Modern Greek Literature: A brief History

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3000 years of written literature

- The literature written in Greek is divided in
  Ancient Greek Literature (1000 B. C.- 1000 A. D.)
  Modern Greek Literature (1000 A. D.- today)
First Period: 11th century-1453 A.D.

It is still Byzantium. Why do we say that this is the start of Modern Greek Literature, then?

- The first literary text written in the demotic Greek emerged as it was used more and more over the Attic idiom, which was the official language of the Byzantine Empire: *The Epic of Digenis Akritas*
- A new national identity, that of Modern Greek starts to create.
Byzantium in 565, 1020, 1260 A.D.
Works from 1000-1204 A.D.

• Akrites guarded the eastern borders of Byzantium (between Cappadocia and Euphrates), but they were not a military body. They were given property by the state and defended it. A strong military feudalism grew up and inspired the Byzantine "national epic" of *Digenis Akritas* and the cycle of the *Acritic songs.*

• *Prodromika:* Four poems written as a petition to the emperor Manuel Komnenos.

• *Spaneas:* Poem written by Alexios Komnenos. It is an outline of court morals and etiquette.
Vasilios Digenis Akritas
Works from 1204-1453 A.D.

- **Influenced by the western tradition:**
  1. *The chronicle of Moreas* (1300): 10,000 verses in dekapentesyllables, describes how Franks conquered Moreas (Peloponnese) and how William Villehardouin later governed the area. It is a narrative from the conquerors’ point of view anti-Greek and anti-Orthodox, but still written in Greek in verses (inconceivable for a Frenchman) by a “gasmule”.
  2. **Chivalric romances:**
     *Velthandros and Chrysantza/ Livistros and Rodamne/ Kallimachos and Chrysorroe/ Imperios and Margarona* (revision of the French *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelone)*/ *Florios and Platziaflora* (revision of the French *Floire et Blanchefleur*).

- **Influenced by the Byzantine tradition:**
  2. **Comic story about animals** in verses/ *Story about birds*/ *Story about fish*. These are the descendants of Aesopos.
Chivalric Romances

13th – 15th A.D.

The content: Two lovers who are parted (generally after their union) and who suffer trials and adventures until they come happily together again. The man is vassal to Love, single combats, distant countries, legends, the supernatural and the magic (magic palaces, rings).
Influences of Chivalric Romances

a. Romances of the second sophistic age
(1st-2nd c. A.D.)

b. Byzantine novels – the ekphraseis (lengthy rhetorical descriptions of a castle, a work of art, a garden, a person) are in common

c. Western chivalric romances

d. The *Thousand and One Nights* and modern Greek fairy-tales. *Katalogia* (Καταλόγια) with which end some of the romances are independent demotic of the time.
1388 A.D. The life of Alexander

It is a metrical version in the Byzantine literary language of the well known Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes; it derived directly from the ancient text.

After 1680 A.D.: The Chap-book (Phyllada) of Alexander the Great is the life of Alexander written on prose in a more demotic language. It circulated in cheap editions until today. The Macedonian king is carried into the sphere of popular mythology and collects around his personality many marvellous stories around his personality.
After the fall of Constantinople  
15\textsuperscript{th} -17\textsuperscript{th} c.

Πάλι με χρόνους και καιρούς πάλι δικά μας θα ναι
And after times and seasons too again it is our own
(Greek demotic song)

After 1000 years Hellenism was without a background of
a state and without political leadership.

Byzantine scholars fled to the West, mainly Italy

Only demotic songs are developed shaping the modern
Greek identity.

Literary production continues only in the places that were
under the Frankish posession.
II. The Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Turks in 1555.
Literature in the Frankish occupied regions: Renaissance Poetry in Crete

Crete under the Frankish occupation: from 1211-1669=450 years!

*Apokopos* of Bergadis: (Venice, 1519) a *memento mori*, a didactic poem according to the custom of the time, but instead of the darkness of Hades he speaks of the joy of life; his lines are full of light and spring. In Crete many of its lines passed into folk poetry and are still sung as laments for the dead.

*Apokopos=Μιαν από κόπου ενύσταξα...Once I grew sleepy after toil.*

So, the poet sleeps and has a dream: he is hunting a doe and suddenly finds himself up a tree and finally in Hades. Two young deads are asking him for the news of the world above.
Here are the questions:

Αν είναι κήποι και δεντρά, πουλιά να κελαδούσι
Κι ανέ μυρίζουν τα βουνά και τα δεντρά ανθούσι,
Αν ειν’ λιβάδια δροσερά, φυσά γλυκύς αέρας,
Λάμπουσι τ’ άστρα τ’ ουρανού και αυγερινός αστέρας;
And are there trees and gardens still, and are there
birds that sing? / And do the mountains still smell
sweet, do trees flower in the spring?/ And are the
meadows still so cool, and does the sweet breeze
blow?/ And do the stars in heaven shine, and does the
day-star glow?
The Delightful *Tale of the Donkey, the Wolf and the Fox* or *The chap – book of the Donkey*

It was printed in 1539 and belongs to the very much appreciated type of tales about animals and its immediate prototype is the Byzantine *Synaxarion of the Estimable Donkey*.

