shapes of a funnel and a lasso growing into an alembic mimic the feeling they intend to convey. This aesthetic experimentalism—evidenced in "The Lair of Borisowski" (1980:105–106), whose main clause lacks a verb—is a breathtaking advance toward an ever-receding goal. As the sentence grows longer, laden with relative clauses, the advance becomes increasingly absurd, as if meaningfulness were willfully avoided, and violence reduced to the nouns "knout" and "mouth"—a mouth that changes location, becoming now animate now inanimate, and finally metamorphosing into the opening of an empty well.

Edward Lear's illustrated limericks are transposed into quatrains in which the litanic repetitions beginning each line echo the nonsense rhymes' childish rhythms. The animal characters remind one of Lear's "dolumphious duck," "enthusiastic elephant," or "absolutely abstemious ass," but the inspiration abruptly deviates, following a different course that leads to a trite, flat ending that belies the beginning's fantastic promise: "There was an eagle known as blind / There is a gazelle known as crocodile / There are jaws that resemble hibernating bears / There are lovely women outside these flower-pots" (1980:58). Direct borrowings from Lewis Carroll are frequent, as are allusions by virtue of portmanteau words or inventive past participles such as "bronted"

("Bronted with dostoevskian frenzy behind black crystal doors" [1980:27]). But was not Carroll a precursor of surrealism? The metamorphoses of the human body undergone by Alice in Wonderland acquire an increased impact when the Greek persona changes size, shape, sex, and is finally decapitated, as if fulfilling the Queen's command: "Off with their heads!" Of course Kafka's influence is also strongly felt in the multiple metamorphoses of the body undergone by these protagonists, reminding us of Gregor Samsa's transformation into a bug in "The Metamorphosis" (Breton 1966:335–346). Mark Twain's black humor was noted by Breton, who included Twain in his Anthology; reminiscences of it are found in Valaoritis's «Ο ομιλών πίθηκος ή η προφητεία» (1986a:60–63) and in «Ο μουσικοσυνθέτης» (1986a:55–59), where gulls and quacks are as blatant as in "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," to cite just one of Twain's tall tales. Valaoritis makes literary capital out of everything that passes by: he confesses, for example, that his novel *Η δολοφονία* (The Assassination) was partly influenced by one of Woody Allen's early movies! At the same time, some eccentric theories are put into practice by human beings of another era circling in orbit around the earth to decrease their age. These are probably rooted in the theory of relativity and the experiments conducted by scientists with the Langevin twins or Halley's clocks sent in a plane to check how the time they indicated differed from the time of the clocks left on earth.

The result of this vampiristic habit is double-faced; the "universal ghost-writer" is in fact a universal vampire operating telepathically even after his death (*My Afterlife Guaranteed*). Valaoritis justifies Elytis's intertextuality in these terms: "Elytis's text needs to be grafted onto another to be produced, without losing its originality" (1988). It seems that the remark could apply to Valaoritis's own poetry. It is a question not only of "changing life" but also of changing poetry and changing language. For anyone in the vanguard, what matters is to make progress. As Elytis said about Picasso, "He knows that the main thing is to move forward. At any price and by all means, except submission, compromise, or blind obedience" (1974:435).

"Phallogocentrism" or egomania/self-referentiality

"One aspect of surrealism that seems optimally to characterize Valaoritis is "focusing the attention on the narrator, who is in the centre of the discourse, being not so much a narrator of fiction as a living seat of speech" (Béhar and Carassou 1984:84). It is tempting to use Derrida's notion of "phallogocentrism" (a portmanteau word suggesting a Freudian fixation) to describe a poet whose persona, engrossed in the narcissistic contemplation of self, is preoccupied with his neuroses and

their cure. For he displays perversities and ego-distortions such as megalomania, paranoia, and schizophrenia, to name but a few, that are almost caricatures. The self is many, the narrator a multitude enduring the same dismembering and dismantling that happens to the poor female doll-creatures that he buys, takes apart, puts back together again, and trades. His treatment of them is reminiscent of the surrealist Hans Bellmer's treatment of his dolls—his anatomic anagrams where the body is indefinitely permutable and is changed into the elements surrounding it (Biro and Passeron 1982:344). Dali also asserted that "the spectral woman will be the woman that can be taken apart" (Breton 1966:414–415). Valaoritis, in «Η νύφη» (1982a:59–61) or in «Η δεσποινίς Ολτράκ ή πριν χάσουν τα δόντια τους οι τίγρεις των εθνών» (1982a:96–121) describes these female objects that are sometimes of desire, sometimes of hatred, sometimes themselves perpetrators of tyranny. «Η Γολέμ» (1987:18–19), a female doll, is beautifully evoked through its components in a manner reminiscent of Breton's "L' Union libre" but is deconstructed, melted down, and finally evaporated, leaving but a trace of rust on the page of an old book.

