

Blending and Distorting Genre: Comparing Diasporic Texts of Five Diasporic Writers in the Antipodes

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*A comparative study of literary texts by Greek Australian writers who borrow Greek oral traditional tropes and symbols can illuminate the heterogeneous nature of the diasporic identity. When writers borrow and use traditional symbols and motifs it may appear to signify Hellenistic continuity, or alternatively (if used in an untraditional way) it can challenge the idea of an imagined "Greek" homogeneous, cultural identity. The transgressive texts *Dead Europe* and *The Mule's Foal* by Greek Australian writers Christos Tsiolkas and Fotini Epanomitis merge a paramythic voice with the apocalyptic tale, the anti-Bildungsroman, the travelogue, dirty or grunge realism, burlesque and satire. Epanomitis exploits ethnography and renders it strange even as she dares to articulate the unsaid of civil society by using playful satire. Her parody of oral women's tales subverts the male dominance of Greek rural society. Tsiolkas merges violent urban realist themes together with an epic ghost tale to expose the dark side of Europe's and Greece's recent history. When we contrast these texts with Antigone Kefala's *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children* and various poems by Styllianos Charkianakis and Dean Kalimnios then various questions arise; the first has to do with the problem of genre categorisation when antithetical types are merged, and the second has to do with identity when the diasporic subject occupies an ambivalent space in which there is a constant negotiation of contradictory cultural beliefs and ideologies. Are these diverse texts emblematic of Greek Australian postcolonial transformations that link the global and the local while challenging readers to recognize that ethnicity, in a postmodern world, is as Ian Ang states, "a provisional and partial "identity" which must be constantly (re) invented and (re) negotiated" (Ang 2001: 29, 1992-93).*

Introduction

When contemporary Greek Australian diasporic writers draw on their home culture's oral story-telling tradition in their literary texts, what does this signify? Do they identify as Hellenist traditionalists or are they undertaking the role of creative mediators between languages and cultures; the Greek centre and Greek Australian periphery? Are they hybrid identities, who according to Stuart Hall are "positioned in transition, between different positions, which draw from different cultural traditions at the same time", or are they "translated identities, who retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past" (Hall 1992: 310). Furthermore, when the anti-traditional writers reconfigure identity through transgression, does this symbolise a shift from a collective sense of belonging, to an individual focus on the self?

This study specifically engages with the above questions through comparative literary analysis. My chosen group of writers; Styllianos Charkianakis, Dean Kalimnios, Christos Tsiolkas, Fotini Epanomitis and Antigone Kefala were selected on the premise that the paramythi features as a literary trope, and through various ways in their texts. For practical reasons, I had to limit my choice of writers, so I do not claim that these are the only Greek Australian writers who draw from their oral cultural tradition.

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The sources used in this study were mainly literary sources that were written in English. Dean Kalimnios' poetry, however, was written only in the Greek register and therefore his poems were translated by me in the initial phase of my research. There were a few bilingual publications on Charkianakis' work, specifically *Australian Passport* (2002) and *Fireworks and Sparrows* (Stylianos, Archbishop of Australia and Karalēs 2002, Stylianos, Archbishop of Australia et al. 1994) but in some cases I either revised this poet's translated text, or offered my own translation where there were no translated versions. In the case of Dean Kalimnios' work I was fortunate enough to gain an email interview with him, which illumined my interpretations of his cryptic poetry as well as his perspectives on Hellenism and the Greek language. In relation to the non-traditionalists, Christos Tsiolkas (2005), Antigone Kefala (1995/1984) and Fotini Epanomitis (1993), I selected only one text from each writer because of the presence of paramythic symbols, motifs or rhetoric, namely: *Dead Europe, Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children* and *The Mule's Foal*. The problem of the hyphenated identity emerged as a central theme in Christos Tsiolkas and the women writers, which Tsiolkas articulates through the example of his own lived experience in an interview with Mary Zournazi.

It has taken me a long time to feel at home with a sense of an Australian identity, and even at this point I don't particularly know what that may mean. ... I grew up in a Greek family in which Greece was always positive for me as my place, where my origins are from, where I really belonged ... As I entered adolescence, I found myself in conflict with that culture and did try to understand myself then as an Australian, but because the idea of an Australian was a very "Anglo" one, I also felt uncomfortable. So for a very long time I felt that I lived, I think I've expressed it, as living within a hyphen, hyphen where it's neither Australian nor Greek, it's something else.¹

This feeling of "something else" has certain affiliations with Stuart Hall's idea of "novel identities", from a cultural studies point of view. Identity in this context represents a process of "becoming", revealed through the narrative of one's life journey, or what Probyn describes as an "agonistic renegotiation of the world" (Probyn 1996: 10). Stuart Hall's cultural studies approach views identity as a matter of "becoming" as well as "being" (Hall 1990: 225). This implies that identity is something which is fluid because it is constantly affected by change, and it is not something which is fixed because of genealogy. It is not Greek and something else, in an essentialist way, but something new. Yet, within the group of my chosen writers there are some who show they are Greek but also hyphenated, and so in their case, when they draw from their oral traditions they may be fulfilling, what Jan Assmann describes as "a social obligation" (Assman 2003: 154) because they are positively identifying with a communal practice of collective memorialisation (albeit in a literary way).