**Intellectual life in the Diaspora and in Turkish-occupied Greece: demotic prose**

The Byzantine scholars, refugees in Italy, which at the time was discovering the ancient Greece, offered the knowledge of ancient Greek and the writings of the ancients, which they had preserved through all the centuries, and knew how to interpret. In Venice a circle of intellectuals gathered round Sofianos, an educator, and started writing the first prose works in the popular language.
Venice: a center of Hellenism is created

They founded a Greek school and built an orthodox church, San Giorgio dei Greci. Popular books are issued by the presses. Thomas Flanginis a lawyer from Corfou founded a school for Greek boys, the Flanginianon Hellenomuseion worked a whole century (1648-1797).

In Turkish-occupied Greece the Church struggles to keep nationalism and orthodoxy alive by education. A religious humanism is created under the influence of enlightenment.
The Great Age of Cretan Literature (1570-1669)

• Only Crete and the Ionian islands are under the Venetian occupation. The Turks dominate all the past Byzantine empire.

• This is a golden period in the history of modern Greek literature and also the zenith of Renaissance Greek literature.

• All works of this period are dramatic!

• At the same time Shakespeare creates his famous dramas in Britain and Dominikos Theotokopoulos (El Greco) his famous paintings in Venice and Spain.

• The Cretan poets use the spoken Cretan dialect purified of medieval residue and other learned elements; the local idiom is elevated into an elegant literary language.
Georgios Chortatsis

*Erofili* (tragedy), *Katzourbos* (comedy), *Gyparis* (pastoral)

❖ Chortatsis was coming from a noble family in Rethymno, studied in the University of Padua, knew the ancient Greek and (mostly) Latin authors.

❖ The plot of *Erofili* (1585), a masterpiece:

Erofili is the daughter of King Philogonos and is secretly married with the brave general Panaretos. The king let his wrath flow at this unsuitable marriage; he will kill Panaretos by a cruel death and pretending he forgive her he will present his daughter with her lover’s severed limbs in a golden bowl, for a wedding gift; Erofili laments and commits suicide but finally the chorus of girls kills the heartless king. Charos, a personification of death, speaks the prologue, and the ghost of the king’s brother-whom he killed and seized the throne-appears as an instrument of divine justice.
Ερωφίλη και Πανάρετος
Cretan Renaissance Comedy
Katzourbos, 1595, the plot
Stathis (1648) and Fortounatos (1662)-comedies

Two young people, Nikolos and Kassandra, are in love, but the girl’s foster mother, Poulissena, wants to marry her with an old man, Armenis, to get money from him. Finally it appears that Kassandra is his daughter, who had been carried away by the Turks and the comedy ends with the marriage of the young couple. But apart from this thin plot, the stage is filled with a number of comic types who give the play its special colour: the braggart Koustoulieris (the miles gloriosus), the schoolmaster who mixes up Greek, Italian and Latin and produces a number of misunderstandings, and different slaves, one of whom is a glutton, another is a clown (ridicoloso). Anyone may recognize that this comedy has its origins in the Italian comedy of 16th century known as commedia erudita. Katzourbos is a masterpiece; it has swift action, comic invention and creates a living theatrical atmosphere; it has a fine, nervous verse and cultivated poetical language which never becomes feeble.
Vitsentzos Kornaros, *The Sacrifice of Abraham & Erotokritos*

*The Sacrifice* (1663) is a dramatization of the well-known Old Testament episode. The action begins with the appearance of the angel to the sleeping Abraham, there follow dramatic dialogues with Sarah, the journey to the sacrifice and the happy ending. The poet has convincingly portrayed the human characters: the father, the mother, the son, the warm love that unites them and also the violent conflicts into which they are brought by inexorable fate. Some passages such as Sarah’s laments or Isaac’s waking, are infused with moving tender lyricism.

**For nine months I carried you, my precious little one,**
**Within this dark, unlucky womb of mine, my only son...**
**And tell me now, what pleasure you will give to me, my dear?**
**Like thunder and like lightning you are going to disappear.**
**Erotokritos: a milestone of modern Greek literature written between 1635-1646**

*Erotokritos* is a narrative poem or a verse romance. The poem speaks about love and valour and relates (in five part and 10,000 verses) the love story of *Erotokritos* and *Aretousa*, their toils and troubles until the final happy ending. The story is set in antiquity in Athens. Aretousa is the only daughter of the king *Herakles* and Erotokritos the son of the counsellor. Their love is unsuitable (on account of their difference in rank). In the first part we watch love slowly ripening in Aretousa, who is 13 to 14 years old – like Juliet. The poet shows us the blossoming and the gradual transformation of the innocent child into a woman who is entirely obsessed by her passion. The second part consists of the description of a tournament organized by the king to amuse his daughter. Youths of all parts of Greece are coming to take part to this savage game. Erotokritos is of course the victor. We must particularly mention the episode of the duel between the Cretan, Erotokritos, and the Oriental, *Karamanitinis*. In the third part the two lovers meet at midnight by the iron window of the palace. When the king finds out, he sends Erotokritos in exile and Aretousa in prison.
Meanwhile war has broken out between the Athenians and the Vlachs; Erotokritos, blackened in face and rendered unrecognizable by the magic philtre, comes to the help of the king and is finally victorious in a decisive single combat with Aristos, the nephew of the king of the Vlachs. King Herakles gives his daughter and his kingdom to the unknown warrior who has saved him and the hero at last reveals his true identity.