Deconstruction is practiced in many ways in *Ο διαμαντένιος γαληνευτής* and most typically in the brief text «Με ακουστική φαντασία» (1981:45–46). Its epigraph is also its final phrase, *Omnia ex nihilo sunt*, an appropriate illustration for a systematic deconstruction of one sentence by the next: "I had come here for the first time. And yet I had lived here for years. . . . Nobody except the police knows who I am. And yet in front of me was a man who was waiting for me. He had waited for me for years. He is waiting for me yet. He was waiting for me and yet he did not know whom he was waiting for" (1986b:45). Hence it is hardly surprising if, at the end, the "stranger that I was for this man, I was also for myself." The reader eventually expects the full circle of emptiness to return: "From naught I start; back to naught I go. Silence, howls, and again silence" (1986b:46). The other "stranger" turns into a Dracula trying to drink blood from the narrator's throat. The narrator calls him an "angel of the inferno." In sum, what we have as a rough definition for any play, performance, or piece of writing—or, indeed, for any living process—is: "a handful of dust." In a previous piece («Ενώ προηγουμένως», 1981:20–21), the narrator himself chooses to become a vampire bat. Elsewhere he becomes a harlequin («Και πολύ αργότερα», 1981:22), another form of appropriation of different colors, a borrowing from the *commedia dell' arte*. Along the same lines we could add the picaresque, clearly evoked in "Small Contribution to the Windmill Series" (1990b:78). Any protagonist is reversible into his antagonist, any locutor into his interlocutor, any victim into his enemy. The confusion of the origin of any act—or speech—is illustrated by the freedom of comparison between

extremes. In «Μέ» (1982b:53–54), words seem to be looking for alternatives, trying out different declensions, persons, number. They are replaced by others belonging to identical grammatical categories but differing in meaning. In addition, there are recurrences, assonances, plays on polarity, "with the mouth full, with the mind empty . . . with yes and no . . . in the dark—in the light in bed reading with the light, of the moon, with the light of the sky in the dark . . . she makes love with no one, with someone, with me with another with no one with all together with no one with whining with grimaces with laughter with smiles" («Μέ», 1982b:54–55). Different rhetorical devices privilege the zeugma cherished by Lewis Carroll; the preposition "with" takes on a different meaning and function according to context. The whole text races forward in pursuit of itself, with its logical signs—sounds, sense, rhythm—being used and abused to express the disorienting absurdity. The law of contrasts seems to apply one of the staples of Bakhtin's dialogism, which Valaoritis is as familiar with as he is with Dostoevski, Kakfa, and the many other figures he discussed in his comparative literature courses in San Francisco State University.

Just as the persona frequently loses his head, either because he is too busy singing "in praise of folly" ("A Classical Education," 1990b) or because he is decapitated, so language, too, constantly dismembered and re-membered, perpetually evokes the ghosts of history or prehistory—Helen of Troy, Hermes, Noah—indulging in an obstinate cleansing of memory. What remains is an identification of the product, the written text, with the inscriber of a language that is sometimes supposed to have been transmitted from the other world by a universal ghostwriter (who could be yourself, the reader). The image of the scribe haunts the poet at all times; hence his self-description of the act of composing, overwhelmed as he is by a flood of written matter that invades his premises and threatens to drive the neighbors out-of-doors. "How I wrote some of my books" (1980:72), a hint to Raymond Roussell, is one of many titles referring to this lethal addiction to writing, this graphomania. The titles in English and Greek revolve around some form of discourse: In Greek, *Ο ομιλών πίθηκος*, *Ο προδότης του γραπτού λόγου*, *Στο κάτω κάτω της γραφής*, *Ο έγχρωμος στυλογράφος*, *Η πουπουλένια εξομολόγηση*; in English, "Hypnotic Pencils," "De-Scriptive Poems," "Two In-De-Scribable Poems," "Uninterrupted Poem," *Hired Hieroglyphs*, "Language or Silence?" and "Where Does the Spirit of Your Poetry Reside?" The writer is so dependent upon his writing, his very sap equaling that of his production, that he cannot accept the idea of closure: that a story must end. Sometimes he reasons that the best way to write a story that is not a story is not to write it; sometimes he decides to leave a poem unfinished, or muses about "those who pretend not to

