

Translation.Reprint from "De Gids", 1900, No 3.The New Literary Life in Greece.

"Η Τέχνη, Periodical edited by K. Chatzopoulos,  
First year, Athens 1898-1899.

Legrand et Bernot, Chrestomathie grecque  
moderne, Paris 1899.

An Englishman who had just completed a tour round the world, once told me in Athens that Greece was the only country the visit to which had not disappointed him. Although he was not a philologist, he knew enough of antiquity to enjoy independently the view of the scenes where the men had lived who, in his youth, were set before him as models; he had evidently remembered & read enough about the remains of Greek art to enable him, without directions from his guide book,



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to wander with delight through the remarkable museum which Greece had become in his estimation. When I told him that I, in the first place, was interested in what at the present time was to be heard and seen in Greece, and that I was eager to learn how it all had developed in the course of time, he was quite polite or absent minded enough to call this an interesting study; but his first impression was nevertheless that of astonishment. He would, I think, have acted in very much the same manner, had I told him that I intended to allow myself to be locked up in the Great Museum on the road to Patissia, in order to see whether also after the closing hour the statues would really remain gazing at each other in mute admiration, or would gradually change into modern men who in quite as good Greek, but of a newer formation, converse with each other and move about until the following morning, when towards the opening hour they resume on the



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pedestals their antique forms to oblige the studious foreigners.

It would be very fortunate for Greece, if among the foreigners only such as this Englishman were found, for whom on classical ground no other than classical beauty is conceivable; most Greeks, however, make great efforts to renew the prosperity of their nation, which shall not be a repetition of former splendour. They are oppressed by their ancestors. They have probably less of an architectural style of their own than any other civilized nation, and their language is becoming more ancient than that of their nearest predecessors. Since the time when, after the loss of the political independence of Athens, the divergence of the colloquial from the literary language had widened exceedingly, the Greek language has continued its twofold existence: the one, the unconscious expression of Greek thought, the other, constructed as much as possible after the ancient



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model, a vehicle for the communications from scholars. The written tradition was sometimes of great importance, and it alone will prove when a national literature arose in the language, wherein the great majority of the nation, not to say the whole nation, think. Hitherto the native and the foreigner were struggling with the prevailing double-language which renders ~~the~~ modern Greek almost unintelligible for everyone who does not know Ancient Greek, a condition such as exists in Italy and France, where it is required from the foreigner to know Latin or Old-French, as well as the modern language of the country, in order to understand newspapers, names of streets and squares, or simple signboards of shops and coffee-houses. In our age, under the influence of misdirected scholarship, and a mistaken system of education, this scholastic Greek has gained ground. In the schools the children learn exclusively literary Greek - in the colleges and in the university, this language is taught.



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As most people admire everything that is ancient, they follow the example of the scholars, and in the large towns many, when they are not familiarly conversing, try to use ancient words and forms. Even from bakers, in Aristophanes the classical speakers of impure language, I have, in the street, heard words in a form violating the rules of the now living and generally used Greek. Meanwhile, with the less cultured, the influence of the literary language is limited to picking up old words, to which they join mistaken forms of present day expressions. The more educated go further; but, when admitted into their family circles, one notices that they have two languages, and, among themselves, they speak a faultless, pure Modern Greek. Some professors appear to have succeeded in making a colloquial language of the literary language; they, at least, assured me that at home they used the same language



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as before their students. It is altogether a chaos which it is difficult to describe without giving examples; the most simple way perhaps is to invite the reader to imagine the interval which separates the colloquial from the literary language in France increased one hundred, and in Holland seventy five times.

Scholastic Greek has, as already mentioned, gained in power, although, it may be, its influence extends almost exclusively on the surface, and but very little in depth. Those who have not visited Athens during the last fifteen or twenty years, will from superficial observation feel inclined to think that the repression of the modern language is likely to be successful; nor will they be much surprised - unless they are totally blind to the connexion between art and nature - that in the scholastic language



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very excellent scientific books were written, but not yet any important work of art.