¹ Tsiolkas C, "Interview with Mary Zournazi." Episode Six. abc.net.au/TV/2shot. [Accessed: 6 September 2010]

Given these varying positions, we may infer that on the sub-conscious level, the past informs each writer's life narrative, but the way that it is creatively re-interpreted indicates that there is an obvious division between those who reject, and those who engage with their heritage. The writers themselves are also internally divided, at times having the feeling that they belong to the host culture and rejecting the home culture, and vice versa. Such ambivalence is indicative of W.E.B. Du Bois idea of the "double consciousness", "a kind of internal hybridity, which highlights the diasporic writer's ambivalent allegiance to, or double hesitation about, belonging to the "ancestral" home, on the one hand, and to the host country on the other" (Tziovas 2009: 171). This is especially evident in Fotini Epanomitis who states in an interview that she is "both Greek, and Australian, and neither". She sees her sense of identity as divided, since, when she is in Australia she feels "quite Greek", but when she is in Greece she feels "very Australian". She associated Greekness in her early years with isolation since she had been part of a very small migrant community in Perth. In her young adult years feminism became more relevant on a personal level, than an ethnic sense of Australianess or Greekness because it allowed her to voice her main concern, which was her reaction against patriarchy? (Elliot 1993: 9).

Dean Kalimnios in our interview stated that his primary cultural affiliation is with Greece, even though he is Greek Australian in the sense that he "lives, works in, and loves Australia". "Greek culture" he said, "informs my world view and forms part of my own personal identity". He did, however, point out that "maintaining one's "Greekness" is a vexed question, owing to the multifaceted nature of Greece and Greeks".²

Christos Tsiolkas, in the interview with Mary Zournazi, said that in his pre-adolescent years he saw himself as being very close to his Greek heritage because it provided him with a stable point of reference. Later he moved away from what he saw as a very "sheltered migrant community" and so he cut ties with it in a violent way (Zournazi 2010). Tsiolkas' main identification is with urban, working class and homosexual culture.

Styllianos Charkianakis and Antigone Kefala, who were born overseas, show in their texts that their sense of identity does not have the divided loyalties shared by the former group. They see their past as the place which formed them, and recognise that their present continues to transform them. Charkianakis refers to himself as Ο Αυστραλίας Στυλλιανός (Styllianos belonging to Australia)³ even as his Greek past, its traditions and its language remains for him an active creative force as we see in his poems. Kefala, in her interview with Helen Digby, admitted she lost her privileged social position because of the World War and migration, but she also had the experience of "inner dyslexia" because of her initial inability to be understood (Digby 1996: 198). This implies that in her case identity is connected to social class, language and difference. Her tale *Alexia* shows the process of coming to terms with her changed social status but also with herself as "another". She adopts the

² Kalimnios. Email interview. 8th September, 2008.

³ Charkianakis, address at the annual dinner 26th November, 2004.

new language of her host, pointing out in her interview with Digby "to change a language is to change one's selves". One facet of her "selves" was based in European high society. She compares her present, to her childhood experiences in a Europe that was dismantled with the war. Greece was for her, a point of transit, when she temporarily stayed, having been forced to leave her old country as a refugee. Eventually she was transported to New Zealand, and then moved to Australia. Greece may also have been where she first realised that she was considered foreign. Helen Nickas points out that Greece laid no claim to her and her co-refugees, but instead, as Kefala had once revealed to a journalist, "in Greece they call us foreigners". In Romania they had considered themselves as Greeks, because this is how the Romanian host culture viewed its Greek migrant population (Nickas 1995: 16). This shows that identity, for her, depends on perception, and in her case it had to be renegotiated many times because of her multiple experiences with linguistic, cultural, and changes in social status. In Kefala's case, as Maggie Humm says, "identity is not the goal, but the point of departure towards self-consciousness" (Humm 1995: 126), because of such transformations.

Shifting from Greek Centred Trends

Stuart Hall states that, "like everything which is historical, cultural identity undergoes constant transformation, since it is not a fixed essence, a fixed origin to which we can return" (Hall 1990: 226). Fixed origins are also a dominant factor in contemporary revivalist movements in Third World countries, which according to Hall, are "characterised by a revival of ethnic nationalism, fuelled by ideas of both racial purity and religious orthodoxy". Hall makes the interesting point that this idea of fixed origins may indicate "a response to being left out of globalisation" (Hall 1992: 311, 313). Various questions are raised when looking at the Modern Greek situation because, even though it was an insecure modern nation with major structural shifts, many Greek writers maintained a sense of cultural superiority. Jusdanis discussed the political aspect of the modern Greek nation-building phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, observing that a national identity was "a necessary medium to maintain and to possess political authority" (Jusdanis 2008: 61). During this phase, culture was mobilised in a similar way to Third World revivalist movements as discussed by Hall. Tziovas points out that Greece "has seen various shifts from a Third World to a First World structural cultural pattern" (Tziovas 2003: 26). The idealised Hellenistic sense of continuity and superiority, which was especially obvious amongst many poets during the twentieth century, is now being severely challenged by global forces such as the current global economic crisis, transculturalism and multiculturalism. Previously in the mid twentieth century, Hellenistic superiority had been challenged because of political insecurity, the Asia Minor catastrophe, and the divisive civil war which had left a legacy of trauma. Instead of identifying with the *ethnos* (the nation), many disillusioned writers made new attachments, because, as Jusdanis points out,