know where this story will presently end" (1981:47) since the moment of weaning, of severance from the text, is more difficult than even the contemplation of the possible breakdown of inspiration.

That the logos is the guide is evidenced by *Απ' τα κόκκαλα βγαλμένη* (1982), a peritext[14] whose title is taken, of course, from Solomos's famous «Ὕμνος εἰς τήν Ἐλευθερίαν». The novel is centered on a diglossia that engenders utter chaos. This is personified on the very first page by the appearance in a dream of a woman who speaks two languages and is a two-faced Janus, one half of her countenance being the sun, the other half darkness, as if we were at the dawn of creation and the world were dividing in two in accordance with God's command. What follows is a series of juxtapositions of extreme polarities—the woman is everything and its opposite, the incarnation of a split personality made of Siamese twins, dual yet single. The nightmare is inescapable because it is also its antithesis—namely, reality. These elements exemplify both carnivalization and dialogism, the former being the overturning of codified or natural roles, as we saw earlier—such as a man dressing as a woman—while the latter, as we also saw earlier, is the constant hiatus between two languages that refuse to come to terms with each other.

The latter phenomenon is repeated here and there, as in "In the Middle of the Book of Behemoth," where two camps are divided by their language, comically transcribed by approximate signs in the Greek alphabet, «Λεχ ελαούντ», «Αχλαούντ», «Νταούλ ελ ναούτ γκορέλ» (1981:26–30). Behemoth earns a living as an interpreter for one party. The bivocality advocated by Bakhtin—the notion of a writer being plurilingual in that his language is stratified into different languages—certainly finds a dazzling illustration here. The writer's dramatic masks never lack linguistic masks, as is suggested by the expression "[a] linguistic islet where destiny had thrown him" (1981:42). This is an islet surrounded no doubt by a linguistic ebb and flow and many streams, where no meaning is fixed, no sense claimed, no origin determined, no destination predetermined; where words are continually crossed by tributaries of both connotations and denotations from other layers of meaning, other strata of sedimentation, other semantic fields. The logos is the beginning, just as chaos is the beginning of creation. Of course, diglossia has been a much more concrete and real experience for Greeks than for most other peoples, owing partly to the presence of medieval Greek in the Orthodox liturgy and partly to the coexistence of καθαρεύουσα and δημοτική at least until two decades ago, when demotic was officially sanctioned by the Greek state.

Harlequin defies defining

It is useless to make a clear distinction among schools, influences, movements, models, patriarchal literary figures, or genres—for example, the author describes his *Θησαυρός του Ξέρξη* (1984) as a "realistic *phantasmagoria*"! Indeed, each characteristic element of surrealism in Valaoritis resonates either in postmodernism / deconstruction and vice versa or in Bakhtinian dialogism and vice versa. Conscious of carnivalism (even courting it) is this odd sentence: "A carnival discovery in the square millimeter of a foreign tongue" ("An Example of an Example," n.d.) The epigraph of the unpublished "An Example of an Example" is an ode to deconstructionism: "Clearly these things are *constructions*. / Who uses languages *constructively*? / Many people do. For instance, Carpenter" (italics added). In this harlequin's coat, in this picaresque hero, in this "phallogocentric" deconstructionist surrealist, there remains a poet who never tires of seeking his roots in order better to deny them, and at the same time better to assess them, just as his protagonist loses himself in the crowd of a café in order to look for himself. His listing of his different nationalities, beginning with "I am Greek with your open vowels" (1980:41), is a way of illustrating how he can slip into the skin of a cosmopolitan crowd.