It is a consoling thought that each <sup>per</sup>verse-ness contains its own corrective, or, more mildly expressed, that the rising danger has brought poets to the rescue. Just like in the middle-ages the mouldy learning of the court of the Comnenas called forth a reaction to which we owe the first popular literary works in Modern Greek, so also the triumph of the book-learned was necessary to cause more sensitive men to open their eyes. Poets, indeed, had for ages, in preference made use of the people's language, but in prose, if we except some fragments of a few pages, nothing was written in this language. The first book which appeared in the demotic language, was an account of a tour through Greece and Turkey which merely served the author as an opportunity for the development of his theory. The book was published in 1886, under the title of



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"Τὸ Ταξίδι μου". The author was a Greek living in Paris, Jean Psichari, professor at the École des Hautes Études. His work was very severely criticised, and in Greece as much ridiculed as read. There were found in it all kinds of expressions which are heard only in Constantinople and in Chios, as well as numerous barbarisms, especially Gallicisms, and offence was taken at the violent tone of his writing. Now that the first storm of the battle is over, one can safely say that Psichari's was a work of wild presumption and passion, which however has had excellent results. The younger Greek poets, who in Psichari see at once their precursor and their scientific champion, prove that he, in his Ταξίδι, advanced like a fiery steed, taking no heed of obstacles, and treading down whatever opposed him; in his admiration of the evolution of the Greek language he sometimes becomes as doctrinal as his adversaries, changing what does not, or only slowly does, modify; names



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of persons and places. Just objections have been raised against modernizing such forms as Aeschylus and Parthenon, however contrary they may be to the rules of Modern Greek. There does not exist any language grammatically so consistent as that which Psichari writes. Many phrases also, not thoroughly Greek, are more easily explained than defended in this Frenchman of Greek origin.

The followers of Psichari see all his faults as clearly as his fiercest adversaries, but they followed the call of their keen sense for truth and unity, in art and life: they understood that where a French scholar appeared to speak, it was in reality a Greek who spoke. Two novels, entitled "Jalousie" which he wrote a few years after the *Ta Grēdi*, clearly prove him to be a Greek. Such a combination of vehemence and gentleness corresponded well with their own character. We read in these sketches the adventures of two jealous heroes,



Two Greeks who, without external cause, without the plots of a Jago, or the incident of a lost handkerchief, simply by the power of their passion work themselves into a state of madness, in which the one kills himself, the other his betrothed. The psychological process is very cleverly treated, and, considering the power of his imagination and the depth of his emotion, both stories deserve also in Western Europe to be regarded as master-pieces.

Both novels were much admired by the Greeks; an opponent of Psichari's endeavours admitted to me that he considered the denouement of "Jalousie" more beautiful than that of Shakespeare's "Othello". The other works of Psichari, some novels and a very detailed, much too detailed, romance entitled "The Dream of Yanniris" I have to pass over in silence. They exercised much less influence on the new literature.

The present literary movement in



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Greece is the result of two forces; it is the triumph of a more refined taste for art which, joined with scientific judgement, has found greater favour. What the poets had long felt by intuition, and applied without the approval of science, has gradually become considered as the chief condition for the birth of a national literature. To the poets of the National songs and to those of the Romie school, such as Solomos, Zalahostas, Tilaras (who lived in the middle of the XIX. century) belongs the praise of having laid the foundations; the greatest linguist of Greece, Hatzidakis, who has made known in his country the new theory of language, (perhaps unintentionally, for he had little sympathy with the "new school") pointed out where good material was to be found. Psichari, who is not exclusively a philologist, but has also literary inclinations, owes to this combination



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of talents his great influence on the movement.

