

Manolis Anagnostakis

Poetry and Politics,
Silence and Agency
in Post-War Greece

Edited by
Vangelis Calotychos



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I am especially grateful to Periklis Douvitsas, of Nefeli Publications (Athens), for his gracious consent to allow for the reproduction of the Greek text of Anagnostakis's works in Chapters 11 and 12. The resulting bilingual edition of *To Περιθώριο '68-'69* (The Margin '68-'69) and *ΥΓ.* (P.S.) is a welcome addition to the literature. I am grateful to Dinos Siotis

misunderstood, owing most likely to the difficulty of the public to reconcile this non-instrumentality of words and ideas with communism. Probably his most famous pair of verses—“σαν π ρ ό κ ε ς να καρφώνονται οι λέξεις/ Να μην τις παίρνει ο άνεμος” (words should be hammered like nails / So they’re not blown in the wind) (2000a, 121)—do this poet an injustice. At best, these verses can be interpreted as a calling for poetic precision. That is to say, words themselves are the poet’s target (to invoke the title of the collection to which this poem belongs); they’re not the instruments to hit the target. But the conventional interpretation leads us astray. If words are nails to be hammered, they’re basically the building matter that holds an edifice in place. They map the edifice at the joints, perhaps not even the edifice but the bare plan, the scaffolding. Words are by no means *the* edifice as such—certainly not the monumental edifice. By virtue of being hammered—of not being themselves the hammer—words are nails that can be removed, yanked out. That is, they are also the very means of demolishing the edifice, the means of undoing. Creation and destruction are thus not opposed notions; they are dialectically entwined and mutually empowering. In this way, yes, Anagnostakis’s lapsing into silence—which is in effect a specifically targeted silence and hardly the annihilation of his work—might indeed be said to constitute a poetic stance. But in such a sense, silence would mean removing the nails from each and every coffin, from every coffin of every name, one by one.

NOTES

1. This is a crucial point in much of Jacques Derrida’s thinking. See indicatively his “Des Tours de Babel” [1980] in Derrida 2002, 102–34.
2. I have consulted translations of Anagnostakis (when they exist), but the responsibility for all translations is mine.
3. For poetic purposes, I point out here the characteristic anagram in the Greek between *μιλώ* and *λοιμό*. More important is to point out a crucial error made by Kimon Friar in the only existing translation of this poem. He translates the verse as “Now I speak once more as a man who escaped starvation” misreading *λοιμός* (plague) as *λιμός* (hunger, starvation), thereby reproducing the famous misapprehension of the Delphic oracle by the Athenians during the Peloponnesian War. One cannot help but wonder about the credibility of philologists who champion the truth of the Erasmian pronunciation of Ancient Greek if the most venerated of Classical literature itself underlines not only the possibility but the profound effect of such mishearings. Friar, however, is working not from a spoken phrase but from a written text with precise orthography.

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Farewell to the Revolution!

Vassilis Lambropoulos

The internal contradictions of the revolution represent a major part of the political legacy of the late eighteenth century. Since that time, the agony of these contradictions is an experience shared not only by the West but also by many other parts of the world. To the exploited and oppressed, the revolution appears initially as the most drastic way to escape their predicament. It symbolizes the promise of an entirely different world. However, in its aftermath, be it successful or not, this outburst of popular energy not only scatters and dissipates but often begins to serve reactionary purposes. How can a demand for liberation turn oppressive? Michel Foucault, who supported the Iranian Revolution of 1978 only to see it turn against its own people soon after its triumph, raised this question: “We are ready to die in thousands to make the shah leave,’ Iranians were saying last year. And the Ayatollah these days: ‘Let Iran bleed so the revolution will be strong.’ There is a strange echo between these phrases that seem connected. Does the horror of the second condemn the intoxication of the first?” (Foucault 2000, 449). This question represents a paradigmatic meeting point of modern politics and ethics. Must the revolution remain consistent with its principles or with its course? This concerns the explosive moment that aspires to interrupt time and launch something entirely new. To whom should this founding moment be accountable? May the revolution, invoking the suspension of history, defy, even destroy, its own makers?

The Greek Left experienced these burning issues with rare intensity after the resistance against the German and Italian occupation during World War II. Its people were caught between Nazism, fascism, Stalinism, nationalism,

and the sheer demands of survival in a country ravaged by war and hunger. And yet some were able to stand tall, remain critical of all ideologies, denounce expedient compromises, and still retain a deep understanding of human need and weakness. Among them, the most representative literary figure is Manolis Anagnostakis, whose work is dominated by the question of the revolution. It is Anagnostakis who traces the failure of the revolution to its inherent contradictions. He starts with its bitter aftermath (betrayal, defeat, despair, compromise) and its toll on individuals and society, and then looks at everything that made the loss almost inevitable: the fiery ideals of adolescence undermined by the immaturity of youth and the inflexibility of the Party; the passionate rhetoric of liberation discredited by the use of cheap means. All these poetic themes acquired additional resonance during the years of the later military dictatorship, as Anagnostakis was read in light of both the socio-political hopes crashed so abruptly in 1967 and the prospects of any anti-junta struggle. Today, it may be time to read him once more, following the recent revival of the revolutionary project by anarchist activists in Greece and around the world as well as writers such as Badiou, Negri, and Žižek. However, such a rereading would require a very different approach to the poet.