Literary culture permits groups to empower themselves, particularly when, in societies of belated modernisation, they feel politically disenfranchised. In the ensuing conflict between state and civil realms, they invest in culture to gain political authority, transforming culture into a domain from which to resist the authoritarian state (Jusdanis 1991: 161).

Despite a greater emphasis on personal, gender and ethnic identity in postmodernist texts, that resist an authoritarian discourse, Greek identity politics based on a "superior" us, and an "inferior" them remains, albeit in new forms.

Deconstructing "Greekness" in Antipodean Writing

Greekness remains a valid issue for diasporic writers in a more heightened way than it is in Greece, because it represents their point of difference from the host culture, even as it forms the basis of the beginnings of their life narrative. It may be a frame of reference, or a point of departure through memory or desire. When writers in the Antipodes question their own selfhood, they foreground issues of individualistic and communal identity. Their identity is not a matter about belonging to the Greek nation as an insider or an outsider, but it does have to do with survival and continuity of Greek culture, within a diverse and changing poly-cultural society. It appears paradoxical that there are some writers in the diaspora, such as Charkianakis and Kalimnios, who appear to be more traditional than some of their mid twentieth century Modern Greek counterparts. The way that Charkianakis, and Australian-born Kalimnios maintain the language, the ethos and the sounds of the Greek oral tradition indicates that they see themselves as custodians of Greek traditional culture in the Antipodes, but their writing shows that they do not subscribe to Greece's isolationist and separatist politics. Charkianakis and Kalimnios have chosen to linguistically differentiate themselves from their host culture as they write predominantly in the Greek language. This indicates that they are affiliated with the Greek centre, and that it is important for them to share Greek culture with others. The other writers within my chosen set Kefala, Epanomitis and Tsiolkas are choosing something else. The question that arises is whether these writers who have chosen new affiliations are more tolerant of difference, or are they gravitating towards a cosmopolitan or an individualistic mode of being like their anti-authoritarian Modern Greek counterparts?

When Charkianakis and Kalimnios write their poems, they not only prefer to write in Greek (a foreign language for Australians), but they also use cryptic images and symbols for readers who are unfamiliar with Greek traditional culture. This may be a strategy to show their commitment to preserve their culture from extinction. Their poems show that they are insiders because they symbolically maintain strong ties with Hellenism. Physically they are outside of Greek place, but the fact that they write openly or cryptically may indicate something else. The fact that both writers avoid writing in English, despite being fluent in the English language, tells me that they may want to remain as foreigners in the Antipodes. St John Climacus, an Eastern Orthodox Church Father wrote during the sixth century, "A true exile, despite his possession of knowledge, sits

like someone of foreign speech among men of other tongues" (St John Climacus 1982: 87). This implies a willingness to maintain separateness, but it also indicates that those who refuse to speak in the host language, even though they know how to speak and write in English, see themselves as exiles with a political mission or a spiritual vocation.

What type of exile identity do these writers represent? In his earlier poems, Charkianakis sees himself as a Greek "unrepentant, and incurable", in his poem "Exile"; and in the later poem "Portrait", he identifies himself as "solitude dancing in measureless orphancy ... with your own name being your only limitation" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia and Karalēs 2002: 189, 197). Despite this notion of the lone exile he also identifies himself as "belonging to Australia", because of his hierarchical, pastoral position in Greek society. Kalimnios presents his own personal version of the Greece he had come to know through family stories, from his teachers at the Melbourne Saturday school who taught Greek as a first language. It was only after he was fifteen years old that he visited Greece bi-annually, and so his idea of Greece is both a mediated and a direct one. Charkianakis is a Greek-born, migrant poet but in his poems we hear various voices, ranging from the custodian of the Greek Orthodox Church, the philosopher, and the esoteric man with child-like wonder in his physical and non-physical world. Kalimnios is Australian-born of Greek heritage, living and working as a solicitor and poet in Australia, free to explore his Greek roots from the outside.

Tradition for Charkianakis is not "archaeology", as it is for Kalimnios, who is fascinated by the Greek linguistic tradition, having stated in our interview, "I feel like an archaeologist, discovering the language from the outside". For Charkianakis, tradition and words are a source of creativity, for he states, "No genuine tradition remains a dead and static past, but is constantly translated into a creative present" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia 1987: 107). This view on tradition is one based on his sense of responsibility as a spiritual leader, a custodian of Eastern Orthodox Greek beliefs and practice in the Antipodes. But in other poems he shows his dual sense of self shaped by his religious vocation, and his child-like poetic sensibility. In his poem "Response" he writes about the inter-relationship between the poet and the child.