Cornaros is an excellent story-teller. He also knows how to introduce proverbs or gnomic sayings drawn from his experience of life and how to address his characters: “Vain were it, Erotokritos, to act in such a way…” or “Frosyni, thou unhappy one…” The verses of the poem are among the most melodious decapentesyllables in modern Greek literature and have a lyrical colouring which is never sentimental:

Of all that man has good on earth, ‘tis words that have the power
To give to every human heart their comfort in its hour;
And he who has the gift to speak with knowledge and wish style
Can make the eyes of other men to weep, and make them smile.
Erotokritos marks the end of the first phase of modern Greek poetry, which begins in Byzantine times with Digenis. There after there is a decline in poetry for a century and a half.

Crete fell in the hands of Ottomans in 1679. Erotokritos was published in Venice in 1713. Till then the pedlar, going round the villages, used to sell Erotokritos. In Crete people learned whole passages by heart and collected in the evenings to recite it or rather to sing it. Thus a work of conscious art was assimilated by a popular audience and almost became a demotic song.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwDomxyoFgU
1669: the occupation of Crete by the Turks after 22 years siege of Chandax = end of Cretan literature

❖ People divided in three groups: the Turkish – occupied, the Frankish – occupied and the Greeks of diaspora.

❖ Greeks from the Venetian-occupied area but also from other parts of Greece went to the Universities of Italy to study and returned back home to teach. Schools begun to be founded in different towns in Greece.

❖ The Russo-Turkish treaty of Kutsuk Kainardji (1774) gave special privileges to the Greeks in the Turkish empire. A new Greek urban class and material prosperity emerged.
The Ottoman Empire in 1800
First Period of 18th c. 1669-1780

➢ Many Cretans fled as refugees to Venice and Ionian Islands. They try to keep the Cretan tradition. Theodore Montseleze from Zakynthos published a theatrical play Eugena. Petros Katsaitis from Cephallonia published a metrical chronicle about the fall of Peloponnese to the Turks, Lament of the Peloponnese, 1716 and two tragedies, Iphigeneia and Thyestes.

➢ End of poetry, the ecclesiastical rhetoric developed among the Greeks of the diaspora in the demotic language. Franciskos Skoufos, devoted to the catholic church wrote a masterpiece of demotic language: The Art of Rhetoric, first attempt to use it in literary prose. Elias Miniatis succeeded Skoufos. He was an Orthodox, studied in Venice and became a famous preacher.

➢ In Turkish occupied Greece the cultural atmosphere favoured a more literary language. The Phanariots Mavrokordati wrote in archaic Greek Political Thoughts and Political Theatre influenced by the progressive European spirit of the time. The beginning of the Greek Enlightenment.

➢ Eugenios Voulgaris wrote his preaches in archaic Greek as well.

➢ Kosmas the Aetolian, orthodox, preached all over Greece, executed by the Turks.
Second Period of 18th c. 1780 - 1820

- **Josephus Moisiodax**, orthodox, printed in Venice the book *Education* presenting the ideas of John Locke. He wrote in “the common style” which he defended in the debate with the question: “which should be the proper language for the enlightenment of the nation?”

- **Philippos Katartzis** wrote in the popular language and exposed his philosophical system in the *Know Thyself*.

- **Adamantios Korais** (1748-1833): Born in Smyrna, helped his father in a commercial enterprise in Amsterdam and studied medicine in Montpellier. After 1788 he settled definitely in Paris. He lived through the French revolution and accepted its liberal ideas. He entered the linguistic dispute in 1805 and proposed the *via media* to the two parties, the “demoticists” and the “archaists”; he drew the fire of both sides. He was the first Greek philologist of European authority. He published editions of, and commentaries on ancient writers and studied the modern language which he rightly saw as the last phase in the history of the same language, from ancient times until today. The via media was his great legacy to the rising nation. To depart too far from common speech was ‘tyrannical’, while to ‘vulgarize’ was ‘demagogic’. Between oligarchy and ochlocracy, Korais stood for democracy. All members of the nation ought to share in the language. He takes the common spoken language as the basis of the written language starting to purify and enrich it using archaic endings, creating the “*katharevousa*”, which finally became the official language of the newly born state of Greece (1832).
Elias Miniatis – Evgenios Voulgaris
Kosmas the Aetolian
From 1669 until 1821

• Forming the national identity

• Preparing the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire
The decades before the War of Independence

- An enlightened Greek aristocracy had sprung up in the Danubian principalities around the Phanariot princes.
- Education was becoming ever more widespread, new schools were founded and old schools were reformed according to new principles.
- Amsterdam, Trieste, Vienna were centers for commercial companies run by Greeks, who gained considerable wealth.
- The period is marked by economic prosperity, the rise of the middle class, the widening of interests, the thirst for education and at the same time by a deeper national consciousness and a desire for liberation.
Rigas Pheraios (1757-1798)
The first martyr of Greek liberty
His work and offer to the Hellenic nation

- Born in a small village of Thessalia (1757)
- Clerk at Ypsilantis family and then at Mavrojenis family (Constantinople)
- He goes to Vienna: he publishes pamphlets and the *War song*.
- He was arrested at Trieste by the Austrian authorities and handed to the Turkish in Belgrade, where he and seven of his companions were secretly strangled and thrown into the Danube.
He wrote: 1. *The School of delicate lovers*, 1790, (Restif de la Bretonne), six short love stories, translated from French in modern Greek. The start for the genre of short story.

