UNMAKING HISTORY: POSTMODERNIST TECHNIQUE AND NATIONAL
IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY GREEK NOVEL

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2003

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ABSTRACT

As an aesthetic movement, postmodernism is selectively adopted and adapted by writers outside the mainstream of the West. This study investigates the ways that Greek authors have incorporated postmodernist literary techniques after the fall of the Junta in 1974, particularly within the mode of historiographic metafiction. Postmodernism is seen as a global phenomenon, and the implications of the mixing of “globalized” postmodernist culture with local cultures are considered. The mode of historiographic metafiction supplies a framework for an investigation of larger postmodernist concerns such as the crisis of representation, the unreliability of language, the undecidability of meaning, and the fragmentary nature of knowledge that is unavoidably mediated by narrative constructions.

In the case of Greece, due to the prevalence of the nationalist modernism of the Generation of the Thirties, postmodernists have maintained a fascination with the
notion of national identity. These authors have used postmodernist techniques to critique the modernist ideology of national identity while reflecting upon more general postmodernist aesthetic, socio-economic and historical issues. Because of the persistence of national identity in these writings, postmodernist texts in Greece can be seen as “national allegories.” The use of historiographic metafiction by authors such as Ares Alexandrou, Rhea Galanaki and Vassilis Gouroyiannis shows a clear departure from the notions of Greek national identity formulated by earlier writers and intellectuals and streamlined by official institutions, towards conceptions of identity as decentered, multivocal and inclusive. The comparison of these authors to writers from other national traditions such as Salman Rushdie, Manuel Puig, Angela Carter and Orhan Pamuk, broadens conceptions of historiographic metafiction and explores the themes of ideology and national identity in conjunction with the problematics of history.
For My Parents and My Godparents

It’s not that you expect anything in particular from this particular book. You’re the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything of anything.

Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*

Το ρητόν τουτό είναι πόρισμα πείρας εκ της ζωής και πρέπει άνευ ουδεμιάς αμφισβητήσεως να δεχθομεν την αληθεία τουτου. Δύναται όμως της οστίως ζεί εις μίαν κοινωνίαν και αποτελεί μέρους αυτής να αντιληφθεί το μέγεθος της αληθείας του ρητού τουτου, δηλαδή εκ διαφόρων παραδειγμάτων άτινα του έχουν παρουσιασθεί εις την ζωήν.

--Ιωάννης Γεωργουλάκος, *Μηδέν Αγαν*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Gregory Jusdanis for his patience and his critical eye, to Dr. Jim Phelan for his unflagging energy and insight, to Dr. Gene Holland for his careful reading and helpful questions, and to Dr. Vassilis Lambropoulos for his friendship and guidance.

Special thanks go to Dr. Georgios Anagnostu, for always being willing to listen, always looking on the bright side, and for our long walks together.

Many thanks also to The Ouranis Foundation in Athens, Greece for a generous research fellowship, to the Department of Greek and Latin for travel money and continuing support, and to the Department of English for timely funding and teaching opportunities.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my parents, without whose moral and financial support this work would have remained unrealized.
Many thanks also go to Atabey and Kelly, Sükrü and Asli, Bülent and Binnaz, for keeping me sane during the long summer, and to Fish, for continuous exhortations to finish.

Finally, to my dearest friend Meral, your voice from afar was the greatest inspiration and encouragement. I could never have finished without your support.
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PUBLICATIONS

Research Publication


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Interdisciplinary Studies

Studies in English, Modern Greek Language and Literature, Comparative Studies
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CHAPTER 1

“BELATED” POSTMODERNITY? THE GREEK CASE

The varying literary and cultural conditions in this world are bound to produce endless varieties of postmodernism. When, for instance, postmodernism reached Russia or India, the concept changed to such an extent that it can hardly be identified with its earlier manifestations.

--Bertens and Fokkema (ix)

Introduction

When Hans Bertens and Deuwe Fokkema published their encyclopedic volume entitled *International Postmodernism* (1997), they included critical review articles by scholars from countries as far-flung as Finland and Japan, and as diverse as Brazil, South Africa and China. Given the massive scope of the work, and its global orientation, the fact that Greece was not included in the volume is significant. As a member of the E.U., NATO, and, following the Second World War, the Western “sphere of influence,” one might consider Greece to be part of the mainstream of European politics and cultural production. What then could
account for its non-inclusion in a work dedicated to the presentation and understanding of global postmodernism in fiction?

Perhaps the simplest answer to that question lies in the fact that, outside of a few cases, Greek scholars have largely ignored the concept of postmodernism as a theoretical field or as a cultural possibility. In the 1980s, when scholarship on postmodernism was flourishing in other national literary fields, scholars such as Gregory Jusdanis questioned even the possibility of postmodernism as an aesthetic phenomenon in Greek literature. Given his theoretical framework of “belatedness,” Jusdanis argued that at best postmodernism might become a fashionable literary style—an avant-garde of sorts—without the corresponding social, cultural or institutional developments that would support or necessitate such a cultural turn (1987). More recently, by the mid-1990s, conservative scholarship such as that of Roderick Beaton had suggested that the debate begun by Jusdanis and Vassilis Lambropoulos about postmodernism (and by implication poststructuralism as a theoretical approach) was an “arid” one (1994:10). Beaton rather blandly accepted as a given the existence of postmodernism in Greece because, since he considered Greece central to the
Western European literary tradition, postmodernism must be the integration of a current literary movement rather than simply the wholesale, unsophisticated adoption or a trendy mode. In other words, mainstream Greek scholarship oscillated from seriously questioning the possibility of postmodernism in Greece to merely uncritically accepting it, and hence “neutralizing” its theoretical implications.

It is precisely those theoretical implications that are of interest to me. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the ways that postmodernist literary techniques have been adopted by Greek authors, viewed through the thematic lens of constructions of national identity, particularly in the mode of historiographic metafiction.

Postmodernism in Greece

As an aesthetic movement, postmodernism is selectively adopted and adapted by writers outside the “mainstream” of the West. But Jusdanis offers a model with which we can examine the ways that postmodernism has taken root in Greece. In his article “Is Postmodernism Possible Outside the West?” he claims that, in a country such as Greece that did not experience modernity in the same way as the highly industrialized, capitalist and urbanized West (i.e. France, Germany, Great Britain and America), the conditions that
make postmodernism possible are absent. These conditions include the presence of an aesthetic distinction between “high” and “low” culture, the development of a separate sphere (or institution) of culture, the currency of an avant-garde and the socio-economic developments of late capitalism and consumer society. For Jusdanis postmodernism in Greece could be no more than a transitory fad “without an audience to consume it” (1987: 89). At best postmodernism would be adopted as merely a “fashionable” mode with no correspondence to the social reality of the nation.

If, however, we follow his assertions in Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture (1991), then is it not feasible that contemporary writers, following the aesthetic example of their progenitors, are belatedly adopting postmodernism aesthetically in order to “catch-up” to the West? While the proper conditions of modernity, industrialization and urbanization, were not required for Greek writers in the nineteenth century to adopt a modernizing aesthetic that created modern “spheres” of culture and ideology and, ultimately, the institutions that govern them, postmodernists in Greece have the added problem of having to contend with those very same established aesthetics, ideologies and institutions. Thus,
as far as critics such as Dimitris Tziovas and Dimitris Dimiroulis are concerned, taking a Lyotardian perspective, it is the institutionalized grand-narratives supplied by the earlier generations of writers that offer younger Greek writers a point of departure. Indeed, just the notion of a national identity ("Greekness") has given them ample food for thought.

If some have argued that postmodernism as a literary development would have little or no currency in a country such as Greece, where the conditions necessary for it do not seem to exist, and whose literary tradition for most of the twentieth century has remained mired in "antiquated" forms such as realism, has had trouble accepting modernism, and has had no significant avant-garde to supply a critique of that tradition, others have suggested, if only tentatively, that postmodernism has appeared and has had at least a minimal effect upon literary production in Greece. In the time since those views were first postulated, however, it has become evident that postmodernism, as in much of the rest of the world, has indeed been adopted by many contemporary Greek writers who have not merely imitated its style, but adapted it to their own tradition. Bertens and Fokkema, as well as Mike Featherstone, have shown that rather than becoming a "universalizing" mode,
postmodernism, like other aesthetic phenomena, interacts with national cultures to create an indigenous form that, though unified by many of the major thematic or formal concerns that first interested writers in Western Europe and the United States, retains idiosyncratic features. Given the global dimension of postmodernism and its predilection for mass-produced popular culture, it would be impossible to argue that all of the features of postmodernism in Greece are “uniquely Greek,” that is, appearing there and nowhere else; but it is certainly plausible to identify within those larger concerns features that interact with more specific problems encountered in the Greek literary tradition.

In his analysis of postmodernism in Greece, Dimitris Tziovas has found the work of Lyotard the most useful for understanding the Greek case. Following, yet ultimately arguing against Jusdanis, Tziovas states that, whereas earlier Greek writers tended to maintain the indivisibility of public and private realms rather than emphasizing a high/low cultural dichotomy (1993: 246-47), in the postwar moment writers have often moved towards a separation of the public and the private, attempting to foster a more individual/internal focus in their work (1993: 253). This leads to the questioning or reconfiguration of the public
realm and the grand-narratives of nationalism, Hellenism, the history of ancient and modern Greece, the prophetic and often utopian vision of the modernists, as well as the postwar fascination with existential/philosophical anxieties and the attempt to find historical/political truth. Additions to this list could include the themes of diaspora and exile (particularly in the Leftist experience); the return to the homeland after exile; topos, i.e. the literal and literary conception of “how a place becomes a homeland” (Leontis 3); and justice. In a movement towards the “fantastical, the absurd or the random” (Tziovas 252), writers began to construct “small narratives” that entailed a more personal exploration or interpretation of grand-narratives, often coupled with broader metafictional concerns such as self-referentiality, orality and the absence or undecidability of meaning or truth. Tziovas also indicates some other specifically postwar Greek metanarratives encountered in postmodern Greek writers: these include the Romeic (as opposed to the Hellenic) tradition, the 1945-49 Civil War, the concentration camp¹, political power, Communism (or the Left) as “the grand-narrative that was never to be written” (265), and finally, the 1967-74 Junta of the Colonels and its aftermath. Furthermore, Tziovas suggests that elements
such as nostalgia, the questioning of the reality and the "meaning of history" (1993: 259), poststructural theory and self-consciousness have all contributed to a "nascent postmodernism" (1993: 275).

Bertens and Fokkema have suggested that in international expressions of postmodernism there is often a focus upon either content or form, the latter taking its cue from the avant-garde in its formal experimentation while the former addresses postmodernist themes but relies upon more traditional forms instead of challenging them. In the case of Greece it is arguable that due to the lack of a significant avant-garde movement, some writers take the thematic, non-experimental approach. However, more often postmodernist themes are also coupled with formal (often radical) experimentation both in prose and poetry. For many writers it seems that a departure from the norms of traditional writing is a necessary facet, if not the unavoidable result, of questioning grand-narratives: the Greek literary tradition is possibly the most troubling of these. Before turning to more experimental writers, however, a comment should be made about "thematic postmodernists."

Some writers whose main interests can be seen to lie in a more general postmodernist but less-experimental
thematic framework are: Marios Hakkas, Yiannis Xanthoulis, and Petros Tatsopoulos. The earliest of these, Hakkas, was a leftists who had spent time in prison during the ‘50s and under the Junta. He is an intensely personal writer who is also a sharp social critic, incorporating aspects of autobiography, memoir and parody in his stories. While his work may be considered as too early to fit into a postmodernist framework, thematically he is pessimistic, concerned with the impossibility of expressing meaning in literature or in life, and the increasing wave of consumerism and materialism of modernization that he sees as a detriment to a more traditional Greek culture. His story (more a chronicle) <<Η τοιχογραφία>> [“The Fresco”], for example, laments the modernization that irrevocably alters the neighborhood in Athens in which he lived, and attempts to record the “truth” of that place as he lived it.

Xanthoulis is another contemporary writer who incorporates and critiques themes connected to contemporary urban life in his work. In his novel Το ροζ που δεν ξέχασα [The Rose I Didn’t Forget] for example, Xanthoulis mingles the theme of memory, as his narrator attempts to recall his past love affairs, with an apocalyptic, prophetic outlook. While the novel includes certain metafictional devices,
mainly intertextuality and shifts in point of view, it is a more or less traditional narrative.

Of the three, Petros Tatsopoulos is the most metafictional, a writer who also encounters the themes of the problems of modern urban life and the difficulties of representation and meaning. His novel *Η Καρδιά του Κτήνους* [The Heart of the Beast] is written as a nostalgic parody of the serialized, episodic novels of earlier times in which the problem of writing is a central theme:

In the good old days of literature, when novelists worked with less pay and fewer delays, they published their work in serials before they finished them. Thus it often happened that the reader read the fourth part of a fascinating story in the newspaper, and the writer, isolated just a few blocks away, feverishly worked out the seventh, possibly having the same ignorance as the reader about the eighth. This system may certainly have solved the immediate problems of livelihood for the author, but it also similarly bound him to an inflexible plot incapable of improvement later on. And at some point, usually towards the end, he came face to face with ugly games of the intrigue,
literal Gordian knots, unsolvable at least with the characters that were already at hand. Instead of accepting this impasse and giving up—with all of the freakish consequences—, he preferred to contrive a new person, whose unexpected appearance and unremembered—until-now action tied up all the novelistic loose ends.

Of just such a similar Messiah was I also in need... (163-64)

The passage describes how an author might solve an impasse in his plot by conveniently introducing a surprise character at the end. Tatsopoulos then utilizes this exact maneuver, writing himself out of a corner. While the novel is episodic and metafictional, it retains a more or less standard linear development and realistic style. What is more important to all three of these writers are the types of mainstream postmodernist themes they introduce and examine. These themes include the impossibility of representation, the undecidability of meaning, the “shallowness” of consumer society and pop-culture, and the questioning of grand narratives. It is the experimental writers, however, who seem to take on more specifically Greek features of postmodernism.

National Identity

One of the main preoccupations of postmodernists in Greece is the grand-narrative of Ελληνικότητα [Greekness] constructed by the Generation of the Thirties and patterned
upon the earlier nationalism of the demoticist movement.

Greekness, as Lambropoulos states,

like any other notion of identity, is an idea of fixed boundaries and closure: it excludes what is not authentic and true—the non-Greek—and portrays the original, the eternal Hellenic, as an autotelic unity. The authentic is exclusive, sealed off, closed: it does not tolerate uncertainty, indeterminacy or openness. (100)

Like their modernist precursors, it can be said that postmodernists continue to have a fascination with the conceptions of the nation and of national identity: but they are in the process of reconfiguring the idea of national identity based on the impact of globalization and a reexamination of the discourses of national ideology. This reexamination has been further complicated by the influx into Greece, particularly since the fall of the Eastern Bloc, of large numbers of refugees, immigrants, and foreign workers who naturally have brought with them their own cultures and the attendant clash with mainstream Greek culture. While in some quarters there has been a vehement turn towards reactionary ultra-nationalism, what these trends suggest to many postmodernist writers is a turn away from the traditional modernist concerns with homogeneity towards a new acceptance and understanding of multiplicity and diversity.
In his more recent discussion of national identity, Jusdanis suggests that in postmodernity identity becomes symbolic, no longer necessarily bound to the "networks of interconnecting institutions" (1995: 30) delimited by the nation-state. Thus national identity as well as culture "loses its self-sufficiency" (56) and becomes yet another (aesthetic) commodity at the mercy of a globalizing homogeneity. The postmodernist attempt to reconsider the conception of national identity in Greece thus speaks of identity and national culture in a way that was impossible in the previous modernist mode. Whereas writers such as Seferis and Elytis attempted to delineate a unified conception of national identity that “emerged when Greeks articulated […] an abstract principle of territorial identification” (Leontis 6), postmodernists explore identities that do not conform to what came to be perceived as the “official” accepted version and whose dimensions encompass personal, political, religious as well as alternative ethnic possibilities. These types of concerns, combined with postmodernist formal experimentation that questions the older modernist aesthetic, supply postmodernists in Greece with a way to evoke a new national outlook.
Benedict Anderson has defined the nation as an “imagined political community” that is “both inherently limited and sovereign” (6), and he examines the ways in which the nation “became something capable of being aspired to [...] rather than a slowly sharpening frame of vision” (67). For Anderson national consciousness is something that is “shaped” in various ways through the “energetic activities” (71) of intellectuals and the institutional, cultural and political projects they instigate. Modern nation-states, however, increasingly find it necessary to take into account the processes of their formation. Mike Featherstone, among others, has remarked in Undoing Culture that this is a result of the exhaustion of the Enlightenment “project of modernity” (72) and the globalization taking place in the postmodern world. Nations, therefore, must acknowledge the “flawed assumptions” (88) of these processes to become more aware of the pluralities that exist within the nation, and to reconsider the orthodoxy of national identity that assisted in constructing what Andrew Hooks has called the “necessary fictions” (307) of the national project.

Cultural homogeneity is a product of modernity, the rise of nation-states, and the development of a nationalist ideology that seeks to distinguish a nation's culture as
unique and superior while attempting to create a sense of unity and purpose within the nation. Jonathan Rée posits that national identity requires an “implied standardization” (44) of practices, traditions and institutions, which leads to the conception of nationality as “an innate natural characteristic as unarguable as your sex, and no less ominous” (47). National identity, Rée concludes, is ultimately tied to the idea of culture, which expresses the uniqueness of the nation.

Jusdanis (1991) further considers the ways that culture is incorporated into the nationalist project. He regards the development of literature as central to the ways in which the nation-state solidifies its power, legitimates its territorial claims, and retains widespread popular support among its citizens. Jusdanis sees national culture as inherently necessary to the formation and consolidation of a homogenous and unique national identity, and thus nationalism becomes in effect a totalizing institutional delineation of essential ethnic characteristics that allow the “folk” to conceive of themselves as belonging to a specific community that goes beyond the limits of local identification, instilling in them a commitment to the larger whole of the nation-state.
In Greece the earlier process of “standardization” reached its peak with the Generation of the Thirties, though certainly Seferis and his contemporaries were the direct descendents of an older tradition that aspired towards the creation of a homogeneous national culture. A fascination with and a deep devotion to the nation characterize the modernism developed by the Generation of the Thirties. The publication in 1929 of George Theotokas’s Ελεύθερο Πνεύμα [Free Spirit] outlined a new project for aesthetic production influenced both by well-known international modernists such as T.S. Eliot and nationalistic Greek thinkers such as Yiannis Psiharis and Pericles Yiannopoulos. Ελεύθερο Πνεύμα marks the beginning of a concerted effort on the part of Greek writers to abandon the lyricism and romanticism that had been prevalent throughout the nineteenth century. However, this form of modernism was “conservative” in its political outlook and focus on “Greekness,” as well as in its limited approach to formal experimentation.

The label “conservative” is not meant to imply that the Generation of the Thirties was “reactionary,” as Jeffery Herf defines the term: technological modernizers who espoused the aesthetics of “newness,” the “triumph of the spirit” and the self, but who “despised reason” and
“attacked [normative] traditions” (12). Rather, as Leontis suggests, they were preoccupied with nativist concerns:

Much of Greek modernism presented itself as a native product, despite foreign influences. Like high-modernism elsewhere, it cultivated an ambiguous relationship to modernism by declaring its opposition to technology and mass consumer culture. Unlike the modernist standard, however, which explored the primitive roots of others in its tireless search to reinvent the new, Neohellenic modernism insisted on its own native authenticity. It restored interest in its local forms. (115)

For example, the identification with specific localities within the nation-state of Greece served to recreate or recuperate Greek national identity after the Asia Minor Catastrophe.8 The connection between localities and tradition led to notions of “Greekness” that had their basis in a patriotic (if not nationalistic) reverence for the πατρίδα [homeland]. For Elytis this location was the Aegean, for Theotokas and Seferis, Attica. These writers reawakened echoes of the classical past and wove them together with modernist conceptions to construct a “new” Greek identity that transcended the nation-state while remaining focused upon it. Ritsos chose «Ρωμιοσύνη» [Romiosyni], as his topos, which, though not a literal “place,” allowed him to explore a different part of the Greek tradition, one which was perhaps more apt for the Greek nation-state since it did not focus upon the
classical. What Ritsos retained nevertheless was a focus upon history, tradition, national character, as well as place. In his nativist focus, however different from that of his contemporaries, even Ritsos might be termed “conservative,” since “modernism was not a movement exclusively of the political Left or Right” (Herf, 12).

But what has become of this nationalist modernism in the post-war, post-industrial, postmodern age? The Greeks, of course, are no exception to the effects of postmodernity, but given the strong national culture Greece has developed during the past two hundred years and the attempt to fashion a largely homogenous Greek society over the past several decades, one might question the possibility that the Greek nation-state has undergone a similar crisis of identity which Featherstone suggests is so intrinsic to postmodernity. To do so, however, would be to ignore the various upheavals in the modern history of the nation such as the Asia Minor Catastrophe or the Civil War which have shaken accepted representations of national identity. Closer inspection of the literary canon reveals that throughout the modern period texts can be found that thematize, or at least consider, notions of plural identity or “diversity” within the Greek tradition. Some eminent examples include works by Iakovos Rizos Neroulos, Dimitrios
Vyzantios, Georgios Vizyenos, and Constantine Cavafy. While no one can question the place of these writers in the canon, it is clear that they do not conform to the mainstream aesthetic of national identity. It is only with the advent of postmodernism, however, that the diversity these older writers represent has been given a distinctly new formulation.

Postmodernism in Greece includes specific political themes such as the examination of respective political ideologies, for example, or the failed communist revolution and its aftermath. This is why postmodernists in Greece have maintained a fascination with the national, albeit in terms of a critique of the nationalist tendencies of modernists such as Seferis. To borrow Frederic Jameson’s term these preoccupations are “necessarily allegorical” (1986: 69). Because of their “belated modernity” (Jusdanis, 1991), many Greek intellectuals have remained focused upon the national situation, striving to form a homogenous national identity and a nation-state based upon mainstream Western European models; the “national allegory” has remained current in conceptions of its culture. Since nationalist modernism in Greece has been so thoroughly accepted, issues of local identity and community have been sublimated to the larger “grand narrative” of “Greekness,”
that is, the homogenizing effect of institutionalized nationalist ideology. When postmodernists return to these issues they typically reflect upon or question the modernist ideology, but because it is so ingrained they are not able to ignore it completely. Thus their texts can also be read as a new form of national allegory.

The turn to alternate/competing forms of the national allegory can be seen to have begun quite early in the modernist period, and slowly developed into current postmodernist practice. I turn now to an overview of specific authors who exhibit this change in approach: N.G. Pentzikis, Yiannis Skarimbas, and Michel Fais. While the first two are often classified with their modernist contemporaries, it is evident that they are critical of the idea of Greekness and, particularly in the case of Pentzikis, are also highly experimental. The latter is a contemporary writer fully engaged with postmodernist concerns. Skarimbas is extremely metafictional and incorporates a large amount of intertextuality in works such as Τυφλοβομάδα στη Χαλκίδα [‘Blindweek’ in Halkida] referring to many of his own previous writings or having characters from them appear as minor characters in new ones; Pentzikis is influenced by surrealism and metafictional techniques, but ultimately paradoxically
incorporates a very reactionary Orthodox perspective in works such as *O Πεθαμένος και η Ανάσταση* [*The Dead and the Resurrection*]. Pentzikis’s critique of Greekness considers the Orthodox and Byzantine traditions to be more central to the formation of Greek identity than the Classical Age, which is heavily relied upon by writers such as Seferis and Theotokas.