Poetry for Charkianakis is a means to transmit his ideals, and initiate a new way of seeing life, even as it reveals certain wounds, indicated meta-poetically when he refers to his work as, "holy insanity", "the cry like a wounded nightingale", "the restitution of the integral shape" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia and Karalēs 2002: 23, 97, 179), respectively. In the poem, "Those Who Denied the East", he asserts that atrocities which were done to a torn, burnt, sinking earth by modern man, were perpetuated by those who "who denied the East, [and] turned back to the West" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia 2007: 61, 99). Here he is the visionary who wants to remind modern man that a new way of seeing life may be found in the wisdom of the East. He draws on his experience of Eastern Orthodox spirituality and makes a clear commitment to his heritage, and to his forefathers, as indicated in the anecdotal poem "Politeness of the Old", where he writes,

The voice of my generation
 is not modern.
 It does not condescend
 To be modern.
 Let it at least remind acoustically
 Of the politeness of the old ... (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia
 2007: 90).

He continues this analogy to his generation in "Clay Faces", where he specifically refers to the resilience of his long-suffering Cretan forefathers from the town of Rethymio, who had inspired him. Here he compares his compatriots to those rough weathered rocks which stood up to the ravages of time as "souls crystallised before the ocean". His own origins are from this region of Crete, and he seeks to emulate and to "distribute quietly the strength of [such] endurance" which these rocks have inspired in him, rocks which weather the "passions and the joys ... without complaint" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia 2010: 63). In his more recent collections, the guardian of the Christian Orthodox Faith becomes less polemical, and more philosophical as he increasingly shows that he is aware of the passing of time. In the poem "Wrinkled Paper", he admits to "counting my advancing years, while in "With the Exhausted Lamp" he is more candid when he admits to failing memory which is "not merely 'forgetting'/losing names which I had carried in my blood until yesterday". Could it be that he needs to repeat the memories of his past because if he does not he will forget? He writes, "If I don't often repeat these words, they pass discreetly to a shadow/which every day becomes thicker" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia 2010: 32). In *Thola Potamia (Clouded Rivers)* he argues that even though memory begins to falter, sensitivity does not, reinforced by the symbol of ageing in the poem, "The Stone's Privilege", where he writes as though in a public confession,

The stone only knows how to smile
 With grief or with irony.
 Stones do not speak
 they only crack,
 so as to hear better.
 The heart does the same thing
 when it becomes stone so as to survive
 not wanting to trust the inertia of its body's endurance (Charkianakis,
 Archbishop of Australia 2007: 63).

Here he refers to inert physical bodies and humanises them. These images are counter-posed against recurring image of fluidity. Stones, rocks and various images of fluidity, such as the sea and human emotions are interconnected in a paradoxical way. In the poem "My Portrait", Charkianakis stresses the fleeting of time and the fluidity of nature,

My portrait is liquid
 and I cannot manage
 to keep up with its fluidity
 as I move about in strange inscriptions (Charkianakis, Archbishop of
 Australia 2005: 115).

In the poem "Flowing Shades of Light", where Charkianakis says that "he tries to fit into his new clothes, without looking like a fool, or wronging the setting", he is revealing the dichotomy between his two selves, the public and the private, his Greekness and his Australian social position? When he writes that "the whole of human life is written as a constantly changing scene", he introduces a paradox, which is a defining feature of his own sense of selfhood, "Who can deny that the only stable signs, are transmitted from the flowing chiaroscuro?" (Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia 2005: 89). The shades and moments of light may symbolically represent epiphanic moments. Chiaroscuro constantly change, as do his perceptions of himself, and how he is perceived by others. The fact that he quotes Paul Eluard in the epigram, "The setting covers everything", which introduces this poem in the collection *Spiled Topoi (Cave-like Places)* indicates that he is acknowledging that his identity lies hidden within the light and dark spaces of both Greece and Australia. He confesses that "wherever he is/and at whatever time, a certain setting becomes his self-appointed/new garment". Consciously therefore he has to fit in, but subconsciously, his "self" lays hidden amidst the constant flow of change, since he states that "the only stable signs, are those epiphanies revealed within the light and shade of life's canvas". This image of the chiaroscuro implies that for Charkianakis' identity is not just a matter of his various roles, the traveller, preacher, scribe, bard, authority and maturing philosopher, but it lays hidden, and is opened up only momentarily within his journey of becoming.