2. The constitution of Greece
3. The map of Greece (Charta/ Χάρτα)
4. A handbook of Physics
5. *The War Song* (Thourios/ Θούριος)

“How long shall we dwell in the dales, lads,  
Like lions alone on the hills?  
Better a single hour of life in liberty  
Rather than forty years’ prison and slavery!”

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1811: A century and a half after Erotokritos the poetry is starting again

**Athanasios Christopoulos** publishes the *Lyrics*. He had studied medicine and law at Buda and Padua. He sings of love and wine and presents himself as continuously lovesick; however the passion is lacking. The tone is mild.

Spring is grown old/ And summer grown cold/ And wintry winds blow./ Where blossom was glad/ The trees are now sad/ And covered with snow.

No leaf is now green,/ no flower is seen,/ And bare is the earth./ Its beauty is dead/ To chaos is fled/ first source of its birth.
Jannis Vilaras is the second poet of this period. He was born in Jannina and studied also medicine in Padua. He published a curious book in Corfu The Romaic Language: he writes the Greek in a revolutionary manner, he approaches the phonetic spelling, accents and breathings have vanished. His complete poems are at the same atmosphere with Christopoulos:

Spring the sweetest season/
With every flower bespread,/
With roses round her head,/
This earth of ours beguiles.

With grass the earth is clad,/
Their shade the forests throw,/
And melted is snow,/
And all the heaven smiles.
Dionysios Solomos, the national poet of Greece (1798 – 1857)
He was born in Zakynthos by a nobleman to whom Venice had granted the tobacco monopoly and by a woman of the people, a servant at his father’s house. He took Italian education. From the age of ten years he went to Italy and studied at e University of Padova.

- First poems in Italian: *La Distruzione di Gerusalemme* and *Ode per prima messe*. They display technical perfection but there is no sign of anything more remarkable.
- He meets with Spyridon Trikoupis at the end of 1822 who tells him: “Greece is waiting for her Dante”. Solomos decides to write in demotic Greek, the language of his mother.
- He is influenced by Christopoulos and Vilaras and by the Romantic movement.
- In one month in 1823 he wrote the *Hymn to Liberty* (158 stanzas). He is 25 years old and he gets immediate recognition as a poet. This poem was translated into most foreign languages and gave inspiration to philellenism with its lyric voice.
He leaves Zakynthos and settles in Corfu. Best friend of his the composer Nikolaos Mantzaros who is going to compose the music for the *Hymn of Liberty* (1828) which is the National Anthem of Modern Greece.

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJhuZWLtEIM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJhuZWLtEIM)
- Ten years later: *Lambros* is a minor Don Juan, “bad in conduct but great at soul’’; Maria, the girl he seduces is only fifteen. The poem is incomplete and remained fragmentary.
- *The Cretan* is another fragmentary poem to follow. Solomos intended to write an epic lyric, which he had never finished. The shipwrecked Cretan tries to save his beloved from the storm. Suddenly the storm ends and before him is a divine, “moon-clad” female figure. A marvellous sound is heard and enraptures his soul. When this stops he reaches the shore on which he lay his beloved now dead.
- *The Free Besieged* is a poem that started writing on 1830 and never finished although he was writing drafts from time to time for many years. The besieged are those of Missolonghi from 1825 until the heroic sortie of the garrison on the Eve of Palm Sunday 1826 during the War of Independence.
Three drafts of the *Free Besieged* have come to us: 
Some verses out of the third draft: it is spring. Nature in spring at her 
sweetest hour is a force bringing cowardice and hesitation to the 
besieged.

**Over the waters of the mere, where she comes flitting by,**
With her reflected image plays the sky-blue butterfly-
She who has passed a scented sleep in the wild lily ‘s flower.
Even the humble little worm enjoys the blessed hour.
All Nature is a magic world of beauty and grace;
The black rock is all turned to gold, so is the desert place;
A thousand springs are gushing forth, a thousand voices cry.
He who is doomed to die today a thousand deaths shall die.

He died 59 years old, honored as the national poet. But many years 
had to pass before modern Greek poetry could make use of his 
teaching.
The Heptanesian School
1824 - 1910
During the War of Independence all the forces of the nation were focused on this great event and the poets wrote hymns and revolutionary odes. Andreas Kalvos publishes twenty odes, which were his sole contribution to modern Greek poetry.

Solomos gave birth to a whole school, the Heptanesian divided in two: 1. Solomos’s friends and contemporaries, 2. his disciples or followers.

Laskaratos from Cephalonia wrote parodies and satirical lines. He said for himself: “I always wanted to climb Parnassus, but every time I got tired half the way up and turned back”.