Fais also offers alternatives to the homogenizing notions of Greekness. In *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός Βιβλίου* [*Autobiography of a Book*], as the title suggests, Fais is not only concerned with typical metafictional strategies, and the way a novel is constructed, but more centrally to offering an alternative view of a town in Greece, Komotini: its people and history constitute a heterogenous “Balkan Greece.” By focusing on the Balkans, Fais constructs Greek identity in a way that moves away from the topography of the Aegean, which, as we have seen, was the literal “topos” of identification for the Generation of the Thirties. Moreover, he also undermines stereotypical images of Greece of the kind that are promoted by the Greek Ministry of Tourism and are found in travel brochures. This is a complex novel that incorporates parodies of ethnographic studies, “transcriptions” of taped interviews with local inhabitants, historical material, newspaper articles and
convoluted or abandoned narratives as well as the “introspection of the author” which serve to blur the lines between fiction, reality and history. Fais suggests that the people and history of Komotini are unique in terms of what constitutes their own “Greekness,” though their history is aligned with the larger national history, its local dimensions make it different to a large degree.

As important to the questioning of Greekness and history is the Eastern orientation towards identity, which posits another version: Ρωμιοσύνη [Romiosyni], based upon the Byzantine, Orthodox and even the Ottoman traditions rather than (or along-side) the Hellenic and classical. Perhaps following the lead of Yiannis Ritsos’s famous poem of that title, there has been a return to this alternative tradition, which seems to work against the lofty, classical ideals of Greekness, suggesting more of an affinity with the common and the everyday existence of the Greeks. An important novelist here is Dimitris Hatzis, whose novel Το Διπλό Βιβλίο [The Double Book] literally goes in search for the “Romeic.” The novel concerns Greek migrant laborers (“Gastarbeiters”) in Germany and an anonymous writer who comes to them in search of the true meaning of the Romeic tradition. The novel is fragmentary, suggesting an analogy to the fragmentary sense of Greek identity, and deploys
many metafictional techniques. As the “writer’s” narrative slowly unravels and must be taken-up by Kosta, he finds that he cannot reconcile himself to the idea of Greekness: it is not enough given the alienation of his exilic experience as a migrant laborer. Nor can he find solace in a return to Greece. What Kosta seeks is not to be found in ideologies, either national or political, but on a personal level in the relationships between real people and the common, shared experiences of their lives. Hatzis uncovers the artificiality and rhetoric of such ideas as Greekness and the Romeic, and he attempts to locate identity in something other than large constructs.

Another aspect of the questioning of the “national agenda” retained by postmodernist writers is the notion of topos. In Topographies of Hellenism, Artemis Leontis has shown the significance of place and the way it is inscribed both geographically and through writing by ideologies such as Hellenism or nationalism. As writers such as Pais indicate, there has been a focus upon the regional or even more specifically local formations of identity that often run counter to the larger national narratives. Another author for whom place is significant is Melpo Axioti. Her very experimental and metafictional novel To Σπίτι Μου [My Home] is an attempt to show the processes by which a place
can be known and understood, both historically and personally\textsuperscript{11}. This can be achieved through maps and historical material, as the engineer discovers, but for Axioti the knowledge of place must be something that includes the “gluing together” of many fragments that constitute a place’s history and sense of the people who have inhabited it, mixed with a personal “feeling” of the place that can only take place through a kind of ritualistic communal communion. As the museum “gluer” tells the visiting engineer:

Our place, you know, is not easy for someone to understand...For someone to get to know our place he would have to manage to see the people born and buried. In other words, to observe two generations of life. Naturally for a stranger this is utterly impossible, so that the only way would be, sir, for you to drink the water of the three wells...We have three wells...right in the middle of town, and an old saying: the people insist that whoever drinks their water will never again leave from our place. (33)

Thus it is a personal/spiritual/historical/temporal knowledge that is required to come to know even the smallest of islands, which cannot be obtained through the application of ideological constructions. It is experience...
of a place, as well as the indelible stamp that individuals put upon it that constructs the landscape, just as the landscape itself plays a role in constructing the individual.

In the case of Greek literature, postmodernism has often been appropriated by leftist intellectuals and exiles such as Melpo Axioti, Dimitris Hatzis, Ares Alexandrou, Alki Zei and Mimika Kranaki—to name but a few—who have seen in it a possibility of social or political critique. The latter three have written novels that examine the painful years of the Civil War and its aftermath, critiquing the failed project of Communism in Greece and finding disappointment in the Eastern Bloc countries in which they spent their years of exile. Postmodernism has given these writers the opportunity to reconsider the homogeneity espoused by the national project by questioning the discourse and ideology of communism. Through their self-criticism they, too, have reconfigured the national allegory. The disillusionment with communist ideology and the failure of the communist alternative reflects but one facet of mainstream Western postmodernism, since by its very nature postmodernism is intimately connected to and influenced by the rapid capitalism and consumerism of a country such as the United States. But even from this
point of view postmodernism also conducts a critique or at least acknowledges its modes of production and the capitalistic infrastructure that makes its existence possible. As with modernism, the ambiguities of postmodernism resist such over-simplified polarization as Right or Left.

The grand-narrative of the Left contains within it the metanarratives of the Civil War, exile, return, the Junta and justice. After 1950 exile becomes a central theme for leftist writers, many of whom were either sent to ‘internal exile’ on remote and barren islands or fled Greece altogether. Alki Zei’s *H Αρραβωνιαστική του Αχιλλέα* [Achilles’ Fiancée] covers the period from Civil War to the 1967 Junta, ostensibly telling the story of Eleni but attempting to express the experiences of an entire generation of Greeks who were exiled during those years. Zei incorporates many filmic devices mingled with autobiography to create an intertwining set of parallel narratives that examine the effects of exile upon the construction of identity and the failures of an idealized communist ideology to supplant notions of Greekness. Eleni must “find” her own identity within these larger constructs and in the shadow of her fiancée, who is an idealized portrait of “the good Communist.” Zei is also interested in the
reconstruction of a “lost” history (of the Left) that is not incorporated into the larger scheme of national history. Ultimately the novel becomes another personal attempt to discover the truth about history, reality and the way ideologies construct them and the individuals who live them. At the end of the novel, any hopes Eleni discovers for a return to Greece or a consolidation of her own identity are crushed by the events of 1967, and she resigns herself to a bleak existence in exile.

Kranaki’s Φιλέλληνες [Philhellenes] is a massive and complex work that certainly contains all of the themes discussed to this point. This parodic epistolary novel is also concerned with the generation of leftist exiles and the ways in which their experiences change them, but continues past the Junta years up to the ‘90s. As in Zei, Kranaki examines the failures of the Communist ideal and attempts to reconfigure the Left as it disintegrates in exile, showing how time and memory and distance collide in the face of a new postmodern world dominated by global capitalism. The title itself suggests a major re-working of Greekness, and has been a source of criticism directed towards the novel: rather than being Greeks or Hellenes in the traditionally accepted sense, Kranaki sees the exiles as Philhellenes in the way, for example, 19th Century
Western Europeans might have been, but with the twist of the Left:

Ωστε έτσι. Ούτε ’<ανθέλληνας> ούτε ’<μισέλληνας> ούτε ’<εαμοβούλγαρος>, παν αυτά τώρα, πάνε στο σκουπιδότενεκέ της ιστορίας. Φιλ-έλληνας, οπώς λες φιλό-σοφος ή φιλό-μουσος, αγαπάς τη σοφία, τη μουσική, χωρίς ούτε σοφός ούτε μουσικός νά ’σαι. Εξ αποστάσεως ... Παεί, ξάθηκε ο τόπος που σ’άνηκε, που αγάπησε και σ’αγάπησε...(155)

So that’s how it is. Neither “anti-hellene” nor “mis-hellene” nor “leftist guerrilla,” out they go now, into the trash can of history. Phil-hellene, the way they say philosopher or music-lover; you love wisdom, music but you are neither wise nor a musician. From a distance...It is gone; lost is the place that belonged to you, which you loved and which loved you...(155)

For Kranaki, as for Zei, a return to Greece, particularly the Greece of memory that was left behind after the Civil War, is impossible: it is only accompanied by a sense of desolation, disappointment and a loss of meaning which cannot be expressed.

It is important that the Greek authors mentioned above have all chosen to write in a historical mode, and are specifically interested in the ramifications of the Civil War period and its aftermath. They foreshadow a return to an older genre at a time when the impetus of the historical novel had long since become passé. An eminent example is the work of Rhea Galanaki, especially Ο Βιός του Ισμαήλ Φερίκ Πασά [The Life of Ismael Ferik Pasha], but certainly she is not the only author to move in this direction. Galanaki has shown that other periods of Greek history are worthy of
reevaluation, as does Yiorgis Yiatromanolakis (Ιστορία) [History]. Moreover, Yiatromanolakis (Λειμονάριο) [Leimonario] as well as Thanassis Valtinos (Στοιχεία για την Δεκαετία του ’60) [Data from the Decade of the Sixties] attempt to come to terms with the tumultuous era of the 1960s and ’70s. As we saw in Αυτοβιογραφία ενός Βιβλίου [Autobiography of a Book], Michel Fais renders a fragmented account of Komotini that presents not only the difficulties of (re)constructing history but of a Balkan-Greek identity. Other writers, such as Vasilis Alexakis (Παρίσι-Αθήνα, Η Μητρική Γλώσσα) [Paris-Athens, Mother Tongue] have remained focused on the post-war period. Some younger writers who do not expressly engage a historical period often employ or parody other styles and genres that evoke a sense of older literary forms, such as the detective novel, examples of which are Sotiris Kakisis (Τρόμος στο Κολλέγιο) [Terror at the College] and Petros Tatsopoulos (Το Παυσίππονο) [The Painkiller], not to mention Yiatromanolakis’s Ανωφελές Διήγημα [Pointless Narrative]. Certainly even these few examples offer ample evidence of the importance of historiographical metafiction in the development of Greek postmodernism. The use of this mode has allowed postmodern writers, as Hutcheon suggests, to "re-present the past" (62) as the
construction of an "imposed order" (67) in which grand narratives can be exposed and questioned.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined prose texts that suggest postmodernism has indeed brought many of the major "Western" themes and metafictional practices to the Greek literary tradition. While other national literatures may also incorporate similar themes as those examined here, I have attempted to delineate what seems of importance to the distinctly Greek expression of postmodernism. However, it is evident that postmodernists in Greece have combined those concerns with local and specifically Greek theories, styles, themes and problems to create a postmodernism that is itself stamped by an aesthetic manifestation that is idiosyncratically Greek. In terms of larger issues concerning postmodernism, the Greek case poses questions about the necessity of a fully developed modernism for the relevance of postmodernism, as well as the limits of "globalization" and the reaction of local culture to it. Finally, this study will broaden conceptions of historiographic metafiction by exploring themes such as politics and national ideology in conjunction with the problem of history. Ultimately my discussion also
questions the relationship between form and politics that transcends the moment of the Greek case.

In the chapters to follow, I investigate three representative Greek authors who have adopted postmodernist literary techniques. First, however, in chapter two I conduct an overview of historiographic metafiction as part of the larger theoretical field of postmodernism, and specifically discuss formal aspects of metafiction that I employ in my analysis of the novels. Chapters three, four and five will constitute that analysis, and will establish my comparative approach. In chapter three I examine Aris Alexandrou’s To Κιβώτιο [The Mission Box] and compare it to Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children and Manuel Puig’s Kiss of the Spider Woman. Chapter four focuses on Rhea Galanaki’s O Βιος του Ισμαήλ Φερίκ Πασά [The Life of Ismael Ferik Pasha] and Ελένη ή Ο Κανένας [Eleni or No One] and compares them with Orhan Pamuk’s The White Castle and Angela Carter’s Nights at the Circus. Chapter five analyzes Vassilis Gouroyiannis’s novel Το Ασημόχροτο Ανθίζει [The Silverweed Blooms]. The conclusion moves to define and theorize how postmodernism has influenced changing notions
of national identity, and investigates possibilities about the future of postmodernism and developing conceptions of identity in Greece.

Notes

1 This refers mainly to post-Civil War camps in which communists were kept in ‘internal exile’ rather than the Nazi camps of World War II.
2 I do not mean to imply here that Hakkas’ pessimism is representative of Greek postmodernist writers in general, or that it is similar to the “cheerful nihilism” of American writers such as Barth (Bertens and Fokkema (301). Writers such as Xanthoulis and Tatsopoulos, for example, cannot be characterized as “pessimistic,” but rather explore the more positive aspects of postmodernism.
3 The majority of these have been Βορειοπεπερότες (culturally Greek Albanian nationals) and Albanians, but also many other Eastern Europeans (Russians, Poles, Rumanians, Bulgarians) as well as other foreign nationals such Kurds, Pakistanis, and Filipinos.
4 For further discussion on the “exhaustion” of the Enlightenment project, see Adorno and Horkheimer (1949/1972) Huysssen (1986) and Habermas (1987). For criticism relating this to Greek literary studies and nationalism, see Tziovas (1986 and 1989), and Gourgouris (1996).
5 As Dimitris Tziovas suggests, the Demotic movement established a clear connection between literature and national identity (1986: 6), which the modernists adopted and refined.
6 See Leontis (1995) for a further discussion of Psiharis and Yiannopoulos’s significance to the modernists.
7 Herf’s specific focus is on the “conservative revolution” in the Weimar Republic, which was “opposed [to] the principles of 1789 yet found in nationalism a third force ‘beyond’ capitalism and Marxism [...] seeking to restore instinct and to reverse degeneration due to an excess of civilization” (12). As Herf explains, this reaction was closely aligned with Hitler and the rise of National Socialism.
8 The “Asia Minor Catastrophe” (1920-22) was effectively the end of the irridentist aspirations of Greece: the “Great Idea” to reclaim the lost territories of the Byzantine Empire. After the defeat of the Greek armies in Anatolia, millions of Anatolian Greeks were forced to “repatriate” to the Greek mainland. See Woodhouse (1968) and Clogg (1992).
9 Each of these authors suggests in his own way the wide range of diversity that exists in the Greek world. See: Νερουλός (Κορακιστικά, 1813), Βυζάντιος (Βαυτιλονία, 1836) Βιζυμινός (Νεοελληνικά Διηγήματα, 1883-95) and many of Cavafy’s poems.
10 Jameson is, of course, referring to “third world” texts (69). Aijaz Ahmad has criticized Jameson, however, for essentializing the “third world” experience in terms of the universalizing, hegemonic, Eurocentric colonial perspective which in postmodernity, as
Featherstone illustrates, has gradually been undermined. But despite his concern for local identity without the structure of the nation, Ahmad’s main interest is the connection of “one’s personal experience to a ‘collectivity’—in terms of class, gender, caste, religious community, trade union, political party, village” (15). Ultimately he seeks to discover just how local the postmodern focus on identity can be. In Greece Ahmad’s categories encompassing the search for meaning within a “collectivity” have remained on the level of the nation as a whole.

G. Mellisaratou has suggested that To Σπίτι Μου [My Home] is “the first formal appearance in modern Greek fiction of a metafictional trend which is clearly differentiated as much from the realistic tradition as from the modernism of the interwar period” (63), but this is inaccurate. Some earlier examples include Pentzikis’s novel mentioned above and many of Cavafy’s poems.
CHAPTER 2

POSTMODERNISM AND THE AESTHETICS OF
HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

What had passed between Eleanor Harding and Mary Bold need not be told. It is indeed a matter of thankfulness that neither the historian nor the novelist hears all that is said by their heroes and heroines, or how would three volumes, or twenty suffice! In the present case so little of this sort have I overheard, that I live in hopes of finishing my work within 300 pages, and of completing that pleasant task—a novel in one volume; [...]—Anthony Trollope, The Warden (60-61)

Introduction

When people think of postmodernism, in whichever aesthetic or cultural manifestation, they typically associate it with one of its most easily identifiable attributes, namely, its self-consciousness or self-referentiality. It is perceived as art that points to its own status as “art-object” through an explicit presentation or awareness of its modes of production and underlying structures. In the case of postmodernist literature, at
least, the above passage from Anthony Trollope’s 1855 novel demonstrates about self-consciousness in fiction what many literary critics have already suggested: “metafictional characteristics can be found throughout the prehistory of postmodernism” (Currie 1). While it is by no means necessarily the only style in which postmodernists may choose to write, it nevertheless remains an important facet of postmodernist literary production. I asserted in the opening chapter that in the case of Greece, it is specifically the mode of historiographic metafiction that has been of use to contemporary Greek novelists in their reexamination of the discourses of national ideology. I will turn therefore to a discussion of the specifics of the techniques of historiographic metafiction.

In order to do so, it will be necessary to conduct an overview of postmodernist theory as it relates to the socio-historical moment of the latter half of the twentieth century, but also as it reflects the aesthetics of postmodernist writing specifically. My aim is to illuminate the connections between the metafictional concerns of contemporary authors and the larger debates and philosophical underpinnings of postmodernism in general.
Postmodernity and Postmodernist Aesthetics

It is important to differentiate between the notion of postmodernity as a socio-economic and historical phenomenon and postmodernism as an aesthetic movement. I will begin with a brief discussion of issues surrounding postmodernity, and examine it in the context of the way it interacts as a global phenomenon with local cultures.

What Lyotard first labeled “the postmodern condition” and David Harvey called “the condition of postmodernity,” consists in part of fundamental changes in the global economy. Along with Frederic Jameson, they see it as function of "late capitalism," and the technological advances that have made possible the rise of a global, mass-media, mass-produced pop-culture. Conducting a mainly Marxist analysis, theorists such as Lyotard, Harvey, Vincent Leitch, and primarily Jameson, have depicted and criticized postmodernism on an economic as well as cultural level.

According to Jameson, postmodernity involves the spread and “logic” of late-capitalism, the growth of multinational corporations that disseminate a new economic, cultural and political hegemony coupled with the technological advances that enable the rise of a post-industrial, information-age society of consumerism. This
is a “depthless” society that has “forgotten how to think historically” (ix) and can be seen as the logical conclusion of the modernizing process, a “purer stage of capitalism” (3), which has seen the exhaustion of modernism. For Jameson it is essential to see postmodernism as a “cultural dominant” (4) rather than an aesthetic style based upon the global economic system that has emerged specifically from the United States in the postwar era. Jameson suggests this is so because of the “fundamental” (178) shift the perception of art and its modes of production. Symptomatic of this development is a lack of “depth” in society that is concerned too much with the “surface” of consumer consumption. Jameson suggests this has led to various “crises”—of identity, of historicity, of reality, of representation. He connects these crises to larger themes such as the “disappearance of the subject,” the effects of post-industrial society on the individual and, of course, cultural production as a commodity.

Taking into account both Jameson and Lyotard’s formulations of postmodernity, Leitch considers it a “corrosive cultural moment” (ix). While admiring Jameson’s approach, Leitch criticizes his “totalizing” sense of postmodernism as a unified discourse of “the cultural logic
of the world system” (127). Leitch focuses upon the “local effects” and responses to the invasion of postmodernism. Following Lyotard in his turn, Harvey also suggests that Jameson’s formulation is flawed given postmodernism’s “distrust of all universal or ‘totalizing’ discourses” (9). Harvey, however, is more concerned with the conceptions of modernity and postmodernity as ideological, economic and historical constructs and how they have transformed not only the ways in which capitalism functions globally, but how culture has been affected by the “new dominant ways in which we experience time and space” (vii). Harvey does not see the rise of postmodernism as the emergence of a new “postcapitalist” or “postindustrial” society, but sees them rather as “shifts in surface appearance” (vii).

If the aesthetic culture that develops as a product of postmodernity is disseminated, as Jameson suggests, by the industrialized West, what are the implications for the culture that receives it? In Undoing Culture, Mike Featherstone, like Harvey, suggests that postmodernism is concerned with the problems of modernity and the “difficulties of coping with, and meaningfully assimilating, the overproduction of objective culture” (5). Taking into account the impulse to see globalization as
central to the cultural logic of postmodernism, Featherstone examines the way this globalization interacts with national cultures. If globalization can be seen as “national-culture writ-large” (6), Featherstone argues that, rather than having a universalizing effect through the processes of technological developments, the economy and the mass-media, as Harvey also notes, postmodernism’s focus upon “heterogeneity and difference” facilitates the emergence of “competing centers” of cultural production coupled with a focus upon local cultures that have an effect on the “syncretic” global culture (called “glocalism”), but which do not produce “uniformity” (14). Because modernity itself is not a universalized construct—the idea, for example, that the industrialized West is “advanced” and the rest of the world must follow its lead is not universally accepted—Featherstone offers alternatives to the formulation of postmodernism that entail the merging of global and local forces in which he questions much of previous postmodernist theory. Featherstone posits that postmodernist globalized culture does not eclipse older national cultures, since nations conceive of themselves as communities and the world is
conceived of as a community of nations (108), rather
national cultures simultaneously “absorb, assimilate and
resist” (116) postmodernism’s globalizing effect.

Cultures that import postmodernism, however, do not
necessarily adopt it in its entirety; postmodernism has the
ability to blend with other cultures and create a unique
synthesis of the traditional and the new. Featherstone
associates this trend with the globalizing nature of
postmodernism, which simultaneously engenders a focus on
the local that produces an awareness of “new levels of
diversity” (14). He goes on to suggest that the mixture of
globalization and the local creates “syncretisms” and
“hybridizations” (14) that raise questions about the ways
in which images of culture are perceived.

It is the very amorphous nature of postmodernism that
makes it so apt to question constructions of national
identity. Because of its own tendency towards self-
consciousness, it brings with it a built-in critical
framework in its interaction with a particular national
culture. Despite its capitalistic element, postmodernism
as a cultural phenomenon remains ideologically open through
its self-conscious ambiguity. The mainstream, monolithic
“high” culture of modernism has been replaced by
"marginality" and the "periphery," an accentuation of
polyphony, heteroglossia, difference. Following Featherstone’s argument, what this means is that coupled with the elimination of the gap between high and low culture, notions of a central, unified Western dominance have been decentered so that there arise competing “centers” (such as Japan). This creates an increased awareness of “cultural complexity” (12) that allows the integration of the local and the international. Rather than succumbing to new forms of hierarchy and uniformity, competing centers offer a “contra-modernity” (11) that consists of a hybrid, syncretic, borderline culture. Peter Brooker provides a useful account:

For if the features of postmodernism...are historically specific, they are not culturally hermetic. Indeed, one of the most convincing descriptions of postmodernism is of a shift, prompted and enabled by social, economic and technological change, into the heteroglossia of inter-cultural exchange, as idioms, discourse across the arts and academy, and across these and mass forms, are montaged, blended or blurred together. 'Postmodernism' becomes its own best symptom of dissemination and difference. (20)

Postmodernism, therefore, seems to already carry within it the concept of a plurality of cultures and identities as well as the willingness to let them flourish.

As an aesthetic movement, postmodernism has developed over the past forty years as a critique of modernism and its aesthetic assumptions, as well as a response to the
developments of postmodernity discussed above. Jameson asserts that it is the very dominance of modernism that hastened its demise:

If then we suddenly return to the present day, we can measure the immensity of the cultural changes that have taken place. Not only are Joyce and Picasso no longer weird and repulsive, they have become classics and now look rather realistic to us...The most offensive of this art--punk rock, say, or what is called sexually explicit material--are all taken in stride by society, and they are all commercially successful, unlike the productions of the older high modernism. This means that even if contemporary art has all the same formal features as the older modernism, it still has shifted its position fundamentally within our culture. (178)

Postmodernism, then, is a fundamental cultural change in the perception and reception as well as the presentation and production of art, regardless of the formal characteristics which that art might share. Like modernism before it, postmodernism is necessarily tied to capitalism and modes of production: culture becomes another commodity for consumption on the market and in the integrated corporate structure.