Kalimnios' sense of identity begins with, what Giannis Vasilakakos describes, as a "cult-like worship of the spectre of the diachronicity of ecumenical Hellenism". In our interview, he referred to his outsider conception of Hellenism as, "his own unique conception, divorced from any feeling of chauvinism or patriotism". Initially, his first collection of poems, *Kipos Esoklistos*, shows that he is a proud Greek, but as he matures we note that he is becoming a disheartened Hellenist. Even so, this young poet shows that there are moments where he reaches for hope in his Eastern Orthodox religious faith. Like Charkianakis, Kalimnios draws from images of his religious tradition as indicated by their use of the symbol of the rising sun and the resurrection (Kalimnios 2004: 21, Charkianakis, Archbishop of Australia, Karalēs 2002: 127). While this young poet appears to be searching for life's meaning through his cultural heritage, each of his collection of poems emphasises a particular facet of his character. In *Kipos Esoklistos* he is the proud translator of Greek migrant culture, while in the next collection *Alexipyrina* he is the alchemist. In *Apteros Niki* he is the linguistic scholar and historian of Eastern civilizations and symbols, and in *Anysihasmos* he is the Hellenistic philosopher who forms new words. In *Plektani* we recognise the pilgrim and visionary

prophet, and finally in his most recent collection *Kelifospastis* he represents the disenchanted Hellenistic archaeologist. This disillusionment had been foreshadowed in his initial collection in the poem "Mosaic", where he meta-poetically reveals his style of writing, as "scattered fragments/collections of the mind". Then he deconstructs idyllic childhood, or what he refers to as the primal state, by referring to the revelatory moment in which the grown child discovers "grandmother's withered tomato plants, the empty chicken coup, and grandfather's weed filled garden". Here we recognise an anecdote which metaphorically describes how one comes to terms with loss, through the images of the neglected garden, the disappearance of its animals, and "the paramythi cut in the middle" (Kalimnios 2003: 7). In his later collections he moves away from a defensive position resisting Greek stereotype as in his earlier poem "Photo frame" that "I want to be unhung, to change the frame, and to be allowed to shine in the sun", and he begins to temper his cult-like worship of Hellenism, by turning inwards. In his collection *Apteros Niki*, Kalimnios focuses not on Hellenism, but on the cultural memories of a pre-Hellenic world. He travels back in time and searches for meaning in symbols tied to the ancient civilizations of Anatolia and ancient Babylonia. These civilizations are associated with the cradle of civilization, but Babylonia is also a symbol of exile in the Jewish tradition, and in Greek Orthodox hymnology. In Kalimnios' subsequent collection *Anisyhasmos* we note that the proud Hellenist is becoming more inclusive of other cultures, especially Eastern cultures, as indicated by his poems, "Nirvana", "Omar Hagiam", "Toura". In the poem "Dreamtime" he acknowledges indigenous Australia, and states that he is searching for inspiration in the oral stories and spiritual world of cultures which predated his Greek culture, "on the level of the woven plot we experienced life ... seeking in their deserted bodies the waking of Morfeas" (Kalimnios 2010: 29, 69, 84, 89). In *Plektani* the poet steers away from recurring images which indicate his pride in his Hellenic identity. Instead we recognise the contrapuntal vision of the diasporic poet as prophet. The desert and the Holy Land is the setting of this collection, and like his Australian counterpart, A.D. Hope, he identifies a utopian space as that region of the mind which has been liberated from the "lush jungle of modern thought". To find this space he has sought wisdom in the oral tradition of the cultures and personalities which have converged in the Holy Land. The insights of this pilgrimage inspired him to write as a prophet who uses a cryptic language of anecdotes and parables in order to debunk, cauterise and identify the plague that continues to strike Western society satiated by confusion, overcome by *lithi* (inertia), and filled with many "isms" but lacks substance. He, like his Australian forerunner Hope, asks the poignant question whether "still from the deserts the prophets come?" Prophets and poets share an uncanny relationship, because they can challenge their audience by revealing bitter and dark truths, as he writes in Evdomi Pligi (The Seventh Wound) "they can dance on asphalt/drenching the clouds". This poet moves between disillusionment and the faint hope that he draws from his Eastern Orthodox religious faith. "No, the bruises of the wild almond trees will not be lost ... our armpits still exude

myrrh" (Kalimnios 2012: 45, 46). Here he combines the image of the wild almond tree often used in Greek folksongs to symbolise life's joys mingled with sorrow, with the religious symbol of myrrh which signifies sainthood. He repeats this idea of a world stretched to the limits of endurance, in the poem "Galilee" when he writes, "Not even the waters of Galilee pray on the limits of endurance". In "Low ceiling days", he candidly admits, "no we don't want to worship the soil" which symbolises materialism, but instead he identifies with those who 'remain lying upside down to lick forgiveness from the sky' (Kalimnios 2012: 39, 66). The forgiveness which he begs in "Asbestio (Lime)" is for the sins perpetuated by the self-obsessed and the powerful, who hide the atrocities of the past, "someone forces the innocence of the wall/all the sparrows are lined up/and we lime wash them with the crushed bones of our forefathers" (Kalimnios 2012: 104). The poet is not the judge, but by including the personal pronoun, "we", he identifies himself as a co-traveller with those who have also embarked on a pilgrimage towards self-realisation. He does not detach himself from the collective guilt of his materialist society, but identifies with this society. The point he wants to emphasise is that he can see more clearly from the desert, because in the desert he experienced a more authentic way of being. Kalimnios, like his Greek counterpart Kazantzakis, is obsessed with ancestors and sees poetry as a spiritual and aesthetic practice. Both emphasise Sartre's "human condition" which Kalimnios tempers through his Eastern Orthodox faith, in contrast to Kazantzakis who emphasises the moment through his nihilistic Nietzschean philosophy. Kazantzakis protagonist seeks relief from pain through the dissolution of the soul and body into the nothingness of the "cool sea", while Kalimnios indicates that sorrow, which is held behind "sealed lips", can be tempered by the hope of faith, indicated by his allusion to the image of the swallow, and the reference to "our fathers".