Aristotle Valaoritis occupies a place of his own. Born in Lefkas he was a genuine Heptanesian, but he was influenced by the demotic song instead of Solomos. His subjects are taken from the War of Independence and the pre-revolutionary period. His heroes move in an impossibly exalted atmosphere where the supernatural element blends with Romantic exaggeration. Astrapogiannos, Athanasios Diakos are his masterpieces, written in the demotic language.
The Phanariots - The Athenian School
Greek Romanticism

• **1828**: the new Greek state is officially recognized by the western powers and by the Porte. In Nauplia and then in Athens, the capital after **1834**, intense intellectual and literary activity was developing along with the political life.

• Romanticism, the predominant current especially in France influences strongly the poets in Athens. Panagiotis Soutsos prints *The Traveller* in archaistic Greek. The Traveller and Rallou meet again, fail to recognize each other, swoon, lose their senses, see visions, run mad, and finally commit suicide, exchanging with their last breath the most heart-rending words of love.

• Alexandros Rizos Rangavis publishes *Dimos and Eleni*. This poem has a purely romantic structure and it is written in demotic language which was tidied up.
The modern Greek state 1830-1947
• **Achilles Paraschos** was the last romantic poet and wrote three volumes of poems in the archaistic language. The demotic was finally abandoned.

• Prose appears through the genre of historical novel with **Stefanos Xenos**, who wrote *A Heroine of the Greek Revolution*, **K. Ramfes** with *Katsantonis* and *The last days of Ali Pasha* and **Dimitrios Vernardakis**, a scholar of classical studies, with *Maria Doxapatri, Merope, Fausta*.

• **Emmanuel Roides** wrote the *Pope Joan* (1866). The rationalism, the irony and the elegance of this work place Roidis in contrast with the Romantic school. *Pope Joan* was censured by the church and it still provokes hostility.

• **Pavlos Kalligas** wrote *Thanos Vlekas* (1855) away from romanticism as well. The subject is taken from contemporary actuality: the misery of the new Greek kingdom, tormented by misgovernment and banditry.
After the romantic period, Greek society began to set itself more realistic goals; a new bourgeoisie began to demand better state organization and to place faith in the parliamentarianism and in democratic principles. Charilaos Trikoupis as prime minister organized the state and its policy along realistic lines.

There was much progress in the language question.

Literary research abandoned the exclusive devotion to the ancients and looked for national origins in popular tradition.

G. Chatzidakis laid the basis of modern Greek linguistic study.

Nikolaos Politis founded the science of folklore in an attempt to systematize research into popular tradition and culture.
The poets of the generation of 1880

- **Joannis Polemis**, prolific and shallow.
- **George Souris**, who writes satiric verses and publishes them at the newspaper his newspaper, the *Romios*.
- **George Vizyinos** who publishes in London its *Breezes of Atthis* in a polished katharevousa.
- **George Drosinis** with its *Radiant Darkness* and *Closed Eyelids* (1918) showing the beneficial influence of folklore.
- **Kostis Palamas**, a milestone for the Greek poetry *(1859 – 1943)*: He quickly rose above the average of the age and for fifty to sixty years was the central figure in the intellectual life of the country. He stands in the forefront of progress not only because of his poetry but by reason of his criticism and his continuous presence on the scene.
• **Palamas** writes in demotic and finds its origins in Solomos. His work moves between two extremes, in a major or in a minor key. There are poems that are more lyrical, where he writes of home, of retirement, of the ‘immovable’ life (what he called ‘lyricism of the Me’) and others (‘lyricism of the Us’) in which he extends his range into large epic compositions and ‘great visions’. In his own day his poetry in the major key was over estimated; it is his poetry in the minor key that has better stood the test of time.
The short story appears, particularly the one that describes the Greek countryside, the villages and their simple inhabitants. It is called the ‘genre’ short story.

The start came with Loukis Laras (1879) of Dimitrios Vikelas written in moderate katharevousa, has an unromantic, realistic setting and was translated in many languages.

George Vizyinos known as a poet wrote seven short stories, masterpieces of style and content. He could be named “father” of the genre short story. They were written between 1883 until 1896. He uses the katharevousa with genuine demotic in dialogues. He presents the customs of Thrace, which was his motherland. My mother’s sin, The One Journey of his life, Moskov Selim are some titles.
• **Alexandros Papadiamantis** (1851-1911) devoted to the ‘genre’ short stories and wrote 200 short stories, many of which are masterpieces. Almost all of them describe events and human characters to be found on his island, Skiathos; and the writer’s homesickness gives them life and movement. Nostalgia is the permanent basic element in Papadiamantis. His stories go deeper than mere ‘genre’ tales or folkloristic studies and this is admired by his supporters.

• The language in his short stories: in the narration he uses the katharevousa with an admixture of many demotic elements; in dialogue he uses the popular spoken language, almost photographically recorded, and often with idioms from Skiathos.