Anagnostakis's eminence in Greece has been indisputable since the late 1950s. Yet his critical reception is marked by two gaps. The first one is its small quantity. Only since the 1990s has there been some attempt at systematic engagement with his work. Until then, it remained more a matter of general consensus: commentators agreed that he was a major poet but were not greatly interested in examining his poems. That is why his bibliography has been surprisingly small. The other gap in his reception is the near total absence of international comparisons. Critics read Greek history but not the poetry of other countries into his work. This narrow view makes Anagnostakis an exclusive property of the Greek canon. Even the most recent studies appear uninterested in placing him in the international poetic context of his or any other era. Thus they ignore the comparable cases of the Irish Louis MacNeice, the English W. H. Auden, or the American Ezra Pound.

So it happens that Anagnostakis's work has not been discussed alongside Osip Mandelstam's "The Twilight of Liberty," written in May 1918, just months after the October Revolution. The poem begins as follows:

Brothers, let us glorify freedom's twilight,
the great twilight year.
Into the seething waters of night
a massive forest of snares is sunk.
Into unhearing years, O sun,

you are rising, judge and people.
And let us glorify the fateful
burden which in tears the nation's leader shoulders.
And glorify the somber burden of power,
its insupportable weighing-down.
In whom there is a heart - he must hear, time,
how your ship goes to the bottom.

(Mandelstam 1990, 78)

These lines bring to mind the parenthetical remark of the Greek writer: "(In all our lives we sank many ships within us in order that we ourselves might not be shipwrecked before our time.)" (Anagnostakis 2000a, 9). Also, it would be highly interesting to read Anagnostakis's poetry of the 1950s alongside the "Buckow Elegies" (1953) and other poems that Bertolt Brecht was writing in East Germany during the same period. The similarities in tone and attitude are unmistakable. Here is "The Solution," a poem from 1953, on the failed uprising of workers in Berlin:

After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers' Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

(Brecht 1976, 440)

Like Anagnostakis, Brecht too read C. P. Cavafy in the 1950s, as his "Reading a Late Greek Poet," inspired by Cavafy's "The Trojans," clearly attests:

At the time when their fall was certain—
On the ramparts the lament for the dead had begun—
The Trojans adjusted small pieces, small pieces
In the triple wooden gates, small pieces.
And began to take courage, to hope.
The Trojans too, then.

(Brecht 1976, 445)

Anagnostakis's work can also be related to other arts besides poetry, for example, cinema. Two trilogies immediately come to mind: one from

the 1950s by the Polish Andrzej Wajda (1927)—*A Generation* (1954), *Canal* (1956), and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958)—and one from the 1960s by the Italian Bernardo Bertolucci (1941)—*Before the Revolution* (1964), *The Conformist* (1969), and *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970). Both cinematic trilogies probe the most disturbing questions of power, freedom, violence, and justice, just as the poet does throughout his work.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will dwell more on the relation of Anagnostakis's work to theater, an art with a great tradition of grappling with the contradictions of the revolution. Already this theme appears in the founding play of modern drama, Friedrich Schiller's *The Robbers* (1781). As a band of robbers takes arms against feudal tyranny and hypocrisy, the play follows a fratricidal struggle for the legitimacy of the next regime. While Franz Moor desires might and his brother Karl espouses liberty, both believe in man-made destiny, and pursue their own with catastrophic results. This theme of the revolutionary struggle with external foes and internal demons can be traced from the late eighteenth century all the way down to Tom Stoppard's trilogy, *The Coast of Utopia* (2002). Part II of Stoppard's work, titled *Shipwreck*, deals precisely with the disastrous routing of the libertarian uprising in Paris by reactionary forces in 1848.

To discuss Anagnostakis's importance in this particular theatrical context, it is especially illuminating to look at what is arguably the greatest play in this tradition, Georg Büchner's *Danton's Death* (1835). The action takes place in 1794 during the last fourteen days of the hero's life and ends with his execution. From the start, Danton is despondent at witnessing the internal disintegration of the French Revolution. As the new regime tries to consolidate its power, it resorts increasingly to violence. Furthermore, it includes among its enemies growing numbers of its founders and friends, and proceeds to exterminate those as well. Danton's despondency swells to become not just political but historical and philosophical too. He despairs over history, as he admits that phenomena like popular upheavals do not follow universal laws and cannot be controlled. He also despairs over humanity, as he discovers that its course is determined by an unknown yet inescapable fate. Afflicted by dejection, Danton questions the recent course of the revolution during the play. And when Robespierre and Saint-Just turn against him and his friends, he rises to the challenge to deliver blistering speeches denouncing the terror. Yet the futility of it all is clear to him from the start, and he cannot bring himself to undertake any action.