In "*Metafthinoporino* (Beyond Autumn)" he uses the symbolism of the seasons as in folksongs to generate hope. Just as spring is anticipated during and beyond autumn, so too beyond the preview of death and dying creation there lies the hope of eternity, symbolised as "an inexhaustible azure", an unending vision of beauty beyond the grave. It is the colour which signifies hope for the Greek diasporic poet, it is a colour which reminds the exile that home is where the sea and the sky meet, where the senses are felt, it lies beyond our senses, "beyond the nails of our feet" (Kalimnios 2013: 7, 9-10). There beyond the crustacean shells lies the azure blue which is the colour associated with the Aegean, but the same colour also encircles Australia. Kalimnios, like Charkianakis cannot extract himself from this setting, as it has contributed to his own self-perception, and the way in which he views life and death. Both poets draw from the images of their folk and religious tradition when they want to impart the hope which their culture has given them to counteract life's riddles.

The Women Writers

Antigone Kefala and Fotini Epanomitis differ from each other because of their age, generation and place of birth. Unlike their male counterparts, these women writers do not show the same fascination, or sense of connection to the Greek centre. They are neither Greek, nor Australian insiders. As outsiders, or travellers in between Greek and Australian culture, they do not seek to perpetuate Hellenistic values and beliefs even though they do use paramythic symbols and tropes. They draw from their oral tradition and write cryptically, or "in slant" as Angela Carter would say. Kefala opens up the silences of the migration experience, and Epanomitis looks back at a communal society in decline, exposing the bigotry, archaic superstitions, sexism and racism which colonise identity in remote rural communities, and in her own society. Both female writers expose patriarchal oppression, and explore issues of sexual difference and the unconscious. Their tales question and subvert Hellenistic traditions, through a feminist strategy of self-interrogation, passive resistance, play and sarcasm. Unlike the male poets they do not see themselves as exiles from the Greece centre because their relationship with the centre is ambivalent. Nickas, in her introduction to *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children* argues that "all of Kefala's work has been, in a sense, a tale of exile" because this modernist writer depicts life away from home (Europe). Maggie Humm argues that the experience of exile, geographically or imaginatively were crucial to male modernists. Here we have a female modernist writer, and a postmodernist female writer who write of their impressions of the homeland. They, however, unlike the male modernists do not use the discourse of exile in the same way. The Greek centre does not signify a place of a desired or imagined return, because their experience was very different to the male poets who idealised Greek place and its spiritual values. Kefala remembers Europe as the fairy-tale that was violently cut in the middle, since the "strolls through gardens with cupids", the moon gazing, and the dining on "black cherry confiture and sherbert" (Kefala 1995/1984: 46) were irredeemably lost, when her privileged community ceased to exist, and in an instant she and her people became refugees. Greece represented for her a place of disappointments, because it was not the ideal place which her migrant parents had remembered with nostalgia, but it was where she realised that she was perceived as an "other" for the first time. There she had to re-learn the Greek language which she had been taught as a child. Every new migration entailed learning a new language, and finally in her last migration to the Antipodes she learnt English (Nickas 1995: 15). This shows that identity for her is a vexed question, or it may be multiple and contradictory because of the many languages and cultural influences that have affected her self-consciousness. Alexia, Kefala's protagonist, reflects a growing awareness of her new world, but it is highlighted by a sense of irretrievable loss, not only of privileged social position, but also of language, home, and familiar signposts. She was forced to learn new ways and words, and so identity was neither a conscious goal, nor a point of departure, because she had experienced many departures. Beyond this she was perceived by her various hosts as merely a number within a group of refugees, "saved", the narrator ironically points out, by

"the Charity of the World", and therefore a non-identity. Having mastered the new language of her host culture, Kefala projects onto her protagonist her own need to forge a new identity. Interestingly she appropriates the fairy-tale, which in her situation was cut in the middle, and re-writes a new fairy-tale which is, as Nickas points out, "no ordinary tale" (Nickas 1995: 17). Her method of appropriating the minor genre of paramythi in order to subvert the oral tradition may be, as Helen Nickas says, Kefala's feminist strategy to "turn her marginality into a position of some advantage". It also indicates that this diasporic Greek female writer "enjoyed a special kind of freedom by not having to conform to any one's rules" (Nickas 1995: 16). Contrasts frame her tale, and they underwrite her own life's story of "becoming". Her sense of self was tied to being a member of a privileged class which no longer exists, since the Greek economic migrant community which she had been part of in Romania, were dispersed after World War Two. She, therefore, was forced to come to terms with herself as another because her situation was virtually transformed overnight. Her poetic prose style highlights change through the technique of using sharp contrasts when she compares her colourless and strange new world in the Antipodes to the romantic, fairy-tale, world of her past. The cellos which had made such beautiful sounds in the old country, the learned languages of Latin and Ancient Greek used to interpret life and work, are symbols of an elite culture. These familiar musical sounds and intellectual conversations were replaced, after migration, by the shrill sound of the pneumatic drill, and a "confusing" and levelled language which did not contain the "philosophical resonances, metaphysical nuances" (Kefala 1995/1984: 42, 46, 58, 86), she had once known.