• His masterpiece is *The Murderess* (1903). Frangoyannou, the woman with the perverted mind, who puts herself outside the human society, is an enigmatic figure and altogether unlike the islanders that people the other stories. The psychological description is given with a quite different fullness.
George Vizyinos
Alexandros Papadiamantis
1888: Jannis Psycharis publishes *My journey*

- *My Journey* is the first work in prose written in the demotic language. This work provoked a great debate. Vernardakis, Chatzidakis, Kontos, all scholars of the University of Athens attacked the book. **Psycharis** was a scholar at the University of Paris; a French citizen and a Greek patriot. He tried to prove that demotic must written everywhere, in prose and in verse, and according to all its rules, in grammar and in form, without any yielding to the established usage.

- **Grigorios Xenopoulos**: from Zakynthos wrote short stories and novels influenced by realism and naturalism; he recognized Balzac, Zola, Dickens and Daudet as his masters. His work advanced the prose from the limitations of the ‘genre’ story to the complicated novel of town life. His work was read by a very wide public and increased the general interest for literature.
The Theatre: The Comidyll from 1888 - 1898

- A sort of comedy with songs introduced. The heroes are men of the people, their language is demotic prose, the ‘genre’ and folklore elements play a large role, but at the same time the influence of naturalism is very obvious. This type of theatre became very popular for many years.
- S. Peresiadis, *Golfo*
- D. Kokkos, *Lyre of Old Nicolas/ Captain Giakoumis*
K. P. Kavafis (1863 – 1933):

He was born in Alexandria of Egypt and lived there all his life. For some whiles he lived at Constantinople and London with his family. He was the last out of nine children. He had a permanent position in the Civil Service. The corpus of acknowledged poems amounts to 154. They are Romantic in their conception, uninfluenced by the change of 1880. The language is katharevousa far from the formal katharevousa, very individual. Kavafis’ s poetry employed new forms of expression far from the known and established. He saw his poems as belonging to three categories: philosophical, historical and erotic (sensual). After his death Xenopoulos was first to remark and praise Kavafis’s poems in Athens. In the meantime E. M. Forster who served in Alexandria in the first World War, knew the poet, translated some of his poems in English and published an article in the Athenaeum. G. Seferis, W.H. Auden, C.M. Bowra, Marguerite Yourcenar and many others refered to his work writing books and critical essays. Kavafis influenced the younger poets after 1930 and he does until today.
Ithaca translated by Stratis Chaviaras

• When you set out on your way to Ithaca you should hope that your journey is a long one: a journey full of adventure, full of knowing. Have no fear of the Laestrygones, the Cyclopes, the frothing Poseidon. No such impediments will confound the progress of your journey if your thoughts take wing, if your spirit and your flesh are touched by singular sentiments. You will not encounter Laestrygones, nor any Cyclopes, nor a furious Poseidon, as long as you don’t carry them within you, as long as your soul refuses to set them in your path.

Hope that your journey is a long one. Many will be the summer mornings upon which, with boundless pleasure and joy, you will find yourself entering new ports of call. You will linger in Phoenician markets so that you may acquire the finest goods: mother of pearl, coral and amber, and ebony, and every manner of arousing perfume — great quantities of arousing perfumes. You will visit many an Egyptian city to learn, and learn more, from those who know.

• Bear Ithaca always in your thoughts. Arriving there is the goal of your journey; but take care not to travel too hastily. Better to linger for years on your way; better to reach the island’s shores in old age, enriched by all you’ve obtained along the way. Do not expect that Ithaca will reward you with wealth.

Ithaca bestowed upon you the marvelous journey: if not for her you would never have set out. But she has nothing left to impart to you.

If you find Ithaca wanting, it’s not that she’s deceived you. That you have gained so much wisdom and experience will have told you everything of what such Ithacas mean.
Angelos Sikelianos (1884 – 1951)

- He was born in Lefkas and the tradition of the Heptanesian School was still alive in him.
- The corpus of his work was published in three volumes with the title Lyric Life (1946).
- The **Light - Shadowed** (1907): a lyrical autobiography of the young poet describing his immediate experience, while he wandered in complete freedom in total accord with nature, by the olive groves and shores of his island home.
- **Prologue to Life** (1915): a vast composition presenting his beliefs; faith in the ‘universal soul of the World’ and the coincidence of the ‘feeling soul’, that of the poet, with the center of the world. In the fragmented world of today, in its arbitrary, mechanical, mnemonic, distinguishing, and logocratic interpretation and ordering of life, he desires wholeness of the kind the ancients knew in myth. Hence the poet’s familiarity with the mystery religions, and above all with Orphism; hence too the deeper meaning that he sought in centers of ancient Greek religion, such as Eleusis, Olympia and Delphi.
- **Mother of God** (1917): the most musical poem written in Greek since the death of Solomos.
The Delphic Festivals (1927 and 1930)

• Sikelianos dreamed of founding a world wide intellectual amphictyony in Delphi, ‘the navel of the earth’, a Delphic Union and a Delphic University. He organized a Delphic Festival with the performance of Prometheus Bound, an exhibition of folk art, naked contests in the stadium, folk dances and fairs. The soul of the whole enterprise was Sikelianos’ wife, Eva Palmer, an American by birth. The music of the chorus was based on the modes of Byzantine music and the folk culture of today, the costumes were woven by herself on popular models and the movements of the chorus were inspired by the study of ancient monuments. But the festivals were a complete financial failure. Eva went back to America and only returned to Greece in 1952, when she died and was buried in Delphi.