Three attitudes toward the revolution clash in the play. Robespierre says: "The social revolution is not yet finished, and to try to end a revolution in the middle is to dig your own grave. . . . Vice must be punished, virtue must rule through terror" (Büchner 1993, 23). Saint-Just argues:

"The revolution is like the daughters of Pelias: it rejuvenates humanity by hacking it to pieces" (43). Danton believes: "The revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children" (21). For Büchner, the revolution exemplifies the conflict between freedom and necessity, the paradox of the human search for independence. On the one hand, it understands itself as the supreme act of self-definition; on the other, it views itself as the product of historical necessity. In this way, freedom remains implicated in necessity and is never ready to shoulder its own responsibility. As Peter Szondi (2002, 96) put it, "the revolution fails because it cannot free itself from the spell of 'necessity' and, indeed, is based upon it, just like the conditions it wants to abolish." The tragedy of the revolution is that it is itself historical and therefore cannot transcend history. While it aspires to serve humanity, it commits hubris by trying to save it from historical accident and material struggle. Danton realizes that he and his comrades are the outcome, not the agents of change: "We didn't make the revolution, the revolution made us" (Büchner 1993, 29).

In Anagnostakis's poems the speaker and his friends, with whom he is constantly debating the meaning of recent upheavals, share the same anxieties with Büchner's Dantonists, who argue incessantly over the destiny of the revolution. In the case of the Greeks, the difference is that the revolution in which they participated eventually failed. But this makes their protest even more interesting and poignant. Their post-revolutionary despondency does not come from defeat or the ensuing oppression of the Left, as one might expect. It comes from two different kinds of betrayal. The first is internal and originates with the revolutionary leadership. The mass movement was undermined by the duplicity of its leaders who put power above principles. The second betrayal came from all those seeking accommodation with the new regime, those who abandoned ideals in exchange for a comfortable life. Gerasimos Lykiardopoulos (1963) has rightly stressed that the source of the greatest desolation is not a sense of decline or death but rather the return of adjustment, success, and assimilation. In the midst of general prosperity, what characterizes the poet in these times is a Hamletian uncertainty, insecurity, and doubt. "Poetry is failure and defeat in a world which has overcome failure and defeat" (Markidis 1988, 46).

This post-revolutionary predicament leaves Anagnostakis ambivalent. Sometimes, in yet another attempt to salvage a public role for poetry, he seeks words with literal meaning, things with a single function, ideas with an authentic value. But, as Dimitris Tziouvas has shown, he is soon overcome with guilt since, if circumstances demand action, poetry is no substitute for it. He realizes that, when he sets up a clash between "ethics and rhetoric, praxis and theory, truth and art, content and form" (Tziouvas

2005, 217), he will be forced to draw on the latter to defend the former. More often, though, he concedes that he belongs to a generation that did not find a place in history because it lost everything—not just friends and battles but hopes and visions too. Empty-handed and betrayed, it can only insist on defending its principles, even if this is politically useless. Anagnostakis writes about those who were let down by the revolutionary project—those who were abandoned by leaders, by comrades, and by history, and were eventually defeated by everyday life. He sings for those who suffered for their ideals, saw their efforts come to nothing, and yet never renounced idealism or forgot the heroic past (Meskos 2005). These people have experienced the tragedy of revolution: they discovered that the quest for freedom cannot transcend the necessity of history.

Is this also the tragedy that drives poetry to silence? To address this vexed question we must begin with the simple fact that Manolis Anagnostakis was not a poet. He was a radiologist by profession and a life-long political and cultural activist. In the realm of politics, he participated in the resistance of the 1940s; he was exiled; he ran for Parliament; he traveled the world as a (Euro-)communist party delegate. In the realm of culture, he published prose, poetry, reviews, essays, translations, and journalism; he used numerous pseudonyms; he gave talks; he published a magazine; he collaborated with several newspapers and magazines; he oversaw newspaper pages; he ran a fifty-book fiction series; he edited a poetry anthology; he participated in weekly radio programs for nearly six years. In short, his role in public culture was very visible and covered all media.