The danger of becoming a chameleon is clearly announced in "A New Poetic Movement," where the "Intertextuals" proclaim "lack of originality a virtue" and preserve "their caste from the obsession of difference" (1990b:15–16). They have become gray, asexual nonentities whose different throats emit the same voice thanks to obligatory surgery. They managed to rewrite "verbatim quite spontaneously and intentionally the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," an exploit now endlessly copied by their followers. This nightmarish, science-fiction vision is a satire on schools, homogeneity, conformism, the establishment of rigid rules, and the fawning on masters to the degree where spontaneity and originality degenerate, becoming mere dictation and copying. The vision is also a haunting fear of repeating oneself or others or of using the same word to begin each and every line, as for example in *Hired Hieroglyphs* (1970). The one thing that Valaoritis knows for certain is: "Pure poetry exists only in the mind" ("Blank Dawn as Requested," [unpublished]).

Conclusion

Nanos Valaoritis is improperly classified in the avant-garde because his *oeuvre* is such a motley, subdivided one, and because in spite of his innovations, experiments, musings, and detours he seems to want to leave a wake behind him. He never sells his soul to the vampires or

ghouls, nor does he become a ghost-writer in the sense of betraying words: hiring hieroglyphs to do their job or his. The reciprocity, reversibility, and bipolarity of the relationship of reader to writer might be associated with an avant-garde that paradoxically has become an *arrière-garde* in the military sense of a corps that brings up the rear. Has Nanos Valaoritis not been called "the last Greek surrealist" (Levi 1991:31)? The Robert dictionary (1971:1.248) quotes the phrase *L'humanisme n'apparaît plus que comme un combat d'arrière-garde* and indicates the role of the rear guard, which may be to protect the retreat. But Valaoritis has not abandoned the avant-garde. Even though his humanism pierces through his sometimes sadistic descriptions of bloody disfigurement, beheading, or dismembering, he nevertheless remains faithful to surrealism.[15]

Valaoritis's *Ανώνυμο ποίημα του Φωτεινού Αηγιάννη* (1974) has been duly noted for its acute awareness of the act of writing (Lambropoulos 1988:151–153) along with Eleni Vakalo's "The Way for Us to Risk" (1966) and Viron Leondaris's "Only by Sorrow" (1976). Lambropoulos deems Valaoritis's attempt a rereading of Angelos Sikelianos's *Πρόλογος στη ζωή* (1915–1918). His postmodernist endeavor goes against the grain of the diluted modernism that is currently rampant in Greece; the threatening nature of the avant-garde seems to be proportionate to the growth of antimodernism and conservatism in Greece, not to mention the growth of self-satisfied jingoism. Roditi (1990:48–49) underlines how the concept of the avant-garde may have been satirized by Valaoritis:

> In "A New Poetic Movement," Valaoritis exerts his irony against the whole increasingly outmoded notion of a literary or artistic *avant-garde* which, above all in the United States, has managed in recent years to impose itself as both an absurdly vain "cult of personality" and a new kind of academism. . . . [He] reveals, in very ironic satirical terms, how very "trendy" much of our literature is rapidly becoming, in fact all too much a matter of mere fashion, like the ready-to-wear trade in clothing.

Of course, one may wonder whether the phenomenon of the avant-garde is not a continually recurring one—whether there might not be an "eternal avant-garde." However, there is no reason why the πρωτοπόρος should not be the remnant of a declining era.

Valaoritis has undoubtedly served his time in Greece. Whether that time is over and he will now earn the respect due him is a matter for conjecture.[16] His arrival in California—etymologically "the fertile land"—has not passed unnoticed. He seems to have sown and reaped there, gathered and expanded, gained some notoriety. No one is a prophet in his own country. Noting that *My Afterlife Guaranteed* (1990) was published

in California before it came out in a modified version in Greece (1993), we may conclude that Einstein's theory of relativity (which inspired the poet), even if it be a joyful relativity according to Bakhtin's principle, should certainly inspire critics to be cautious in their verdict, allowing for all sorts of objective and subjective hazards.

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NOTES

[1] See Didier 1994. Urmuz and Ion Vinéa created *Simbol*. Then Ion Vinéa and Marcel Janco created *Contimporanul*, a "constructivist" magazine celebrating progress and the beauty of machines. Then *Integral* set out to synthesize the various modernist movements. *Uni* was created by Sosa Pana.

[2] This carried in its wake Odysseus Elytis's *Προσανατολισμοί* and Engonopoulos's *Bolivar*, as well as Nikos Gatsos's *Αμοργός* and Nicolas Calas's *Foyers d'Incendie*.