In the autumn of 1898, the first energetic steps were taken to reduce by organisation the literary confusion. At that time the first number of "Η Τεχνη" was published, a monthly periodical, which is the organ of a group of literary men who banish the artificial language from prose and poetry. The recognized chief of this club is Kostis Palamas, at this moment almost generally acknowledged to be the first of the living poets of Greece. Twice a week the principal contributors to the periodical, many of whom are youths living in Athens, meet at his house, where also strangers who take an interest in the movement, are heartily welcomed. Palamas is not only the most gifted of this company, but also the man who has studied most. He is exceptionally well read, but more surprising still is his independence of staple literature. Especially in his



recent verses, he is quite free from the too well-known "poetical language", from which so few writers know how to escape, and which hinders the movements of all those who try to write poetry in the artificial language.

After Palamas, Kambysis deserves to be named, the author of four plays which clearly show the influence Ibsen has exercised on the new school; his latest piece, "Mother's Ring" was doubtless inspired by reading Maeterlinck. The brothers Passayannis write poems in a style rich in epithets and heavily gilded which in living authors is commonly called overburdened, and which we have tried to admire in Bacchylides, unearthed a few years ago. The elder of the two brothers has also published short tales and an incomplete novel, describing the life and the peculiar customs of the inhabitants of Maina, the author's



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native land. His prose works show a strong affection for the bold, according to our ideas almost theatrical, character of the Maniots. He touchingly describes how in one of the mediaeval fortresses (which in those wild districts are still to be seen in many villages, the Kinsmen met round the dead body of one of their tribe, who had fallen a victim of vengeance, and calmly considered how they could give the slain "his blood". So long as he remains unavenged, the dead cannot rest, nor is he regarded as buried in a worthy manner. The honor due to the dead, is not rendered to him until another victim has fallen. In a room under the meeting place of the men, the women intone their dirges and songs of vengeance; Their weird sounds incite the men to thirst for blood. And yet the same people are gentle and hospitable towards the stranger, robbery and theft rarely occur.



The other poets and prose-writers of importance in the new movement\* ought also to be noticed here, but I will not weary the reader with so exhaustive an enumeration. For two men, however, I must make exception, but even for them I have to confine myself to a single observation. In the first place, Eftaliotis (pseudonym of C. Michaelidis) who exquisitely describes the life on the Greek islands, his work is perhaps too simple both in language and subject, and too free from sentimentality to be admired by everybody; but certainly no author has shown us better than he, what by a happy neologism a Frenchman has called "la grande interiorité du caractère grec". The Greeks

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\* They are not all contributors to "Η Τεχνη". Karkavitsoas has already withdrawn from it in a friendly way. Also Drossinis and Souris do not belong to this circle. An excellent review of Modern Greek Literature, with biographical & biological notes, is to be found in the Chrestomatie mentioned at the heading of this paper.



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are a people who do not easily show to the stranger their real inner nature, their invincible fondness of reasoning, arguing and investigating is contrary to their desire to conceal their intimate life from the stranger and the consequence is that they impose upon the unsuspecting listener in that fine manner which is known to the readers of Plato. How many interesting bits of folklore were manufactured in this way, is not recorded. A well-known modern Greek distichon says: "Three things are good for man: beauty, intelligence, and not to reveal what he has in his heart."<sup>\*</sup>

On reading these words, some philosopher might, while willing to acknowledge the moral decay of the Greek nation, feel an inclination to set against it the exclamation of

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\* Τρία κατὰ σίον ἀνθρώπου: ἡ ὀμορφιά, ἡ γνῶσις,  
 καὶ ἐκεῖνο ποῦ οἱ στὴν καρδίαν καὶ μὴν τὸ φανεροῦν.



Achilles <sup>1.)</sup> :-

"For I hate him, as I hate the gates of Hades

"Who in his heart hides one thing, and tells another."