In the last decade of his life Sikelianos wrote tragedies of his own. The last Orphic Dithyramb, The Sibyl, The death of Digenis.
Poetry up to 1930

• **Kostas Varnalis** (1884 – 1974): His beginning was like that of Sikelianos, with finely written poetry influenced by the Parnassians and the Symbolists. His later poems are marked by a strong Dionysiac flavor and a deep sense of music; he has a strong tendency towards satire, when his playful and agile verse emphasizes his sharp humor.

• **Kostas Ouranis** (1890 – 1953): He travelled a great deal and the cosmopolitan spirit that he brought into literature was perhaps his more marked characteristic. His impressions of travel describing places that he had visited with lyric feeling are among his best works.

• **Napoleon Lapathiotis** (1888 – 1943): He developed a despairing and melancholy tone, dominated by the feeling of lost ideas and nostalgia.

• **Kostas Karyotakis** (1896 – 1928): Just before his death he published Elegies and Satires. In the July of that year, when a Civil Servant in a small provincial town, he committed suicide. Karyotakis’s poetry is serious; any trace of belletrism, aestheticism or playfulness that one may have found in his predecessors has vanished from his work. There is a full awareness of reality and a feeling of futility and of loss, which became more and more stark till he reached the tragic impasse which resulted in his suicide.
"Καλό ταξίδι αλαργινό καραβί μου, στου απείρου και της νυχτός την αγκαλιά, με τα χρυσά σου φώτα…"

Τελευταίο Ταξίδι, Καρυωτάκης
Prose after Psycharis: Nikos Kazantzakis

**First half of 20th century:** 1. 1897: Greek – Turkish war ended with defeat of Greeks. 2. Greece claims Crete and Macedonia 3. Eleftherios Venizelos, a political personality from Crete, becomes prime minister of Greece. 4. Balkan wars, 1912-13 ended by adding to the Greek State Macedonia, Epirus, the Aegean Islands and Crete. 5. First World War: 1916-1920, Greece stands for the Allies against Germany. 1922: the disaster in Asia Minor, 1,500,000 Greeks established there for four thousand years came in Greece as refugees. 6. Second World War: 1940-1944. 7. Civil War: 1945-1949.

**Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957):** he was born in Heracleion Crete. In 1897 went to Naxos and graduated from High School. He studied Law in Athens and Philosophy in Paris. He got acquainted with Sikelianos and visited with him Mount Athos. In 1918 he travelled in Switzerland and Russia, stayed in Vienna and later for a longer time in Berlin. He returned in Greece in 1924 to leave again and travel to Russia. His impressions of three travels in Russia were written in French in his novel *Toda Raba*. He visited Spain, Japan, China, England and then came in Aegina to live throughout the war and the occupation. In 1957 he started a journey to China invited by the Chinese Government; he returned sick in Copenhagen and died in Germany. He was buried in a bastion of the Venetian walls of Heracleion.
• **Asceticism, 1927**: expresses his metaphysical beliefs; the circles are five: Ego, Humanity, Earth, Universe, God and Action and the last step of redemption is Silence. The work has a strong and a charm that gives it a literary elegance. After his visit in Russia he denied his former theories (Nietzscheism, communism) and turned towards complete nihilism.

• **Odyssey, 1933-1939**: twenty-four rhapsodies and 33,333 seventeen-syllable iambic verses. It is translated in English by Kimon Friar. The poem begins with the return to Ithaca and is about further wandering by the hero. First he goes to Sparta, whence he steals Helen, then to Crete, where a conspiracy dethrones the king, then to Egypt, where there is a working class revolution; after leaving there and living as an ascetic on a mountain, he founds a city (Utopia), which is destroyed and reaches ‘complete freedom’. He meets Managis (a personification of Buddha), Captain One (Don Quixote) and a virgin fisherman (Christ). Finally he sails to the South Pole, where death overtakes him and he is sublimated. Odyssey remained an isolated work and still remains so.
• *The life and manner of Alexis Zorbas*, 1946: he is making a legend out of a real person, a primitive man of people from Macedonia with whom he collaborated in a curious enterprise, a mine in Mani in 1916-17. The author has transferred the action in Crete, but the central figure is this unpolished character with his tremendous zest for life, a man outside the society, whom the meditative and cultivated author regards with some envy. Kazantzakis met with international success for the next novels as well. They were translated in many languages, were widely read and criticized or adapted to the stage or the screen.

• *Kapetan Michalis*, 1950: the author depicts his own father in all his dynastic severity and he tries to resurrect the struggles of the Cretans for their liberty. The central figure is less a combatant for liberty than a new incarnation of Kazantzakis’ heroes.

• *The Last Temptation*, 1950-1: has Christ for its main subject.

• *The little poor man of God*, 1952-3: is a fictionalized biography of st. Francis of Assisi.

• *The Fraticides*, 1954: is set in the time of the civil war after the Second World War.

• *Report to Greco*, 1957 (publ. 1961): it is a poetical autobiography.
You should love responsibility. You should say: I, and I alone, have the responsibility to save the world. If it is not saved, it’s my own fault.