Harvey ostensibly supports Jameson's "daring thesis" in the analysis of postmodernism, examining in detail the intricate relationship between culture and late-capitalist society. However, Harvey attempts to pinpoint this relationship in the change of consumer habits of late
capitalism that entails "a new role for aesthetic definitions and interventions" (63). Postmodernism, he contends, has much more to do with the trappings of everyday existence:

...the mobilization of fashion, pop art, television and other forms of media image, and the variety of urban lifestyles become part and parcel of daily life under capitalism...we should not read postmodernism as some autonomous artistic current, [i]ts rootedness in daily life is one of its most patently transparent features. (63)

Whereas modernism attempted to construct itself as an autonomous, monolithic and rather dogmatic artistic institution, supporting the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, postmodernism destroys this distinction by being completely immersed in every day practice and the conditions emanating from consumer society. As Brooker succinctly puts it:

postmodernism, we can say, splices high with low culture, it raids and parodies past art, it questions all absolutes, it swamps reality in a culture of recycled images, it has to do with deconstruction, with consumerism, with television and the fall of communism... (3)

Harvey points out that this aspect of postmodernism is not necessarily the same as conceptions of the avant-garde. He stresses, on the one hand, that the avant-garde movements attempted to close the gap between popular culture and high culture in a "revolutionary mode," a
destruction of the old in search of the new that entailed a social transformation and a belief in the "progress" of technology. On the other hand, postmodernism diminishes the distance between popular and high culture through the manipulation of new technologies but lacks the revolutionary and destructive project of the avant-garde, "leading many to accuse postmodernism of a simple and direct surrender to commodification, commercialization and the market" (59). For Harvey the social transformation has already taken place and postmodernism can be seen as a by-product. But Harvey does not concede that postmodernism is a shallow, pop culture phenomenon and the "demise" of art: instead it attempts to "explore media and cultural arenas open to all" (59), and if it appears shallow, concerned only with surfaces, this simply reflects the influence of societal conditions from without (such as the proliferation of television) rather than a lack of depth within. Ultimately Harvey’s conception resists Jameson’s formulation that the "depthlessness" of postmodernism is contrived and remains only one facet of the movement. Furthermore, he claims that postmodernism’s “strong injection of fiction as well as function into common sensibility […] must have consequences, perhaps unforeseen, for social action” (115, emphasis in the original).
Matei Calinescu has suggested that postmodernism as a movement might have remained parochial, “merely one literary mood, in one country” (297), if it had not aspired, like modernism, to an international and comprehensive “frame of reference” (298). But postmodernism has transcended its “parochial” beginnings in North America and Western Europe and become an “overarching global phenomenon” that has been adopted by writers worldwide. However, like modernism before it, postmodernism has not been incorporated in its entirety as it has evolved in American or Western European writers: the specific national context within which postmodernism flourishes tends to adapt it to its own requirements. It is important, as we have seen, to take into account the ways in which postmodernism is disseminated around the world as well as the local effects of national differences and local cultures that contribute to determining the form and content of its adoption.

In International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice, Bertens and Fokkema have taken up the problem of situating postmodernism in various national contexts. Refuting the idea that postmodernism has become “moribund” (3), Bertens and Fokkema state that, if the early North American and Western European models seem to have run their
course, postmodernism as an aesthetic practice flourishes throughout the world. They argue that, while each national culture adopts and adapts postmodernism in its own way, despite the dissimilar literary, economic or political conditions, a unifying factor is the sheer “availability” of postmodernism through international mass-media technology. They see this as “another factor that contributed to the relative synchronicity of the introduction of postmodernism around the globe” (299). Analyzing the model of the development of modernism as an international movement, Bertens and Fokkema suggest that postmodernism has taken hold because of mass media technology, “even if the experience of modernism or the historical avant-garde was almost completely lacking” (299). Moreover, they suggest that the mass media dissemination of postmodernism accounts for why various “national manifestations” of it in specific social contexts might “appear rather similar” (299).

Bertens and Fokkema describe at length the ways in which local conditions affect the implementation of postmodernism. Briefly summarized, these include: the extent to which literary modernism had taken hold or was still vital within a particular tradition; the existence, however weak or brief, of an avant-garde movement; a strong
Marxist tradition, which determined to what extent postmodernism was resisted (in the West) or was seen as a “subversive political tool” (in the Eastern Bloc); the fall of authoritarian governments which allowed a “new intellectual freedom”; and finally, the “type” of postmodernism that had been introduced—in other words, whether it was influenced by French philosophical debates or North American “literary postmodernism” (300). In the end, the most important factor Bertens and Fokkema delineate is the form postmodernism takes when adopted, thus either form or content become significant:

...there are those critics who focus on the formal properties of texts in determining their 'postmodernness' and those for whom [it] is established by content, by a specific postmodern thematics, rather than by form [...]. (8)

Therefore, in its international context, postmodernism can be either a formal distinction or a thematic one. It is important to note, however, that the distinction between form and content is not absolute, nor is it meant to imply that the categories are mutually exclusive; specific writers’ formal choices most often either reflect or materialize out of their thematic concerns: “it is certain themes...emerging out of certain formal procedures that establish the postmodern character of a text” (Bertens and Fokkema 8).
Aesthetic postmodernism developed as a critique of what were seen as the limitations of modernism, as well as in response to the social, economic, and political concerns of the postmodern condition. For example, In The Crying of Lot 49 Thomas Pynchon incorporates themes such as the shallowness of American suburban experience, the problems with consumer society in general, global conspiracy theories, the impossibilities of knowing or comprehending reality, and the problems of representation. All of these reflect his interest in postmodernity. Others writers also deal with such themes: Don DeLillo’s White Noise also takes up the problems of the American suburb, while Tim O’Brien’s In the Lake of the Woods incorporates the meaning and abuse of history, violence and the moral effects of constructing or presenting the “truth” in a particular, subjective way.

In other national contexts, writers have adapted their works in accordance with the thematic, formal and canonical issues that inform their particular traditions. For example, English writers such as John Fowles or Angela Carter have produced a “historically engage[d], problematically referential” (Todd 342) postmodernism that critiques the stodgy, excessively traditional and patriarchal society of England. Other writers are overtly
political: Czech expatriate Milan Kundera, for example, whose themes encompass a critique of the (now defunct) Communist regime and totalitarianism, the experience of exile, conceptions of national identity and the processes of representing history, reality and truth. Many others around the world, including such writers as Salman Rushdie, Mukul Kesavan and J.M. Cotzee, mingle postcolonial themes and a Third-World perspective with postmodernist concerns and aesthetic form.

These few examples serve to illustrate Bertens and Fokkema’s theoretical structure of international postmodernism. While it is helpful to think of postmodernism as a “global movement” retaining a certain number of the formal or aesthetic traits developed by early exponents in Europe and North America, it is also useful to keep in mind that generally global postmodernism takes on thematic concerns that are idiosyncratic to the national contexts that adopt them. For this reason we must speak of “postmodernisms” within these various national contexts; each stamps it with its own local effects.

Metafiction and History

In my examination of the larger issues of postmodernity, I suggested that postmodernist art reflects
the social, cultural and aesthetic changes that have taken place in the last three or four decades. As one of the possible modes of postmodernist aesthetic expression, the concept of metafiction presents a way in which to further explore the specifics of how postmodernist writers approach these concerns. One of the reasons for this is that, since the processes of metafiction highlight the ways in which texts are constructed, they offer insight into the broader postmodernist theoretical issues such as the constructedness of reality. Historiographical metafiction in particular focuses on the problem of making sense of the events of history and the ways in which historiography is another kind of narrative construction.

According to Patricia Waugh, the processes of metafiction are neither a contemporary development nor strictly limited to the genre of the novel, though it is in the novel that they can be most readily identified. In *Metafiction* she argues that “although the term ‘metafiction’ might be new, the practice is as old (if not older) than the novel itself,” and that “metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in all novels” (5). In some earlier periods, metafictional aspects of the novel were elided in order to give the novel a more “naturalistic” or “realistic” sensibility. It was not until the advent of
modernism, Waugh states, that such elisions gave way to more playful expressions of, and experiments in, the nature and problems of writing itself, in such novels as Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. Given the prevalence of overtly metafictional practices in contemporary fiction, it would be safe to assume that, following their modernist precursors, postmodern writers have fully embraced metafiction as a basic element of their work. However, as Matei Calinescu, Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon suggest, metafiction is but one technique employed by postmodernist fiction in the exploration of a much broader range of themes and philosophical concerns. Thus, it can be argued that postmodernism, while incorporating the older strategies of metafiction, presents a much larger and more loosely defined category of aesthetic production that is not limited exclusively to the fundamental problems of writing.

At its most basic level the concern of metafiction “is simultaneously to create fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction” (Waugh 6), so what is foregrounded is the difference between, as well as a conflation of, “creation and criticism” (22). Metafiction accomplishes the frustration of the conventional expectations of writing, so that what becomes evident are
the ways in which fiction is artificially constructed in order to seem, as Waugh suggests, “transparent” (22). This corresponds to Calinescu’s formulations of the larger scheme of postmodernism. Calinescu suggests that the focus upon the process of writing and the (im)possibility of representation leads to more general problems of the “indeterminacy or undecidability of meaning” (298). The “crisis of representation” of reality necessitates the self-referentiality of postmodernist texts, since “reality itself turns out to be shot with fiction through and through” (299). Here, of course, Calinescu incorporates some of the larger concerns of postmodernism described by Baudrillard and Lyotard. Ultimately the notions of “simulacra” and their relation to the problematic determination of what is precisely real and knowable, particularly within the narrative constructions by which we can know the real, are part of the major philosophical thrust of postmodernism.

The “crisis of representation” in literature is directly connected to Lyotard and Baudrillard’s philosophical concerns about reality and the manner in which it can be represented or, in fact, known. Therefore, in formulating literary postmodernism, Calinescu delimits some "central" questions of postmodernist writing:
Can literature be other than self-referential, given the present-day radical epistemological doubt and the ways in which this doubt affects the status of representation? Can literature be said to be a 'representation of reality' when reality itself turns out to be shot with fiction through and through? In what sense does the construction of reality differ from the construction of mere possibility? (299)

Thus the crisis of representation and the construction of reality are key to understanding the strategies and devices employed by postmodernist writing. Calinescu distinguishes several characteristics of this writing that are implicitly related to these fundamental questions. Self-referentiality is a basic convention in Calinescu's conception, yet the self-referential aspect of postmodernism differs from that of modernism: the latter reveals literary conventions and devices, with an amused wonder which conveys "the sense of novelty, originality and artistic pride" (303) involved in artistic creation, whereas the former accentuates devices as contrivances in order to state that "everything else is a contrivance too and that there is simply no escape from this" (303). Contained in the notion of self-referentiality are a number of conventions: the existential or "ontological" use of narrative perspectivism; the duplication and multiplication of endings, beginnings and narrated actions; parodic thematization of both the author and the reader; the
treatment on "equal-footing" of fact and fiction which leads to an inescapable circularity; the extreme use of the unreliable narrator; the use of "hypothetical constructions" which foregrounds the impossibility of reality beyond "a composite of construals and fictions" (Calinescu 303-05).

Waugh supports the claim that self-conscious writing examines the ways in which reality itself is constructed: "composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one’s ‘reality.’ Writing itself, rather than consciousness, becomes the main object of attention" (24). A good example of the metafictional techniques described by Waugh is Italo Calvino’s If on a winter’s night a traveler. The well-known opening of this novel situates the reader in the act of reading the very novel being written:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, If on a winter’s night a traveler. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade...(3).

Waugh suggests that this opening and other references to the reading and manufacture of novels reminds the reader of the status of the book as an “artifact” (47). Calvino sets up the “very common” metafictional device of the “frame” in which he can freely distribute fragments of “other” novels
and allow “the reader” to become in effect the protagonist as he chases down book after book in an effort to “find” the novel with which he began. What differentiates Calvino’s novel from more typical metafictional novels, however, is this emphasis upon the reader and the act of reading, which deviates from the more typical focus upon the author, or narrator as author. Examples of the latter are Saleem Sinai in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, and the narrator of Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. These writer/narrators take on the role of the fictive author in order to accentuate the processes and difficulties of representing reality.

Calvino’s “you” by contrast not only deflects these specific authorial concerns onto the reader but constructs a dual identification between the character of the “the reader” and the actual reader. The actual reader at first is lured into identifying with the “you” of the opening chapter, but comes to realize that the narrator is addressing a specific reader, a character in the novel rather than the real person holding the actual book in his hand. The end of the novel makes this clear when both “readers” within the novel finish their readings. The second reader, Ludmilla, is named and given the status of a regular character, while the “you” remains unnamed,
retaining its dual role as character and as direct address to the actual reader. Thus the novel becomes an interesting play upon the blurring of fiction and reality.

Critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Susan Onega have defined historiographical metafiction as a type of postmodernist writing that reflects a “retreat into history” (Onega, 93) characterized by a self-reflexive approach in terms of its narrative construction, as well as a self-conscious appropriation of “history.” Unlike traditional historical fiction, which “incorporates” historical data and “assimilates” it in order to create a sense of “verifiability in the fictional world,” thereby achieving verisimilitude for the reader and veracity in the text (Hutcheon 1988:14), historiographical metafiction incorporates historical data to paradoxically acknowledge that “history” can only be accessed via “circumstantial evidence” and “textual traces” (Hutcheon 1989:78). Thus historiographical metafiction plays upon the “truth” of the historical record while posing questions about both the conventions of narrative discourse and the nature of historical knowledge. In the attempt to “de-naturalize” history (1989:49), historiographic metafiction explodes the notion that history can obtain an “objective truth,” and exhibits an awareness of “historical representation” as an
“unavoidably ideological” and hence political project (1989:54) which imposes artificial order on the events of the past. Ultimately what Hutcheon finds most important about this type of writing is the possibility of a radical critique of the “totalizing narratives” (1989:70) used to make sense of the world. Offered in place of those narratives is a parody of history that, through its self-conscious use of narrative and historical conventions, does not “dissolve difference and contradiction” (1989:70).

Hutcheon’s preoccupations with the conventions of historiography are reminiscent of Hayden White’s theories in *Tropics of Discourse*. White takes to task conceptions of historiography as “objective” and “semi-scientific” discourse (27). Like the novel, he claims, historical narratives “wish to provide a verbal image of ‘reality’” (122). As a discourse, this always involves an act of interpretation on the part of the historian, who attempts to determine from a known chronology of events (what happened) their significance in the scheme of things (why it happened) (53). In other words, a particular meaning is imposed upon a specific text, which in turn dictates the kind of story he or she will tell. This is a narrative “reconstruction” (51) that White calls “emplotment” (83). Because of the necessary imposition of this kind of a plot
structure onto the events of history, White comes to the conclusion that historical narratives are "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found" (82, his emphasis). Ultimately for White, what is at stake is recovering for historiography the possibility of creating a kind of "knowledge" about the past that is both understandable and relevant, which he contends is still possible:

...to say that we make sense of the real world by imposing upon it the formal coherency that we customarily associate with writers of fiction in no way detracts from the status as knowledge which we ascribe to historiography. It would only detract from it if we were to believe that literature did not teach us anything about reality, but was a product of an imagination which was not of this world but of some other, inhuman one. (99)

Thus here there is not so much a conflation of reality and fiction, but rather an acknowledgement that our knowledge of that reality must unavoidably be mediated by fictional elements.

It is the blurring of fiction and reality that Linda Hutcheon emphasizes in her two books on postmodernism. In A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988) Hutcheon examines how with historiographic metafiction postmodernism is able to incorporate its other formal aspects and wider philosophical themes. Hutcheon attempts to dispel the
allegations of Baudrillard and Lyotard that postmodernism is “ahistorical” and Jameson’s criticism that it is “depthless.” Hutcheon posits that the main difference between postmodernism and metafiction is the fascination with the past and the experimentation with the conventions of historiography that allows postmodernism to confront issues such as the ways in which the past can be known, the implications of “rewriting” history, the relationship between history and fiction, subjectivity, and the relationship between fiction and the “facts” of reality.

One of the ways historiographic metafiction differs from the more basic form is in its intertextuality which, according to Hutcheon, is more complex than the self-reflexivity of metafiction. Given the more general fascination with history and constructions of the past, intertextuality allows the postmodern text to engage, incorporate and comment upon the literary past as well: “Postmodernism signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it” (1988: 130). This is not mere allusion. What intertextuality provides is a “complicitous critique” (1988: 223) of the literary and historical past, which is
at once an acknowledgment of the significance of those pasts for the present and an attempt to "subvert the system’s values from within" (224).

In The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), Hutcheon continues this assessment of "complicitous critique," taking into account the ways in which the formal elements of reflexivity, intertextuality and parody question the act of representation (on whichever level: fictive, historic, natural or real). By "de-naturalizing" (1989: 33) and "de-doxifying" (53) representations of the real in order to make the reader aware of the "ideological nature of every representation" (53) and in order to show the way in which what is taken for "reality" is just as subject to construction as fiction, Hutcheon claims that, rather than degenerating into "hyperreality," the very acknowledgment of the "constructedness" of reality can also give form to narrative:

In a very real sense, postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations. What this means is that postmodern art acknowledges and accepts the challenge of tradition: the history of representation cannot be escaped but it can be both exploited and commented upon critically. (1989: 58)

This implies that through the narrative forms of metafiction, intertextuality, parody, pastiche, among those
described by McHale, Calinescu and Jameson, the debate about the representation of reality is both “inscribed and subverted” (49).

Here one notices a resonance with Mark Currie’s description of metafiction as a “borderline” or “marginal” discourse that exists in the boundary between fiction and criticism (2). Metafiction, as we have seen, is an “exploration by literary texts of their own nature and status as fiction” (Connor 129). As Currie has pointed out, however, metafiction is not the invention of postmodern writers, and the techniques can be traced in earlier texts (1). According to Engler and Müller, the “hybrid quality” of metafiction is useful as a mode of critique because it contests the “traditional view of art as a realistic or mimetic representation of reality” (13). Moreover, as Waugh points out, metafiction “problematises explicitly the ways in which narrative codes – whether ‘literary’ or ‘social’ – artificially construct apparently ‘real’ and imaginary worlds in terms of particular ideologies while presenting them as transparently ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’” (22). Thus, as we saw in chapter one, it is useful to Greek authors who wish to radically critique accepted conceptions of Greek identity and history that have been naturalized in just such a way.
Conclusion

Postmodernism incorporates the technique of metafiction not as an end, in which the act of writing alone is problematized, but as a beginning, in which larger philosophical debates about the creation of meaning and reality are examined. The self-consciousness of such writing exposes the ways in which reality itself is constructed through various types of narratives, whether they are historical or ideological. The "radical critique" that Hutcheon sees possible in this kind of knowledge can lead to a deeper understanding, finally, of the inescapable condition of postmodernity.

Notes

1 Jameson criticizes the "new society" produced by postmodernism, which he sees as a function of the aspirations of multi-national corporations to create "hegemony" through the spread of what is called "global" culture he calls "a purer form of capitalism" (1991: 3). He claims this is a product of and assists in the construction of "a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world" (1991: 5).

2 Bertens and Fokkema give Portugal and Spain as examples, but the same could be said of Greece and any number of other cases.
CHAPTER 3

IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY: ARES ALEXANDROU,
MANUEL PUIG, AND SALMAN RUSHDIE

To tell the truth, I lied about Shiva’s death. My first out and out lie—although my presentation of the Emergency in the guise of a six-hundred-and-thirty-five-day-long midnight was perhaps excessively romantic, and certainly contradicted by the available meteorological data.

Salman Rushdie—Midnight’s Children (529)

—I don’t really get it, it’s very confusing the way you tell it.

Manuel Puig—Kiss of the Spider Woman (12)

Introduction

As we saw in the first chapter, many of the post-war writers in Greece who incorporated postmodernism into their works were members of the Left who had participated to one extent or another in the Civil War (1945-49). Beyond their self-recriminations, what interests many of them are the workings of ideology in terms of its political ramifications.
The use of metafictional techniques has provided these writers a way to critique the discourses of both communism and nationalism, as well as the disparate versions of "history" they present. In this chapter my comparison centers on the theme of ideology and the way that Ares Alexandrou, Manual Puig and Salman Rushdie have examined ideology in light of its implications for identity and history. I begin with a brief background of each author.

Ares Alexandrou, best known for *To Κιβότιο* [The Mission Box], his only novel, was born in 1922 in Leningrad, his father Greek, his mother Russian. His family moved to Greece in 1928 where Alexandrou attended school and eventually entered the university. During the German occupation of World War II, he participated in various resistance groups more or less associated with the communist party, but left the party in 1941 for reasons of conscience. At this time he began his career as a poet and translator, and was imprisoned by the Germans towards the end of the war. Although he did not actively participate in the ensuing civil war, because of his former communist affiliations and his unyielding leftist beliefs, Alexandrou spent the greater part of the next fifteen years either in prison or internal exile, publishing his writings during intermittent and brief periods of freedom. In 1967, perhaps fearing reprisals from the Dictatorship of the Colonels, he fled Greece, taking up residence in Paris where he worked at various menial jobs
while composing Το Κιβώτιο. The novel was published in 1974 after the fall of the Junta. He died of a heart attack in 1978.

Manuel Puig was born in Argentina in 1932. In his childhood, by attending the cinema with his mother, he developed a fascination with film and spent much of his early adulthood working on films in Argentina and Italy. His novels often incorporate cinematic elements or use the cinema as a central motif. He became something of a world-traveler and cosmopolitan expatriate, living for various periods in Europe, New York, and Mexico. He wrote his first novel in 1965, but because of censorship problems in Argentina, Betrayed by Rita Hayworth was not published until 1968. Over the course of the next twenty years he would produce eight novels along with several plays and screenplays. He is best known abroad for Kiss of the Spider Woman (1976), which was later made into an Academy Award winning film. Translator and biographer Susan Levine comments that Puig “was genuinely and intuitively political in his writing” (257); his novels consistently explore political and social themes that are informed by a leftist outlook, and he is particularly interested in the politics of sexuality from an overtly homosexual perspective. He died in 1990 following complications from surgery.

Of all the authors included in this study, Salman Rushdie (born in Bombay, 1947) perhaps requires the least
amount of introduction or background. He attained worldwide fame (or infamy, depending on one’s point of view) after Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa denounced The Satanic Verses and called for Rushdie’s death in 1989. The publicity that followed the controversy surrounding the novel, Rushdie’s subsequent retreat into hiding, and the final removal of the fatwa are well documented. Nevertheless, Rushdie was an author of some note before the controversy, having won both the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Midnight’s Children (1981). Rushdie’s novels are always very demanding, as Roger Clark suggests, most them written in a “tightly woven metafictional style,” and, although his politics are not overtly leftist, “he makes it pretty clear how he feels about secularism, dictatorship, and the unreliability of historical accounts”.

In this chapter I will focus on the themes of power and ideology, specifically as they are used in constructions of identity and history in To Κιβώτιο [The Mission Box], Kiss of the Spider Woman and Midnight’s Children. The theoretical concerns of historiographic metafiction inform my reading of the texts.