The emphasis in Epanomitis' tale *The Mule's Foal* is not on migration, nor on social change, but on the internal changes women undertake in their struggle against colonisation. This struggle has to do with her own experience of being a female within a patriarchal and closed Greek society. Her transgressive tale seeks to reclaim the power that her home and diasporic migrant Greek society refuses her, since she is deemed to be an outsider with openly feminist views. She, however, sees herself, as both an insider and an outsider. She is Greek when in Australia, and Australian when in Greece. She writes a provocative tale, which is an extreme version of women's gossip. In closed rural communities this has been, and continues to be, a source of women's social power. So she uses the tools of her rural Greek female counterparts together with the feminist strategies, as described by Maggie Humm (Humm 1995: 174, 267), to explore the female experience. She shows that she is playing with paradox and welcomes contradiction. Her ghastly tales, within the tale, open up silences, even as she uses deviance as resistance to patriarchy. She explores a politics of difference from host and home culture because she is not only defamiliarising the traditional conception of women and men, but she also plays with genre. Like the Black feminists, she transforms the silences of Greek rural histories into a provocative language of action which could represent an act of self-revelation, even though she states that she does not know where all these unconscious thoughts have come from. It is interesting, however, to note that in her opening dedication she writes, "words borrowed from family and friends I return with thanks", which indicates that she does know where many

of these words have come from. By using the sayings and words of her people, she is continuing the tradition of Greek oral paramythia, riddles and anecdotes, even though she has transformed these by including other foreign voices. She alludes to these foreign voices in her final page when she says,

If you found my story somewhat puzzling all I can say is that every house has a story. For those who hear that story there is no relief, not under the shade of a tree or even behind a rock. They hear it in the voice of a stranger, in the sound of running water, they hear it everywhere (Epanomitis 1993: 150).

Here she may be indicating an inter-cultural dialogue through the stories of strangers and foreigners, or she may be feeling a queer sense of empathy with the marginalised others, because she does expose some very strange and "scandalous histories", or what she symbolically alludes to as "the ghastly carvings of Agape" (Epanomitis 1993: 150). Her female protagonists are hybrid characters, Agape is the child of a starving Turkish widow, Meta has a name which signifies transformation, Mirella is the ancient whore. The story is their story, spoken through the voice of Mirella, and it is also about a hybrid male character, Yiorgos the Apeface, who has very feminine and sensual traits which attract the attention of the men and women in the village, "He wasn't much of a fighter, but my God his blood was sweet" (Epanomitis 1993: 146). The mysterious happenings, emotions and desires which the story-teller reveals shows that this is a woman's tale which exposes the unsaid of civil patriarchal society. The words of men are challenged, "the men who used the whores were mostly drunks and generally men whose word could not be trusted" (Epanomitis 1993: 144). Here Epanomitis is subversively challenging the way history has been told by ridiculing those who have the power in society, are corrupt and lead hidden double lives.

Syncretic Trends: Deconstructing Hellenism

Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* subversively defamiliarises his own extreme realist novel by merging it with the gothic paramythi. This has certain similarities to the counter-cultural style deployed by American novelists, as well as transgressive postmodern Greek fiction writing that according to Eleni Kefala shun "discursive authority and ideological seriousness". This trend is becoming more common in Modern Greek literature, as confirmed by the following observation by Voulgari (Voulgari 1997: 231-232, Murphy 1992: 230) commenting on the prose poem as "a polymorphous and inherently subversive, dynamic and polyphonic genre, a genre which has the ability not only to break norms, revise generic boundaries and question distinctions". Modern Greek literature by women after the 1990s shows a trend syncretic writing that deploys postmodern and experimental techniques, as well as motifs from and parody of paramythia. Rhea Galanaki's *O Bios tou Ismail Ferik Pasha (The Life and Times of Ismail Ferik Pasha, 1991)*, and Maro Douka's *Enas Skoufos apo Porfyra (A Cap of Purple, 1995)* are good examples of such writing. They experiment with postmodernist literary modes such as meta-fiction, satire and carnivale. These women writers engage with