It is therefore inaccurate to idolize Anagnostakis as an author who suffered in agonizing silence the inadequacies first visited upon modern Greece's first national poet, Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857). More like Andreas Kalvos (1792–1869), who published just two collections of Greek poetry (in 1824 and 1826) in order to support the War of Independence, Anagnostakis was an occasional poet who wrote verses together with many other genres, literary or not, as the historical moment seemed to demand or inspire. Hence, the big gaps in his poetic publications between 1955–1962, 1962–1968, and 1989–2005. As he himself observed in his 1983 portrait filmed for state TV by Lakis Papastathis, “in each specific case life demands a special expression, a different expressive mode which is not necessarily of an artistic order.” It is only fair to his greatly varied and influential creativity to demystify the poetic dimension by placing it in the framework of his life-long cultural engagement. However, such a demystification runs up against his admirers' dogged wish to portray him as a martyr of verse. In fact, it is fascinating to see over the years so many commentators express the wish, the hope, even the conviction that one day new material will emerge from his bottom drawers and will be

added to the roughly one hundred published poems. Indicatively, when Anagnostakis is groping for the right word or simply pauses during Papastathis's TV program, an intrusive voice-over quotes his verses: the poet is not allowed even a literal silence of a few seconds! This insistence that poetry cannot stop flowing recalls the collective anticipation that gathered force during the decades of the silence of the Greek national poet, Dionysios Solomos. How can those who consider poetry a natural spring accept that it may dry up?

Perhaps, it is more productive to view Anagnostakis's poems as if they were postcards to his dear friends. He mentions their names often, starting with the ubiquitous Yiorgos Apostolidis. The second person singular so common in his verses indicates that he is less composing poetry than sharing an argument or sentiment with old comrades dear to his heart. The reader hears parts of such a conversation, and may respond by treating the poem's voice as a friend's, one who is answering back. These dispatches from the frontiers of skepticism would be unthinkable without the incomparable warmth of friendship.

Anagnostakis stopped publishing collections because he had other, more pressing and perhaps more important things to contribute. He also stopped because, as a sophisticated critic himself, he looked the looming crisis of verse as high art straight in the eye. In this regard, he built on the intimations of post-modernity found in earlier poets such as C. P. Cavafy and Kostas Karyotakis, and composed some superb elegies to poetry. If the revolution betrays those who revolt, if history normalizes those who dissent, if idealism exterminates those who dream, then the time for great, visionary art is over. No reason to despair or join Hölderlin in lunacy. No reason to lie about it either.

Anagnostakis was not alone in this view. His friend Titos Patrikios begins with the same bitter awareness his poem “Στίχοι, 2” (Verses—2), published in 1957:

Στίχοι που κραυγάζουν
 στίχοι που ορθώνονται τάχα σαν ξιφολόγχες
 στίχοι που απειλούν την καθεστηκυία τάξη
 και μέσα στους λίγους πόδες τους
 κάνουν ή ανατρέπουν την επανάσταση,
 άχρηστοι, ψεύτικοι, κομπαστικοί,
 γιατί κανένας στίχος δεν κινητοποιεί τις μάζες.

(Patrikios 1998, 178)

[Verses that howl
 Verses that rise erect like bayonets
 Verses that threaten the established order
 And in their few metrical feet

Make or overthrow the revolution,
 Are useless, false, boastful,
 Because no verse today can overthrow the established order,
 No verse can mobilize the masses.]

(Friar 1985, 572)

The false, self-deceptive connection between verse and revolution, between *poesis* and *praxis*, haunted all those important intellectuals of Anagnostakis's generation who confronted "the question of poetry's antagonism with communism's strict standards of so-called 'true knowledge' and its prescriptive consequence—*engagement*, in the sense popularized by Sartre" (Gourgouris 2000, 47). There is a famous poem that stands as a monument to the many among them who reached similar conclusions. In 1958, a year after the publication of Patrikios's lines cited above, Michalis Katsaros, a utopian writer of uncompromising passion, took to task his fellow poets for abandoning their mission, losing their vigor, and allowing circumstances to intimidate them. The following concluding lines from his "Μπαλάντα για τους Ποιητές που πέθαναν νέοι" (Ballad for Poets who Died Young) convey this tone very well. I cite below from the Greek original and my own translation:

Με ποιον με ποιον να μιλήσω;
 Και σεις ποιητές όλοι εσείς μονάχοι
 τι γίνατε; Ποιος άνεμος σας έδιωξε σας πήρε;
 Τώρα που σας καλώ όλους εδώ—
 θυμάστε αλήθεια θυμάστε
 τα καφενεία τα πεζοδρόμια τα μυδράλλια
 τα δωμάτια με τα χρυσά πουλιά
 θυμάστε
 κείνο το βράδυ που μιλούσαμε
 θυμάστε;

(Katsaros in *Odos Panos* 30)

[With whom with whom to talk?
 And you lonesome poets all of you
 What happened to you? What wind blew you away took you?
 Now that I summon you all here—
 Do you remember truly remember
 The coffee shops the sidewalks the machine guns
 The rooms with the golden birds
 Do you remember
 That evening when we were talking
 Do you remember?]