[3] Key to abbreviations: AP for "Amusement Park," DR for *Diplomatic Relations*, FB for *Flash Bloom*, HPE for *Η πουπουλένια εξομολόγηση*, MG for *Μερικές γυναίκες*.

[4] The painters Dali, Miro, Tanguy, and Toyen tried to reintegrate collages into painting. The Czech painters replaced the delirium of prewar collages with a "realistic imaginary" trend, a criticism of the world in which subversion is based on daily observation. In the Paris group, the Czechs became the instruments of speculative drifting. Two distinguished women collagists cross-bred collages with painting and transformed them.

[5] "Rotella: 'Sexi'—décollage (1962)," *Páli* 6 (December 1966), p. 61; in the 1975 reprint, p. 494.

[6] The dadaists derided past and the future alike, any and all human activity plus the feelings it engendered, the machine, art, and society. The contemporary styles often employed to denounce this bourgeois chaos were cubism, expressionism, and futurism. The dadaists' aim was to get rid of political, social, cultural, and artistic Western traditions, since they assumed that these had caused the first world war. See Lista, Lemoine, and Nakov (1991:81).

[7] Embirikos was followed by Engonopoulos, Gatsos, Elytis, and Calas. The surrealist school turned Greek poetry upside down.

[8] Surrealism's introspective quality was what particularly motivated the poets. According to Dimaras (1965:502–515), who holds that neohellenic self-awareness came to full bloom in the 1930s, Occidental movements answered psychic needs and were thus quickly assimilated.

[9] Linos Politis links neohellenic lyricism to the popular tradition and the Cretan, the Ionian school, and then to such poets as Sikelianos, Seferis, and Elytis, and to the Greek surrealists (Dimaras 1965:504).

[10] "The semantic isotopy can be defined as the homogeneity of the level of the signifiers in a given text; it therefore depends on the semic redundancy operated within it"

(Weisgerber 1986:2.886). Greimas was the initiator of the concept of isotopy, "the redundant whole of semantic categories which makes the uniform reading of a text impossible" (Weisgerber 1986:2.935).

[11] Psiharis's *Το ταξίδι μου* (1888), which defended δημοτική, an idiom liberated from the pedantry of καθαρεύουσα, had a considerable impact, indeed was welcomed like a bomb among literary circles (Vitti 1989:249–251).

[12] This chapter is followed by another entitled «Το μετα-υπερρεαλιστικό χιούμορ στον ελληνικό χώρο».

[13] Aphorisms were dear to the surrealists. Breton (1966:57–73) was particularly fond of Georg Christopher Lichtenberg's.

[14] The peritext is an aspect of the paratext. Genette (1987:65) concentrates on the editorial peritext, which he defines as that part of the peritext under the direct responsibility of the publisher—that is, the most exterior aspect of the paratext. The title and the name of the author belong to the editorial peritext. Genette quotes Giono, who claimed that he needed the title like a banner to give him a direction before he could write. See also Genette 1987:20–38.

[15] For example, he keeps reviewing surrealistic works and participating in surrealistic festivals. The introduction of his work at the Festival of Poetry in Cogolin is described by him in *Για μια θεωρία της γραφής* (1990a:252–258); the published proceedings include one of his texts (*Poésie de Cogolin* 1985:2–8). He participated in and was the co-curator of the large presentation of Greek surrealists in the Centre Pompidou, Beaubourg, in Paris, and edited the volume *Surréalistes grecs* (1991). My translations are published in both volumes, as well as in *Συντέλεια* (1991), XNARI(A)/KHNARI(A) (1987), and in "La Grèce en mouvement" in a special number of Jean-Paul Sartre's periodical *Les Temps Modernes* (no. 473, December 1985).

[16] Reviewing *Μερικές γυναίκες*, Christopher Robinson (1982:673) finds the "result interesting but self-conscious and, in European terms—dare one say it?—a little dated." Peter Levi (1991:31) deems Valaoritis "a full-blooded member of several successive European movements in their Greek form." Commenting upon some poems from *My Afterlife Guaranteed*, he claims: "He is still obstinately, irretrievably Greek, he has never become a Parisian or an American; in spite of the strangeness of his present disguise it is purely native, even more than it is European."

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