Odysseus, however, rather than Achilles, is the representative of the Greek nation, and it is remarkable that the cunning hero of Ithaca himself says almost the same thing just before he begins a narrative which, from beginning to end, is invented, and which contains many more untruths than were needed for the narrator's first object.<sup>2.)</sup> Neither do the solemn assurances which Odysseus gives to his countrymen, here and elsewhere, make any deep impression on them. Yet this want of truthfulness, especially

1.) Ἐχθρὸς γὰρ μοι κείνος ὁμοῦς Ἀΐδαο πύλῃσιν,  
 10 IX. 312/3. ὅς χ' ἔτερος μὲν κεύθῃ ἐνὶ φρεσὶν, ἄλλο δὲ εἶπῃ.

2.) Ἐχθρὸς γὰρ μοι κείνος ὁμοῦς Ἀΐδαο πύλῃσιν  
 Od. XIV. 156. γίγνεσθαι, ὅς πενήντ' εἶκωτ' ἀπατήλια βάζει.



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when it is so naively owned, cannot prevent us from feeling deep sympathy with this gifted and good-hearted nation, which has become still more charming owing to the unfortunate conditions under which it has lived for ages; the grief has introduced into the national character an unmistakable melancholy which strikingly appears in the sketches of Eftaliotis and in the works of the other author above referred to. It is Karkavitsas, a ship's-doctor, who has written a few novels and a number of sketches of the life of sailors and sponge-fishermen. He is more or less what in Flanders is called a "taalparticularist" (i.e. a separatist as regards dialects), and in consequence of this still more than owing to the numerous technical terms occurring in his works,



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he is sometimes difficult to understand even for Greeks who do not come from the same districts.

A favourite statement in hastily written handbooks is that the Greek language contains so few foreign words, but whoever has given a glance at Kar Kavitsas's books knows better, for he will have actually seen that, besides a large number of Italian words, mostly borrowed from the Venetians (amongst them most nautical terms), there is a liberal supply of Turkish and many other words the origin of it is difficult to trace. Although such words are not to be found in any of the existing dictionaries, their meaning is easily understood and interpreted, and, in case of need, the author himself is willing to give an explanation. In place of the numerous Russian and



Scandinavian novels which over-  
 - flow us in translations, it is also  
 desirable for a change to introduce  
 the literary productions of Greece  
 into Holland. In doing so, pre-  
 - ference should, of course, be given  
 to what is least international  
 in the recent literature, therefore  
 the works of Eftaliotis, Epachtitis,  
 and Karkavitsas should be the  
 first chosen of prose-writers for  
 translation.

In Greece, Palamas and  
 his followers are called "Decadents",  
 and himself in his later poems a  
 "symbolist". I admit, without hesita-  
 - tion, that I do not exactly know  
 what these terms mean, and seeing  
 how differently they are used, I can-  
 - not help thinking that I do not  
 stand alone in my ignorance.  
 If "Decadence" is to convey an  
 idea that in the pursuit of literature



one is no longer guided by a "Golden Age" which produced models unsurpassed in every respect, then certainly does the name suit poets who admire Aeschylus and Ibsen quite as much as, if not more than, Sophocles or Corneille. In any other sense, however, the name is hardly applicable to the new school.

What in Western Europe is understood by the term "Symbolist", that surely Palamas is not.

In a country where one is not accustomed to art seeking new forms for its ideas, everything uncommon is at once declared inconceivable; any other comparisons than those in use ever since writing was invented are called far-fetched symbols. The poetry of Palamas



and most of his friends will therefore not easily become popular. On the contrary, this peculiarity prevents their ideas of language from gaining ground; it is also, in a great measure, the cause of "H Tixoy", their latest enterprise, not proving successful. That periodical offered an easy butt for scorn, and even those persons who did not care for it, but admitted its importance, were disappointed. They could not but object to the many peculiarities of the new school, and were afraid that its radical teaching might cause a reaction. Thus the new organ was, from the commencement, not sufficiently supported. The struggle lasted one year, but had finally to be abandoned. The periodical, however, is not yet extinct, but in the last number of



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the year 1899 it was announced that in future it would appear at irregular intervals; I think I may say that this advertisement was simply a disguised announcement of death. The founders, if true artists, will console themselves with their faith in the power of the Beautiful which is bound to prevail at last over the common indifference. When a new Homer or Dante rises in Greece, the critics will be as eager to explain, as they now are to condemn; there is, I think, no doubt that they will then discover in the peculiar <sup>\*</sup>writers of the present the precursors of the greater <sup>man</sup> who has converted them.