And here, from earlier in the same poem, Katsaros refers to Anagnostakis:

Χάθηκε ο Αναγνωστάκης στον Βορρά
 Ούτε ένα θρήνο νέο
 λες και πέθανε τώρα αλήθεια
 ούτε ένα Χάρη δεν κλαίει ούτε τον ήλιο.

(Katsaros in *Odos Panos* 29)

[Anagnostakis is lost in the North
 There is not even a new lament
 As if he died now for real
 He cries for neither a Haris nor the sun.]

Of course many years earlier, in 1951, Anagnostakis had already composed his "Epilogue" to poetry that itself conveys similar sentiments:

Οι στίχοι αυτοί μπορεί να είναι οι τελευταίοι
 Οι τελευταίοι στους τελευταίους που θα γραφτούν
 Γιατί οι μελλούμενοι ποιητές δε ζούνε πια
 Αυτοί που θα μιλούσανε πεθάναν όλοι νέοι.

[These verses may even be the last
 The last among the last that shall be written
 Because poets of the future no longer exist
 Those who would have spoken have all died young]

(Anagnostakis 1980, 38–39)

Throughout his poetic career, this writer practices the art of the last collection, the art of making each book the last one, his last collection of poetry, the last book of all poetry.

To be sure, the collective disenchantment of the dissenters with the capacity of poetry to serve revolutionary struggle shattered the intellectual environment of the left, which had always invested in engaged literature. Determined to marginalize them, the official party line promoted instead poets with an uplifting socio-political message, like Yiannis Ritsos, Niki-foros Vrettakos, and Tasos Leivaditis. Andreas Kitsos-Mylonas (2005, 49) has written incisively about the power of the party to control literature not only on a thematic and formal but even on a confessional level that included expressions of guilt and repentance, even disaffection. It cannot be stressed enough that the only support the heretical poets had was their friendships: they met, shared their work, encouraged one another with remarkable generosity. (We can get a glimpse of that world from Stephanos Rozanis's (2005) fine memorial to literary circles.) Outside that network,

they had to deal with a party orthodoxy that supported exclusively socialist realism. Neither could they hope for the appreciation of contemporary criticism. George Savidis's (1981) comprehensive list of influential critics at that time includes Markos Avgeris, Vasos Varikas, Yiorgos Themelis, Alkis Thrylos, Andreas Karandonis, Timos Malanos, Kleon Paraschos, Petros Spandonidis, and Emilios Hourmouzos. No critic of that period was able to comprehend the kind of self-questioning poetry that was just emerging.

And yet the years between 1940 and 1960 constitute the most recent great period of Greek poetry for many reasons. Indeed all the major literary achievements of the period appeared in verse. In numerical terms, there were almost twice as many poets as there were prose writers. In political terms, while nearly all poets were progressive and engaged, many prose writers were neither. In aesthetic terms, poets dethroned the bard and wrote intensely self-reflexive works. (For example, already in the very first literary—as opposed to student—poem published by Anagnostakis in 1942 and entitled “1870–1942,” the full moon is not a natural phenomenon but a quotation from the Greek Romantic poet Spyridon Vasileiadis.) In ideological terms, they abandoned the ethnocentrism of the early twentieth century. As Toles Kazantzis (1991, 52) put it epigrammatically, this poetry was to some of its contemporary readers a living monument to an era that they felt made their lives worth living, and to others, a living remorse for their capitulation to the establishment.

Together with many other writers of the post-World War II generation, Anagnostakis bid farewell to the revolution that succumbed to its own contradictions and compromises, unable to suspend history or redeem action. He also bid farewell to high poetry, the art that, more than any other since Romanticism, seemed destined to exalt the revolution and spread its message everywhere. Specifically in Greece, the years of fiery resistance in the 1940s renewed its bardic mission, providing fresh heroic material. Following the War, the poetry of defeat succeeded the poetry of resistance as the writer reckoned with the exhaustion of revolutionary ideology. Vyron Leonardis put it succinctly in a justly famous essay:

Basically the poetry of defeat constitutes a deep crisis and perhaps the end of the ideology of resistance and the poetry of resistance. . . . The poet of resistance was absolutely convinced that human potential, individual and collective heroism are inexhaustible. Today he feels the future within his present, refusing to accept the notion that his era and his life are “transitional.” He used to believe in certain social and cultural achievements. Now even they undergo doubt and critical examination. Finally, he considered himself certain and responsible for his poetry, its influence on the transformation of the world, while today the poet experiences his poetic function as an anxiety. (Leonardis 1983a, 68–69)

This crisis of revolutionary ideology was not new. Older generations experienced it and wrote memorably about their disappointment. *Danton's Death* is full of memorable passages. Less than a year before writing his play, in March 1834, Georg Büchner was preparing a revolutionary pamphlet, *The Hessian Messenger*, which begins: “Peace to the peasants! War on the palaces” (167). He was also organizing a revolutionary cell with working-class and middle-class members. During the very same month, the twenty-two-year-old medical student wrote to his fiancé:

I have been studying the history of the French Revolution. I felt as though utterly crushed by the hideous fatalism of history. I find in human nature a terrible sameness, in human circumstances an ineluctable violence vouchsafed to all and to none. Individuals but froth on the waves, greatness a mere coincidence, a ridiculous struggle against an iron law that can at best be recognized, but never mastered. . . . What is it in man that lies, murders, steals? I can't bear to take the thought any further. (Büchner 1993, 195–96)

This is a famous passage on the tragic fate of the revolution. So is the first paragraph of the *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) that argues that, even when movements attempt to launch a new beginning, they are condemned to borrow props and rhetoric from the past, often in an unwittingly parodic fashion:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. . . .

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, in turn, 1789, and the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795. (quoted in Tucker 1987, 594–96)

Anagnostakis understood Marx's opening aphorism in both political and artistic terms. He concluded early on that the time for high art, the time of prophecy and revolution, had passed and the only path available to poetry was to return as farce after the defeat. Readers discerned this position in his collections but people did not believe him. The idea was

unfathomable to a Greek audience that had recently buried two national poets, Palamas and Sikelianos, and was looking for their successors. It would soon find them in Seferis and Elytis. So, in the late 1950s, Anagnostakis began to show by example where he stood. Drawing on his impressive capacity for versification, he began to improvise parodies and share them with all his friends. Soon they became quite well known. I recall good friends like Manos Eleftheriou and the late Eleni Vakalo citing them in the mid-1970s:

Ποιος μίλησε για Βακαλό / εάν εγώ, ανακαλώ / (κι όλοι πια λεν: καλό,
καλό . . .)

(Anagnostakis 1987: 36)

[Who has spoken of Vakalo? / if I, then I retract / (and everyone will say:
nice one, nice one . . .)]

People found these rhyming lines funny, biting and quotable, but did not recognize the despair driving them. Anagnostakis then took another step and published them in the fictional biography of his *alter ego*, Manousos Fassis, whose work evolved between 1980 and 1987. Readers had a hearty laugh once again, but the work fell on deaf ears. How could anybody handle it? Here was a book proving that the poet's silence was a myth. It showed that Anagnostakis never stopped writing verses, he just felt that the time for serious poetry was over. In the 1992 interview to Michel Faït and reproduced here in Chapter 1, the poet said that the pieces in *Manousos*, "[t]oday's political poems, the dramatic poems, must tend to satire, I think. They should be political as well as satirical. We lack such a thing. I do this partly in *Manousos Fassis*—if anyone understood this" (Anagnostakis 2005b, 27).

In vain does one look for criticism or scholarship of *Fassis*. Commentators have been able to write adoring pages on one-liners from the collection of aphorisms *P.S.* (1983), but they have ignored completely an elaborate 140-page book that represents the real postscript to his poetry while nearly doubling the volume of his published verses. Brief references to it merely mention that it contains playful rhymes, like those the author used to improvise. Yet the book represents not only the longest and most experimental book of Anagnostakis but also one of the great achievements of Greek satire. It is the purported critical study of a fictional contemporary author, Manousos Fassis, which examines his life and work and concludes with an appendix containing critical writings on him. It makes wild fun of real writers and critics, actual places, political parties, and historical events. In addition, the narrative ridicules every convention of Greek literary life—methods and standards of composition, publication, circulation, and reception. Through the biography of a typical writer

the national institution of literature becomes the stage for an uproarious farce. Also, the fabricated quotations from his oeuvre mock all the cherished modes and moods of Greek poetry, such as the fifteen-syllable line, lyricism, political engagement, rhyme, and patriotism:

Διαβάζαμε το "Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος"
και ξενυχτούσαμε μετά στα αχτίφ του Κόμματος.

(Anagnostakis 1987, 74)

(Όχι μόνο ολοκαύτωμα
χρειάζεται κι απαύτωμα.)

(1987, 87)

Εγώ αγαπούσα πάντα την Ελένη
όμως αυτή δε μου'κανε τη χάριν
δεν αγαπούσε εμένα αλλά τον Λένιν
και μου 'σκισε όλα τα βιβλία του Μπουχάριν.

(1987, 121)

Μέρα τη μέρα θά 'ρχονταν η Επανάσταση
και περιμένοντας πέρασαν χρόνια
κι όμως σ' το λέγαν οι γονείς σου: "ας' τα συ
πάντα θα βρίσκονται στον κόσμο άλλα κωθώνια".

(1987, 114)

Upon finishing the book, the reader is tempted to subject much of his beloved Greek poetry to the same ironic treatment, and so begin to dispute its treasured authenticity.