**Ideology, Power and Identity**

Like many of his leftist postwar contemporaries, Alexandrou is specifically interested in the Civil War period and its aftermath. In To Κιβώτιο Alexandrou is concerned with
the problem of ideology and its impact on the construction of a political identity. Alexandrou employs techniques such as an unreliable narrator who overtly misleads both the narratee and the real reader through a fractured chronology that unexpectedly jumbles the events of the story. The narrator questions the validity of the Party and its ideological claims, and also rejects the way he has been used by it, preferring rather to be executed than to continue his narrative. Through metafictional techniques, Alexandrou problematizes conceptions of identity and the meaning of writing in conjunction with the meaning of the historical events he depicts.

The novel, which was enthusiastically received in Greece and was critically acclaimed by such fellow writers as Yiannis Ritsos and Vassilis Vassilikos⁴ (Crist 39), tells of a desperate partisan mission during the civil war. The setting of the novel is that of the “interrogation” of a prisoner, the narrator, who is the last surviving member of the secret mission concerned with the "steel box," which was supposed to lead to the victory of the communist rebels over government forces. The prisoner is compelled to tell his version of the events of the mission, writing on blank but numbered reams of paper provided by his captors. His narrative becomes a defense of the actions and his own perceived failure of the
mission that led to his imprisonment by the communist faction. Ultimately the novel becomes a critique of the ideology of the Left.

Robert Crist situates the novel in the modernist tradition, claiming parallels to writers such as Faulkner and Gertrude Stein (whom he contends Alexandrou had never read), Joyce and Kafka. Other critics, such as Argyriou (1989), have proposed simplistic biographical interpretations of the novel, seeing its roots in the author's long imprisonment; but Alexandrou himself was reticent to ascribe too much meaning to such superficial suppositions [Εξω απ' τα Δόντια (Outside the Teeth), 181]. Nevertheless, it is a powerful novel, for Alexandrou is deeply concerned with the theme of justice and its implied conceptions of right and wrong, guilt and innocence, which leads to an examination of power and its implications for identity.

Power in the novel is expressed in many forms, such as in institutions, communities and regimes of discipline. A series of complex relationships impact the identity of the narrator: the main influences for the narrator are the κόμμα, or the Party, and his role as a member of the communist resistance against the Germans and later as a soldier in the communist rebellion. For the greater part of the novel the Party dictates his every move: where he goes, what he does, even what he thinks. Any notions he has of national identity are sublimated to the identity constructed by the political
ideology. For example, during the occupation, when his friend Christophoros is ostracized by the Resistance on the suspicion of being a Gestapo agent, the narrator complies with the order of the Party, "executing his party duty" despite his own misgivings:

I obeyed the orders of the party, and I stopped going to his house (and fortunately Christophoros didn't step foot in mine). Once I actually met him by accident on the street and I passed him as if he were any ordinary stranger, despite the fact that our eyes met. (173)

He even goes so far as to attempt to convince another comrade, Aleko, to follow this order. Later, of course, after Christophoros helps the narrator escape from the Germans and reveals that he has indeed "infiltrated" the Gestapo (although in which way is left unclear), the narrator feels ironically and bitterly vindicated at this final act of resistance that leads to Christophoros' death.

While the Party is one significant disciplinary power, it exerts its force over the narrator through other overlapping institutions, namely the army and the prison. The army is more or less simply an extension of the Party: it replaces the resistance to the occupation on a larger scale, and in a transformed context. A "chain of command" (or control) develops with the Party at the top of the scale, pouring its power through the polit-bureau to the general command of the army, to the regional commanders, the local
commanders, on down the line to soldiers such as the narrator. In this schema there is an attempt to suppress "resistance" on the part of party members: power is meant to flow in only one direction.

The prison offers another example of an institution of power, still subordinate to the Party (as far as the narrator can surmise), but with a difference, since the narrator can offer "resistance" to the injustice of his imprisonment in various ways, which has evident effects upon the structure of the novel. For the present, however, I should like to forego a detailed discussion of the prison situation in order to address other formations of power more clearly.

In To Κιβώτιο several "communities" take shape under the aegis of the Party that appear to function as separate "institutions" of power. For example, under the rubric of the army (and hence the Party) the narrator encounters a localized "community" in the encampment [πρώην γυμνάσιο] of city N, where he is assigned to train for the mission. Although comprised as a regular army unit, it operates according to its own set of conventions. Here a subordinate, who goes about his business rather mercilessly, trains the troop of highly decorated officers. It is literally an institutional "regime of discipline" designed to ready them physically and mentally not just for their mission, but to take the oath required of them as "volunteers:"

Τέκνο τοῦ εργαζόμενου λαοῦ, πολίτης τῆς Λατικῆς Δημοκρατίας, δέχομαι νὰ πάρω μέρος στὴν ἀποστολή καὶ ὀρκίζομαι. Κάθε μου σκέψη καὶ κάθε μου πράξη, θα αποβλέπει στὴν επιτυχία τῆς ἀποστολῆς. Εἰμι έτοιμος νὰ θυσιάσω
akóma kai tē zōhē mou gia tēn epituxía tis, pous thā mazx charísse tēn telikē nikh evō ston topo maë..kai thā eīmēi āzios tēs genikēs peripheronísēs kai āzios varias tisgorías, an parabw thon vérko mou. (52-53)

Son of the working people, citizen of the People's Republic, I accept a place in the mission and I swear: My every thought and my every action will be towards the success of the mission. I am ready to give even my life for its success, which will grant us the final victory here on our soil...And I will be worthy of general contempt and worthy of severe punishment if I betray my oath. (52-53)

This subjects the mind and body completely to one purpose, one discipline as it were: the success of their mission.

Within these spheres of order the troop of "volunteers" organizes itself into a "community" with its own conventions. Although rank has been "officially" dismissed among the group and the men are supposed on equal footing, they create a hierarchy based on the convention of decoration:

Αποδείξτηκε Ότι και οι δεκατρεῖς <<ποδοσφαῖροι>> είταν παρασημοφορημένοι...καθιερώθηκε τελικά μεταξύ μας μία νέα ιεραρχία και οι άπαξ συνήθισαν να υπακούνε σε μας τους δίς, κ' εμείς πάλι στους τρις και στον τετράκες παρασημοφορημένα λόγια Σταμάτη, που έπαιξε πρωτεύοντα ρόλο στή διάρκεια της πορείας μας... (20)

It became apparent that all thirteen “footballers” were decorated veterans [...] and there was established between us a new hierarchy: the once-decorated got used to obeying us, who had been twice-decorated; we in turn obeyed those thrice-decorated, as well as Sgt. Stamatis, who had been honored four times and who played a principal role in our mission [...] (20)

The adherence to their own system during the mission governs their actions in somewhat precise terms regarding duties and assignments, particularly after the trial and execution of the "one-eyed Major." Throughout these "communities" Alexandrou weaves the circulation of power, creating complex relationships between the people involved.
The most complex relationship in the novel, however, is the one between the imprisoned narrator and the jailer/interrogator, which has implications for the structure of the novel as a whole, and offers Alexandrou the opportunity to employ metafictional techniques. The narrative constantly circles back on itself, starting over time and again, always with the self-consciousness of the narrator. Each chapter, for example, begins with a direct address to the narratee, “comrade interrogator” [σύντροφε ἀνακριτά], and a description of his own processes of writing. The narrator structures his narration based upon certain assumptions regarding the identity of the interrogator (particularly assumptions of party affiliation). In justifying his actions he deems it necessary to "test" the identity of the interrogator by omitting certain passages, supplying false details. Like Saleem Sinai in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Alexandrou’s narrator blatantly and admittedly "lies" to both the narratee and the real reader. When this ploy apparently fails, and he becomes confused as to the identity of his jailer, he switches tactics and offers a new version, which he claims will be the "truth." This version is just as "unreliable" as the first, as he later admits. Finally, forsaking the knowledge he seeks, he offers yet another, more detailed version of the events of the summer of 1949, changing various "important" details and adding the final pieces of the story.
For the narrator these "games" are in a sense the only resistance he can offer to his interrogator. When he suspends the writing of the narrative, going "on strike" for cigarettes and a table, the ploy proves fruitless. Simply not writing is not an alternative either, for the blocks of paper keep stacking-up in his small cell. Wordlessly the interrogator has "forced" him to write a justification as if he consented, since it appears to be the only option, and indeed the narrator does consent. What else can he do? This work of telling and re-telling ultimately becomes a justification to himself, irrespective of party, of dogma, of interrogator, particularly when it becomes clear to him that no one is actually reading his report (except, of course, the real reader of the novel); he must account to himself not only for his actions during the mission but during the past episodes of his life. The act of writing has become for him the only chance to ascribe meaning to anything, and in the end he realizes that even this is not possible: "all of my writing is, in the end, laughable and worthless" [Όλο το γραπτό μου τελικά είναι γελοίο κι άξιο άρετο] (282). He cannot find justification or redemption, just the chaotic meaninglessness of it all. Herein lies Alexandrou's critique of leftist ideology: the mission of the 'steel box' that was intentionally designed to fail, the construction of an
identity that turns individuals into mere instruments of the party, the appeal to a version of 'history' to justify the events and the failures of the movement.

The writing of the prisoner becomes an example of, in a Foucaultian sense, a "regime of discipline" in which the shared power relationship, or the circulation of power, can be seen to operate. The prisoner is simply left with blank sheets of paper and a pen, yet the pages are numbered so that the interrogator can monitor the writing. The prisoner begins to write his defense without having been given a direct command to do so, assuming that his situation calls for justification, assuming that these sheets are left to him in order to compose a confession, assuming that he is being interrogated. In effect, the prisoner interrogates himself without the explicit instructions of the interrogator. Thus it is that the writing strike fails, for he is compelled to write by his own sense of the need for justice, to discover for himself whether he is right or wrong. This is the driving force that turns the writing into a discipline for the prisoner: the need for a reprieve from meaninglessness.

When ultimately the narrator of To Κιβώτιο comes to his conclusion that it was all for nothing, he surmises the mission was not only doomed to failure but was designed as such:

αυτός είταν ο σκοπός του Γενικού Αρχηγείου...δεν έπρεπε να φτάσει, μα να περιφέρεται το κιβώτιο, όλο να προχωράει και να περιέχεται και να πλησιάζει στο υποτιθέμενο τέρμα, όλο να διαδίδεται η φήμη πώς μια επιχείρηση υψητής σημασίας βρίσκεται εν εξελίξει, πώς όποι ναναι φτάνει το κιβώτιο στην πόλη Κ, πώς όπου ναναι φτάνει συνεπώς η νίκη, μόνο που
this was the plan of General Headquarters... The 'steel box' was not supposed to reach any destination but to circulate, to always advance and march along, to near its hypothetical end, to always spread the rumor that any time now the 'steel box' will make it to its destination, that any time now victory will also be at hand, except for that a few problems exist, barriers appear, the 'box' is forced to turn and turn again, going in circles passing two or three times by the same spot [...] (285)

Finally, when he realizes that the only justification is that he "followed orders" [με διατάξανε](291), he reminds us of the Soldier's version of Oedipus:

That it was an order and decision of Apollo is attested to by the fact that he ultimately got his way. Oedipus, therefore, could have quite easily said that he existed plainly and simply as an executive instrument. (255)

Crist suggests that as an "executive instrument" the narrator took it upon himself to finish the mission which was never meant to be finished (39): his real task was to fail and die miserably along with his companions so that the idea of the "steel box" would work as it was meant to, as the hope against hope, as the long-awaited solution that is always just about to arrive.

Is the narrator's imprisonment then the justice of the novel? Is he guilty, and thus "worthy of severe punishment," as the oath he took suggested? In the final pages of the
novel the narrator seems to find no meaning in anything, neither in his words nor his actions, nor can he affect his own death, which if he could would also be meaningless:

...παρ’όλα αὐτὰ τὸ έξιχασα, δὲν έκρυψα τὸ κύάνο στὸν επίδεσμο...καὶ αὐνομίζετε λοιπὸν πώς θα χρήσει το κιβώτιο με το πτώμα μου, τί περιμένετε και δὲ μέ στήνετε στα έξοβήματα, στὸν τοίχο, ἢ μάλλον στη σιδερένια, δίφυλλη πόρτα; (293)

...despite all this, I forgot it: I didn't put the cyanide in my bandage...and if you think that the 'steel box' will be filled up with my corpse, what are you waiting for and you don't stand me up at six paces, against the wall, or rather against the double iron doors? (293)

This final appeal appears to be typical nihilism, since the narrator can ascribe no form, no truth, no responsibility to his former beliefs. He has been left to judge himself and come-up empty-handed.

What the narrator’s act of self-interrogation has accomplished, however, is to establish for himself his own innocence, as well as allowing him to realize the emptiness of the institutions—the Party—in which he had so idealistically believed. What saves the narrator, in his own eyes, is that although the cause is proved meaningless—the steel box found empty—the quality of his dedication to that cause is irreproachable. He believes and is proud that he did the right thing, that he followed the orders of the Party and of his commanders. He appeals to the myth of Oedipus and revises it: Oedipus was innocent because he executed his divine orders to the best of his ability. Therefore, the narrator reasons, because his motives were pure and his
intentions good, because he executed his orders faithfully to the letter, he is innocent. In the eyes of the Party, of course, in accomplishing his mission, he failed, as did Oedipus: thus he is guilty and must pay the price.

But the act of self-interrogation has also led the narrator to another level, to a higher sense of justice. Through discipline he has managed to resist and transcend the authority of the institution. Ultimately, his dedication and success is morally superior to the criteria of those who sent him on the mission. That this anagnorisis happens in the face of his impending execution makes it tragic, but, for the reader, perhaps all the more meaningful.

Like To Kīβωτίο, the bulk of Manuel Puig’s Kiss of the Spider Woman is set in a prison cell. In it Puig presents two characters: Molina, a homosexual imprisoned for “corruption of minors” (148), and Valentin, a committed leftist intellectual held “under Executive Power” (148) for his involvement as an activist and strike organizer. Puig constructs a very complex novel around the experiences of the two prisoners, touching on the themes of Marxism and revolution, political oppression, violence, torture, love, betrayal, but also psychology, aesthetics and art. Certainly the conditions in Argentina during the 1970s demand that Puig address such themes: the repression of a military dictatorship differs markedly from, for example, the American fascination with the numbing affects of TV culture and
suburban life. Puig incorporates many metafictional forms and postmodernist strategies in his writing to frustrate the reader: the intertextuality of film references as well as "critical" footnotes, multiple and shifting points of view, parody. He employs a deceptively simple yet experimental form that complicates and remarks upon the content of the novel itself, as well as the processes of writing it.

The main story is presented through unmediated dialogue and internal monologue, without any tags, description, exposition, or other narrative intrusion. For example, the novel opens simply with two "voices." The first relates a story that we soon understand is the plot of a film, and the second asks questions about that story. This dialogue continues well into the text before we even learn their names (18), and it is not until the end of the first scene that it becomes apparent that the two speakers are prisoners:

—But tell the truth, wouldn’t you like to have a mother like that? Full of affection, always carefully dressed...Come on now, no kidding...
—No, and I’ll tell you why, if you don’t follow me.
—Look, I’m tired, and it makes me angry the way you brought all this up, because until you brought it up I was feeling fabulous, I’d forgotten all bout this filthy cell, and all the rest, just telling you about the film.
—I forgot all the rest, too.
—Well? Why break the illusion for me, and for yourself, too? What kind of trick is that to pull? (17)

We learn about both characters and their situation solely through what they say to each other. According to Norman Lavers this serves to "eliminate as radically as possible any sign or presence of the author" (57), so that rather than
comprising a metafictional text with the obvious markers of self-consciousness or self-referentiality, the narrative voice seemingly disappears entirely, relegated to the footnotes.

The presentation of the story through dialogue is evidently meant to allow the prisoners, and especially Molina, who tells the plots of the films, to become their own narrators. In terms of identity, for Lavers what this means is that Puig attempts to avoid the problem of representation by allowing the characters their own subjectivity:

One motive may be to eliminate as much as possible the subjectivity of the author, which, overlaying the subjectivity of the protagonists, is just one more filter separating us from their reality. The characters must experience their own reality filtered through the distortions of their culture and language. (58)

Lavers’ reading indicates that Puig is at odds with the typical metafictional practices that seek to make explicit the processes of writing and the awareness that the representation of reality is merely a construct. Puig is perhaps more interested in showing as plainly as he can the way different ideologies affect two distinct types of identity. However, it is not necessarily the case that the author is “eliminated” at all: his presence must be felt in the words he puts into the characters’ mouths, in the choice of not just the films Molina narrates but the details about them he includes. The passage from the novel cited above is a good example of how Puig manages to include metafictional
flourishes in their discussion, as Valentin spoils the escapist "illusion" of Molina's narrative and brings them back into the reality of their cell. Moreover, Puig supplies the novel with several different narrative voices in the simulation of "police reports," for example, as well as in the annotations.

Critics have made much of the footnotes to the novel. Apart from the second footnote, which explicates the "Nazi propaganda film" told by Molina, they comprise what at first glance appears to be a scholarly essay on the origins of homosexuality. In her biography, Susan Levine attributes their existence to Puig's realization that his reader needed to "understand and to care about homosexuality in order to be drawn into the story" (257). Furthermore, the footnotes not only solve the problem of the two characters discussing these theoretical ideas, they are also part of the overt political project of the novel:

[...] he realized that they couldn't have books about homosexuality in the cell, and besides, the gay character was uneducated, almost illiterate. Since homosexuality was such a violently repressed topic in his own culture, what better way to represent the marginalized than by inserting it in the margins, or, in this case, at the bottom of the page? Wherever the character's lack of knowledge created dramatic tension [Puig] inserted footnotes—explaining to the average reader the theories, controversies, and misconceptions surrounding homosexuality [...] Despite his ever-present mischievous irony, [Puig] did have a political mission: to educate both the victims and the perpetrators of homophobia in Latin America. (257-58)
Jonathan Tittler also maintains that Puig, by “addressing the question of homosexuality directly” (49) meant the reader to subscribe to the seriousness of the footnotes:

I take at face value Puig’s comments as to his felt need to disseminate information on the matter [...] The sort of play going on here, rather than mere spoof, is the endless freeplay of signifiers, as Derrida would put it, or the polyphonic interplay of indeterminately authoritative voices, in Bakhtinian terms. (50)

If in the main text Puig is at pains to apparently distance the authorial or narrative voice from the characters, in the footnotes he very consciously wants to establish that authority. And yet that authority is “indeterminate,” perhaps only appearing to signify scholarly knowledge.

Nevertheless, one cannot wholly accept the footnotes “at face value,” despite the seeming earnestness of their political message. The revelation that the final exponent of his theories on homosexuality is a “nonexistent Swiss female psychoanalyst named Dr. Anneli Taube” (Levine 258) suggests a parodic spin on the authoritative narrative. While Levine concedes that Puig is “exposing the kitsch of scientific rhetoric” (258) as a comic device, she reads the inclusion of the counterfeit scholar as a means for Puig to expound his own theories of a “bisexual utopia” (258). If one takes Taube as a parody, however, then Tittler’s reading is useful:

Like Molina and Valentin, she is an invented figure whose ‘presence’ in the footnotes effaces the neat distinction between reality and fiction maintained until that point. (50)
Thus the footnotes are another metafictional maneuver designed to expose the structures of the novel, particularly as they are laid out on the page and contrasted to the main text: at points they consume the main text, running on for pages after a chapter has ended. By the same token, as a parody of scholarly writing they emphasize the constructedness of scientific discourse or historical knowledge.

The footnote on the Nazi propaganda film must also be viewed in terms of parody, for it satirizes fascist ideology. The film Molina narrates is not an actual movie, but a composite of German films from the thirties Puig had seen, coupled with a veiled biography of starlet Hedy Lamarr (Lavers 44). Part of the satirical effect here is that Molina is fascinated in the “girl stuff,” of the film (89), such as what the heroine is wearing or her hairstyle, but he seems indifferent to or disinterested in the historical inaccuracy of the propaganda:

—But he understood the maquis were all a bunch of mafiosos; just wait and listen to what you find out later on in the film.
—Do you know what the maquis were?
—Yes, I already know they were patriotic, but in this film they’re not. Let me finish, okay? So...let’s see, what happened next? (78)

Puig’s “analysis” of the film critiques the ways that pop-culture is harnessed to ideology. Levine suggests that this coupling is central to this section of the novel:
[Puig] would be the first writer to explicitly link the Broadway-Hollywood manipulation of images with that of the Third Reich. He had recognized that the German National Socialists were perhaps the first political force to use the tools of the studio-system—charismatic stars and technological extravaganzas—toward a political end, the first government to make the cinema into a propaganda machine. (262)

Puig’s discussion of ideology is also reflected in the main story, particularly in the character of Valentin. Like Alexandrou’s narrator, at the beginning of the novel Valentin’s identity seems to be dominated by the ideology he espouses. If Molina can only see the world through the clichés of popular culture, Valentin condescendingly “corrects” Molina, as in the above passage, his world view couched in Marxist clichés and popular versions of Freudian psychology that “he barely understands” himself (Lavers 39). As the novel progresses, however, we see Valentin move from his often doctrinaire and chauvinist Marxism to an understanding of Molina. In the end, they have given each other something: Valentin reawakens to an aesthetic sensibility of life, Molina to the possibility of a meaningful political praxis. As Tittler concludes:

Revolutionary politics becomes sexualized, sexual dissidence becomes politicized. [...] Puig has always held out more hope for the gains in the micropolitical, intersubjective arena than in the national or global theater of macropolitics. (59)

It is important, then, that the two characters transcend their original ideologically constructed identities. Thus Molina, who on the one hand betrays Valentin, comes to learn
on the other hand that redemption and meaning can be found in acting politically, though he still romantically desires to become the “heroine” of his own story, dying a noble death. Valentin conversely, comes to realize that a present life sacrificed to the dream of a better political future is meaningless, and at the end of the novel he embraces an acceptance of both difference (in Molina’s homosexual outlook) and of love, in accepting that he loves Marta more than his ideology.

In his enormous and complex novel *Midnight’s Children*, Salman Rushdie is less concerned with overt political ideologies such as Marxism than are Alexandrou or Puig. It is impossible to easily sum up such a lengthy and multifaceted work, despite James Harrison’s assertion that the novel’s “controlling metaphor...is the making of chutney” (66-67). Rushdie is at bottom most interested in the connection between the national and the personal, between the official and unofficial histories that constitute how the narrative of the nation is itself constructed and understood. Rushdie intertwines the vicissitudes of post-colonial India with the life of Saleem Sinai, the narrator of the novel, who is born, along with one thousand other children, at the very hour of India’s independence:

[...] there’s no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1947 [...] On the stroke of midnight as a matter of fact [...] I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades there would be no escape. (3)
Critic T.N. Dhar points to the significance of this opening, noting that, for this novel at least, Rushdie views India as purely modern, without a history, as a “nation that had never previously existed” (Rushdie 129). For Dhar this has implications regarding what will be his outlook on history: “India as a nation was born in 1947; this makes it an invented country, which was possible through a massive collective dream” (Dhar 176). Rushdie somehow dismisses the five thousand year history of India, Dhar posits, because it is “mythical and imaginary” (176).

Rushdie, however, does include a “prehistory” of Saleem Sinai that covers his family background: this necessarily is part of the pre-independence period, and is certainly a less mythical or imaginary time for India. Here what Rushdie is interested in is the imprint of the colonial experience upon India, and how both official history and individual memory coincide to create the imagining of the nation. This occurs through the possibilities embodied in the children born during the midnight hour of Independence, who both literally and figuratively “dream” the nation:

> In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children who were only partially the offspring of their parents--the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream. (137, emphasis in the original)

The irony of the novel is that the possibilities of the children are never realized nor harnessed for the good of the
nation. It is significant that these are children only "partially the offspring of their parents," since it was the abdication of English colonial power that ultimately enabled the "birth" of India as an independent nation. But this passage is also an ironic reference to the fact that the English Mr. Methwold, whose estate the Sinai family purchases, is in reality Saleem's father, the first of the midnight's children whose life is intimately intertwined with that of the nation. That Saleem is not in fact the "chosen child" (135) is problematic, since India's future is tied to a case of mistaken identity. Saleem is quick to dismiss this detail of the babies switched at birth:

when we eventually discovered the crime of Mary Pereira, we all found that it made no difference! I was still their son, they remained my parents. In a sort of collective failure of imagination we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts...(136)

One of the key episodes in this section of the novel occurs during the countdown to Independence, when the Sinai family moves into the Methwold estate. Methwold, a descendent of the infamous William Methwold who assisted in the foundation of the East India Company in Bombay, makes them agree in the terms of the purchase to keep the estate as it is, untouched or unchanged in its English glory, as well as enculturating the Sinai family into certain age-old English traditions such as the "cocktail hour." Methwold's reason?
“My notion,” [he] explains, “is to stage my own transfer of assets. Leave behind everything you see? Select suitable persons--such as yourself, Mr. Sinai!--hand everything over absolutely intact: in tiptop working order. Looking around you everything’s in fine fettle, don’t you agree? Tickety-boo, we used to say…” (111)

The multiple ironies working in this passage encompass not only the allegorized transfer of power, but the implication that Britain left India “intact” with the condescending notion that if the Indians simply continue to do as the British have done it will stay that way. Of course, by the Emergency at the end of the novel, this obviously was not the case, and Methwold’s grand estate had been turned into a high-rise. Nevertheless, the legacy of British colonial rule cannot be divorced from the modern history of India.

Throughout the novel Rushdie is fascinated with questions about the construction of history. Ultimately he parodies and critiques the thirty-year period covered by Saleem’s story. One example of this is the M.C.C. (Midnight Children’s Conference). The children all have various miraculous or magical powers, among them a kind of mental telepathy. In this way they hold a sort of “parliament” in Saleem’s mind, though he is “passive” in his involvement with the other children (Harrison 43):

I communed with them every midnight, and only at midnight, during that hour which is reserved for miracles, which is somehow outside of time; (254-55)

The purpose of the Conference is for the children to work together, using their powers to help shape the fate of the
nation. Yet all they seem to do is talk and talk, getting nowhere on any subject. Harrison suggests what is parodic about this is that the M.C.C. “contains the seeds of its own destruction” (44). The children are “representative” of the nation, since their births and their fates are tied to those of the nation, yet when they “commune” they fall into factionalism, prejudice, regionalism, classism: anything that will divide them:

…and, on top of all this, there were clashes of personality, and the hundred squalling rows which are unavoidable in a parliament composed entirely of half-grown brats.

In this way the Midnight’s Children’s Conference fulfilled the prophecy of the Prime Minister and became, in truth, a mirror of the nation. (306)

In this way Rushdie satirizes as much of the history of the nation as he can in the novel, from the devastating effects and consequences of the Pakistani war in 1965, to Indira Gandhi (as “the Widow”) during the Emergency. Saleem’s life always mirrors the events: for example, he is in the army as a “sniffer” during the war, and is an eyewitness to the horrifying atrocities that take place. As he recalls these terrible memories he feels cursed with this connection to the nation: “Why, alone of all the more than five hundred million, should I have to bear the burden of history?” (457). Harrison sees this as a “clear, comic economy with which Rushdie parodies the whole notion of history” (62).

Saleems’s connection to the events sets up the contrast between official and unofficial history, between the public
and the private, in which Rushdie critiques the constructedness of historical knowledge. Often he comments on the differences between the official version of things and his own recollections. As Dhar points out: “Rushdie illustrates the fragmentary nature of the historian’s recreation of the past by expounding the idea of history reclaimed through memory” (170). To be sure, Saleem is not averse to owning his own lack of authority as chronicler of both his own story and the nation’s history, admitting his own unreliability. He pieces his narrative together not only from the depths of his own faulty memory, but also from the fragmentary information he receives from various friends and other sources. He points out when he is mistaken, as in the case of the date of Gandhi’s death, or when he has mixed up the events. For example, after he recounts a certain episode in which the M.C.C. attempts to influence the outcome of an election, he pauses, knowing something is amiss:

And then it occurs to me I have made another error—that the election of 1957 took place before, and not after, my tenth birthday; but although I have racked my brains, my memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events. This is worrying. I don’t know what’s gone wrong. (265)

Thus, while he puts the events in a certain order to fulfill the aesthetic or dramatic requirements of his narrative, he is well aware of the contingency of his own memory.

Saleem’s awareness of the way in which he constructs his narrative as “history” reflects the larger metafictional
concern that reality, too, is shaped by narratives. Joel Kuortti sees this as a central issue in the novel that works on several levels such as personal or national identity. For example, in terms of the national and historical themes, Kuortti asserts that Rushdie’s interest lies in showing “how the story of the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan is made a reality” (81). But the narratives Saleem chooses to tell are pointedly one-sided:

Why do I say that?—Because it must be true; because what followed followed; because it is my belief that Parvati-the-witch became pregnant in order to invalidate my only defense against marrying her. But I shall only describe, and leave analysis to posterity. (492)

Here is a narrator whose presence, opinions and choices are felt everywhere in the text, attempting to persuade the reader to prize his particular shaping of history over others that may exist. Kuortti notes that this “parallels the view of history not as a homogeneous and transparent ‘truth’ but as one which is produced, constructed from an endless number of stories” (85).

Like Alexandrou’s narrator or Puig’s prisoners, Saleem paradoxically writes because what he desires most of all is to find some sort of meaning, despite being aware of the artificiality of his own narrative. Of course, he has stated this desire from the very beginning of his narration:

Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, over used body permits. But I have no hope saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work fast,
faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning—yes, meaning—something. I admit it: above all things I fear absurdity. (4)

For Saleem, then, the production of a narrative, of a text, is what he hopes will supply a meaning that goes beyond the “solipsistic preoccupation with it own fictionality” (Harrison 67). For Rushdie the meaning derived from his text comes through the engagement with the problem of history and the modes of historiographic metafiction, which allows him to conduct “critical explorations” (Baker 172) of issues such as national history and identity.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Alexandrou, Puig and Rushdie incorporate the devices and techniques of metafiction in order to examine notions of power, history and identity. They rely on the self-conscious constructedness of their narratives to provide a framework for critique and to question assumptions about how “knowledge” is produced. Yet all three authors attempt to find a way to derive some meaning from the narratives they fabricate, even if that is counter to the techniques that they espouse. Puig and Alexandrou are fascinated with ideology and its impact on identity, particularly as it tends to override other types of subjectivity such as national identity. Rushdie, who is not overtly ideological in the ways Alexandrou and Puig are,
seems paradoxically invested in imbuing his text with a meaning that transcends the unreliability of a language that can shape reality.

Notes

1. "I left the phrase half-finished, and thought to cross-out the "or rather, the substance of the thing, since," because certainly what else could that mean if not that I didn't tell the truth..." Ares Alexandrou—The Mission Box (81).

2. For a complete list of Puig's works see Tittler (1993).

3. There are literally dozens of books on the subject. The most comprehensive of these may be Appignanesi and Maitland (eds.) The Rushdie File (1989). See also: Piper (1990) and Akhtar (1989). For a full list of Rushdie's works, see Clark (2001).

4. Ritsos had the leftist "credentials" to critique the novel, having won the Soviet Union's Lenin Prize in 1959. Vassilikos is perhaps best known for his novel "Z," (made into a film by Kostas Gavras), which is based on the assassination of the leftist MP Grigorios Lambrakis in 1963.

5. Puig surely plays on his own "authorial power" by forcing the reader to interrupt his experience of the main text. More on the significance of Puig's footnotes later.
CHAPTER 4

FRAGMENTS OF IDENTITY AND HISTORY:
RHEA GALANAKI, ORHAN PAMUK, ANGELA CARTER

Many men believe that no life is determined in advance, that all stories are essentially a chain of coincidences.

Orhan Pamuk—The White Castle (13)

‘Believe it or not, all that I told you as real happenings were so, in fact; and as to questions of whether I am fact or fiction, you must answer that for yourself!’

Angela Carter—Nights at the Circus (293)

Introduction

While the careers and works of Rhea Galanaki, Orhan Pamuk and Angela Carter have been markedly different, they are united thematically in their approaches to identity and the impact of the reality/fiction dichotomy. In my comparison I shall examine identity as an overriding theme,
but shall also pinpoint certain generic aspects relating to parody, the literary biography, and the authors’ approaches to myth and history. I begin with brief backgrounds of each author.

Born in 1947 in Crete, Rhea Galanaki now lives and works in Patras. Like Alexandrou and Gouroyiannis, she initially made her career as a poet, publishing two collections of poems: Πλήν εύχαρις [Without Joy, 1975] and Τα ορυκτά [The Minerals, 1984]. Her next two works, Το Κέκ [The Cake, 1980] and Πού ζεί ο Λύκος; [Where Does The Wolf Live? 1982], have been described as “synthetic narrative poetry” (Νεο Επίπεδο 10); it is here that her transition to prose and her eventual abandonment of poetry begin. Nonetheless her prose continues to be characterized by a poetic style, as is evident in her first collection of short stories, Ομόκεντρα Διηγήματα [Concentric Stories, 1986]. In 1989 she publishes her first novel, Ο Βιός του Ισμαήλ Φερίκ Πασά [The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha], followed by Θα Υπογράψω Λουί [I Shall Sign as Louie, 1993], Ελένη ή Ο Κανένας [Eleni or No-one, 1998], and her most recent novel Ο Αιώνας των Λαβυρινθών [The Age of Labyrinths, 2002].

For the past dozen years Orhan Pamuk has been recognized as the preeminent Turkish novelist. Born in 1952, he has produced seven novels, four of which have been...
translated. Novelist, translator and critic Güneli Gün has described Pamuk’s first two novels¹ (neither translated) as being “modernist” (59) in their approach, but notes a shift to postmodernism in his third novel, The White Castle (1985). Pamuk’s next works are The Black Book (1990), which plays on the detective genre (Gün 60), and The New Life (1994), a “postcolonial rereading” of Dante’s Vita Nuova (Biddick 45). Both of these novels employ contemporary settings of modern Turkey and continue Pamuk’s exploration of postmodern themes and techniques. There follow his recently translated My Name is Red (1998), a historically set mystery told from multiple narrative perspectives, awarded the prestigious Impac Prize; and his latest novel, [Kar] Snow (2002), not yet translated. An overtly and actively political writer, Pamuk has reached international acclaim by borrowing, according to Gün, “the attitudes and strategies of Third World authors writing for the consumption of the First World” (62).

English author Angela Carter (1940-1992) wrote a wide variety of texts in her intense and prolific career³. Lindsey Tucker describes her early novels as “grounded in realities of sixties urban living” (7), and mainly interested in “surfaces.” Pushing the boundaries of Realism, as in The Magic Toyshop (1967), Carter “depicts
the gritty, sometimes sinister underside of bohemian culture of the sixties with all of its flaunted sexual freedom and narcissism—and violence” (Tucker 7). Always overtly political and informed by a Feminist critique of social as well as literary concerns, Carter’s later prose is more experimental, dominated by a fascination with the grotesque, parodies of myth and fable, gender issues, and generic mixing. For example, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972) is a highly intertextual science-fiction picaresque novel that employs a mimetic, “overtly masculine” narrative to “undermine rather than enhance reader identification” with the themes of sexual violence and domination (Tucker 10). Carter’s later novels, such as The Passion of New Eve (1977), Nights at the Circus (1984) and Wise Children (1991) exhibit a mature feminist perspective that endeavors to undermine and parody notions of myth and the construction of (especially feminine) identity.

In this chapter I will specifically focus upon Galanaki’s two novels, The Life of Ismael Ferik Pasha and Eleni or No-One, Pamuk’s The White Castle, and Carter’s Nights at the Circus. I have chosen these specific texts because each employs metafictional techniques to problematize issues of identity and history.
Parodies of Fictional Biography

Of the three novelists I examine in this chapter, only Galanaki has written explicitly in the mode of the fictional biography, incorporating as her central characters real historical figures—but of which only one is an author. Conversely, Pamuk and Carter offer parodies of this mode that incorporate certain conventions but do not include real historical figures as their subjects. In delineating the dimensions of fictional biography as it relates to postmodernism, Aleid Fokkema reasons that in the face of the “death of the author,” postmodernist writers and critics continue to require a way to approach and understand notions of discursive authority: “postmodernism’s stock character” (41) of the author-figure enables an examination of the crisis of representation. For Fokkema this entails “upsetting the conventions and limitations” (44) of biography—that as a scholarly text it is based on “factual evidence” and seeks “authentic truth”—but also plays on the rupture between fact and fiction. With writing itself at the center of metafiction, Fokkema contends that the author-character is integral to the attempt, in Lyotard’s terms, to “represent the unrepresentable” (44) because of its “subject position in the system (or chaos) of writing” (49). Ultimately the
ontological implications of that subject position inscribed within the text serve to blur the line between the fictive and the real, extending, according to Brian McHale⁴, the levels between the “real world” (whatever that may be) and the feigned “authenticity” or “authority” of a text.

In The Author as Character, Franssen and Hoenselaars suggest that, as a type of genre, the “author as character” offers to postmodernists “a lively, economical way of not only raising but actually embodying such postmodern concerns as representation, the (im)possibility of historical knowledge, the share of the author in the genesis of a text, and intertextuality” (11). But Franssen and Hoenselaars are careful to note that the genre itself is not a new one, and that writing having at its center a famous (or obscure, as the case may be) author goes back at least as far as Plato and Aristophanes, and is certainly not limited to prose fiction⁵. By the nineteenth century, however, prose genres such as the vie romancée (fictional biography) and the Künstlerroman (the artist as hero) were firmly established, though Franssen and Hoenselaars maintain that the specificity of the author as character is an important distinction, placing it at “the crossroads between the historical novel, biography and the Künstlerroman” (18). One significant variation of this
genre is the *vie imaginaire*, attributed to the French author Marcel Schwob, and in which “[h]istorical fact is almost completely abandoned” (15). This last category, like historiographical metafiction itself, foregrounds “history” as indeterminate, representation as subjective, blurs the line between the fictive and the documentary, and balances historical verisimilitude with fictional projection (20).

Early in *I Shall Sign as Louie*, Rhea Galanaki’s protagonist Andreas Rigopoulos (a real historical author) withholds certain of his writings from the publication of his “collected works.” What he consciously omits from the collection are his adolescent poems written in demotic Greek, not only for their language, as he says, but for their (revolutionary) “sentiments”: "<πάνε ἄλλωστε τόσα χρόνια>" [“anyhow so many years have gone”] (11). He also removes some essays written in *katharevousa* that pertain to the “development of [his] reasoning as well as the development of a new nation” [<<ἡ ανάπτυξη ενός συλλογισμοῦ και συνάμα η ανάπτυξη ενός νέου κράτους>>] (12), but for the more simple reason, he claims, that he has not kept the original publications. Parodying the form of the epistolary novel, Galanaki creates a *vie imaginaire* of Rigopoulos, loosely based on his life and writing, but providing imaginary sources of
information, such as the character Louisa, who receives his letters and ostensibly has “preserved” them as “artifacts” in the present text.

What the author-character Rigopoulos does as a conscious effort to present only a fragmentary version of his own creative life points to an important aspect of Galanaki’s works in general. In much of her prose, Galanaki is interested in exploring history or, more specifically, real historical figures, at least in part through the fragmentary “textual” evidence they leave behind (what Hutcheon calls “textual traces” [1989:78]). Moreover, in her novels as well as in the development of her protagonists, Galanaki is concerned with the notions of circularity or what one critic has called “circular time” (Ziras 16), the ambiguities and possibilities of (historical) truth, the function of memory and constructions of identity. Ultimately Galanaki questions assumptions regarding the status and interrelationship of history, myth and fiction in her novels: she employs narrative techniques that allow her to examine the inaccessibility of history as well as the unavoidable gaps within literary texts. Through these gaps Galanaki also questions national identity as a monolithic conception supported by “official history.” She attempts to show the
disparate elements that constitute national identity such as place, religion and language, are only provisional and subject to a complex set of circumstances and representations.

Like Galanaki’s Andreas Rigopoulos, in The White Castle Orhan Pamuk’s narrator chooses to edit portions of the story he tells, condensing to a few sentences, for example, his life before his captivity:

In short, he was an average youth. It pains me to think, when I have to invent a past for myself, that this youth who talked to his beloved about his passions, his plans, about the world of science, who found it natural that his fiancé adored him, was actually me. But I comfort myself with the thought that one day a few people will patiently read to the end of what I write here and understand that I was not that youth... (15)

The novel, set during the seventeenth century, concerns a Venetian who is captured by the Turks and made the slave of the aptly named Hoja (master/teacher), a would-be “Renaissance man” who at once aspires to be a Courtier, man of letters, inventor, warrior, westernizer, enlightened philosopher and (unenlightened) astrologer. Instead of using a real historical figure, Pamuk parodies the autobiographical form by placing his fantastic characters in a plausible historical setting. Nonetheless, he simultaneously admits to the reader that, although “our
‘knowledge’ of history is generally verified in the book” (10), many of the events depicted cannot be corroborated by “reliable” historical sources.

The novel opens with the topos of the scholarly preface claiming the discovery of the text that is to follow, much as in Eco’s The Name of the Rose. Pamuk complicates matters at the outset through his fictional scholar Darvinoglu, who prefers to focus on the author of the piece rather than its historical significance:

My distrust of history was then still strong, and I wanted to concentrate on the story for its own sake, rather than on the manuscript’s scientific, cultural, anthropological or ‘historical’ value. I was drawn to the author himself. (9)

In essence Pamuk offers a kind of double blind to the reader, on the one hand inviting the reader to focus merely on the surface elements of the story, and on the other suggesting that indeed the piece must have historical weight if it is to be consciously ignored. But the fictional scholar undermines and dismisses from the beginning the veracity and importance of the text, and thus Pamuk collapses the line between the different ontological levels of the novel:

A professor friend, returning the manuscript he’d thumbed through at my insistence, said that in the old wooden houses on the back streets of Istanbul there were tens of thousands of manuscripts filled with stories of this kind. (11)
The discovered text, in other words the "historical document" that the novel represents, is neither special nor necessarily authentic. In light of this questionable authenticity, of equal importance is the status of the text as a "translation." Darvinoglu, the discoverer of the text, has translated it himself from the Ottoman original into modern Turkish: "reading a couple of sentences from the manuscript I kept on one table, I’d go to another table in the other room where I kept my papers and try to narrate in today’s idiom the sense of what remained in my mind" (12). What we are meant to read, then, is not the actual text itself but his impressions and interpretations of that text. By the time the novel proper begins, we are at least two levels away from the "real world" or the "actual" historical document.

Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* also begins in an (auto)biographical mode that has at its center both writing and interpretation. The novel, set at the end of 1899 on the brink of what Fevvers idealistically and symbolically believes will be a "New Century" (281), employs aspects of the picaresque novel in following the life and adventures of Fevvers and Walser through their Russian tour as members of Colonel Kearny’s Circus. The narrative scheme is, to say the least, convoluted and polyphonic, consisting of an
unreliable third person mixed with any number of other voices. At the beginning Fevvers and Lizzie tell their story in a dual (and dueling) narrative to the journalist Walser, who is busy writing it down. While the “reported” narratives of the other two characters dominate these early chapters, the narrative focus is ostensibly on Walser’s perspective. For example, as Fevvers and Lizzie speak, we are privy to Walser’s interpretations of what they say, as well as always kept aware of his act of writing:

And Walser found himself asking himself: are they, in reality mother and daughter?
Yet, if this were so, […] who or where in all this business was the Svengali who turned the girl into a piece of artifice, who had made of her a marvelous machine and equipped her with her story? Had the one eyed whore, if she existed, been the first business manager of these weird accomplices?
He turned a page in his notebook. (28-29)

On one level, Walser is at once writer and reader, both the raison d’être of Fevver’s narrative and its chronicler. Often the flow of the narrative is interrupted when Walser stops writing. The “Svengali” is a play on the ontological levels of the text: for Walser, who thinks rationally within his fictive world, must somehow supply a reason for the existence of Fevvers, but, for the reader, of course this can also be seen to refer to the narrator, and, ultimately to Carter herself.
The metafictional/parodic forms of these novels in terms of their uses of the conventions of biographical or autobiographical writing serve to “criticize naïve views of representation” (Rose 66). What Rose implies here is that the double coding of metafictional texts questions the “how of knowing,” (90) by creating an awareness of how we receive literary texts as well as how the world is represented in them. As we shall see, these metafictional concerns seep into the ways that Galanaki, Pamuk and Carter investigate understandings of identity and history in general.

**History, Myth and Identity**

Galanaki has stated that in her novel *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* she did not have the “intention to write a historical novel or even a novelistic biography” (Kostandellou 43). Rather, what ostensibly interests her is the way in which disparate elements (including but not limited to history) can be expressed in a variety of modes of writing. The novel tells the story of two Cretan brothers captured by the Turks during the Greek War of Independence. One is taken to Constantinople: he escapes to Odessa, later settles in Athens, becomes a wealthy businessman and supporter of the continuing independence.
movement against the Turks. The other, the title character Ismail Ferik Pasha, goes to Egypt, converts to Islam, is educated in military schools, becomes the confidant of the viceroy and, after a stellar career, attains the rank of general in the Ottoman army. He returns to Crete in the 1860s at the head of the forces that must put-down the latest revolt of the Greeks, and where he confronts his former life as a Christian Greek. The novel is divided into three parts, each written from a different perspective. The first, “Years of Egypt, the Myth,” is a third person narrative that is, despite its title, more like a biographical sketch which incorporates “historical material” such as the letters he exchanges with his long lost brother. The second part, “Days of Homecoming and History,” is written in the first person in the style of a journal: Ismail narrates his own story beginning with his landing on Crete to prosecute the war. The final part, “Epimythio”⁶, reverts to an omniscient third person in order to relate differing versions of Ismail’s death.

Because of her distinctive style, some critics of Galanaki’s work have found it difficult to place her within a specific category and offer a variety of generic possibilities. Dimitris Maronitis, for example, examines the ways in which Ferik Pasha uses the modes of historical
fiction to question notions of historiography, chronology, historical knowledge and fantasy (229), but resorts to descriptive terms such as “novelistic anthropogeography” (228), “archeology” (229), and “linguistic baroque” (233) to try to fit the novel into a sub-category of the genre. He notes her use of narrative “retrogression” [οπισθοδρόμηση] (232), in which the straightforward historical chronology of the novel is undermined through continual reference to (and knowledge by the narrator of) the end, as well as the use of shifting point of view, alternative narrators and fragmentary epistolary techniques. Eleni Yannakaki also sees Galanaki’s novels in terms of the relationship between fiction and history. What interests her is the way in which Galanaki plays with the presentation of historical time in the novels, and the manner in which the structure of the novels subverts the presuppositions that accompany both the writing of history and the writing of traditional historical novels. Maronitis suggests, however, that Ismail Ferik Pasha has no real ideological link to historical fiction since it is neither escapist, nor naturalistic, nor patriotic. Rather, at a loss perhaps to fit her neatly into a particular category, he concludes simply that Galanaki “broaches timely problems” (234) in Modern Greek history.
At the center of the novel are Ismail’s obsessions about identity. Initially it appears that he is ambivalent towards his identity, which he never quite resolves over the course of the novel. Early on, this ambivalence symbolically takes the form of a knife he finds when as a boy he is captured by the Ottomans in a cave near his village:

*Τι άλλο ήταν η σκουριασμένη πράσινη λεπίδα, που βρήκε τότε στα σκοτάδια της σπηλιάς; Το σχήμα της δεν του θύμιζε κανένα γνωστό είδος χριστιανικού ή αραβικού μαχαιριού. Ο ίδιος δεν έβγαλε ποτέ τη λεπίδα από τα κεντημένα ρούχα του Οθωμανού πασά, πιστεύοντας πως ήταν μάλλον η ρομφαία ενός ανεξήγητου αγγέλου, που ορίσε τη ζωή του στην τροχαία των μαχαιριών.* (16)

What else but a thing of this nature was the rusty green blade he discovered in the darkness of the cave? Its shape evoked none of the Christian or Arab types of knife known to him. In the years ahead, he was never to remove the blade from under the embroidered costume he wore as an Ottoman pasha, preferring to believe that it was the sword of some creedless angel who had ordained that his life should revolve within the orbit of knives. (Cicellis 15)

Because the blade itself is of unknown origin and make, he cannot use it as a talisman to remember his lost Greek identity, nor yet as a reinforcement of his Ottoman one: rather, since it is “creedless” and warlike it becomes for him the emblem of some vague “sin without a body” (15) [«αμαρτία δίχως σώματο», 16], floating lost in the haze of the past like his memories of the plateau and his mother’s face. He associates it with the liminal moment between his
Greekness and his Ottomanness, a moment where he comes to dwell in his secret inner life. Ismail’s own interpretation of the blade, of course, comes from the perspective of the mature man who has struggled to understand and give form to the events of his life.

After his capture, Ismail feels “newborn” in the world, and as he emerges from the cave he sees the plateau where he lived in flames and defeat. Later, in Egypt, he outwardly accepts the Ottoman way of life forced upon him, is Islamized, but he consigns his old Christian/Greek life to a separate, inner reality. He speaks to himself in Greek and keeps alive as much as he can his memories of the time before his capture. Thus Ismail leads two separate lives in the novel, his outward Ottoman life as a soldier, and his secret inner life that shelters the Greekness he feels. In either case the “identity” is incomplete, since he accepts the one only partially while the other is based on a few memories. This is why, when his long lost cousin brings him news in Cairo of his brother’s life and successes in Athens, Ismail is moved and feels a renewal of his dormant Greek self. Galanaki provides fragments of letters (authentic or fictitious) Ismail exchanges with his brother in which they describe their lives to each other, and slowly Ismail is brought closer to his ostensibly
“true” Greek identity. However, once again the letters can only provide a partial connection, in this case to his brother’s experience:

He was keen to find out what it would have been like to live that life—a life hanging on what amounted to a wayward stroke of chance; even though he was aware that a life recounted in a letter could not possibly match the first-hand experience of living his own life. (Cicellis 57)

Tzina Politi suggests that it is not this type of reference to the difference between writing and reality by itself that makes Galanaki’s novels metafictional, for Galanaki makes no overt comment about the writing of the novel, to its underlying structures or to the “dialectical relationship between the genre and whichever reality” (11). More often, however, references can be found to fragments of letters, the creation of art or the making of history. Galanaki’s prose, Politi continues, does make a kind of self-conscious move in that it takes on a “poetic design” which functions metonymically to represent the “forgetfulness” of historical memory and to offer a structure through which the characters can explore their own “existential problem” with time:
In all three novels, her concern is to organize, underneath the external differences that bound the fragmentary lifetime of her historical characters, a unifying, indivisible structure which answers man’s existential problem with time, in other words, with death, memory and hope. (11)

Galanaki uses this “angst” in her characters to reflect (and ultimately to question and to undermine) what Politi observes as a typically 19th Century problematic of the “unified” versus the “fragmented” self.

The fragmentation of Ismail’s dual identity and the scraps of the “historical evidence” serve to emphasize Galanaki’s fascination with the depiction of reality/truth and historical fact. While the narrative imitates authoritative historical texts, it uses images and metaphors that undermines its authority. For example, when his cousin visits him in Cairo, Ismail suspects the truth of the story his cousin tells him, and attempts to “lift the mask from the stranger’s face” (Cicellis 49) [<<να σηκώσει τη μάσκα του ξένου>>, 57]. As he muses on it he comes to the conclusion that nothing is “authentic”:

Κατέβασε το βλέμμα του στην περίμετρο το θόλου, την κοσμημένη με στρογγυλές κορνίζες ανάμεσα σε κάνιστρα γεμάτα λουλούδια και πλατιά φύλλα. Μέσα στις κορνίζες αιγυπτιακά τοπία, ζωγραφισμένα με τον τρόπο
He lowered his gaze to the circumference of the cupola, decorated with medallions and painted baskets of flowers in the manner of the purest classicizing French school, opening up illusory vents of escape in the cloistered room. Nothing authentic here, he decided, despite [its] own authenticity. (Cicellis 49, translation modified)

Surrounded by architectural and artistic imitation and illusion, Ismail cannot find the “authenticity” he seeks in his cousin nor even in his own secret identity.

Imitation and illusion continue to play a significant role in later sections of the text. In Ismail’s first person account of the Egyptians’ campaign on Crete, for example, he is constantly struck by the “unreality” of the experience and the effect upon his two identities that his return to Crete creates. The conflict between the two comes to the fore in various ways. Upon his arrival in Crete he realizes that, despite his eagerness to see his homeland again, he misses his Ottoman family (76/90) and his wife, who at their parting somehow sensed he would never return to her. Moreover, his duties as General cause him to confront the duality of his own sense of self:

Με ξένησε το γεγονός ότι άκουγα τον εάυτο μου να υπαγορεύει αργά και καθαρά τα αραβικά, ενώ βρισκόμουν στη νήσο που γεννήθηκα, σαν να μην άγγιζε το ένα γεγονός το άλλο: ή μάλλον σαν να μην είχα στην
It felt strange listening to myself dictating my report in Arabic, slowly and clearly, while stationed on the island where I was born, as if these two facts remained entirely unrelated; or rather as if I had not yet [in reality] set foot on the land I had preserved so long in my imagination...But I felt obliged to remind myself that the present campaign, after all, was directly part of my Ottoman self. (Cicellis 83, translation modified)7

The longer he is on the island the more he begins to feel the strangeness of the place, for its reality does not correspond to his memories of it.

Another instance of this sense of strangeness occurs later in the campaign, when Ismail visits Herakleion and comes closer to the mythic plateau where he had lived as a boy: he vaguely remembers the city from the time of his capture:

I told myself that for many centuries the conquerors and the conquered had been setting the scene for the last act of my life in a manner reminiscent of the
operatic stage sets I had seen in Europe long ago. The memory of two captive boys, forever separated in this harbour, sundered to the very marrow by their different paths, suddenly transformed both past and present into the flimsy décor of a theatrical episode. The factitious impression was so intense that I wondered whether the completed episode had ever actually taken place in real life...But if there was one person who could prove that he had truly existed in this whole story, if there was some real, living creature still ravaged by that parting long ago, that could only be me. That was all I could vouch for. I could only acknowledge the fact of my own existence, here, in the same setting as then, experienced as reality, not as mimesis. Anything beyond that fact I could only doubt. (Cicellis 126)

The “operatic” unreality of the place, as if it were a theater set, undermines Ismail’s connection to it as “authentic homeland.” The place seems “fake” (127/149), and ultimately alienates him, throwing him back to his ambivalence toward an authentic identity. According to Vangelis Calotychos this is important because it allows “Ismail to play out or project for himself a number of roles that structure identity along the potential li(n)es of origin, purity and return” (251). Galanaki employs artistic imagery and the theatricality of the “set-piece” to underscore the constructedness both of her narrative and of the sense of an authentic identity fostered by topography. If that topography itself only seems real on the surface, or from a distance, then so must the identity it supposedly nurtures seem shallow or inaccessible.
Yet Ismail still feels compelled in this unreal topography to attempt to find a connection, to feel the reality of his “first life” as a Greek. As the army approaches the plateau where he was captured, taking the same road which he walked as a prisoner, he again experiences an “exit from reality” (Cicellis 132) [<<έξοδο...απο την πραγματικότητα>>, 156]; he wishes to be able to be “in touch with the ground” (131)[<<έτσι μ’άγγελο το χώμα>>, 155] and rubs pieces of soil between his fingers (133/158) when he finally dismounts to rest. The soil, he hopes, will aid him in his search for the reality of the place, of his memories, of his past life. However, the split between his two lives torments Ismail, and he vacillates between the desire to reclaim his lost Greekness and hating that desire, which has “imprisoned” (133/157) him as an Egyptian/Ottoman soldier. Later, as his grip on reality becomes more tenuous, he believes he is visited by the phantom of his old friend Ibrahim, but finds that he can only speak to him in Greek.

At the climax of Ismail’s narrative, during the final stages of the war (which in the end goes badly for the rebellious Greeks), Ismail orders that his regular troops fire upon Ottoman irregulars who will not desist from
attacking the women and children of a razed village. In doing so, his description of himself belies the complexity of his identity:

Τότε εγώ, υπουργός πολέμου της Αιγύπτου, αρχηγός του αιγυπτιακού στρατού σ’ αυτήν την εκστρατεία, Κρήτης την πατρίδα, τουρκισθείς κατά την παιδικήν μου ηλικίαν και αδελφός ως λέγονσιν, του εν Αθήναις Παπαδάκη, όστις λαλώ την απλοελληνικήν και είχα το πρόσταμα της τελευταίας μάχης, διέταξα τον τακτικό οθωμανικό στρατό να πυροβολήσει ενεντίον των Οθωμανών ατάκτων. (167)

This was the moment when I—Egyptian Minister of War, the general commanding the Egyptian army in this campaign, a Cretan by birth, reared as a Turk, reportedly a brother of citizen Papadakis of Athens, a speaker of vernacular Greek, and the man in charge of operations in this last battle—this was when I ordered the regular Ottoman army to fire at the Ottoman irregulars. (Cicellis 141)

Ismail is at once all of these versions of himself, and the conflict between the different identities cannot be resolved easily in him. Nonetheless, at the moment of what ostensibly will be the last act of his second life, he chooses to protect the victims of the war, to align himself with his first life and his first homeland.

Having made this choice, he afterwards returns to the house where he lived as a boy, which has remarkably survived the ravages of the intervening years, in order to exorcise the ghosts of his double life. Performing a kind of folk ritual, he sees or imagines he sees his brother and his parents, who symbolically accept him:
Δεν ήξερε πιά πώς να με αποκαλέσει, με το χριστιανικό ή με το μουσουλμανικό μου όνομα. (...) Μερικά πράγματα δεν αλλάζουν, είπε, και γιά τούτο σε δέχομαι, αν καί τυρραννίστηκα μέχρι να το αποφασίσω. (...) Πρόκειται, και αυτό είναι καλό, χάθηκες όμως από τη συνέχειά σου. Μαζί σου έκοψες και μένα. Σε σώζει ότι ποτέ δεν θέλησες, ή δεν κατάφερες, να μας διαγράψεις. (173-74)

He no longer knew how to address me, by my Christian or my Muslim name. [...] Some things never change, he said, and that is why I accept you, though I had great trouble arriving at that decision. [...] You prospered, and that is a fine thing; only you lost the connection, the continuity; you broke off, and I was broken off with you. What may redeem you is that you never wished, or were never able, to obliterate us. (Cicellis 147)

Ultimately Ismail feels or comes to understand that a sense of connection to his former life does exist in the visions of his slaughtered relatives. It is his memory of them, and of his first life, that allows him to finally feel “himself” and “at home” again. What is unclear in the text is the “reality” of his vision, for Galanaki sets this resolution in the dreamlike setting of the ritual in the old house. For Ismail it seems real enough, and so he ends his own narrative with premonitions of his own death. Galanaki, however, is not so quick to accept Ismail’s version of the story.

In the final section of the novel, where she returns the narrative to an omniscient third person, Galanaki questions this particular ending of the story. In a typically metafictional “non-ending,” she supplies multiple
and conflicting versions of Ismail’s death. He is poisoned in the first version for his involvement in the intrigues of the Viceroy’s state policy; in the next he is poisoned for his treason at the battle and for reverting to Christianity; another has him wounded in the belly during the final battle on the plateau, while at the very end he commits suicide using the old knife he had carried with him for so many years. Galanaki plays with these multiple versions to highlight the inaccessibility of historical knowledge. She has pieced together various fragments of a particular history, but dwells on the sense of erasure between them, which undermines any conception of absolute truth. The monument erected to Ismail’s memory is emblematic of this notion, for it is placed in a location that itself shows the various layers and erasures of history:

Ismail Ferik Pasha’s cenotaph was thus erected in the precincts of the Vizir Mosque, which was about to be completed at the time. It had been destroyed by a great earthquake eleven years earlier and was now being rebuilt on the old foundations, on the same site where many years ago there stood a Christian church,
alternately Orthodox or Catholic, according to the ruling sovereign’s creed... The Byzantines used to bury governors, archbishops and generals of the Cretan theme in the precincts of the church, while the Venetians used the space for the burial of Dukes, Commanders-in-Chief and Latin archbishops, and the Ottomans, at a later date, for their Pashas and other notables. (Cicellis 164-165)

Thus Ismail’s “soul” remains on the island as part of the diverse history of the place, but only in a temporarily privileged position. Ironically, the traces of this history are destroyed to make way for modernization: a school is built on the site in the 1930s, and the old Turkish graves do not conform with the “Europeanized image that the city was intent on presenting” (165) [<<Ηταν ασύμβατα και με την εξευρέσας σμένη εικόνα, πού η πόλη επιδίωκε να δώσει>>, 196]. In the end a completely different national model that prizes another kind of history effaces Ismail’s internal struggle about his identity. As Calotychos has noted, Galanaki’s perspective on both history and identity in *Ismail Ferik Pasha* is one that “rewrites” and “decenters” (255) accepted, official notions of them, providing her a way to “critique the logic of history and national identity by deconstructing the modes of narration and reading that create them” (256). The fragments that have been left behind are used to reconstitute and reconsider the mythologized versions of a real historical figure.
In *The White Castle* Orhan Pamuk is similarly interested in deconstructing narratives of identity, and, writing as he does on the “periphery” of Europe (Calotychos 243), must also negotiate between differing ideologically charged narrative constructions of history. However, if Ismail’s struggle with identity seems personal and internal, affected coincidentally by external and conflicting ideological forces, in *The White Castle* Pamuk presents the conflict of identity purposefully set against the dynamic of overtly ideological propositions such as the clash between East and West. If, as John Updike laments in his review of the book (105), there is a certain detrimental loss of realism in this move, what Pamuk gains in his metafictional approach is a way to question constructions of reality, identity and history. Significantly, it is through the act of writing that the characters attempt to form a sense of their own identities.

The novel’s metafictional elements do not stop at the preface, but continue throughout the “translated” narrative. The unnamed Venetian narrator constantly refers to the composition of his text and his readers, and provides numerous images of both reading and writing. For example, the narrator often stops to ponder the effects of his text upon the reader:
[...] he repeated it again: he would go on till the end.
Now I begin to wonder: who, once having read what I’ve written to the end, patiently following everything I have been able to convey of what happened, or what I have imagined, what reader could say that Hoja did not keep this promise he made? (47)

The repetition of the phrase “to the end” playfully refers to the main character Hoja, who will be an agent in the plot until its conclusion—as well as foreshadowing the action to come—but also refers to the reader, who must read to the end of the book in order to find out. Moreover, the narrator manages not only the reference to the reader and the text, disrupting the flow of the realistic narrative, he also breaks the plane of “suspended disbelief” by undermining his own status as the authoritative voice recounting “what happened.” He could just as easily have “imagined” it.

From early in the novel identity is something that is malleable and contested. When the Turkish ships subdue the Venetian galley, the narrator decides to hide his true identity and, posing as a physician, offers his services to the Turks in order to save himself from the torture he expects. The advantages of the assumed identity are clear: while it does not save him from enslavement and imprisonment, he is treated better than the other prisoners. Later, the status he acquires as a “learned
doctor” in the prison coupled with the small fees he collects for treating prisoners and guards alike, allows him hire a tutor to teach him Turkish; he is then taken to treat the Pasha, who befriends him, and he ultimately escapes the prison when he is given to Hoja.

The action of the novel centers on the relationship between Hoja and the narrator, and hinges on the singular coincidence that they look exactly alike. At their first meeting, the realism of the narrative evaporates into what sounds more like a fairy tale, and the identity of the characters is immediately thrust into question: “The resemblance between myself and the man […] was incredible! It was me there” (22, emphasis in the original). But then just as quickly the narrator moves to downplay his first sense of incredulity, feeling that this coincidence must be “a fiction of [his] troubled mind” (22) or a joke played on him. Nevertheless, after the narrator takes his place in Hoja’s household—not exactly as a slave but as a kind of “research assistant,” mentor and confidant—their relationship slowly develops into one of mutual understanding.

Hoja is portrayed as a very intelligent, ambitious, sometimes frighteningly disturbed individual who views the world in conflicting terms. His relationship with the
narrator often reflects the clash between East and West. While he is enamored of Western science and philosophy, he often exhibits contradictory emotions towards the West: sometimes he is awed, acutely aware of the “backwardness” and “inferiority” of the East, while at other times he scoffs at the “limitations” of the West, reinforcing his pride in Eastern thought and Islamic values. Hoja is enraged, for example, when the narrator refuses to abandon his Christianity, even on threat of death, yet later he comes to respect the narrator for his steadfastness and his intellect.

Throughout most of the novel, Hoja, in search of “enlightenment,” forces the narrator (often sadistically) to write stories of his life, and to “teach him everything” (32), both in an attempt to learn who his “twin” is, and to glean as much “Western knowledge” as the narrator can provide. The narrator, however, despite the torturous nature of Hoja’s methods, makes a game of it, often attempting to confound Hoja with half-truths, exaggeration, fictionalization and blatant lies: his relationship to Hoja as a reader reflects Pamuk’s view of his own to the actual reader:

Hoja had so pressed me [...] that I was obliged, just as I am now, to dream up something my reader would find believable and try to make the details enjoyable. (61)
The narrator attempts to appease and entertain Hoja by playing to his expectations, and similarly, through these scenes of writing Pamuk keeps the reader aware of the processes he himself is employing to achieve the same.

Hoja himself uses writing as a method to investigate his own inner self, embarking on a sort of "vision quest" to understand his own identity. He clearly puts more stock into the possibility of meaning than the narrator. They couple the writing at times with scenes in which they look at each other in mirrors: here their identities are blurred, and the narrator himself often feels confused about (their) identity:

I looked, and under the raw light of the lamp saw once more how much we resembled one another. I recalled how I’d been overwhelmed by this when I’d first seen him as I waited at Sadik Pasha’s door. At that time I had seen someone I must be; and now I thought he too must be someone like me. The two of us were one person! [...] It was one of the most terrifying of all the nights I spent with him. (82-83).

Later, despite his terror, the narrator again feels that this is some kind of a game Hoja is playing. What develops is a game of interpretation, as Hoja attempts to ascribe meaning to everything, from the simple events of their daily life to the connections between grand historical events and what Hoja hopes will be their place in them.
Following these intellectual pursuits, their identities continue to merge until the narrator becomes completely uncertain of himself:

He had said to me that basically every life was like another. This frightened me for some reason: [...] While I looked apprehensively into his face, I felt an impulse to say ‘I am I’. It was as if, had I the courage to speak this nonsensical phrase, I would obliterate all those games played by all those gossips scheming to turn me into someone else, played by Hoja and the sultan, and live at peace again within my own being. But like those who shy away from even the mention of any uncertainty that might jeopardize their security, I kept silent in fear. (122-23)

Slowly the narrator senses that he is losing “himself” and becoming “a completely different person” (124).

Pamuk often ironically treats Hoja’s urgent need to “know” everything, as well as his need for celebrity—to be known as a great scholar and philosopher. This irony is largely observable in the episodes where he and the narrator “work” on various projects: astronomical and astrological reports to the Pasha, and later the Sultan; interpretations of the Sultan’s dreams; books of fables and fairy tales; eliminating the plague from the city; various “inventions,” including fireworks displays, more accurate clocks, improving on existing weapons and building an ultimate “secret weapon” that will aid the Sultan in conquering Europe. Perhaps the most biting irony is that
Hoja is in the end a failure. The Sultan, while amused at his works, quickly forgets them. No one reads the books he writes, no one takes him seriously as a scholar or philosopher. The great weapon gets stuck in the mud at the battle and is useless. Hoja eventually escapes his own failures and the dread of his own identity by trading places with the narrator and disappearing. The narrator, whose notion of self by the end of the novel is completely blurred, assumes Hoja’s identity. At bottom he seems far better equipped to survive in the world of the Sultan’s court, and goes on to live a comfortable and quiet life.

John Updike has suggested that as a “historical fable” The White Castle is contrived and lacking in “lifelikeness” (104). But it is precisely the incorporation of elements such as those of the fable, the autobiography and the fragmented “translation”—the conscious move away from realism—that allow Pamuk to go beyond the realistic historical novel that Updike prizes. Pamuk’s use of metafictional narrative strategies allows him ultimately to explore and question such large topics as (to paraphrase Adorno) the “project of Enlightenment,” and the meaning/meaninglessness of constructions such as history and identity. Pamuk’s text embodies the postmodernist perspective that, in the words of Ian Almond, “there are no
grand narratives—or rather, there are only narratives, stories whose secret is that there is no secret, no supernatural source, no cosmic meaning beneath them” (75, emphasis in the original).

Angela Carter, like Pamuk and Galanaki, is also interested in notions of identity, but in *Nights at the Circus* they are a part of her larger fascination with the chasm between reality and fiction, between authenticity and illusion. Whereas Galanaki uses real historical figures and whatever real fragmentary information about them she can find to invent imaginary “histories,” and Pamuk uses imaginary figures in apparently convincing historical settings, Carter begins with a fantastic character whose story is full of grotesque imagery, implausible situations and almost boundless illusion. Moreover, Carter employs metafiction to explore writing from a feminist perspective. As Beth Boehm suggests, much of Carter’s work “has been geared towards exposing the male bias behind both literary and cultural constructions” (194).

Walser’s task at the beginning of the novel is to determine if Fevvers is real or a hoax. With this in mind, Walser ponders the nature of such illusions as Fevvers represents, remembering previous hoaxes:
In Kathmandu, he saw the fakir on a bed of nails, all complete, soar up until he was level with the painted demons on the eaves of the wooden houses; what, said the old man [...] would be the point of illusion if it looked like an illusion? For, opined the old charlatan to Walser with po-faced solemnity, is not this whole world an illusion? And yet it fools everybody. (16)

Carter points to the required realism that will enable the viewer of an illusion (and her readers) to “suspend disbelief,” and although the opening chapters of the novel are very concrete in their descriptions and their “reconstruction” of London in 1899, Carter’s realism only serves to emphasize the unbelievability of her story. Magali Michael points out that in Carter’s work the opposition between reality and fiction is always “precarious,” and thus Walser’s observations suggest “the concepts are intertwined” (210). In part, then, the fantastic element serves to make the suspension of disbelief all the easier.