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\*.) Although the men of "H Tixoy" do not in their appearance distinguish themselves from their fellow-citizens, they are by comical journalists called "the long-haired". The term is taken from the international saying: "Long hair, short wit", which however in Greece, as a rule, is used to signify the female sex, and that is perhaps the origin of it. -



It is difficult to give by translations an idea of a movement and of a contest of not only a literary, but also a philological character. One of the features of "Η Τέχνη" is the discussion of topics of all kinds about which anything has in our time been written in Greek, thus there have appeared in it a lengthy paper on Nietzsche, another on Northern authors, and, from the pen of Palamas, some very fine character sketches of modern Greek authors. All this, however, for various reasons, is not proper material for translating. The mystic and the properly so-called symbolical pieces besides I cannot render into Dutch, because they belong to a class which, also in my mother-tongue, requires a greater comprehension than mine. And yet, in order to give, by an example, an idea of the nature



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of the modern literature, I insert here an epitome of a novel by Palamas, that same has not appeared in "Η Τέχνη" does not matter, it is called: -  
 "The Death of the Pallikar".

The literary movement to which I have called attention is still weak. "Η Τέχνη", suspended in its early stage, is to be regarded as a wave of more than ordinary force and size, which threatens the sea-wall, but cannot destroy the old, old master-work; yet after the ebb, the flood will return with renewed force, and nature will finally triumph here also. Wealthy Greeks abroad are preparing, as I have just learned, to hasten this triumph by offering prizes for the best book written in Modern Greek.

Much more could be said



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concerning the causes of the early  
 - ill-success of the efforts to support  
 such a periodical as "Η Τέχνη". If  
 all the contributors had been as  
 excellent as Palamas, and had  
 so much talent combined with  
 such strength of mind, the chances  
 would certainly have been better;  
 that some followed a direction  
 of art which is nowhere po-  
 -pular, and could still less be  
 appreciated in the bright at-  
 -mosphere of Attica than else-  
 -where, is no reproach to them,  
 because they honestly reflected  
 their own impressions. Indeed  
 the few gloomy or fantastic  
 & pieces in "Η Τέχνη" should have  
 been overlooked, and when the  
 & critics had had their laugh, no  
 & such eccentric productions  
 & should further have been received.  
 The chief cause, however, is that the



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public do not yet understand that the language which is daily spoken and - this is remarkable fact - for a century almost exclusively used by poets, can also be employed in prose works. The Greeks are passionate newspaper readers, and in the towns at least, by strictly compulsory elementary education, and advanced instruction of all classes, they cling to the opinions of their teachers. Even those who have learned to think independently, cannot free themselves from the forms wherein they daily read the thoughts of others, and the social events at home and abroad. Owing to the circumstance that to everybody the demotic language appears fit for poetry, not only for light



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and simple pieces, but also for serious poems, it is not easy to find in any other literature a similar conditions to that prevailing in Greece. An exhaustive discussion of this question is beyond my present subject, I only wished to make a few observations which, at least partially might help to explain that facts which foreigners of such widely different views, as Krumbacher, Legrand, Pernot, Psichari, Schmidt and Thurnb have so clearly felt, and so convincingly proved, are by most Greeks not admitted.

Only the best prose-writers can gradually modify the dominant opinion, but it is not to be expected that their ideas will triumph in the nearest future.



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