Beyond all this, there is a special dimension that makes this farce rather unique: the story is a thinly disguised autobiography, and the literary excerpts cited are the satirical poems everybody knew that Anagnostakis was writing. With this volume, Anagnostakis is sending up himself—his own myth and the aesthetic ideology that produced his status as a poet. Friends, events, issues of his life appear with their real name. The self-absorbed Manousos Fassis, who is obsessed with politics, women, versification, and recognition, is none other than his own maker: "Fassis remains authentic in his own *de facto* imperfection as well as that of others, in harmony with the terms of his birth and his historical being, deficient as well as proactive. Fassis is a supplement to Anagnostakis, or, to be precise, he emerges from his interstices and affirms the fact that, above all, consciousness remains a historical negativity" (Zervos 1993, 60). Anagnostakis announces to one and all that he never lacked the words for his verse—that, in fact, he has written hundreds of poems. He is also announcing that all these poems sneer at the self-important art of poetry.

For example, the book opens with the manuscript of a poem where the speaker tells the receptionist at Hotel Macedonia:

Θέλω άνεση σουίτας
είμαι ποιητής της ήττας

(Anagnostakis 1987, 8)

[I want the luxury of a suite
I, the poet of defeat!]

To be a member of the generation associated with the "poetry of defeat" entitles one now to the luxuries of a hotel suite. In this manner, the book provokes both delicious laughter and a distinct sense of utter nihilism. Anagnostakis debunks not just literature, not merely its mechanisms, but his own myth as well, announcing that it was a big lie. He also shows that, today, poetry can only function as its own parody. Following his earlier elegy for the revolution, he has now written an obituary for its bard, the Poet.

As we know from the book's lack of reception, the greatest irony is that readers were deaf to this kind of radical and sarcastic questioning. Nobody could dethrone Anagnostakis, not even he himself. After all, the author function is not something an author may control. It can very well operate on its own. We have seen its impressive results even in extreme cases of one-hit writers like Nikos Gatsos, who remained an author even though, after *Amorgos* (1943), he published no second book until his death nearly five decades later. Myles Weber (2005) has written a stimulating book on four American writers who belong to a single category: J. D. Salinger, Henry Roth, Ralph Ellison, and Tillie Olsen. The subtitle of the book indicates that there are writers whom we continue to "read" once they have been consecrated as "authors," even though they have stopped publishing. How can we keep reading them when they give us nothing new to read? As the title of the study indicates, we read not their works but their silences, interpreting them in endlessly inventive ways. In fact, there are no silences consuming such writers; interpretive communities produce and consume authorial silences as consummate artifacts. Mechanisms of the aesthetic market, which sustain the author function, guarantee the textualization of everything, including the total absence of texts. Anagnostakis must have realized this when he saw that Manousos Fassis had no impact on the consumption of Anagnostakis as an "author." It may have been *this* realization that made him finally give up publishing his work. He probably felt unable to dispel his literary legend. The canonization of the author overwhelmed the defeat of poetry.

Is there anything left, then? Is it anywhere possible to retain an ethico-political integrity that can resist not just oppression but also the triumph of opposition that turns revolution into domination, liberation into terror, poetry into textuality, writers into authors? By commemorating a unique epoch and some special friends, Anagnostakis seems to suggest that there are moments and collectivities where ethics and politics can merge and explode. These occurrences are events, though, not developments, in that they arise in history but not as stages of an evolution. Vangelis Calotychos (2003, 209) captures their uniqueness very well: "Anagnostakis's 'epochs' freeze his historical moment out of history; the lived moment resists its appropriation by the party, the continuum of Hellenism, or grand meta-narratives." Michel Foucault (just a year younger than Anagnostakis) answered his own question about the meaning of rebellion by expressing his appreciation for the lived moment of revolt and by rejecting the chiliastic project of the revolution: "Revolts belong to history. But, in a certain way, they escape from it. The impulse by which a single individual, a group, a minority, or an entire people says, 'I will no longer obey,' and throws the risk of their life in the face of an authority they consider unjust seems to me to be something irreducible. Because no authority is capable of making it utterly impossible. . . . And because the man who rebels is finally inexplicable" (Foucault 2000, 449). Since uprisings "are thus 'outside history' and in history" (450), we can speak of the "enigma of revolts" (450), which cannot fit into any laws of history, norms of politics, or categories of thought. If the utopia of the revolution is no longer tenable, does this mean that it is useless to revolt? Even in the midst of his grave disappointment over the Iranian experiment, Foucault insisted that he was:

not in agreement with anyone who would say, "It is useless for you to revolt; it is always going to be the same thing." One does not dictate to those who risk their lives facing a power. Is one right to revolt, or not? Let us leave the question open. . . . A question of ethics? Perhaps. A question of reality, without a doubt. All the disenchantments of history won't alter the fact of the matter: it is because there are such voices that the time of human beings does not have the form of evolution but that of "history," precisely. (Foucault 2000, 452)

In his poetry as well as the rest of his consistently engaged cultural work, Manolis Anagnostakis shows that it is pointless, and in the end destructive, to view history as a burden or a prison from which humanity needs to escape. At the same time, it is meaningless to reduce humanity to a historical process alone since the brief epochs of revolt show that individuals and communities can also make their own history. What is left, and what may, just may, sometimes be inalienable is what he calls a "Moment," the precious record of a moment which rewards our cheap lives

and makes what is temporary indelible. Anagnostakis defined it in an appropriately obscure poem titled "Αν Θυμούμαι . . ." (If I Remember . . .).