current and topical issues, and use abrupt transitions and shifts and dare to violate the mores of patriarchal society by unmasking areas that were considered as sacred and private (Mackridge and Yannakakis 2001). Karapanou dares to engage with issues of hybridity in a serious way by exploring violence and repressed sexual themes (Frangopoulos n.d.) and so negotiates culture through what Bhabha refers to as "The Third Space", writing that according to Kefala (Kefala 2005: 65) "conveys the multi-temporal heterogeneity of contemporary culture in countries of the so-called periphery which are situated on the cross-roads of multiple and heterogeneous traditions and civilizations" (Kefala 2005: 65). The Greek contemporary female novelists appear to be reacting against realism since they view the realist novel as a literary equivalent of official structures of power and oppressive social convention (Bran 2009: 72). Tsiolkas on the other hand uses explicit dark realism in order to shock his readership and merges it with the gothic novel in order to challenge race representation and narratives of cultural supremacy. His gothic paramythi is a narrative of trauma (Vaughan 2012: 1), where the discourse of memory merges with photographic depictions of the protagonist's outer journey. Tsiolkas' real and remembered journey to Greece does not pay homage to his past, the authenticity of folk culture, the ideal community, and the notion that Greece is a safe haven. There is no sense of yearning for origins since the protagonist's past is contaminated by many spectres, of "past trauma, ideology and experience" (Vaughan 2012: 5). Instead there is a lot of anger underwritten by an implicit search for redemption, a desire to become free of the complexities, contradictions and "truths" of the past. The recurring visitations of the ghoul child are constant reminders that for this traveller the trauma of the past remains to haunt the present, as do the divisive politics of the mid twentieth century. The photographs of the exploited margins of society are so stark that racism is revealed in its most raw form, and shown to be endemic not only within the layers of Greek, but also European and Australian society. The author, through the first person voice of the protagonist, Isaac, implicates a complicity in collective crimes against others, by stating that, "I knew enough to know that I was ashamed of being human" (Tsiolkas 2005: 226).

Beyond the depiction of collective shame, Tsiolkas focuses on individual internal conflict. He shows the psychological trauma played out upon the psyche and the body when the modern subject is caught between antithetical beliefs and ideologies. Tsiolkas' protagonist is filled with contradiction, but the protagonist's reaction to his own art tells his reader that he cannot detach himself from his art since photography is his way of communicating and interpreting life. When Isaac admits that photography is more truthful than oral stories, "it is the most truthful of the arts", we recognise that Tsiolkas is using his anti-art to reveal his values. When the protagonists discuss the photographs which Isaac had taken, when they debate whether these represent "his Hell", or the "truth of Europe" (Tsiolkas 2005: 404), and when the narrator makes his manifesto, describing the horrors which humans enact upon each other, we come to realise that the most disturbing thing about his art is that it shows the conceit of the powerful who perpetrate crimes against humanity, "simply because we can" (Tsiolkas 2005: 379). It may be that this is what *Dead Europe* reveals about who Tsiolkas is. It shows an author who wants to

shock his readers into seeing the cold, callous conceit of modern man and his institutions. It may also indicate that he foresees the future as indicated by the scene in which Guila becomes Tsiolkas' mouth piece when she argues that the peasant land will outlive the modern institution, "This place has been here for thousands of years, and it will be here when your euro and your EU and your ... NATO will be just memories" (Tsiolkas 2005: 105-106). The aesthete and hedonist protagonist vacillates between guilt, and indifferent scorn of powerful institutions, and anger against racism, sexism and consumerism. The final scenes depict the protagonist's final breakdown, and disconnect from society, defiantly asserting, "I will walk among strangers, feeling no connection with anyone". When he says "I am nothing in this world", it could signify the protagonist's despair, or his desire for redemption, but it may also point to the nihilistic despair of the Nietzschean. The rhetorical statements in his manifesto appear to imitate authoritarian discourse, but they may also imply the opposite to what they state. Tsiolkas' strategy of merging counter-cultural and very explicit realism with a gothic fairy-tale has the effect of deconstructing binaries. It questions what is real and what is imagined. It also makes a powerful statement on the contradiction which is modern society, and the individual living between two very different worlds.

Conclusion

The writers discussed in this paper are all very different from each other, with different pasts and experiences. Charkianakis and Kalimnios show their loyalty to the Greek centre, as indicated by the fact that they have maintained the Greek language, and the traditional values of their religious faith. Both poets subscribe to the idea of a borderless Hellenism. The women writers Kefala and Epanomitis are not Hellenists. They look back at their home culture, but not with ethnic pride, but with a feeling of strangeness, since they occupy an ambiguous position. Their memory of Greece has been affected by the experience of being deemed as an outsider, in both their home and host culture. They, like the anti-traditional Tsiolkas, use their memories of Greece, and merge these in their quasi-fictional tales to open up silenced histories. They are polemical in their challenge to powerful institutions, and challenge patriarchal relations through irony, and the strange paramythi. The latter group are showing that because they see themselves as outsiders, they can challenge the stereotype. They deconstruct the idea of a homogeneous Greek identity by revealing silenced histories of migrants and foreign others. In this they are showing their transition towards an individual identity which is multiple and often self-contradictory. Tsiolkas's novel *Dead Europe* is indicative of recent postmodernist trends, merging realism with a gothic dark paramythi to represent the existential crisis of modern Europe even as he shows the desire to dissociate himself from his inherited cultural identity. All of my chosen writers negotiate their different identities, and their sense of selfhood amidst the process of internal and external change. They all indicate on various levels that their past continues to inspire or haunt them, and this affects the way that they textually represent themselves through their respective art.

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