Carter carries this theme of reality and illusion into the descriptions of Fevvers’ stage act, though in somewhat the reverse of the above, for Fevvers seems at pains to make herself seem entirely fake:

What made her remarkable as an aerialiste, however was the speed—or rather, the lack of it—with which she performed even the climactic triple summersault [...] The music went much faster than she did; she dawdled. Indeed, she did defy the laws of
projectiles, because a projectile cannot mooch along its trajectory; if it slackens its speed in mid-air, down it falls. But Fevvers, apparently, pottered along the invisible gangway between her trapezes with the portly dignity of a Trafalgar Square pigeon [...] Yet, apart from this disconcerting pact with gravity [...] Walser observed that the girl went no further than any other trapeze artiste. She neither attempted nor achieved anything a wingless biped could not have performed, although she did it in a different way, [...] he was astonished to discover that it was the limitations of her act in themselves that made him briefly contemplate the unimaginable—that is, the absolute suspension of disbelief.

For, in order to earn a living, might not a genuine bird woman—in the implausible event that such a thing existed—have to pretend she was an artificial one? (17)

The blurring of the line between truthfulness and deception serves to heighten the experience of the fantasy in her audience, so that by limiting her performance and making herself seem artificial, she ultimately makes herself more believable. This reflects Carter’s own choices in terms of the presentation of her text, in which she combines, on the one hand, the fantastic and the grotesque with, on the other, an “entirely conventional relationship between teller and told, writer and reader” (Boehm 196).

In terms of its treatment of Fevvers, the novel is a parody of the Künstlerroman. Carter continues her exploration of Fevvers’ “unnaturalness” (30), focusing on all manner of the carnivalesque experiences and grotesque
characters she encounters. Brian McHale comments that
topoi such as these reflect the polyphony of postmodernist
texts (1992: 154). Fevvers grows up in Ma Nelson’s brothel
playing the part of a “living cupid” and, after she has
grown a bit, as a “statue” of “Winged Victory” (37). Later
she makes her living portraying the “Angel of Death” in
Madame Schreck’s “museum of women monsters” (55). The
novel is full of stories about women who have been ill
treated by men. Linda Hutcheon posits that these kinds of
images are reflections of Carter’s feminist project: woman
as the object of the male gaze is “never real” (1989:32),
and Carter challenges the politics of representation
through parodies of “canonical male representations” (98)
of women. After many bizarre adventures, Fevvers finally
emerges as a strong, independent woman, the “Helen of the
High Wire” that Walser comes to interview at the beginning
of the novel; and she is completely in control of all
aspects of her life and her career. As Mary Russo suggests
in her feminist reading of the novel, Carter “grotesquely
de-forms the female body as a cultural construction in
order to reclaim it” (243), and thus by becoming an object
of the gaze on her own terms, Fevvers undermines and
critiques conventional discourses of representation.
Walser’s own “formation” story, a parody itself of the *Bildungsroman*, comes in two stages. First, as a clown in Colonel Kearny’s circus, where, in learning the rudiments of “the Ludic game” (99) (as the Colonel is fond of calling it), and putting on the make-up, he begins to lose own identity:

When Walser first put on his make-up, he looked in the mirror and did not recognize himself. [...] and Walser’s very self, as he had know it, departed from him, he experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the language which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of burlesque. (103)

If at first he feels free in losing himself, he realizes later that the “surface” is not enough and that the clowns live in a kind of “terrible suspension of being” (116). This is exacerbated after his mishap with the lion, when he can no longer send his dispatches back to his newspaper:

...his right arm is injured and, although healing well, he cannot write or type until it is better, so he is deprived of his profession. Therefore, for the moment, his disguise disguises nothing. He is no longer a journalist masquerading as a clown; willy-nilly, force of circumstance has turned him into a real clown...(145)

The second stage of Walser’s “formation” comes after the circus train wrecks in the Siberian wilderness, where he literally loses himself (and his memory), only to be
saved by a shaman and “re-formed” as an aboriginal. He teaches Walser the language and customs of his tribe, but also initiates him into the “secrets” of his profession as an interpreter of “the visible world around him” (253). Like Fevvers and Colonel Kearny—and so many of the other characters in the novel—the shaman is a “con man.” Carter plays with the sense of “confidence” a figure like the shaman represents, not as a “humbug” (263) but as the leader of his people, whose belief in him he must respect and protect. If his conjuring tricks reinforce their society’s basic belief system, then he is at peace with pulling the wool over their eyes. Carter here presents yet another version of the main paradox in the novel, for the “simple” villagers “reality” is somehow upheld by the shaman’s sleight of hand. In both Fevvers’ and Walser’s stories Carter examines the malleability of identity through experience and circumstance, and offers a variety of expressions of agency.

Throughout Fevvers’ and Lizzie’s accounts of the improbable places and events of their narrative, Walser looks for signs of verifiability. Carter constantly makes references to real historical figures such as the Prince of Wales (19) and Isaac Singer (of sewing machine fame)(46). Moreover, she points out in the text her use of “facts,”
yet this only serves to confound Walser’s attempt to prove Fevvers’ tale: “Walser tapped his teeth with his pencil tip, faced with the dilemma of the first checkable fact they’d offered him and the impossibility of checking it” (46-47). Thus Carter again parodies the ways in which historical accuracy or biographical facts can be ascertained.

In the end it is the sense of indeterminacy and openness that makes Nights at the Circus an apt critique of both constructions of identity and constructions of history. Carter is aware of her own complicity in this critique, and consciously attempts to present a world in which there exists the possibility of “a new kind of being” who is “unburdened with a past” (28).

If Carter is interested in identity from a plethora of theoretical points of view, what she leaves out is the element of national identity. This is not the case with Galanaki, who, as we saw in Ferik Pasha, specifically examines this theme. Her next novel, Ελένη ή Ο Κανένας [Eleni or No One], presents the reader with a complex approach to history and the presentation of real historical figures coupled with a narrative approach that explores the relationship between writing, history and ideas about the construction of identity. Ultimately she offers a new
insight into notions of national identity through a protagonist who is constantly shifting her own identity, as well as through the lens of metafictional narrative techniques.

The novel tells the story of Eleni Altamoura Boukoura, the daughter of an Albanian-Greek merchant marine captain who later moves the family to Athens and opens a theater. Eleni shows her talent for drawing at an early age but is discouraged by her family, who take a very traditionalist view of a woman’s role in society. After convincing her father to let her use her own dowry money to further her education, she studies art in Italy disguised as a man, whom she calls to herself “Κανένας” [No One]. There, she meets the revolutionary artist Saverio Altamoura, falls in love with him, and reveals her “true” identity. They live together for some years, producing three offspring, but after he leaves her for another woman, she returns to Greece with the two older children. There she takes up residence in the old family home on the island of Spetses, where she chooses to live out the rest of her days in seclusion and near insanity.

The narrative/historical (re)construction of Eleni or No One is not as explicitly problematic as most metafictional texts tend to be. Styliani Pantelia has
commented that the historical perspective in the novel is meant to demonstrate the “multiplicity of truth” in the text:

"The multiplicity of the truth is emphasized, the numerous versions and appraisals of the same event, the variations of the same history that constitute but do not subvert the core of the narrative. (40)"

What often takes place is a subtle shift in point of view or time frame. For example, early in the text the narrator alludes both to history or historical facts, but also to the production of myths and the telling of fairy tales that come to influence the protagonist’s life. Through the young Eleni’s interest in art, the narrator is able to draw a comparison between the construction of fairytales (paramythia) and drawing, as an aestheticized approach to identity:

"No representation, however, matched the manner in which Eleni viewed her, enriching as she grew her infantile conjecture with the ambiguities, which allow as much the traces of fact as the fairy tales. She ascertained this when, grown up now and an artist, she saw a few of the representations of the Lady. But she had by this time understood that painting can render..."
the same face with many images, either from the freedom of art itself, either because a face is always more than one. (18)

Here, of course, Galanaki sets forth one of the main projects of her novel: to portray a character from many different points of view. But if art can represent the physical features of a face (or of a person) in different forms from different angles or perspectives, this is possible because identity itself is something that is neither static nor viewed from a single perspective: each person (or face) “is many.” Galanaki goes on to explore this multiplicity of identity at length in the rest of the novel. Essentially the novel offers a series of portraits of Eleni in her various guises, like the portraits of Laskarina.9

The first part of the novel might be seen as the “historical” or “biographical” part, in which Galanaki presents the reader with an apparently straightforward third-person narrative. However, this narrative is a bit deceptive in that it is punctuated by sudden shifts in time, as seen in the passage above: the narrator skips from the early portrait of Eleni as a child to her memories of childhood as an adult and the mature understanding of the world that she has ultimately acquired. Thus the linear
narrative is interrupted as later events are revealed or alluded to, in this case the protagonist’s education in Italy. The resistance to supplying the reader with an easy, linear narrative is reflected in Eleni’s resistance to the social order imposed upon her as a woman. By drawing she is entering the prohibited world of “knowledge” that only men are supposed to enjoy (this is 19th Century Greece after all), and she must be punished for “damaging” that social order. Yet she resists that punishment both by not allowing herself to be emotionally effected (she staunchly doesn’t cry when they force her to stop drawing at school), but also by making the decision to be “different” by not accepting her role as a Greek woman (of home and family), and by assuming the identity of a man in order to attain the knowledge she seeks.

The second (and largest) part of the novel might be seen as the “memoir” or “autobiographical” portion. The sudden shift to first person is striking, as is the more formalized division between different time periods: in the italicized chapters Galanaki presents the thoughts of the aged Eleni, who is reviewing the events of her life, but who also supplements the other part (non-italicized text) of the narrative through her commentary upon those events. Thus the narrative provides within the framework of the
first person narrative entirely different points of view, while both are from the same character. This part of the narrative recounts her life in Italy in two stages: in disguise as a man so that she may study painting, and as the wife of the Italian artist Saverio Altamoura.

Despite the first person narrative, Galanaki also complicates this section of the text by allowing that first-person narrative to fall back into the third person, which could be the narrator of part one, or something else. For example, the scene in which “Kanenas” reveals herself as a woman to Saverio alternates between the two narrative voices, ostensibly allowing Eleni’s voice to play the part of the “omniscient” narrator while supplying the thoughts and feelings of Saverio. What appears to be “omniscient” and authoritative in the third person, however, could also simply be the projections of the first-person Eleni onto the characterization of Saverio: Eleni is perhaps playing the “author” here, and treating her husband as a character, supplying him with motives and feelings that she herself perceived, but that may not have necessarily been there.

Galanaki complicates both of the personas of the protagonist, “Eleni” and “Kanenas” (her male self), through the interplay between them, as well as through their relationship to (a sense of) national identity. Eleni must
never forget that she is a “Greek woman” (Ελληνίδα) – the promise she makes to her father upon her arrival in Italy (complicated further by the fact that the family are Arvanites) – and which often determines the way in which she confronts the problems that beset her. The binary of Man/Woman (and perhaps by extension knowledge/ignorance) is paralleled to that of East/West, so that the conflict within her has a national dimension. She cannot easily remove herself from her “Anatolian” ways, (whatever those may be) and her husband (representing the West) ultimately leaves her because of it. In the end what Eleni indeed cannot seem to free herself from is the fact that she is inescapably both Greek and a woman, no matter how “different” she attempts to be. But she refuses to accept these categories in the naturalized, de facto manner that her society prescribes. Rather than seeing them as “totalizing narratives,” she questions their validity and resists their claims, offering instead a representation of history and its ideological project that is based on her subjective experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have encountered three markedly different explorations of identity and history in Galanaki,
Pamuk and Carter. Angela Carter uses metafictional techniques to explore these themes from a feminist perspective in terms of critiquing discourses representation and the ultimate “unverifiability” of historical truth. Pamuk examines grand narratives such as the Enlightenment or the civilizational clash between East and West. He includes in this latter theme the importance of religious identities, but, as for Carter, they do not lead to an investigation of the national identities. For Galanaki what is at stake is the impact of the national. Galanaki seeks an end to ossified notions of national identity accomplished through the critical reevaluation of not only history but of the underlying impulses that lead to its construction in a particular manner. The use of metafictional techniques both illuminates and problematizes the ideological foundation of a national Greek identity and the assumptions it makes about how individuals must act or feel. In crossing the boundaries of that ideology and offering a critique of such processes, contemporary Greek writers have begun to reinterpret the interplay between fiction and history in order to explore the multiplicity of perceptions of identity and go beyond the accepted notions of the national.
Notes

“...work should never be preserved whole” (I Shall Sign as Louie, 11, my translation).

These were, respectively: Cevdet Bey and His Sons (1982), a realistic bildügsroman that tells the “saga of an Istanbul family,” and The Quiet House (1983), a fragmentary political novel (Gün, 59).

For a complete list of Carter’s works, see Lindsey Tucker (ed.): Critical Essays on Angela Carter (249).

McHale posits that the insertion of the author into a (his/her) text “paradoxically relativizes reality: intended to provide an ontologically stable foothold, it only destabilizes ontology further (...) the supposedly absolute reality of the author becomes just another level of fiction, and the real world retreats to a further remove” (1987: 197).

Franssen and Hoenselaars do not give a definitive name to this “genre.” Rather, they see it as an open-ended category that can appear in various forms, from imaginative dialogues, drama, epic and lyric poetry, and even contemporary film. Although they do not mean to limit themselves to just “literary biography,” I find that for my purposes, that designation is less cumbersome, though I note the distinction between the general category and the vie romancée, which itself is not limited to “authors” as its main subject.

Meaning “the moral of the story.”

Cicelli’s translation here is slightly amiss, for she leaves out the phrase ‘in reality’ [στην πραγματικότητα], which seems to me to counter Ismail’s sense of his imagined homeland and to underscore his growing confusion.

This is a reference to the scene in the Odyssey where Odysseus visits Hades.

Laskarina, a woman from Spetses, famously became an “admiral” during the Greek Revolution in the 1820s, leading several successful raids on the Turkish fleet.
CHAPTER 5

TRACKING GHOSTS: VASILIS GOUROYIANNIS

"Ενα τέρας κυνηγώ," ψυθίσας και πάλι ακολούθησε υπνωτισμένος τα ίχνη που πήγαιναν.

(Το Ασημόχορτο Ανθίζει, 67)

Introduction

Vassilis Gouroyiannis is an author who is most interested in exposing the interplay between the effects he creates in his writing, and the way in which he creates them. Gouroyiannis emerged in the 1990s as one of the younger writers engaged in postmodern experimentation and in pushing the boundaries of accepted notions of genre and style. His work is often consciously difficult, playful, mixing parody with history, poetry with prose. To an extent, however, he follows thematically the concerns of history, as well as an identity located within a particular topography. Born in 1951 in Ioannina, the main
topographical focus of his writing is Epirus, where he has explored various incarnations of a Greek identity that differ widely from the mainstream.

Gouroyiannis’s early work consists of two short volumes of poetry that are notable for the ways in which, according to the critic Demosthenes Kourtovik, they incorporate both the poetic forms and other genres such as criticism:

ta (πολύ σύντομα) ποιήματα συνοδεύονται από (πιο εκτεταμένα) σχόλια, που μιμούνται εξωτερικά τη μορφή και το ύφος των υποστημιεύσεων σε λόγια και επιστημονικά κείμενα για ν’αναπτύξουν, να συμπληρώσουν ή και ν’αμφισβητήσουν, μ’ένα είδος ποιητικού διαλόγισμου, ορισμένα σημεία των ποιημάτων. (57)

the (very brief) poems are accompanied by (more extensive) comments, which mimic externally the form and style of footnotes in the language of scientific articles, in order to develop, to complete, and/or to question, with a type of poetic dialogism, certain parts of the poems. (57)

One focus of these early works of poetry, then, is the dynamic between the poem and the criticism of the poem, the space between art and interpretation. This is particularly the case with the second volume of poetry, Σχόλια σε Ποίηση [Notes on Poetry], in which Gouroyiannis plays with the forms of academic writing and commentary. The poem itself contains fragments of other works and allusions, but more importantly the commentary supplied often is humorous, sometimes almost facetiously inappropriate for the text.
being “explicated,” or completely off the subject, and written entirely in a pompous academic style. What at first appears to be an “authoritative” gloss becomes a comic imitation that serves to undermine the project of interpretation. Gouroyiannis will explore this style again in his early fiction.

The earlier poems of *Απο Φωτογραφία Βουνού* [*From a Mountain Photograph*] while stylistically simple—free verse, short as well as long prosaic lines and paragraphs—nonetheless contain the germ of what will become Gouroyiannis’s aesthetic orientation and thematic preoccupation. In "Θάνατος σπιτιού στήν Ηπειρο" ["Death of a House in Epirus"] for example, Gouroyiannis laments the passing of a traditional way of life in Epirus while looking both to the past and to nature to seek elements that endure:

```
Αλλα σπίτια είναι καράβια
tραβηγμένα στη στερία
Τούτο το σπίτι είναι κιβωτός
Απ’ την καταπακτή τ’ ουρανού
ένας ένας οι προγονοί πήδηξαν στή γῆς
Ως το στήθος βύθισαν στο χώμα
Υστερνά φύγαν τα πουλία
ανυψώνοντας τίς ξόβεργες καί τα κλουβιά τους

Τα ειδή της νυχτερίδας και της κουκουβάγιας
dεν εννοούν να φύγουν... (1985: 23)
```

Other houses are ships
pulled upon the shore
This house is an ark
From the hatch of heaven
one by one the ancestors leaped to earth
Plunged up to the chest in the soil
Last of all the birds left
raising their traps and their cages

The species of bat and owl
don’t intend to leave…(1985:23)

Here the speaker evokes the biblical proportions of the
“ancestors” who are symbolically bound to the earth, but
also finds solace in the image of nature as resistant
change. Gouroyiannis employs the language and imagery
typical of nationalistic demoticist poetry, and at first
glance appears to adopt the assumptions of this discourse
by performing the sort of “naturalizing” task that attempts
to ground history and identity in a specific landscape. By
the end of the poem, however, Gouroyiannis turns this
notion in upon itself, for the house in Epirus, perhaps
representative of an older way of life, whose edifice is
that of the nation-state, caves-in on itself, as if the
corrupting change comes from within:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ασθημαίνουν τα σπίτια} \\
\text{Πλανταζμένα γκραμίζουν τα στέρνα τους}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Παράξενα όντα τα σπίτια} \\
\text{Κανείς δεν γνωρίζει που κρύβουν την καρδιά}
\text{ούτε άλλο ακάρια σημείο σφαγής}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Τo σπίτι στην Ηπείρο} \\
\text{πεθαίνει βασανισμένο}
\text{ωσάν μοσχάρι από χασάπη ατζώμη.}
\text{Οπου ποτίζει το αίμα φυτρώνουν αχριστύκιες.}
\end{align*}
\]
The houses wheeze  
Choking they destroy their sternums

Strange things houses  
No one knows where they hide the heart  
nor another instantaneous sign of slaughter

The house in Epirus  
dies tortured  
like a calf by a clumsy butcher.  
Wherever the blood flows wild figs take root.

The house, then, contains its own ruin in the secrets of  
torture and death it hides, ultimately responsible for  
destroying itself. Following the logic of the nationalist  
discourse in the first half of the poem, the internal  
strife here could imply the struggle between traditional  
culture and modernization, but could also suggest the wars  
fought on the land, either for independence or for  
political ideologies. What endures in the landscape is the  
spilled blood that waters the wild figs. The imagery of  
slaughter and torture here prefigure Gouroyiannis’s  
preoccupation with the war years in *To Ασημόχορτο Ανθίζει* [The  
Silver Weed Blooms], while Gouroyiannis again takes up the  
image of traditional culture and local identity in his  
earliest prose work.

Identity and its construction, particularly in light  
of postmodern aesthetic concerns, often has been of  
interest to Gouroyiannis. This is the case with his prose
work, Λεπηγήσεις Παραφυσικών Φαινομένων, [Narratives of Supernatural Phenomena] in which Gouroyiannis compiles a wide variety of magical folk tales whose only sense of connection lies in their geographical proximity in villages near Ioannina. In this short work a different narrator tells each story; some are real people who related their tales to Gouroyiannis, and each is followed by a "sociological" explanation by the "author." Thus Gouroyiannis attempts to characterize an aspect of identity that is ultimately concerned with diverse local custom that is nonetheless "Greek." One of the metacomentaries he makes, of course, is that the tales are "interpreted" for us by an "expert" who follows rather rigid notions of Greekness. As in Notes on Poetry, here Gouroyiannis parodies the pomposity of a kind of academic writing that seeks to undermine the reader’s ability to interpret the texts in other ways. The reader is meant to see through the rhetoric of the commentary. Moreover, at the end of the piece he reveals that most of the tales in the book are his own fictions, while only a few he has appropriated from other sources, so that the "authority" of the folk beliefs is also questioned.

Gouroyiannis’s most recent work, Ο Θείασος των Άθηναίων [The Troupe of Athens], is another meditation on historical
Greek identity. Here, however, he is concerned with the late Roman period and the clash between Christians and idolatrous Greeks. The novel presents a fascinating interplay between identity, religion and language, serving to problematize conceptions of Greekness through the fictionalized attempt of an Athenian “intellectual” to revive and preserve the glory of Ancient Greece and its culture. While the novel is admittedly more of a straightforward historical piece than To Ασπιώχορτο Ανθίζει, Gouroyiannis continues to include metafictional elements to convolute his narratives. As one critic suggests, the novel not only presents an obscure period in Greek history but also creates analogies between the Pax Romana and postmodern globalization (Ρουβάλη 56).

The Silverweed Blooms

In To Ασπιώχορτο Ανθίζει [The Silverweed Blooms], Gouroyiannis employs many postmodern techniques which allow him to examine the problem of identity. The novel tells the story of the "Tzamides" in the northwestern region of Greece near Albania, who are Greek-speaking Muslims and who retain minority status, but whose ethnic identity is ambiguous; they are variously held to be "Turks," "Arvanites," and "Albanians" by the "purely" Greek
characters of the novel. The novel is set during the Italian/German occupation of Greece, in which historically the Tzamides supported the occupying forces; later they became the target of reprisals and atrocities during the bloodbath of the civil war. The novel has three main plot lines, though these become increasingly blurred, overlapping at many points. First is the tale of Iliaz Intriz, whose wife is killed by a Christian. He vows revenge and undertakes a journey/quest in an attempt to capture and kill the murderer. Next is the story of Lambrou, who is ostensibly the one being chased by Iliaz, and his friend/blood-brother Roustem, who helps Lambrou and his family to a "safe house" where they find shelter. Finally, the novel's third plot is that of the αντάρτες, (partisans) first in resistance to the Germans, then during the civil war. The narrative evokes a general atmosphere of war and terror, provides the setting of the story, and allows Gouroyiannis to situate the other narratives within the historical backdrop of the 1940s. The novel is dark, difficult, brooding, and interested in the portrayal of the horrific. Critic and novelist Demosthenes Kourtovik has described it as a "rhapsody of haunted horror" (Ta Νέα, 8 January 1993), in which shock value and terror are used in a detached way to achieve a sense of "human fragmentation."
The book takes a serious look at the tragedies of a dreadful period of Greek history. The troubles of the 1940s in Greece give occasion first to shock the reader, and next to supply the needed frame for the horrible actions undertaken in the name of a national ideology that take place in the text.

The postmodern features of *To Ασημιόχορτο Ανθίζει* help to accentuate the constructedness of identity during a specific historical crisis. The narrative itself is spiral, moving from story to story with little regard for traditional, linear modes. Since the novel jumps around in time and space, it is difficult to follow distinctly one particular part of the story. Characters and their tales tend to merge magically with one another, creating a very disorienting effect and undermining the traditional narrative. The narrator is in the third person, apparently omniscient yet totally unreliable. The focus upon minute details and descriptions, for example, tends to make the narrator stray from the narration of the story and often to slip into what can only be assumed is the narrator's own stream of consciousness. Accompanying this lack of narrative focus is the use of the fantastic, magical
realism, surrealism, realistic description and allusion that create an amalgamation of images and techniques serving to further convolute the narrative.

The story of Iliaz and his quest for revenge takes on very strange and surrealistic qualities in which the author incorporates techniques such as allusion and pastiche, though this pastiche is a mixture of narrative twists and enchanted images rather than of narrative styles. Iliaz is searching ostensibly for the murderer of his wife, who becomes a terrible sort of monster with one human foot and one bird-like claw, to tell from the trail it leaves for Iliaz to follow. The quest becomes bizarre, leading often through a wonderland of mysterious images: a grove of trees that have photographs on the branches rather than leaves (67), strange caves inhabited by ghosts and "vampires" (69). Gouroyiannis employs aspects of magical realism and incorporates folk elements into the story, using the fantastic to make it almost like a fairy tale. This again recalls Gouroyiannis's fascination with ghost stories and the supernatural aspects of a geographical location in Διηγήσεις Παραφυσικών Φαινομένων [Narratives of Supernatural Phenomena]. At one point Iliaz meets a gypsy in some ruins who summons for him a group of ghosts by playing his clarinet. Iliaz converses with the ghosts and
asks about his ever-elusive prey. Here the allusion to Odysseus’s descent to Hades to consult the dead seems quite clear, but the passage is also reminiscent of Seferis’ search for a meaningful connection to the past in <<Ο Βασιλιάς της Ασίνης>> [“The King of Asine”]. The ghosts, however, are an indication of the shifting identities constantly occurring in the novel, mainly between the Greek and the non-Greek, but also in the "real" and the "unreal." What is ironic here is that the ghosts with their strange voices and exotic music can tell him nothing. None of them are from his region, <<Μα κανένας δεν είναι του τόπου...>> [“But no one is of this place”](72), and he cannot understand their message beyond the knowledge of their torturous deaths. When it is finally revealed that the ghosts are the dead victims of war, the passage can be read as allegorical: not just the civil war is represented here, but the history of the nation. Moreover, the "grand narrative" of the Homeric epic is also undermined: here it is not a great hero who has descended to Hades to find his destiny, but a common soldier who is merely seeking revenge.

Shifting identities are more clearly delineated in the other parts of the novel. For example, in the Lambrou/Roustem story, on their journey the two constantly take on cultural roles in order to make it to the "safe
house." Both Albanian and Greek identities are always being negotiated and manipulated as circumstances require. At one point they are captured by "rebels" whose identity and affiliations are not immediately known:

Here everything pointed to their being Muslims, but the fact that they didn’t know or didn’t speak Arvanitika again created strong doubts. But even if they were Muslims, what was their position? Could they be Greek-speaking Tzamides? [...] Or perhaps Leftist Tzamides, or Christian Leftists, or right-wingers who had swiped Albanian uniforms? (78)

Throughout the novel identity is always at stake and never clearly defined. Characters take on many identities depending upon circumstance. Gouroyiannis uses the ambiguity of this situation to comment upon notions of national identity: when elements such as politics, language, religion and local culture come into play, can there really exist the cohesiveness that the national ideology requires? If the meaning of identity constantly shifts, then ideology is undermined. It is here that the postmodernist reevaluation of the older modernist mode occurs.
Throughout the text the main characters are constantly asked "Who are you?" and "What are you?" and "What is your affiliation?" These of course change as circumstances require. At one point in the novel, Iliaz seems to take on the personality of Kitsio, the man he was supposedly hunting, and for the rest of the novel wonders whether he is dead or alive, whether he is himself or "the other." Petso/Petro also undergoes a personal transformation when he willfully becomes a Christian in order to survive the reprisals after the war. It saves him in the end.

In the Lambrou/Roustem story identity is constantly being mixed. Lambrou and Roustem, Christian and Muslim respectively, are blood brothers; the line between their cultural and religious particularities becomes blurred. The story of their friendship is told, and the ritual ceremony they perform to become blood-brothers is an interesting example of the ethnic mixing that Gouroyiannis saw as possible in this time and place:

Μαξεύτηκαν οι συγγενείς στον οινότα. Απάνω στην τάβλα έβαλαν το σταρένιο καρβέλι. Πάνω σ’αυτό ακούμπησαν το αργυρένιο φολαχτό των μουσουλμάνων. Σ’αυτό έπειτα ακούμπησαν σταυρό φτιαγμένο πρόχειρα από δύο ξυλαράκια. Ετσι έπρεπε αφού οι βλάμηδες ήταν διαφορετικού θρισκεύματος...(100)

The relatives gathered in the room. On the plank they put the wheat loaf. On that they placed the silver amulet of the Muslims. Afterwards upon it they placed
a cross made sloppily out of two little sticks. That’s what was necessary since the blood-brothers were of different religions. (100)

This passage not only suggests the awareness of disparate identities, but the willingness to allow them to be mixed, reflecting the postmodern affinity for recombining disparate elements in order to create something that is new but not unrecognizable. Moreover, this is an example of the blurring of “high” and “low” culture in which official religious practices merge with those of local superstition.

Later Lambrou and Roustem are able to come and go between the two families and the two cultures with no regard to any official boundaries:

Απο τότε τριτυρίζε σαν συγγενής αναμεσά τους. Κουβέντιαζε με τις χανούμ. Τον κοίταζαν στα μάτια. Τον πονούσαν. Και το παιδί του τώρα το έχουν <<ανυψώ>. Και τη γυναίκα του άνθρωπο δικό τους. (100)

From then on he wandered as a relative among them. He talked with the women of the household. They looked him in the eyes. They felt for him. And his child is now their “nephew.” His wife one of their own. (100)

At this point the relationship between people is placed in familial terms rather than in ethnic, cultural or religious ones. Gouroyiannis creates a kind of utopian vision of ethnic coexistence that does not appear anywhere else in the novel. Gouroyiannis critiques ethnic identities and ideologies, implying that on the level of the family, at least, such differences can lead to a more open and
tolerant society. For the most part, however, the ethnic parties spend their time torturing and slaughtering each other, but in the Lambrou/Roustem tale they love each other as "kith and kin." The sense of community between the two distinct groups is strengthened when the Christian family allows the Muslim to baptize their newborn: the ceremony again takes place in a mixture of rituals and religious beliefs. However, even here the inherent problems of "diversity" charge the scene ironically, for although Lambrou’s wife is considered by Roustem’s family as "one of theirs," she cannot reconcile herself to living amongst the Muslims. Lambrou must remind her:

<<Άνθρωποι εἶναι κι αυτοί>, την καθησύχαξε ο Λάμπρος. <<Ετσι σου φαίνονται, μωρά, γιατί εσύ γεννήθηκες σε χριστιανοχώρι>>. Μονάχα η οικογένεια του Ρουστέμ της φαινόταν ανθρώπινη. (102)

“They are people too,” Lambros reassured her. “They just seem that way [inhuman] to you because you were born in a Christian village.” Only Roustem’s family seemed human to her. (102)

In the story of the Αντάρτες (partisans), the grave differences that separate the two groups are ironically accentuated. Early in the novel there is a meeting of resistance fighters of various persuasions, communist and nationalist, Christian and Muslim, and they agree to help each other in the common cause of liberty against the
occupying German forces. However, this is as far as the coexistence goes. As soon as the Tzamides leave the meeting, the Christian rebels embark upon a long and ferocious tirade against their Muslim counterparts, slandering them mercilessly and showing their complete mistrust of these strange bedfellows.

<<Τους είδατε, παιδιά μου, τι ξερά κεφάλια που είναι, και πως βρωμοκοπάνε >>
<<Καλά μας έλεγαν, παππούλη, ότι μυρίζουν τουρκίλες >>.
<<Δεν έχουν το μύρο, παιδί μου. Γι’ αυτό ρίχνουν μπρομπλία με την οκα να σβήσουν τη βρωμία. Αν και οι περισσότεροι απ’ αυτούς έχουν ελληνικόν οργανισμό, βρωμοκοπούν όμος γιατί δεν πήραν βάφτισμα >>. (47)

“Did you see, fellows, what hard heads they have, and how they reek?”
“They told us right, grandpa, that they smell of Turkishness.”
“They don’t have the chrism, my son. That’s why they dump scent by the gallon to hide the stench. And even if most of them have a Greek constitution, they stink because they were never baptized.” (47)

In this scene neither ethnicity nor even politics are the central issue, for the Tzamides have a "Greek constitution," a pun which is not lost on the reader. But it is their religion that makes them too different and pejoratively like "Turks" for the Greeks. Despite their need of one another, the Christians remain suspicious. Religion as a function of national identity causes the unmendable rift between the groups. The Christians go on to discuss the "vile" and "vampire-like" Jews in an orgy of stereotypical racism and anti-Semitism. This is highly
ironic for they are fighting to rid their homeland of the very occupying forces that are giving the Jews "what they deserve" in the concentration camps (48-50). The intertextuality of the scene makes it even more intriguing. The priest, instructing them on the horrors of the Jews and the Turks, refers to a "history" book which tells the tale from the point of view of the Christians under Ottoman rule, giving a cultural and historical precedent for the hatred of the non-Orthodox. Here the convergence of history and nationalist ideology are made painfully clear; this foreshadows the bloodbath that will follow in the closing chapters of the book, when the Tzamides are mercilessly persecuted for their involvement with the occupying forces and because of their ethnicity.

Throughout the novel ostensibly real historical documents are used in order to portray the relationship between the two factions of the guerrillas, Christian and Muslim. Yet the postmodernist confusion of the real and the fictional is again evoked, so that the boundaries between the two are completely blurred. It is impossible to guess what is "actual" or "real" documentation and what is fabricated. Gouroyiannis includes what the reader is called upon to accept as actual documents of agreements drawn up between the Tzamides and the Christians (these are
referenced in his "Notes" at the end of the book), and he also supplies a detailed list of atrocities performed by various individuals. This merging of the real history and the fiction of the novelistic "sphere" accentuate the inhumanity of the situations described by paradoxically reinforcing their authenticity. Thus reality itself is put into question, for the reader must sift through both actual and simulated artifacts. The narration presents the terrifying and bloodthirsty details without flinching, and with no hint of emotion. As Kourtovik suggests:

The first thing that impresses the reader is the almost unbelievable (by Greek standards) self-control of the writer during the description of the most terrible scenes. No theatricality in the expression, not a single lament or groan from the mouths of the victims who suffer unspeakable tortures. It is exactly this writing devoid of sentiment that gives the full measure of human destruction. The great pain stuns you...

This shock value allows Gouroyiannis to create a kind of metafictional dystopia where the merging of fictional and historical atrocities serve to complicate the perception of reality. The war and the events of the novel constitute an apocalyptic world, one that is dreadful yet
distant. Accompanying this are the strangeness of the events, the seeming unreality of them yet their startling truth. Hardships, the fear of sudden death without warning, capture and examination by one of the various warring factions, fear of imprisonment or summary execution, general paranoia; all of these elements contribute to the dystopian aspect of the novel.

The political ambiguity of events and of characters also lends an atmosphere of uncertainty and eccentricity to the narration. For example, when Lambrou is captured and interrogated by a group of guerrillas, the entire episode is bizarre and ironic, for the captive has no idea with whom he is dealing, so his answers to their questions are so general that the guerrillas themselves cannot identify him with their enemies. This is one of the few comic scenes in the novel, and one which shows again the ambiguity as well as the significance of identity in placing individuals into categories set by the construction of ideology:

Τ ’αυτί του προσπαθούσε να πιάσει καμιά λέξη ταυτότητας, δηλαδή κανένα «συναγωνιστή» κανένα «συμμορίτη», καμία «ισότητα» κανένα «σύντροφο» από τούς γύρω που παρακολουθούσαν κι άλλαζαν που και που κουβέντες...Η λέξη ελευθερία μπορούσε κάπου να τον οδηγήσει. Οι Ελασίτες θα έλεγαν «ελευθερία». Ύστερα έπεσε η ερώτηση:

<<Πες ότι εδώ επίτοπου σκοτώσουμε τον Τούρκο και εξασφαλίζουμε τη γυναίκα σου και το παιδί σου όσο έχουμε εξασφαλισμένες τις δικές μας φαμίλιες, θα βγεις κι εσύ να πολεμήσεις; >>
<<Έιμαι Ελληνας όσο κι εσέις.>>
<<Δηλαδή, ποιοί εμείς; >>
His ear tried to catch some identifying word, for example a “brother at arms” or a “mobster,” some “equality” or “comrade” from those around him who were watching and who from time to time exchanged a word...The word “freedom” could give him some clue: the ELAS troops would say it [in a particular way]. Afterwards they asked:

“Say that on the spot here we kill the Turk and safeguard your wife and child as much as we have our own families safe, will you come out and fight?”

“I’m a Greek as much as you.”

“In other words, which ‘us’ do you mean?”

“You! Aren’t you Greeks?”

“We are and then some! But there are all kinds of Greeks. Some are worse than Turks, than Germans, than Italians.”

“I am one of the Greeks who fight the Turks, the Italians, the Germans and those kinds of Greeks.

The answer impressed the captain. (93)

The irony here is that the examining officer is baffled by Lambrou's own lack of knowledge of his captor’s identity, and so undermines the entire object of the interrogation. His idiotic (yet playfully skillful) answers to the questions lead the interrogator to conclude that he is one of them. The entire novel is suffused with this type of ambiguity.

Dystopia is not the only "imagined world" of the text, for, as discussed above, there are examples of a utopian alternative where the diverse groups coexist peacefully, sometimes even in harmony. Lambrou and Roustem are one
example, the union of Christian and Muslim guerrillas is another, though it is tainted with underlying hatred.

The novel makes use of linguistic play as well to create a sense of polyphony and of multiple identities. In certain scenes, when Lambrou and Roustem are in the καφενείο [café] (84) for example, a sort of Βαβυλωνία [Babylonia] is created in the jumble of intertwining languages and voices. Gouroyiannis toys with the notions of heteroglossia: this is not the simple diglossia of Katharevousa and Demotic. Many languages converge in this text, from various dialects of Greek to Arvanitika to Albanian and Turkish. All of these languages can be at once considered Greek and yet considered foreign as well. In some cases, characters who are ethnically Greek only understand Arvanitika, or at least pretend to. Throughout the text Gouroyiannis moves easily between one language and another, without providing interpretations many times, which adds to the difficulty of the text. The interweaving of various tongues constitutes a linguistic pastiche that parodies the diversity of language. The "Arvanitika" that Gouroyiannis employs are merely phonetic impersonations of that language, not the real language itself but a simulation, as he notes at the end of the book:
The use of Arvanitika conforms only to literary convention, for this reason it is not necessary to obtain exact grammatical or conceptual meaning. (219)

Given the nature of the novel, however, it is difficult to gauge the veracity of this statement. Is the author playing upon the assumptions of readers that the truth of authorial notations outside the fictional text is to be taken for granted, or is this another false lead designed to further demonstrate the playfulness of the text? As in Δημήτριος Παραφυσικών Φαινομένων [Narratives of Supernatural Phenomena] in which Gouroyiannis supplies a pseudo-scientific commentary on his stories, here by way of undermining the authority of his text, Gouroyiannis simply gives the impression that another language is being used for the purposes of the narrative. It does not actually correspond to a real language and is just gibberish meant to have no meaning at all. Gouroyiannis ironically exposes the use of language as unstable in the construction of national identity.

The playfulness of language and the constant instability of identity in the novel lead to another postmodern concern, the problem of representation and the representation of reality. Again boundaries are crossed.
and distinctions are blurred in an effort to undermine traditional, realistic narrative. The mixture of "real" elements, such as the historical documentation or the setting of the tale during the occupation, with the fantastic and the horrific ultimately question the function of the real in the novel. This seems to suggest part of the general postmodern attempt at critique and innovation, but also its ambivalent stance of postmodernism and metafiction towards the "real." Everything gets constructed in a particular way in a particular time and space, and that does not necessarily have to be what happens in the real world. The use of disparate materials also comments upon the notion of fragmentation, and ultimately the recognition that diversity is a construction along with the rest, a construction that can be manipulated in any conceivable way for any purpose.

Conclusion

*Το Ασημιόχαρτο Ανθίζει* is a complex and challenging work that incorporates many aspects of postmodernism to cast the theme of national identity in a new light. However, it is clear that Gouroyiannis has been very selective in his choice of those postmodernist elements. Where he requires an aesthetics that will allow him to reconsider traditional notions of the nation, of culture and of identity, not to
mention the subversion of conventional modes of storytelling, postmodernism is apt for his purpose. On the level of identity, one can say that Το Άσημόχορτο Ανθίζει practices what Jameson's theory has called the national allegory, since what Gouroyiannis attempts is to undermine the "grand narrative" of Greekness and offer a modified view of what it means to be Greek.

For him "Greekness" is not a monolithic, homogenous or metaphysical set of primordial characteristics, rather it is exemplified as a multiplicity in which the nuances of difference can unite as well as divide the nation. Ultimately the Lambrou/Roustem relationship of mutual acceptance is the paradigm Gouroyiannis offers. The postmodern aspects of the novel allow a critical reevaluation of modernist formulations of national identity, and Gouroyiannis's view is mainly critical rather than celebratory: the novel is perhaps even cynical in its commentary upon the atrocities that have been committed in the name of ethnicity, in the name of purity of culture, race or religion, and in the name of nationalism. Like the leftist, exiled intellectuals who preceded him, Gouroyiannis adapts postmodernism as a critique not only of
the aesthetic but the political ramifications of nationalism through the concept of identity and its construction.

Notes

1 "I'm chasing a monster," he whispered, and again followed as if hypnotized the traces that went. (67, my translation).
2 Little exists in reliable historical sources on the Tzamides. It is not within the scope of this study, however, to examine claims such as those presented in, for example, the obviously biased INAF (International Affairs Research Foundation) News Bulletins (see issues of 27 June 1998 and 11 January 2000) and similar sources. Lena Divani provides a more balanced account in her work on Greek minorities).
CONCLUSION

NEW IDENTITIES? NEW STORIES?

Reader, it is time for your tempest tossed vessel to come to port. What harbor can receive you more securely than a great library?
   Italo Calvino—*If on a winter’s night a traveler* (253)

These leave-takings in novels are as disagreeable as they are in real life; not so bad, indeed, for they want the reality of sadness; but quite as perplexing, and generally less satisfactory.
   Anthony Trollope—*Barchester Towers* (257)

I began this study with the premise that contemporary Greek authors are in the process of reconfiguring conceptions of Greek national identity, influenced by their adoption of metafictional techniques and postmodernist theories regarding subjectivity, representation, contingency and the constructedness of all kinds of narratives, whether those narratives are political, ideological, national, personal, historical, or fictional. To suggest that in Greece postmodernists are more politically oriented or active than their counterparts in
other countries, we have seen, is in fact not correct. What Rushdie, Puig, Carter and others have offered here is the notion that the political can take different forms: for one, post-colonial, for another, post-ideological, and for the third, feminist.

What I hope to have accomplished is to show that in Greece writers such as Alexandrou, Galanaki and Gouroyiannis have been interested in the conceptions or reconceptions of national identity as ideology, in response to trends that dominated twentieth century socio-political practice and aesthetic production. To say that they have merely responded to the Generation of the Thirties is to do them an injustice. Having digested that tradition thoroughly, their work, while honoring it, does not revere it as sacrosanct; their “complicitous critique” also strives to undermine its rigidly institutionalized canonization. Thus they too have formulated their agenda and their postmodernist aesthetics based on the intricacies and contingencies of their own specific national context.

In the Greek case postmodernism has allowed the exploration of alternative choices in terms of the way Greek identity is consciously constructed through all types of cultural and social institutions, without constraints as
to what the narratives, histories or myths that constitute that identity should be. To be sure, they will produce new stories, and perhaps new identities as well.

But what does the future hold for these notions? Will next year’s Olympic Games simply serve to reify the old stereotypes that promote a very narrow view of Greek identity in the service of filling up hotel rooms and selling junk to tourists? Perhaps the images of the Acropolis and Zorba–like figures dancing on the beach are an inescapable as signifiers of “Greekness” to the outside world, and they make for pretty pictures on TV.

Nevertheless, despite my own (perhaps) cynical view of the limited imagination of the Olympic Organizing Committee, the Greeks themselves seem to be aware of other possibilities. A recent poll in the Athenian newspaper To Vima (27 July 2003) shows that 55% of those polled “trust” the European Union. The poll also suggests that Greeks are taking seriously the country’s ties to the EU and the notion of a “European identity.” For example, 61% of those polled feel that the nation’s involvement with the EU is “positive,” although that figure is down from 68% two years ago. In terms of a “European identity,” however, the Greeks are not so supportive. Of those polled, only 3% consider themselves solely European, while the same number
see themselves as European and Greek (3\%). The overwhelming majority see themselves as either Greek and European (44\%), or solely Greek (53\%). One may conclude from these figures that the majority of Greeks do not really think of themselves in any way other than in terms of the national, but for me the point is that almost half of them are willing to include some sense of “Europeanness” in their conception of identity. This is not to say that the older, modernist notions of Greekness did not entail a sense of the place of the Greeks in Europe, or rather their centrality to the Western tradition, but it did not conceive of an identity connected to a larger geopolitical unit that beyond the borders of the nation-state. I realize that this may not be earth-shattering or scientific, but it supports the idea that Greeks are aware of alternatives to national identity.

In another recent article in To Vima, (13 July 2003) Pavlos Eleftheriadis critiques what he calls “the new collective identity” [<<Η νέα συλλογική ταυτότητα>>]. Eleftheriadis frames his discussion in the recent events of the Iraq war, and the vehement disagreements between European leaders about whether or not to support it. Some of those against the war, he notes, have made the claim to a unified European identity in support of a political
agenda that Europe make itself a “competing center” of military, diplomatic and economic power. Supporters of such an identity posit “universal” European values such as “peace, economic prosperity, social justice and democracy” [<<η πρήνη, η οικονομική ευημερία, η κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη και η δημοκρατία>>] as the ideals that constitute unity. Eleftheriadis is quick to point out that these “values” are so general that they do not imply anything that is intrinsically European, and furthermore they are exactly also those of the United States. But even though he disagrees with the political agenda of those who have been employing the rhetoric of a unified identity, he is also cognizant of the fact that the European Union does exist as a geo-political entity: “Europe and not the nation is currently a new accepted collective whose strength and progress comprise an end in itself” [<<Η Ευρώπη και όχι το έθνος είναι πλέον μια νέα αποδεκτή συλλογικότητα, η ισχύς και πρόοδος της οποίας αποτελούν αυτοσκοπό>>]. Whether the European Union eventually solidifies its sense of identity on stronger foundations of shared values and institutions, or whether established conceptions of national identities will persist, remains to be seen. To be sure, either way they will construct themselves as narratives.
Finally, if postmodernism is a global and globalizing form, despite the fears of the “hegemony” and the “deleterious” effects of the global economy, it has not in the end succeeded in effacing or replacing national identity. There may be a McDonald’s in Syntagma Square, but it serves “Mythos” beer.
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