The poem defies translation, maybe even paraphrase:

Αν θυμούμαι, δεν είναι που νικήθηκα
 Δεν είναι που επιδίωξα μιαν αγοραία λύση
 Όλα συγκλίνουνε μπροστά σε εκείνο που έρχεται
 Αδιάλειπτο, ανεξίτηλο, στίγμα στο πρόσκαιρο.
 Να ξεχωρίσεις, αν υπάρχει, μια Στιγμή
 Σ' αλλεπαλλήλων χρόνων στείρα διαίωηση
 Για κείνο που έρχεται, φραγμός σε μια παράταση,
 Σαν περιζήτητη αμοιβή φτηνής ζωής.

(Anagnostakis 2000a, 94)

[If I remember, it isn't that I was defeated
 It wasn't that I sought a vulgar solution
 Everything converges before that which is coming
 Incessant, indelible, a blot on the transient.
 Make out one Moment, if it exists
 In the barren perpetuation of successive epochs
 For that moment which is to come, barrier to the extension.
 Like the much sought after reward for a cheap life.]

The same unique "moment" returns just two poems later in the same collection of 1951:

Αυτοί δεν ήταν ήρωες. Όμως ο θάνατός τους
 (. . .) Είχε ακόμη την σκληρήν ευγένεια των πραγμάτων
 Που μιας στιγμής η απόσταση ξέρει να υψώνει.

(1980, 37)

[These were not Heroes. But their deaths
 (. . .) possessed the hard nobility of things
 Which the interval of a moment knows how to elevate.]

What endures is precisely what did not, could not, last—the lived moment of resistance, no matter how frail or futile. It may not be useful to revolt but it remains imperative as a matter of personal human dignity and collective ethico-political responsibility. Neither apocalyptic nor messianic, the explosive moment manifests the demand for justice and the defiance of authority in the only absolute present possible within history. The poetry of Manolis Anagnostakis honors that noble, fleeting present, bidding farewell to the necessity of the revolution and accepting the tragic contingency of revolt.

10



Self-Reading, Self-Anagnosis

The Progressive Ethos of the Late Anagnostakis

Vangelis Calotychos

This chapter follows my prior preoccupation in print with the major poetry of Manolis Anagnostakis and his generation in chapter 6 of my book *Modern Greece: A Cultural Poetics* (2003). There I considered the relation of poetics and politics in his poetry, from his first poems in the 1940s up to and including the poetry collection *Ο Στόχος* (*The Target*) of 1969. This chapter will address Anagnostakis's meagre output after this generally acknowledged mature period embodied by this anthology of his *Poems (1941–1971)*, which was published in 1971. For it is widely held that *The Target* is Anagnostakis's last important collection and that the anthology encapsulates his thinking about poetry and politics. For many critics, Anagnostakis recedes into silence after *The Target*, forsaking poetry, never to speak or write in the same terms again.

However, while *The Target* will likely remain the poet's most important work and will forever leave its mark on Greek poetry, this should not curb the reader from appreciating the works—all adjudged not to be poetic or else quite serious enough—that followed it in the close to thirty-five years up to his death in 2005. This chapter will revisit this rupture, not so much to explain the poet's withdrawal from poetry after 1969—others have commented upon this silence, in this volume and elsewhere—rather, specifically, to consider how, following *The Target*, Anagnostakis still seeks a way to speak anew about the past, present, and future. Far from concluding his poetic output in 1969, Anagnostakis reaches no conclusions about poetry's role in this task and continues to seek a mode or a genre to speak through and also to hide behind.

Προσπαθούσε να σε πείσει πως όλα είχαν αλλάξει,
 'Όμως εσύ τα βλεπες γύρω σου απελπιστικά
 όμοια.

He was trying to convince you that everything had changed,
 but you saw everything around you distressingly
 the same.

Εμένα θα μου άρεσε με μια μουσική υπόκρουση,
 Είπες, όπου θα καθόριζες εσύ τα κενά της σιωπής.

What would please me, you said, would be a musical accompaniment
 in which you would delimit the moments of silence.

'Όμως ποτέ δε θα μου εξηγήσεις το πώς και το
 γιατί.

But you will never explain to me the how and
 the why.

Πόσα άλλα κρυμμένα βαθιά . . .

How many other things hidden deep down . . .

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