Nikos Kazantzakis

"I felt once more how simple and frugal a thing is happiness: a glass of wine, a roast chestnut, a wretched little brazier, the sound of the sea. Nothing else."
Giorgos Seferis 1900 - 1968

- 1931, *Turning Point*, his first poetic collection, which introduced a new form of expression and a modern poetry. He combined the traditional poetry with the fresh currents in European lyricism.
- 1932, *Cistern*
- 1935, *Mythistorima*: Here Seferis abandoned strict meter and rhyme to create his own personal style in free verse. In these difficult years for Europe the poet finds refuge in Greek myth and Greek history. No other collection is so weighted with classical recollections.
- 1940, *Logbook*: The 2nd World War had started. There is an atmosphere of anxiety but it is an anxiety without panic, full of courage and decision.
- 1944, *Logbook II*: A poetical transubstantiation of his war experiences. The poems were written in the places of his exile.
- 1944, *Essays*: Seferis was a profound thinker and a student of persons and things concerned with history and literature. Essays on those topics were collected in this volume.
1963: Seferis wins the nobel prize for his poetry

- “I belong to a small country. A rocky promontory in the Mediterranean, it has nothing to distinguish it but the efforts of its people, the sea, and the light of the sun. It is a small country, but its tradition is immense and has been handed down through the centuries without interruption. The Greek language has never ceased to be spoken. It has undergone the changes that all living things experience, but there has never been a gap. This tradition is characterized by love of the human; justice is its norm.”

- From Seferis’s speech in the Swedish Academy, 1963
"For poetry there exists neither large countries nor small. Its domain is in the heart of all men."

Giorgos Seferis

"Don't ask who's influenced me. A lion is made up of the lambs he's digested, and I've been reading all my life."

Giorgos Seferis
Odysseas Elytis (1911 – 1996)

• 1940, **Orientations**: a youthful optimistic poetry, full of light, where the Aegean has a central place. Characteristics: neologistic combinations of words, images that immediately project themselves as free and unique and are woven together in a ‘super-realistic’ unity.

• 1945, **Heroic and Tragic Song for a Second Lieutenant Lost in Albania**, was appreciated by a large section of the public.

• 1960, **Dignum Est**: It is a severe architectural construction, consisting of three parts: ‘Genesis’, which is like an introduction, ‘Passion’, and ‘Gloria’, which is like a conclusion. The poet’s personal experience is blended with the ‘Passion’ of Hellenism, in a range, both synchronic and diachronic, interwoven with subjective feeling and leads up to the metaphysical dimension of the last section, which is a series of hymns of praise where the beauty of the infinite things of this world takes on an unearthly radiance, and where the Now and the Always (Nunc and Semper), earth and heaven, are joined in an other-worldly unity. *Dignum Est* is an epic where the poet by the tradition of his country and race and goes in search of the secrets that compose it.

• 1979: He is awarded with the **nobel prize** for his poetry.
"You'll come to learn a great deal if you study the Insignificant in depth."

Odysseus Elytis
Giannis Ritsos (1909 – 1990)

- 1936, *Epitaphios*: the lament of a mother over her son, killed in a demonstration of out-of-work tobacco-workers, has deeper tones, but follows the ‘Karyotakism’ of the time.
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=denJDO6lAq8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=denJDO6lAq8)
- 1937, *Song of the Sister*: we notice a change of form and of feeling.
- 1948-1952: he was in exile on an island and on his return he published a number of volumes, in which his harsh experience is naturally reflected.
- 1954, *Agrypnia (Vigil)* was published, with *Romiosyni* and *The Lady of the Vineyards*: the poet’s experience from the second world war and the civil war that followed is transformed in significant poetry.
• 1972, *The Fourth Dimension*, In the dramatic monologues that make up *The Fourth Dimension* - especially those based on the grim history of Mycenae and its royal protagonists: Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Electra, Iphigenia - Ritsos presents a timeless poetic paradigm of the condition of Greece. These soliloquies (the speakers also include Ajax, Persephone, Helen and Phaedra) move effortlessly between mythic and modern realities, haunting yet immediate. The volume also contains a group of modern narratives, including the famous and much-anthologized 'Moonlight Sonata'. Ritsos regarded *The Fourth Dimension*, rightly, as his finest achievement.
• Ritsos is a prolific poet. His poems are on a large scale, with a continuous flow which springs spontaneously. His images are rich and fresh, his language carries weight and significance and is at the same time delicate and passionate. Ritsos’s poetry touches the problems of contemporary man as an individual and in society.

• 1967-1974: Ritsos was in exile in the island of Samos during the dictatorship of that period.

• He was awarded with many prizes (1956, National Hellenic Prize for Poetry/ 1975, Prize ‘Georgi Demetrov’, Bulgaria/ Prize ‘Alfred de Viny’, France/ 1977, The Prize for peace ‘Lenin’, USSR)
• The photo that inspired him the poem *Epitaphios*
Αβ ψεύτη

Αβ ψεύτη με είσαι
με ποράκε
με αίπτε.

Αβ ζιώ

μενάκα του "σύγκρισιν".

Γιοι ψεύτη
μια ψεύτη.

Ο κόσμος.

(Πρώτα "Εξόρισμα" Αθήνα 1973)

Γιάννης Νίκος
• Based on the books: