Transforming Paramythi in Diasporic Literature: Five Greek Australian writers

by

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_Dedicated to my mother, who taught me the Greek letters, and to the memory of my late fathers, Kosmas and Dimitris who told many paramythia. I also dedicate this work to my mentors in the Greek letters, Chrysoula Gotis-Graham and Vasili Stavropoulos, who inspired me with their enthusiasm for literature, translation and the rhythms of Byzantine Hymnology._
Abstract

This thesis investigates the different ways in which paramythi, a Greek oral traditional practice of storytelling, has been used by contemporary, diasporic Greek Australian writers Stylianos Charkianakis, Dean Kalimnios, Antigone Kefala, Fotini Epanomitis and Christos Tsiolkas in their literary texts. Paramythi is the specific framework that I have used to compare how these writers negotiate cultural identity and conflicting cultural influences. I have had to compare how my chosen diasporic writers diverge or differ from the mainland Modern Greek writers, who also drew upon elements of paramythi in their texts.

I draw upon Bakhtin’s idea of ‘outsidedness’ and Homi Bhabha’s concept of cultural translation, as well as insights from feminist and cultural theorists Sneja Gunew, Smaro Kamboureli and Stuart Hall to explore how my chosen set of writers use their outsider position to negotiate their past and present. Paramythi in this thesis is not examined as an ethnographical narrative trope, but as a sub-literary strategy employed by literary writers. So, after my initial investigation into how paramythi has been creatively used and transformed in its place of origin, my main focus is to translate the diasporic writers’ uses of paramythi, and to interpret the varied ways in which its traditional role has shifted. The main aspects that I focus on chapter by chapter are: the different ways in which the writers use language; how the anti-
traditional writers blend or distort the boundaries of genre; how the traditional poets
and the anti-traditional prose writers negotiate the idea of home; and how each writer
represents their emerging sense of selfhood. The varied ways that each writer is
positioned in relation to their heritage indicates that paramythi represents Greekness
in contestatory ways
# Table of Contents

GLOSSARY viii

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: How do Greek Australian writers use and transform the paramythi and why? 1

What is significant about this research? 3

Towards a methodology for studying the use of paramythi in Greek Australian texts. 12

How did I come to this research? 31

CHAPTER TWO

Defining paramythi 34

Features of Greek myth 51

What is paramythi? 62

CHAPTER THREE

Deployment of Paramythi by Modern Greek Writers 74

George Seferis 81
Odysseus Elytis 96
George Sarantaris 102
The non-traditionalists: Nikos Gatsos, Miltos Sachtouris and Andreas Embirikos 108
CHAPTER FOUR

Searching for One’s Voice through Paramythi

The language question in the Antipodes

Charkianakis and Kalimnios: their relationship to language and Hellenism

Charkianakis’ relationship with his predecessors

Kalimnios’ relationship with his predecessors

Antigone Kefala’s relationship to language

Concluding remarks on language use

CHAPTER FIVE

Blending and Distorting Genre: The Anti-traditionalists

Christos Tsiolkas and Fotini Epanomitis

What genres are these writers using?

Epanomitis’ feminist magical realism

Tsiolkas’ blending of the oral into literary form

Epanomitis’ and Tsiolkas’ use of the Carnivalesque

How Tsiolkas and Epanomitis differ in the way they bend and blend paramythi

Conclusion
CHAPTER SIX

Home, Belonging and Not-Belonging

Nostalgia for the ancestral homeland 238

Women writers: shifting boundaries representing home 246

‘Non-territorial, essentialised belonging,’ or ‘the desire for somewhere else’ 250

The anti-traditionalists: differences and points of intersection between them 260

CHAPTER SEVEN

Representation of Identities Through Paramythi

Changing modern Greek Identity politics and Diaspora 284

The diasporic identity: the poets and Hellenistic continuity 293

The female writers: journeys towards self-consciousness 311

Tsiolkas’ anti-traditional tale 317

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion 324

BIBLIOGRAPHY 343
**Glossary**

**Akathistos Hymnos:** The Akathistos hymn is the most famous Byzantine hymn to the Virgin Mary (Panagia). It expresses devotion to the Mother of God, and had become a central expression of identification in Constantinople in the sixth century, when Panagia was given the attribute of being the protector of the city. The entire service is either sung or chanted to traditional Byzantine melodies.

**Aphanisis:** Long-term absence of someone, without an explanation of their disappearance, resulting in the presumption that she or he is dead; not being known or famous.

**Chronos:** The time span which is realised as a consequence of events happening in one’s consciousness.

**Demotic:** The ordinary, everyday current form of vernacular language which is used in writing by the majority of the Greek people; it is the common neo-Hellenic language which was enriched with symbolic words and is therefore the preferred form of language used by most Modern Greek poets, in antithesis to *katharevousa* which was the official language of the Greek State.

**Erotokritos:** A romance written during the seventeenth century in the Cretan dialect by Vikentios Kornaros. It is made up of 10,012 fifteen-syllable rhymed verses which explore the themes of love, honour, friendship and courage.

**Estia:** Open space inside the family home where there was fire. It was a place of warmth and often where the cooking took place; *Estia* was also a national newspaper published daily in Athens. It was considered as conservative and followed the purist language *katharevousa*, which was abandoned as the official administrative language in 1976. *Estia* is the only daily newspaper that continues to employ a simplified polytonic accentuation system, which was officially abandoned in 1982.

**Kairos:** The right time, epoch; usually a long span in time.

**Kleptic:** Songs associated with the resistance groups during the War for Greek Independence during the colonial period of Ottoman rule. These songs have a
distinctive rhythm that is also associated with the *tsambiko* (a lively and war-like) folk dance.

*Katharevousa*: An archaic, purist form of the Greek language, which was used as the ‘official’ language, as opposed to the spoken and literary demotic language, by the newly formed Modern Greek State during the nineteenth and twentieth century.

*Laiko*: Belonging to the people and referring to the people and often associated with the lower rungs of society; based upon popular and folk traditions, which express the common sentiments of Greek rural and communal society.

*Mythistorima*: A literary work that is written mainly in prose and rarely in meter. It is a narrative about people who experience fantastical adventures. It explores the emotions and passions of its characters and often has a complex but linear narrative plot.

*Moiroloi*: A song sung for the dead; a song of lament.

*Paramythi*: In the Greek context paramythi is understood by folklorists and philologists as a folk or popular narrative, mainly to please and teach children which always tells an imaginative or fantastical story filled with mythic/supernatural/irrational/magic motifs mainly from the lives of people, and animals and plants. In this study paramythi acts as a literary trope, and its meaning is closer to the definition first introduced into English Rhetoric Studies by Henry Peacham (1577) in *The Garden of Eloquence* where he refers to paramythia (*παραμυθία* in Greek) operating through the folk-tale (or its equivalent) as an expression of consolation and encouragement.¹ This trope becomes the lens through which the negotiation of cultural identity will be explored.

*Rebetika*: Urban Greek folk music associated with particular sub-cultures. Often it is a short, romantic café song with an Eastern influence and played to the accompaniment of various instruments: the violin, *laouto*, *lyra*, clarinet, accordion, mandolin, finger cymbals, tambourine, and the *bouzouki*.

*Synaxarion*: Historical synaxarions are a collection of biographical narratives on the lives of saints and accounts of the events for which they are remembered.

CHAPTER ONE:

HOW DO GREEK AUSTRALIAN WRITERS USE AND TRANSFORM THE PARAMYTHI AND WHY?

The aim of this research is to interpret the texts of Greek Australian writers who use, transform or subvert the paramythi (a non-literary storytelling form connected with the oral tradition), and who incorporate elements of the paramythi into their literary texts. The main emphasis is not on reading how a particular paramythi operates, but how paramythi as a literary trope circulates in different ways. This research therefore begins by acknowledging that the paramythi in a Greek context signifies an imaginary tale and has parallels with fairytales, folk tales, the fantastical, and horror stories. It can present a wise, familiar and comforting voice, or transmit non-naturalistic fantastical elements which challenge any sense of coherence. It can transmit meanings ranging from the kinds of metaphysical truths found in parables to nothing but gossip, innuendo or a vortex of images. It is resilient and adaptable within popular cultural forms such as folksongs, folk tales and comic and popular theatre.

Having researched a wide range of Greek Australian contemporary writers, I found only a few who wrote after the 1970s and who specifically engage
with the paramythi in a serious way. Stylianos Charkianakis and Dean Kalimnios use paramythic oral sayings, symbols and rhythms throughout their visionary religious or imagistic poetry, respectively. In their case, the paramythi functions as a symbol of Hellenistic and Orthodox Christian values. The others appropriate the paramythi’s powerful narrative style in their grotesque realist texts (Fotini Epanomitis), in the semi-autobiographical memoir (Antigone Kefala), or in the transgressive anti-

As readers, we note a range of practices amongst this particular group of writers: those who show a positive alignment with their traditional and religious values and beliefs; and those who are either ambivalent about or breaking away from their cultural heritage. Charkianakis and Kefala were born in Europe. Kalimnios, Epanomitis and Tsiolkas are all Australian-born. The male poets are traditionalists and write their poems in the Greek language only, despite the fact that Kalimnios is a second-generation Australian. He has not produced any bilingual versions of his anthologies, while Charkianakis has. The prose writers, in sharp contrast to the poets, show an ambivalent relationship to religious and Hellenistic values and beliefs. They write in English only. Kefala is a writer who negotiates the tension between traditional and individual ways of being. She publishes her prose and poetry as bilingual editions. This apparent dichotomy over

2 Dimitris Tsakoumas also makes use of paramythi, but I have not dealt with him since the main body of his work was published prior to 1975, the period which promoted multicultural awareness by the Whitlam federal government.

3 In this thesis, I will use the transliterated name Dean Kalimnios as this is how it is written in Greek in each of his collections of poems. In his Neos Kosmos English edition newspaper articles in English, he refers to himself as Dean Kalimniou.
traditional ties is not generation-specific, but it is highlighted through each writer's choice of language and style of writing.

**What is significant about this research?**

This thesis will argue that the interpretation of the varied uses of the paramythi in contemporary diasporic texts has a dual function. From a cultural point of view, the interpretation can reveal the various ways that diasporic writers are negotiating their own sense of selfhood and identity amidst conflicting cultural influences. From a literary point of view, it shows the development of a hybridized literary style which merges popular cultural forms with highbrow or modernist literary trends.

The writers belong, either directly or indirectly, to a transplanted migrant culture, and are borrowing from the Eastern Mediterranean oral tradition by creatively merging the paramythi into their own texts. Within their symbolic or subversive texts, we can trace themes that map each writer’s developing sense of selfhood: their choice of language; the way that they negotiate belonging or not belonging to home or host culture; and how they articulate their ambivalence in regard to their cultural heritage. The Antipodes, the space from which they write, is a fluid, multicultural zone. As outsiders to Australian mainstream culture, the diasporic writers reveal how they see the host culture. Kefala’s tale *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children* is a prime example. Kefala uses a child migrant’s perspective to describe her own initial encounter with a different culture, and a new language. Kalimnios views himself as ‘Australian born, trying from
Australia to construct and deconstruct the Greek world view,’ while Charkianakis, according to Kalimnios is ‘Greek born and trying to grapple with the world from a Greek world view while in Australia.’ The latter poets, in contrast to the ambivalent female poet Kefala, show that their main alignment is with a borderless Hellenistic culture, whose wealth they choose to share with their readers. These texts are examples of ‘outsidedness’, which according to Bakhtin is a powerful factor in understanding one’s culture, since ‘it is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly’. Such a literary dialogue, I propose to demonstrate, can reveal ‘the most intense and productive life of culture’ because the different viewpoints articulated by writers who are situated either from the outside or within Australian culture can test the way ‘Greekness’ is negotiated from the diasporic point of view.

I shall demonstrate that the paramythi does not speak of Greek culture in a monologic, essentialising way. Instead, it engages with current cross-cultural concerns in a dialogic way. Within such a context, certain questions arise: Does the use of the paramythic tale, like the secular parable, subvert or destroy the world of logic; and, like the fantastic tale, does it open a window to the subconscious? When it functions as art, or subversively as anti-art, is it allowing for the unsaid to be articulated? Are

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4 D. Kalimnios, e-mail interview with author, September 8, 2008. (Henceforth, through the thesis, this is referred to as the ‘e-mail interview’ as there was only one interview.)
6 Bakhtin, ‘Response to a Question,’ p. 7.
the female writers especially exploiting the latter method? Whatever their reasons for choosing to incorporate a non-literary form into their literary texts, we, as readers, are aware that these writers are openly displaying their ‘foreignness’ within Australian multicultural literary space; and are exploiting their own ambivalence while articulating their inherent need to be accepted despite linguistic and cultural otherness.

Contemporary Modern Greek writing, according to Dimitris Mitropoulos, is facing a crisis of representation and of identity. He researched the reception of Greek literature in the English-speaking world, and found it to be in decline, with very little international visibility except for George Seferis and Odysseas Elytis from the generation of the 1930s, who had received the Nobel Prize for literature. Karen Van Dyck also points out the minority status of Greek writing, and makes the interesting observation that it is the women writers Margarita Karapanou, Maro Douka (novelists), Katerina Angheliki-Rooke (poet), and Rea Galanaki (historical fiction) who are setting contemporary literary trends in Greece.

More recently, Eleni Panargyriou’s review of contemporary Greek literature points out that the new generation of prose fiction writers have

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shown an expansion of physical and mental territories. They are producing fiction where the individual transgresses traditional notions of space, assuming a new identity. What type of ‘new’ identity this is remains a controversial question on the Greek mainland and in the diaspora. Identity articulated through the paramythi in the diaspora is a major focus of this study. It is obvious from Mitropoulos’ paper in 1997, and the more recent study in 2009 by Panagyriou, that there has been no progress in generating a wider interest for Greek literature outside of its Greek-speaking borders. Mitropoulos’ argument, while dated in relation to the reception of Greek literature might still be valid. He had pointed out that the lack of interest in contemporary Greek literature can be attributed to its failure to ‘foster a coherent meaning of what it means to be Greek, and to write in the Greek language,’ since the mainland Greek writers fail to exploit their traditional Greek heritage, and very few mainland Greek authors pick up from where their predecessors left off. My study will show that this is not the case with the diasporic Greek Australian group, since the use of the paramythi testifies to the fact that there are writers of Greek heritage who are engaging with their traditional past. I will also show that there is evidence that some are borrowing from their predecessors, such as Kalimnios, who states that his writing has been influenced by Charkianakis.\(^\text{10}\) Charkianakis also shows that he has been influenced by his Greek literary predecessors, as he quotes from a range of Modern Greek writers such as George Sarantaris, Andreas Embirikos and Pandelis Prevelakis. He also includes quotations from popular Cretan folk sayings and the Orthodox Church

\(^{10}\) D. Kalimnios, email interview.
fathers. This type of interaction reflects the type of creativity discussed by Smaro Kamboureli in her analysis of the Canadian Long Poem. In my research, I have found that, while Greek Australian writers as individuals are constantly being affected internally by life changes, and externally by other social changes, the question of a Greek tradition and language continues to frame the way that they negotiate Greekness in their writing.

This research breaks new ground in literary criticism because to date paramythi has not received such an intensity of focus in Greek Australian literature or in any other diasporic group of formerly Greek writers. My chosen writers use elements of a traditional but non-literary form, even though their texts are literary, so I will be focusing on the way that this low-brow form is used, transformed or subverted in their texts. The paramythi’s transformational uses will be interpreted from outside its (Greek) home of origin. As a bi-cultural and bilingual interpreter and literary critic, I will be negotiating the paramythi’s dual function: the way that paramythi symbolises various aspects of Greek culture, but also how it challenges traditional aspects of Greekness. Smaro Kamboureli’s study of the Canadian Long poem does have certain parallels with this one from a Canadian perspective. Both studies foreground an anxiety over defining their host nation’s literature from a multicultural perspective. Within an Australian and Canadian context, national literary bodies have privileged European ‘imported’ literary traditions, while marginalizing its

autochthonous indigenous constituents, which, in both cases, have a strong oral tradition. I am discussing a minor literature which is not autochthonous, but retains elements of a powerful oral tradition, and uses these as a point of cultural reference. Both studies illustrate what Kamboureli describes as the ‘contamination of origins’ based on aesthetics and ideology, which is extraneous to the Canadian (or Australian) experience. Both studies explore verbal art forms that exceed the boundaries of closed genres even as they borrow certain elements from the epic, the lyric and the narrative poem, and the novel, which have European connections and oral traces. My study is significantly different from Kamboureli’s because I am specifically focusing on the uses and transformation of paramythi by a set of Greek Australian writers. Whilst this is my main focus, I also compare Greek Australian uses and transformations of the paramythi with mainland Modern Greek writers who draw upon elements of paramythi in a literary way.

I will be showing how Greek Australian paramythic texts disturb readers’ expectations through what Kamboureli describes in relation to the Canadian Long Poems as the ‘breach of promise’. Instead of a cohesive, homogenous voice associated with the Greek traditional folktale, the characteristic features that emerge in my chosen texts are non-linear narratives and a mixture of heterogeneous voices, the demotic included in the highbrow. In Charkianakis’ religious poems, for example, paramythi

can represent a wise parable, or presents as a different type of modernist, self-reflexive memoir. His hierarchical traditional voice replicates Eastern Orthodox rhythms in some poems, and merges the traditional with a polyphonic voice. Kalimnios’ imagistic modernist style uses paramythic and traditional Byzantine symbolism and other non-Western cultural allusions and demotic sayings. In Kefala’s Alexia, fantasy merges with semi-autobiography as a double-voiced discourse filled with irony. Epanomitis’ fictional paramythic tale The Mule’s Foal includes non-fictional observations and a provocative carnivalesque style. Tsiolkas’ Dead Europe is overtly transgressive. His grotesque realist novel has mythic and paramythic intrusions.

All of the chosen writers display, to some degree, a ‘lawlessness’ taking the form of ‘resistance to generic labels’ that Kamboureli also found in the Canadian Long poem.14 This is because they do not remain within the boundaries of a certain genre but cross and merge antithetical forms. Such crossings indicate that these diasporic writers have been affected by other philosophical, literary and cultural influences. Such play corresponds to the new, productive and emancipatory experience that Bakhtin found within the novel because of its unrealized and as yet ‘plastic possibilities’.15 Despite the fact that Bakhtin is specifically referring to the novel, I draw upon his idea of ‘plastic possibilities’ for my reading of

14 Kamboureli, On the Edge of Genre, pp. xiii-iv.
poetry as well as the novel because my chosen writers are producing new
texts. The Antipodean writers are well placed to create such experimental
and new texts, because, as diasporic creative artists, they are occupying a
transitional zone, characterized by the need for continuity and the pressure
to break away from the past. Kamboureli describes this tension as:

The semiosis of the new country, lacking as it does any fixed codes,
offers the potential to produce writing that occurs exactly within the
gaps marking meaning; such writing dislodges the totalizing codes
and images of the mother country and enunciates the colonial poet’s
dislocation.16

Kamboureli points out that texts which develop from such contradictions
reveal the ‘measure of the culture that it comes from and speaks to’ as well
as ‘the complex ways in which [they] relate to past traditions and to its
present circumstances’.17 This is a potentially rich and diverse area that
can be exploited by other diasporic writers who are faced with similar
challenges. The open form of paramythi, which uses various rhythms and
verse forms similar to Greek folk poetry and songs, Byzantine hymns,
parables or anecdotes, enables writers to experiment with form; while its
fictional status allows them to camouflage real life experiences, silences
and trauma in an enigmatic or playful way.

16 Kamboureli, On the Edge of Genre, p. 21.
17 Kamboureli, On the Edge of Genre, p. 204.
The main question that arises from such a study is what does the confluence of incommensurable forms tell us about literature produced in the Greek diaspora? Does it make the literary text less literary and ‘quotidian’, to borrow from Michel de Certeau’s theory on marginal texts which represent popular cultural forms and which are usually overlooked or muted? Alternatively, does it show that the oral tradition continues to be a powerful creative force, which is open and plastic albeit in different circumstances? What does the merging of various elements of the paramythi into the layers of their texts reveal about those writers who show an ambivalent relationship to their origins? Furthermore, what does it reveal about the development of texts which combine various languages and cannot be confined to a particular genre; and how do readers respond to such shifts, which transform the paramythi into a transgressive, carnivalesque, or multilayered and complex text? The theme of language, the use of a Greek code and the need for translation as well as the type of genre crossings deployed by the non-traditionalists will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five, respectively, after the preliminary chapters. In Chapter Two, I will trace debates surrounding paramythi, and I will distinguish the paramythi from the myth, in order to explain what I mean by paramythi. In Chapter Three, I will discuss the way that the paramythi, as a Greek diachronic cultural tradition, has been studied and used in the past by Greek scholars, and how it is used in literature by Modern Greek writers. I refer to Chapter Three as preliminary because it is not an in-depth textual analysis of Modern Greek writing, but instead highlights the

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case of Modern Greek literary uses of paramythi, which can be seen as preparatory to the further transformations by diasporic writers in the Antipodes.

This thesis situates itself in diaspora studies, which has developed from postcolonial studies. The interpretation of paramythic transformations, therefore, is aimed at a recovery of the taken-for-granted oral voice within literary texts that are produced within the liberal Antipodean space of Australian literature and from outside the Greek mainland. We have, on the one hand, traditional poets who use the paramythi to voice their Eastern Orthodox views, even as they use a non-traditional style that has Western influences such as Imagist and Modernist traces. On the other hand, we have experimental writers rewriting the superstitions and customs of Greek people into a form that is out of synchrony with its communal beginnings. The latter group raises the question: Why are they letting drop their social masks and allowing the repressed to surface in such an extreme way? Is it that they are unable to dissociate the archaic and the more recent remnants of their cultural past? These questions will not be explored through sociological and anthropological theories, which in the past discussed orality and folklore. Instead, I will draw from feminist and cultural theorists who raise questions of hybridity within the context of literary studies.19

Towards a methodology for studying the use of paramythi in Greek
Australian texts.

This thesis examines Greek Australian literary texts through the specific lens of the paramythi in both traditional and carnivalised forms. My methodology deploys comparative textual analysis, and it borrows various insights from Bakhtin, such as his notions on dialogism, heteroglossia, and the carnivalesque. In order to frame my analysis of the paramythi I also introduce into the conversation certain insights from diasporic cultural theorists, Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, since paramythi is an oral diasporic phenomenon. Furthermore, I borrow from contemporary feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Rosemary Jackson, Smaro Kamboureli and Sneja Gunew. Michael de Certeau’s notions on the quotidian and mystic speech, Roman Jakobson’s ideas on ‘the verbal message,’ and Hans Robert Jauss’s notion on the reader’s ‘horizon of expectation’ all contribute to how I frame the paramythi, as does Paul Ricoeur’s ideas on the symbolic function of metaphors. In what follows, I shall detail some of the key ideas derived from these theorists which animate this thesis.

The comparative textual analysis that I will use in order to chart the changing role of the paramythi will consider the diasporic writer’s subjectivity and the reader’s response. So, expressed another way, in order to recognise what the transformations of the paramythi can signify in diasporic texts, we need to consider the context in which they have been written, as well as the expectations, or reversal of expectations, on the part
of the readers. Each writer uses a specific linguistic code, either the Greek language or the English. Within this code, we recognise further sub-codes which indicate an alignment or non-alignment with Greekness, as well as the type of readership they invite. Each writer’s style reflects a complex mixture of languages, attitudes and world views. This phenomenon has been discussed by Bakhtin, who introduced the idea of heteroglossia, arguing that the ‘word is not a static entity with a fixed meaning but a locus of action, a cross-section of different and often clashing points of view’. In this study, there is considerable evidence of Bakhtinian heteroglossia. The poets use certain elements from the demotic, non-literary voice in their highly allusive poems. They add other cultural voices, as well as ideas from Western and Middle Eastern philosophy. Kalimnios quotes from Syrian philosophy and includes the Arabic linguistic code. Charkianakis quotes from Western surrealist J. L. Borges in ‘Simply Thus’, Yves Bonnefoy in ‘In Brief’, and refers to the Australian indigenous culture in the poem ‘Within Dreamtime’. Epanomitis’ tale, *The Mule’s Foal*, has certain parallels with Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s magical realist novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. She addresses the reader through an oral voice, but defamiliarises the narrative tale by using a highly allusive and non-linear style. Kefala’s paramythic tale *Alexia* plays with foreign words, while making the English language appear strange. Tsiolkas merges a powerful paramythic narrative style into his

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grotesque realist novel *Dead Europe* and includes transgressive language, or what De Certeau refers to as the ‘institution of rot’ as a strategy to reveal the ‘seriousness of the real, and the mockery of the truth it displays’.\(^{23}\) In order to explore the complex interrelationships that recur in my chosen writers’ texts, I will refer to Kristeva’s ideas on intertextuality. She saw the potential in transgression, and discussed Bakhtin’s ideas on the disruption of the monologic through the dialogic. These ideas are relevant in this thesis since the traditional paramythi, which represents the monologic voice, coexists within the plural text and highlights ambivalence. This will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five. As Kristeva states, ‘any text is the absorption and transformation of another’.\(^{24}\) All of the writers show that they are borrowing from various modern and postmodern literary movements while engaging with current diasporic concerns such as language and identity.

What is of particular interest for this study is how the paramythi functions as a point of resistance to various traditional Greek beliefs and institutions. I shall demonstrate how the dissenting, experimental writers choose to side with *unofficialdom*, and how their interruption of the normative testifies that the heteroglossic voice may challenge official discourses. Epanomitis’ and Tsiolkas’ subversive literary texts are examples of mimicry that mock


the symbolic order of Greek traditions and values through irony thereby constructing the type of play that Bakhtin describes as:

Carnival laughter [which] overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations…it was not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe inspired by the forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden. It was the defeat of the divine and human power.25

In the experimental writers, we note that they are promoting a transgressive type of liberalism. They draw from their past, their memories, and their cultural traditions in such a way that it indicates a desire for separation from mainstream Greek beliefs and values. We could interpret this as a postcolonial strategy of enunciation against patriarchal values and institutions. Alternatively, we could interpret this as a type of play in which writers borrow from the classical Cynics and Old Comedy supporters and thus they also use obscenities to challenge the status quo and/or to attract a wider audience.26 Chapter Five will discuss these issues, and in particular will compare how the transgressive writer Epanomitis uses the paramythi differently from her male counterpart, Tsiolkas. It will also discuss the types of boundaries that their texts contest, and from what position they are enunciating their emancipatory ideas.

By comparing the varied ways that the paramythi is being transformed, I aim to show how diasporic writing subjects are challenged by conflicting and ambivalent emotions and ties. They inhabit what Kristeva describes as, ‘the double of lived experience’.27 When they use play, satire or transgression, they use an abrupt and provocative style which shows that ‘identity, substance, causality and definition are transgressed, so that others may be adopted: analogy, relation, opposition, and therefore dialogism and Menippean ambivalence’.28 When they borrow from the voice of a paramythic past in a positive way, again it opens questions regarding belonging and identity, since there are other voices included which are not oral but literary. The themes of belonging and not-belonging will be discussed in Chapter Six, in which I will explore the ways that paramythi negotiates at-homeness or alienation from the host and home cultures. In Chapter Seven I will discuss the different types of identities represented through paramythi.

The underpinning assumption in the interpretation of such complex texts is that I am completing the meaning of the text according to the horizon of my own experience and expectation. As the reader, I have a socio-cultural history and this intrudes into the literary process, forming what Jauss refers to as ‘the horizon of expectation’.29 When there is a reversal of

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27 Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 89.
28 Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 86.
expectations, when the paramythi does not follow the structure we would expect from a fantastical or folkloric text, it is important in the overall literary experience, since it can generate literary discussion because of its open-endedness, its heteroglossic or hybrid constructedness. Such reversals or indeterminacy can, as Iser points out, ‘determine the degree of aesthetic effectiveness and hence the artistic character of a work’. 30 Iser also points out that ‘where there are reversals in the communicatory structure of fiction when the storyline suddenly breaks off, continues from another perspective or in an unexpected direction, there is a blank that the reader must complete in order to join the unconnected segments’. 31

When a given text appears to be fictional, but it includes uncanny moments or realistic scenarios, then we have reversals in reader expectations. In Epanomitis’ *The Mule’s Foal*, for example, the non-Greek reader would initially be aware that he or she is reading a subversive imaginary tale with an ethnographic element, since there are references to strange Greek names, characters and customs. This imaginary story, although foreign, is attractive because it is driven by a powerful narrative technique. The most unsettling feature, however, occurs in the ‘breach of the promise’ 32 when the paramythi reveals experiences which seem very real, despite its fictional status. When Epanomitis constructs imaginative characters, and when she describes certain incidents of major life changes such as the

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30 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 69.
onset of old age, we recognise in her fictional tale real contemporary issues such as the unsettling fear of change, difference, and the colonising effects of stereotypes. The assumptions that I will be making about the significance of such reversals in readers’ expectations are based on the cultural context in which the text has been written (as part of a minority writing in Australia), and the cultural heritage from which the paramythi is derived (from a highly patriarchal and nationalistic culture). When the subversive writers use the English language, they maintain the sense of the foreign because they reveal Greek customs and superstitions in their original ‘strangeness’ even for those who are familiar with Greek traditions. Such texts are significant because ‘their aesthetics can challenge traditional structures or hierarchies’,33 in home and host cultures, because of their foreignness and hybrid makeup.

Jauss refers to the readers’ horizon of expectation when reading a literary work, but he also points out that ‘a literary work with an unfamiliar aesthetic form can break through the expectations of its readers, and as a work (or medium) of art it can confront the reader with a new, ‘opaque’ reality that no longer allows itself to be understood from a pre-given horizon of expectations’.34 The enigmatic poetry of Kalimnios, and the magical realist text of Epanomitis, are examples of such art. In both cases, the readers are forced to work at possible meanings, while often there might be no meaning, or there may be many meanings. This implies that

34 Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, p. 44.
the author unsettles the reader through the text. As Kristeva points out that in order to countervail the sign system ‘the subject undergoes an unsettling, questioning process; this indirectly challenges the social framework with which he had previously identified, and it thus coincides with times of abrupt changes, renewal, or revolution in society. 35

Roman Jakobson argues that ‘a poetic work cannot be defined as a work fulfilling an exclusively aesthetic function… Rather, a poetic work is defined as a verbal message whose aesthetic function is the dominant’.36 This thesis will explore the various functions that the paramythi exploits. Within a traditional context, paramythi symbolises Orthodox and Hellenistic values and customs; and in a non-traditional context, it appropriates archaic superstitions, but also religious motifs and images in order to subvert them. The traditional poets exploit most of Jakobson’s six functions, in particular the poetic, emotive and conative functions, with the poetic being the dominant, since Kalimnios’ poetry is dominated by a vortex of enigmatic images. In his poem, ‘Παραμύθια’ (Paramythia),37 he makes a symbolic connection between the paramythi and a story without a beginning and an end: ‘Εμείς αφήσαμε πολλά παραμύθια νά ξυπνούν δίχως άρχη, ποτάμια νά κοιμούνται δίχως τέλος’ (We allowed many paramythia without a beginning to awaken, rivers to sleep without an end). We become aware that his poetry works on another level of meaning

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which has a dreamlike quality, rather than the didactic and nostalgic philosophical tone associated with Charkianakis’ paramythi in ‘Ξανθό Παραμύθι’ (Blond Fairy-Tale) in which he writes: ‘τό ξέρεις πώς ένας Αρχάγγελος διδάσκει τήν άκρα ταπείνωση χωρίς λόγω’ (you realise: he is an Archangel preaching utter humility without words). Kefala recalls her traumatic past and exploits memory and the dream state in her poems, as we note in ‘Coming Home’: ‘What if getting out of the bus in these abandoned suburbs pale under the street lights, what if, as we stepped down we forgot who we are become lost in this absence emptied of memory’. 38 But in her paramythic tale Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children, the paramythi’s referential function is the dominant one, since the apparently naïve, childlike tale has an interrogative potential, challenging powerful institutions such as the ‘charity of the world’ the church and the dominance of the English language, through irony and parody. 39 The Greek language and the paramythic images represent the code and the poetic message, respectively, and these dominate the meaning that the poets convey to their readers. The meanings, however, are often obscure because the readers might not be able to navigate the foreign language without translation, but they also might not be aware of the significance of the tone and the enigmatic images that the writers use.

The meaning of the paramythi requires a method that goes beyond Jakobson’s approach, which focuses on analysing the metaphor and metonymy by isolating single words. Ricoeur’s insights are useful because they add another dimension, a hermeneutical level of meaning that goes beyond words and their symbolic function. While this study is not a hermeneutic one, it does focus on how the paramythi circulates as a trope which also utilises the metaphoric function. Ricoeur argues that metaphors are valuable because they force the listener to interpret them. ‘In reading, the text yields the world of the reader.’ The metaphoric process links the word to the context of the sentence, but also to the cultural context of the discourse in which the sentence was located. This insight identifies what is a major focus in my reading of paramythi in my chosen writers’ texts, namely the interrelationship between language and cultural identity.

When we analyse traces of the paramythi in the various texts, we are taking into account the writing subject’s history, which has affected his or her artistic and socio-cultural vision, and, since there are such varied uses of the paramythi, it tells us that there are very different histories within the apparently ‘homogenous’ Greek Australian group. Kalimnios uses allusions that take us on kaleidoscopic, historical journeys stretching from the East Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. He includes pre-Christian, Aramaic, Arabic and Byzantine Orthodox symbols and sayings, which show that he is wrestling with ‘pre-conceived ideas of Paradise and

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primeval states of being’.

Charkianakis reveals a metaphysical, mystical world in his religious poems, while Tsiolkas’s mythic allusions explore superstitions that continue to exercise a powerful force on the Greek mind. Ricoeur’s ideas on interpretation of metaphor are useful, because the paramythi functions as an extended metaphor of a very diverse Greek society living in the Antipodes, and one that is divided in regards to tradition, and polarised between beliefs based on Orthodox Christian values and a pre-Christian antediluvian supernatural mythology (which continues to have a significant influence in some sectors of the home and diasporic population). I will be using a biblical type of hermeneutic interpretation on the religious texts by Charkianakis and Kalimnios, because some of their narrative poems are similar to parables, which contemporary Christian scholars such as John Dominic Crossan, Bernard B. Scott and Ernst Fuchs view as metaphorical texts. It is Crossan who sees parables as pluralist and ambivalent in meaning when he states that ‘myth establishes world…satire attacks world [and] parable subverts world’. When Charkianakis uses the paramythi as a parable, he subverts a rational and materialist world view. His parable-like poems introduce a metaphysical and spiritual vision when he is borrowing from the teachings of Church fathers, or from contemporary Orthodox ascetics. When he includes the paramythi in the beginning of his poem, as an epigram, or when he uses the rhythms of Byzantine hymnology, or Patristic

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41 Kalimnios, email interview.
admonitions, he could be using it in order to draw in the common person, who might otherwise be excluded because of his highbrow poetics.

Paul Ricoeur highlights the need for explanation rather than simply inviting outsiders to understand the text, and he points out that metaphors of the creative type are not a substitute for analogies, but convey cognitive truths…and involve change, movement and transposition’. He also argues that language undergoes creative mutation and transformation. Language will be explored both from a Bakhtinian perspective in respect to heteroglossia, and on the basis of Ricoeur’s ideas on the metaphorical dimension of language. For biblical and cultural scholars, the paramythi functions as a living metaphor. The traditional poets use the paramythi symbolically as a way of connecting to the past, while re-imagining idyllic worlds of innocence. The experimental writers, by contrast, transform the paramythi by using it to frame their explorations of the subconscious, trauma or subliminal areas. Antigone Kefala frames her tale *Alexia* as a secular parable told through the voice of a child narrator, while she infuses it with a pervasive sense of irony that challenges authority, and so ‘has the power…to project itself outside itself and to give birth to a world that would truly be the ‘thing’ referred to by the text’. It is from a European world that is being erased, a world that has a different linguistic and cultural code that this diasporic writer views her present. Fotini

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Epanomitis’ *The Mule’s Foal* targets sexual boundaries and the stereotype when, in her fantastical story, she uses the ambivalent female (with male characteristics) protagonist as her narrator. In both of these inverted paramythia, the readers are invited to complete the meaning as in parables, even though these stories could be considered to be anti-parables.

In his study ‘Oneself as Another: The Identity of the Self, “Otherness”, and Narrative’, Ricoeur discusses a problem that recurs frequently in this study: the problem of negotiating selfhood when the self is in the process of change. His ideas on a hermeneutics of suspicion, while directed at interpreting Freudian ideas on dreams, can be applied in this study of the paramythi to recover the underlying meaning within the text. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and Jakobson’s communication model, allows for an interpretation that considers the textual features of the paramythi, but also considers the writer’s socio-historical positioning within the context of change. It also acknowledges the reader as an interpreter who translates the cultural significance of the paramythi according to his/her pre-understanding of the cultural significance of the paramythi.

Not all the texts in this thesis function as parables. Many are fantastical anti-parables that exploit the subversive element through the imagination. Rosemary Jackson’s ideas on fantasy fiction, although written from a psychoanalytic and Marxist perspective (which this study does not aim to explore), do illuminate Epanomitis’ fantastical and provocative tale *The
Mule’s Foal. It is steeped in allegories that ‘trace the unsaid and unseen culture: that has been silenced, made invisible, covered up and made absent’. Jackson prefers to call the fantastical ‘a literary mode rather than a genre’ and to place it between opposite modes of the marvelous and the mimetic. Within Epanomitis’ fantastical text there is room for playing with genre, since her story crosses into the realms of the real, the uncanny and the imaginary. The Mule’s Foal is transgressive of the dominant order and represents in-betweenness in an original way, although there are similarities with magical realist texts. Fantasy, Jackson writes, ‘is not an escape from literature, but rather… imagines the possibility of radical cultural transformations through attempting to shatter the boundaries between the imaginary and the symbolic’.

If we combine Ricoeur’s insights on the metaphor and the transformative effects through language with Bakhtin’s ideas on heteroglossia and Jackson’s fantasy theory, then the paramythic texts can, like fantasy literature, take us from the fictional world of make-believe and transport us to a real and confronting present. If, by contrast, we apply Michael de Certeau’s concept of ‘mystic speech’, representing a trope which explores a metaphysical dimension, it allows us to interpret the paramythic layers as a parable transmitting Eastern Orthodox religious symbols and beliefs. These oral traces, the hymnological rhythms, the images and the wise sayings transport the reader to view a world outside of time such as we

47 Jackson, Fantasy, p. 178.
note in Charkianakis’ religious poems. When he articulates the migrant experience of being torn from one’s familial ties and the desire for stability, he elevates this struggle to a spiritual dimension by using religious symbols, but also by quoting sayings of Orthodox Church fathers in the prologue of some of his poems. In his poem ‘Travelling’, for example we note how this religious poet negotiates the migrant journey through an Eastern Orthodox perspective, which deems accepting tribulation with patience as a virtue. ‘Travelling is an unfulfilled promise until the moment you accepted deprivation and mistreatment.’

Similar paradoxical connections that use the theme of travelling are part of De Certeau’s oeuvre, when he uses religious symbolism to negotiate change in a positive way: ‘continuity is found in rupture, stability in Abrahamic wandering’.  

Homi Bhabha’s ideas on the subversive potential of hybridity, which challenges ‘the erasure of the real history of the other, the women, the homosexuals, the natives through stereotype and colonial policies of exclusion’ can be applied to Epanomitis, Kefala, Kalimnios and even Tsiolkas, since all of these writers challenge the ‘erasure’ of the margins. The paramythi can represent Bhabha’s encrypted narrative, which subverts official policies of exclusion. It may also signify a Greek version of a ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ that challenges mainstream Australian

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literature by asserting ‘the right to difference in equality’. Bhabha advocates for a better understanding of ‘belonging’ based on a rethinking of our national and communal identity in a global world, through a polemical ‘right to narrate’. The texts in this study can be seen as employing similar tactics when the writers enunciate selfhood as different. The female writers will be shown to co-opt Bhabha because, as part of a minority, they need legitimacy in order to challenge the boundaries, and so they appeal to the legitimacy of their past cultural traditions even as they defamiliarise these in order to enunciate their sense of selfhood.

Just as Bhabha argues that it is a matter of processes rather than essences that are involved in the construction of cultural identity, so, too, the paramythic signifies a process in which the diasporic subject is negotiating selfhood amidst change and exposure to foreign cultural influences. The feminist writers in this thesis re-tell their story as a paramythi, but in fact they are enunciating their sense of selfhood while being aware of the position from which they speak and the position from which the reader reads. They use their minority positioning as a way to break or transgress privileged meanings. Their stories are highly complex and dare to speak of the unspeakable through writing. Sneja Gunew discusses female marginality from the perspective of a diasporic and a minority writer, which encourages transformations across differences by actively

\[51\] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. xi, xiii, xx
translating culture-specific codes of behavior across all groups’. The paramythic transformations that will be explored in this thesis represent such a cultural code that is specific to the Greek Australian group, but it can be shown to be a strong feature in other diasporic and indigenous groups as well.53

Kristeva demonstrates that disturbing elements are played out in poetry, literature and art. We see this in her theory of the abject as neither a subject nor an object, ‘it is not a thing but a process, it is both inside and outside and so threatens boundaries and distinctions by resisting distinctions, ambiguously inhabiting the borders, the margins…the abject always threatens to break down and subvert the symbolic order’.54 She explains such doubling in her theory of intertextuality.55 In Epanomitis, we recognize the interplay between Kristeva’s intertextuality and Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia as ‘the mosaic of quotations’ within a field of ‘transpositions of various signifying systems’.56 Epanomitis could be using such a feminist subversive strategy, which invites a rethinking of identity by showing ‘the interaction of consciousness…every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled

53 Oral traditions are referred to by Canadian researcher. See Kamboureli, On the Edge of Genre, p. 21; J. Pivato and S. Totosy de Zepetnek, Literatures of Lesser Diffusion, Research Institute for Comparative Literature, Edmonton, 1988.
55 Julia Kristeva, La Revolution du Language Poetique (Revolution in Poetic Language), Seuil, Paris, 1974, p. 60.
with struggle’. Rather than mourn the loss of her originary culture, Epanomitis uses and exploits parts of her inherited cultural practices in order to subvert its patriarchal elements and enunciate her new identity. Female writers who are from a migrant background are twice colonized because of gender and ethnicity, but I will argue that the subversive paramythi allows them to overcome the problem of speaking in a woman’s voice. When they show the stereotype of their selfhood and then subvert it through carnival or mimicry, they are intervening in the process by which ‘woman’ is constructed. When writers from a highly patriarchal culture dislodge the familiar and the comforting paramythic voice of the past through carnival, satire and play, meaning is opened up, but also distorted because there is no longer a single meaning, fixed boundaries nor a sense of closure. These paramythic texts describe outsider (Greek) realities and ‘unrealities’ (metaphysical, religious or superstitious beliefs), and like Jakobson’s verbal art, show the ambiguity of living between two cultures and different languages.

Since the poems are written in Greek, I translate those which do not have any available translations. Throughout this process I try to retain the aesthesis, or the poetic experience and the culturally specific character of the text, knowing that the meaning will appear strange to those who are from a non-Greek background. My translation is not aimed at transcending

57 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, p. 32.
the intentionality of the text, but I specifically want to translate it in its foreignness.\textsuperscript{60} Concurring with Jauss’ insights, I acknowledge that my explanations and interpretations are affected by my own Antipodean positioning and horizon of expectations. Since I have directly experienced the paramythi through narration solely in the Greek language, I consider that the power of the paramythic language should be maintained. Therefore, I will often include the poems that I am analysing in their original Greek form, and place the translated version next to it so that the reader can have a direct, as well as a mediated experience, of the poem in its source and target language. I will frame this through the cultural studies model of translation to engage with the social and cultural significance of the differences between languages. As Sherry Simons points out, ‘translation…destabilizes cultural identities and becomes the basis for new modes of cultural creation.’\textsuperscript{61} Translating the symbolism of the paramythi, which is a foreign concept for non-Greek readers, can enable readers from other cultural backgrounds to realise deeper meanings within these diasporic texts, but it also deconstructs the fixed ‘Greek’ diasporic identity. The translator or interpreter must be willing to navigate the tradition, either with an insider perspective or from an in-between ‘insider-outsider’ perspective and use, as I will be doing, knowledge of both languages in order to allow the conversation to continue.

\textsuperscript{60} T. Niranjana, \textit{Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context}, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p. 116. Niranjana states that ‘the accuracy of transmitting the form and the meaning of the original could also refer to the translator’s capacity to recognize what is in the text that claims us.’

How did I come to this research?

My interest in stories began in the 1960s at the same time that I had begun to realize that I was different from many of my Anglo-Celtic peers living in a beach-side suburb of Sydney. A sense of my father’s broken English articulated in the Australian public space reinforced for me a growing awareness of my own linguistic and cultural ‘otherness’, despite the fact that physically I did not stand out as a foreigner. My father’s paramythia, the lively images that he conjured in his oral art form, reinforced my loyalty and admiration for him as they allowed me to see another side to him. He was no longer the marginalized migrant labourer with the stunted vocabulary, but the powerful storyteller whose vivid stories enabled dreams and wishes to become a ‘real’ possibility, albeit momentarily, during the actual moments of the paramythic experience. The paramythic voice articulated extraordinary tales and imaginative adventures, and transported both of us to a timeless zone, a borderless space in which ‘otherness’ did not matter. This was our shared moment of abandonment in which the migrant storyteller let go all those handicaps and inadequacies that had muted him because of his lack of competence with the English language. I came to realize that those stories, which had inspired me in my formative years, were not merely Greek imaginative fairytales or didactic tales, but had shaped my initial encounter with the culture of my parents. Indirectly, paramythia had transmitted the rhythms, the philosophy and the language of another world that was different from my present reality, but was not out of synchrony with the way in which I interpreted my present. Cultural otherness could be meaningfully mediated through stories, and so,
as a natural progression, my own creative writing borrowed from this traditional narrative practice while using another linguistic code.

Although this account of my own experience might seem simplistic and perhaps naïve, it emphasizes the areas that form the focus of this research, which are the paramythi and cultural identity in the Antipodes. By interpreting the various ways that Greek Australian writers Stylianos Charkianakis, Dean Kalimnios, Antigone Kefala, Fotini Epanomitis and Christos Tsiolkas use the paramythi in their literary texts, I am in fact engaging with the way diasporic writers have used, changed, transformed or subverted a traditional Greek narrative form. I will not be discussing the whole range of texts that these writers have produced, but only those which use the paramythi.
CHAPTER 2: DEFINING PARAMYTHI

The reader of a poem or the viewer of a painting has a vivid awareness of two orders: the traditional canon and the artistic novelty as a deviation from that canon. It is precisely against the background of the tradition that innovation is conceived.

Roman Jakobson.¹

Within a Greek cultural context, and since antiquity, myth and paramythi have had a very long and entangled relationship. Paramythi connotes a demotic (laiko) prosaic tale which has a fictional status, and when used as an adjective it signifies a consolatory function, encouragement, exhortation, reassurance or gentle persuasion. If we consider para-mythi etymologically, we have the sense that it originates from myth or lies on its periphery, but it can also mean ‘in spite of,’ in which case it could suggest a parody of myth, or a counter-myth. In this chapter, my aim is to discuss the way I am conceptualizing and using paramythi in this thesis, while distinguishing it from Greek myth. So, initially I will discuss the problem of separating these two terms since, they are often used interchangeably. I will also discuss certain formal characteristic features of Greek myth, how the Greek mythic tradition has changed over time, and then, by comparison, I will discuss various types of paramythi, how these differ from myth, and what overlaps are evident when they are used in a literary way. In the next chapter, I will show how certain Modern Greek writers have co-opted and appropriated paramythi in some of their literary texts.

After Modern Greece became an independent nation, there was a period of political instability between the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. In this period, we find there were some Modern Greek writers who returned to, and rejuvenated the mythic and paramythic forms in a literary way. Some writers used myth as a connection with the ancient heroic past, while others used the oral tradition, folktales and ballads as a palimpsest of the past, a way to assert an authentic ‘Greekness,’ while speaking through an uncontaminated Greek voice apparently free from Western European ideas and aesthetic trends. In both cases, we see that myth and paramythi contain familiar Greek mythological or folkloric characters, motifs and types, refer to actual Greek places, and engage with familiar Greek themes.

G.S. Kirk, in his study *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* describes myth and folktale as two separate narrative genres which had begun in early antiquity. In *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Kirk traces the history of Greek myths, their different forms, and the attitudes that they gave rise to, such as life’s transience, relations with gods and with humans (and in particular women). He explores the religious, social and political significance of myths, and their evolution. He discusses how classical poets used the mythic and folkloric heritage, and how myths were transformed and became more complex with the introduction of literacy. He also charts the evolution of traditional Homeric and other

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myths, arguing that dramatists such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes re-imagined and reinterpreted myths in their own creative works, in order to be more relevant for their audience. He explains that, despite the challenges to traditional beliefs, which undermined the mythic gods and heroes’ ‘divine’ status, myth retained its socio-cultural influence since it was ingrained into the very fabric of Greek life. Greek myth was significant in the Greek religious and moral social system, and it also affected personal behaviour, since, as Kirk states, ‘at the most popular level the Iliad and the Odyssey remained a familiar treasury of ancestral morality and practical wisdom’.  

Kirk’s analysis of Greek myths provides us with an outsider’s view of Greek myths primarily in the period of classical antiquity. I am extending the field to include religious myths from the early Christian era up until contemporary times, since these religious myths and legends have played a significant role in the way that modern Greek society has expressed itself and has been educated. Artemis Leontis points out that the neo-Hellenic literary cultural project ‘absorbed as many layers of Greek oral and written traditions as it could: not just Homer’s epic poems and Aeschylus’ tragedies but also Byzantine liturgical music, demotic and popular songs, and Cretan Renaissance literature’.  

Leontis further points out that religious symbols and stories were dominant cultural forms during the Byzantine era and beyond. Stories of saints were written in synaxaria and they served a pedagogical role, since they transmitted the Orthodox ethos.

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in a lively and emblematic way through oral, visual and written accounts of saint’s lives, through hagiography, martyrology, hymnology and iconography.\(^6\) These narratives are not simply biographies or chapters in Church history, but instead they represent a verbal icon of the saint’s life narrative. For readers who are not familiar with the Orthodox Christian faith, these myths and legends may appear incredible, dubious stories. For the faithful Orthodox Christian, however, they represent divinely inspired truths which contain ‘the myth and mystery of the Orthodox Christian tradition’.\(^7\)

Kirk’s discussion of the relationship between myths and folktales does not engage with the Christian era, but his study is important since it highlights the problem of separating myth from folktales. He discusses instances of mobility between folktales and myths, such as the Perseus story, with the folktale motif of ingenuity; and the tale of the Odyssey, which contains the trickster motif.\(^8\) This does not provide us with any significant evidence as to whether myths evolved from folktales, or vice versa. Rather, like Kirk, we note that no binary categorization of traditional tales is likely to be satisfactory, and that it is more useful to think of myth and paramythia as secular or sacred myths which are part of a hierarchical narrative order. Within this order, myth occupies a privileged position, while paramythi, as a demotic narrative form, occupies a lower position in this order.\(^9\) Both

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\(^7\) Catherine Tsacalos, (in conversation), December 12, 2010.


myth and paramythi find their way into tales that reflect deeper preoccupations, even though it is myth that has the status of ‘possessing a special aura’, since it is ‘concerned with profound subjects, such as the “sacred” or supernatural origins of things’.  

Folklorists distinguish myths from folktales by collecting, transcribing and categorising each tale according to its type and motifs. Folktales, according to Kirk, ‘are designed for the people, for Everyman, and they are kept as general and universal as possible’. The following point neatly sums up his argument:

Myths often have a serious underlying purpose beyond that of telling a story. Folktales, on the other hand, tend to reflect simple situations: they play on ordinary fears and desires as well as on men’s appreciation of neat and ingenious solutions…both genres are, to different degrees, controlled by the laws of story-telling, which operate more prominently - more crudely, perhaps - in folktales than in myths. In practice we have seen, the two often overlap…

I am using Kirk’s idea of a hierarchical order and I specifically focus on paramythi, not folklore, even though there are overlaps, since both are oral narrative forms which do not purport to tell factual truth. By placing these forms on a spectrum, we are avoiding the problem of origins.

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11 Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, p. 34.
In early classical times, in Hellenistic and Roman imperialistic ages, but also in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine era, and in modern times, Greek myths and paramythia have been transmitted orally by storytellers, passed on through the generations by storytellers, mothers and grandmothers, songsters and bards, changing and evolving with each retelling. Therefore, these oral traditional tales are not considered to be the work of a specific author, but are resilient, changing forms that have a communal and local character. They often have a didactic or sardonic role and codify societal mores, and reveal regional customs, or they encourage the sense of a proud Greek national identity by referring to the heroic past. Myths undergo significant transformations with the introduction of writing, and become quite complex even from antiquity according to Kirk and Ioannis Kakridis, as will be discussed later. Paramythia on the other hand, remain predominantly an oral phenomenon until the late nineteenth century. After 1871, folklorists such as Nilolaos Politis collect and compile paramythia in written form in anthologies, journals and periodicals. Politis connects certain tales with particular communities and regions in Greece, while comparing the customs and lore of modern Greece with those of Ancient Greece. Georgios Megas’ text, *Folktales of Greece* mimicks folklorist trends set by European scholars Antti Aarne-Stith Thompson and Max Luthi, who had collected and compiled folktale and fairytale anthologies.

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14 Ben Amos, foreword to Luthi, *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1982, p. vii. Luthi sought to identify formal characteristics of folktales through structural and stylistic analysis, in order to establish certain criteria, such as oral and thematic formulas and structures, for what he saw as a specific genre of the European folk narrative.
Megas categorizes oral tales according to types and motifs such as animal tales, wonder tales, tales in which kindness is rewarded and evil is punished, tales of fate, jokes, anecdotes and religious tales and legends about spirits and magical places.

If we compare Megas’ view of Greek tales with Max Luthi’s European view of folktales, we find in both cases a tendency to romanticize the folktale. This phenomenon is typical of a nineteenth century view of literature as ‘an organic manifestation of a connection between language, spirit and nation’. Artemis Leontis argues that ‘the turn to folklore is directly related to wider European and Greek nationalistic trends, which sought to mobilize the nation’s history, geography, society, politics, language, folklore, art forms and popular culture in order to maintain a defensive, provincial and nostalgically introverted self-sustaining ethnocentrism’. This trend was promoted in Greece through Politis’ influential periodical Estia. Writers were encouraged to use village life, peasantry and rural settings since these were deemed to reflect ‘the true image of the Greek soul’. Alexandros Papadamantis’ short stories written in the late nineteenth century are examples of such an ethnocentric turn, since his paramythic stories are deeply rooted in Greek space, as is evident in ‘Tales from a Greek Island’, a set of twelve stories which capture the folk ways of Greece with a particular emphasis on describing the sea and

15 Max Luthi, The European Folktale, pp.1-38.
the land. These stories, according to Leontis, promote an ‘alliance with a
pre-modern type of “Greekness” free from European and classical
influences. His characters are often devout Orthodox types, and his
settings are realistic depictions of impoverished lives and broken spirits,
particularly dramatic in his story Ei Fonissa (The Murderess).

The Greek folklorists Georgios Megas and Demetris Loukopoulos, like
European scholars, Propp, Luthi and Thompson, treat folktales as cultural
art that needs to be preserved so that it is not forgotten. The fact that
Megas compiles paramythia from the journal Laographia, from published
and unpublished folklore archives, and from N.G. Polites’ Paradoseis
(Legends), indicates that paramythia often reveal historical, geographical
and cultural information about a certain region or community.

There are many laographic texts from the various regions of Greece which describe
the values and customs, costumes, ways of living, rules governing the
behaviour of the different genders, and the rituals accompanying rites of
passage, of the regions from which the tales originate. They also refer to
local sayings, superstitions, and folk cultural phenomena such as songs and
stories as well as topical names and expressions, and highlight sacred and
historical sites. Greek paramythia, often alluded to in laographic texts,
share more in common with Eastern cultures – the Gypsy, Turkish, Arabic,
Persian, and Indian wonder tales – than with Northern or Western

19 A. Papadiamantis, Tales From A Greek Island, E. Constantinides trans., John Hopkins
21 G. Megas, Folktales of Greece, H. Colaclides trans., University of Chicago Press,
22 Examples include S. Rousali-Liatsintou, Laographia of Leonidion, Academy of Athens,
Athens, 1977; G. N. Katsalidas, Demotic Songs From Northern Epirus, Gutenburg,
Europe. These are not necessarily the same as the fairytale, which Luthi distinguishes from the folktale. In the Greek case, these types are not so clearly distinguished from each other, since folktales and fairytales and legends begin with once-upon-a-time even while they are often grounded in actual social and historical events that happened in a certain region or place to living persons. The European method provides Megas, Loukopoulos and Alexiou with the tools to distinguish between the different types of tales, but it does not identify social and cultural contexts, nor the social conditions of production, nor the variability of paramythia, since there are tales which do not always fit into these categories, as is the case with some paramythia that are not folkloric.

According to Dorson, the non-folkloric types of paramythic tales are didactic tales about everyday life and have a fundamental utopian idealism. Contrary to the ‘happy ever after’ ending usually found in the European folktales, Greek paramythia often display a matter-of-fact popular wisdom, are connected to nationalistic concerns, or have a religious moralistic focus. In the klephtic sayings, for example, we note the repeated allusion to the Greek national dream of a restoration of lost Hellenic lands, and in particular Constantinople. ‘Παλέ με χρόνια με καυρούς πάλι δικά μας θάνε’ (‘Again in time they [colonised Greek lands] will become ours’). This theme has been taken up by poets as well as clerics. Kosmas Aitolos (1714-1779) teaches the illiterate rural population of northern Greece using

23 Alexiou, Beyond Antiquity, pp. 216-218.
oral stories and inspires them with the dream of freedom and reignites their hope for autonomy. Father Paisios (1924-1994), a famous contemporary Athonite monk, revisits the same dream centuries later, prophesying that Constantinople will be returned to the Greeks one day. Religious stories are the example *par excellence* of the didactic tale that distils the Orthodox ethos in an interesting way, and often include references to the Greek topos even though they highlight an ‘other worldly’ ethos. *St Gregory of Nazianzus: Three Poems*, for example, is the earliest piece of Christian autobiography and in the first of his three long poems *Concerning His Own Life* gives details of his infancy and early childhood. He refers to his travels through Greek cities and ports, Athens, Corinth and Thassos, and when referring to his abiding friendship with Basil, he mentions the Greek topos, ‘We made a team, if I may boast a little, that was celebrated throughout Greece’. This religious author uses pastoral images to produce a folkloric type of parable, as indicated when referring to his parishioners as ‘parched souls, the light still burning in the lamp would be nourished by absorbing oil’. This imagery is specifically directed to a rural population, which is further reinforced when Nazianzus depicts his own vocation, ‘a pastor of citizens…I was a prosperous husbandman, even though my harvest was not yet completely assembled. I had but recently gleaned some of them from the thorns’. Other religious tales such as various synaxaria are not as complex as those constructed by St Gregory of Nazianzus, but they read like a biographical story with some degree of fictional,

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paramythic embellishment. These texts reflect social concerns which are based in the ‘here and now, or in the hope for a better time to come.’

There are other writers spanning a period from the late nineteenth century until contemporary times, such as Stratis Myrivilis, Dimitris Hatzis, Yorgos Iannou and Nikos Kazantzakis, Elli Alexiou and Rhea Galanakis, who are positioned in a very different way to those who use paramythi in a religious or nationalistic way. This group of writers deconstruct history and the idea of a pure national identity tied to the Eastern Orthodox ethos. Georgios Vizyenos, for example, has no interest in Byzantium and prefers European trends. He associates the Byzantine influence with clericalism, as indicated by his comment to A. Zachos, ‘I don’t want to become a cleric, but to learn letters’. Vizyenos writes literary short stories and children’s literature, engaging with ethnological themes such as the coexistence of Greeks, Slavs and Turks in the Balkans, the dialogue between Greeks (Ottoman Greeks, diasporic Greeks) and shows a connection between Europe and modern and ancient Hellenism in his texts *Between Piraeus, Naples, and The Only Voyage of His Life*. This writer’s paramythia are subversive since he defamiliarises the paramythic genre and avoids ‘pure’ Greek mores, while challenging what he sees as hierarchical order imposed by society by using the paralogous and split identity characterization. Such texts show the heterogeneous nature of Greek culture, and acknowledge Byzantine, Arab and Turkish influences. These

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texts represent transitional genres with polyphonic elements, since they are situated in-between fiction and life narratives.29

The historical legendary paramythia, the religious paradoseis and the non-traditional heterogeneous texts, such as Vizyenos’ work described in the previous paragraph, are closely related to fictional historiography and folktales, since they have a similar open narrative form. Paramythia purport to be grounded in historical truthfulness or fact, in contradistinction to fairytales or folktales that are deemed to be ‘not true,’ merely enjoyable or suspenseful and often end in the ‘happy ever after’ formula. In the Greek fairy or wonder tale, this formula includes the reader and others by ending with ‘they lived well, and we lived even better’.30 This shows a communal function whereas the European fairytale maintains an individual focus. Richard Dorson points out that Greeks traditionally prefer the myth and the legend, rather than Marchen (the fabricated fictional tale) because they seek historical anchorage, and often contrive legends to masquerade as history.31 He uses the example of Herodotus’ history of The Persian Wars in which the ancient Greek historian inserts personal anecdotes and graphic incidents to authenticate and personalise the chronicle of a large scale happening, even though Herodotus was not an eye-witness.32

29 Alexiou, Writing against Silence, p. 226.
30 Alexiou, After Antiquity, p. 212.
In Greek storytelling practice, myth and paramythi are often terms which are used interchangeably, in contradistinction to European practice, which distinguishes myth from allegory and legend. When Kirk distinguishes the folktale from myth, he acknowledges that, while the two forms overlap, he is choosing to separate the two ‘genres’ because he is exploring the symbolic function of folktale motifs in myth. I, however, am exploring the paramythi’s symbolic and aesthetic function in order to gain access into the various ways in which identity is represented in certain Greek Australian literary texts. So despite the fact that, in the Greek case, there have not been clear definitions regarding traditional tales and paramythia, or adequate reasons supporting their distinctness as separate genres from myth, I choose to delineate the paramythi from myth, not in the sense that they signify two separate genres, but in the sense that paramythi represents a low-brow literary variation, or an inversion of the mythic form. Kirk’s idea of a hierarchy of myths is what dominates my conceptualization of paramythi. In order to understand how paramythi is used, Fredric Jameson’s interpretation of Northrop Frye’s view of oral tales is useful, since paramythi begins as an oral phenomenon. However, it can represent a significant unit within a more complex story, since according to Jameson:

…the oral tales of a tribal society, the fairytales that are the irrepresible voice and expression of the under classes of the great systems of domination, adventure stories and melodrama, and the
popular and mass culture of our own time are all syllables and broken fragments of some immense story.\textsuperscript{33}

Paramythi on a literary philosophical level does not profess to engage with the bigger questions that the mythic explores, but it does deal with familiar everyday concerns. These concerns are symbolically abstracted through stories, and so paramythi can be considered to be part of a ‘bigger story’ that has been framed in this thesis as the struggle for identity when negotiating different cultural influences and languages. Since paramythi is closely related to the oral tradition, but is expressed in a literary way, it can be interpreted in a mythic way rather than a folkloric way, even though it has various formal features which overlap with folktales. Contemporary neo-Hellenic scholars Artemis Leontis, David Ricks, and Stathis Gauntlett re-engage with such lower-brow forms and realize that the ‘turn to the demotic tradition is not only a nineteenth century phenomenon but it is also constitutive of the avant-garde literary aims of the Generation of the Thirties’\textsuperscript{34}. Ricks argues that ‘this generation emulates folk poetry style for broader purposes’ while further pointing out that ‘it is not easy to disentangle the folk and the learned traditions’.\textsuperscript{35} He shows that paramythi has been deployed for other than solely nationalistic purposes, and he cites the example of Seferis, who deploys folk poetry in some of his high-brow poems so as ‘to invert readers’ expectations’.\textsuperscript{36} It is this potential that my

\textsuperscript{34} Yannis Dallas, \textit{Πλάγιος Λόγος (Oblique Logos)}, Kastaniotis, Athens, 1989, p.11.
\textsuperscript{36} Ricks, ‘The Bottom of the Well’, p. 76.
analysis of paramythi seeks to explore, since it works in a similar way to the subversive potential that Jack Zipes sees in the modern fairy tale.\textsuperscript{37} Experimentation with folktales and myths indicates that the writer may be challenging conservatism, traditional institutions and a particular type of Greekness that was linked with nineteenth century national policies in which language and literature were co-opted to represent the spirit of the neo-Hellenic identity. Rather than ascribing to this dominant nationalistic ethos, some writers experiment with paramythi, since their texts contain traces of paramythic tones, diction, versification, folk metre and motifs, but they use these in a different way, either in order to disrupt reader expectations, or to make their own statements against what they see as the myths of the past. These issues will be treated in more depth in the next chapter.

Contemporary Neo-Hellenic critics are interpreting modern Greek literature in new ways as we saw in Rick’s appraisal of Seferis’ deployment of folk poetry. Beyond this, the early twentieth century writers’ preference for using myth and elevated language over the demotic folk heritage has undergone various phases, depending on prevailing literary trends. According to Ricks, it was the folklorists who were the most relevant poets in the mid-nineteenth century, although it was difficult to discern because of the increasing obsession with classical models in shaping national consciousness.\textsuperscript{38} Ricks argues that the poets of the generation of the 1930s, ‘starting with Palamas, felt the need to revitalize


\textsuperscript{38} Ricks, ‘The Bottom of the Well’, p. 75.
folk poetry, since it was a key source of cultural reference’.  

I would argue that the mythic tradition has a similar pattern, as we see in Ritsos’ cycle of mythological poems, and in Seferis’ ‘Mythistorema’. While writers such as Miltos Sachtouris show an affinity with folk ballads and folk songs, we cannot dismiss the fact that they also deploy a mythic element as well. Myth and paramythi, the landscape and the traditional cultural creative practices are interrelated, and provide a point of reference and a link between antiquity, pre-modern and modern history, and the present. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard argue that:

The ancient world in all its aspects preoccupies the imagination of these poets constantly. This preoccupation is only natural in a country which, like Greece, remains full of physical remnants of antiquity…the Greek poet…can evoke characters and settings that have mythological overtones with less danger of being merely literary in doing so…since his own natural landscape is that to which these gods and heroes themselves once belonged and in which they still confront the mind’s eye plausibly.  

While the Greek landscape and mythological characters remain a dominant aesthetic motif in Greek literature, the late nineteenth, and early twentieth century poets explored societal concerns that had to do with national survival and continuity. They reflected a growing national anxiety over its cultural identity and its Greek character. Anastasia Anastasiadou supports this view on the grounds that during the interwar years the Greek

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39 Ricks, ‘The Bottom of the Well’, p. 75.
state co-opted literature into defining the national Greek character. She points out that ‘the 1930s’ turn towards aesthetics, in the Greek case, did not mean that they ignored Greek history since it was important for them’. Concerns over a national cultural identity intensified during and after the civic and national strife of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the World Wars and the Civil War, and subsequent mass migration. The social, religious and political fabric of society was being challenged in an extreme way, especially in the aftermath of the Civil War, which irreparably divided Greece between conservatives and radicals, between left and right. Leontis argues that ‘although some Modern Greek poets sought to Europeanise their art, in order to emulate artistic and philosophical developments in the West, the ethno-centrists turned inwards towards Greece and Greekness’. Within the latter group, Leontis argues we find the well-known national poets, and winners of the Nobel Prize for literature, George Seferis and Odysseas Elytis, who sought to re-define Greekness on Greek terms, even though their art is not always so obviously ethnocentric. They were considered to be reacting to foreign Western universalising influences, even though they themselves were borrowing from French and English modernist literary trends such as surrealism and the high modernism of T.S. Eliot. Their neo-Hellenic modernism according to Leontis ‘insisted on its own native authenticity. It restored interest in its local forms…It reaffirmed its indigenous ties with Hellenic tradition’. Philip Sherrard refers to Elytis’ often-quoted saying, taken

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from his text *Analogies of Light*, ‘I and my generation have attempted to find the true face of Greece’.\(^4^4\) Elytis often uses a mythological style as well as surreal imagery, while Seferis, on the other hand, refers to the demotic tradition as ‘a living tradition, not solidified and unchanging’. He argues that ‘our folksong can in the sensitivity of one and the same person throw fresh light on Homer, and fill in the meaning of Aeschylus’.\(^4^5\) While both poets appear to occupy opposite poles, the one elitist, the other demoticist, they are both articulating the same concern over self-expression and Greekness. Leontis points out that the issue of identity is connected to the contradictions inherent within Greek society, but also within the Greek character itself, divided not only ideologically, politically and philosophically but also socially and religiously.\(^4^6\) Herzfeld articulates this, from a sociological point of view, as a dichotomy: ‘the separation between society that is rational, civilized and a product of much historical change, and one which is rural, semi-literate, primitive, superstitious and unchanging’.\(^4^7\) I argue that another major division is between institutional and counter-institutional alignments, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Features of Greek myth.**

The lexical meaning, according to *The Dictionary of Contemporary Hellenic Demotic Language*, defines myth as ‘a story which was created...

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by logic and imagination to produce an impressionable story about the society of gods, people and animals’. Greek myths are oral and written narratives which are formed through significant symbolic oppositions, such as those evident in Aeschylean tragedy, a dialectics between the paternal and the maternal, god and man, light and darkness, freedom and slavery. This is obvious in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, in which the protagonist refers to the binary structure imposed in the human and supernatural world by Zeus: ‘Straightway he called the gods, and gave each one His place and honours’. This binary structure frames the tragic narrative of the human child who chooses to defy an unjust god:

And chaos is on sea and sky…
The blast of Zeus in terror strong!
Tis here.-O Earth, O Mother mine
Most holy, O thou Sky divine,
Whose light is shed on all, ye see
This anguish and this wrong!  

We find that oppositions are highlighted through references to Greece’s diverse landscape, the antithesis between its urban and rural settings, the soil, the sea and the sky. Greek myths use a series of variations on Homeric language and technique such as the traditional hexameter, the trimeter and the elegiac form, which later used the twelve-syllable verse form of the Byzantines. They often employ a rhetorical and didactic tone,
and in religious and nationalistic myths may use military symbols such as the horse and the sword, symbolising victory over barbarians and evil. In Sophocles’ *King Oedipus*, the chorus retells the prophetic tale of doom using the language of authority to denounce Oedipus as an impostor: ‘Out from the snowy dawn on high Parnassus / The order flashed, to hunt a man from his hiding…From the heart of Earth they cry against him’.  

This type of imagery replicates the binary structure which is evident in hierarchical institutions. The poetic diction exploits vocabulary and syntax which is not used in daily vernacular or demotic speech and so it suggests an elevated discourse. This is obvious if we compare a similar scenario, from the demotic folksong tradition, in which the songster presents a similar prophecy of impending doom, but using an idiomatic language of the people, as well as an address to a common person:

> Look and see, the season which charos chose to take you, Kuriako,  
> Kuriako.  
> Kuriako my lad,  
> now that the branches flower  
> and the earth yields grass.  

Kuriako is a young resistance fighter, and it is his name which is invoked, whereas in the myth of King Oedipus the protagonist who is doomed to be destroyed has royal blood. Often myth opens with an invocation to the gods or the muse, and might enumerate the persons, places or objects in

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52 ‘Look and see the season which was chosen’, ll. 1-6, in ‘Song of National Resistance’, in Katsalidas, *Demotic Songs of Northern Epirus*, no. 267, p. 225.
order to broaden the context of the unfolding story. It uses repetition of epithets and formulaic expressions. Repetition is also used in paramythia, as indicated in the previous demotic song, but the emphasis is different. It is like a lament, whereas in the myth it operates as rhetoric. Greek myth is, therefore, associated with conservatism, as Kirk argues in his study, *Greek Myth*, when he states:

> By Homer’s time…myths had developed an exemplary role that is in one way an extreme application of primary charter functions. It stimulated a restricted kind of generalisation, yet its main effect was conservative and highly discouraging to new ways of thought.\(^53\)

Kakridis points out dramatists such as Aristophanes and Euripides did not show the proper respect to the mythic tradition. They did not merely re-interpret the heroic tradition but they levelled it to a human level in order to expose the heroes with all their failings and passions.\(^54\) This levelling foregrounds later subversive and counter-institutional literary practices such as parody and irony, developments which have continued up to the present. The Greek myth became a site of contestation between tradition and new ideas which were often counter-traditional, counter-institutional and often challenged the morality of Greek society in an explicitly provocative way.

Myths in contemporary literature explore the precarious and unpredictable facets of life, its contradictions and its mystery, and when viewed from a

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\(^{53}\) Kirk, *Greek Myth*, p. 301.

\(^{54}\) Kakridis, *The Mythic Tradition*, p. 65.
historical Greek literary point of view, we find that while they promote traditional values, they have also been used in a subversive or unfamiliar way in order to challenge institutions and beliefs. 55 Greek myths, according to Kirk, are severely anthropomorphic and humanistic, and rather than explaining phenomena in the real world, they often make an emotional evaluation of personal life. To a degree, they are a charter theory of Greek customs, beliefs and institutions but they explain these loosely. They are silent about the invention of human functions and social institutions, and they are also vague and ambivalent about the creation of man. Animals and other-worldly creatures do not often appear in Greek myths, except sporadically in a symbolic way, or for dramatic effect, such as the Cyclops and the Hydra which, as Kirk points out, could represent ‘latent fears of the unknown’. 56

Kirk argues that, ontologically, myth seeks a unified vision of the cosmic order, while epistemologically it has no proven base, since it is founded on beliefs and the imagination. Myths fulfil psychic needs and express repressed or dormant traumatic emotions while having a cathartic effect, since they aim to purge pity and fear, such as in the Oedipus story, in which the hero kills the father and marries the mother, but must be punished, so that society may be purged of its guilt. The themes are relatively simple since they contain the shallowness of most heroic Greek stories, which are one dimensional and have unrealistic ‘happy’ endings. They elaborate upon and complicate certain folkloric themes such as the

56 Kirk, Greek Myth, pp. 43-68.
origin of old age and disease, retrievals from the underworld, sex changes, fire, unusual births, enclosure and the displacement of elders. While they might be frightening, myths are rarely wild, grotesque and horrible. Instead they have a diverse, aristocratic amalgam of character types, including anthropomorphic gods, heroes, and larger-than-life human characters. In antiquity, myths convey the idea of the sacred and the mysterious, and have a didactic and a celebratory quality. They express a longing for immortality, utopia, and liberation from real life problems such as evil, disease, toil and old age. Heroes are elevated to an almost divine status. Homer, Hesiod and Pindar stress the mortality of mankind, the archaic fear of divine envy and the psychological dangers of success, the impossibility of achievement without toil, the need for divine aid for success and the unbridgeable gap between gods and men. In the heroic epic myths, and in the dramatic plays, we find that while the paramythic archetypes or motifs remain stable, the content and the modes, such as anagnorisis within comedy, agon and conflict in romance, pathos in tragedy, and sparagmos within irony, alternate according to prevailing social, cultural and political trends.

Homer and Hesiod represent the culmination of a long period in which myths are orally recited according to a formalized tradition. The epic technique uses verse through successive hexameters. Paramythia, by comparison often employ oral verse forms which are associated with

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57 Kirk, Myth, p. 243.
59 Kirk, Myth, p. 251.
demotic or laika popular forms. These consist of two hemistiches, of eight and seven syllables, respectively, divided by a strongly established caesura after the eighth syllable.⁶¹ Such verse forms are built up of metrical words which are not simply phonological and syntactical units but are also units of sense. The two hemistiches often balance one another by means of equality or antithesis. Mackridge maintains that one of the lexical words in the first hemistich must be omitted, implied or repeated in exactly the same syntactical structure in the second hemistich.⁶²

After the introduction of literacy, myths are reinterpreted through drama, either as tragedy or as comedy, and these performances are infused with choral lyrics, dance and music. I.T. Kakridis argues that ‘not only dramatists, but epic poets also add their own creative flair, to rejuvenate the myth and make it current and new, but also to impart social and political lessons’. Kakridis refers to an old Aitolian story about a young man who fought with his uncle and killed him. His mother sought revenge for her brother and killed her own son.⁶³ In the hands of the clever poet, Kakridis argues, this paramythi is converted into an epic, such as Aeschylus’ The Oresteia and, instead of having the few characters mentioned, it becomes transformed into an epic war story, which inspires nationalist ideals, as well as religious beliefs and values. So we see the archaic paramythi becomes enriched through the construction of

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memorable characters, violent scenes and epic themes, by poets who improvise these stories by using the heroic and panegyrical themes, or through the introduction of other mediums which intensify the experience, emotionally and vividly, as well as aurally through specific meters.

Kakridis’ study of the Greek mythic tradition is dated, but useful because it emphasises how Euripides’ subversions can prefigure subversions of paramythi. In the beginning of his study, Kakridis argues that poets have a privileged position in Greek society, using myths and the spoken word to manipulate their audience. With changes in society, the poets’ position is undermined by philosophers who challenge traditional ideas and myths. The poets continue to refer to the well-known mythological characters, a dominant part of the people’s belief and social system, even though the gods lose their divine status. Poets such as Euripides and Aristophanes lose their respect for archaic myths, which had enjoyed a divine status. Myths are no longer a ‘holy istoria’ (history or story) for them, and when they subvert myths, they are reflecting wider political, religious and ideological shifts in society. Such a change is the consequence of a reaction against a traditional way of thinking because of growing rationalist trends and allegorisation, introduced through the literary tradition. Tragedy, religious worship and traditional rites and rituals maintain their external trappings, for example, mythic drama continues in Dionysian worship ceremonies, but the language is not elevated, and instead the everyday vocabulary of the sophists and rhetoricians is used. Despite such challenges, the Greek mythic tradition remains relatively
uniform, with the same gods, heroes and characters, as Kirk also points out.\textsuperscript{64}

The poets’ disillusionment with the old beliefs is reflected in the way they confront tradition, through a dramatic struggle between reason and social convention, as opposed to emotion. Sophocles’ \textit{Antigone} is a prime example, while Euripides’ plays embody a complete break with the sacredness of the mythic tradition. Kakridis points out that Euripides’ mythic subversions are enabled through writing, since this medium allows him the freedom to create human characters and actions which challenge the mythic tradition through logic. We note in his plays that each \textit{logos} placed on the protagonist’s lips is echoed by an \textit{anti-logos}, since he is questioning established institutional practices, such as the monarchy, democracy and women’s place in society. He doesn’t provide answers to the problems that he raises, but instead creates radical disharmony between traditional values and modern ideas. He achieves this through satire and \textit{antiphasis} between heroic words and deeds. Myths are constructed which reinstate man in the place where the gods once stood,\textsuperscript{65} thereby indicating a shift from the sense of the sacred. Euripides, for example, undermines the sacredness of mythological thought, with his emphasis on human failings. He stands as a precursor to the carnivalesque – the poet no longer as the teacher and the defender of a heroic past, but the dissenter who uses his recreation of myth to challenge authority and belief in a glorious past. He shows through his characters that heroic thoughts are an illusion, and

\textsuperscript{64} Kirk, \textit{The Nature of Greek Myths}, p. 95, 110, 112.
\textsuperscript{65} Kakridis, \textit{The Poet and the Mythic Tradition}, pp. 79-80.
that heroic deeds are devoid of meaning. Despite these challenges to the
status of myth, it remains a dominant cultural form, for the ordinary Greek
person and for creative poets, since it is part of their belief system and their
historical memory.\textsuperscript{66}

Moving beyond classical to modern times, we have thinkers such as Paul
Ricoeur, T.S. Eliot and Mircea Eliade who do not essentialise the mythic
tradition in the way that the Greek philologist Kakridis does, even though
they also explore a sacred dimension in myth. Eliade, for example, shows
the creative potential in the dialectics between the sacred and the profane.

The sacred is qualitatively different from the profane, yet it may
manifest itself no matter how, or where into the profane world
because of its power of turning any natural object into a paradox by
means of a hierophany.\textsuperscript{67}

Here, Eliade, following Eliot refers to the mythic representing ‘an elitist
aesthetic praxis’ and a redemptive trope, ‘desiring order and fulfilment in a
hierarchical system that codified eternal truths’\textsuperscript{68}. This system represented
a counter-system to corrupt, worldly institutions. Eliot expands on this idea
by pointing out that it was through mythic language that people could
express their need for fulfilment in a higher power, since ‘words demand

\textsuperscript{66} Kakridis, \textit{The Poet and the Mythic Tradition}, pp. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{68} Cited in Coupe, \textit{Myth}, pp. 42, 58-61.
fulfilment in the Word’. Ricoeur takes a more secular route, referring to myth as an ideological tool, a way to preserve order through the imagination, or one which has a utopian potential and can disrupt the totalising elements of society and tradition. Greek myths are based on an orderly structure, but when this order is challenged, the myth can then have a violent potential, which Ricoeur believes can ‘forge a new (rebellious) language to describe a new reality, since it introduces new meanings through the use of irony, play and the carnivalesque’.

Oral and written myths continue to exercise a strong emotional, aesthetic and intellectual force in the Greek mind. Possibly, their power can be attributed to the fact that the mythic element in poems, in oral and literary narratives, and in dramatic performances, lifts the audience or readers outside of chronological time, and transports them to primal or eschatological time. According to Eliade, mythic time ‘does not bear the burden of time’, since it is associated with a sacred or reversible cyclical form. Miriam Chirico reinforces this argument in the particular case of the highly symbolic dramatic performance. She points out that the mythic dimension announces abstract truths through a symbolic system that is affective rather than informative. Myths move from the contingent to the sacred, and create another world view. The setting lifts the individual out

69 Cited in Coupe, Myth, pp. 42.
70 Cited in Coupe, Myth, p. 146.
of ordinary time and the present moment, and places him/her in mythic
time. The reader is drawn into the mystic or ritualistic story, and it can
provide a pattern of experience by which to examine feelings of loss and
grief. Chirico further states that, ‘Myths concretise for us the basic patterns
of human existence without the superficial minutiae of our quotidian
lives’.  

Paul Ricoeur argues that myths carry the promise of another mode
of existence, which can be realized beyond present time and place, and
which is both foundational and liberating.  

But he also points out that in
order to acquire self-knowledge, one must take ‘a detour through cultural
signs which are articulated through symbolic mediations which articulate
action, and, among them, the narratives of everyday life’. So he is
pointing to another level, perhaps below the mythic but equally influential,
which can deal with issues of human existence. He suggests a preference
for the quotidian, in contradistinction to the more elevated notion of myth.

What is paramythi?

Paramythis most characteristic feature, as previously argued, is that it is a
quotidian oral phenomenon, while myth began as an oral phenomenon but
was transformed into writing from a very early stage in Greece’s ancient
history with the institution of the Panatheneia by Peisistratos in Athens,
circa 632 BC. As mentioned previously, it is only in modern times, in the
late nineteenth century, that paramythia were compiled and transcribed

73 Miriam Chirico, ‘Zimmerman’s Metamorphoses: Mythic Revision as a Ritual for
74 Cited in Coupe, in Myth, pp. 96-97, 155, 196.
75 David Wood, On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation, Routledge, London,
into written anthologies, periodicals and journals, although in the oral form they possibly predated myth and continued to transmit the Greek story through local and socio-cultural themes that reflected the society’s character, ideology, morality and religious traditions. The themes that paramythia explore have to do with the Greek experience, everyday concerns, and Greek popular beliefs and sayings. They are resilient, and constantly evolve through time and space so that they are relevant for each generation. While paramythia engage with everyday concerns, such as the description of the natural world, human behaviour and personal relationships, reports of action and deeds, ways of survival and the desire of a return to home and safety, they also explore profound areas such as love, death, exile, fear and change, which are linked to the experiential.

Paramythi reveals itself through a range of diverse popular, demotic and religious forms, so hypothetically it is quite distinct from myth. We cannot assume that the lyrics of demotic and regional folksongs (such as the Cretan demotic folk poem Erotokritos and Maniat laments, narrative ballads which are historical folk songs (often about the loss of cities to the Ottomans, and Constantinople), klephtic ballads, and songs, hymns or stories about saints, tales about heroes of the past such as Digenis Akritas, and the more recent rebel songs, the rebetika) are mythic since they have a different purpose, audience and style. Instead of the hexameter, they use a robust and familiar demotic or Byzantine metrical form, as well as popular diction. The rebetika song genre is a populist folkloric form adapted to
music, which Gauntlett describes as ‘the preferred song of the rebel’. Beaton describes these as displaying the gangster heroism of *manges*, who have an individual code of honour. These have a dramatic structure, frequently use stylized dialogue in order to set the scene and juxtapose vivid episodes, and their function is mainly lyrical. Shadow theatre and modern comic theatre are performance paramythia. Proverbs, riddles, anecdotes and secular parables are embedded within everyday speech and narrative, and use language which is rich in proverbs, dramatic gestures and humour. Paramythia are not static, nor are they relics of a bygone era, but they continue to evolve in Greece and in the diaspora mainly as children’s fiction, or as inter-textual traces within poetic and dramatic texts, or as a *mythistorema* (prose fiction). Greek Australian researchers Anna Hatzinikolaou and Stathis Gauntlett point out that since paramythia traditionally have been associated with mothers, grandmothers and children, they have contributed to maintaining a Greek identity in the diaspora, but these researchers also indicate the need for further research in this area. Often, in Greece and in the diaspora, we find that paramythic stories exploit the theme of a nostalgic yearning for a return to an idyllic time and place. They may, like the European folktale, also have been constructed as a response to the changes that creative individuals faced through immigration or conquest.

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While demotic paramythia and folktales change, the parable-type synaxaria, Byzantine hymnology, iconography and church services such as the *Akathistos Hymn* have remained relatively unchanged in Greece and in the diaspora, and so provide a ritualistic sense of stability amidst life’s difficulties. In one of his letters, the well-known Church Father, St John Chrysostom refers to the trials of this life as paramythia or ‘idle tales,’ rendering lived experience meaningless, in contradistinction to the ‘Logos,’ the authoritarian word of God as meaningful. Modern Greek poets such as Giorgos Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, Nikos Gatsos, Miltos Sachtouris and Andreas Embirikos use a paramythic tone to reinforce or destabilize worldly wisdom in contradistinction to the other-worldly wisdom of Chrysostom, which supersedes logic. In both cases, but through a different kind of emphasis – the one secular, the other religious – the paramythic story performs the function of the interrogative, the subversive or the familiar and reassuring, ritualistic voice, while becoming a form of escapism, as I will show with forthcoming examples in the next chapter.

The paramythi often functions as a practical guide to living within society according to certain rules and codes. It may also function as pure entertainment, and so it uses comedy or the *paralogous*, with imaginary characters and scenarios, and unlikely heroes, in which case it explores societal codes in a more interesting way. Its themes, plot and characters appear simplistic, beginning with ‘μία φορά και έναν καιρό (once upon a
time).\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Kairos} is a concept that suggests a time outside of time, or the ‘supreme moment or opportunity for something special or out of the ordinary to occur, but the story is within time since it begins in \textit{kairos}, moves through a struggle and resolution phase, and concludes with the set formula of ‘\textit{ζήσαν καλά καὶ εμείς καλύτερα},’ (they lived well and we will live even better). Such closure reinforces the idea that life is not out of control and humans may have some sort of control of their destiny, since things will be well in the end. As Demetris Loukopoulos points out, ‘the reader expectation would not concede anything short of a happy or just ending.’\textsuperscript{80}

Paramythia contain elements of truth and fantasy, because they tell unreal stories that have an element of truth. \textit{Kairos} and \textit{chronos} coexist, since paramythia begin in the \textit{kairos} of an eternal present, but have a linear structure as in real time. Therefore, they admit a ‘before and after, but not a no-longer’, thereby reinforcing a sense of hope and comfort, since, as in the redemption stories of the Christian martyrs, the chaos of the present is but a prelude to a \textit{paradisal} existence where there will be equity and a more authentic state of being.\textsuperscript{81} From the start, the reader is taken back in time, to become a child, drawn into the tale, and momentarily is able to escape from time within the actual time frame of the storytelling experience. Mythic time transcends the notion of structure and \textit{chronos} as

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\textsuperscript{79} D. Loukopoulos, \textit{Introduction to Greek Folklore}, Educational Institute of the National Bank of Greece, Athens, 1977, p. 271.  
\textsuperscript{80} Loukopoulos, \textit{Introduction to Greek Folklore}, p. 272.  
measured clock time. According to Eliade, mythic time was preceded by no other time, coming into existence all at once, since it is associated with a sacred or reversible cyclical form,\(^2\) which indicates that it is outside of the linear structure of paramythia. For Greek society, particularly the post-war society which experienced the irrationality of fratricidal conflict, the paramythi operates on the level of the consoling voice, and allows for ‘\(\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\mu\omicron\omicron\theta\alpha\) (paramythia) to lead to \(\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\mu\omicron\omicron\theta\alpha\) (consolation), in a literary, psychotherapeutic sense’.\(^3\) Such paramythic stories revisit traumatic experiences, but since they don’t have the complexity of the myth, the matter-of-fact way with which they deal with problems provides a counterbalance to the mythic tragedies and dramas that initiate a reactive response in the readership. The paramythi leads to consolation because generally it conveys hope for a better future and, even though it is a-logical, it is ordered since there is an ending, unlike the myth which, according to Coupe is ‘constantly implying, but always resisting, completion’.\(^4\) Rarely does the myth allow the reader to feel that, in life and in human relationships, one can have a sense of control, as we see in Sophocles’ and Aeschylus’ tragic plays, which are the prime examples of this. Antigone, Oedipus and Prometheus suffer a merciless fate, in retribution for a fatal flaw in their natures according to popular conception. The paramythi does not have such perfectionist aims, while its simple narrative devices introduce surprise and climax but without the anxiety of the myth. Despite


\(^3\) Davis Ricks, ‘The Bottom of the Well’, p. 79.

their differences, myths and paramythia are resilient and fluid forms, which allow us to concur with August Nitschke, who states that in:

…the new stage of civilization, the symbols and configurations of tales were endowed with new meaning, transformed, or eliminated in reaction to the needs and conflicts of the people within the social order’. 85

The problem with interpreting the paramythi in Modern Greek literary texts lies firstly in the fact that the paramythi signifies an oral phenomenon, not a literary one, even though I am recognizing, reading and interpreting its textual traces as well as its symbolic significance. The other problem is that it is difficult to contradistinguish paramythi and myth from folklore, just as it is difficult to distinguish fantasy from reality, since in literary texts they are not always mutually exclusive. Paramythia may represent various versions of childhood stories which are obviously not true, but I am exploring the cultural and literary significance of these naïve stories. Since, according to a general consensus, paramythia are deemed to be fantasy, literary criticism places these in opposition to the greater truths revealed through the mythic. The ancient debate between mythos as fantasy and logos as rational argument collapses when we place paramythi and myth on the same spectrum and argue that these two antithetical forms are not distinct and separate genres, but that it is a matter of each

occupying a different position on this hierarchical, traditional-story spectrum. This leads to the next problem, which is that Modern Greek literary criticism, until recently, was heavily biased towards a rationalist philological method, and I have had to draw from such criticism in my initial research for this study, even though my own method is not philological. Philology was influenced by European post-Enlightenment nineteenth-century philosophical and literary debates over what constitutes truth and fantasy. Vico had argued that philosophy and philology are oppositional, since philosophy investigates truths that are not knowable by man, whereas philology investigates certainties that are a product of the human mind; factual or constructed truths which one can understand as fully as a ‘watchmaker knows the clock he has made’. In the Hellenistic mind, however, and in storytelling practice, myth and paramyth coexist in an entangled tension. The paradoxical coexistence between reality and fantasy reflects a parallel dichotomy found in the notion of paramythic time, with its synchronic use of chronos (in history) and kairos (out of history, or at a special supreme moment).

Jean-Pierre Vernant argues that the concept of myth, peculiar to classical antiquity, came to be defined through the opposition between mythos and logos. In the Enlightenment, scholars such as Christian Gorrlob Heyne believed that by examining form and then content in the mythos

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(narrative), it would enable the scholar to understand the mind of the society which produced the story. Other scholars such as Giambattista Vico in his *Scienza Nuova* argued that the only useful science of humanity would be one which ‘comprehended what lay beyond *logos*. Not reason, but imagination was the key to myth’. 88 It is this type of reasoning that underwrites my understanding of paramythi, since like myth it offers another type of logic which does not see fantasy and rationalism as mutually exclusive but in an entangled relationship, where the one informs and speaks through the other, similar to Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogic. This type of reasoning, based on paradox, is not such a contradiction if we recognize that Greece has had a fractured modern history, and that its geographical position lies between the Occident and the Orient. Such an inter-space will inevitably be affected by contradictions, and so it is inevitable that creative writers occupying such a space will produce literary texts which merge fact with fantasy, rationalism with mysticism, and conservatism with experimentation. The coexistence between antithetical voices in paramythic stories and poetry represent the phenomenon of an intersection between real and fanciful experience, which Nicole Ollier points out in reference to Seferis’ style:

> Even Seferis’ poetry is said to have a French flavour…yet also involving two poles: his position as a Smyrniot on the dividing line between the East and the West, mysticism and rationalism, the rigor

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of form and the audacity of innovation. But is this not the essence of Hellenism at its best?\textsuperscript{89}

If we look at critics who do not have a classicist perspective, but use a religious perspective, such as Rudolf Bultmann, Kenneth Burke and T.S Eliot, we find that they show a preference for a mythical method, since they believe that it was best suited to negotiating contradictions in life. Bultmann sides with rationalism and the truth within Gospel stories and places his emphasis on modern existential interpretation and thinking. Burke uses myth as a code that needs to be unlocked in order to solve life’s problems, while Eliot, like Bultmann, chooses to replace the narrative method with the mythic, which they see as a preferred method in explaining the contradictions of living.\textsuperscript{90} These theorists show that myths have important social and cultural meanings that can address the problematic in reality, and explain the unexplainable in symbolic ways. When Roman Jakobson refers to Erben’s preference for mythology, he states that they provide:

\textbf{…In a fine and profound sense, a natural symbolism and folk philosophy, which for him, is the essence of true philosophy and symbolism in general, just as the folksong is the source of all true poetry.}\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90} Coupe, \textit{Myth}, pp. 10-11, 35.
Jakobson appears to agree with Erben’s view that myth has been informed and has originated from folksongs that represent an authentic expression of the people. The problem of origins is a complex one, since we are referring to an oral tradition and there is no definitive evidence as to which came first. I do, however, agree with Jakobson in elevating the lower, folkloric forms, including the paramythi, to a higher order, because ‘natural symbolism’ and ‘folk philosophy’ can inform highly literary poetic works. In addition, if we borrow from Paul Ricoeur’s method of analysing myth and use it in a similar way by focusing on what paramythia (instead of myths) say and what they do, we could find that paramythi contains a potential which has been under-exploited. Beyond its aesthetic and symbolic role, it can also have a socio-political function; a way of binding society through common beliefs and goals. It may function as a protreptic (warning) against transgression, or it may challenge inequalities, revisit trauma and symbolically be used to come to terms with massive life changes. Just as Burke saw literature with mythic elements offering readers answers to their theoretical problems, so too, the paramythi may provide a more practical type of ‘equipment for living’, since it explores real life problems and everyday concerns. Paul Ricoeur argued that ‘myths can extend the reader’s horizon, since they can lead to a disclosure of unprecedented worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world’. This can also apply to paramythia that resemble parables, and therefore paramythia can extend the reader’s knowledge about his world.

92 Coupe, Myth, pp. 8, 196.
and the inner world of the reader’s or listener’s mind. Paramythia, which have a didactic role, function through a binary structure. They show what eventuates when rules are followed, and the price paid by those who transgress. Subversive paramythia exploit areas of the repressed and reveal scars of trauma in a non-threatening way, hiding an element of truth through parody or comic illusion. The consoling paramythia take readers or listeners to the romanticised dimension of childhood innocence, in which case they reject logic, and side with an imaginary world of fantasy.

What we observe in Modern Greek literature is that myth coexists with paramythi, and the demotic with the elitist, since mythos and logos overlap. I will illustrate this with various examples of writers who use modernist or surreal techniques such as Seferis, Elytis, Gatsos, Sachtouris and Embirikos. Ritsos employs both techniques. All of these writers borrow from the folk tradition and incorporate mythological themes as well as historical facts. They may co-opt or appropriate the paramythi as an escapist strategy, or in order to invert reader expectations. When used in a romanticised and rhetorical way, the paramythi may promote Modern Greek nationalist pride in a glorious mythological past, or it may simply be used as aesthetic praxis based on nostalgic yearning for innocence and safety. The paramythi and the parable can provide a counter-narrative to the horror of reality, and it is such themes which will be discussed in the forthcoming chapter.
CHAPTER THREE:

THE DEPLOYMENT OF PARAMYTHI BY SIX MODERN GREEK WRITERS

And if I talk to you in fables and parables
it’s because it’s more gentle for you that way, and horror
really can’t be talked about because it’s alive,
because it’s mute and goes on growing

George Seferis

The imaginative narrative tale allows writers to fictionalize the silences of history according to Giorgos (George) Seferis, as we note from the above quotation taken from his poem ‘Last Station.’ Some Modern Greek writers use a paramythic voice in poems that resemble the apocalyptic tale with realistic images of horror, while others revisit the Greek landscape, its mythos and its contemporary reality but distort its paramythic tones, or use its traditional narrative sequence in an unfamiliar way. In this chapter, I will compare ways in which paramythi has been used and transformed by Giorgos Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, Giorgos Sarantaris Miltos Sahtouris, Nikos Gatsos and Andreas Embirikos – six poets from the Generation of

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the 1930s. I have chosen this period because it represents a crossroads between conservative nationalist trends, which promoted demotic movements, and new modernist styles, such as surrealism.

Some modern writers use the standard demotic fifteen-syllable form, known as the *dekapentasyllavos* or *politikos stichos*\(^2\) which has been used over many centuries\(^3\) in oral and folk poetry, songs and ballads, the Cretan Renaissance romance *Ερωτόκριτος*, in *Maniat* laments and dirges, and in the Byzantine metrical system, but make subtle changes to its form and rhythm. They may add other intricate rhymes and verbal configurations by breaking the standard fifteen-syllable verse pattern, or abolishing the caesura. They may combine free verse and standard political verse within the one poem.\(^4\) Iraklis Apostolidis’ comprehensive anthology of Modern Greek poetry, spanning the late sixteenth until the early twentieth century, indicates that most poets used this vernacular form,\(^5\) even though, according to Kostis Palamas, it was deemed to be ‘low brow, common and mangled verse by the Byzantine literati’.\(^6\) So the immediate question that

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\(^2\) The *dekapentasyllavos*, or *politikos stichos* as it is known, is equivalent to the term demotic (*demotikos*), or popular (*laikos*), and not political in an ideological sense.

\(^3\) Letsios indicates that there is no consensus as to the origins and development of *politikos stichos* (political verse) although scholarly research had begun in 1839, and in the twentieth century by two main schools identified by Margaret Alexiou and Davis Houlton. See Vassilios Letsios, *The Life and Afterlife of Political Verse*, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 23, no.2, October, 2005, p. 282.


\(^5\) Iraklis Apostolidis’ *Anthology of Modern Greek Poetry* is a comprehensive collection which spans the period from 1708 till 1933, and most of the poems in this anthology use political verse either entirely, or in part.

arises is what is it that motivates high-brow poets and writers in the twentieth century to revisit a pre-modern demotic tradition?

When writers refer to the Greek *topos* (place), *tropos* (way of life) and *ichos* (sounds) in a paramythic way, are they using Greek motifs, images and sounds as a stable cultural frame of reference, or as a poetic device which provides an antithesis to modernity’s realist depictions of despair and trauma? Alternatively, are Modern Greek writers revitalizing a national dream when they use the paramythi as a symbol of Hellenistic continuity and traditional values? In 1888, Yannis Psiharis had said: ‘A nation requires two things to become a nation: to expand its boundaries and to create its own literature’. So we may revisit the previous questions and ask whether the writers who belatedly adopt European avant-garde trends such as surrealism are rejecting the Greek style, or are they seeking to establish a neo-Hellenic modernism by using an ‘authentic’ (demotic, low-brow or religious) Greek paramythic voice which promotes conservative liberal nationalist purposes? Whatever their reasons, these writers invert reader expectation by combining incommensurable traditional and modern concepts and ideas, so the main focus in this

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7 Loring M. Danforth argues that powerful and educated elite will often seize elements from rural culture to demonstrate the continuity of Greek culture from classical antiquity. In ‘The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 1984, p. 58.
chapter is to explore how paramythi has been used by Modern Greek writers, and in what ways it illuminates their negotiation of identity.

Different literary styles often herald a creative response to change and in Greece, the mid-twentieth century was a period characterized by disillusionment and great national angst, since the dream of the *Megali Idea* had been destroyed with the Asia Minor Catastrophe.\(^{11}\) Subsequently, the unstable political situation during the Metaxas dictatorship years, the ensuing Albanian war, German occupation, and the Greek Civil war left deep scars which traumatized and divided the Greek nation. These events aesthetically influenced and ideologically polarized its intellectuals and writers. Petros Haris argues that social and political changes precipitated by such events exerted a major force within the imagination of Modern Greek prose writers, who inevitably moved away from Romanticism with its utopian vision of an idyllic new nation.\(^{12}\) He argues that they engaged in a writing style that was more inward-looking and critical, while borrowing from its demotic tradition in order to move away from the purist conservatism of the past. I would argue that although paramythi does have conservative and Romantic connotations, it allows writers greater flexibility to experiment with form, but also to camouflage silent traumas in an oblique way. I am making such a supposition based on recent

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\(^{11}\) Η Μεγάλη Ιδέα (*The Megali Idea*) was a 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century national idealistic dream which sought the restoration of all the colonized Hellenic territories and the construction of a Great Hellenic nation.

research into trauma by Joy Damousi.\(^{13}\) Trauma is traditionally thought of as something which cannot be verbalized or narrativised because it resists meaning. But as Jay Geller, following Cathy Caruth and Dominick La Capra, points out: ‘working-through trauma often entails a narrative by which the event can be integrated onto one’s life history or else mastered by transforming the experience into something one controls’\(^{14}\). Damousi argues that the trauma of war and migration, with its legacies of loss, grief and remembered pasts are being recognized because there has been considerable ‘poetry and novels that have documented and explored the nature of these experiences’\(^{15}\).

Yannis Dallas interprets the turn towards the demotic tradition as ‘constitutive of the avant-garde literary aims of the Generation of the Thirties\(^{16}\)’ while Davis Ricks explores and analyses a renewed interest in traditional verse forms. He refers to writers who transform paramythic demotic elements in their poems, such as its meter, its rhyme and its diction. Specifically, he refers to the surrealists, Sachtouris and Elytis, who, he argues, turned to folk poetry for inspiration by alluding to its rhythm without being bound by its metrical form. Yatromanolakis argues that in the case of the counter-traditional surrealist writer Embirikos, his


relationship with the ‘Hellenic demotic centre is different from the traditional alignment with the folk tradition’.¹⁷ This implies that the demotic is not synonymous with folk tradition, although Vassilios Letsios in his paper ‘The Life and Afterlife of Political Verse’ identifies common formal characteristics, since in both cases the standard verse form is used across a wide range of genres and linguistic and literary registers.¹⁸ This traditional iambic verse form uses fifteen syllables in traditional meter with two hemistiches, eight and seven syllables, divided by a strong caesura after the eighth syllable.¹⁹ Letsios observes that Modern Greek poets sought to renew demotic verse forms by making certain subtle formal changes. Some appeared to make a complete break from the traditional form. This signaled a poetic revolt by Modern Greek writers who sought to pursue a more individual and ‘less monotonous’ style, but it also represented the need to modify their Greek style within their changed historical circumstances. So we see that paramythi, as well as the traditional verse forms, are significant Greek demotic cultural traditions that have maintained a lasting influence. The paramythic motifs and themes persisted, even though the verse form underwent various changes and transformations, which I will discuss in the forthcoming analyses.

¹⁹ Peter Mackridge, ‘The Metrical Structure of the Oral Decapentasyllable’, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 14, 1990, pp. 207, 210-11. Mackridge argues that metrical words are units of sense. He points out that the two hemistiches balance each other out by equality or antithesis. One of the lexical words in the first hemistich is omitted, understood or repeated in the same syntactical structure in the second hemistich.
Kostis Palamas, Angelos Sikelianos and Giorgos Seferis often maintained *politikos stichos*’s typographical format but they abolished the caesura, and this signified a symbolic break with tradition, which reflected the wider socio-political anxieties of the Greeks during the first decade of the twentieth century.\(^{20}\) We can concur with Letsios that the formal changes, the paramythic transformations and the poetic revolts against long-standing verse forms by the poets of the generation of the Thirties indicate that the contrived optimism and nationalistic rhetoric of the previous generation, which promoted the restoration of lost Hellenic lands, could no longer be sustained in such a politically unstable era. The demotic influence, however, which had been used for nationalistic purposes in the late nineteenth century by poets and writers such as Dionysios Solomos and Alexandros Papadiamandis, also could not be easily erased, since it was deeply ingrained within the public psyche and, therefore, was mobilized by conservative Helleno-centrists who sought to establish an indigenous Modern Greek literature. Paramythi survived in new forms and for new purposes, often like *politikos stichos*, as a ‘latent demotic presence’.\(^{21}\) Paramythi was appropriated or transformed by the Generation of the Thirties not necessarily for nationalistic and traditional purposes. Seferis, Elytis and Sarantaris, as well as national poets Kostis Palamas and Angelos Sikelianos prior to the Generation of the Thirties, transformed paramythi and the traditional verse form in a literary way, as did the surrealist poets Gatsos, Embirikos and Sachtouris. Paramythic transformations are not just formal changes in structure, or a break with

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\(^{21}\) Letsios, ‘The Life and Afterlife of Political Verse’, p. 308.
tradition, but, I argue, they can reveal complex individual negotiations over identity, and a writer’s search for their own personal historical truth, as well as their search for new forms of creative expression which, ‘Like the ghost of [the mythical] Helen [of Troy], returns under a new guise to haunt twentieth-century Greek poets…, [while] evoking a distinctly modern sense of unsettlement’.22 This modern sense of disquiet will be discussed in the forthcoming analysis of Modern Greek poetry.

**Giorgos Seferis**

Seferis develops a poetic form that merges a traditional Greek *tropos* (morality) with a European high modernist style.23 He maintains traces of *paramythi*, as we see in his use of familiar Greek symbols and motifs, mythological characters such as Odysseus the archetypal diasporic subject, frequent references to the Greek light, landscape, demotic language and intermittent use of demotic verse patterns intruding into his free verse, as well as modifications to *politikos stichos* in his rhyming poems, especially obvious in his poem ‘Erotikos Logos’ (‘Love Song’) which is a modern transformation of the Cretan Renaissance long poem *Erotokritos*. This indicates that while he is artistically inspired by modernist trends, and constructs poems which contain traditional and quasi-traditional elements, his use of formal and thematic traditional demotic features are ethno-

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Hellenistic. He promotes the idea of Hellenistic continuity in his treatise *On the Greek Style*,\(^{24}\) and uses paramythi as a nationalistic emblem. He also liberates paramythi from its traditional didactic role, thereby indicating an avant-garde method of using a traditional form in a new way for national-political purposes, but also to invert reader expectation.

When Seferis employs the demotic turn and uses elements of paramythi, he refers to the Greek *topos* and its sounds, but he also introduces images of shattered physical remnants of a classical past in his enigmatic poetry. In this way, he subverts a view of past grandeur promoted by the heroic epic, and merges an arid contemporary view of Greece with a variety of antiquated characters and changed verse patterns, as well as a modern dissociated voice, free of heightened emotion. We see this in his highly complex poem *Mythistorema* which presents as a modern Odyssey, in which the traveller poet is seeking an idyllic return to the *estia* (security and warmth) of home. But the narrator concedes that his hopeful yearning for an ideal place (the beautiful islands of mythical antiquity) is but an illusion:

\[\text{Tό ξέραμε πώς είταν οραία τά νησιά}\\ \text{Κάπου εδώ πού ψηλαφούμε}\\ \text{We knew that the islands were beautiful}\\ \text{Somewhere round about here where we are groping.}^{25}\]

The title *Mythistorema* is an ambiguous term. It signifies an imaginative narrative genre which is neither myth nor history, but lies somewhere within the grey zone between *istoria* (an imaginative story or enquiry) and *mythos* (legend). When he disrupts the typical poetic narrative sequence, it represents a poetic strategy to create a disturbance by unsettling the reader, while his rhymed poems’ meanings are more predictable and less ambiguous, since the reader senses the meaning from the rhythm. In his poems ‘The Turning Point’ and ‘Denial,’ for example, we have a traditional form which resembles a dirge and a song, respectively, while paramythic symbols reinforce such an assumption. In the former poem, the image of the black pigeon is a paramythic omen that heralds the impending death of a loved one: ‘You reached me at sunset like a black pigeon. The road whitened before me, soft breath of sleep at the close of a last supper…’. The tone verifies this, as do the images of sleep, heavenly garden, last supper. In ‘Denial’, the mood is built up, and there is throughout a growing sense of expectation as in paramythic songs, and then a confession of life’s expectations denied, but a positive turn nevertheless: ‘On the secret seashore white like a pigeon…on the golden sand we wrote her name; but the sea-breeze blew and the writing vanished…we lived our life: a mistake! So we changed our life’.  

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Politikos stichos occasionally appears within Seferis’ free verse for a particular poetic effect, rendering the poem neither traditional nor modern, but like Mythistorema, in between both forms. In ‘The Return of the Exile,’ and just before the outbreak of World War Two, Seferis prophetically describes the impending destruction of his land. He juxtaposes the historical past with the present, using epic war symbolism together with rural images to highlight destructive forces which have frequently been part of Greece’s historical reality. The only visible traces of this history are the shattered fragments, the broken monuments of a glorious mythical past, but also a broken and fragmented memory. So here we hear a dialogue, in which the rhyming form of politikos stichos intrudes upon the free verse. This dialogue is between a character who is confused and lost, and his powerful addressee (who speaks confidently and condescendingly) stating, ‘My old friend, don’t you hear me? You’ll get used to it little by little’. Seferis reinforces the tragedy of the shattered memory, the destroyed homeland, and the broken human spirit, by repeating the mumblings of this broken mind which occasionally repeat his need to locate the memorable places and persons of his childhood:

‘Γυρεύω τόν παλιό μου κήπο’
τά δέντρα μου έρχονται ώς τή μέση...
...Γυρεύω τό παλιό μου σπίτι
μέ τ’άγηλα τά παραθύρα...
...Πιά δέν ακούω τσιμουδιά
βούλιαξε κι’ ό στερνός μου φίλος
The narrator’s dominant voice uses a prophetic, authoritarian voice: ‘Your nostalgia has created a non-existent country, with laws alien to earth and man’. The other voice realistically represents the broken, confused subject: ‘Now I can’t hear a sound. My last friend has also sunk’. The authoritarian voice has a mythic quality, while the returning exile uses simple demotic expressions and nostalgic paramythic motifs – the garden, the old house, the last friend – and it is this voice that concludes the poem, leaving a lasting impression. Free from empty rhetoric, this paramythic voice of the returning exile represents ‘everyman’s’ voice, while the dominant narrative voice, which uses elevated mythic language, indicates
that the narrator is an authoritarian figure, even though we sense that the 
author sides with both, even as he privileges the marginal colloquial voice, 
since it has the last words.

Seferis’ modernist style transmits ambiguous meanings because it is 
traditional and modern, demotic and elitist. Seferis is a man of his time, 
situated at the crossroads between the past, the turbulent present and the 
unpredictable future. According to Stathis Gauntlett, he combines 
traditional, quasi-traditional and distinctly non-traditional features. Such 
imitative parody could signal a poet searching for a new form, while using 
old ways through modernist experimentation. He also searches for a Greek 
modern voice that identifies with the Hellenic language and tradition. We 
cannot, however, assume as George Theotokas does, that Seferis is a 
custodian of a popular demotic tradition, since he often professes an 
admiration for the popular tradition, although such rhetoric appears 
contrived and dishonest. When Seferis promotes the demotic turn in The 
Greek Style, it may be an appropriation, since his poem ‘Folksong’, 
according to Theotokas, is a most witty satirical parody of poetic 
folklorism,\(^{30}\) and parody has subversive connotations. Keeley and Sherrard 
observe that he borrows actual phrases from epics by poets of the Cretan 
Renaissance, and adds these into his own.\(^{31}\) We note this in his poem 
‘Erotikos Logos,’ which transforms the demotic traditional Cretan poem 
Eratokritos into a highly symbolic modern poem. The leading female

subject in the latter poem is ‘Aretousa’, a name similar to *areti* that connotes virtue, while in Seferis’ ‘Erotikos Logos’ the leading subject is the ‘Red Rose’, which is a symbol of erotic love, and hence of an inversion of *areti*:

Ρόδο ύλικο τού ανέμου καί τής μοίρας,
μόνο στή μνήμη απόμενεις, ένας βαρύς ρυθμός
ρόδο τής νύχτας πέρασες, τρικύμισμα πορφύρας
τρικύμισμα τής Θάλασσας...Ο κόσμος είναι απλός.

Red rose of the wind and of fate,
You remained in memory only, a heavy rhythm
Rose of the night, you passed, undulating purple
Undulation of the sea…The world is simple.  

Seferis could be exploring his society’s contradictions as well as his own ambivalent positioning, and according to David Ricks, he uses references to demotic folk poetry to invert the reader’s expectations through a change of emphasis. He changes the emphasis, as we saw in the preceding ending to ‘Erotikos Logos’, through the use of irony, the unexpected and enigmatic endings. In ‘Sixteen Haiku’ for instance, he writes sixteen disjointed haiku verse, but the ending appears to be a stand-alone verse, since it isn’t haiku. Seferis concludes this poem by using a rhyming verse: from the non-sequential verses which describe sensual images (‘Meditative

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her breasts heavy in the looking – glass…Naked woman the pomegranate that broke was full of stars…’) to travellers’ yarns (‘What’s wrong with the rudder? The boat inscribes circles and there’s not a single gull’). In the concluding verse, he describes a nightmare, since ‘The world sinks: hang on, it’ll leave you alone in the sun’. He then confesses in the final haiku verse how he writes: ‘You write: the ink grew less, the sea increases’. Finally he describes in a lyrical and enigmatic way why he writes, leaving the reader to assume that he has borrowed the rhythms of the past, but his purpose to renew hope has not eventuated, since these sounds have been hopelessly smothered in the confusion of musical time:

Τούτο τό σώμα πού ἔλπιζε σάν τό κλωνί ν’ ανθίσει
Καί νά καρπίσει καί στήν παγωνιά νά γίνει αυλός
Η φαντασία τό βύθισε σ’ένα βουερό μελίσσει
Γιά νά περνά καί νά τό βιασανίζει ὁ μουσικός καιρός.

This body that hoped to flower like a branch,
To bear fruit, to become a flute in the frost-
Imagination has thrust it into a noisy bee-hive
So that musical time may come and torture it.\(^{34}\)

In this concluding verse, Seferis uses a demotic motif, ‘the branch which will flower,’ which expresses a hope of national renewal. But the main body of the poem is in free verse haiku. The meaning within the haiku verses is obscure, but when he adds the final rhythmic verse, we can

interpret this as a conversation between the past and present, in which Seferis is trying to come to terms with the demise of the national paramythic dream. So here we note the contradiction of living in a period which is both conservative and modern, and the unusual way in which this creative writer tries to negotiate it by including a paradoxical final verse. This obvious paradox undermines his notion of the continuity of a Greek Style, since his own writing style combines antithetical verse types, the foreign haiku, and the local politikos stichos form. The paramythic verse at the end of the modern free verse appears strange and out of context, but it may be a poetic strategy of antithesis to create balance in an obtuse way.

While Seferis includes images which represent all types of Greekness – the classical, the Byzantine and the modern – it could be that he is exploring his own ambivalence. When he uses mythological allusions, it could signify an elitist Greek identity and a desire to satisfy a European readership interested in classical antiquity. When he also includes paramythi – its motifs and types, its musicality and verse form – it indicates his alignment with demotic culture and the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s Romanticist, national Hellenistic project in which paramythi was co-opted to present the authentic Greek type as simple, rural and demotic, rather than its opposite which was complex, urban and purist. However, the fact that he defamiliarises paramythic traditional verse indicates that primarily he is a modern writer. We see this in his poem ‘Spring A.D.’ where he uses demotic themes such as spring, youth and blossoming almond trees. He builds the momentum as in a ballad, but
then violently inverts the reader’s expectation by introducing a realistic scene that describes a public execution. His demotic realist song expresses grief as in the moiroloi (lament): ‘Εγινε λίμνη η μοναξία ἐγινε λίμνη η στέρηση / ανέγγιχτη κι’ αχάραχτη’ (‘The lake became loneliness / now a lake / untouchable and untraceable’).\(^{35}\) In his later poems, he merges paramythic and mythic motifs, distorts time and uses enigmatic fragmented scenes that imitate high modernist trends. His disjointed and fragmented scenes are held together through a paramythic voice, repeated images, and the prophetic, authoritarian tone of a storyteller who moves freely between different time frames and various dialects and forms. In the poem ‘Mythistorema,’ for example, we note a surreal image in which the storyteller appears to see his own body disintegrating in the future: ‘My hands disappear and come toward me mutilated’. In a later verse he gives this image a concrete form by referring to the plight of the refugee who is ‘without the sense of touch / without men / in a country that is no longer ours / nor yours’. This image continues to evolve into a more tragic form that the reader can readily identify with: ‘When we go down to the harbours on Sunday to breathe / we see, lit in the sunset, / the broken planks of the voyages that never ended, / bodies that no longer know how to love’\(^{36}\). In the poem ‘The Cistern’, again we note that Seferis uses the image of the refugee, lost in time and alone at sea: ‘Time goes by, suns and moons, but the water has hardened like a mirror: / expectation open-eyed / when all the sails sink / at the edge of the sea that nourishes it’\(^{37}\). He uses

\(^{35}\) Seferis, *Collected Poems*, p. 245.


the colloquial expression for the passing of time to highlight the cyclical nature of Greek migration and exile.

Seferis’ migration experience might have contributed towards his creative exploration of the various historical phases of his cultural past. ‘Meaning in culture,’ according to Clifford, ‘involves migration as well as rootedness’. 38 Seferis shows both experiences in his poetry as a creative tension between security and displacement, hope and hopelessness, in which the significance of home translates as the idealised place, which he admits does not exist. The home as an estia is not a fossilised tradition, but presents as nostalgia for the past while engaging with the present. Home in such a context signifies revisiting the past as a source of renewal, even after the desolation of war. Seferis writes in his journal that ‘The ultimate evil of the Byzantines is ossification; the ultimate evil for us is dissolution’. 39 The living, continuously transformed demotic tradition, as an inspiring force, becomes his metaphor of hope, to fight off such dissolution because he refuses to ossify his art. Therefore, he produces a unique style which borrows from a robust, demotic tradition and transforms it.

When Seferis identifies with his roots, the demotic language, its stories and lyrical sounds, he indicates that, although he is prone to nostalgia,

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39 Seferis, A Poet’s Journal, p.78.
nevertheless nostalgia can be a positive creative force that inspires hope. He therefore moves beyond the mythic and uses the paramythic as a symbol of stability and permanence. In ‘The Cistern’ and in ‘Erotikos Logos’,\textsuperscript{40} Seferis uses mythic motifs such as a ‘throbbing earth’ which ‘flaps its wings’ and dies out in ‘ebony darkness’, and ‘corals of memory’ that ‘shine like purple’, which both have other-worldly and regal connotations. Primarily, however, we note that he uses a rhyming traditional verse form which presents like a prayer – a metaphor for hope to counteract the despair caused by impermanence and the dislocation of a twentieth century society in crisis. In ‘Erotikos Logos,’ he writes, ‘Come forth sleepless form in the gathering silence / raise your head from your cupped hands / so that your will be done and you tell me again’. In the next line, we note the symbol of hope ‘a flock of doves awakens and descends / their low, circling flights entangles me / the stars are a human touch on my breast’.\textsuperscript{41} By combining the form of the prayer with the biblical symbol of the dove (which is also a familiar demotic form), the poet tries to renew the nation’s sense of hope in itself. The demotic, according to Seferis, articulated the Greek ideal, the notion of \textit{ἀνθρωπος} (man) in antithesis to the ‘animalistic’. This idea supports faith in the human at a time when the civil war presented the bestial side of man. Seferis argues that this virtue of being ‘a human’ was ‘deeply implanted in the Greek spirit ever since

\textsuperscript{40} Seferis, ‘The Cistern’, l. 6-9, 15, ‘Erotikos Logos,’ Part 2, l. 3 in \textit{Collected Poems}, pp. 493,481.

that far away time, when Oedipus made an end of the Sphinx and her world of nightmares, by uttering the one word “Man”.\footnote{Seferis, ‘Mycenae’, ll. 23-25 in \textit{Collected Poems}, p.69.}

The idea of the ‘free’, autonomous man is fundamental to the discourse of Hellenism for this poet. The classical Greek virtue of the ‘measure,’ revealed in the popular saying ‘πάν μέτρον ἄριστον’ (‘everything in moderation’), works through antithesis during a national crisis. Modernity’s idealisation of the ‘human as the measure for all things’ is undermined by a loss of all sense of the measure, since man during critical historical moments often has been known to yield to the unforgivable flaw of hubris. He refers to his own era being out-of-control in the poem ‘Mycenae’, when he writes: ‘I’ve seen snakes crossed with vipers, knotted over the evil generation,’ with the ceaseless perpetuation of crimes against humanity as the ‘path from killer to victim to punishment / from punishment to the next murder’.\footnote{Man in Greek is \textit{anthropos} and etymologically is similar to \textit{αρθρωνω} meaning ‘to articulate, but also to stand on one’s two feet’. The riddle the sphinx asked Oedipus was a word game involving this play on words. \textit{Anthropos} connotes, not only the physical form of the human being, but also the virtuous person, the polar opposite to the animalistic type of person since he or she can articulate words.}

In the next verse, when Seferis asks: ‘How can you gather together the thousand fragments of each person?’ I interpret it as a deconstruction of his previous idealisation of man as ‘the measure for things and people’. This is because he adds that man is as fragile as the butterfly, as well as complex and brittle. Here there is a similar strategy of using the riddle in order to make a point, as in the ancient gnomic riddle of the Sphinx. Both Seferis and the ancient anecdote...
reach the same conclusion, that autonomy is an illusion, being only temporal. Man as *anthropos* stands on two feet at noon only. In his primal state, he goes about on all fours and eventually he returns to a humbled state as he needs a walking stick and guidance. During troubled times, paramythia function as an antidote to despair, despite the historical experience that men become broken, symbolized in the gnomic verse as crawling on all fours, or in Seferis, through the paramythic image of ‘a dead butterfly without makeup’.  

The pain of history and its effects on its people is further emphasized by Seferis when he refers to the tortured landscape in ‘*Mythistorema*’, in which he uses many allusions to pastoral scenes:

> Ο τόπος μας είναι κλειστός, όλο βουνά  
> ...Δέν εχουμε ποτάμια δέν έχουμε πηγάδια  
> δέν έχουμε πηγές  
> Μονάχα λίπες στέρνες, άδειες κι' αύτες, πού ηχούν και τίς προσκυνούμε.  
> Ήχος στεκάμενος κούφιος, ίδιος μέ τή μοναξιά μας…

Our country is closed in, all mountains  
…we have no rivers, we have no wells,  
we have no springs,  
Only a few cisterns - and these empty - that echo,  
and that we worship.

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A stagnant hollow sound, the same as our loneliness…

This reads like a demotic lament, a collective confession of despair, but also an individual confession of Seferis’ own personal experience, heightened by a more omnipresent threat of death, together with a loss of faith and the weakening in some sectors of society of traditional religious beliefs. His creative interest in tradition and religion could signify a personal response to counter this loss, even as he engages in moral and existential questions. He moves between polarities of hope and despair, and combines motifs from a variety of historical epochs. Oppositions are played out. The suffering of humanity through the ages, from antiquity to modern times, is mediated by hope, which reaches a climax in the cadences of the oral religious rituals and hymns, and in the memories of idyllic country scenes.

Seferis may have appropriated the paramythi in order to create an individual style. He may have imitated the well-known Cretan Erotokritos in order to stir popular sentiment and promote an ethno-Hellenistic identity at a time when public morale was at a low. It is also valid to assume that he co-opted the demotic Greek traditional paramythi to negotiate personal as well as collective despair, especially since his verse had touched a sensitive chord and was later adapted into music by composers Mikis Theodorakis, Hadzidakis and Xarhakos during the politically repressive

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Junta years. Seferis knew what a powerful tool this low-brow form could be and used it to stir popular as well as international sentiment.

Odysseus Elytis

Elytis is similar to Seferis in deploying elements of paramythi together with a Greek modernist style that uses the sounds of Hellenic Eastern Orthodox musical and hymnological traditions, but he differs in the way that he uses surrealist traces with depictions of the Greek landscape and folkloric culture. This shows that he is not immune to Western influences despite his ethnocentric goal ‘to explore the true soul of Greece’. Beyond his desire to explore the Greek soul or ‘psyche’, he also expresses a desire to explore the supernatural dimension ‘paramythically’, and he does so by using the tools of the Byzantine tradition, its sounds and colours, its images and motifs. But he also exploits the demotic, rhythmic sounds of the Greek topos. His preferred use of surrealism has a very different emphasis to the way in which his surrealist counterparts Sachtouris, Gatsos and Embirikos use paramythi, since they focus on the dark side of life by depicting depravity, while stressing the alienation of the modern individual from the traditions and beliefs of the past. Elytis, in contrast, seeks to counterbalance the horror, not to compete with it, through ‘a move forward towards a continual renewal of life, [since he feels] the indomitable need to express directly [his] impulsion towards the vision of Paradise’.  

46 These composers also adapted some of Elytis’ and Gatsos’ poems into musical songs which have become timeless songs sung by many generations since the post-war years.  
47 Elytis, Anoikta Hartia, Asterias, Athens, 1974, p.18
Elytis probes the subconscious and metaphysical world through a positive Greek Orthodox vision, which he insists is a true imaginative vision since it does not separate the spiritual from the physical, natural world,48 but, as in Eastern Orthodoxy, both dimensions are united. Philip Sherrard points out that his high-brow, spiritual and naturalistic emphasis pays attention to minor details of the landscape: ‘Αυτ’ος ο κοσμός ο μικρός (‘This small world the great’),49 and includes the low-brow swaying rhythms of the rebetika, and the chanting sounds of spoken conversations.50 Elytis writes:

Others said: Why should he get to know those 
lives within the eyes of the other. 
I didn’t see anyone else’s eyes, 
I only met tears in the Emptiness which I embraced 
And nothing but storms in the peace which I endured.51

This reads like a confessional lament that draws from familiar symbols of the natural environment and uses a rhythmic tone similar to popular rebetika. So his metaphysical spiritual vision is balanced by a creative exploitation of the Greek world using a Hellenistic vision as ‘an assimilative activity, which borrows material from the East and West’.52 The paramythic images that dominate his Eastern view are recurring images of Eros, sea, islands, ships, wind, the woman on the rock who

48 Elytis in Anoikta Hartia, p.238, states that, ‘The imaginative or spiritual world, is not another world set apart from the natural world.’
50 Elytis, Anoikta Hartia, p. 50.
51 Elytis, ‘The Passions’, Part IV, ll. 21-25, To Axion Esti. p.35. (my translation)
52 Elytis, Anoikta Hartia, p. 424.
haunts mankind. Into this paramythic element, he also injects slang terms and neologisms together with katherevousa (purist Greek language), biblical, archaic and demotic terms, as well as Byzantine rhythms. In his highly enigmatic poem To Axion Esti, Elytis names the three major sections as ‘Genesis,’ the ‘Passions’ and the ‘Doxastikon’ (‘Glorification’). These terms have liturgical and biblical significance. While he uses complex metered patterns which in some verses parody Byzantine hymnology, in other sections he employs narrative prose (often without semantic coherence) which function like a kerygma (a sermon), or a prophetic dialogue:

`Καὶ μετὰ θά μιλήσει, νά πεί: εξόριστε Ποιητή, στὸν αἰῶνα σου, λέγε, τί βλέπεις;
- Βλέπω τὰ ἔθνη, ἄλλοτες ἀλαζονικά, παραδομένα στὴ σφήκα καὶ στὸ ξινόχορτο...
Χρόνους πολλοὺς μετά τὴν Ἀμαρτία ποῦ τὴν εἶπαν Ἀρετή μέσα στὶς εκκλησίες καὶ τὴν ευλόγησαν...

And after he will speak, and say: Exiled Poet, what do you see in your age?

I see the nations, at times arrogantly, given to wasps and bitter grass…

Many years after the Sin which they called Virtue in the churches and which they blessed…

A dominant theme throughout this prophetic poem is antithesis, the repetitive use of the concept of light and darkness: ‘ΑΞΙΟΝ ΕΣΤΙ τὸ φῶς καὶ η πρώτη χαραγμένη στὴν πέτρα ευχή’ (‘Worthy is the Light and the

first imprinted blessing on the rock’).

This is qualified by contrasting references to death and resurrection: ‘ΑΧΙΟΝ ΕΣΤΙ τὸ χώμα ποῦ ανέβαζει μίαν οσμή κεραυνοῦ σὰν τὸ θειάφι τοῦ βουνοῦ ὁ πυθμέναι ὁποὶ θάλλουν οἱ νεκροὶ ἀνθη τής αυριον’ (‘Worthy is the soil which emits a smell of lightning as though from mountainous sulphur from which sprout the dead blossoms of tomorrow’). Antonios Aligizakis argues that Byzantine hymnographers and hagiographers believe that they can only receive enlightenment through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, in contradistinction to modern European classicists, who support the rational spirit, but also pursue the divine through material beauty and passion. Elytis merges both.

Byzantine hagiography often refers to the sun as a symbol of glory, eternity and perpetual light, and we note that Elytis uses this symbol in one of his major poetic collections published in 1943 named Ηλιος ο πρώτος (The Sovereign Sun). Such an analogy is relevant in a poetics that rejects the rational spirit of the West, and instead reinforces the Greek view that Orthodoxy is a Church of light. Elytis’ poetics stresses this relationship through the concept of a ceaseless ‘photology’ (‘science of light’) of perpetual illumination, or the ‘luminous as the idealization of light as it signifies vitality’. We note a similar symbolic relationship at work in the

54 Elytis, ‘To Doxastikon’, ll. 1 in To Axion Esti, p. 73.
55 Elytis, ‘To Doxastikon’, ll. 59-63 in To Axion Esti, p.78
56 Antonios Aligizakis, Η Οκταηχία στη Ελληνική Λειτουργική Υμνογραφία (The Eight Sound in Greek Liturgical Hymnology), International Musicological Society, Thessalonika, 1985, pp.118,120.
Byzantine liturgical musical sequence known as the ordo, which is a system of eight modes portraying the eight-moded wheel of the sun.\(^{58}\) Elytis’ adaptation of the Byzantine chant form, with its strophes, pauses, repetition and rhyming patterns, is consistent with the visionary role that he attributes to himself, as we note in ‘Prophetikon’. The prophetic dimension in To Axion Esti could be related to the pervasive spirit of doom, especially heightened because of the horror of civil war, which had been foretold by Christ when he said that ‘brother will betray brother to death, and father his child, and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death’.\(^{59}\) This same theme of impending doom is taken up by Elytis: ‘Ταραχή θα πέσει στόν Άδη, καὶ τὸ σανίδωμα θά υποχωρήσει από τὴν πίεσι τῇ μεγάλῃ τοῦ ἡλίου’ (‘Hades will be in turmoil, and the floor will give way under the huge pressure of the sun’).\(^{60}\) He counteracts this pessimism by constructing a paean to the light, and elevates the sun to divine status by naming it ‘Justice’s logical sun’ while begging it repeatedly to never cease remembering his land: ‘Τῆς ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗΣ ἥλιον νοητέ…μή παρακαλῶ σας μή λησμονάτε τῇ χώρᾳ μου!’ (‘Logical sun of Justice…please I beg you don’t forget my land’).\(^{61}\) Here, we note that the poet is emphasizing patriotism and justice, and the plea for national dignity through enlightened remembering, but more pervasively we sense silences which cannot be articulated, but are implied.

\(^{58}\) A. Aligizakis, O Χαρακτήρας τῆς Ὑποδοξίας Ψαλτικῆς (The Characteristics of Orthodox Chant), International Musicological Society, Thessaloniki, 1988, p. 398.
\(^{60}\) Elytis, ‘To Profitikon’, in To Axion Esti, p. 65. (my translation)
\(^{61}\) Elytis, part VII, l.1 in To Axion Esti, p. 46.
Elytis’ poetics is what he himself describes as a ‘solar metaphysics’ in which the image of the ‘sovereign sun’ functions as the primary source of poetic vision according to Katerina Andriotis-Baitinger. \(^{62}\) I argue that his use of hymnological rhythms is a strategy similar to the oral tradition’s use of memorization, but it also gives his poetics a mystical and religious tone. This produces a majestic Greek voice that is new, but is also grounded in the low-brow art of its people. His positive message of light is counterbalanced by surrealistic allusions to dark areas, similar to the indistinct but heightened memories of traumatic dreams. In To Axion Esti, his verses resemble oral hymns which also contain surreal memories. Some are idyllic, such as images of innocent children holding hands without speaking, images of the countryside, the Aegean, its light, the vegetation. Others are traumatic: ‘ΑΧΙΟΝ ΕΣΤΙ τό χερὶ ποῦ επιστρέφει ἀπὸ φόνο φρικτὸν καὶ τώρα ἔχειντο αἰώνων αὐλήθεια ὁ κόσμος ποῦ υπερέχει ποιὸ τὸ “νῦν,, καὶ ποιὸ τὸ “αἰεν,, τοῦ κόσμου’ (‘Worthy is the hand which draws back from freakish murder and now knows in truth which is the world that reigns supreme, which is the “now” and which the “to the ages” of the world’). \(^{63}\) This quote is a liturgical κατάλυσις (catalysis) – an ending which functions like a caesura, at the point when the priest blesses the people and reminds them that ‘God is and remains, now, and forever and until the ages of ages,’ and then, after a long pause he pronounces ‘Amen’ to verify the truthfulness of what has been chanted. In Elytis’ extended catalysis in To Axion Esti, he repeats this liturgical formula eight times. He


\(^{63}\) Elytis, ‘To Doxastikon’, ll. 13-16 in To Axion Esti, p. 87.
uses unusual punctuation (by eliminating pauses and accentuating the word ‘Now’ with a capital letter). He also employs an authoritative elitist tone that is rhetorical and repetitive. He concludes with a verse that parodies the rhythms and content of liturgical catalysis while subverting the hierarchical order of the Church tradition by placing the emphasis on man and nothingness, and reinforcing the idea that the Gods (not God) have been undermined. Such an observation sheds light on the overall meaning of this highly complex poem, which tells the tale of the tragedy of present-day modern Greek society, which has disintegrated (hence the repetition of the word ‘Now’ but it may also reveal the poet’s pessimism and hopelessness, which has been disguised through the parody of a religious paean).

George Sarantaris

George Sarantaris, like the two previous poets Seferis and Elytis, also deploys elements from the paramythi, but unlike them, he does not use enigmatic images and the surrealist techniques of their complex, modernist

64 Elytis,’To Doxastikon’, ll. 9-11 in To Axion Esti, p. 88.
style in his poems. Instead, he uses the simplicity of child-like verse, even though he explores deep existential ideas and, according to Katherine Cassis, seeks a Greek ‘geist’ like his traditional counterparts. He explores such themes through a traditional Eastern Orthodox focus, even though he had lived and received his higher education in Italy. Art for him does not appear to be a means of socio-political action, although he does go against contemporary artistic trends which are aligned with Nietzschean politics, stressing the death of God, religion and faith in a metaphysical world. He chooses to engage with this metaphysical world without hiding an attraction to the real world. We can presume this by looking at the titles of his poems, most of which refer to nature, ‘Again the sky opens here at the gates’, ‘Two Songs of Spring’, ‘The Moon’, ‘The Wind and Spring’, ‘Our Heart, Of Beauty’, ‘Three Poems of the Sea’. He describes natural phenomena and metaphysical truths with what appears to be paramythic, child-like simplicity. In the latter poem, he includes a prologue that poses an existential question: ‘Did our life leave, or did the birds leave God’s palm?’ Then he responds philosophically as in folk sayings:

‘They thrust gunshots in order to shoot them
Our life became more beautiful…I remember the summer of my life
as though you were the only springtime of this earth
I face you O day of my birth’.66

Like Elytis, Sarantaris appears to highlight a positive view of life, without denying the inevitability of death. He does this by tempering his society’s post-war disillusionment, which had resulted in a loss of faith because of the atrocities that had been witnessed during the war years. The way that he appears to provide a sense of hope, and a counter to despair, is through the use of a verse form typical of folksongs and poems, but in his case his perspective is a religious one rather than a demotic one. He reinforces the meanings that he wants to transmit through repetition. In his poem ‘Είναι μία γυναίκα’ (‘There is a woman’), he repeats the idea that the narrator is dreaming of a better future, while referring to the wisdom of the past with its nostalgic remembering of love and country. He begins the poem with highly symbolic opening lines: ‘Είναι μία γυναίκα και τραγουδά / Θά γίνω σάν τη θάλασσα πού βρέχει τή ζωή μας / Θά γίνω περιστέρι’ (‘There is a woman who sings / I will become like the sea which sends rain upon our life / I will become a dove’).  

There is no caesura or pause, so the meaning is ambiguous. Does the woman speak in song, or while looking at the woman does the narrator break out in song? The motifs he uses are paramythic (or even mythic as this unnamed woman might be Helen of Troy) while the rhythm is like a demotic song:

I will become like the sea which lies before me
and follows me when I walk
and follows me when I cry
and consoles me when I am not in the wrong
the hour when I remember my country

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erōs and my lost love.⁶⁸

Sarantaris changes the stress to vary the tone of the actual word in ‘Καί μ’ ἀκλοθά’ (‘it follows me’), and this stress on the last syllable gives the poem a colloquial tone, further reinforced when he drops the ‘ε’ from μὲ (me) and the o from [ο]νεϊρομαι. Through these minor formal changes, Sarantaris transforms the symbolic poem into a paramythic verse, which is in turn transformed because of the absence of the caesura. In this way, he expresses familiar and contemporary national concerns in a new way and with a different emphasis. The simplicity of his form, together with his use of subtle changes, allow readers to infer various possible meanings. In his poem ‘Φιλίες’ (‘Friendships’), Sarantaris shows his exuberance for life, although he dulls it down by confessing his acceptance of the inevitability of another existence. The poem reads like a parable told by an Orthodox Church Father. It transmits the ascetic Orthodox belief that this life is transitory, and that we should not become attached to it. In a highly symbolic way, he connects the image of the sun to a loving, but jealous God:

O αγαπημένος ουρανός
tósō aphiλής tósō agathós
mē tō aplētō tou φῶς mās enokhleī
dēn sygχωρεἰ
vā epōteutouμe tē zōh,
mē prothumía.

⁶⁸ Sarantaris, Like a Breath of the Wind, p. 8.
Beloved sky
so naïve, so virtuous
with its abundant light annoys us
it doesn’t forgive
when we willingly fall in love with life. 69

Sarantaris often uses religious symbols, a simple language, and uncomplicated rhyme patterns, as in parables. His positive and religious memories and images convey the impression that he is purposefully using his religious traditions, their content and form, in order to counter the pessimism of his age, but also to resurrect broken spirits through a redemptive remembering, even though this remembering is different from most poets of his time, who wrote about similar issues in a more complex way.

Έχω δεί τόν ουρανό μέ τά μάτια μου
Μέ τα μάτια μου άνοιξα τά μάτια του
Μέ τή γλώσσα μου μίλησε
Γίναμε αδελφοί και κουβεντιάσαμε
Στράσαμε τραπέζι και δειπνήσαμε
Σάν νά ήταν ό καιρός όλος μπροστά μας

Και θυμάμαι τόν ήλιο πού γελούσε

Πού γελούσε και δάκρυζε θυμάμαι

I have seen the sky with my eyes
With my eyes I opened its eyes
With its tongue it spoke to me
We become brothers and conversed
We set the table and supped together
As though all time was before us

And I remember the sun, how it laughed

It laughed and it cried I remember\textsuperscript{70}

Here we note a traditional metered poem, with repeating opening words and rhyming couplets. While it suggests action, it is about remembering and its imagery indicates the coexistence of antithetic emotions. The emphasis is in the last two lines since the poet spaces these out and, unlike the previous couplets, the two final lines are without punctuation. This distortion of the typical sequence allows us to infer that the missing lines tell of silent truths that are too hard to express. Sarantaris’ poems revisit the past and are a way to work through his experiences, but also the collective experience of a society that has shared the same trauma. Therefore, he uses a language and style that can be understood by many Greek people, since it is not complex. It is closer to the pedagogic paramythi in contrast to the previous poets, and it allows his readers to fill in the gaps that he includes.

\textsuperscript{70} Sarantaris, ‘I have seen the heavens…’ in \textit{Like a Breath of Wind}, p. 2.
The non-traditionalists: Nikos Gatsos, Miltos Sachtouris and Andreas Embirikos

The counter-traditional, provocative and subversive group of Greek modern writers do not identify with the Greek Orthodox Christian religious tradition and debates on ‘Greekness’ and national identity, as do Seferis, Elytis and Sarantaris (to a lesser extent). They are often linguistically unorthodox since they merge *katharevousa* with demotic Greek, and they are inclined to use a prosaic style which dwells on historical themes rather than mythological ones. When Nikos Gatsos, Miltos Sahtouris and Andreas Embirikos use paramythic motifs, they emphasize a negative version of humanity and life, the bestiality in man, and they present scenes that are haunted by traumatic images. Instead of functioning as a symbol of continuity and hope, paramythi in their texts represents a nightmare vision. Implicitly, they are using the imaginative paramythic form to express their society’s existential fear of self-annihilation, while reflecting the loss of meaning in the old truths and traditional religious values. Their subversive style could represent their response to what they see as unjust institutions, while abstracting from the trauma of their past. In all these poets, we sense their urgent need to highlight destruction, colonization and loss of faith in God and in man. When they use paramythi, it is in a highly expressionistic way that stresses the demise of paramythic innocence.

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Sachtouris uses a style which has an affinity with folk poetry, since we note that he uses political verse’s opening couplets and closing triplet in some poems together with shorter segments of meter, such as in ‘Η Πηγή’ (‘The Spring Fountain’). In other poems, such as ‘Η Πληγωμένη Άνοιξη’ (‘Wounded Spring’), he also uses politikos stichos’ iambic form with its predictable rhythm, but he subverts paramythic motifs such as the canary, the dove, the garden, the mirror and transforms these into images that reflect the atrocities occurring in his contemporary world, as well as in Greece’s turbulent past. The canary becomes the silenced object and plays a minor role in the violent scene which sounds like a parody of a modern Crucifixion. The dove becomes a ferocious dog howling in the night.  

The garden ‘smelled of fever that was no garden some strange couples were walking inside wearing shoes on their hands...heads like wild epileptic moons’. Ricks observes that Sachtouris is relocating himself in relation to his folk heritage. He explores the dark side of the ballad tradition in an unsettling way by using the paralogous, or what Ricks refers to as the ‘terra cognita of the imagination to explore the psychologically ancestral layers of the mind’. When he uses coded images of violation and mutilation, it is because it was politically incorrect for poets in that era to undermine the nationalist and official religious rhetoric which sought to cover up silences. He combines distorted images with the intermittent beat

75 Sachtouris, ‘The Garden’, in The Seal or the Eighth Moon.
77 Ricks, ‘Bottom of the Well’, p.74.
of folk poetry, recreating and exorcising the horror of his time, in a similar way to what Seferis and Gatsos did. But as Rick points out, ‘Sachtouris carries this a stage further’. 78

Sachtouris uses simple paramythic images that he violently exploits, such as the motifs of innocence and purity, which have religious symbolic connotations in a traditional context, such as the dove, the child and Maria, which is a name revered by Christians. He subverts these as he places them into a foreign context and transforms them into sinister apparitions. Such violation is further emphasized through the way he abolishes the caesura. The endings are often unsettling, as is the absence of punctuation, full stops and pauses, which highlights the fact that the poet is distorting not only traditional verse patterns but also normal speech patterns. In the poem ‘Maria’, the pensive protagonist constantly weeps. She embodies the colonized ‘other’ who articulates terror through multiple traumatic voices, the whimpering soldier’s voice, the dying sheep’s cry of the sick person, and the cry of a baby being born. While she is violated, the unemotional radio plays on, symbolizing the indifference of modern life to rape and other forms of oppression. Finally, Maria opens her hands and flies around the room, symbolizing her desire for liberation by escaping to another dimension. The protagonist is depicted as imaginatively performing flight and so the realistic but coded depiction of rape ends as a surreal paramythi.

78 Ricks, ‘Bottom of the Well’, p. 82.
Sachtouris’ subversive poem ‘The Saint’ appears as a hagiographic narrative that concludes with a typical religious sentiment of acceptance or a resignation, but it contains nihilistic undertones: ‘I’ve finally decided I’ll live among the drowned and among the lepers’. While this appears to be a paraphrase of something that a saint would have said since it reinforces the Eastern Orthodox Christian belief that accepting loss and defeat is a positive Christian virtue, the rest of the poem with its depiction of raw images – ‘the flesh peeled off and fell bit by bit soon nothing would remain but his skeleton’ 79 – indicates that this is not a religious Orthodox text. He abstracts the horror of his time to another level through shocking images that provoke disgust. Furthermore, his combination of incompatible elements, such as religious and paramythic motifs that become sinister apparitions, mocks the Greek Orthodox moral code as well as Seferis’ idealist notion of a Hellenistic continuity that uses traditional cultural forms. 80

Embirikos connects the unconnected in a series of paradoxes in a similar way to Sachtouris, only he is more concerned with language games than with questions of national identity, as were his surrealist literary counterparts, according to Kalokyris. 81 True to his iconoclastic approach, he merges religious sayings and rhythms even though this is a parody of the highly rhetorical epic style. For example, in ‘Στροφές Στροφαλών’

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80 Voulgaris, ‘Playing with Genre(s): The Prose-Poems of Nanos Valaoritis’, in Tziovas, Greek Modernism and Beyond, p. 234.
81 Kefala, ‘Kalokyris and Borges’, p. 76.
(‘Turbine Turns’), he uses the iambic politikos stichos ‘Hail, who have never feared the clashing rocks, with mythic motifs, the mermaid, the whale, the sirens, the clashing rocks’ and then subverts the poem by inverting the traditional meaning of the images in an ironic way: ‘Hail, who have let yourself be ravished by the sirens’. He abolishes the caesura, and does not use full stops, even though he begins each line with a capital letter. The momentum rises as in epic narrative, but the expected climax is disrupted through a series of negations and ambiguous associations:

Hunters are we of delight of dreams
The destination that runs on but never rests
As dawn never rests
And shivers never rest…

The highly symbolic paramythic poem ‘Winter Grapes’ reads like verse, but is written in free prose, and often, though not always, omits punctuation:

They took away her toys and lover Well then she bowed her head and almost died. But the thirteen destinies like her fourteen years smote the fleeing calamities. No one spoke. No one ran to protect her against the overseas sharks which has already cast an evil shadow over her like a fly staring with malice on a diamond or a land enchanted. And
so the story was heartlessly forgotten as always happens when a forest ranger forgets his thunderbolt in the woods.\textsuperscript{82}

This reads like a paramythi about a young girl, but it is about a more sinister history which has been ‘heartlessly forgotten’. It symbolically represents the story of the occupation of Greece, and how the ‘overseas sharks’ or German invaders colonised, raped and plundered the innocent citizens.

In the poem ‘Όρθρος’ (‘Matins’), which is a Byzantine service prior to the Divine Liturgy, he inverts reader expectation in a subversive way by describing a sensual experience of frenzied pleasure. He includes mythic allusions to the caryatids, the symbols of beauty and perfect form together with heightened sensuality and the beauty of nature in a pandesia, a triumphant song of pleasure, very different from a religious service. In the poem ‘Αυξήσι’ (‘Augmentation’), he does not use parody as in the previous poem. The tone is subdued, descriptive and again sensuous. Embirikos’ surrealist style uses paramythi in a syncretic way, since he combines many voices in a labyrinth of words and through a vortex of sounds. He focuses on language, just as Greek Orthodox tradition believes that the Logos was revealed through God’s logoi (words). Embirikos chooses to subvert this hierarchical order by inverting the traditional and religious meanings of words by including words that describe violent

paramythic scenes. He subverts the biblical narrative of the Magi by transposing the protagonists into a modern time frame. Within such a context, the gifts of the Magi represent the excessive consumerist desire to devour: ‘They lift their veils and reveal their mighty arms swelling’. In a similarly subversive way, the image of the heavenly Virgin Mary becomes a sensuous female object in his poem ‘Turbine Turns’:

O υπερωκεάνειον τραγουδάς και πλέχεις
Είναι ο καπνός σου πλόκαμος της ειμαρμένης
Ποι ξετυλίγεται μές’ στην αιθρία κι ανεβαίνει
Σαν μαύρη κόμη ηδυπαθούς ουρανίας...

O Ocean Liner you sing and sail
Your smoke trail is a strand of destiny
Uncoiling in the ether and ascending
Like the black looks of a voluptuous heavenly virgin...\(^{83}\)

Gatsos’ most famous work is his long poem *Amorgos*, which has similar themes and motifs to those used by Seferis in ‘Mythistorema’. However, the former poem is harder to decode since it does not have any thematic continuity. Instead, it is an example of automatic writing, designed to challenge the reader.\(^{84}\) The atmosphere which permeates the writing is one that a post-war world can identify with: fantasy, horror and impending


doom as a result of the reversal of the natural order of things. There are traumatic and dynamic images and the tone escalates into frenzy at various points. He uses the most explicit scenes of violence and despair, reviving history and replacing it with a paramythi in which he refers to a European haunted princess, and other foreign intrusions such as a historic reference to ‘Baltimore’.

Like Seferis and Elytis, Gatsos uses the mythic image of the Symplegades (the clashing rocks), which the latter two poets used to represent the journey over to the other side, although Gatsos prophesises that this must be preceded by a blood sacrifice. He refers to muteness taking over the spirit (a modernist symbol of an emotional state used by T.S Eliot in The Wasteland) after using the mythic image of Achilles taking up the reins to control wild horses. When he incorporates a long prose paragraph within the modern long poem, he uses a vortex of active words which reach a crescendo, like a song of hope that summons a day of resurrection: ‘an angelic song opens itself and shakes itself against corruption…the nightingales will be resurrected…and the people with the cold eyes and the pale faces when they hear the bells ringing…will find festive hats to wear and flamboyant bows to put on their shoes’. This heightened euphoria then loses momentum and the verse uses a slower pace, and the voice becomes more personal as it uses intimate language, which is a sharp contrast to the preceding prose verse that described senseless action. In this intimate

The poet repeats a refrain whose last two lines are also repeated at the end of the poem: ‘How much I loved you only I know’. Eventually, there is a confession of despair: ‘Great black sea with so many pebbles around your neck’. Gatsos uses Turkish Eastern allusions, mythic characters Adonis and Achilles and the cattle of the Achaians, ancient writer of history Herakleitos, folkloric motifs and legendary figures such as Levetoyiannis and Golfo, who was a paramythic character driven mad by the loss of her lover. He merges the paramythi with myth and legends, and uses different meters in order to create a disjointed but dynamic rhythm that resembles prophetic narrative prose:

Do not become FATED…It is a fire, it is the Turk’s matchmaking. It is the Hungarians’ lair…

The writers whom I have analysed in this chapter are situated at various points along a traditional and counter-traditional spectrum. We have Seferis and Elytis, who use modernist trends since they use surrealistic elements and a complex collage of disjointed images and scenes which may include mythic allusions, but their work also contains paramythic tones and motifs. Their political conservatism, therefore, remains a paradox and it may be related to their social position as national poets of Greece, and their desire to be both popular and avant-garde. They appropriate paramythi, or creatively exploit its verse form, in order to promote an identity which appears to maintain national Hellenistic traces.

Sarantaris is also conservative, but he does not use the modernist trends of the West, but instead chooses to use paramythic simplicity in order to engage with profound themes. The counter-traditional poets Embirikos, Gatsos and Sahtouris subvert the paramythi in a violent way. They target the very soul of Hellenism, its language and its religion. That which unites all these writers is the use of the demotic narrative in order to explore the demise of the nation’s most optimistic paramythi, *The Great Idea*, and what they view as the myths of the past. The glorious heroic tradition was unable to mobilize the nation’s fading morale, but neither could folklore and nationalism work in the same Romantic way as it had in the late nineteenth century. Modern Greek writers had to reinvent a style that suited their situation, but also would regenerate hope. Their challenge was to resurrect the hopes of the past, when only fragments remained in a present filled with stark images of ravished lands and people, street cleaners sweeping in the dead bodies and rows of boats sailing away. They responded to this challenge in different ways. Seferis and Elytis used the paramythi as an emblem of hope and stability, a return to innocence and safety from the reality of their situation. Sarantaris steered away from Western influences and aligned himself with the Eastern Orthodox tradition, especially with the wisdom found in the simple truths of its parable-like paramythia. Nikos Gatsos, Andreas Embirikos and Miltos Sahtouris used the paramythi in a different way and showed what Linda
Hutcheons describes as the tension between ‘constructive and destructive intent’.  

The transformations of modern fairytales and folktales across various cultural and ethnic groups are associated with societal insecurity as indicated by Marie-Louise Teneze’s question: ‘Is the folktale a response to the oppressive interrogation of reality?’ Paramythic transformations by Modern Greek writers are related to massive social changes such as war, civil strife, poverty and mass migration, but also indicate how creative writers are searching for a form that can best express their own individual voices through the Greek *topos, tropos and ichos*. The precedent of the paramythi’s transformation, beginning with the Modern Greek writers, is a characteristic phenomenon that is constantly evolving. In the diaspora, both the traditional and non-traditional diasporic writers transform the paramythi, although in their case, the Hellenistic identity with its *tropos*, tied to the Greek *topos*, is challenged because of their distance both in time and in space from Greece. They therefore create new paramythia through which they negotiate identity, change and their sense of home.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SEARCHING FOR ONE’S VOICE THROUGH PARAMYTHI

The novel assembles a heterology or diversity of discursive types, a heteroglossia or diversity of languages, and a heterophony or diversity of voices…

Bakhtin\textsuperscript{1}

The Greek language with its multiple and diverse registers, dialects and forms has a specific and complex history which is marked by stylistic, linguistic and ideological conflict. In the previous chapter, I explored six Modern Greek poets who had created what Bakhtin refers to as a novelistic discourse, since their texts were made up of a ‘diversity of voices’ which blurred the boundaries between the high-brow and low-brow, the modern and the pre-modern, the written and the oral languages, and showed Western and non-Western literary influences. These writers showed alignments either with or against the policies of the newly formed Greek State, which sought to establish a unified national and cultural identity during the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{2} The language question, however, was a highly divisive issue that polarized its educated elite along political lines from the nineteen thirties to the seventies. While the left

\textsuperscript{5} Alexiou, \textit{After Antiquity}, p. 314.
supported the demotic, and some conservatives from the right saw the demotic as the language of anarchy, \(^3\) we note that national poets who were conservatives, such as George Seferis and Odysseas Elytis, creatively used and transformed the demotic for nationalistic and personal reasons, as discussed in the previous chapter. \(^4\) According to Margaret Alexiou, ‘it was this lack of agreement about a standard literary and spoken language which goaded writers to find their own voice amid the plethora of oral and literary texts’. \(^5\) Modern Greek writers exploited the full range of their past Classical and Christian heritage with its diverse linguistic registers. Poets such as Giorgos Sarantaris and Andreas Embirikos showed a preference for the song-like quality of the vernacular (the people’s language), even though they were so different regarding their aesthetic and ideological persuasions. Alexiou argues that prose and speech writers often used their own particular strand of *katharevousa*, which again was not homogeneous but had various forms. She further points out that Nikos Kazantzakis had pointed out that ‘Greece has acquired not one but hundreds of *katharevousas*’. \(^6\)

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\(^6\) Alexiou explains that *katharevousa* is a purist form of the Greek language which is a compromise between archaism and colloquialism. It was adopted as the official language of the Greek State in the early nineteenth century. In literature, there are various gradations of learned uses, and no homogeneous form. In the education system, *katharevousa* was the language of secondary schools and higher education. In Church literature, we see the influence of ancient Greek and New Testament Greek, which again varied from *katharevousa*. After the 1880s, *katharevousa* began to be replaced by the demotic as the major form for Modern Greek literature, but this too had various gradations, ranging from standard demotic to ultra-demotic, which was influenced by intellectuals. See Alexiou, *After Antiquity*, pp. 35-9.
First-generation migrant writers in Australia who had been educated in Greece and wrote in Greek were not directly affected or constrained by the politics which had polarised the mainland Greek poets during the twentieth century, although they did follow Greek linguistic trends, according to George Kanarakis. He points out that they shifted from *katharevousa* to an unorthodox mixture of demotic and purist, and more recently the more developed and now official Greek demotic form. Many poets, he states, also followed changes in the accentuation system, and so we find writers like Dimitris Tsaloumas, Dimitri Tzoumacas, Tony Maniaty, Dina Amanatidis and Vasso Kalamaras shifting from the polytonic to the monotonic system. It is interesting to note that my chosen writers Dean Kalimnios and Stylianos Charkianakis both continue to use and publish their work in the now ‘unofficial’ Greek polytonic system. Despite the fact that they employ modernist techniques, such as free verse, multiple perspectives and voices, both maintain the outmoded formal tonal system.

Contemporary Greek Australian writers are freer to exploit their diverse linguistic heritage without the need to conform to official Greek trends, and without the fear of being marginalized, silenced or exiled, as was the...

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8 Kanarakis, *Greek Voices in Australia*, p. 6.
9 When I translate their poems I use the monotonic system although the original poems are in the polytonic system.
10 See M. Alexiou, ‘Writing against Silence: Antithesis and Ekphrasis in the Prose Fiction of Georgios Vizyenos’, *The Familiar Stranger: Byzantium in Modern Greece*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1991, p. 263. Ritsos supported the left in the Civil War (1946-1949); in 1948 he was arrested and spent four years in prison camps. In the 1950s, 'Epitaphios', which was set to music by Mikis Theodorakis, became the anthem of the Greek left. In 1967, he was arrested by the Papandopoulos dictatorship and sent to a prison camp in Gyaros.
case with writers such as Georgios Vizyenos and Yiannis Ritsos, who severed links with authority and rejected the social order of their times.\textsuperscript{10} The main question to be answered therefore in the course of this chapter is why do my chosen writers Kalimnios and Charkianakis insist on maintaining the Greek language in their texts with little or no translation? What facet of their linguistic heritage are contemporary writers emphasising when deploying elements of paramythi? Are the Greek Australian writers who continue to use the Greek language perpetuating what Alexiou refers to as ‘the ideal of Hellenic linguistic continuity tied to the idea of cultural unity’ without the politics that have marked Modern Greek literature?\textsuperscript{11} Are those who use paramythic elements, and write in English, challenging the religious, recreational, and pedagogic orientation of the oral tradition, while creatively using its symbols and motifs and language in order to produce a new body of literature in the Antipodes?

Initially in this chapter, I will explore how the language question presents in the Antipodes. I will then explore the type of relationship that Charkianakis and Kalimnios have with language and Greek place, and how this differs from their Modern Greek counterparts from the generation of the Thirties.\textsuperscript{12} Then I will examine to what extent Charkianakis and Kalimnios are drawing upon the paramythic features identified among the mainland Generation of the Thirties, and in what way they differ from their

\textsuperscript{11} Alexiou, \textit{After Antiquity}, pp. 3.19.
\textsuperscript{12} The Literary Generation of the Thirties introduced Modernism into Greece, but it was peculiar to the Greek situation and was tied to ethnocentric, national and Hellenocentric matters, as well as the continuation of a unified Greek language and cultural tradition, as discussed by Nasos Vayenas, in Tziovas, \textit{Greek Modernism and Beyond}, pp. 43-47.
counterparts when deploying elements of paramythi. Furthermore, when these Greek Australian poets use enigmatic or unfamiliar words and expressions, are they challenging their Greek and non-Greek readers poetically, or are they inviting them to search their roots through their linguistic heritage? I will then discuss how Antigone Kefala’s relationship to language differs from that of the Charkianakis and Kalimnios by referring to her paramythi *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children*. Why does she write only in English, and in a non-English way? Is this female writer seeking to make a personal stand against the colonising dominance of the English language by showing the problem of acquiring a new language? In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss possible reasons why Greek Australian writers turn towards their demotic paramythic tradition, and to the Greek language. Does it represent a creative and a personal choice? Does such a choice empower or disempower the writers who choose to use only the Greek language? Are they limiting their readership and opting to remain exclusive? Does the sole use of the Greek language in contemporary Australian literature signify that writers are more confident about introducing the foreign Greek form into the mainstream, or are they defying Australia’s marginalisation of minority languages by speaking in their own voice?

**The language question in the Antipodes**

The language question in the diaspora is not about choosing between a particular strand of the *katharevousa* or the demotic register, but instead it
is about choosing between the Greek or English language. Kanarakis argues that the Greek language in the Antipodes continues to be a primary cultural source that transmits Greek religious beliefs and customs to future generations. Greekness is tied to a common ancestry, shared religious beliefs and culture, but most importantly a shared common language. Therefore, the rejection of the Greek language can be deemed to be a rejection of Greekness, or it may indicate that the writer is targeting an Australian, not a conservative Greek readership. Gillian Bottomley points out that many children of migrant Greek descent have become Australianised to various degrees, which means that they have adopted English and partially lost their command of Greek. There is a very minor group of contemporary bilingual writers, such as Dimitris Tsaloumas, Vasso Kalamaras, Kathy Paulou and Yiota Krili-Kevans, who are fluent in both languages and able to express and identify with both cultures.

There have been lively debates in recent Modern Greek Studies conferences and by literary researchers George Kanarakis and Con Castan over the language question and whether English undermines or can maintain a Greek identity. Castan does not support Kanarakis’ thesis

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14 G. Bottomley, After the Odyssey: A Study of Greek Australians, The University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1979, passim.
15 Kanarakis, Aspects of Literature by Greeks, p. 43.
that language determines ethnicity and the ‘nationality of its literature’\(^\text{18}\) since he does not support a transparent view of language. He argues that the inclusion of Greek into mainstream literature signifies an opening up of the Australian canon to include non-Anglophone literature, rather than a separate Greek canon written by Greek writers in Australia. These very different viewpoints show that the questions of language and identity, and what constitutes an Australian, Greek and Greek Australian literature, do not have clear definitions, but are a matter of perspective. Therefore, the language question in the Antipodes, just as in its home of origin, continues to be a divisive issue and a source of generational, cultural and literary conflict. Beyond such literary debates, the social reality faced by the first two generations following migration has been characterised by a polarisation between those who maintain the Greek language and religion and those who do not. The latter have felt disenfranchised from the Greek-speaking community while the former, usually the older migrants who could not learn to communicate in English, have been equally disenfranchised from the wider Australian community, and often from their own children, because of the language question.

Despite such debates over a writer’s choice of language, for those who write in Greek, in English or in both Greek and English, language is a complex and contested site. In this chapter, I will be showing that language is constantly evolving in the diaspora as in its home of origin. In the Antipodes, as Sneja Gunew points out, ‘writers are contending with the

nuances of gender, culture, race and class, through language’. There are increasing numbers of writers of Greek descent who write in English, but this does not mean that the Greek language is disappearing, since we have writers from the second generation, such as Dean Kalimnios and Konstandina Dounis, who use the Greek language in their poetry with a level of skill that is similar to first-generation writers.

Charkianakis and Kalimnios: Their relationship to language and Hellenism

Terry Eagleton pointed out that ‘the way you interpret your world is a function of the languages you have at your disposal’. What languages do the poets use, how do they relate to language, and how does their choice of language affect the way in which they interpret their worlds? Both Charkianakis and Kalimnios are fluent in English and Greek, and they are also Latin and Classical Greek scholars. Charkianakis has a Cretan heritage, but he is also a fluent German speaker, while Kalimnios has a mixed Greek ancestry, Epirotan and Mytilinean, but he is also familiar with history of the Syrian, Chinese and Albanian linguistic traditions.

Both draw from the multiple registers of their Greek linguistic heritage as

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22 Dean Kalimnios, ‘Return to Anatolia’, *Neos Kosmos*, 26 February 2007, p. 3. He writes of a relationship with other Eastern cultures: ‘Our texts became an integral part of their own identity, and today, culturally at least, we are indistinguishable from them.’
well as ecclesiastical rituals and beliefs. Charkianakis is a religious leader of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia who draws from Orthodoxy, borrowing symbols and the tones of the Byzantine and the demotic traditions. This wide knowledge of languages and dialects gives their writing style depth and power, not only because they are drawing from a wide variety of words and ideas, but also because they employ the rhythms of a rich and diverse oral tradition with its varied dialects and its hymnological tradition.

The most obvious differences between the mainland and the Greek Australian writers are that the latter do not exploit high culture and the mythic \(^{23}\) to the extent that their predecessors do, and, when they draw from their oral traditions, they do not use the long poem genre like Seferis in *Mythistorema* and Elytis in *To Axion Esti*. Nor do they mimic the rhyming long, demotic, song poems which are typical of their own regional dialects such as the Cretan demotic long poem ‘Ἐρωτόκριτος’ (*Eratokritos*),\(^{24}\) and the popular epic Epirot songs such as ‘Τῆς Ἀρτας τὸ Γίοφύρι’ (*The Bridge of Arta*).\(^{25}\) Kalimnios in ‘Long Poems’ implies a possible reason for the brevity of his art. He indicates that his poetry springs from ‘fractures and ruins’.\(^{26}\) This indicates that for him long poems are unsuitable when referring to trauma and painful experiences, since ‘the

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\(^{24}\) Vitzentzos Kornarou, *Ἐρωτόκριτος (Erotokritos)*, Astir, Athens, 1976 (1713).
first drops which we keep from the echo of the flow of words are
enough’. 27 Kalimnios is in fact redefining how he conceptualizes language
use in the ‘Long Poem’. It is not a matter of quantity, but the quality of
words which can best express the effect of lasting pain:

Confessions
on the final embraces
which lasted a lot longer
than our capabilities
sting our lips. 28

As alluded to in ‘Long Poems’, major change such as migration may be
the reason for such brevity, since the pain of dislocation has the effect of
silencing all that can be said, but cannot be stated, since: ‘We close our
mouth/and await for healing’. 29 The epigram to this poem is a quotation
from Jelaleddin Al Rumi: ‘If I stop speaking this poem will close and will
open its silent wings’. This quotation reinforces how a poem’s silence can
be a powerful way to express the fractures and ruins of life or lives. Not
only does Kalimnios use the short poem to express intensity of emotion
but also a proverb which expresses a yearning for the landscape of one’s
homeland, as in his poem ‘Epirus’, where he writes, ‘Even in the moon /
we see mountains./ It is /our destiny’. 30 In ‘Epicurean’, he refers to
changes in his current landscape imitating the gnomic verse which

27 Kalimnios, ‘Long Poems’, ll. 6-9 in Alexipyrina, p. 59
employs naturalist symbols typical of paramythia: ‘There, always there / the birds of our yard. / The only thing is / that the trees have disappeared’. 31

When Charkianakis uses the short or haiku form of poem, he also expresses silent pain. In his poem ‘Ambition’, Charkianakis writes: ‘I write because I struggle to find the briefest way to draw a graph of tears’. 32 In ‘Haiku’ he writes: ‘Night lurks in remembrance / like sadness / in failure’. In ‘Psychology’ he builds upon the same theme: ‘When it gets dark / everything half becomes complete / fear, sadness, nostalgia’. 33 He then includes the notion of circular time to express how people throughout the ages have experienced the cyclic nature of joy, pain and sorrow. He expresses his ancestor’s desire for an answer to the question: ‘who is hidden within dusk / and constantly moves the clock hands?’ 34 This philosophical question, which engages with the theme of time and the metaphysical being, shows that Charkianakis is drawing primarily from the didactic function of paramythia, since his short poems resemble wise sayings.

Both poets, in contradistinction to their predecessors, promote a poetic vision that is not tied exclusively to the homeland, since they include

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33 Charkianakis, ‘Psychology’, ll. 1-3 in Australian Passport, p. 69.
34 Charkianakis, ‘Psychology’, ll. 4-5 in Australian Passport, p. 69.
names, places and an engagement with contemporary Australia as well as its prehistory. They enter into a dialogue with Australia’s past and make symbolic connections with the first people in poems such as ‘Dreamtime’, in which Kalimnios refers to an interconnectedness of life experiences:

On the level of an interwoven plot
that is exactly how
we experienced life
just as the Erichthonians dreamt of it’. 35

In ‘Within Dreamtime’, Charkianakis identifies with the indigenous artist ‘who did not condescend to abandon dreaming’. He, like his indigenous counterpart who ‘carved his name on the trunk’ to express ‘the bitterness of a race’, is drawing from his cultural heritage, and puts pen to paper as his response against the infiltration of consumerism. 36 Beyond such allusions to indigenous Australia’s cultural history, both poets refer to Australian places, together with emotions evoked by these places. In the poem ‘Flight’, Kalimnios describes the memory of a journey between Melbourne and Fanari, which expresses the emotion of being torn between two worlds: ‘I measure the blood of swallows / which drop from the seams / of my wings’. 37 The build-up of emotion, ‘How can the whole ocean escape which wells inside us?’, in the last line in the poem ‘St Kilda Beach’ is expressed after revealing painful memories in some way

36 Charkianakis, ‘Within Dreamtime’, ll. 7-8, 1-2, 5-6 in Australian Passport, p. 56.
associated with ‘an epileptic jelly fish’.\textsuperscript{38} In ‘Wintry Melbourne’ he contrasts a wintry European landscape with the dullness of his evergreen leafy surroundings:

Here poppies do not sprout every year
nor do the trees shed their leaves
before they rest.
Everything stays awake in readiness,
a dull, forever green
indolent prudery.\textsuperscript{39}

In this poem, we note his use of contrast to highlight a pervasive sense of sadness and nostalgia for the winter-land of the homeland, which contrasts with his present home in Melbourne.

The Modern Greek poets, discussed in the previous chapter, predominantly associate language with Greek place. For example, in \textit{To Axion Esti} (\textit{Worthy It Is}),\textsuperscript{40} Mackridge argues that Elytis is searching for a new way to express the contemporary voice of Greece. He argues that this poet does so through ‘an emotional attachment to the Aegean, the profound existential significance of this landscape and his self-identification with it’, as indicated by the phrase ‘My only care my language on Homer’s shores’.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Kalimnios, ‘St Kilda Beach’, l. 5 in \textit{Anisyhasmos}, p. 107.
\textsuperscript{39} Kalimnios, ‘Wintry Melbourne’, ll.1- 6 in \textit{Alexipyrina}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{40} O. Elytis, \textit{To Αξιον Εστι (Worthy It Is)}, 12th edn, Ikaros, Athens, 1979.
\textsuperscript{41} Peter Mackridge, ‘Textual Orientations: Writing the Landscape in Elytis’ \textit{Axion Esti’}, in Tziovas, \textit{Greek Modernism and Beyond}, p. 119.
This ties language to Greek place, whereas I argue that my chosen Greek Australian writers have deterritorialised associations with their homeland through memories of images, colours and sounds. While Kalimnios and Charkianakis are emotionally attached to their homeland, since they use its language and their poems are at times nostalgic, when they include other languages, they indicate that their vision has been expanded by other cultures, but that it remains framed through a Christian Greek Orthodox perspective which is universalising. It is these two factors, their affiliation with a borderless and diasporic Hellenism and their religious Orthodox perspectives that distinguish Charkianakis and Kalimnios from their predecessors.

Charkianakis and Kalimnios are interested not just in the Greek language but in a broader view of language, ‘celebrating in words’, and wanting to taste ‘the magic of each tongue’. This is indicated by the many foreign registers that Kalimnios includes either as titles to his poems or in his epigraphs. Charkianakis praises the wonder of language as we note in his very short poem ‘Language’, in which he expresses this love of language as a mystical experience:

Concert of chromosomes
reflected on tears of admiration
question marks

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42 Kalimnios, e-mail interview,  
43 Charkianakis, ‘Unheard Request’, l.10 in Australian Passport, p.144.
passions of sounds and verbs.\textsuperscript{44}

So we can say that their use of language incorporates Jakobson’s two orders, ‘the traditional canon and artistic novelty’, \textsuperscript{45} since they merge traditional Orthodox sayings and ideas from the religious Fathers of the Church with their own revisions of demotic proverbs based on their observations of their lived experience in Australia. Charkianakis signs off each poem by including the place and date of authorship. He arrived in 1975, and ever since then and up until now, we find that Australian place names dominate his journal-like entries at the end of each poem. He occasionally includes Greek places, as well as spaces ‘in transit’ between Greece and Australia, or in between Australian cities. Despite the fact that Kalimnios displays an inclusive view of other cultures as indicated by his quotations from foreign cultures, his language is exclusive because very few people would have the modern, demotic and classical Greek knowledge to appreciate the full range of words that he uses. When I questioned him in our e-mail interview about his use of such an elevated form of the Greek language, he admitted that he uses unfamiliar words ‘from a very rich literary palette spanning four thousand years of written language history’.\textsuperscript{46} He sees himself as an ‘archaeologist, discovering the Greek language from the outside’, while his use of such a diverse and often archaic vocabulary shows that language is part of a dynamic, non-autonomous system of cultural representation, and culture is not stagnant,

\textsuperscript{44} Charkianakis, ‘Language’, in \textit{Australian Passport}, p.111.


\textsuperscript{46} Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
but borrows, adapts and changes.\textsuperscript{47} We see this in the titles to his collections of poems, as in \textit{Alexipyrina}, a neologism meaning ‘Inflammable’, and in \textit{Anisyhasmos} meaning ‘Disquietening’. In our interview, he refers to the Byzantine word ‘βεβορβορωμενοι’, which means dirty, and he states that it was a ‘real find for me’.\textsuperscript{48} When I asked Kalimnios who had inspired him, he referred to the writers ‘Constantinos Cavafy for his use of history, Giorgios Seferis for his deep pondering of matters to do with the construction of a Modern Greek identity, and Miltos Sachtouris and Nikos Engonopoulos, a Modern Greek painter and surrealist poet, for their style’.\textsuperscript{49} He stated that, among the Greek Australian writers, Stylianos Charkianakis had profoundly moved him, and that he had been influenced by ‘his use and love of language’. He also made the following comment:

\begin{quote}
In some ways we are mirror images of each other. Charkianakis is Greek-born and trying to grapple with the world from a Greek world view while in Australia, I am Australian-born, trying, from Australia to construct and deconstruct that world view.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

When Kalimnios draws from his Christian Orthodox and Classical Greek heritage,\textsuperscript{51} he includes other Eastern words and personalities who were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[48] Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
\item[49] Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
\item[50] Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
\item[51] For debates on how religion and ethnicity have constituted a traditional identity in the Modern Greek context see V. Adrahtas and P. Triantafyllopoulou, ‘Religion and National/Ethnic Identity in Modern Greek Society: A Study of Syncretism between
\end{footnotes}
associated in various ways with Hellenistic culture, as he himself admits in his interview, where he states that:

I don’t confine myself to narrow geographic or cultural definitions, exploring both the origins and the overflow of Greek culture…My view is broad enough to embrace such people as Jelaleddin, Al Rumi, the founder of Sufism, Ibn Al Mutaji, St Anthony the Copt, the prophet Jonah, Arp Arslan and places that are no longer ‘Hellenic’ in the strictest of senses.\footnote{Kalimnios, e-mail interview.}

Here, we note that Kalimnios acknowledges that his inspiration stems from ‘various approaches to Hellenism’, which suggests the various epochs of Hellenism, as well as non-Greek, Eastern historical figures, mystics and storytellers. In his \textit{Diatribe} articles in the English section of the newspaper, \textit{Neos Kosmos}, and in certain poems, he includes Greco-Assyrian, Anatolian and Mesopotamian personalities and themes.\footnote{Kalimnios, short story (forthcoming), \textit{Ei Teleftea Rapsodia Tou Lycophronos (The Last Rhapsody of Lycophronos)}, November 2011.} In his unpublished short story \textit{Η Τελευταία Ραψοδία του Λυκόφρωνος} (\textit{The Last Rhapsody of Lycophronos}),\footnote{Kalimnios, short story (forthcoming), \textit{Ei Teleftea Rapsodia Tou Lycophronos (The Last Rhapsody of Lycophronos)}, November 2011.} his paramytha, the storyteller protagonist, has the name of a historically controversial figure who was a foreigner, a native of Chalcis who was active in Alexandria in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC. In his most recent collection of poems \textit{Plektani (Intrigue)}, and specifically in the poem ‘Bar Hebraeus’, for example, Kalimnios shows that he has

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{52} Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
\textsuperscript{54} D. Kalimnios, short story (forthcoming), \textit{Ei Teleftea Rapsodia Tou Lycophronos (The Last Rhapsody of Lycophronos)}, November 2011.
\end{flushleft}
extended the boundaries of the Greek language to include obscure characters from the past such as the philhellenic, Syriac Monophysite scholar (1226-1286) who had translated Greek texts for Middle Eastern people in mediaeval Christian times. The title of this poem is in Aramaic script followed by its Greek translation ‘Μπάρ Εβραίος’ (‘Bar Hebraeus’). This subtle inclusion of a foreign script as well as its Greek (not English) translation is not merely a decorative emblem; it indicates his willingness to ‘explore the limits of Hellenism’, as well as its polyphonic and multi-textured aspect, as stated by Kalimnios himself in our interview. It implies that he is drawing from oral and scriptural cultures which have a Greek or Hellenic connection. The obvious absence of English translations, however, shows that he is determined to introduce Greek as well as foreign scripts into Australian literature. He does, however, use a few Australian place names as his titles such as ‘Brighton Beach’, ‘St Kilda Beach’ and ‘Dreamtime’. In his poem ‘Μετάφραση’ (‘Translation’), Kalimnios shows an indifference to being ‘read’ in the preferred (English) language, since he prefers his own authenticity, even though this may seem obsessive and irrational as indicated by his reference to hysteria.

Άν τά δακτυλικά μας αποτυπώματα
φυλάσσονται
στά μητρώα της υστερίας
tí peirázεi

55 Kalimnios, e-mail interview, 2008.
σὲ ποιὰ γλώσσα
δὲν θ’αναγνωστῶ?

If our finger prints
are guarded
in the registers of hysteria
what does it matter
in which language
I am not read? 57

Kalimnios includes obscure foreign linguistic scripts that are difficult to decipher since very few readers would be able to recognize the Eastern scripts and characters that he uses, either as titles to his poems, or as an epigram. In Plektani he uses an Arabic and an Aramaic title in the poems ‘Cave of Miracles’ (‘Μεάραθ Γκαζέ’) and ‘Bar Hebraeus’, respectively. He includes a Persian title with no translation into Greek, except in the table of contents, which uses the Greek translation of the poem’s title ‘Σεχεραζάντ’ (‘Sheherezade’). He uses a letter from the Russian alphabet pronounced ‘е’ in ‘Eto Bam’ where the ‘E’ is written in reverse, and in Anisyhasmos he includes a Chinese title which he does not transliterate or translate, but we infer that it is related to the quotation from Tao Ti Tsing translated into Greek, ‘Αυτός ποῦ μένει, παραμένει’ (‘He who remains, over-stays’). 58 In Apteros Niki (Wingless Victory) he writes a title in Albanian ‘Peshperites’ without any translation, but from the quote we

58 Kalimnios, Plektani, pp. 60, 42, Anisyhasmos, He does not transcode the foreign Chinese script but quotes Tao Te Tsing in p. 62, and the Arabic script in p. 84 has no title or quote in Greek translation.
realize that it is an Albanian proverb, since he includes this qualification in the epigram. The poem is about grandmothers who preserve ‘dead poems’ from extinction since they recite them orally as a prayer: ‘Τά πεθαμένα ποιήματα / δὲν επιστρέφουν στή γῆ...Γιαγιάδες τήν ψέλνουν στά αδιάβατα τής σκόνης’ (‘Dead poems do not return to the earth…Grandmothers chant them in the impasse of dust’).59

Kalimnios uses many words and allusions that are challenging to interpret and to translate because they are his inventions. He admitted in our interview that ‘at times he coins neologisms in order to tease the reader, but also to display the versatility of the Greek language’. The title of his collections Alexipyrina and Anishyhasmos are composite words that are his own constructions. He synthesises new words from source words with contradictory meanings. A-lexi-pyrina means ‘wordlessly inflamed, but also enlivened, burning, but not burnt’.60 This has Biblical connotations to the burning bush, an Old Testament metaphor referring to God’s presence, which in Orthodox theology is used as a metaphor of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. The term ‘Anisyhasmos’ could be a continuation of the burning bush symbolism, or it may juxtapose the idea of spiritual thirst and the desire for liberation, together with an anguished cry for help. Such composite meanings are contradictory, but Kalimnios fully exploits contradiction and antithesis, a technique used across a broad spectrum of forms and genres. It is exploited by surrealist modern writers, but also in

60 Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
paramythia and in Byzantine hymnology. Margaret Alexiou describes how Romanos the Melodist exploited metaphor and metonym by using a chain of images related to cosmic, natural and human forces.\textsuperscript{61} Fire and light express human love and longing for Christ, while the concept of life as a race or contest has religious connotations. Such imagery, drawn from scripture and from colloquial idioms, are obvious in the \textit{Akathistos Hymn}, but, as I am showing, they are also fully exploited by Kalimnios and Charkianakis in their modernist texts, which use natural images such as fire, light and horticultural subjects to explore religious and existential themes.

\textbf{Charkianakis’ relationship with his predecessors}

When Charkianakis uses the rhythms and the language of his mainland Greek predecessors, or when he uses quotations of sayings of writers from other cultures in his epigrams, it may be that some of their views and phrases inspired him to write his poems, or they were relevant for him during a particular stage in his life. Alternatively, it may also be a poetic device to highlight dialogue with ‘forerunners’ from various epochs and races. He uses quotations taken from his Modern Greek counterparts Andreas Embirikos, Giorgios Sarantaris, Pandelis Prevelakis, Takis Papatzonis, George Seferis, Yiannis Ritsos, Constantinos P. Cavafy and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{61}] St Romanos, the Melodist or the Hymnographer, lived in the sixth century, and was the most famous Byzantine hymnographer. He used the Atticized \textit{Koine} (a popular, elevated style) as well as Semiticisms. In the ninth century these works were referred to as kontakia and were used in ecclesiastic and liturgical services. He was credited with composing the famous \textit{Akathistos Hymn} to the Theotokos, chanted during the Lenten services. See Alexiou, \textit{After Antiquity}, p. 61-64.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Odysseas Elytis. He refers to folk sayings such as ‘From the madman and the child you learn the truth’.62 He uses quotations of verse used in church services such as ‘A low spirit has overtaken me, because of those who have abandoned your Law’, and from the Matins of Good Friday: ‘Every limb of your divine flesh’.63 He refers to the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus and the folklore and literary historian N. Politis. He also uses quotations from the Old and New Testament and the Orthodox Church Fathers St Basil, St Gregory Nazianzos and the more contemporary Athonite monk, Father Paisios.64

The difference between Charkianakis and the writers from the Generation of the Thirties is that he does not share their narrow Helleno-centric world view, which is tied exclusively to Greek place, even though he uses similar modernist techniques, and explores psychological and philosophical themes and ideas. Both parties borrow from the Greek demotic tradition and use free verse, but Charkianakis, as I am showing, is more conservative and religiously didactic than his mainland Greek predecessors when drawing on paramythi. When Charkianakis adds a quotation at the beginning of his poem, I argue that it represents a dialogue between

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himself and his predecessors. He is speaking in his own voice, even as he acknowledges influence and inspiration from other sources that are not necessarily Greek, such as the Western surrealist writers J. L. Borges, St John Perse and the German magic realist writer, political activist and poet, Gunter Grass. While these writers do not share a similar belief system with him, in the main, they do engage with deep philosophical concerns and human rights issues as in ‘The Coast of Ashes’, where he refers to Gunter Grass’ gnomic verse: ‘Whoever laughs in here, must know that the soil holds him in his hands’. He makes a direct connection to nuclear holocausts:

Slightly different, I had imagined
the edge of the sea.
Seeing how much ash remains silent
…a minimal tribute
to unknown holocausts
that sustained from the beginning
the liquid bridge. 65

Charkianakis’ poem revisits Grass’ concern about the nuclear threats generated by the Iranian crisis in the 1990s, as well as the subjects of forgotten histories and genocide. In a metaphoric way, Charkianakis is re-engaging with these issues and reminds his readers that even though we may be ignoring the truth about our own inhumanity, (and so we are like ‘the stork which buries its head in the sand’), nevertheless, the remnants of

the victims are real, since he sees ‘how much ash remains’. He, like Gunter Grass, is responding to the modern phenomenon of societal indifference by subtly reminding his readers that the only thing that remains for him (as a poet) to do is to acknowledge this oversight and to ‘wave to the storks that strut unsuspicious…a minimal tribute to the unknown holocausts’. In ‘Studying Death’, he uses a quotation from a surrealist writer St John Perse: ‘My glory is found upon the sand’, and in ‘Elegy of the Sea’, he uses the quotation from Pandeli Prevelakis’ lyrical verse: ‘Like the shimmering of the waters which are caressed by the winds’. In all these poems, Charkianakis compares natural images of the sea, sand and naturalist elements with emotions inherent in the human condition, such as euphoria, sadness and the fear of death.

Charkianakis’ philosophic poems deal with life, language and poetry. In ‘Unheard Request’, he is introducing an ecumenical vision when he expresses a desire ‘to know all languages’, and, like Kalimnios, subscribes to a global or borderless Christian Orthodox Hellenism; one which is open to other cultures, histories and languages, but also open to God since his address is to ‘You’, his Creator, to whom he attributes his inspiration:

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‘I am afraid I wouldn’t be a poet if I didn’t ask You for the most unheard of request’. At the core of Charkianakis’ work, we sense the search for self-definition based on existential authenticity. Charkianakis does not compromise his ontological foundations, and shows that he remains loyal to his heritage, which explains his use of Greek language. Beyond this identification with his homeland lies a deeper desire, which is to know all languages because then he would be truly human, as he expresses in ‘Unheard Request’:

I am afraid that I wouldn’t be a poet
if I didn’t ask You for the most unheard of requests:
I know that each one of us comes
only once to this boundless world
and probably this is why -- by the way--
we love it so frantically.
But I would ask the grace to be granted
and be incarnated again as many times
as You allowed human languages to be created
and taste thus the magic of each tongue
the names bestowed on everything created
everything that glorified You in the seventh day
and only then I’ll believe that I was born
only once a complete human!

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70 V. Karalis, ‘Introduction’ in Charkianakis, Australian Passport, p. 12
This is a prayer to understand all languages because only then, he writes, can he be ‘completely human’. As a religious poet, Charkianakis combines his celebration of languages with the pastoral need to know and understand others. Silence and wonder merge, and are allowed a forum which shows the possibilities opened up by a poet who expresses Eastern Orthodoxy’s respect for the authority of the ‘logos’, as the transmitted word of God. This is evident in the poem ‘The Word’, where he refers to the Christian belief that Christ is the Word and He illuminates, magnifies and perpetuates all that is worthy to be loved and admired such as ‘the motherland, the home, the person and love’. His use of repetition emphasises a living faith in God, in contradistinction to his predecessors who repeatedly used images which highlighted the presence of evil, the loss of hope and faith, and the fragmentation of society. The counter-traditional Modern Greek writers were undermining the Christian faith in God by emphasising a humanist perspective, supporting the poet as creator, and dwelling on the here and now, or what Elytis describes as ‘The small world, the Glorious’.

When Elytis draws on Byzantine hymnology and uses religious images in *To Axion Esti*, it is in an aesthetic way, not in a didactic or theological way. I argue that Elytis’ use of religious symbols was mainly an aesthetic choice, since Eastern Christian Orthodoxy was entrenched in Greek

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nationalist discourse in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century.\textsuperscript{74} The fact that Elytis often uses parody signals an underlying disillusionment, or a will to subversively challenge the institutions of the past by using them in an irreverent way. When Charkianakis celebrates in words, in language, and in poetry, there is no evidence of Elytis’ negativity and irony.\textsuperscript{75} In the poems ‘Unheard Request’, and ‘Language’, for example, Charkianakis refers to language as his own personal treasure, ‘the magic of each tongue’, and ‘the concert of chromosomes…passions of sounds and verbs’.\textsuperscript{76} Both of these poems read like a prayer, a hymn to language, which is what readers would expect from a religious leader who is well versed in Orthodoxy’s celebratory liturgical tones, its Byzantine chants, its strophes, pauses, rhymes and repetitions. For Charkianakis, his heritage represents ‘a living tradition’ as he stated in an opening address to a national Orthodox Youth Conference in 1986 on ‘Tradition’, and it is this which he recreates in a positive way in his poetry.\textsuperscript{77}

Charkianakis transforms the quotations that he borrows from various non-religious sources according to his own Orthodox vision. In the poem ‘Simply Thus’, for example, he uses the quotation ‘Every writer creates his forerunners’ from J. L. Borges as his epigram. The reader questions what type of relationship Charkianakis can imply when referring to Borges who is an unlikely forerunner, since he is a transgressive, surrealist writer.

\textsuperscript{76} Charkianakis, ‘Unheard Request’, and ‘Language’, in \textit{Australian Passport}, pp. 145,110.
Charkianakis’ poem reads like a prayer expressed by a hierarchical leader:

‘Επρεπε να ρθείς Εσύ / για να γεννηθούν όσα είχα δεί και δέν είχα προσέξει (You should have come / so that all that I have seen and have not noticed could be born).’\(^{78}\) Just like the Seferian method of defamiliarisation discussed in the previous chapter, Charkianakis also changes the emphasis of the poem through the enigmatic quote in the beginning, not at the end of the poem, thereby showing a didactic tendency. Seferis, on the other hand, upsets the perceived meaning of his poems by adding an unusual ending, or by using inversions of paramythic motifs and symbols. Borges invites Lucifer to illuminate his fragmented images: ‘In the absolutely irreverent land of Lucifer, literature and philology plunge into each other, forming a diabolical alchemy, which sustains the (evil) tension of syncretism’.\(^ {79}\) Charkianakis invites God into the conversation, and attributes his creativity to Him. When he writes

‘Ετσι αποκρυπτογραφούνται τά σύμβολα / μες’ ἀπ’ τά κρυπτογραφικά πού στέλνει ο Θεός (And thus symbols are deciphered / through hieroglyphs sent by God),\(^ {80}\) we note a religious poet who sees the mysterious presence of God in creation. He then takes this a step further by calling on God to shed light on those life mysteries which confounded him, and his predecessors in the past.

You should have come
to give birth to all I had seen and didn’t notice

\(^{78}\) Charkianakis, ‘Simply Thus’, ll. 1-2, in *Australian Passport*, p. 161.
\(^{80}\) Charkianakis, ‘Simply Thus’, ll. 8-9, p. 161.
to solve the riddles which terrified me
to familiarise me with the contradictions of logic.  

Charkianakis writes to his Greek predecessors through a vision that has been extended through his diasporic experience, but also one which is heavily influenced by his Byzantine heritage. He exploits the poetic technique of antithesis which is also a dominant demotic poetic feature. We see this most clearly in his short poems, ‘Poetry’, ‘Poets’, ‘Time and Pain’, ‘Refutations’, ‘In Brief’, ‘Axiom’ and in ‘Haiku’. In the poem ‘Mutuality’, for example, he writes ‘Τό μαύρο είναι τού ἀσπρου ὁ στεναγμός / τό ἀσπρο είν’ ή μετάνοια τού μαύρου (Black is white’s grief / Black’s repentance is white.’) This shows that he draws on the Christian Orthodox belief which supports the idea of mutuality, where mutual respect allows for the coexistence of antithetic types, since both white and black are mirror images of each other and hence are intricately intertwined. This is similar to Kalimnios’ idea of the interwoven plot. Antithesis as well as his diasporic and Christian sensibility and world view combine in the poem ‘Time and Pain’, where he repeats the black and white symbolism, and again refers to the inter-relationship between opposites, which in this case, is extended to include ‘time and pain’ as ‘the lived chronicle in definite connections / of black and white’. In ‘Multiplier of Pain’, his subject is the electronic medium, an artificial light which ‘degenerates into a multiplier of pain’. This light is the extreme antithesis to the light of the

81 Charkianakis, ‘Simply Thus’, ll. 1-4, p. 161. (my translation)
82 Charkianakis, Australian Passport, pp. 23, 37, 115, 136, 143, 151, 190.
84 Charkianakis, ‘Time and Pain’, ll. 4-6 in Australian Passport, p. 114.
Word which illuminates creation, an image also exploited by Elytis in ‘Sun the Sovereign Sun’ symbolising creative energy. 85 In Orthodoxy, light is a symbol of God. Light generated through ‘electronic means’, is antithetic to light since it ‘is hurting us’ by recreating scenes of ‘crimes of all kinds…scenes we long to forget / but no longer can’. 86

Charkianakis juxtaposes opposites – grief and triumph, light and darkness, hope and fear, materialism and spirituality 87 – in a similar imagistic way to Elytis and Seferis, but unlike them, he uses a hieratic voice. We see this in his poem ‘Hymn to the Anonymous’, in which he begins by using a religious authoritative tone:

You are not Logic
because logic does not know limits.
You are not Justice
it also has presuppositions’. 88

After such a rhetorical introduction Charkianakis concludes with conversational language: ‘Love, you are my only presupposition without any presuppositions’. 89 Such changes in language code are also evident in ‘Poetry’, where he begins by using the high-brow language used in ecclesiastical texts, ‘Η διά τῶν τεχνῶν ἀρρητὴ αλήθεια (The ineffable truth

86 Charkianakis, ‘Multiplier of Pain’, ll. 2, 11, 13-14 in Australian Passport, p. 79.
through the arts’), but then in the next line he continues using a simpler standard Greek, ‘Η μουσική τών λόγων / Ο λόγος τής σιωπής (The music of words. / The word of silence).’

When we translate the initial line, the translation cannot convey the effect of the ecclesiastical language of the source text, nor the rhythm created by juxtaposing λόγων with λόγος since English is not an inflected language, and therefore the poem’s tonal momentum is reduced in translation. We cannot translate the tone of the original Greek rhythm, but the communal element of the demotic tradition, which Charkianakis preserves, is not lost in the translation. We note in ‘Midnight Hymn’ that he transforms negative associations by referring to the communal practice of singing together about life:

Come let us sing together
the song of the night
silence’s unborn child
before the sun rises and destroys
with the heartlessness of a child murderer
the magic we built up
on the banks of the dream.

In the initial line, the narrator invites others to join in singing ‘the song of the night’, since he is using a communal strategy which has been used by Greek people throughout the ages to counteract harsh reality, or what he refers to as ‘silence’s unborn child’. The poet constructs a paramythic

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hymn, a communal prayer in free verse, using antithetic images of light and darkness to counterbalance the ordinariness of everyday living. Charkianakis refers to the futility of life in one of his journal articles, and he discusses how dreams (like paramythia) afford an escape:

Dreams on the hill of hope...yet dreams always have a mournful aspect. Firstly because they console you with their tranquility which you know will soon end. And then because they are a life-long standard of comparison which makes us feel anxiety amidst everything that is non-dreary, let alone ordinary...  

If we compare Charkianakis previous reference to dreams with the poem ‘Midnight Hymn’, we can note obvious similarities. In both cases, Charkianakis may be comparing dreams to the experience of a fantasy song, but they may also refer to ritualistic liturgical prayers of the night, two forms of communal practices which enable individuals to share their grief and joy. The final line in the poem is nostalgic, as is the tone in his prose, since in both cases Charkianakis expresses a desire for those stories which like dreams transform the harshness of everyday life, and generate hope and joy. Religious rituals promote a similar function, translating lived experiences into positive redemptive stories. These rhythms may be changed in the English translation, but not completely lost, since the reader has access to the Greek original text in Charkianakis’ bilingual editions. In this way, the experience of the communal practice of paramythi with its

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ritualistic function is preserved through the oral tones and images that Charkianakis borrows from the Orthodox hymnological tradition.

Kalimnios’ relationship with his predecessors

The e-mail interview, together with my readings and translations of Kalimnios’ poems, have led me to conclude that Kalimnios’ most defining feature is his love of language, which is a characteristic shared with Elytis. At the outset, Kalimnios seems to use language in order to assert that he is ethnically different. He appears to be a traditional poet, but it is difficult to work out whether he is a religious surrealist or a proud Neo-Hellenic scholar who draws from his religious and cultural traditions for aesthetic purposes. Whatever his reasons – political, philosophical, religious, or aesthetic – the most defining feature of Kalimnios’ poetry is that he uses an elevated form of the Greek language with very few colloquialisms. As he himself says, he ‘borrows from dialects and constructions that span the whole gamut of the Greek language from Homer to Ritsos’. His diverse knowledge of words includes many registers that require translation, and often the concepts explored are obscure and require a broad knowledge of Greece’s long history and its diverse linguistic traditions – the Achaic, philosophic, ecclesiastic, dialectic and demotic.

Like Elytis, Kalimnios uses surrealist elements, often combining antithetic and incommensurable images, but his poems are even more difficult to

94 Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
decode since he includes foreign scripts and uses quotes borrowed from diverse and non-Greek personalities such as Jelaleddin Al Rumi the founder of Sufism, Ibn Al Mutaji, St Anthony the Copt, the prophet Jonah and Arp Arslan.

Andreas Karantonis refers to Elytis as a poet who digs deep into words, and allows free reign to his natural artistic instinct, which is imbued with a nationalistic pride in his Hellenic roots. Kalimnios also fits this description, except that Kalimnios does not limit himself to Greek words only, nor does he use rhetorical language with the intensity of emotion of his predecessor. In Ηλιος ο Πρώτος (Sovereign Sun the First), Elytis dramatically writes ‘O deathless sea what do you whisper, tell me?’ In To Axion Esti, he again uses the same rhetorical, lyrical tone when he writes ‘ΤΗΣ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗΣ ἥλιε νοητέ...μή παρακαλώ σας μή / λυσμονάτε τή χώρα μου!’ (‘JUSTICE’S rational sun... Please don’t, don’t forget my land!’). These emotionally charged phrases show a deep commitment to the homeland. Kalimnios’ surrealist style has certain affinities with Elytis in drawing on Greece’s past, with its heroic mythic tradition, and it also shows a communal commitment to sharing Hellenistic values. His tone, however, in antithesis to Elytis, is not rhetorical, but it is tempered by his religious world view, which is in some ways similar to Sarantaris’ view. Eastern Orthodoxy is Kalimnios’ and Sarantaris’ source of inspiration, and

96 O. Elytis, ‘I Lived the Beloved Name’, l. 15 in Ηλιος ο Πρώτος (Sun the First), 8th edn, Ikaros, Athens, 1971(1943).
97 Elytis, To Axion Esti, p. 46.
it provides these surrealist poets with another type of spirit that does not use Elytis’ florid style, nor does it reproduce the pessimism that is obvious in the poems of Embirikos and Sachtouris. Paradoxically, however, Kalimnios imagistic style has certain similarities to Sachtouris, with his vortex of successive expressionistic images. Unlike Sachtouris, Kalimnios does not have his predecessor’s nihilistic view on life, even though, like his counterpart, he does show a world stretched to the limits of despair.

When Kalimnios refers to Sachtouris and Karyotakis, he is making a strong statement about poets whose works have haunted him, since he writes ‘the teacher with the Pyrian helmet / wipes her nose / on the haunted poems / of Sachtouris’.\(^9\) In his poem ‘Karyotakis’, he uses negative associations when referring to his predecessor’s writing – ‘Νωπές δαχτυλιές / στά απορρίματα τοῦ ντενεκέ’ (‘Damp fingerprints in the refuse of the rubbish bin’) – and paradoxically invests them with anguished life: ‘Νεκρά ποιήματα σπαρταροῦν/στά μολυβένια κύματα’ (‘Dead poems which throb and are still wet upon leaden waves’).\(^9\) This impressionistic depiction of the tragic poet indicates that Kalimnios has been affected by Karyotakis’ traumatic life ending, even as he shows that he does not want to be associated with him. Instead, he chooses another direction in his poems that is not nihilistic and self-absorbed. I argue this on the basis that in some of his poems we find fragments of the song-like qualities of demotic songs with the iambic decapentesyllic meter overlapping with

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\(^{98}\) Kalimnios, ‘Exoscholico’, ll. 15-18 in Plektani, p. 100.
rhythmically oblique sounds taken from Byzantine music. This turn to the demotic, and Byzantine hymnography, indicates that Kalimnios engages positively with his communal traditions, despite his willingness to also engage with the dark side of life. This shows that he differs from the Modern Greek modernists, who often exploited their demotic traditions in a reactionary, but highly individualistic way.

Kalimnios merges religious language with demotic sayings, but he also uses riddles. In *Alexipyrina*, we see this in the poem ‘Romanos Diogenis’. He begins the poem by using a well-known phrase used as a petition in common prayers, ‘Τά ἐργα τῶν χειρῶν σου μὴ παρίδης’ (‘Do not forsake the works of your hands’). He then constructs a poem which reads like a tale, but which also contains many historical allusions to revolution. He also includes a saying from a demotic song: ‘Στίς βίγλες τῶν εξεγερμένων ἡλιών’ (‘In the watch of uprising suns’). In the title, Kalimnios changes the name of a revolutionary figure Akritas Diogenis, and gives him the name of the well-known Byzantine hymnographer ‘Romanos’, to show that he is fusing legend and history. This type of manipulation indicates that Kalimnios is overturning the notion that translation conveys unchanged meaning because he is showing that the Greek language is a dynamic medium that can be transformed by combining varied registers, such as the ecclesiastical with the demotic, as in the above example.

100 Kalimnios, ‘Romanos Diogenis’, l.1 in *Alexipyrina*, p. 63.
101 Kalimnios, ‘Romanos Diogenis’, l.8 in *Alexipyrina*, p. 63.
Translating such a complex multi-leveled language can, according to David Damrosch:

…the reveal an ethics and a poetics of compassion…and in our encounter with something new and radically old we are challenged with what we think we know and therefore we are offered new possibilities which we could not have experienced on our own.\textsuperscript{102}

Kalimnios’ poems invite new ways of seeing history, since he includes Eastern identities that are not necessarily Greek. He admits that the view which he projects is ‘his own unique conception of Hellenism, divorced from chauvinism and patriotism’.\textsuperscript{103}

Kalimnios’ ritualistic language can challenge modern thought since he is introducing his readers to an Eastern Orthodox experience, employing sounds which are affective on a level beyond the rational. He employs a vivid dramatic style without the rhetorical embellishment of his Modern Greek counterparts. In the poem ‘Anisyhasmos’, for example, he writes:

With the splinters
of a broken breath,
I reproduce prismatically


\textsuperscript{103} Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
the whole world,
above my vessels.

I capitulate,
to the rhythmic sound
of a mature drum,
a polysyllabic haiku
which lets out exclamations
and releases the surplus
secretly.\(^{104}\)

His tone of voice carries through into English, in the same way that
cANTED Byzantine hymns translate well into English without the rhythm
being completely lost. When I translate his poetry into English by
rewording the multiple Greek registers which he employs, I try to maintain
the original rhythm, as this is his most striking feature.\(^{105}\)

Like their Byzantine predecessor Romanos the Melodist, both Kalimnios
and Sarantaris exploit cosmic, natural and human forces using both
metaphor and metonym to form a chain of images.\(^{106}\) Often the meaning of
these enigmatic images can be found by tracing how a particular image is
used throughout subsequent poems in his later collections. An example of
this is the repeated paramythic allusion to paramythia in ‘Μωσάκον’

\(^{105}\) This is an example of ‘intralingual’ translation, based on Jakobson’s ideas of
interpreting verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. See Anthony
Pym, ‘Cultural Translation’, in Exploring Translation Theories, Routledge, London,
p. 151.
\(^{106}\) Anna Hatzinikolaou, ‘Introduction’, in Kipos Esokleistos, Tsonis, Melbourne, 2003,
p. xiii.
(‘Mosaic’) and in ‘Παραμύθια’ (‘Paramythia’), the lake of Giannina in ‘Παμβώτιδα’ (‘Pamvotida’) and ‘Pamvotida II’, the flight of birds in ‘Πτήση’ (‘Flight’), and in ‘Ο Δρόμος του Χελιδονιού’ (‘The Way of the Swallow’), there is a two-way flight between the past and the present. Other times, the meaning of the poem can be traced by noting the disjunction between the title and the quote, the subtexts and the actual text. In the poem ‘Pruners’, for example, the quote suggests an idyllic desire for a utopian existence.

ΚΛΑΔΕΥΤΗΡΙ

Μπείτε στή σκία του δέντρου που ανθίζει συνεχώς
Τζελάλεντι Άρουμ.

Δέν θα προτιμήσουμε
κανένα άνθος εφέτος.
Όλοι οι κίβδηλοι σκοποί
μονάζουν στά μπουμπούκια
και μεταδίδονται στούς τέτυγγες
tών νεανικών καλοκαιριών.
Ανασηκώνουμε τό τσαπί
νά σπάσουμε
τό στρωμένο τσιμέντο
στά αυτά μας
και ή μάνα
μάς σκουπίζει τίς μύξες
dιαστροφικά.

PRUNERS

Come into the shadow of the tree which is forever in bloom.

Jelalendin Al Rumi

We don’t prefer
any blossoming this year.
All our worthless aims
rest solely upon the buds
and are passed on to the ‘whatever’
of young summers.
We lift the hoe
to break
the set concrete
in our ears
and our mother
wipes our running noses
perversely.\textsuperscript{109}

The poem which follows the initial quote does not have the same elevated lyrical tone used by Jeladelin Al Rumi. The idealistic desire for perfection is counterbalanced by a disillusioned response, which is further undermined in the last verse by the depiction of violent action, which may figuratively represent the purging force of the poet’s irony, as Kalimnios himself admits to using.\textsuperscript{110} The image of pruning may be a metaphor of editing, cutting away whatever is superfluous from language so as to allow past experiences to crystalise and produce something new. The disjointed

\textsuperscript{110} Kalimnios, e-mail interview.
images that allude to violent and futile action – ‘we lift our hoes / so as to break / the concrete which has set / in our ears’ – are followed by a strange sequel to this action: ‘our mother / wipes our running noses / perversely’. Is such language symbolically breaking apart those ideas that have been established as ‘normal’, or do we need to further explore this recurring image of pruning in Kalimnios’ later poems? In the poem ‘Τελευταία Χειρονομία’ (‘The Final Act’), we again have the enigmatic image of pruners, metaphorically linked to the subsequent image of shears belonging to a (grand) mother, who represents a gatekeeper of cultural traditions. The final act may signify a desperate attempt to reconstruct the broken arches of the pruners that have been destroyed by overusing them to break up set ideas. Is the final act a metaphor of a restoration, or is it a metonym signifying that paramythia are more real than broken ideas, since the rational spirit has been relegated to an Epicurean burial ground?

ΤΕΛΕΥΤΑΙΑ ΧΕΙΡΟΝΟΜΙΑ

Η τελευταία χειρονομία τής γιαγιάς,
παραπομπή στίς καμπύλες
toύ ακρωτηριασμένου κλαδευτηριού
cαι στίς ρίζες τών ξεπατωμένων κουκιών
pού τάξουν παραμύθια.
στούς μεταξοσκόληκες
tού επικουρικού νεκροταφείου.

FINAL ACT

The final act of grandmother,
is directed towards the arches
of the destroyed pruners
and the roots of the overused seeds
which promise paramythia
to the worms
of an Epicurean burial ground.

The pruners could be a metaphor of the syncretist ethos, transmitted through the poet’s pen, which cuts away so that the emerging creation may have a healthier life. It may signify that his craft is deconstructive or a way to reconstruct new life, new meanings by cutting away all that is superfluous. In our interview, Kalimnios stated that his art is like alchemy, a purging away of the excess, in order to reach core values. He therefore does not demolish traditional values in the way that his predecessors Embirikos and Sahtouris did. Instead, he searches for these core values through paramythia transmitted by the custodians of Greek culture. Here, he is making a connection between women, paramythi and the gatekeeper role of the oral tradition. In an obtuse way, paramythi overrides and outlives reason, since ‘the final act of the grandmother’ is to wield her stories against reason which promised ‘paramythía’ to the worms of an Epicurean burial ground’ (the rational spirit here may be synonymous with ‘the Epicurean’). This act of defiance against reason may represent a reaction which is aimed at restoring a sense of balance when life is out of control, since the negativity of modern life could be a direct result of
Reason and Reason, as we are told in this poem, lies in ‘a burial ground’. In another poem, ‘Φλογιστόν’ (‘Flamed’), again he deconstructs the rational spirit, but in a more violent way, ‘Όλες οί υβριδικές αφορμές / κείτουνται / μαζί με το πτώμα του Λαβοισιέρ ακέφαλες / κάτω από τήν καρμανιόλα’ (‘All the syncretist reasons / lie / together with the corpse of Lavoisier / beheaded / under the guillotine’).

Such syncretic images of purging, pruning and decapitating are summed up in the poem ‘Μοσαϊκόν’ (‘Mosaic’), which promotes the idea of recreating something new from ‘scattered fragments collections of the mind broken marble’.

Kalimnios, unlike his Modern Greek syncretist predecessors Embirikos and Sachtouris, upholds his religious traditions as indicated by the way he deploys the use of antithesis in a similar way to the poetics deployed in Byzantine hymnology. He uses an Orthodox reasoning, which has certain affinities with the Septuagint tradition. ‘The Wisdom of Sirach’ states that antithesis is a God-given natural language: ‘Look upon all works of the Most High. They come in pairs, one the opposite of the other’. It is this type of reasoning that is also evident in Byzantine hymnology and it is also fully exploited by Kalimnios, who makes no secret of ascribing his creative inspiration to the divine enlightenment of the ‘Word’, since he uses biblical imagery to describe the creative process as enlightenment.

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113 Kalimnios, ‘Flamed’, ll. 6-10 in Alexipyrina, pp. 1-2.
115 The Wisdom of Sirach 33:15, St Athanasius Academy Septuagint, The Orthodox Study Bible, T. Nelson, Nashville, 2008.
through the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the tongues of burning fire. He concludes the poem ‘Alexipyrina’ by saying that ‘sometimes small burning tongues will fall like rain on the thirsty mouth of a poet’. Here, he refers to his religious tradition and this, like his use of paramythic motifs, becomes a recurring theme across a range of his poems. In his most recent collection of poems, *Plektani*, and specifically in the poems, ‘Galilee’, ‘The Seventh Blight’ and ‘Cave of Miracles’, he challenges modern society’s obsession with rationalism and material possession by including symbols of rituals and mysteries. In ‘Στρωσιμο’ (‘Covering’) and ‘Γαλιλαία’ (‘Galilee’), Kalimnios introduces a religious emblem of hope by referring to a Church mystery ‘Μύρον’(‘Holy Myron’). This is associated with liturgical practice in the Orthodox Church, but it is also a sign of sainthood.

ΣΤΡΩΣΙΜΟ
Οχι,
δέν θά χαθούν οι μώλωπες τών πικραμύγδαλον
από τούς λεκέδες
πού σχημάτισαν τά κορμιά μας
στα σεντόνια
μέ τίς υποκύπτους ρίγες.
Ευοδιάζουν οί μασχάλες μας
ακόμη
μύρο.

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No,
the bruises of the bitter almond tree
will not go to waste
from the stains which shaped our bodies
on the sheets
with the bluish stripes
Our armpits exude
still
Myron.\textsuperscript{118}

The imagery in this poem includes the common paramythic motif of the natural bitter almond tree, which symbolises life’s struggle, as well as the religious reference to a sign of sanctity that exudes from holy relics. In the poem ‘Galilee’, life’s journey is figuratively represented as a Sinaic ascent and, although the traveller is stretched to the limits of endurance, nevertheless there is the allusion to a hope factor, again in the emblematic reference to Myron. The inclusion of this religious tradition shows that, for Kalimnios, his Eastern Orthodox heritage is not merely an aesthetic point of reference: it can provide images that present alternative views based on Eastern Orthodox life and practice. His observations about social, experiential and metaphysical themes work together as a dialogue between past and present. In ‘Galilee’, for example, his use of the biblical quote, from the past, comments on contemporary society’s agnostic doubts.

\textsuperscript{118} Kalimnios, ‘Strosimo’ (Covering), ll. 1-9 in Plektani, p. 45.
ΓΑΛΙΛΑΙΑ

Μή καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἰς;
ἐραυνήσον καὶ ίδε ὅτι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας προφήτης οὐκ ἐγείρεται.

Οὔτε τά νερά τῆς Γαλιλαίας
προσεύχονται στόν μηνίσκο τῆς ἀντοχῆς.
Περπατοῦν
dύο μέτρα κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἑπιφανειακὴ τάση,
ἀναζητώντας στὰ κοραλλιασμένα ὄστα τῶν ὀλιγόψυχων
τὶς χαμένες ὀκτάβες
μίας σινατίκης κλίμακος,
λίγο μύρο,
καὶ τὸν δρόμο πρὸς τὴν Καπερναοῦμ.

*Are you also from Galilee?*

*Search and you will find that no prophet will arise from Galilee.*

Not even the waters of Galilee
Pray at the crescent of endurance.
They walk
Two metres below surface appearances,
seeking in the fossilised remains
of the fainthearted
the lost octaves
of a Sinaic climax,
a little Myron,
and the road towards Capernaum.119

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In this poem, the poet comments on the tortuous path that is the life journey; a common motif used by Byzantine hymnographers, such as Romanos the Melodist. Kalimnios, like Charkianakis, does not parody religious hymns as Elytis does in *Axion Esti*, with its subversive, nihilistic undertones: ‘Νῦν η ταπείνωσι τῶν Θεῶν Νῦν η σποδός τοῦ Ανθρώπου/Νῦν Νῦν τό μηδέν / και Αιέν ο κόσμος ο μικρός, ο Μέγας! (Now is the humility of the Gods Now the ashes of Man, Now Now nothingness / and forever this world, the small, the Great!). Kalimnios avoids using elevated diction, although his vocabulary is refined, and he presents his view as a historical observer, but also one who has embarked on a journey of self-discovery together with his fellow humans. This journey is marked by many detours through a maze of unfamiliar words, languages and personalities that transcend the limits of Greek place, which for Elytis represented a ‘small’ but ‘Great’ world. I argue that it is because of his diasporic and religious experiences that Kalimnios’ poems transcend the limits of this world.

**Antigone Kefala’s relationship to language**

Antigone Kefala’s *paramythi Alexia:A Tale for Advanced Children* shows a very different relationship to language from the previous writers Charkianakis and Kalimnios, who celebrate in the language of their cultural and religious traditions. She shows how learning a new language can be a linguistic, conceptual and ideological struggle between individual and communal ways of being. Her use of English may suggest that she is
writing for an Australian readership, or that she is disillusioned with her past heritage and is forming new alignments, since she has another sense of being. This other sense of being has been experienced by other immigrant writers. Smaro Kamboureli, for example, describes such an experience as ‘one based in the struggle between languages’ since the new self is ‘the bastard child of the coming together of two selves, of two geographies, of two languages’. Kefala shows the problems involved in negotiating a hybrid state that emerges from the confrontation between two vastly different cultural systems of thought. She also shows the difficulty involved in the acquisition of a new language, and the problem of translation. The question that we as readers ask is what becomes lost in this process of acquiring a new sense of selfhood, and a new voice?

Kefala had to relearn language, and she deciphered the present using the experience of the past, which was now incongruous to her present. She was using a language that was not her first language. Romanian was her first language, then French, then Greek, and finally English. Her story *Alexia* is not about crossing national geographic boundaries, but about the challenge of trying to cross linguistic boundaries. The tale has two obvious roles, the first being that it is part of a meaning-producing system, which can allow for an awareness of different worlds, thus opening up a new awareness of the (diasporic) ‘other’. It also re-interprets her own lived experience.

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122 T. Hawkes and R. Barthes, cited in Gunew, *Feminist Knowledge*, p. 14, point out that there are other systems as well such as music, films, mathematics, dress codes of conduct and customs, which help interpret our world to us.
experience when she, as a migrant, was challenged by an awareness that inadequacy in the mastery of the foreign language seriously disables and creates a restless yearning which cannot be fulfilled, because there is no release for those ‘strangers’ who cannot understand or be understood, as shown in the poem ‘Memory’.

Were that enough in these strange lands, not even our offerings can rest, aimless in unknown cities. And the Gods no longer living in our eyes, neither the ones above, nor the below, and we, robbed of our release. 123

The female narrator questions institutions that uphold traditional beliefs. Her negative experience of migration might have contributed to the demolition of her faith in the old belief systems of her homeland. The gods represent those institutions and belief systems articulated through a religious and elevated language that give meaning to ordinary lives, and these become meaningless in the strangeness of the ‘other’ place. Thereby, language undergoing such an overhaul because of the loss of the familiar signposts can take on negative connotations. It shows the psychic dissolution caused by the inability to find release through communication that the migrant undergoes when she or he is confronted by new meanings, new words and different institutions and customs. Kefala may be reacting against the traumatic memories of her past when she undermines the

institutions which were sustained through language in ‘the old country’. This is implicated in her use of irony when she states that ‘they had lost everything in the war, which was not a great deal, mainly feather pillows, and Grandmother Asimina’s icons and chalices, of which she had a whole collection’. Her past and its religious traditions in this statement are undermined when she conflates pillows with religious artifacts. However, in her mind’s eye both images are connected with traumatic memories of escape from her war-torn home. Within this context, tradition does not represent for her a dynamic and creative presence, nor a stable frame of reference as it does for Charkanakis and Kalimnios, but a set of practices related to an unstable world. In the writer’s memory, this world is fading, as indicated in her observation about ‘Music - A Miracle that belonged to the Old Country, but which was not considered of great importance here’.

Kefala’s concluding manifesto in Alexia is a parody of a Western empiricist challenge to logos when she refers to ‘Language’ as ‘a vast, magnificent edifice built by the constant efforts of successive generations of people’. She then undermines her own rhetoric through irony when she adds:

[Language is...] a day to day effort in which everyone takes part, in which their passions, fears, worries, discoveries, resolutions, the very

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124 Kefala, Alexia, p. 32.
125 Kefala, Alexia, p. 70.
distillation of their lives goes in, and remains there to serve them, and to remind them Who They Are, to allow them to develop, to help them become themselves.\textsuperscript{126}

This statement is made at the end of her story, but the narrative which precedes this ending seriously questions such a rhetorical statement since she had shown how her character Nicholas Alexia’s brother, was disempowered and rendered mute because of his inability to express himself fluently in the new language. She shows that, for those struggling to adjust to a new culture and life, language proves a daily struggle, because this migrant does not feel at home in language but his broken English proves to be a reminder that he cannot progress, but only regress into becoming someone who he is not. Language, therefore, shows the imbalance of power existing within the Greek Australian diasporic group, as it does for so many other migrant groups.\textsuperscript{127} Kefala shows by her contrasting characters that there are those who embrace their new language and those who have been silenced. According to Sneja Gunew, learning to become fluent in English for these writers was ‘tantamount to acquiring a new reality and a new self’.\textsuperscript{128} When Spivak refers to ‘translation’, she says that ‘Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries’.\textsuperscript{129} Within the range of those who learn and those

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Kefala, \textit{Alexia}, p. 106.
  \item Kamboureli describes this imbalance as ‘Broken English’ which ‘is written in a rhythm of a being that lives beneath language. This being exists through violence, silence, instinctual knowledge, restlessness.’ Kamboureli, \textit{In the Second Person}, p. 9.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
who refuse to learn a new language, there is a paradoxical similarity. Those who hold on to their past and refuse to move on regress into themselves and away from others, while those who feel the need to break away from their heritage also isolate themselves from their familiar anchors such as community, language and culture. Ironically, both groups are bound in an ambivalent relationship with the past, as both suffer from isolation. Despite such a struggle, language is Kefala’s two-edged sword that builds up an awareness of other worlds even as it dismantles the concept of ‘know-ability’. How does a person know anything when language becomes something unfamiliar as it is divorced from its familiar setting? Language represents the σημείον αντιλέγομενον (the controversial sign) of this struggle for Kefala. In her interview with Jenny Digby, she says that she finds language a very complex medium, and impenetrable despite ‘its immense fluidity, its capabilities, and amazing richness’.  

Beyond the thematic representation of the struggle in acquiring a new language, there is a subversive element transmitted through the types of characters that Kefala constructs. Kefala undermines the mainland and diasporic Greek tradition maintained by mothers and grandmothers of transmitting the Greek cultural heritage and language to subsequent generations through religious and demotic stories, songs and dance. She undermines this through irony, since the mother in the tale is

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disempowered and remains locked in the past, unable to inspire her children. She also undermines philosophy by using irony, as is the case when discussing the problem with ‘Time, time taken out of music in the new country, forgetting how to invent Time, and therefore dying’.

Her character, Grandmother Asimina, represents the stereotype of the wise grandmother who has the solution to all of life’s problems, since ‘she would have known how to deal with this question of Time’. In contrast to this typical (in paramythia) character, she introduces a refined European character with an Arabic name, Mamoush, who deconstructs Western philosophy and its colonial legacy in a subversive way when she states that ‘she wanted them (Alexia and Basia) to Live and Experience Life and grow into Real People’. We as readers ask were they not real people before they knew the English language? Is Kefala signposting Western logocentrism and its imperialist and colonial legacies by using this ironic comment about ‘real people’?

Kefala’s most authoritative and colourful figures are the women with foreign non-Anglicized names – not men. The only male perspective is Nicholas’ laconic intrusions. He shows the *aphanisis* as an experience similar to aphasia that can occur when language and experience cannot connect, depicted by references to his growing silence due to his problem with words, and the undermining of sounds. ‘Sounds had become

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132 Kefala, *Alexia*, p. 76.
133 Kefala, *Alexia*, p. 76.
134 Kefala, *Alexia*, p. 82.
superfluous things’.\textsuperscript{135} In this paramythi, it is the females who have been allowed to communicate their thoughts and so they are shown to be empowered because they can engage in dialogue. The male presence, however, is disempowered and psychically regresses, because male characters are shown to be incapable of communicating. It is the female diasporic voice that controls the information in this ‘paramythi for advanced children’ in contrast to Kefala’s other texts \textit{Coming Home}, \textit{The Island}, \textit{Absence} and \textit{The Alien}. Her narrative point of view and voice in this ‘story for advanced children’ is powerful and serves a dual function: It explicitly represents Self (female and migrant other) and advocates for those who have been silenced by making the migrant experience visible. Language represents the author’s ability to play with, decipher, speak and communicate with words. Dexterity with language and between languages is an empowering tool although, paradoxically, the outcome for those who play such language games can often lead to a dismantling of a sense of cohesion within oneself. Kamboureli in her introduction to her collection of poems \textit{In the Second Person} describes such games as ‘a doubleness of [her] language’ which becomes a ‘precursor of [her] personality’. She further explains this bilingual condition as ‘two linguistic identities of self [which] emerge as a dynamic dyad that insists on being considered as one’. Here she is showing, like Kefala, how the female voice insists on its own self-representation as a way of enunciating one’s difference. And this difference, this ‘living on the edge of two languages’, according to Kamboureli, is tantamount to living ‘on the edge of two selves named and

\textsuperscript{135} Kefala, \textit{Alexia}, p.70.
constructed by language, [and it] liberates the self from a monologic existence’. Such an existence, for Kefala is paradoxically empowering and destabilizing. Kamboureli affirms a similar view when she explains that ‘The self becomes a being of multiple meanings and jouissance and many little deaths’.\(^1\)\(^{136}\) So we can assume that the price for acquiring a new self presupposes ‘deaths’, which in Kefala’s case signals the death of traditional ways of life and consequently the Greek language.

Kefala’s use of English follows recent trends, which according to Kanarakis show that ‘there has been a steadily increasing number of people of Greek origin writing poetry, prose and drama in English’, and that ‘in the English-language texts the influence of the Greek language makes its appearance, now for the first time, in all genres, but only in the form of loan words and expressions transliterated into English’\(^1\)\(^{137}\). In _Alexia_, it is more than a matter of foreign loan words and expressions introduced, since she introduces a foreign world view and a different type of reasoning. She uses parody of philosophy to show that through the narration of the life story of her protagonist, Alexia she challenges the transparency of language, which has the ability to represent truth, because she in fact is asking, as well as showing through the comparison of cultures and languages, ‘who knows what is true and what is not?’ Kefala shows the problem of translation and how this concept of ‘truth’ has other


\(^{137}\) G. Kanarakis, _Greek Voices in Australia_, pp. 9, 39. Greek Australian literature moved from the purist Greek form, _katharevousa_, to a mixed form with demotic elements and then to a more developed form of the demotic. Parallel changes followed in the accentuation system, moving from the polytonic to the monotonic.
nuances in other cultural spaces. As a female writer with a direct experience of migration, she shows how the ‘old truths’ are not meaningful once the self has been displaced. She shows this by exploring how various refugees react to change, and how they feel inadequate because they have been silenced due to their inner dyslexia. Even though she appears to emphasise the position of the marginal characters, the children, the foreign women, the silenced youth, she also questions the meaning of the accepted practices of the host culture as compared to her original home culture’s notions of joy, work and rest, coming and going.\(^\text{138}\)

*Alexia* is not a simple paramythi since it is for ‘advanced’ children. In the later edition of this text, Kefala has changed the title’s subtitle, from ‘a tale of two cultures’, to ‘a tale for advanced children’, which allows the reader to infer that this tale may be telling us that the writer has revised the title in response to changes in official multicultural policies. Kefala’s writing experience in Australia spans a number of decades, from the early 1970s until the present, a period in which official policies of multiculturalism have been re-negotiated many times.\(^\text{139}\) The change from her original title takes the focus away from multiculturalism and engages with what may have been her text’s primary function, which is to challenge advanced thinkers with philosophical questions. Is language ‘diffident at first and distant, difficult to approach, to understand’? Does her story support her

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\(^{138}\) Kefala, *Alexia*, pp. 46, 72, 86.

rhetoric or does it undermine her thesis that ‘there is a lot of sympathy in a language, and a willingness to co-operate, to allow newcomers to its secrets, and to its kingdom, which for every language is a different one’? Is she using philosophical language in the mouthpiece of a child protagonist to defamiliarise her paramythi in a similar way to her mainland predecessors, who challenged their institutions in subversive ways? The subtitle functions as a subtext, and there is no translation into Greek of both English subtitles, which would be ‘Ἐνα παραμύθι δύο πολιτισμῶν’, and, ‘Ἐνα παραμύθι για προχωρημένα παιδιά’. This omission cannot be accidental, but it may be significant, since Kefala is undermining the conventions of translation by omitting a translation of the title. Since there is no Greek translation, we as readers infer that the text is for an Australian audience. The shift in the emphasis from being about two cultures, and presented as a tale for advanced children, not only highlights a shift from a discourse on translating culture but emphasises the active role of the readership. By directing her readers to read this tale as a paramythi for ‘older children’, Kefala is subverting the function of the typical story, and implying that there may be adult themes which are not meant for children, even though she appropriates the language and the style used in stories for children. This may imply that, with the abandonment of her native language, this diasporic writer has moved beyond innocence, and so her tale is for older audiences. The presence of irony and parody testifies to the idea that the grand narratives or ‘Stories’ of the past, are no longer relevant for her.

140 Kefala, Alexia, p. 104.
Concluding remarks on language use

When a first generation migrant writer such as Charkianakis continues to write literary texts only in Greek, it is not unusual; and when a female writer of the first generation writes in English, it may be subversive, but it is not unusual. When the second-generation, Australian-born writer Kalimnios writes only in Greek and without translations, then we have a somewhat extraordinary situation. In his response to the question posed in our interview about whether he would consider writing in English or having his poems translated into English, he responded by stating that ‘Greek is his preferred literary language’.\(^{141}\) So the question remains why some poets insist on using Greek only. Are they seeking recognition for their work in Greece, since they are obviously targeting a Greek-reading audience which is steadily declining in Australia? Charkianakis, according to Con Castan, writes some poems that are ‘explicitly Australian’,\(^{142}\) and in one of his speeches, Charkianakis himself has openly declared that he considers himself as Ο Αυστραλιάς Στυλιανός, (Stylianos belonging to Australia). Kalimnios stated in our interview that ‘I want to show that a language like Greek, in a multicultural country such as Australia, is a valid Australian literary language’. So if both poets consider themselves writers writing in Australia, why do they choose to write and publish in a minority language when, in the case of Kalimnios, he can write with equal dexterity in English (as he does in his prose articles), and when Charkianakis can publish more bilingual editions? Charkianakis has published only three

\(^{141}\) Kalimnios, e-mail interview.

bilingual collections of poems to date: *Australian Passport, Fireworks and Sparrows*, and *Mother a Moving Reflection of God*, while Kalimnios admitted in our interview that he has not yet thought of having his poems translated. Both poets show an engagement with and respect for other cultures, and so they are not rigidly mono-cultural. They are both prolific writers who have continued to produce a new collection of poems on an annual or bi-annual basis from the time of the publication of their first collections. They have received recognition for their work in Australia and in Europe, and yet they are resistant to translation. So we are led to question the significance of their insistence on using the Greek language. Is it the language which best expresses them and their traditional Hellenistic views based on an ecumenical Christian Orthodox tradition? Can it be that they insist on transmitting the sounds and experience of their Eastern Orthodox tradition in its authentic, non-translated, Greek voice?

Kefala shows the problem of translation and how simple concepts have other nuances in other cultural spaces. She questions the meaning of the accepted practices of the host culture as compared to her original home culture’s notions of joy, work and rest, coming and going. Meaning is arrived at not through the dictionary but according to context, which, according to Bakhtin, is ‘a trans-linguistic project…a hermeneutic which concerns itself not with a text’s context but with the context’s text… it is

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143 Charkianakis has had many of his poems translated into English, German, Serbian and French.
144 Charkianakis has been awarded the Poetry Prize by the Academy of Athens (1980) and the International Prize Gottfried von Herder (1973). Kalimnios has received recognition for his services to Australia by the Premier of Victoria.
145 Kefala, *Alexia*, pp. 46, 72, 86.
not based on words in a lexicon-semantic or purely linguistic sense, it is a context of tones.\footnote{Mikail Bakhtin: The Word in the World, G. Pechey ed., Routledge, London, 2007, p. 150.} When Stuart Hall refers to an understanding based on the union between the inner and the social world as a correlation between concepts and tones, he is speaking about subjectivity arrived at through translation. He says:

Our shared conceptual map must be translated into a common language, so we can correlate our concepts and ideas with certain written words, sounds or visual images (signs)…\footnote{Stuart Hall ed., Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, Open University Press and Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 18.}

What is the common language that Hall suggests? Could it be that there is a paramythic language which transcends geographical boundaries and allows us a new way with which to communicate, since stories allow us to enter a space beyond logic? This is the language which I have directed my attention to in this thesis, and it is in the Greek and the English texts I have had to translate linguistically and culturally in order to explain its symbolic meaning. In the case of the poems by Charkianakis and Kalimnios, I have chosen the shorter poems from their collections, which comment on, or borrow from, paramythic motifs and symbols, while steering away from their more complex philosophical poems, because these shorter poems exploit antithesis – a dominant characteristic of paramythi. It has been important for me to translate these poems in order to enable a non-Greek audience to appreciate these foreign language poems, even though in
Kalimnios’ case he resists translation. My main concern in this project has been to interpret and translate the significance of paramythic elements in the texts of my chosen writers. When certain words resist translation into English, I have transliterated them with the view of maintaining a close representation of the original meaning. This method follows Venuti’s idea of the resistant translation, since I do not hide the foreignness of the text from the reader, especially since the writers themselves want to maintain their difference. A good example of this can be seen in my translation of Kalimnios’ poems, especially in the way that I maintain his foreign-worded titles to his collections of poems: *Kipos Esokleistos*, *Alexypyrina*, *Anisyhasmos*, *Apteros Niki* and *Plektani*.

When Kalimnios and Charkianakis use religious symbols and merge these with elements of paramythi, they interrogate the borders of ‘reality’ by implicitly directing the reader towards an imaginary but also a mystical, metaphysical realm. Kalimnios’ poem, ‘Prism’, for example, compares the poetic journey to ‘the defragmentation of the prism so that it can discover new meanings’. These meanings can be shared through the translation of the poems of this contemporary bilingual writer, who uses the language of his forebears as a personal ομολογία (confession) of his individual experiences. He uses words that reveal his fascination with many homelands, even as he shows a preference for the language of his Greek cultural heritage. Charkianakis, in his poem ‘Definition’, states that poetry is ‘divine insinuation when life is denigrated…when man loses measure,

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and sums up losses as profits’.  

Charkianakis, ‘Definition’, ll. 1-2, 5-7 in Australian Passport, p.179.
CHAPTER FIVE
BLENDING AND DISTORTING GENRE: THE ANTI-TRADITIONALISTS CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS AND FOTINI EPANOMITIS

Quests for my own word are in fact quests for a word that is not my own, a word that is more than myself…The author’s quests for his own word are basically quests for genre and style, quests for an authorial position.

Mikhael Bakhtin¹

In the previous chapter, I considered language as the best lens through which to examine the uses of paramythi in literary texts by Stylianos Charkianakis, Dean Kalimnios and Antigone Kefala. In the case of the poets, the use of the demotic Greek language and elements of paramythi indicate a close relationship with tradition, especially the religious and linguistic tradition of their past; while Kefala deploys the traditional paramythi in a non-traditional way, because in her tale we note a metalingual strategy in which her child protagonist comments on complex adult issues such as the problem of translating between languages and different ways of understanding social meanings. In this chapter, I will be examining how the anti-traditional prose writers, Christos Tsiolkas and Fotini Epanomitis, radically transform paramythi through their heterogeneous texts, by defamiliarising the conventions of paramythi. Specifically, I will be showing the problem of categorising these transgressive texts, since they contain various elements of the traditional paramythi that are distorted and merged with postmodern contemporary

¹ M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, V.W. McGee trans., C. Emerson and M. Holoquist eds., University of Texas, Austin, 1996, p. 149.
genre forms. When Greek Australian writers merge elements from the Greek oral tradition with postmodern forms, such as the apocalyptic, the anti-Bildungsroman, the travelogue, dirty realism, burlesque and satire, are they imitating global postmodern transgressive modes of writing? Alternatively, are they building upon the transformations of paramythi that their Modern Greek counterparts had experimented with in the first half of the twentieth century? Or are they producing idiosyncratic hybrid texts which show that they are moving beyond Helleno-centric issues and ‘forging new ties’?

Earlier, in Chapter three, I discussed the ways in which the writers Andreas Embirikos, Miltos Sahtouris and Nikos Gatsos from the Generation of the 1930s use and transform verse forms, motifs and imagery from the Greek demotic tradition in their literary texts, and how they defamiliarise paramythi by merging it with elements from the early Modern Surrealist movement. Modern Greek prose writers such as Nikos Kazantzakis, Nikos Gavriel Pentzikis and Nanos Valaoritis also draw from the Greek demotic, Byzantine and post-Byzantine traditions, and combine modernist trends with various paramythic forms. Kazantzakis, for example, uses folkloric realism in *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. He appropriates the epic verse form and imitates the twenty-four rhapsodies used in Homer’s *Odyssey*. His characters, however, are not heroic, but they

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represent the types of marginalised identities who belong to a polyglot, rather than to homogeneous, Modern Greek society.³ His protagonist, for example, is what he himself describes as a ‘Don Odysseus, a mariner of the other Odysseus who returned, killed his enemies and, stifled in his native land, put out to sea once more’.⁴ Nikos Gavriel Pentzikis in Pragmatognosia (Knowledge of Things) and O Pethamenos ke I Anastasi (The Dead Man and the Resurrection)⁵ uses one-dimensional characters, which are typical of the folkloric tradition. On the discursive level, Pentzikis confuses his readers by mixing narration with meta-narration, and he imitates the impersonal journalistic style of newspapers in his extreme modernist experimentation, which Eleni Yannakakis argues is similar to European modernism,⁶ especially as he mixes archaic pagan and Orthodox Greek symbolism. In both Kazantzakis and Pentzikis, we see paramythic elements together with philosophical ideas and complex issues such as the theme of madness and schizophrenia.⁷ More recently, we find writers such as Nanos Valaoritis, and women writers such as Margarita Karapanou, Maro Douka and Rea Galanaki, who are producing postmodernist texts that are subversive imitations of European folktales. Some critics see these texts as an indigenous form of postmodern writing, while others see this as a continuation of syncretic writing. Nicole Ollier

⁵ D. Tziovas, Greek Modernism and Beyond, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1997, pp.152, 162.
sides with the former view, as indicated in her appraisal of on Nanos Valaoritis’ collection of short stories *Paramythology of Him who Speaks Like an Ape*, in which she reads his short story ‘Red Riding Hood’ as a satirical transformation of the familiar European fairytale with the same title. Ollier argues that ‘Valaoritis stretches the limits of the Surrealist Modern style’ as indicated in the way that he ‘shuns narrative coherence, employs incoherent images, and uses a quasi-poetic rhythm together with a multiform play of language’.\(^8\) Voulgari, on the other hand, refers to such writing as ‘a “ludic” genre, typical of syncretic writing since it is subversive, polyphonic, and merges incommensurable styles and elements together’.\(^9\) According to Eleni Kefala, this type of experimental writing, which shuns ‘discursive authority and ideological seriousness’ and adopts ‘certain principles of contemporary American post-surrealist and postmodernist trends’, is becoming more common in Modern Greek literature.\(^10\) This is confirmed by the following observation by Voulgari on the prose poem:

Recent bibliography on the prose poem has indicated the possibility of viewing it not simply as an aestheticised, ‘decorative’ and lyrical kind of writing or as an ‘illegitimate’ hybrid but as a polymorphous and inherently subversive, dynamic and polyphonic genre, a genre which has the ability not only to break norms, revise generic

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boundaries and question distinctions, but also to carry out an inquiry into language and referentiality, thus aligning itself with the Avantegarde quest for the new and the experimental.\textsuperscript{11}

More recently, in the 1990s and beyond within Modern Greek literature, Greek women’s writing that employs postmodern and experimental techniques, as well as motifs from and parody of paramythi, has become far more visible. We see this in Rhea Galanaki’s \textit{O Bios tou Ismail Ferik Pasha} (\textit{The Life and Times of Ismail Ferik Pasha}, 1991), and in Maro Douka’s \textit{Enas Skoufos apo Porfyra} (\textit{A Cap of Purple}, 1995). Dimitris Tziovas and Grigoris Jusdanis argue that contemporary Modern Greek experimental postmodern writing presents as an indigenous form.\textsuperscript{12} I argue that it is the visibility of paramythi’s forms and conventions within these texts that allows us to concur with such a deduction.

In the past, Modern Greek literary theorists did not view syncretistic aesthetics and genre blending in a positive way, since they viewed such merging as antithetical to the classical Greek ideal of harmonious and intelligible forms.\textsuperscript{13} The prose poem, for example, was referred to as a

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\textsuperscript{11}Voulgari, ‘Playing with Genre(s)’, in Tziovas, \textit{Greek Modernism and Beyond}, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{13}The Greek style here refers to the modernist Neohellenic turn to a Hellenic indigenous aesthetic grounded in Greek place. Artemis Leontis describes this as ‘autochthony’ rather than ‘the Western aesthetic principle of ‘autonomy’ She argues that Greek identity and Greek place are founded on the ‘virtue of light’, the ‘clarity of lines and contours’, and ‘the virtue of measure’. See Artemis Leontis, \textit{Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland}, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1995, pp. 116, 125,128.
\end{flushright}
‘bastardized genre’ by Modern Greek scholars Apostolos Sahinis, K. Dimaras, Yorgos Savidis and Linos Politis.\textsuperscript{14} Despite such reactions by conservative literary critics, the Neo-Hellenic scholar, Margaret Alexiou in \textit{After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth and Metaphor} argues that, even though writers and critics have deemed ‘the tragic genres as high, comic genres as low, and those which fit neither, as beneath contempt’, \textsuperscript{15} the fact remains that in textual practice most Greek modernist literary texts, as well as those on the more traditional end of this spectrum, cross generic boundaries. In Chapter Three, I explored this phenomenon by showing how both the traditional and the non-traditional writers deployed paramythi in their syncretic modern texts.

Gerasimos Katsan argues that in the post-Junta period, contemporary Greek writers such as Ares Alexandrou, Yiannis Xanthoulis and Vassilis Gouroyiannis defamiliarise the traditional paramythi by using meta-fictional and experimental narrative techniques to produce an indigenous Greek postmodern style. They mix ‘real’ elements such as Greek historical, geographical and ethnographic settings with the fantastic and the horrific, and thereby question the ‘real’ in the novel. They use intertextuality, parody and pastiche and produce ‘alternate and competing forms of national allegory’ that are often critical of traditional notions of


Greekness. Katsan argues that recent historiographical meta-fiction indicates a renewed interest in history, but also a confrontation with the silences of the past. In his novel *The Silverweed Blooms*, for example, Vassilis Gorogiannis deconstructs Greece’s recent history to reveal its racist politics. Rea Galanaki’s *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasa: A Thorn in the Side of Venice* is a historiographical novel that resembles a reversal of the *synaxarion* genre to reveal repressed non-European contexts and to highlight alternative modes of collectivity. Both of these novels challenge the idea of Greek cultural homogeneity.

Women writers such as Katerinia Anghelaki-Rooke, Maro Douka, Rhea Galanaki, and Margarita Karapanou are using old themes in new ways. They experiment with postmodernist literary modes such as meta-fiction, satire and carnivale’. They engage with current and topical issues, and use abrupt transitions and shifts. They are willing to violate the mores of patriarchal society by unmasking areas that were considered as sacred and private. Margarita Karapanou, one of Greece’s foremost postmodern writers, dared to challenge distinctions between victim and victimiser in her most famous novel *Kassandra and the Wolf*. George Frangopoulos,

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quoting Karen Van Dyck, points out that Karapanou’s transgressive style is emblematic of postmodern women’s writing in Greece, which does not follow the well-worn path of the disinterested position, or the explicitly ‘engaged’ prose or poetry used by non-traditional male writers. Karapanou includes multiple subject positions that challenge the binary rationale which relegates the private and public, the personal and political, the female and male, into separate spheres. She dares to engage with issues of hybridity in a serious way by exploring violence and repressed sexual themes.  

This type of discourse differs from what Artemis Leontis describes as the ‘defensively provincial, nostalgically introverted, ethnocentric Greek literature’ of the pre-1970s, and it indicates how ‘National literatures have been supplanted by new or revitalized cultural expressions representing other geopolitical and multicultural zones’.  

Within such a context, Neo-Hellenic women literary scholars such as Eleni Kefala, Nicole Ollier and Sophia Voulgari are using an interdisciplinary method which draws from Modern Greek literary theory, Neo-Hellenic literary history, popular culture criticism, philology, and more recently it also draws on cultural, feminist and Bakhtinian insights.  

Eleni Kefala, for example, revisits the texts by the early twentieth century surrealist, Dimitris Kalokyris. She argues that his work displays ‘Borgesian notions of the verbal universe, the poet as maker, and writing as a series of

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21 Leontis, ‘Beyond Hellenicity: Can We Find Another Topos?’ pp. 217-231.


appropriations, falsifications and distortions’. Such writing, she argues, ‘constructs a multifaceted and highly atypical (for Greek literature) syncretist discourse which brings together different and often opposed elements, narratives, discourses and traditions’. She shows that this modern Greek writer was in fact negotiating culture through what Bhabha refers to as ‘The Third Space’, since such writing ‘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’.\(^\text{24}\) She is referring to Greece and Argentinia, but one can assume she might (and I certainly do) include Australia, which is similarly placed since it is made up of many identities from diverse cultures and traditions at their ‘cross-roads’.

In relation to Greek Australian literature, George Kanarakis observes that recent trends indicate a high degree of experimentation. He refers to the writers of such texts as:

\[\ldots\text{iconoclasts in harmony with the modern Greek, Australian and international currents in literature and art, they break down the established forms of literature and the barriers between poetry-as-verse and prose-as-poetry \ldots\text{. Radically experimental in nature, their work is sometimes combined with equally modernistic visual materials, resulting in a psychodynamic exploration of subjects and ideas. A common characteristic of this group of writers is their}\]

\(^{24}\text{Kefala, ‘Kalokyris and Borges’, p. 65.}\]
reaction to the mores and values of society, which they declare through a highly personal form of art.  

Recently, the type of experimental or anarchic writing that we see in contemporary Greek Australian writing by men such as the poets ΠΟ and Komninos Zervos has a similar focus to contemporary modern Greek writers such as Kazantzakis and Valaoritis, with their exploitation of ‘urban settings, international flight and spiritual exile’. Whether this type of syncreticist aesthetics is well-received in Greek literary circles is questionable, and beyond the scope of this thesis, but it appears that the early twentieth century philological aversion towards syncretism has not disappeared completely in more recent times. I argue this on the basis of my own observations regarding the reception of *Dead Europe*. This text did not receive the type of attention that it has received in non-Greek literary circles and at Australian writers’ festivals. In a recent Neo-Hellenic conference, it is interesting to note that it was a female critic, Maria

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26 Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism*, p. 130.


Herodotou, who presented a paper on this controversial writer. She argued that, in *Dead Europe*, ‘Tsiolkas uses the paramythi to deconstruct the myth of globalisation, multiculturalism and the acceptance of difference’. There was a general consensus, however, in the discussion which followed, that this text resists generic definition and is therefore ‘problematic’.

Experimental women writers do not have the same focus as their male counterparts. They avoid deconstructing the grand narratives of cultural homogeneity. They do not take the disinterested position towards a politics of marginalisation, but they show that their own marginalised status in Greek society matters. They do not obscure the silenced histories of the past, nor do they separate the private from the public. Instead they exploit transgression through images that expose the violence of the symbolic order. Karpanou writes ‘Words no longer interest me. Only images do…I would like to write a book using only images’. As Frangopoulos says, ‘Karapanou, like Beckett, sought an escape from signification, escape from exhaustion of definition and concrete meaning’. Others, such as Maria Douka in her meta-historiographic metafiction *A Cap of Purple*, exploit what Panagiotis Roilos refers to as ‘a thematics of liminality’ by using a narrator whose identity has many personalities. Epanomitis, like her Modern Greek counterparts, improvises with the paramythi and writes it as

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an imaginative fantastical text that exploits sexual transgression, like her Greek counterpart Karapanou. The diasporic writer, however, merges this with another strategy rarely found in Modern Greek literature. Roilos argues that he only found one comparable text in Greek literature: *Opera*, written by Libanius. In this text, a eunuch laments his fate, since he was in love but unable to satisfy his desire.\(^{31}\) This example reminds us of Apeface, Epanomoitis’ protagonist, since both are representative of the third gender, or what Roilos describes as ‘the ambivalent person’.\(^{32}\) The women writers undermine historiography because their fictions problematize its conventions, as well as the conventions of paramythi. So, we can consider their texts as dissenting new sub-genres.\(^ {33}\) They exploit the inner, private female space in contrast to texts written by their anarchic male counterparts, whose main focus is on urban themes. The women do not approach ‘real’ themes directly, but they use indirection to comment on violence, horror, sexuality and oppression through a feminist revisionist strategy which, Theresa De Lauretis, following Irigaray, argues ‘mocks patriarchal and mainstream sexist ideas and envisions gender and race otherwise’.\(^ {34}\) These female writers, but Tsiolkas as well, challenge the oppression of patriarchy and sexism through perverse role reversals by which the victim becomes the victimiser, the oppressed female or homosexual becomes the murderer, the enchantress and the monster, as occurs in the case of Epanomitis’ character, Meta, and Karapanou’s


protagonist, Kassandra, and Tsiolkas’ Isaac. In these cases the narrative point of view is from the perspective of the outsider, the marginal female, Mirella the ancient whore in *The Mule’s Foal* and the child Kassandra, who is transformed from a child into a maniacal storyteller who describes the wolf through very sexually transgressive imagery; and Rebecca in *Dead Europe* who openly defends her son’s homosexuality thereby rendering her an outsider to conservative Greek and Australian society. Epanomitis challenges conservatism by defamiliarising the ethnography of a remote Greek village, while Karapanou’s text makes certain political allusions to the Greek dictatorship of 1967-1974 and the Greek Civil War, but it purposefully moves away from referring to the physical borders of Greece and its provincial political realities. Tsiolkas uses a more direct approach through the construct of the lens in order to show more explicitly the horror of anti-Semitism and European Imperialism.

My chosen Greek Australian writers, Tsiolkas and Epanomitis, are situated in a very different geographical and socio-political space from their Greek counterparts. They revisit Greek socio-historical, cultural, political and ethnographic space as outsiders, and destabilise traditional socio-cultural and generic boundaries. Their texts contain the type of ‘lawlessness’ which Smaro Kamboureli refers to in the Canadian long-poem, because not only do they resist generic labels, they are also irreverent towards

35 Frangopoulos, ‘Violence and Evasion’, p. 6
36 The postmodern emphasises difference according to Linda Hutcheon, which suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality (1988:62). The postmodernist emphasis in Greece does not focus so much on high/low culture as it does on public versus private according to Tziovas 1993: 244-275; Roilos, ‘The Politics of Writing’, p. 17.
traditional institutions and ‘crudely violate etiquette’, as Bakhtin says in regard to Menippean satire in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*.  

In order to map the extent of this lawlessness, I will be using Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories on carnivale and Menippean satire, because these ideas are useful in analysing the moral-psychological experimentation and the subversive satire that is evident in both *Dead Europe* and *The Mule’s Foal*. Tsiolkas and Epanomitis explore the unusual and abnormal moral and psychic states of man and woman, but they also construct characters who embody the hybrid state, since they are neither man nor woman nor beast, but something in between. Bakhtin’s dual conception of hybridity as a syncretic power, which combines opposing world views and is a metaphor of unnatural intermixture, is a useful theoretical tool to use in these texts, since in both cases there is a merging of antithetical types of genres and sub-genres, and characters that unsettle the notion of pure forms and essentialist constructions of identity. Homi Bhabha’s ideas on ‘The Third Space’ are also useful since these writers occupy an ‘in-between position’ and negotiate dual cultures (Greek and Australian) and opposing world views: the modern Western and the pagan Eastern Mediterranean.

**What genres are these writers using?**

It is impossible to confine *Dead Europe* and *The Mule’s Foal* to a strictly defined genre since both texts contain a variety of genres, sub-genres and forms, but in order to explain how I am conceptualising these texts vis à

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vis the paramythi, I refer to Tsiolkas’ *Dead Europe* as grotesque realism (conceived as dirty realism), because he blends a ghostly and macabre paramythi with realism. Epanomitis’ *The Mule’s Foal*, I argue and will show in the forthcoming section in this chapter, is a Greek Australian variation of the postmodern Latin American magical realist genre, but it is driven by the lively momentum of the oral, traditional, Greek narrative style. Epanomitis’ use of paramythi differs from Tsiolkas’ because in *The Mule’s Foal* there is an obvious Greek ethnographic element, whereas in *Dead Europe*, Greek customs and superstitions serve as a backdrop, but they are not the principal feature of the story. Instead, the paramythi which accompanies the travel journal has a powerful narrative style and momentum which resembles the American violent action film genre. Tsiolkas also borrows certain elements from dramatic epic narrative, and from the semi-autobiographical travelogue (as a postmodern variation of the confessional autobiography). The narrator or characters within the novel describe the protagonists’ mental and emotional states by alluding to their respective crafts. Isaac’s mental state is revealed through his photographs, and it is commented on through the third person, as in the scene in which Colin is shocked by the obscene, ugly reality of the photographs, with ‘landscapes [which were] awash as if in blood, the misery on the cadaverous faces of the figures’. The protagonist reacts to his own art through first-person self-reflection: ‘The eyes that stared back at me from my photos were dead’.38 Rebecca’s inner state, her anger and frustrations, on the other hand, are revealed through the narration of her

sadistic paramythi about the Jews who ‘Every Christmas...would take a
Christian toddler and put it screaming in a barrel, run knives between the?
slats, and drain the child of its blood’. Colin, Isaac’s partner, comments on
her paramythi by announcing that ‘She made it sound like a
fairytale...some pretty fucked up fairytale’.39 This very disturbing
paramythi appears episodically, and alternates with realist chapters. The
paramythi has a sensationalist and informative function as it presents as a
traumatic oral history filled with stories about a whole community as well
as the ghosts of dark family secrets. The initial paramythi chapter has the
heading ‘Apocrypha’, which connotes a secret and unofficial (because it
has not been documented in writing) Biblical narrative, and yet it is a very
incriminating and grotesquely irreverent tale since it reveals the silences
and dark secrets of Reveka’s predecessors. It is also a metaphor of a wider
socio-cultural phenomenon which is Europe’s, but also Greece’s,
unofficial but very real history of sexism, racism and anti-Semitism.

The protagonist Isaac tells a global story through his epic journey, and
through this story he uncovers the silences and underside of history. On
another level, it appears to be a semi-autobiographical text about trauma,
since the ghouls and the ghostly apparitions that intermittently intrude into
Isaac’s photographs and incite ‘deranged’ moments could indicate
‘paranoia’.40 Tsiolkas transforms a ghostly European medieval tale into the
postmodern genre of grotesque realism, in which he uses the explicit

39 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, pp. 3, 385.
40 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, pp.158, 108.
language of the street, and he constructs the type of inversions, scandals, sharp contrasts and oxymoronic combinations that Bakhtin refers to in his discussion on Menippean satire. Grotesque realism has been associated with medieval popular culture according to Aron Gurevich. He argues that it is different from classical genres and modern genres, since it uses ‘an ancient type of imagery that was present in ancient mythology and art, but later was driven into the lower levels of society into non-canonical regions of art’. Tsiolkas exploits the edges of popular culture by using dirty realism and the mimetic anti-art form of pornographic photography. In the travelogue chapters which run parallel to the episodes of this gothic paramythi, we note the repetition of religious and ontological questions directed by Colin and by prostitutes to Isaac, ‘Do you believe in God? Do you believe in anything?’ This blending of philosophical and religious questions with dirty realism and fantasy indicates that this text goes beyond the gothic tale.

Epanomitis’ tale is not purely a fantastical paramythi, nor is it semi-autobiographical, even though there are elements of both, such as its setting being in indeterminate time, and about impossible and unbelievable events and characters, which paradoxically have a certain realistic element. It re-interprets the fictionalised chronicle, but also deploys various sub-genres of paramythi, such as demotic sayings and riddles. These are

43 Tsiokas, Dead Europe, p. 231.
evident in some titles of chapters such as, ‘When something or someone goes missing here, they say that the earth eats’, ‘Prosperity goes in waves’, and ‘So that was the story of this village’. The narrator estranges the ethnography of the village by rendering its customs and characters as extraordinary. We see this in the way the narrator confuses her readers by repeating the given names of female characters. Here she is imitating the Greek cultural practice of maintaining Christian names between generations. The many ‘Vaias’ are not clearly differentiated from each other, but in the case of the male characters there isn’t such confusion. Pappous Yiorgos is clearly distinguished from his grandson Yiorgos, through the descriptive and subversive nickname, Apeface. Women in Greek village society are rarely identified or nicknamed according to their own personal characteristics, but they are named through association with their husband, or father if there is no husband. Epanomitis alerts her readers to the fact that there is such a custom. The various rituals that accompany all the different life stages are followed by feasting, indicating that joy is a communal, not a personal affair, but grief is also a public matter. When a village woman gave birth, for example, she had to follow the village rituals of presenting the child to the whole community. When the child had a disability or was disfigured, then the mother had to deny her maternal instinct to protect the child, and she had to obey the barbaric and inhumane practice of leaving it to die. When these rituals were not kept, it was deemed to be an ill omen for the whole of the community. In this text Epanomitis exaggerates but also downplays these barbaric, ancient customs and rites as we see by the following comment: ‘The
villagers would let out their pigs which would maul and eat the child’. Overall, Epanomitis depicts antiquated communal rituals as strange, primitive and improbable, despite the fact that they have been preserved in memory through the oral tradition in some Greek rural villages and island communities. Some customs have also been transmitted by stories told by the first generation of migrants in Greek communities that settled in the diaspora. There are certain regional groups and families who continue to maintain certain superstitious customs such as the belief in matiasma (the evil eye). Epanomitis includes some customs in her tale, such as ancient match-making and post-wedding customs, funeral wakes, hierarchal relations within families and the community, as well as naturalist medical, culinary and creative practices. These rituals have a realistic and unrealistic aspect. In a similar way, we can make the analogy with the genre of paramythi, which is by definition fictional and unreal. But in the texts being examined, we have the situation in which the author estranges it because she presents the unreal element in the paramythi as disturbingly real, and the realistic element as unreal. This type of estrangement is typical of the postmodern genre of magical realism deployed by writers such as Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.44

Epanomitis refers to certain incidents which appear to be a literalised metaphor of village women’s gossip and scandalous tales. This is evident in the hagiographic legend of St Vaia, in which Epanomitis satirises Vaia’s

‘martyrdom’ by stating that she had ‘a bloody ending’.\footnote{F. Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, Allen and Unwin, St Leonard’s, p. 113.} Her protagonist Yiorgos the Apeface transforms the ‘scandalous truth’ of St Vaia’s ‘martyrdom’ from the written ‘histories of Stefanos’ into a folk song.\footnote{Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 109.}

They pulled poor Vaia out of the fire, sings Yiorgos the Apeface, they want to know why she killed the Mustaphaki. Perhaps she told them that she loved the Mustaphaki. Perhaps she told them nothing. The song says that no matter what, Vaia had a bloody ending. Bloody enough for a sainthood.\footnote{Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 113.}

This incident replicates the way that folktales are transformed into popular songs and so this scene is a meta-fictional representation of this tradition. Hybrid texts that pull apart processes which naturalise oppositions can be powerful sites of resistance.\footnote{M. Humm, \textit{The Dictionary of Feminist Theory}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1995, p. 58.} Epanomitis uses such a feminist strategy as well as playful satire that parodies women’s tales and village gossip, which had been specifically used by rural Greek women for centuries to ridicule and undermine men and to subvert authority. We see this in the way that the narrator ridicules the authority of the Priest of Casia, the village council of The Ten Pious Men, the League of Good Men. These authoritarian figures are undermined, while Meta, who represents the foreign and marginalised ‘Other’, is Epanomitis’ most powerful character. This reversal of the symbolic order is not only a feminist strategy that...
challenges patriarchy and authority, but it also shares a similar politics with postmodern cyborg writing which, according to Donna Haraway, ‘is about the power to survive’.\(^{49}\) Her character, Meta, embodies this survival characteristic. She is initially presented as the discriminated and marginalised Turkish wife of a weak Greek husband, but then she is shown to undergo metamorphosis and she becomes a man, both in appearance and desire, after she is unjustly imprisoned. She is then empowered, and she returns to the village in various guises, changing from blind shoe-polisher to lesbian, male whore and finally Blind Traveller. In the scenes that describe the whores, Epanomitis ridicules men, but she also uses burlesque and comedy to exaggerate women’s gossip as we see in the story of the woman who ate her mother-in-law, and was then transformed into a bear. This transformation is explained in terms of the superstitious *matiasma* or evil eye,\(^{50}\) a sub-genre of old wives’ tales, which is about repressed and closeted secrets: ‘But their good fortune was matiased because their daughter was ruined somewhere around the age of seven…the father could not keep his mind off his young daughter’.\(^{51}\) When she reveals private relations and openly discusses sexual topics and taboo subjects, she transgresses the unwritten laws of village life which demand that the private domain must remain private, despite the fact that in the village ‘nothing belongs to you, - not even your grief. People steal your letters and gossip your thoughts before you’ve spoken them’.\(^{52}\) When Agape of the


\(^{50}\) Epanomitis *The Mule’s Foal*, p. 40

\(^{51}\) Epanomitis *The Mule’s Foal*, pp. 29,75.

\(^{52}\) Epanomitis *The Mule’s Foal*, back cover page.
Glowing Face ridicules the Pale Millionaire in the male-dominated and public space of the village *kafeneio* (coffee shop), she shows how the marginal female has openly defied the unwritten laws of Greek communal customs in a very transgressive way.\(^5\)

**Epanomitis’ feminist magical realism**

Epanomitis’ tale can be considered as a feminist variation of Latin American magical realism since her highly allusive, primitive and exotic tale does not rewrite the history of a national region from its origins in the same way that Marquez does in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.\(^4\) Instead, she shows that the history of this village has a timeless quality, as in paramythia. The story or the chronicle of this village has a circular structure, as indicated by the repetition of names throughout generations, rather than the linear Western notion of history. Like Marquez, Epanomitis’ text is defined through its engagement with primitive rituals, history and prehistory, as well as its dialogue with alterity. Epanomitis critiques oppression and patriarchy, and following Marquez, she uses multiple perspectives, which in her text are signalled through a change in font. This postcolonial and feminist critique is a characteristic of the magical realist mode and is reminiscent of Modern Greek postmodernist women’s writing, as previously discussed in relation to Karapanou and Doukas. Epanomitis also includes a philosophical dimension when she

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\(^5\) Epanomitis, *The Mule’s Foal*, p. 89.

\(^4\) D. Mitropoulos argues that Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* captivated Greek readers perhaps because of its fantastical and primitive element. ‘On the Outside Looking In: Greek Literature in the English-Speaking World’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 191.
interrogates knowledge in a self-conscious way: ‘How was one to know anything in a world such as this?’\textsuperscript{55} She shows this world to be a very strange Greek one by using a very excitable tone of voice, in contrast to Marquez, who replicates the impassive storytelling style used by his grandmother, as he states in an interview with P. A. Mendoza. Both Epanomitis and Marquez imaginatively recreate the impressionable experiences of their childhood through stories.

[All] I wanted to do was to leave a literary picture of the world of my childhood which as you know was spent living in a very sad house with a sister who ate earth, a grandmother who prophesised the future, and countless relatives of the same name who never made a distinction between happiness and insanity.\textsuperscript{56}

Both of these writers, while from different geographical, historical, cultural, and socio-political and gendered contexts, share the common ground of belonging to a community with a strong oral tradition and a lively cultural life.

Epanomitis’ main goal is to explore the power and fortitude of women, and their ability to change external things by their internal changes’, as

\textsuperscript{55} Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, p. 143.
Epanomitis states herself in an interview with Helen Elliot.\textsuperscript{57} Epanomitis speaks through her female narrator Mirella, who addresses the reader in the first person, and uses meta-fictional comments that call into question the credibility of stories and storytellers who present official versions of village histories: ‘I will tell you their story and you must take my word for it. Who’s else do you have?’\textsuperscript{58} Her main focus is on telling how Meta overcomes the violence enacted upon her, and relaying the internal and external transformations that she undergoes, and how she empowers herself and other marginal women such as Agape, who is her novice. When Epanomitis mimics Greek demotic folk culture, which is playful and lively, it suggests that she is using a feminist strategy described in Helene Cixous’ theory on \textit{jouissance}, which deploys the form of woman’s pleasure which combines mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of female experience, and the source of woman’s creative power.\textsuperscript{59} Again I refer to the example of Meta, who has been given multiple roles because she undergoes various transformations, ranging from fitting teeth to redecorating the village brothel, and teaching Agape the secrets of seduction, fortune-telling and how to make poisons to kill off her enemies.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 4.  
\textsuperscript{59} Humm, \textit{Dictionary of Feminist Theory}, pp.197, 300.  
\textsuperscript{60} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, pp. 86, 88.
Mirella listened to yiayia Stella…Yes, she knew exactly which herbs could make the most delicious sausages. But she must know what and whom they were for. 61

Here the narrator implies secret women’s business, which is spread by women united in seeking revenge on men through the seductive art of cooking, and knowledge of lethal herbs.62 Meta also has amazing powers to immobilise men and even wild boars with one fierce look: ‘With her bare hands she would kill wild boars’, and be feared by women, and desired by the men who would feign contempt spitting on the ground, but having a desire that they would never admit to but that none the less made them go weak at the knees and muddled in the brain every time they saw her’.63 Meta is Epanomitis’ most powerful and lively character, and she shows that it is this marginalised female who survives in the public memory of this village, while the protagonist Apeface is killed in a humiliating way.

When he (Apeface) rushed at the boar, men and women alike held their breath at the sight of him. The old people thought of Meta as a young mother. They were reminded of her powerful limbs. They thought of the way she wrestled wolves and wild boars…But Yiorgos the Apeface was only a kafedzis. He did not have the strength of Meta…64

61 Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, p. 64.
62 Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, p. 64.
63 Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, p. 16.
64 Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, p. 145.
Apeface, the main character of the story, is thus undermined through a comparison with the more powerful female marginal character. Traditional power relations are inverted, and the protagonist is deposed through ridicule. Apeface’s anti-heroic action pales in comparison to the memory of Meta’s remarkable physical prowess. Epanomitis’ male protagonist inverts accepted norms and disrupts what R.W. Connell describes as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. He is presented as the extremely ugly, hybrid identity with remarkable qualities which are not typical of the male hero in paramythia. His qualities have feminine connotations, such as his ability to play the *gaitha* which is a traditional instrument, to sing sensuous songs, make sensuous food, tell stories and read books. This ugly and beastly protagonist, however, is likeable despite the Greek aversion to impure forms because, as the narrator tells us, ‘Yiorgos the Apeface had friends, admirers and well-wishers’. This might be satire, or it might indicate that Epanomitis is purposefully blurring binary categories, the male/female, powerful/gentle, attractive/repulsive which indicates a feminist strategy to highlight ambivalence through the construct of impure Greek cultural forms.

Epanomitis uses traces of Apocalypse, as in magical realism, but with a difference. While Apocalypse is associated with science fiction, the end of civilization and climate change, Epanomitis’ tale refers to the destruction of a whole way of life and culture in the wake of modernisation,

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commercialisation and urbanisation. She concludes her tale by telling her readers that ‘Without the [seductive demotic] songs, the kafeneio(coffee shop) of Yiorgos the Apeface became a sad and lonely sort of place’.67 The centre of the village, the kafenio, which symbolises male dominance in Greek agrarian society, and the natural ecosystem surrounding the village, both yield to the destructive force of nature and to modern urbanisation: ‘eventually the marsh reclaimed its land…the young people went to the city to find work. One by one the whores left’. The pre-modern village that had been full of life, intrigue and scandal, comes to a sudden end with the death of the kafedzis (proprietor of the kafeneio) who had ‘brought such life, vivid and rich, as the village had never seen before’.68

Epanomitis uses a typical magical real convention of showing the marvellous in the real. We see this in the way she depicts real life situations, such as when she describes the renewal of interest in life after Stella’s episode of depression:

One day yiayia Stella lost interest in the road altogether. She came inside, found the coloured threads and began weaving a beautiful tapestry, as if nothing had happened…The weariness remains…but she gave herself back to the world, and the waters broke and colour ran through everything.69

69 Epanomitis, *The Mule’s Foal*, p. 131
While the incident of the old woman’s depression might be a banal event, the way she recovers when she finds a renewed sense of wonder in colours reminds us of Carpentier’s idea of the Baroque spirit in the ‘marvellous real’. The motif of weaving, a folk-cultural tradition, is a metaphoric representation of creative writing, but it is also used in a meta-fictional way, reminding the reader that Epanomitis borrows from magical realism’s Baroque spirit. Why does she choose this strand of magical realism? Carpentier states that ‘The [Latin] American Baroque develops along with criollo culture, with the meaning of criollo, as self-awareness of…being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a criollo; and a criollo spirit is a Baroque spirit’. Epanomitis possibly identifies with the criollo spirit, as she herself is in between cultures; a Greek Australian young woman interested in, and imitating a similar (Latin-)American marvellous real, and therefore ‘Other’ to most of her Modern Greek counterparts, but also to her non-Greek readers. It is therefore natural that she merges antithetical genres, the oral and the literary, and constructs characters who represent marginal identities, hybrid characters who belong to ‘muted’ groups, because she identifies with them, and engages in similar transgressive politics, which are typical of magical realism and feminism. When the male characters from these groups are given feminine characteristics, and the females are given male characteristics, then the coloniser becomes the colonised. And when the grotesque hybrid

protagonist disrupts the symbolic order, then we have a feminist strategy of protest which works through introspection, as well as postcolonial satire. Patriarchy, Kristeva, argues, ‘thinks it knows woman’, just as the colonial power believed that it knew its colonised subjects. This woman writer dislodges such assumptions and intervenes into how minorities are constructed. This may be the reason why Epanomitis empowers her female protagonists who represent Kristeva’s ‘L’Etrangere’ (the strange, or foreign woman) who is changed and ‘changes the place of things’.

Epanomitis’ text exploits the magical in the real by presenting the wonder in the ordinary, everyday events of a Greek village, in a similar way to Marquez’ literalised metaphors in his One Hundred Years of Solitude, such as the clouds of yellow butterflies, the marvellous trickle of blood, and Remedios’ ascension into the sky. In The Mule’s Foal, there is an allusion to the blue brothel which was painted with giant yellow flowers ‘so that Agape will sleep under a field of giant chamomile’. Marquez’ yellow butterfly is similar to the image of the chamomile flower used by Epanomitis, since it is a delicate, small yellow flower that covers the Greek mountain tops in late spring. Epanomitis exaggerates the flower’s size as in magical real painting, since, as Alejo Carpentier says, such an aesthetics uses the combination of real forms in such a way that it ‘does not conform to daily reality’. When Epanomitis uses the metaphor of

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73 Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics, p.167.
74 Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics, p. 151.
76 Carpentier, ‘The Baroque and the marvellous real’, p. 103.
blood, which has a symbolic association with lineage or life, she subverts it by giving it a transgressive potential. She describes the blood that trickled from Apeface’s temple after being killed by Agape’s boar in a sensuous way: ‘He wasn’t much of a fighter, but my God his blood was sweet’. It reminds us of Cixious’ witches, who tell things that only those ‘on the edges of language and culture, together with madwomen and hysteries’ would say. So while Marquez includes a mythical and a religious dimension in his histories, such as Remedios’ ascension, which invites comparison with the assumption of the Virgin Mary, and the cessation of interpreting Melquiades, the gypsy’s coded manuscripts, signals an apocalyptic end. In Epanomitis, there are no such elevated metaphors, but only base, earthly and sensuous metaphors and allusions, such as the woman who ate her mother-in-law, the apparition of St Vaia beating the Turks, and Agape’s boar running through the brothel. These allusions refer to the unsaid of civil society, told as a farce, as rumour, gossip and innuendo that exposes patriarchy, but also inter-racial, Greek-Turkish conflict and racist crimes, which stem from falsified versions of history as symbolised by Stefanos’ scandalous histories. Epanomitis uses farce to challenge the official Greek version of history by pointing out that the Turks were reacting against the torment inflicted on them (and not vice versa) by young Greek boys who ‘painted their faces with rice powder and dressed in white robes’. She shows that it is not the Turks who are the oppressors, but the oppressed, the colonised, the ‘Othered’, because of

80 Hall, ‘Writing across boundaries’, pp. 112-3.
racial extremism. She then empowers the underdog when she points out that ‘One St Vaia was captured by the Turks and had her balls cut off’.\textsuperscript{81}

Epanomitis challenges what is real by leaving open questions as to what is real and what isn’t in her ending: ‘Today Meta said that someone found a fish on their field. Was it really a fish or was it a rumour?’\textsuperscript{82} She explains in a meta-fictional way why she blurs reality and fantasy, self and other, coloniser and colonised, when she states: ‘If you found my story somewhat puzzling all I can say is that every house has a story’. She indicates that she is using a woman’s craft to tell her story: ‘Those who hear that story must repeat it in a tapestry woven with coloured thread, in scandalous histories, in unanswered letters, even in ghastly carvings of Agape’.\textsuperscript{83} Unlike the Modern Greek writers Embirikos and Sachtouris who borrowed from a Eurocentric Surrealist movement to pursue the marvellous, \textit{The Mule’s Foal} is making its own unique contribution to magical realism, because it is, as Maria Takolander argues, ‘geographically, culturally and, historically anchored to an extra-textual reality’.\textsuperscript{84} In Epanomitis’ text, we have an example of an extra-textual reality which is a strategy to reinforce the notion of a deeply ingrained ambivalence. This is typical of the Greek culture, which has a tendency to exaggerate and to sensationalise its past, to be melodramatic in some instances, and in other instances to downplay tragedy through sarcastic humour. Her concerns, however, are grounded in

\textsuperscript{81} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p.142.
\textsuperscript{82} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{83} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p.150.
\textsuperscript{84} Takolander, ‘Apprehending Butterflies’, p.167.
contemporary problems that are not just Greek but global, such as the demise of agrarian communities, the exploitation of women and children, the destruction of the environment, and the stereotyping of minorities. She uses the female craft of subversion that persists in oral, written and performative forms. These varied forms are expressions of the subconscious since, as Epanomitis admits, she doesn’t know where all these thoughts have come from, but they are stories which need to be narrated: ‘Every house continues to repeat its story in any way it knows how. This is the story of my House, and I have told it to you in the only way I knew how’.  

Her ‘House’ might not be ‘place’-specific, but its form is gender-specific, since she has used scandal, gossip and subversive play to expose the unsaid histories of the past.

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Tsiolkas’ blending of the oral into literary form

What is the role of the paramythi in *Dead Europe* and why does Tsiolkas blend this low-brow narrative technique into his complex text? If we note how the paramythic chapters appear as a sequence of episodes, and that each of these chapters foregrounds the subsequent action that develops within the realist dramatic plot of the main text, then we can infer that it is the gothic paramythi within the travel story which generates intrigue and suspense throughout the novel. I believe that without the paramythi, this text would be very difficult to read because of the visual barrage of disturbingly real scenes, which explicitly show ‘how narcotics replace

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food, how illegal immigrants and the economically marginalised sectors of society are exploited by not having passports or an identity’. These realities are captured though the construct of the photographer-protagonist’s lens and are presented as shots of lifeless, muted objects. The paramythi progresses the story, but unlike the traditional, one-dimensional Greek paramythi, this story imitates violent cinematic scenes through dramatic action, and by traversing various time frames. *Dead Europe* begins in the recent past, then it moves back and forth in time, and finally in the end, the past merges into the present.

Tsiolkas’ para-textual strategy, especially the choice of titles to most of the chapters, highlights the paramythic dimension in this book. We note this in the chapters with the titles, ‘Ante-Genesis’, ‘Apocrypha’, ‘The Serpent’s Song’, ‘The Serpent’s Course’, ‘In the Garden of Clouds’, and ‘The Book of Lilith’. These ‘mythic’ chapters occupy the most strategic positions in the narrative plot, and they signpost the five stages of the text’s dramatic action which are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and revelation or catastrophe. In between these sections, there are semi-realist chapters such as the ‘The Brothel of Prague’, and ‘The Nietzschean Hotel Porter’.

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87 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, pp. 1, 12, 237, 305, 383.
88 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, pp. 177, 329.
direct documentary cinema. The chapters ‘The Solid Earth beneath my Feet’ and ‘Atonement’ present as a semi-autobiographical fiction, the confession of traumatic memories, feelings and emotions. There are also very real scenes, as in a travelogue. There is dialogue as in drama, and there is the narrative thread of an oral history. The details of the characters’ memories and emotions are not always narrated by the protagonist, but they are transmitted as an oral historical tale within the larger narrative, which could be a postcolonial one. In the chapter ‘White Skin’, we have the sense that it is a parody of the postcolonial text *Black Skin, White Masks* by Franz Fanon, since it may be appropriating and inverting the subject in Fanon’s title. Tsiolkas may be reversing the order, replacing ‘Black’ with ‘White’, and ignoring ‘Black’ all together in order to highlight how racism functions by eliminating the colonised other.

In other instances we are indirectly given some insight into the protagonist’s state of mind through a commentary on the photographs taken by the protagonist. When the author allows the reader to overhear the dialogue between co-protagonists, as in the following dialogue, then we are given a view into the psyche of the photographer-artist:

-What do you think of those photographs?

-I think they are true.

-And what truth is that?

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90 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, pp. 66, 391.

91 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 25.
-That’s not Europe in those photographs, his words rushed out. Those photographs are Hell. What Hell did Isaac see? What Hell is he in?\textsuperscript{92}

Here Rebecca and Isaac’s lover appear to be psychoanalysing Isaac through his art, indicating that the author is participating in the genre of semi-non-fiction. The protagonist narrator acknowledges his own depravity (as though from outside of himself) and from the perspective of his victim.

I wanted to capture that moment when he looked silently at me, rejecting me, his gaze demanding me to leave. It was that stare I wanted to capture. I wanted to make my memory of him tangible…\textsuperscript{93}

There is also a social realist chapter titled ‘War Crimes’\textsuperscript{94} which exposes racism and anti-Semitism, not only as a social disease and a historical reality, but also as a disturbing and traumatic personal experience.

It doesn’t matter, Col. It’s all in the …past, it doesn’t matter…But, of course, it did matter. For something was exchanged between us that night. If with me Colin had found someone prepared to accept his shame, I now shared something of his exile…The ink (of the swastika tattoo) was on my skin too.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{92} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 403,404.
\textsuperscript{93} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{94} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{95} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 255.
Colin admits his hatred of the Jews, and Isaac is torn, loathing anti-Semitism, but accepting the anti-Semite as his lover.

Tsiolkas disrupts reader expectations when the content of the chapter does not follow the conventions sign-posted in the chapter’s title. Instead of maintaining the genre which it para-textually signals, there is a blending of often incommensurable genres within each chapter. We note this in the chapters which purport to be mythical, as in the first chapter ‘Ante-Genesis’, and also in the final chapter ‘Atonement’. By naming his first chapter ‘Ante-Genesis’, Tsiolkas directs his reader to mythical time, a time before historical time, but also before biblical time. The reader might be expecting to read a myth, as indicated by the title, but the story and the action that unfold show that this myth contains very dark satire which exposes misotheism (hatred of God or gods), anti-Semitism, misogyny and racism. The narrator-protagonist describes his own initial experience with race and religion, which appears to frame the way in which he interprets the question of ‘the Jews’ throughout the subsequent story. Semitism and anti-Semitism are framed through a woman’s (his mother’s ‘peasant’) paramythi. The powerful father figure violently reacts against this story even as he denigrates the storyteller and accuses her of having a peasant mentality. The male dominant viewpoint, in this case, is anti-hierarchical, influenced by Marxist and Nietzchean ideology, as Isaac points out in reference to his father’s reaction to Rebecca’s paramythi: ‘Being Dad, of course, he put his own Marxist spin on it…He told us that the Bible was all
crap and not to believe in any religion’.\textsuperscript{96} So, race and religion become players in this personal, intra-familial, trauma narrative.\textsuperscript{97} In the scene in which Isaac demands that his lover remove the swastika tattoo, ‘I wanted to erase that tattoo. I hated the barrier it placed between myself and Colin. I hated its history, I hated its power’,\textsuperscript{98} anti-Semitism, misogyny, patriarchy and sexism are framed within the discourse of power; not as a myth, but as an oral history about a real life experience – the protagonist’s but possibly the author’s as well.

In the introductory chapter, Rebecca’s paramythi resembles a mock parable. It is an anti-Semitic story about Jews killing Christian infants and drinking their blood. This story introduces the reader into Tsiolkas’ dark world, while textually it introduces the protagonist into his mother’s psyche. As in meta-fictional texts, the narrator explains her own fiction, and tells her audience that this is the story which she received: ‘That is what my father told me and what his mother had told him’. She then questions the validity of stories that are passed down: ‘Maybe it is true maybe it isn’t’.\textsuperscript{99} In the second last chapter ‘Purgatory’, the same story is told through the perspective of the male narrator. Isaac repeats the same mock parable, but he includes his own interpretation, and from this story he enters a wider philosophical discussion about religion and race, but ultimately, an ethics of his own identity. He states: ‘So for me to believe in

\textsuperscript{96}Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 385.
\textsuperscript{98}Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{99}Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 3.
God, I have to believe that loving you, making love to you, being with you, is a sin and I am damned to Hell forever?”  The discourse of homosexuality becomes synonymous in Colin’s mind with being sentenced to Hell and damnation and it forces Isaac to make a conscious choice. Isaac chooses to live with the consequences as identified by Colin, since he states: ‘If there is the one God, I still choose you’. This conscious choice is reaffirmed in the final chapter ‘Atonement’, where Isaac asks to be photographed next to his lover, and amongst his family. The drama of the paramythi reaches a resolution phase, with the appearance of the haunting figure of the ghost child, which could also be a metonym for unresolved guilt. This enters into the real life drama narrative, but from the perspective of Rebecca. The focus shifts from the male to the female protagonist. Unlike her son, Rebecca has forfeited her right to be able to choose her fate. Her son had the choice of choosing to remain with his lover, even though this meant disenfranchisement from a religious belief system which he did not subscribe to. He announces his defiance against religion: ‘If there is a God I choose you, I choose Hell’. The mother, however, is forced to forfeit ‘choice’ as well as her place within her community, and this translates as choosing Hell in exchange for the life of her son:

She understood the extent of her punishment. She was never to see the light of the Saviour’s face…She was never to hear her husband’s

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100 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 389.
101 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 390.
102 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 390.
booming, singing laughter, would never be reunited with her father. She was never to rest with her family and children. This earth, this earth that smelt of sparse rain and parched ground, this earth and this boundless sky, was Hell.\textsuperscript{103}

This ending shifts the mock parable to a mythic level, revisiting and reinterpreting the living death theme in Sophocles’ \textit{Antigone}. The women protagonists are forced to sacrifice themselves for their men, Rebecca for her son, and Sophocles’ \textit{Antigone} for the honour of her brother’s name. It is not just the mock parable that reaches a resolution phase but also Rebecca’s realist travel journey. As the fictional ghost tale and the realist epic drama draw together in this last scene, they conclude with a para-mythic ending.

The coexistence of oppositional genres (fictional, non-fictional and dramatic) within the one text indicates the ‘doubleness of postmodernism’\textsuperscript{104} which as Linda Hutcheon points out ‘paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies’.\textsuperscript{105} Tsiolkas’ \textit{Dead Europe} pretends to be an epic telling a global story about contemporary and recent historical and social realities, but because of its gothic layer, it reads like fantastical fiction. It also sabotages the genre of the Bildungsroman, which shows the struggle of the individual who searches to understand self because, in the end, when the ghost of the murdered

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{103} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 411.
\item \textsuperscript{104} L. Hutcheon, \textit{A Poetics Of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction}, Routledge, New York, 1988, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Hutcheon, \textit{A Poetics of Postmodernism}, p. 11.
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Jewish child raps his icy arms around the aged woman, there is the sense that there is no growth, but a psychic breakdown instead, and banishment, as in trauma fiction.

Epanomitis’ and Tsiolkas’ use of the carnivalesque

When Epanomitis exploits Bakhtinian carnivalesque, we could say that she does so in order to invert the hierarchical socio-cultural order of the host and home culture through ‘the mask of the clown and the fool’.106 Blending the serious with the comic is a similar strategy used in subversive Greek folk stories and songs. Epanomitis alerts us to this through her comment on the back page of her text, stating that ‘this story is a form of ancient storytelling’. As the observer of strange village customs and personalities, she repeats fragments of oral tales she has heard from village women who use stories as entertainment in order to render their mundane lives more interesting.107 She exaggerates these tales by using carnivale and satire in order to challenge the patriarchal and misogynist order of rural Greek society, but also traditional Greek customs in the diaspora. Satire, according to Margaret Alexiou, allows writers a certain license to challenge authority, and this frees the writer from being answerable, since they use words ‘which are not their own’.108 Epanomitis states through her narrator that she is using words which are not her own: ‘I will tell you their

106 Bakhtin, Problems with Dostoevsky’s Poetics, p. 111.
107 She begins her text by narrating a sensationalized paramythy, constructed, as she admits in the interview with H. Elliot, ‘Fresh Out of The Melting Pot’, from the ‘bits and pieces of narratives and stories that I found and collected’ while living for a year in a mythical Greek village.
108 Alexiou, After Antiquity, p. 100.
story and you must take my word for it’.¹⁰⁹ Here we note that she is enforcing her feminist position upon her readers, as the authority, by using the word ‘must’. She empowers her female characters by using a strategy of protest and possibly of self-discovery, since as Epanomitis states in an interview with the *Sunday Age* that she wants to show ‘the power and fortitude of women, and their ability to change external things by their internal changes’.¹¹⁰ Epanomitis shows this transformation by using Mirella, ‘the ancient whore’, as her mouthpiece. In this way she is inviting her reader to see the marginalized female voice in a more attentive way, by giving oratorical authority to the whore, a twice-marginalised figure in Greek society. Immediately, she dislodges the paramythic tradition, in which the storyteller, or paramythas, was a highly respected male, despite the fact that, within popular memory and cultural practice, it was the females, the mothers and grandmothers, who transmitted traditions through oral stories, but also scandalous tales through gossip.

In ancient Greece, obscene speech flourished in the Old Comedy, and its function was to entertain, but it also had an important role to play in the life of democracy.¹¹¹ While there are no direct links between obscene speech, earthy folktales¹¹² and the carnivalesque, they share certain

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¹¹² Alexiou, *After Antiquity*, p. 98. Alexiou argues that ancient texts were rediscovered for new perspectives and often not to mimic, but to exploit privileged texts for irony, satire and parody.
common characteristics with Menippean satire, such as their use of inappropriate words and cynical frankness, mocking the sacred and crudely violating etiquette.\textsuperscript{113} The fact that Epanomitis does not want to discuss the savage nature of her text indicates that while she exposes how she saw her ancestral home, she prefers to hide her own inner conflicts from the public gaze, and so her use of paramythi functions as a mask behind which she hides. She indicates carnivale when she states:

\begin{quote}
One minute you’re a woman. The next you’re a bear. There’s a woman here who is neither man nor woman. And a man who’s both man and beast.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Could this be a metaphor of her own journey of self-discovery, and her ‘turning inwards’? Tsiolkas, by contrast, does not use paramythi as a mask. Carnivale is not playful satire like the Mediaeval and Renaissance grotesque described by Bakhtin as that ‘which was filled with the spirit of carnivale, which freed the world from all that is frightful and terrifying and makes it completely unfrightening and therefore merry and light’.\textsuperscript{115} Tsiolkas uses a grotesque form of carnivale to expose the hidden links between racism, sexual exploitation and violence. He inter-textually uses the gothic fantasy paramythi within his hyper-realist text to heighten the effect of his challenge. His use of carnivale exposes how the coloniser becomes the colonised, the photographer becomes the photographed, and

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\textsuperscript{113} Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{114} Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, back cover page.
\end{flushright}
the subject becomes an object. Isaac the photographer, and the descendant of the Jewish lad’s coloniser, becomes colonised by the demonic ghost child who refuses death but will live forever to torment his colonisers’ descendants. When Tsiolkas includes gothic fantasy in his travelogue, the reader experiences what Todorov describes in relation to fantasy fiction as ‘uncertainty and sustained hesitation’ because the tale is populated by ghouls and ghosts which render the tale unbelievable. But when he uses explicitly provocative realism, then he challenges the reader to confront real disturbing situations in matters of race, religion and sexuality. The fantastical element together with the real amplifies the disturbance that he seeks to create.

Carnivale is textually represented through the use of contrasting paired images, references to scandals, and crowning and de-crowning, and it suggests a ‘world upside down’. For example, Tsiolkas names one of his most defining chapters, ‘Carnivale’, in which the storyteller begins with a description of the angelic sounds of Mulan’s clarino, ‘the voice of God’, which subsequently becomes transformed into the demonic voice of hatred:

Mulan blew a note of such piercing anguish that the very tables seemed to lift off the ground and begin their own dance. He knew he was singing in God’s voice – he was singing with the devil… As the music became more furious, the whole village descended into the

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118 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 54.
madness of the dance…It seemed that a thousand stomping feet…were singing hate and madness and above all hunger, always hunger, right back to him.

There is a metonymic connection between the seductive demotic instrument and subversion, since ‘devilish’ music is associated with a violation of the unwritten sexual, racial and religious laws of Greek society. The result of such violation is the conception of a hybrid, illegitimate offspring, which in this context works as a counter-narrative that exposes silenced and debased histories. Lust fuelled by hatred leads the coloniser and the colonised, Lucia and the Hebrew youth, into an unlawful union, symbolizing not ‘a joyful expression of carnivale’, but a very dark and profane debasement in which the beggar for a moment becomes an [anti]-king who fathers an illegitimate child. The Hebrew youth is subsequently murdered by the coloniser, the hybrid offspring is murdered by the village woman who had delivered him to life, and the ghost of the murdered Hebrew, the father of the hybrid child, haunts his murderer’s descendants forever. This carnivalesque scene symbolically represents the type of inversions that will be played out in the rest of the text. It foregrounds how power relations between the coloniser and the colonised are overturned, but it also sets the tone for the rest of the story in which the descendants (and others) are doomed to perpetrate and perpetuate similar racial, sexual and colonial perverted acts of violence in other circumstances and places. Tsiolkas uses paramythi to unmask

119 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, pp. 54-65.
120 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, p. 124.
history. Together with the construct of the photographer’s lens, which objectifies mute, silenced, dehumanised victims of society, he opens up hard questions of intercultural racism, intra-ethnic violence, misogyny and homophobia.

Tsiolkas and Epanomitis both use the motif of the sensuous musical paramythi in a symbolic way but it is also a meta-fictional strategy to show how the demotic, musical paramythi can affect its listeners in a transgressively powerful way. For example, when Tsiolkas’ narrator refers to the sensuous music of Mulan’s clarino (clarinet), he states that ‘The whole of God’s earth seemed to be dancing to his delirious, mad tune’, while Epanomitis describes the effect of Apèface’s voice upon the audience as ‘slowly caressing the bodies of all the people who were listening, for they were overcome with a terrible desire’.121 These comments explicitly refer to paramythia, which are transmitted through the form of popular folk music and folk song, and they imply an erotic experience. In an oblique way, therefore, each author indicates that he or she is using paramythi as a metaphor for transgressive sensual desire. This inverts paramythi’s traditional role, which deploys folk or popular music and song to inspire a sense of collective belonging.

121 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 56.
How Tsiolkas and Epanomitis differ in the way they bend and blend
paramythi

Tsiolkas and Epanomitis both test the limits of genre in *Dead Europe* and
*The Mule’s Foal* by unsettling the Hellenistic ideal of pure forms through
their use of impure hybrid characters, and through their play with genre.
They illustrate that it is difficult to sustain the purity of genre promoted by
Modern Greek neo-traditionalist writers such as Giorgos Seferis and Kostis
Palamas, as discussed by Artemis Leontis, because, as shown in this
chapter, paramythi can undergo a series of permutations and changes
signposted by the textual use of genre switching. Storytelling begins the
tale, but ultimately the driving force behind *Dead Europe* is the revelation
of the underside of Europe, riddled by racial and ideological conflict. The
protagonist is exposed to visual scenes of racial hatred, psychological
abuse, and evil in its most open form.

Tsiolkas’ travel journey through Europe translates how he perceives
modern Western society. His highly graphic social-realist novel reveals
traumatic experiences as it deconstructs Europe’s recent history.
Contemporary Australian literary critics Liz Shek-Noble and Michael
Vaughan both argue that Tsiolkas’ *Dead Europe* deconstructs the violence
which is European twentieth century history, with its ‘legacies of sexual
violence, murder and anti-Semitism’. He does this by merging visual
graphics and a very dark paramythi together with his realist narrative. His

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123 Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism*, p.139.
protagonist, Isaac, speaks through his confronting photographs, while, as Michael Vaughan argues, ‘spectral shadows speak to him from within his own reproductions’. We see this in the following scene:

I picked up a photograph. It was my mother’s village…What I could not understand were the shadows that dotted my landscape. In one field, a thin strip of roughly ploughed land, a figure crouched and stared furiously at the camera…Everything about him - his body, his face - was blurred and faint, except for that violence in his eyes.

This type of anti-art causes a disturbance, reinforcing Vaughan’s point that ‘it is a novel that has been described as unsettling, disturbing, poisoned and repellent’. Tsiolkas appropriates the traditional paramythi genre and transgresses its conventions in order to expose the ‘violence inflicted upon human bodies’ in order to question the humanity of a supposedly civilised society. He uses raw imagery to depict realistic objects of hate, such as the old man who represents the last, dying connection between life and the grotesque sculptural reliefs on the Holocaust Memorial. This old man appears to have a sadistic fascination with the past, since he insists upon having Isaac photograph the crude symbols of continuing racism. When the protagonist admits that these scenes are the only ones which ‘touch’ him, then we recognise not only a complicity between characters who are fascinated by viewing images of horror, but also a metonymic depiction of

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126 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 133.
127 Shek-Noble, ‘There were Phantoms,’ p. 5.
128 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 151.
the pornographic gaze. Tsiolkas takes this fascination with violence to an even lower, more base level, by exploring dark satanic practices such as ‘the call of blood’, the smell of death – ‘Europe stank, it stank of ghosts and shadows’ – with his protagonist’s sadistic invitation: ‘Sweet Armageddon, beloved genocide, Come to me’. Lust is intensified by a parallel paramythi, which refers to the bestial side of racism, where Stellios the grave digger spits and throws the corpse of the dead Jewish boy on the pyre, while justifying his hatred on religious grounds by stating: ‘It is a rare chance a man has to kick at Satan himself. I’ll get to Heaven’. Prior to the chapter on the final murder with the title ‘The Nietzschean Hotel Porter’, we have the paramythi chapter ‘In the Garden of Clouds’, and prior to ‘War Crimes’, which depict his final breakdown, we have a parallel chapter which reads like a paramythi highlighting racism called ‘The Sparrow’s Song, The Serpent’s Course’. The intermittent use of paramythi defuses the intensity of the realism, even though the limits of both forms (paramythi and realism) are stretched because Tsiolkas is describing what can be construed as a schizophrenic experience, or an acute psychosis: ‘I will speak to none of them. I am not ill. I still have clarity’. The female co-protagonist Rebeccaa symbolically expresses racial hatred by re-enacting holocaust history, when she physically erases the Hebrew’s name from the memorial grave stone:

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129 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 331
130 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 358.
131 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 381.
132 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 245.
133 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 329.
135 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 304.
Her hand had lifted a rock from the earth and she used it to pound away at the Hebrew’s name. The wretched concrete face crumbled easily and before long she had erased his name.\textsuperscript{136}

Naming is a sign of dominance while erasure indicates symbolic violence, or racist indifference and contempt. When Isaac seeks to erase the Russian in the last violent scene, he enacts racial hatred through real or imagined murder, while the American looks on. Could this indicate that the American represents the coloniser who wants to dominate by objectifying the victim through the gaze, and so is complicit in real or imagined murder? The gaze is about objectifying the subject, and imagining active hatred: ‘I want to rip the Russian apart…’ since he imagines ‘The American is watching me, blocking out the feeble light and casting the room in shadow’.\textsuperscript{137} Here again we note how Tsiolkas is using photography (with his allusions to dark room, shadows and light) metonymically for pornography, which is a metonym for the exploitation of naked and vulnerable bodies. The protagonist imagines hatred, and this leads to a reversal. Isaac is no longer the creator-photographer, but instead he imagines himself as self-photographed as in a psychotic episode. Is the author projecting individual and collective guilt in order to awaken consciousness, or is he metonymically using photography as a symbol of colonisation? When he concludes his story by using the allusion of photography, there is an inversion:

\textsuperscript{136} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 409.
\textsuperscript{137} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 374.
He was no longer a young man. He awoke to find his mother and his sister, his lover and his niece and nephew around him. He knew what he wanted…Take it, Isaac ordered, take the photograph.\textsuperscript{138}

The protagonist now demands to be the photographed. He is symbolically coming out, and enunciating who he is, not through the paramythi, but through the photo. The photographer-author uses his visual craft to enunciate his homosexuality. This last scene typifies the way he has used the discourse of photography and the image of the gaze to bend the genre of paramythi and blend it with the discourse of realism. It is this bending and blending which creates a disturbance that reaches a level which is more extreme than Epanomitis’ text, because of its explicit realism, but also because Tsiolkas collapses psychic experiences with violent action, and foregrounds these through the intermittent yet parallel and powerful paramythi.

\textit{The Mule’s Foal} is equally disturbing, but as the reader, I find it less repulsive because it is a tale of contemporary life camouflaged as ancient storytelling.\textsuperscript{139} Epanomitis blurs the distinction between the real and the imaginary. She opens up ‘her house’ to the public gaze, with its dark secrets, taboo topics and ancient superstitious practices. This writer exposes mainstream Greek society and shows that it is made up of contradictory values and beliefs, rational and irrational ideas and practices

\textsuperscript{138} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 410.
\textsuperscript{139} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, back cover page.
that have been transmitted through the generations. These irrational fears do not disappear in the diaspora, but in many ways are heightened when individuals are faced with traumatic life changes.

The Mule’s Foal is not a myth but an impure paramythi which uses the *paralogous* to interrogate the conventions of the real. When she transforms Meta into a modern-day version of the mythical Tireseus, ‘I am a blind traveller. My eyelids have become dry, so dry that they scrape against my eyes. I am looking for the mother of the gorilla child so I can wash my eyes with her milk and be comforted’, then we may have an example of hybridity which, according to Young, ‘in the twentieth century …was reactivated to describe a cultural phenomenon rather than a physiological one’. When Epanomitis merges the mythic character Tireseus with her paramythic Meta, then we register this elusive identity as existing in that space which has been named by Homi Bhabha ‘the Third Space’, the undecidable, neither nor, the disavowing of the authoritative discourse of colonialism whilst it creates a crisis for any system of authority. Hybridity for Homi Bhabha represents that ‘ambivalent turn of the discriminated subject into the terrifying exorbitant object of paranoid classification, a disturbing questioning of images and presences of authority’. Meta’s identity confounds the reader, as does Yiorgos the Apeface. Does she represent an aberration in nature, the result of the god’s

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143 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* p. 113
vengeance for the sins of the progenitors, even if these are alien Turks? Does the gorilla child symbolise the schizophrenic person, a modern Doctor Jekyll/Mr Hyde, both man and beast? By night Yiorgos is the introvert, unassuming kafedzis (café owner) but by day he displays an extrovert and voyeuristic self. We could say that Yiorgos as the Apeface symbolizes an extreme version of hybridity because of his dual identity, but Meta surpasses this extreme version because she has multiple identities. This play with the motif of hybridity confuses readers, since they do not know when the one identity begins and the other ceases to exist, as the signposts are textually blurred. The author’s repeated use of gender-switching and human-to-animal transformations uses hybridity to confuse her readers, since there are no clear delineations as to who and what her elusive characters are, showing us how fantasy can use a language which can, as Kamboureli says, ‘make us perceive ourselves and those around us otherwise’.  

By showing the many sides of the powerful (but marginal) woman, Epanomitis may be doubly subverting patriarchy. She promotes a hyper-feminine male protagonist Apeface, the antithesis of what R.W. Connell describes as hegemonic masculinity’s fantasy figure, the unattainable cultural ideal, ‘the public face of hegemonic masculinity which is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power’. She deconstructs the idea of pure essences, one-dimensional characters and

fixed gender roles as found in traditional paramythi, by using carnivale to reveal and expose heterogeneity. Epanomitis’ unusual fantasy characters, especially her female protagonists, represent what Anne Cranny-Francis describes as a feminist response to the patriarchal real, which uses fantasy ‘to envision gender otherwise’.\(^\text{146}\) Meta’s characteristics allow for such a strategy since she has been constructed as a very dominant but ambiguous being, with a complex and ambivalent past. She was known as the fierce Turkish woman who had been ravished by the rooster as a child, married off to a weak Greek man who considered her his possession, lusted after by the village men, victimised, imprisoned, abused, transformed into a hermaphrodite or an impure hybrid embodying both superhuman and animalistic qualities. These changes may be fantastical, or they may symbolize how woman is perceived by man: feared, devious and an object of desire.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how Tsiolkas and Epanomitis, by exploiting the paramythi’s transgressive potential, have taken hybridity to another level. Their multi-voiced, heterogeneous texts explore subliminal areas of the psyche, question boundaries and challenge the authority of the traditional discourse of Hellenism with its emphasis on pure forms. Epanomitis speaks out against patriarchal ideology which has colonised Greek village life, and she shows, as Luce Irigaray says, that she is

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‘exempt, in part, from phallocratic law because she ridicules it’. Tsiolkas exploits dark satire by merging the gothic paramythi with a cinematic, visual depiction of horror which I have termed grotesque realism. Both writers exploit contradiction, which is the migrant condition itself, the contradiction of living in between the past and the present, and in between traditional and liberal socio-cultural values and ideas. Both writers exploit a hybrid writing style which resembles Homi Bhabha’s discourse on hybridity as ‘the third space which enables other positions to emerge’. In both of these texts, the narrators are marginal identities, a homosexual traveller-photographer and an ancient whore, respectively. Their tales invite aporia (questioning) because, while the fantastic events are beyond interpretation, there is also a very disturbingly real element within these paramythia. Instead of an imaginative tale, we sense that we are witnessing a response to the postmodern condition, or what Hobsbawm refers to as ‘the despair of reason’ which has allowed ‘a new emphasis on magic, accident, irrationality, symbols and dreams’. This emphasis disrupts, as Kristeva says, ‘the symbolic’ and replaces it with another rationale which is not based on logic.

I have argued and shown that Tsiolkas’ Dead Europe is both a global epic story and a postmodern gothic ghost tale, and that Epanomitis’ The Mule’s

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147 L. Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, C. Porter trans., Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985, p. 68.
Foal is a unique Greek Australian version of magical realism. I have shown that Tsiolkas and Epanomitis have rewritten recent European history and the ethnography of the remote Greek village through peripheral identities, and they have exposed, destabilised, and provoked the social order of both their host and home cultures. Perhaps they have appropriated the exotic element of paramythi because it makes the text more interesting, and its plastic quality makes it adaptable to Bakhtinian carnivalesque? 150

The presence of paramythi, despite its anti-traditional presentation in these texts, indicates that these writers cannot totally disengage from their past, since paramythi remains a ‘haunting presence’. 151 It may indicate that when paramythi merges with postmodern genres, the emergent hybrid genre may represent Homi Bhabha’s ‘ethics of survival’, 152 because the writers refer to their pasts in order to work through their presents. In the forthcoming chapter, I will be exploring this tension, and the ways in which the traditional and anti-traditional Greek Australian writers recreate a sense of home and how they use paramythi to negotiate at-homeness or alienation from their Greek home and Australian host cultures.

150 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p. 247.
152 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p. 35.
CHAPTER SIX: HOME, BELONGING AND NOT-BELONGING

In this postmodern world our bodies are bereft of those spatial and temporal co-ordinates essential for historicity, for a consciousness of our own collective and personal past, ‘Not-belonging’, a sense of unreality, isolation and being fundamentally ‘out of touch’ with the world become endemic in such a culture….Only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised - this is home, this is belonging.¹

Greek diasporic writers traditionally have articulated their sense of displacement as a sense of loss or as hope of a return to their ancestral home, like other classical diaspora groups.² In their search to understand themselves and where they belong in the midst of major life changes, they often retreat to their past, or imagine a better future, by drawing from a diverse range of Greek oral stories, and revisiting certain landscapes, histories, myths, images and performative rituals. This ‘retreat’ may be their way to counter personal and communal feelings of dislocation, or, as Stuart Hall says, their ‘lack of wholeness’.³ In Modern Greek diasporic writing, this sense of being displaced translates as exile and ‘exile’, according to Dimitris Tziovas, ‘ostensibly concerns itself with certain absolutes, such as the meaning of identity, history and politics and their

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relation to one’s own place or home’. Tziovas argues that in postmodern novels, this becomes problematic because ‘the fragmented postmodern experience is one where boundaries are reconfigured or obliterated all together’. In this chapter, my aim is to explore how my chosen writers negotiate their sense of home and belonging, by focusing specifically on the ways in which they use elements of paramythi in their modernist or postmodernist texts. The paramythi is a useful lens to use in such an analysis, since it is widely used by diasporic and mainland Greek writers in contemporary postmodern texts, and is more flexible than myth, previously deployed in early Modern Greek literature. The other advantage in using paramythi as my focal lens is that it is not exclusive. Women writers draw from it in creative ways, unlike myth, which was predominantly used by the more famous male poets of the twentieth century, especially those of the Generation of the Thirties. The preference for this low-brow form indicates a shift from an elitist, mythical discourse which, according to Peter Mackridge, had been mobilised to promote an essentialised sense of belonging to Greek national institutions, its territory, Greek Orthodox religion and the Greek language.\(^5\)

Initially in this chapter, I will discuss how the discourse of home and belonging was represented in literature by the early Modern Greek and

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\(^5\) P. Mackridge, *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Poetry: Essays in Memory of C.A. Trypanis*, Frank Cass, London, 1996, p. xiv. The Greek language continued to remain a vexed question as *katharevousa* (purist) had many versions, but it eventually was replaced by the demotic as the official language of literature. Some writers included both forms in their writing. I have discussed the language question in Chapter Three.
diasporic Greek writers, how this has changed in contemporary texts, and especially how the Modern Greek women postmodernist writers are situated within such changes. Then I will focus on the Greek Australian group and examine whether the traditional poets Stylianos Charkianakis and Dean Kalimnios maintain a Hellenistic commitment to a Greek place with its idealised past. What is the position of the anti-traditional writers? Do Christos Tsiolkas and Fotini Epanomitis retreat to an imaginary space that reconfigures and ‘obliterates’ the traditional boundaries of Greek place? Worded another way, does the presence of paramythi indicate that the writers are maintaining the home culture’s traditional views on home, or is it being used as a rhizomatic form, since it merges the old traditional form of storytelling with new ways of conceptualising home and belonging? In the second section of this chapter, I will be focusing on what the anti-traditional writers are telling us through their deployment of paramythi, about themselves and where they belong. In particular, I will discuss the differences between Tsiolkas and Epanomitis, and their points of intersection.

**Nostalgia for the ancestral homeland**

Certain Greek Australian diasporic writers uphold their past traditions, and others explore the fluid space of hybrid, fragmented and heterogeneous identity. There are also those, such as Kefala, who lie somewhere else within this continuum. The non-traditionalists often challenge patriarchal, religious and communal ways of being. In all of these instances (the
traditionalists, the anti-traditionalists and the ambivalent), we see writers who creatively draw from their heritage and construct narratives that Rogers Brubaker describes as ‘a non-territorial form of essentialised belonging’ or ‘an alternative to the essentialisation of belonging’. Early Greek Australian literary texts used the construct of home as a metaphor for the diasporic subject’s utopian dream of a return to their homeland although the real historical experience of home had not always been an idyllic one. Diachronically, in the Greek literary and oral tradition, home represented the estia (a safe haven), and it was symbolically connected with the ancestral homeland. The metaphor of the return home can be traced back to Homer’s The Odyssey, an epic story about Ulysses’ voyage back to his home island of Ithaca. This metaphor had been exploited by diasporic Greek travel writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century such as Dimitrios Vikelas, who in Apo Nikopoleos eis Olympia (From Nikopoleos to Olympia) promotes Greece as both an ancient and modern country, from both a Western and Greek perspective. Yiannis Psycharis, in To Taxidi Mou (My Journey), parodies the realism of travel narratives, emphasising emotions, patriotism and the worship of ancestors in order to boost national self-esteem. He also reveals his own identity crisis, desiring to meet Greek people and to hear the Greek language, but yearning for his host home in Paris. Alexandros Pallis in Μπρουσός (Broussos) writes a journal type narrative which is highly critical of Greece and Greeks. He writes as a frustrated diasporic Greek with a

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colonial (British) mentality. He compares Greece to the West, praising aesthetic and practical aspects of Western languages and ways while critiquing Greece’s lack of progress due to its ‘pernicious national traits, such as its lack of empiricism and indiscreet social behaviour’. According to Michalis Pieris, other famous diasporic Greek writers such as C. P. Cavafy in his poem ‘Ithaca’, and Nikos Kazantzakis’ sequel to the *Odyssey*, build upon the Odysseus theme as interpreted by Western writers Dante and Tennyson. They use the Homeric hero to represent not a quest for the return home, but in order to represent ‘the eternal quest for experience’. Nanos Valaoritis, according to Nicole Ollier, re-incarnated, parodied and was obsessed by Homer’s epics, since he had been ‘forced to learn the Homeric epics by heart [and] the lines clung to his memory’. The varied interpretations of the return journey home by these early and late Modern Greek writers are opposed to more recent sociological perspectives on home. James Clifford, for example, argues that diasporic groups maintain a commitment to return to the ancestral home and to share, maintain or restore the common cultural experience of the homeland. Brubaker argues that Greek diasporic groups share a common commitment to maintaining language, religion and ethno-centric Greek boundaries. Some writers share this diasporic commitment, but others such as Pallis, Kazantzakis and Cavafy show that they are ambivalent, or suffer a crisis of identity since, as diasporic travellers, they are both

insiders and outsiders. Their texts show that they have been affected by, and have ties with, Western ways, since they paradoxically support, but are also highly critical of, Greek practices. They contest its nationalistic and moral codes and the boundaries of fixed identity, since they are positioned as migratory transnationals, or self-imposed exiles, as in Valaoritis’ case.\textsuperscript{13}

There are various perspectives which influence the way that home is imagined and recreated in modernist Greek texts. Gregory Jusdanis indicates a politics of belonging to national territory when he states that ethno-centric Hellenistic culture had been ‘conscripted into the service of nationalism because of the capacity of stories to promote popular identification with territory and history, and to instil national symbols into daily practice’.\textsuperscript{14} Dimitris Tziovas argues that writing about home presents as ‘an act of ‘replacement’, since it re-imagines an idealised cultural and mythological past in the present. We see this in Seferis and Ritsos, whose idea of home is tied to their sense of being entopios (a sense of dwelling in a Greek place).\textsuperscript{15} Mackridge argues that ‘it is in poetry that the modern Greeks have the profoundest and most sophisticated use of ancient mythology. A sense of dwelling in the same place…has given the Greek poets a sense of closeness to the ancient mythical stories that are supposed

\textsuperscript{13} Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration}, p. 6; Ollier, ‘Nanos Valaoriitas’, p.30.
\textsuperscript{15} A. Leontis, Beyond Hellenicity Can We Find Another Topos?’ \textit{Journal of Modern Greek Studies}, vol. 15, no. 2, 1997, p. 218.
to have been enacted there’.\textsuperscript{16} Artemis Leontis describes such literature as ‘homeward bound’ since it promotes the Hellenistic linguistic and geopolitical habitat, and its patriarchal Greek Orthodox paideia (education and intellectual system).\textsuperscript{17} Alexandros Papadianamdis, Angelo Sikelianos and Odysseas Elytis idealise the notion of home and its folk by giving the landscape and the Greek culture a religious and mystical significance.\textsuperscript{18} This sense of the sacredness of place is often tied to what Tziovas refers to as\textit{ nostos}, which is a desire for place or hope of return. Dimitris Tziovas shows that writers such as Giorgos Seferis, Yiannis Ritsos and Nikos Kazantzakis, who have had the experience of being exiled, reinterpret and demythologize the Odyssean journey of return by reinventing the symbolic structure of the ‘old place’ in order to highlight the absence that corresponds to the ‘placelessness of exile’.\textsuperscript{19} Peter Mackridge shows how the discourse of home is tied to a tension between myth and history. He argues that, for Seferis, the Odyssean voyage is a mythological source that he exploits for its ‘moral and spiritual symbolism’, while place locations are ‘a constant reminder of pain, guilt, failure on both a personal and national level’.\textsuperscript{20} He observes that ‘wherever Seferis goes in the Greek world, he is haunted by the historical and mythical stories – most of them characterised by the presence, or the memory of violence which has taken

\textsuperscript{16} Mackridge, \textit{Ancient Greek Myth}, p. xiv.
\textsuperscript{17} Leontis, ‘Beyond Hellenicity’, pp. 221, 222.
\textsuperscript{18} D. Ricks, article ‘Papadianamdis, Paganism and the Sanctity of Place’, \textit{Journal of Mediterranean Studies}, vol. 2, no 2, 1992. p. 162. Ricks states that ‘Papadianamdis wrote to an urban audience about the survival of a pagan past in the present, the survival of piety in rural communities, and the persisting sanctity of place.’
\textsuperscript{19} Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration}, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{20} Mackridge, \textit{Ancient Greek Myth}, p. xix.
Various interpretations of place, which draw from Hellenistic mythological and geo-historical discourses in early Modern Greek prose according to Peter Mackridge, served as a boundary to ‘preserve traditional Greek culture from the inroads of cosmopolitan modernity’. This ‘Hellenic form of Hellenism’, rooted in the Greek landscape and its myths, its cultural traditions, its popular and demotic elements, its music, art and architecture, its oral and literary traditions, had become deeply entrenched in the nationalising project of the newly formed Modern Greek state.

Diasporic writers do not always share similar nationalistic goals to those held by their mainland Modern Greek counterparts. Leontis argues that changes inevitably occurred which challenged the official discourse of Hellenism, based on national origins and purity. These changes were consistent with the blurring of race, ethnicity, gender and class boundaries, which challenged earlier notions of cultural continuity. She states:

As the cultural and physical boundaries of all European nations are pushed and pulled in every direction, national literature, the instrument of expression that developed as those boundaries were first taking shape, loses its dwelling place. It no longer finds security in the

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topos that it made for itself when it occupied the local vernacular and made national culture its business.\textsuperscript{24}

Tziovas points out that diasporic writers were often ambivalent about their past, idealising the homeland on the one hand, but often critical of its political and social system. He states that they displayed signs of an ‘internal hybridity’, a sense of belonging to the ancestral home, but also showed an attachment to their host country. They were ambivalent because of their past\textsuperscript{25} and often challenged by the question of identity because they considered themselves exiles or outsiders. Exiles, according to Tziovas, can be compared to the colonised, because they consider themselves to be in a state of continual marginality, and they often suffer from a crisis of identity.\textsuperscript{26} Seferis, for example, shows that the return from exile is often shown to be either impossible, or it requires a major compromise. Edmund Keeley analysing Seferis’ \textit{Mythistorima} states:

The sweet day of return (or the Odyssean \textit{nostos}) usually remains just out of reach or turns out to be not sweet at all, a thing denied, as the Elpenor-like companions die one by one with lowered eyes, or grope for the beautiful islands slightly lower down or slightly higher up.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Leontis, ‘Beyond Hellenicity’, p. 223.  
\textsuperscript{25} Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration}, p. 171.  
\textsuperscript{26} Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration}, p. 207.  
\textsuperscript{27} E. Keeley, ‘Nostos and the poet’s vision in Seferis and Ritsos’, in Mackridge, \textit{Ancient Greek Myth}, p. 82.
Here we note that exile is represented as an anti-climax, because the return to the original home proves to be an illusion since it rarely meets its desired expectations. It is always just beyond reach, as Seferis says. Exile is often presented as the other side; within the male-dominated discourse of *nostos* as desire, and travel as conquest. Women rarely feature in such discourses, except as objects of desire. More contemporary theories on diaspora include, as Elspeth Probyn points out, the postcolonial and women.\(^{28}\) Some of Ritsos’s poems motioned towards these more inclusive perspectives. Edmund Keeley observes that Ritsos used the narrative voice of women in some of his poems in order to explore characters who were outsiders. He drew from Homer’s ‘less than heroic protagonists’ in order to explore ‘the recognisable experience of modern man - especially those who are made to suffer because of things beyond their control, or because they are made to serve the will of others’.\(^{29}\) In his satirical poems ‘Repetitions’ for example, he humanises the myth and removes the prestige of ancient heroes by using Odysseus’ companions as protagonists in order to give the underprivileged more visibility by revealing their less than heroic actions.\(^{30}\) So we see a change, a more ‘quotidian’ emphasis which is not feminist, but is more willing to include the marginal perspective.


\(^{29}\) Keeley, ‘Nostos and the poet’s vision’, p. 91.

Women writers: shifting boundaries representing home

In the early twentieth century, Modern Greek poetry and ancient myth were closely connected to a sense of place, following Mackridge in his research of the symbolic associations of mythology with specific places’. There was no significant representation of women writers during this phase of Greek literature, which may be attributed to social and political factors of the time, which saw women intellectually and socially marginalised. Karen Van Dyck points out that if there were women who wrote poetry, ‘they certainly were aware that myths negatively stereotype women’, since myths are ‘governed by gender roles, both inside and outside the myths’. Despite their marginalisation, Margaret Alexiou argues that women historically played a stronger cultural rather than a literary role in transmitting culture. She points out that ‘during times of foreign domination, women promoted moral and religious values by telling stories and singing songs in a family context’. It is interesting to note that Mackridge uses an image which is associated with a performative women’s tradition when he states that ‘myth provided the Greek poets of the generation of the Thirties ‘a warp on which to weave their poetry’, but he fails to acknowledge, as Alexiou later does, that there was a hidden presence of women storytellers who inspired the famous writers of subsequent generations. She observes that, in the Greek case, the women’s voices and stories ‘across the ages, have been more muted and more

subversive making freer use of dialect, tones and purist phrases as appropriate to their woven words’. J. Hart demonstrated this by focusing on the force of women’s oral histories from the Greek Resistance and the Civil War, while Margaret Alexiou observes that women ‘sang songs and told stories that pertained to the business of everyday life and to the life cycle’, whereas the men who dominated Modern Greek literary discourse used myths from the ancient epic tradition ‘to celebrate individual exploits’. So, the male writers framed home in terms of territorial boundaries, as well as mythic associations with place. Mackridge, for example, states that ‘we cannot think of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, or of Delphi, without recalling the struggle between Apollo and the Python’. In contrast to the male writers, women storytellers, mothers and grandmothers have continued to transmit the notion of home since ancient times – not through myth but through paramythia and songs.

In the post-Junta period following the 1970s, however, we see a countercultural and counter-institutional practice emerging which exploits the subversive and transgressive potential of the oral tradition. The so-called ‘women’s writers of the generation of the 1970s’, according to Karen Van Dyck, ‘developed a poetics of censorship as a means of subversion under the military dictatorship’ which indicates that women used paramythia to

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35 Alexiou, *After Antiquity*, pp. 14-15. Alexiou argues that ‘males appropriate the rich oral heritage of their rural mothers.’
37 Alexiou, *After Antiquity*, p.16.
challenge the male dominated nationalist-demotic canon which had begun to take shape from the 1880s.\textsuperscript{39} Katerina Kitsi-Mitakpou’s interpretation of the heroine Frangoyannou in Papadiamantis’ text \textit{The Murdress} shows how women had been marginalised and colonised by a politics of what was deemed by men to be proper for women. She writes:

The birth of national identities, the fascination with borders, and the ‘map mania’ in the nineteenth century ran parallel with the effort to allocate proper spaces to women and carefully demarcate their boundaries.\textsuperscript{40}

In postmodern fiction, such boundaries are questioned. Instead, we note a shift towards identity and gender (rather than national) politics. Greek feminist writing and research does not challenge territorial borders, and they do not, as Mackridge argues, ‘mythologise modern Greece, to create a country of the mind in which they and their compatriots live’.\textsuperscript{41} Instead, feminist writers are involved in debates over what constitutes Greekness in terms of identity, and identity is closely tied to how and where one belongs. My chosen Greek Australian diasporic writers are far removed from Greek place, and they belong to another time-frame in which women are no longer a muted group. Contemporary Greek, and diasporic Greek


\textsuperscript{41} Mackridge, \textit{Ancient Greek Myth}, p. xxii.
women writers are drawing on their cultural heritage with a renewed interest in the folkloric and demotic tradition, even as they continue to avoid mythic representations of home, since, as previously noted, they realise that mythic representations are ‘inevitably limiting’. They draw from the paramythic tradition, as well as the European fairytale tradition, and transform or subvert these in order to challenge the symbolic order of traditional Greek society, its beliefs and traditions. Van Dyck’s research into contemporary trends by Modern Greek women writers points out that Rea Galanaki, Jenny Mastoraki and Maria Laina, who produce experimental texts that blend fantasy and documentary into a bio-mythography, have similarities with Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in their use of voice and the oral tradition. Such a creative use of low-brow forms (in contrast to the high-brow mythic) allows the women to exploit heterotopic spaces and to articulate their sense of being outsiders in a playful or ironic way. Diasporic writers, who represent ‘outsiders’, do not assert home and belonging in territorial terms since they have the freedom to move beyond such borders and to explore other spaces. The women writers, especially, as I will be showing by referring to Epanomitis in the last section in this chapter, traverse liminal spaces and explore private spaces through memory or the imagination. Such spaces challenge ‘the logic of identity’ as Probyn argues, ‘which proceeds through division and designation, ultimately producing polarisation, categorisation’. ‘Heterotopias’, Probyn argues, ‘provide an analytic space in which to

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44 Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, pp. 9-10
consider forms of belonging outside the divisiveness of categorising’.45 Probyn discusses outside spaces in the case of the postcolonial and the queer,46 whereas in this chapter I am discussing insiders and outsiders in relation to a traditional Greek sense of belonging, following Stuart Hall’s idea that ‘the diaspora experience...is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity’.47

‘Non-territorial, essentialised belonging’, or ‘the desire for somewhere else’.

My chosen set of writers appears to be divided between those who display a non-territorial, essentialised belonging, and those who enunciate an alternative to such an alignment. Charkianakis and Kalimnios linguistically and symbolically show a particularistic form of attachment to Greece, in tension with a sense of nostalgia for the territory that they no longer occupy. Charkianakis, remembering his original home in the poem ‘Ελλάδα’ (‘Greece’), idealises the homeland when he writes ‘Το ένα / το πρώτο/ το φώς’ (‘The one, the first, the light’). In the poem ‘Exile’, written before he migrated to Australia, but included as the last poem in his anthology Australian Passport, he refers to himself as ‘a Greek unrepentant and incurable’.48 In his first major anthology, in which he includes various poems from each of his previous publications after having

45 Probyn, Outside Belongings, pp. 9-10.
46 Probyn, Outside Belongings, p. 25.
47 Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 235.
settled in Australia, he uses the title *En Gi Allotria (In Another Land)*,\(^{49}\) which suggests that he identifies himself as an exile from his native homeland. Kalimnios, in the poem ‘Lexis’ (‘Words’) from his most recent anthology *Kelifospastis (Shell-Cracker)*, confesses that his ancestral Greek world is not the idyllic place which, in his earlier anthologies, he had imagined, as implicated by allusions to popular folk images such as the threads of flokati, the childhood shortbreads, the snails that weave a silvery moiroloi of silence, and the rising sun in ‘Vespers’,\(^{50}\) as well as historical, and mythological figures such as Aristotle, Heraclitus, the dying Adonis and the conquered Calypso, all of which represent ‘the overflow of Greek culture’\(^{51}\). *Kelifospastis* was written in the wake of Greece’s present socio-economic crisis. In this text, he takes the role of the engaged observer who continues to be interested in Greece’s past history and its present cultural affairs. Despite a more muted Hellenistic pride in his heritage, in the poem ‘Lexis’, he reminds his readers that ‘the beauty of the relics of the ancestors is unbearable’. This indicates that he ultimately believes that his country will be resurrected one day, or that the past figures as a heavy burden for the present generation. As a visionary bard, he maintains a sense of religious awe for his ancestors, which he is trying to rekindle in his compatriots. We see this in the first poem ‘Kelifospastis’ in the collection of the same name. It foregrounds his text’s main idea, which is that despite the ‘falsifying dye’ that has stained his people’s heritage, the

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\(^{51}\) D. Kalimnios, email interview.
imprisoned cries of his ancestors continue to escape through ‘the cracks of the tombs’.52

Charkianakis’ belonging is not articulated in specific territorial terms, since there are very few, direct references within his poems to actual topographical sites in Greece. The only Greek place names that he includes are at the end of each poem, appearing like journal entries stating where and when he wrote each poem. In the poem, ‘Fremantle’, he shows that for the migrant there remains the nostalgia for the first motherland; ‘On the shore the initial judgement and initial comparison between the first and the second motherland’53 He emphasises this by drawing images and motifs from paramythia. The migrant journey, for example, is compared to ‘the missions of storks’, while in the final confession, ‘here the first dreams were cradled together with the bitterest nostalgia of the Immigrant’,54 he uses the paramythic allusion of the cradle. In his collections of poems published after his arrival to Australia, he often makes direct references to places in Australia in the titles of poems such as ‘Australian, 1975’, ‘Visual Australia’, ‘Fremantle’, ‘The Swan of Botany Bay’, ‘Over Darwin’ and ‘Sydney Centre-point’. In an early poem, ‘Australia, 1975’ he shows a sense of awe in a land that looks like the sea:

Vast, challenging, untamed, virginal
with its bread rich and salty

53 Charkianakis, ‘Fremantle’, ll. 1-3 in Australian Passport, p. 73.
54 Charkianakis, ‘Fremantle’, ll. 5, 11 in Australian Passport, p. 73.
In ‘Visual Australia’, he expresses a childlike wonder in the topography of his new home, when he compares the central Australian landscape to a magnified image of the human skull and brain. Flying above ‘the silent desert’, he makes analogies in a way that an impressionable child might connect incommensurable visual objects and scenes. He describes Australia’s ‘immense wrinkles, its rivers and ravines, its lakes and forgotten salt-mines’ as:

…infinite shapes and colours of this vast space
they look as if someone has opened unexpectedly the skull of the earth
and allowed to admire for a fleeting moment
the eternal analogies of the outside world with the human brain;
after this all comments are redundant.  

The final expression betrays the voice of the preacher, the visionary poet who sees a spiritual dimension in the Australian landscape, using analogies of visual physical images, in a similar way to parables. When he describes exile, it is not in terms of absence from Greece, but as an eschatological longing for ‘another’ world. We see this in his poem ‘Studying Death’, in

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which he refers to exile from the body as a release which enables the soul
to be free in order to find a more authentic home, since ‘absolute
nothingness makes one Godlike’. He indicates that the return home is a painful memory and an illusionary
dream, since ‘Every time he returns he finds them fewer and fewer; every
time he goes away, he leaves them sadder and sadder’. He does not name
the place he returns to, but merely refers to the people whom he is
returning to, and leaving from. In his poem ‘Unwritten Destiny’,
Charkianakis uses a tone that imitates the folk tradition of the lament, but
he transforms it so that it becomes a conversational poem about
transcending national and physical boundaries. Finding and losing one’s
self connotes the endless possibilities of a liberated soul that does not need
to belong to any specific temporal place, even though it desires to settle in
a place with which it can identify.

…every city is an unwritten destiny
and every street a collective possibility
moving towards all directions
until you find or lose your body
which, identifies with your soul, either way.

Charkianakis’ positive, theological philosophy counters the incompleteness
felt by many diasporic writers. When he draws on Hellenistic and religious

57 S.S. Charkianakis, ‘Studying Death’, in Μεροληψίες (Partialities), Agrotikes
Synetairistikes Ekdoseis, Thessaloniki, 1985, p. 67.
images, and motifs from paramythia, it indicates that he is a traditional poet with an ‘essentialised belonging’, since he identifies and upholds the home culture’s ideas of home as a safe haven. The idea of a ‘collective possibility’ shows that he has a sense of communal belonging with place that transcends the physical boundaries of the homeland, even though he now sees life from another perspective, that of the traveller: ‘Travelling is fever and thirst / for seeing life turned upside down’.

Kalimnios also displays a non-territorial form of longing for home, since the homeland for him is not constrained by boundaries of place and time. He imaginatively pursues the phantasm of a glorious Hellenistic past, amongst fossilised remains in the present. He maintains a fine balance between tradition and innovation, the one merging into the other. In ‘My Greek Odyssey’, for example, he speaks of the ‘Greek light which transcends itself and turns abruptly into total darkness’. It is within such a tension between antithetical elements, light and darkness, and hope and disillusionment, that he imaginatively, but also physically, journeys back and forth between the home and host cultures. He confesses that this to-and-fro movement is a common characteristic shared by other Greek Australian writers:

Those who were born outside of Greece often refer to Greece as a motif, as a source of inspiration and influence. In their situation they present with a dystopic melancholia, since most are as familiar with

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60 Charkianakis, ‘Travelling’, ll. 10-11 in Australian Passport, p. 129.
their Australian environment as they are with their cultural Greek heritage. They are simply trying to discover their Greek roots while, conscientiously bridging the divide between both cultures, so that their existence in their new home may be more psychologically balanced.\textsuperscript{61}

In his earlier anthology \textit{Alexipyrina} and, in particular, in the poem ‘Neokeladasmoi’ (‘New Bird- Songs’), Kalimnios indicates nostalgia for the homeland that he idealises as a paradise which no longer exists. ‘No one dismissed the nightingales which no longer return’, he writes. The nightingales represent a lost paradise which, according to Giannis Vasilakakos, ‘is one facet of the phantasm of an ecumenical Hellenism’. Another phantasm is the allusion to other-worldly καντάδες (serenades) which, the poet reminds us, have been replaced by modern sound technology. The outcome is that ‘we didn’t send the nightingales away’, but ‘they chose to become phantasms’.\textsuperscript{62} In the poem ‘The Swallows Journey’, he refers to ‘the wingless birds of the south’ who ‘threw back black wings’. This image of the swallow and its journey is commonly used in paramythia to symbolise return migration. He uses the image of black wings as a metaphor to describe the exiled migrant’s grief. This metaphor is similar to the common saying that when migrants leave the home country, they throw a black stone behind them as a sign that they are never


to return. Migration, within this context, is synonymous with exile. When Kalimnios writes ‘we scratch the earth for worms each winter / with our beaks directed towards the north’, he is highlighting the migrant’s sense of nostalgia. In his poem, ‘Acupuncture’, in his most recent unpublished anthology *Kelifospastis*, we note that such nostalgia has turned one hundred and eighty degrees, and instead of the poet’s gaze being focused north, it is now turned towards the south, which may represent the Antipodes, or alternatively it may represent the other world of the underground. The opening line in this poem begins as a gnomic saying: ‘Do not cry / no Solomon can separate you from the earth’. In the final lines, he indicates that now he identifies with the earth of the South, since he shares its diet. In paramythia, the motif of sharing a common diet is associated with belonging to a community, tribe or race since, in customary practice, sharing a meal is performative celebration of the various life stages. Kalimnios identifies with the south, but ‘south’ may represent many places. He is not specific, but combines diverse and often antithetical images in order merge the themes of nostalgia with the realisation of the impossibility of a return, and hence permanent exile. The fairytale images that he draws on reveal a deep sense of nostalgia for lost innocence. When he draws on present experiences, he indicates the rude awakening from the dream. This is evident in the poem ‘Mosaic’, in which he describes how the idyllic world of the past is decaying, and is abruptly

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being torn apart like ‘the paramythi which was cut in the middle’, just like his memory of ‘the withered tomato plants / behind the empty chicken coup and grandfather’s weeded garden’. He describes these images meta-poetically as ‘the scattered fragments, the collection of the mind’. These fragments of a mosaic are broken even further so as to ‘stick [them] on our eyes’. In this poem, it appears that the poet is appropriating the mythic allusion of the passage to the underworld, but instead of using the image of the coin, which in mythology is placed on the eyes of the dead, he uses the construct of ‘sticking a piece of broken marble on our eyes’. Here, we note innocence juxtaposed with images of decay and destruction, just as paramythi is juxtaposed with the myth of the underworld. In the poem ‘Εντιμη Αλήθεια (‘Honest Truth’), the myth and paramythi collapse together in a surrealistic scene in which images of gods and werewolves coexist:

In the empty gaping wound
where once there existed a tooth,
there is bloody shrinkage,
before the prisoners are defiled, wilting away
in the empty space under the poem
and behind the window where
the declining gods of the past wither
becoming werewolves
softly murmuring exorcisms and curses,

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65 Kalimnios, ‘Mosaic’, ll. 5-9 in Kipos Esokleistos, p.7.
having been rudely awakened.\textsuperscript{66}

The untold story of trauma, the honest truth which is ‘a gaping wound’, shows a writer who is bent on exorcizing the ghosts of the past, where he cannot speak openly but in riddles and through ghost-tale images. The mood created in this poem is one of ‘dystopic melancholia’, resulting from the realisation that one cannot return to the idyllic Hellenic place of gods and heroes. As the poet revisits the Hellenic past, he finds that its history is filled with contradiction, with phantasms, and with demoralised dreams. He compares his eye-opening revisitation of history with the image of a child who dips his head into water in order to sharpen his senses. But he professes that his revelations will go unheeded, since the past cannot be redeemed, just as fossils, alluded to as the diseased beads of the \textit{komboli} (worry beads), resist change:

\begin{quote}
How can the curtains bloom again?
How can the diseased beads of the \textit{komboli} feel like velvet?
A child dips his head into the water
and sharpens it in the sun.
Don’t sweat.
Who will listen to you
after such a downpour!\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{66} Kalimnios, ‘Honest Truth’, ll.5-16 in \textit{Kelifospastis}.(n.p.)
\textsuperscript{67} Kalimnios, ‘Downpour’, in \textit{Kelifospastis}. (n.p.)
Here we sense that Kalimnios is using images of a secular parable, since he sees his role as a bard, as indicated by the phrase: ‘who will listen to you?’ When he introduces a colloquial phrase, ‘don’t sweat’, he introduces another voice that imitates the contemporary jargon of the disillusioned modern person, thereby providing two perspectives in the one text, which are drawn from his home and host culture, his past and present.

**The anti-traditionalists: differences and points of intersection between them**

Tsiolkas and Epanomitis do not have a similar commitment to Hellenic values, nor do they share a similar nostalgia to return to Greek place. Revisiting the past, for these writers, is not based on Hellenistic pride or the sorrow of being exiled from Greek place. Instead, they both display a cynical detachment. Their return to their ancestral homeland is presented as a disturbing and strange experience. Tsiolkas’s protagonist Isaac confesses that ‘this journey seems to be taking me further and further from myself, from all certainties, even from a sense of my own origins’.

Epanomitis, remembering her parent’s remote home village, refers to its strange ways and barbaric customs and ends the tale with the image of Agape, the whore, carving ghastly images in response to the terribly sad song that the weary and insignificant man sang in the square. When Tsiolkas and Epanomitis use transgression, irony and the carnivalesque,

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68 Kalimnios, ‘Downpour’, in *Kelifospastis* (n.p.)
69 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 259.
70 Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 259.
they disrupt the symbolic order of patriarchal Greek society. In their case, belonging to home has an alternative meaning which is very different from the poets with their sense of an essentialised, non-territorial belonging. The anti-traditionalists are using either a dark, ironic or grotesque form of the tale-telling tradition, which may be their way of making sense of their lived experience. However, the fact that they articulate thoughts of belonging indicates, as Probyn says, that ‘perhaps [they] are already outside’ of belonging in a traditional Greek sense.\(^{71}\) They display an individualistic alignment that does not favour a positive connection to their roots. Tsiolkas symbolically shows this through the construction of his protagonist Isaac who, on returning to his mother’s home village, *Agrio Dassos (Wild Wood)*, recalls his mother’s ‘fierce determination to chop away at her roots’.\(^{72}\) We note a disconnection from community in the final scene in *Dead Europe* in which Rebecca, the co-protagonist, confesses her outside-ness by stating that ‘she was never to find rest with her family and children. This earth, this earth that smelt of sparse rain and parched ground, this earth and this boundless sky, was Hell’\(^{73}\). Her past and her present home are, therefore, rendered as not-home since ‘she was to be alone, forever alone’.\(^{74}\) This marginal character occupies heterotopic space, since not only has she rejected her roots, but she has also cut herself off from her community in a pact with the devil. This final damnation scene deconstructs any sense of a utopian ending, described by Probyn as

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\(^{71}\) Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, pp. 9-10.

\(^{72}\) Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 69.

\(^{73}\) Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 411.

\(^{74}\) Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, p. 411.
‘the comforting and fabulous no place’. Tsiolkas highlights ‘not-belonging’ in a powerful way by defamiliarising conventional paramythic characters and narrative structure. This is evident when Isaac, the homosexual son of the ‘cursed’ Rebecca, shows that he chooses another place for himself by demanding to be photographed next to his partner Colin, fully dressed, in bed with him, his sister on the other side and Rebecca, ‘unsmiling, stayed standing holding her granddaughter’s hand’. Tsiolkas is symbolically enunciating, through his characters the ‘outsideness’ of the migrant who is ‘other’ in both host and home community. We sense this when Rebecca admits that she does not feel at home in any place.

She had been born in a remote corner of damaged, destroyed Europe but it had still felt like the centre of the world. As a Greek she knew she was at the centre of the world, even as she wandered what it would have been like to have migrated here [to London] instead, to have remained in Europe. She would probably not feel that hunger for something else, which for her, was the meaning of being Australian.

Home and belonging in Rebecca’s case has to do with positioning, since there is the repeated allusion to claims of being in the centre, while simultaneously desiring ‘something else’. So, in this situation, home is represented as a mental landscape, a ‘dissatisfaction’ that requires an

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75 Probyn, Outside Belongings, pp. 9-10.
76 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 410.
77 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 399.
alternative. In the final scene, this different sense of belonging is enunciated and validated through the construct of the photograph. When Isaac asks to be photographed, Tsiolkas may be using the photographed image in a symbolic way to enunciate where he is speaking from. The image is a rhizomic construct, since it shows Isaac’s roots (his Greek family unit) but also the shoots which represent new attachments and ‘other’ belongings. This rhizomic construct contrasts with the Modern Greek poets who, according to Tziovas, seek ‘to reinvent the symbolic structure of the homeland in order to eradicate the placelessness of exile’.\footnote{Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration}, p. 213.}

Tsiolkas’ final scene shows that he has symbolically chosen ‘somewhere else’ since his alternate family is where he feels at home. The protagonist has not come ‘home’ in the traditional sense, but he ‘has become resigned to a different one’.\footnote{Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration}, p. 213.} Tsiolkas is the prime example of such a diasporic writer. His alternate family which is depicted in the photograph is not the typical heterosexual one. His sense of home has nothing to do with territory or topography, but with position which, following Stuart Hall, sees that ‘identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’.\footnote{Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 222.}

The grand narratives of Hellenism, and its traditional values, had little to offer Tsiolkas’ protagonist who felt like an outsider observing a very different Greece from the idealised one promoted by official history and ancient myth.
In Epanomitis’ tale, the characters take on a different sort of ‘outsideness’ since they represent what Probyn refers to in her description of heterotopias as ‘different forms of social relations and modes of belonging’.\footnote{Probyn, \textit{Outside Belongings}, p. 10} The narrator speaks to her readers and tells them that this tale is about her people: ‘If you found my story somewhat puzzling all I can say is that every house has a story…This is the story of my House, and I have told it to you in the only way I knew how’.\footnote{Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonard’s, NSW, p. 150.} Her people and house appear to be primitive, and their names and stories are confusing because they are interconnected in strange ways.

Yiayia Stella and Pappous Yiorgos stayed awake at night and spoke to each other in hushed whispers about the mystery of their house. The house where a mule gave birth to a mule.\footnote{Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, pp. 132-3.}

From the start we are told that her characters are either deviant or strange:

There is the House of Stefanos…This is a house laid waste from the start…the House of the Vaias. This house is mysterious…Then there is our house. The house I have made with Meta and Agape…People have called our house a house of sin, but you can judge for yourself.\footnote{Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, pp. 4-5.}

The name of the place in which the tale is set has no name, but instead the storyteller describes it as ‘a village of amnesiacs, whereas once it was the
village of gossips. Placed in between gossip and forgetfulness, the stories about these houses cannot be anything but fantastical, and yet the protagonists display exaggerated, but nevertheless, disturbingly real characteristics, such as Stella’s depressive psychotic episode, Vaia’s secret fear of her son’s reading habits, and Meta’s vengeance against her tormentors. These prodigal, mysterious and marginalised characters of Greek village society represent characters who have been stereotyped, but they are presented in such a strange way that the reader is invited to ‘consider’, what Probyn refers to as ‘forms of belonging outside the divisiveness of categorizing’. Epanomitis enunciates her sense of rupture, and her desire to break away from Greek roots, even as her larger-than-life characters speak out against stereotypes endemic within the patriarchal sexism deeply entrenched within Greek society.

Tsiolkas and Epanomitis both draw from the paramythic tale-telling tradition in order to challenge the traditional idea of home and belonging. They do not maintain diaspora’s myth of return to an idealised ancestral homeland, since for them such a place represents a negative experience filled with traumatic memories and in which they do not feel at home. These writers have a Greek connection through their parents, but they are not diasporic in the strict sense of the word, since they identify themselves as Australian. They both, however, subscribe to a diasporic philosophy.

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which, according to Hans Gur-Ze’ev ‘emphasises, but does not idealize difference’. 88 Their ironic and dark texts highlight ‘immediacy, the moment, meaninglessness, violence and productivity’. 89 They represent what Stuart Hall describes as ‘new diasporas created by post-colonial migrations, which are “translated (wo) men” who must learn ‘to inhabit at least two identities’. 90 The spaces that they describe represent a dystopia which is framed by a sense of alterity, as defined by poststructuralists and feminist writers such as Elspeth Probyn and Julia Kristeva in their theories of outside belongings and of abjectivity. Sneja Gunew observes that the discourse of dystopia is typical of second-and third-generation writers of Greek descent whose direct experience of home is ‘not rooted in place at all’. 91

Kevin Robins argues that when global culture dissolves boundaries and disrupts continuities, when the older certainties of identity are challenged and home no longer connotes a separate and safe place, then we find a reaction to this, one which he refers to as ‘the resurgence of place-bound traditions, languages and ways of life’. 92 The storytelling traditional narrative of home is an example of such a ‘local’ presence because it

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90 Hall, The Question of Cultural Identity, p. 310.
91 A. Counani and S. Gunew, Telling Ways: Australian Women’s Experimental Writing, Australian Feminist Studies, Adelaide, 1988, p.10. Gunew points out that ‘the presence of second and third generation writers emphasizes the need to move beyond the category of migrant so questions of cultural difference infiltrate all future considerations of national literature’.
provides a point of reference for the negotiation of belonging and not-belonging to one’s ancestors and native earth. Tsiolkas, in an interview with Catherine Padmore, points out that, in his case, the oral storytelling tradition allows him to explore some really dark and difficult questions in regards to Greek history, and in a sense, it gives him a sense of mastery over traumatic events. He states that the fable is closer to his present, even though it has the appearance of being a fiction of the past. He sees it as affective because it allows his readers ‘to imaginatively inhabit the experience of others’. Tsiolkas explains how he used fiction to reveal his impressions of his journey to Greece, and to reveal what he saw as ‘a disintegrating Europe’. He explains that initially he thought that he would write non-fiction ‘to examine post-Communist Europe, the fall of the Wall, the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the eastern European states, and to do it as a traveller from Australia’. But then he realised that there was another side to this story about home in Europe which he had experienced through his father’s ‘amazing story-telling’. This imagined space was occupied by ‘vampires and ghosts that lived in his village’. He realised that he would use both accounts, the documentary realist depictions of Greece as he saw it as a traveller, but also the paramythi which emerged through remembering his father’s stories. He wrote this tale about his journey from the perspective of an outsider, an Australian, preoccupied with the feeling of being ‘from elsewhere’, and observing facets of Eastern European and Greek recent history which had been suppressed.

For Epanomitis, her imaginative tale shows that she also is an outsider from her home culture. Her text is a feminist’s reaction against her homeland’s social system, especially the way certain members of society are stereotyped because they are different. This difference is what she highlights by showing through fiction how those who are different are marginalised and colonised. Her fictional images, enigmatic scenarios and characters are, however, hauntingly familiar. She shows that, while these may represent her ‘house’, she is not at home in such a place, as indicated by her use of playful, but confronting irony. The reader is invited to hear a strange tale about a very untraditional village, and its powerful marginalised women characters. The village and the houses go into decline, but the scandalous story remains, a story which she meta-fictionally describes as having an after-life: ‘Those who hear that story must repeat it—in a tapestry woven with coloured thread, in scandalous histories, in unanswered letters, even in ghastly carvings of Agape’.94 With this story, she seeks to create a disturbance.

Epanomitis, like Tsiolkas, may be dissatisfied with what the homeland represents, since she does not fit in. Both writers had learned to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two languages, and to translate and negotiate between them.95 Unlike Tsiolkas, she was, for a certain time, an insider, since she had a direct experience of living in a Greek village. But Epanomitis identifies herself as an outsider, indicated by her allusion to the

94 Epanomitis, The Mule’s Foal, p. 150.
storyteller as ‘the voice of a stranger’.\textsuperscript{96} She also represents the exile, since she cannot identify with her roots, even though she draws from the performative traditions of her roots in her narrative art, which works through the allusion of ‘a tapestry woven of coloured thread’\textsuperscript{97} This allusion symbolises the various interconnecting perspectives that work together to produce this story. She is an example of a syncretist diaspora writer who, as Paul Gilroy argues, ‘affirms while [she] protests’\textsuperscript{98} The fact that she uses the storytelling tradition ‘affirms’ her inside-ness within Greek traditional culture, even though she ‘protests’ against its patriarchal and sexist ways. She may be creating new affiliations with what Paul Gilroy refers to as ‘an intricate web of cultural and political connections’ that binds Antipodean women to their female counterparts in Greece.\textsuperscript{99} She uses subversion and multiple personas to challenge the ‘male’ coloniser. Her personae are Mirella, the ancient whore and storyteller, and Agape who carved ghastly wooden figures in response to hearing the sad song of ‘the insignificant man who walked into the village, who sat down in the square and sang a song, but was not heard or listened to’\textsuperscript{100} Her carvings may be a metonymic depiction of her own craft, since, as a foreigner, she constructs unattractive and inert male characters, metaphorically represented as ‘beasts on wooden lifeless bodies’,\textsuperscript{101} which contrast with her lively and powerful women characters. These carvings represent not

\textsuperscript{96} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{97} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{99} Gilroy, ‘Diaspora Cultures’, p. 322.
\textsuperscript{100} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{101} Epanomitis, \textit{The Mule’s Foal}, p. 148.
only a challenge to established hierarchies, but they also represent subliminal thoughts and imagining in a metaphoric way, as she admitted in an interview stating that ‘she doesn’t know where all these came from’.102

Epanomitis’ depictions of a strange home destabilise the traditional gender roles that remain in some rural Greek villages. She destabilises through strangeness, in the sense that she blurs the distinctions between the sexes and between the human and the animalistic. Her ghastly tale identifies her characters’ rite of passage through various life stages, sexuality, adulthood and old age. The protagonists’ sense of selfhood becomes marked by exposing repressed and subliminal thoughts, and by using abjection, transgression and the power of horror to map the contours of a fragile sense of identity, as neither subject nor object but somewhere in between. Like Tsiolkas, she challenges the authority of family, society, the church and communal ties. For these iconoclastic writers, the Greek *topos* becomes an alienating place filled with odd and hybrid characters. These writers force their readers to see a space that is fraught through disparities between old legends, superstitions and modern realities.

The difference between these writers is that Tsiolkas presents himself as a traveller, and tells his tale as a tale of travel, conquest and brutal colonisation. He is very explicit in the way that he rejects his homeland

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through a rapid barrage of snapshots, which his protagonist sees as he travels from place to place throughout Europe. Home in this context is nowhere, since in the paramythi chapters, he challenges the taken-for-granted notion that home is safe. He highlights a loss of faith in God, religion and in past traditions such as hospitality and communal ties, while he emphasizes the visualization of horror as disconnection from others. He writes ‘If there is the one God, I still choose you…I’ve made that choice and I’ll live with that choice’.\textsuperscript{103} His protagonist Isaac’s return to his parent’s home leads him to conclude that Europe, present-day Greece, but also his parent’s past is dead, since the photographs which he takes of these scenes, the places and people are lifeless, motionless and inert. He confesses that upon looking at his photographs, he saw death, since ‘death is, of course, simply the absence of life, of the heart and the blood and the soul…The eyes that stared back at me from my photos were dead’.\textsuperscript{104} The idea of not being at home in such a context is related to the experience of psychic conflict (as described by Smaro Kamboureli in the following quote), resulting from trauma, when the individual feels like an exile.

‘Strangers within our gates’ took it upon themselves to cross the boundary separating those who are silenced, who are written about, from those who give voice to themselves. These writers often journey towards an originary home, but they also recognize that they are destined never to return to it, that they have been permanently cast out of a house of familiar knowledge.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 390.
\textsuperscript{104} Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{105} S. Kamboureli, Scandalous bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p.132.
Isaac’s journey back to the homeland is as the outsider, the stranger: ‘I was a foreigner with a stranger’s ears’.\textsuperscript{106} In his own estimation, he saw himself as not Greek, but this was not how others saw him:

Guilia pointed at me and sneered.

- He keeps insisting he is not Greek, he is Australian,

Andreas looked at me and then laughed.

- That’s preposterous. You are indeed a Greek. Not only physically but in your soul.

I protested that I did not grow up here,

that I could not pretend to be anything but antipodean.\textsuperscript{107}

Tsiolkas’s protagonist is faced with his own duality; feeling ‘antipodean’ but looking like a Greek. His sense of home, however, is nowhere, since for him there is no continuum or sense of connection to home and familiarity, but visual images of past traumas and current realistic scenes, which make familiar images of people and places starkly unfamiliar, especially European cities. He problematises fictions of descent by using the symbol of hybridised blood, as opposed to pure blood, which has been used by individuals, the State and the Church as a symbol of belonging to a living and ‘authentic’ Greek race, nation and religion. His sense of home is framed through his alignment with homosexuality, as he shows mainly

\textsuperscript{106} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{107} Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe}, pp. 83-84.
blue light districts. Tsiolkas’ protagonists have a perverse attachment to *un-Heimlich* emphasised through images of visual horror. Not-belonging is affected by his anti-institutional Marxist ideology, but also sexual orientation, since homosexuality is seen as a threat to the traditional structure of home. By asserting his sexual and ethnic otherness from the home and host cultures, we sense that Tsiolkas, through Isaac, is promoting something and somewhere else even though this choice separates him from communal belonging. In his interview with Mary Zournazi, Tsiolkas speaks of the difficulty he himself faced when he found himself in conflict with his heritage, what he saw as ‘a very sheltered migrant community’.\(^\text{108}\) He states that he felt that ‘it is living as a hyphen within a hyphen, where it’s neither Australian nor Greek, it’s something else’.\(^\text{109}\)

Both of these anti-traditional writers represent the stranger, not the migrant who desires to make the return journey to the homeland. This notion of having come from elsewhere is a very strong feature shared by many Australian writers, for as Padmore points out in her interview with Tsiolkas, Australians ‘have a complicated relationship with where we live’.\(^\text{110}\) Robert Hughes, in his autobiographical essays *The Idea of Home,*

\(^{108}\) Mary Zournazi and Christos Tsiolkas, Interview 2 Shot, Episode 6, ABC 4, April 2000, p. 3.
\(^{109}\) Zournazi and Tsiolkas, Interview 2 Shot, p. 1.
\(^{110}\) Padmore, ‘What does fiction do?’ p. 461.
refers to the idea of home as ‘dissatisfaction’. Like Padmore, Hughes reinforces the idea that ‘home’ is a problematic site for Australians. It is problematic because it is a ‘deterritorialized’ space, an imagined and remembered place which may be haunted by ghosts, and often traumatic memories of the past in an ‘other’ (for them) place. Hughes describes this space as a discourse negotiated by the ‘story-teller from afar, and the man who has stayed at home…and who knows the local tales and traditions’. Both storytellers, Hughes tells us, ‘are haunted by the same ghost. In all cultures there is a name given to this dissatisfaction: that name is home’.

It is possible that my chosen anti-traditionalist writers also have a similar dissatisfaction, and so, too, the poets, since in both cases, they show that the return home is either an elusive dream or an impossible reality. I argue this because in the case of the poets Charkianakis and Kalimnios, their texts show that home is not a matter of place alone. They subscribe to a borderless Hellenism and show that home may be in many places. In the case of the anti-traditionalists Tsiolkas and Epanomitis, they are not at home while at home, or, alternatively, they do not fit in either the home or host culture, and they show that they desire something, or somewhere else, since they show their ambivalence, which signifies that they are not yet at home.

Tsiolkas, like Epanomitis, speaks from the perspective of in-between identities who interrogate the traditional sense of home. Unlike

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Epanomitis, Tsiolkas does not mask his identity, whereas Epanomitis uses subversion and the carnivalesque in order to bypass the difficulty in enunciation that the female diasporic writer experiences. The experience of home is problematic for such anti-traditional writers. They show a violent rupturing of any sense of cohesion to well-defined national, racial or gendered boundaries. The female writer is not explicit, but resorts to a covert style that uses ambivalent representations of a home, which could be no real place but the representation of a place that had left impressionable images during childhood or in the adolescent years. The idea of home, therefore, does not sit comfortably along a divisive line between belonging and not-belonging, but becomes an interpretative point of departure searching for an understanding of the ways that varied identities are positioned and negotiate their particular ‘sense of home or not-home’ in and through literature. The sense of home is widened, not limited to physical, geographical, national or temporal boundaries, even though it may explore very different mental landscapes and reveal alternative ways of being and belonging. The next chapter completes my investigation into what each writer who uses elements of paramythi is saying about his or her sense of selfhood amidst change and competing cultural influences.
CHAPTER SEVEN: REPRESENTATIONS OF IDENTITIES THROUGH Paramythi

We are caught between the decline of old political identifications and the new identities that are in the process of becoming or yet to be born… Identity then is never a static location, it contains traces of its past and what it is to become. It is contingent, a provisional full stop in the play of differences and the narrative of our own lives. 

In the preceding chapters, I focused on how Greek Australian writers represent themselves through language, choice of genres and ideas of home when using elements of paramythi. This chapter will specifically concentrate on how each of my chosen writers negotiates cultural identity. If, as Jeffrey Weeks points out, identity is ‘a matter of the values that we share or wish to share with others’, then what do the five writers investigated in this thesis reveal about their own beliefs when they draw from the traces of their past, which they express through the Greek oral tradition? Are they continuing a similar essentialist discourse with their Modern Greek counterparts by drawing from paramythi as a symbol of Hellenistic continuity, as discussed in the previous four chapters? Or are they challenging the narrative of an imagined homogeneous, cultural identity through transformations of the paramythi? Do they identify themselves as Greek, Greek Australian hyphenated writers, or as diasporic

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writers who, as Ien Ang says, ‘link the global and the local, the here and there, the past and the present, while challenging readers to recognize the fluid and indeterminate nature of diasporic culture’? ²

Initially in this chapter I will be discussing Greek identity politics, and in particular how literary critics Dimitris Tziovas and Gerasimus Kastan discuss shifting representational trends in recent and contemporary Modern Greek literature. Then I will discuss how my chosen Greek Australian writers see themselves. Are they insiders, outsiders, or something in-between with respect to the Greek centre and Australia? Do those from the latter group represent 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’?³ Does the contemporary Greek Australian diasporic writer represent a mediator between two different cultures, or an archaeologist who seeks to preserve Greek culture? What positions do the anti-traditional writers take in relation to their communal beginnings, and in what ways do they explore their emerging sense of selfhood, or what I will be referring to as a shift from being to becoming?

In this study I have categorised my chosen set of writers as diasporic, and in this chapter I will focus specifically on how each writer negotiates his or her bicultural experience. Stuart Hall, discussing diasporic identity, states that ‘dispersed migrant writers who know that they will never return to their original homeland, but instead belong to two worlds, represent cultures of hybridity which can negotiate ‘distinctly novel types of identity’.\(^4\) In the previous chapter, I discussed the problem of belonging to two worlds by highlighting the contradictions inherent in identifying with two homes. Christos Tsiolkas articulates this 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.\(^5\)

This comment by Tsiolkas shows that identity is mobile and involves a process of becoming. His adolescent experiences drew him away from feeling comfortable with

belonging to a Greek communal community, but his preconception on being Australian also excluded him from identifying with ‘Australianess’. By admitting that he does not fit in either culture, Tsiolkas deconstructs the (Anglo) Australian, (ethnic) Greek binary, and shows that he sees himself as ‘something else’. He identifies with both cultures, but because of his unconventional choices, his journey of becoming shows what Probyn describes as ‘an agonistic renegotiation of the world’.

Strictly speaking, my chosen writers do not fit the criteria of diasporic identities who are members of a ‘dispersed group previously known as exilic, migrant, or ethnic’, because in their case they have the freedom to travel between home and host countries, physically as much as electronically. However, I consider my chosen writers as diasporic Greek Australians because they draw from their Greek heritage when they use paramythi, even though they may be seeking to cut ties with their roots.

Petros Alexiou, in his research on a reactionary first-generation migrant writer Alekos Doukas, discusses various debates and conflicting views over the hyphen. He points out that ‘the use of hyphenated terms is often a shifting and contextual matter’. This can be subsumed within a wider debate, which has to do with how national and cultural differences are imagined. Does the hyphen indicate a bridging of differences

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leading to acculturation, and the integration of the margins into the host culture? Alternatively, does it signify separation from the host, and belonging to the home national centre? In this study, I do not conceptualise my writers as fitting within such a binary, and so I avoid including the hyphen in the term ‘Greek Australian’, because I want to emphasise Hall’s idea that identity is not a clearly defined essence or fixed and immutable. By not including the hyphen, I am implying that this term is an open definition, and that the writers who are referred to as Greek Australians are part of a continuum. For some of these bi-cultural writers, Greek-ness may be linked with Australian-ness, it may be separated because of ethnic, class, ideological, religious or linguistic difference, or there may be various (other) intersections explored by feminists, such as sex, gender or desire.\(^9\) George Kanarakis avoided the hyphen when alluding to Greek Australian diasporic literature in order to highlight identities belonging to two separate literary canons, those who write in Greek as belonging to Modern Greek literary studies, and those who write in English as Greeks who are part of the Australian literary institution.\(^10\) My aim in this chapter does not focus on a literary canon drawn from each culture, but on how writers are representing their selfhood through literature that draws on paramythi. Kanarakis’ focus is biased by his Modern Greek linguistic background, which views Greekness linked to Hellenistic pedagogy, as well as having the ability to speak and think in the Greek language. My focus is underpinned theoretically by Stuart Hall’s cultural studies approach, which

views identity as a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’.\textsuperscript{11} This implies that identity is something that is fluid because it is constantly affected by change, and not something that is fixed because of genealogy. Tziovas points out that, in the Greek case, ‘cultural identity was based on the denial of the other, on the demarcation of the inside from the outside, and on establishing a distance between us and them’.\textsuperscript{12} This approach operates as a defensive, exclusive strategy according to Tziovas, while Hall’s approach is more flexible, since it sees identity in terms of a dialogue with the past, but also as a positioning, to use the often quoted phrase, that ‘identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves, within the narratives of the past’.\textsuperscript{13} Subconsciously, the past informs each writer’s life narrative, but the way that it is creatively re-interpreted shows that there is a 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. Tziovas, following W.E.B. Du Bois, describes such ambivalence as the ‘double consciousness’ of writers with a diasporic perspective. It is ‘a kind of internal hybridity’ that 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’.\textsuperscript{14} This is especially evident in Australian-born writers of Greek descent within my selection. Epanomitis, for example, like Tsiolkas, shows that she identifies with her Greek

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item D. Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture}, Ashgate, Abingdon, 2009, pp. 170-1.
\item Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 225.
\item Tziovas, \textit{Greek Diaspora}, p. 171.
\end{thebibliography}
heritage and with Australia, but she has the freedom to choose and change her allegiances. In an interview with Helen Elliott, she said that she is ‘both Greek, and Australian, and neither’.\(^{15}\) 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’. Tsiolkas, in the above-mentioned interview with Mary Zournazi, says 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.\(^{16}\) Unlike Tsiolkas, however, Epanomitis’ sense of belonging to a Greek community in her early years did not give her a sense of security, but it emphasised her difference and heightened her sense of isolation from the mainstream Anglo-Australian community. This could be related to the fact that the Greek community in Perth was, and is a very small one, compared to the very large Greek community in Melbourne, which had influenced Tsiolkas’ experience in his formative years. In their adolescent years, both Epanomitis and Tsiolkas turned away from earlier identifications with the Greek community. For Epanomitis, 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.\(^{17}\) Tsiolkas’ main identification, to date, and in *Dead Europe*, is with urban, working-class and homosexual culture.

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\(^{16}\) Zournazi, ‘Interview with Christos Tsiolkas’.

\(^{17}\) Elliot, ‘Fresh Out of the Melting Pot’, p. 9.
The poets, Charkianakis and Kalimnios use a style and language which clearly shows that they are committed to their past, and through it they promote the continuity of Hellenistic culture. Kalimnios said in our interview 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’. However, he did point out that ‘maintaining one’s “Greekness” is a vexed question, owing to the multifaceted nature of Greece and Greeks’.  

Charkianakis and Kefala, who were born overseas, but Kalimnios as well, 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) even as his Greek past, its traditions and its language remain 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’. 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 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

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18 Kalimnios, email interview.
19 Charkianakis, address at the annual dinner November 26, 2004.
high society. She compares her present to her childhood experiences in a Europe that was dismantled as a result of the war. For her, Greece was a point of transit when she stayed there temporarily, 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 on her and her co-refugees, but instead, as Kefala had once revealed to Helen Digby, ‘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. This shows that, for her, identity depends on her perception, which in her case had to be renegotiated many times because of her multiple experiences with other linguistic and cultural codes, and changes to her social status. In Kefala’s case, as Maggie Humm says, ‘identity is not the goal, but the point of departure towards self-consciousness ’ because of such transformations.

**Changing Modern Greek Identity Politics and Diaspora**

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’. Modern Greek literary critics who live outside of Greece view identity in

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new ways, having been influenced by new perspectives from critical and feminist theory, and from diasporic and cultural studies. Tziovas argues that Modern Greek writers are producing texts which show that there has been a shift from collectivism to individualism, and he refers to the current situation, which does not see poets taking centre stage as in the past. Instead, he points out that there has been greater visibility for novelists in contemporary Greek literature. Poetry, according to Tziovas, best expresses values of a collective and traditional society, whereas the novel has been associated with individualism. While this is debatable, it does show that the idealisation of the communal dominates the discourse of identity in Modern Greek literary critique. Tziovas’ comment was made in reference to a comment made by Dimosthenis Kourtovik about Greek literature, that ‘the 1990s had seen an explosion of individuality, a shrinking of collectivity, and subsequent shifts from interest in national identity to personal feelings’.24 The idea of a homogeneous Greek society was part of the nationalist project, and promoted through Modern Greek literature to construct national, class and sexual identities. Fixed origins are also a dominant factor in contemporary reviveralist 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’, and subsequently the strengthening of the local’.25 Greece, according to Gregory Jusdanis, was forced to adopt Western modernisation when it sought independence

from Ottoman rule, but it maintained its Eastern, pre-modern symbols drawn from its religious, linguistic and art traditions as a way in which to found an independent nation. The idea of an independent national identity, erected upon its cultural traditions, became as Jusdanis says, ‘a necessary medium to maintain and to possess political authority’. So religion and culture were used by the State to consolidate the idea of the nation. We see this in the way that its poets retreated to their origins, during the modern Greek nation-building phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as discussed in Chapter Three. V. Adrahtas and P. Triantafyllopoulou discuss the case of religion, and how it relates to the idea of the Greek nation. These Modern Greek researchers refer to studies by P. Kitromilides and P. Matalas, who studied the ways in which the Eastern Orthodox religion was mobilised into the national revivalist movement in the twentieth century. Matalas’ study demonstrates ‘the pursuit, the tension, and the limits of the appropriate relationship between a traditionally transnational Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and an unduly nationalistic Orthodoxy, on the other’. This shows an agonistic relationship between different ways of identifying with Orthodoxy. For some, it was synonymous with the Greek nation, while for others it contained a transnational dimension. Kitromilides sides with the former view, and argues that Eastern Orthodoxy was promoted by the State as difference from the West:

The type of Orthodoxy that was embodied and promoted by the newly found Greek State was bound to incorporate the legacy of Greek revivalism and to consolidate the distinctiveness of its own identity not on the basis of Orthodox ecumenism, but on that of Greek localism (or particularism).  

This highlights Greek isolationist politics being filtered into religion, but it also reinforces the idea that Greece desired to remain separate from Europe, while in Europe. Jusdanis sees this desire for autonomy as ‘freedom in, rather than from, Europe’, and he bases it on the idea that Greek people, since antiquity, had maintained a sense of superiority and suspicion of their imperial colonisers. In the wake of modernity and globalisation that transformed the structural cultural pattern of Greece from a Third to a First World nation, we find that the idealised Hellenistic sense of continuity and superiority, and its preference for the local, is currently being severely challenged by other global forces such as the current global economic crisis, transculturalism and multiculturalism. Previously in the mid-twentieth century, Hellenic 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 through their literary craft because, as Jusdanis points out:

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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.\textsuperscript{32}

The arts, therefore, which had been mobilised to support the State, became a conduit for resistance to the State. Writers such as Gianis Ritsos and Nanos Valaoritis, who challenged the status quo, had to choose exile because of their Leftist and liberal views, which conflicted with the conservative, isolationist Greek state. After the military Junta regime in the post 1970s, the situation changed, and writers were not exiled, but Greek socio-political divisions did not disappear\textsuperscript{33}. Despite a greater emphasis on personal, gender and ethnic identity in postmodernist texts, Greek identity politics based on a ‘superior’ us, and an ‘inferior’ them remains, albeit in new forms. Communal Greek identity continues to maintain a sense of hostility to and difference from ethnic, migrant and political others, as argued by Ioanna Lalaitou. She writes:

The establishment of migrant communities in the midst of Greek cities, villages and neighbourhoods has produced various circuits of transnational flow of people, ideas, capital and culture. Intense conflict, violence and antagonism erupt at points where these circuits intersect with the dominant nexus of native

Greek society. As the presence of foreign migrants in the urban and rural landscape becomes more and more ordinary, so does the exercise of violence between natives and non-natives. During the last few years, native and non-native people in Greece, as in many other countries of the economically developed world, have experienced a sharp accentuation of radical forms of racism.  

This shows how cultural and ethnic racism and exclusion are endemic within present-day Greece, just as they were in the grand narratives of its past. Even though Greece has been promoted as a hospitable and homogeneous nation, Lalaitou’s research shows that the lived experience of its migrants is similar to other first-world countries, which treat their foreigners with suspicion because they are seen as a threat to the myth of a homogeneous and communal traditional nation. The contemporary diasporic Greek critic Gerasimus Katsan argues that we cannot continue to ignore the silences of Greece’s fractured history and politics, and that the discourses of national ideology need to be re-examined. In his analysis of the novel *The Silverweed Blooms*, he argues that its author, Vassilis Gouroyiannis, evaluates the ‘grand narrative of Greekness’ by deconstructing the discourse of a monolithic, homogeneous national identity. Gouroyiannis’ novel highlights the fact that Greek society was divided between left and right in the aftermath of the civil war. Katsan states that ‘throughout the texts the main characters are constantly asked “Who are you?” and “What are you?” and “What is your (ideological) affiliation?”’ Other leftist intellectuals and

exiles, such as Melpo Axioti, Aris Alexandrou, Dimitris Hatziz, Alki Zei and Mimika Kranaki, revisit Greece’s official history, especially the period of the civil war and its aftermath, and they re-evaluate and deconstruct official history by showing the controversies surrounding historical Greek identity. Rhea Galanaki’s recently translated *O Vios tou Ismail Ferik Pasha (The Life of Ismael Ferik Pasha)* explores personhood and changing identities, even as it confronts Greece’s history and acknowledges the Greek Ottoman past. Galanaki sees identity as inextricably tied to the political and social transformations of contemporary Greek society, which is being affected by globalisation and transculturalism. While Tziovas believes that the Greek ‘sense of national superiority and intolerance of others is gradually receding’, I argue that this is debateable based on Laliatou’s study on recent migrant research, which exposes existing practices of discrimination and violence against migrants in Greece. My present study does not focus on the sociology of migration, but it does focus on how cultural identity is negotiated through literature. Who and what each writer represents is not a national but a multicultural and transcultural issue for some writers, and for others it is a feminist or a diasporic matter which can test the validity of ‘Greekness’. When writers in the Antipodes question their own selfhood, they foreground issues of individualistic and communal identity. Their identity is not a matter of belonging to the Greek nation as an insider or an outsider, but it does have

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37 Tziovas, *The Other Self*, p. 27.
to do with the survival and continuity of Greek culture, within a diverse and changing
polycultural society. Greekness remains a valid issue for these 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 also be a frame of reference or a point of departure through
memory or desire.

How are writers from the Greek diaspora perceived by the Greek centre? In the past
thirty years, there have been major transformations in Greek society. It has been
transformed from a country of emigrants to a host of migrants', and the diaspora
Greeks who had been ignored are now receiving recognition for various reasons.
They may represent, as Tziovas points out, ‘a threat to Greek national integrity’
because diaspora is negatively conceptualised as being synonymous with
globalisation’. It is interesting to note, however, that the term diaspora, despite its
Greek provenance, has only recently been adopted in Greece, hesitantly replacing
terms such as Hellenes abroad, or co-ethnics, while the term ‘Greater Hellenism’
refers to Greek communities in the Balkans and East Mediterranean region’. Prior to
the formation of the international diaspora network of ΣΑΕ (World Council of
Hellenes Abroad) in 1995, diaspora was largely ignored, since we find that the
primary focus in journals of Modern Greek studies was on Greece and Greek writers,

39 Tziovas, Greek Diaspora and Migration, p. 8.
40 Tziovas, Greek Diaspora and Migration, p. 7.
41 Tziovas, Greek Diaspora and Migration, p. 7.
not ‘hyphenated’ diasporic writers and writing. This indicates that Greece continued to draw lines between insiders and outsiders, and remained hostile to others and relatively indifferent to its dispersed Greek diasporic communities. Paradoxically, despite a growing acceptance that Greek postmodern society is heterogeneous, in the diaspora we find writers such as Dean Kalimnios and Stylianos Charkianakis who desire to maintain an imagined pure Greek identity. Recently, some cultural authorities have viewed diasporic Hellenism as a resurrected ‘Great Idea’, creating the illusion that ‘Greece, despite being a small country, has a virtual empire thanks to its worldwide diaspora’. Conferences such as ‘Hellenism in a Globalised World’ indicate such a shift, and they also show a willingness by diasporic Greek intellectuals and Philhellenes to transform this modern and exclusive ‘Great Idea’ so that it may be more inclusive of a borderless Hellenic culture. It may appear 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, as was discussed in Chapter Four, have chosen to differentiate themselves linguistically from their host culture,

42 SAE was formed for the global networking of Greeks in the diaspora, and to facilitate all Greeks. It conveys programs to the Greek State and thereby fulfils its role as an advisory and consultative body. <http://en.sae.gr> accessed 16.02.2013.
43 Tziovas, Greek Diaspora and Migration, p. 7.
indicating 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, who are reacting against their cultural tradition, are choosing something else, even though they cannot totally reject their ancestry and their past. Are these writers who have chosen new affiliations more tolerant of difference or are they also isolationists like some of their Modern Greek counterparts? This will be explored in the second part of this chapter, in which initially I will examine how Charkianakis and Kalimnios see themselves as being and becoming. Then I will examine how Kefala, Epanomitis and Tsiolkas represent themselves through their transformations of paramythi.

The diasporic identity: The poets and Hellenistic continuity

Charkianakis and Kalimnios write their poems not only in a foreign language but also by using images and symbols that are cryptic for readers who are unfamiliar with Greek traditional culture. It may be that they are using certain elements of paramythi to show their abiding allegiance to the Greek centre, or as a diasporic strategy which, according to Tziovas, ‘seeks to reclaim and mythologise its origins as a way out of the impasse and complexities of the diaspora experience?’ I argue that there may be another reason that they use the foreign language, beyond 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 in parable-

45 Tziovas, Greek Diaspora, p.172.
type paramythia indicates 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. John Climacus, an Eastern Orthodox Church Father during the sixth century wrote: ‘A true exile, despite his possession of knowledge, sits like someone of foreign speech among men of other tongues’.

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. While this view may appear fundamental and counter-cultural in the present age, it was a strategy adopted by the Eastern Orthodox Church to maintain and uphold its traditions, beliefs and religious practice from non-believers and barbarians. It also indicates that both poets are devout Greek Christians. 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’.

Here, the translation of ορφάνια into the neologism ‘orphancy’ may represent a clever coinage which stresses the noun orphan, but the poet qualifies it with an ending which implies ‘infancy’. Despite this dual image of the lone exile and the vulnerable child orphan, Charkianakis 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 that he had

47 Charkianakis, ‘Exile’ l. 10, ‘Portrait’ ll. 9, 12 in Australian Passport, pp.197,189.
come to know through family stories and 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 to 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, who is much younger than Charkianakis, and does not have the latter’s deep sense of pastoral responsibility. He is 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’. This view about 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. He states that he is a poet who ‘will never get tired of invoking the inexistenent in order to exist / the deceased in order to be resurrected / that which is spent in order to find

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48 Kalimnios, email interview.
the glory which is invested by the sun as it sets’.  

This indicates 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:

One child is equivalent to a song.
A dream inspires one child.
Honour is given to those, who leaving,
have left behind them
dreams and songs!  

This poem illustrates a comment he made publically in a recent address, where he referred to himself as the poet who has maintained a sense of child-like wonder in creation. In his poem ‘Affidavit’, he responds to the logic of the rationalists who seek to invalidate the song and wonder of the child. It appears that he is using this poem as an apologetic, beginning with a quote from the Rock singer Sting in the epigram: ‘You can’t change the world with a song!’ Poetry for him 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’ and ‘the restitution of the integral shape’, respectively. In the poem ‘Affidavit’, we hear the voice of authority when he asserts: ‘I never said those

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51 S.S. Charkianakis, Thola Potamia (Cloudy Rivers), Domos, Athens, 2007, p. 111.
52 Charkianakis, Archbishop’s Annual dinner, November 26, 2012.
things which the omitters want to hear / those belonging to the footpaths and the market place / which would contaminate my voice’. Here, he is clearly separating himself from the material world, and showing contempt for materialism in a more direct way than in an earlier poem, which dealt with a similar theme. In ‘Within Dreamtime’, for example, he used the analogy of the indigenous native who ‘carved his name on the trunk of the tree / then started playing his ancestral Didgeridoo / taking out of his chest / the bitterness of a race’. Like the native, he is drawing upon his oral tradition because he does not condescend to accept material comforts, because they are ‘as wasted milk’. In the final line of ‘Affidavit’, he uses an authoritative voice when he equates materialism with sin: ‘I wanted to avoid contamination / not only of my breath / but also of my mind / but most of all of my conscience’. 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’. 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’, which reads like a folk proverb, where he writes:

55 Charkianakis, ‘Within Dreamtime’, ll. 1-6, 10-11 in Australian Passport, p. 57.
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…⁵⁷

In this poem, he uses repetition to reinforce his opposition to being modern, and his preference for looking back with nostalgia to his ancestors who had inspired him. He continues this analogy to previous generations in ‘Clay Faces’, where he specifically refers to the resilience of his long-suffering Cretan forefathers from the town of Rethymnon who had inspired him. Here, he compares his compatriots to rough weathered rocks that stood up to the ravages of time as ‘souls crystallised before the ocean’.⁵⁸ 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 had inspired in him, rocks that weather the ‘passions and the joys… without complaint’.⁵⁹ 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 that 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 doesn’t he will forget? He writes: ‘If I don’t often repeat these words, they pass discreetly to a shadow / which every day becomes thicker’. In *Thola Potamia (Clouded Rivers)* he argues that although memory begins to falter, sensitivity does not. We see this in the poem ‘The Stone’s Privilege’, in which 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.⁶²

Here, he refers to inert physical bodies and humanises them. These images are counter-posed against recurring images 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:

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⁶⁰ Charkianakis, ‘With the Exhausted Lamp’, ll. 1-5 in *Epifonimata*, p. 32.  
⁶¹ Charkianakis, ‘With the Exhausted Lamp’, ll. 1-4, 9-12 in *Epifonimata*, p. 32.  
My portrait is liquid
and I cannot manage
to keep up with its fluidity
as I move about in strange inscriptions
which falsely address levelling passages.
Even the thermometer can boast
of having a stronger resistance
since it yields only to temperature
although I, totally indifferent to falsity and silver
cannot remain steady
even for a moment in time.  

In this poem, the image of the portrait becomes a locus of tension. The person looking
at his own image sees it as constantly being changed, perhaps aware of the different
ways in which he is seen by others. However, despite the pressure to be measured by
others, this person asserts his defiance against conforming to expectations. When he
makes the concluding statement in which he uses the image of silver, which is
compared to falsity, then we are reminded of the biblical narrative about the
archetypal betrayer Judas, who sold his Teacher for thirty pieces of silver. Here, he
becomes more assertive and defiantly refuses to be associated with such an analogy,
since material gain would be the ultimate betrayal. If we compare this poem with
‘Flowing Shades of Light’, where Charkianakis says that ‘he tries to fit into his new

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63 S.S. Charkianakis, Spilaiodi Topia (Cavernous Landscapes), Domos, Athens, 2005, p. 115.
clothes, without looking like a fool, or wronging the setting’,\textsuperscript{64} then we realise that he is revealing a more personal side of himself. Here, he is not assertive and confident, but shows that he is anxious to fulfil his public role, which he must not do wrong. 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 chiaroscuros?’\textsuperscript{65} The shades and moments of light may symbolically represent epiphanic moments. Chiaroscuros 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 \textit{Spileodi 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’.\textsuperscript{66} 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’.\textsuperscript{67} This image of the chiaroscuro may be his most defining feature. It implies that Charkianakis’ identity is not just a matter of his various roles – the traveller, preacher, scribe, bard, authority and maturing philosopher – but lies hidden, and is opened up only momentarily within his journey of becoming. I argue

\textsuperscript{64} Charkianakis, ‘Flowing Shades of Light’, ll. 5-9 in \textit{Spilaiodi Topia}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{65} Charkianakis, ‘Flowing Shades of Light’, ll. 11-16 in \textit{Spilaiodi Topia}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{66} Charkianakis, ‘Flowing Shades of Light’, ll. 1-5 in \textit{Spilaiodi Topia}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{67} Charkianakis, ‘Flowing Shades of Light’, l. 12 in \textit{Spilaiodi Topia}, p. 89.
that the implied hyphen of the Greek Australian title, suggests in Charkianakis’ case subtle interconnections between the individual self and the communal, which are both inextricably connected because of the clerical vocation that principally identifies who he is.

Kalimnios’ sense of identity begins with what Giannis Vasilakakos describes as a ‘cult-like worship of the spectre of ecumenical Hellenism’. In our interview, he refers to his outsider conception of Hellenism as ‘his own unique conception, divorced from any feeling of chauvinism or patriotism’.\(^{68}\) He admits that he is inspired by ‘the diasporic Modern Greek poet Cavafy with his wide scoped view of Hellenism, and by Charkianakis’ use and love of language, his juxtapositions of seemingly incongruous images and iconoclastic expression’. While I do not read Charkianakis in a similar way, Kalimnios indicates in this observation that he is moved by the power of Charkianakis’ words and that he, like his predecessor, ‘rejoices in language and words’. Initially, his first collection of poems, *Kipos Esoklistos* (*Enclosed Garden*), shows that Kalimnios is a proud Greek, but, as he matures, we note in his more recent collections *Plektani* (*Intrigue*) and his forthcoming *Kelifospastis* (*Shell Cracker*), 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

\(^{68}\) Kalimnios, email interview.
their use of the symbol of the rising sun and the resurrection. While this young poet appears to be searching for life’s meaning through his cultural heritage, each of his collections 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 (Wordlessly Flamed)*, he sees himself as the ‘alchemist’ who seeks to reach the inner core values of his heritage through the purging fire of introspection. In *Apteros Niki (Wingless Victory)*, he is the linguistic scholar and historian of Eastern civilizations and symbols, and in *Anysihasmos (Anxious Guessing)*, he is the Hellenistic philosopher who forms new words. In *Plektani*, we recognise the pilgrim and visionary prophet, and finally in his most recent (forthcoming) collection *Kelifospastis*, he represents the disenchanted Hellenistic archaeologist. In our interview, he said that in his first collection *Kipos Esoklistos*, he challenges the reader ‘to grapple with pre-conceived ideas of Paradise, primal states of being which may be myths of Hellenism, or myths of the migrant experience’. In ‘Mosaic’, for example, he meta-poetically reveals his style of writing, which collates ‘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

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69 D. Kalimnios, ‘Vespers’, l.10 in *Alexipyrina*, p. 21; Charkianakis, ‘The Touchstone’, ll. 5-6, in *Australian Passport*, p.127.
70 Kalimnios, email interview.
through the images of the neglected garden, the disappearance of its animals, and ‘the paramythi cut in the middle’.\textsuperscript{73} In ‘Pruning’, he becomes polemical and defends his migrant culture by stating: ‘whichever shoots are not proud of the resin which matures in their veins, let them be cut away’.\textsuperscript{74} In this paramythi-like riddle, he challenges those who belittle migrants and their offspring by defiantly asserting, ‘and if their apples are small, they are ours. Let them rot on the tree’.\textsuperscript{75} In Anisyhasmos, he continues with themes that display his ethnic pride, again using a rhetorical tone, when he comes to the defence of ‘Greekness’. To those who want to stereotype the migrant, he responds by defiantly asserting in ‘Photo frame’ that ‘I want to be unhung, to change the frame, and to be allowed to shine in the sun’.\textsuperscript{76} He then appears to temper his cult-like worship of Hellenism by turning inwards. In our interview, he indicated that he sees himself as an alchemist, since his poems are like a ‘crucible in which our petty egotisms, face-saving constructs and facades are burnt away through the purging fire of sarcasm, probity or introspection’.\textsuperscript{77} We as readers may ask whether he has begun to challenge his own ‘petty egotisms’, or is he challenging those who want to colonise identity by stereotyping the foreign other, as indicated in the previous poem ‘Photo Frame’, where he states: ‘I am tired of you thinking the same thing’. He then implicates himself by admitting ‘as I do’.\textsuperscript{78} This subtle qualification indicates self-interrogation. In ‘Metaplasis’ (‘Transformation’), we note that he identifies with a communal consciousness when he writes ‘The

\textsuperscript{73} Kalimnios, ‘Mosaic’, ll. 1-7, 10-11 in Kipos Esokleistos, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{74} Kalimnios, ‘Pruning’, ll. 3-5 in Kipos Esokleistos, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{75} Kalimnios, ‘Pruning’, ll. 8-11 in Kipos Esokleistos, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{76} Kalimnios, ‘Photo Frame’, ll. 6-9 in Anisyhasmos, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{77} Kalimnios email interview.
\textsuperscript{78} Kalimnios, ‘Photo Frame’, ll. 1-4, 6-9, in Anisyhasmos, p.73.
broken bricks thrown to the earth, cry the loss of their original plastic appearance and their forced separation from their mother’. Kalimnios may be referring to ancient crimes by his ancestors, or the colonisation of the Australian aboriginals, but, when he includes ‘they are our brothers’, he shows a sense of collective guilt. 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’ and ‘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 the Greek culture ‘on the level of the woven plot we experienced life…seeking in their deserted bodies the wakening of Morpheus’? 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 that has been liberated from the

79 Kalimnios, ‘Transformation’, ll. 7-8, *Alexipyrina*, p. 15  
80 Kalimnios, ‘Transformation’, l. 9 in *Alexipyrina*, p. 15.  
81 Kalimnios, *Anisyhasmos*, pp. 69, 29, 84.  
82 Kalimnios, ‘Dreamtime’, ll. 1-2, 8-9 in *Anisyhasmos*, p. 89.
‘lush jungle of modern thought’. To find this space, he has sought wisdom in the oral tradition of the cultures and personalities that have converged in the Holy Land. The insights of this pilgrimage inspire 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 \textit{lithi} (inertia), and filled with many ‘isms’ but lacking in substance. Like his Australian forerunner A.D. Hope, he 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’. 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 prey on the limits of endurance’. In ‘Low Ceiling Days’, he candidly admits that ‘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’. The forgiveness

\footnotesize{84} Kalimnios, ‘Evdomi Pligi’, ll. 6-7 in \textit{Plektani}, p. 46.
\footnotesize{85} Kalimnios, ‘Stosimo’ ll.7-9 in \textit{Plektani}, pp. 46, 45.
\footnotesize{87} Kalimnios, ‘Low Ceiling Days’, ll.6-10 in \textit{Plektani}, p. 66.
which he refers to in ‘Asvestio’ (‘Lime’) may be 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’. The poet is not the judge, but, by including the third-person 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 stress is that he can see more clearly from the desert, because in the desert he experienced a more authentic way of being. These ideas, he writes meta-poetically in the poem ‘ETO Bam’, are like the ‘black ink of his tears which drip on his eyes like a compass’. In this collection, he reveals dark truths about the human condition and the path that Western society is taking. His readers may query, as he does, whether the prophetic poets will be heard or whether their isolation is too heavy a burden, as indicated by the last phrase ‘you will become a feather of the red eagle’. This image symbolises the Russian poet V. Mayakovsky whom he quotes in the epigram; a poet with a social conscience, but who eventually committed suicide because the burden of his isolation was too heavy for him. In his latest unpublished collection, Kelifospastis, the proud Hellenist returns, but this time he shows that he is disheartened. He uses the image of trying to crack open the hard shells of fossilised remains. Here he may be indicating that, as an archaeologist and poet, he continues to hope, even as he deconstructs or breaks up his civilization’s opaque exterior to reach

88 Kalimnios, ‘Asvestio’, ll.5-10 in Plektani, p. 104.
90 Kalimnios, ‘ETO Bam’, l.19 in Plektani, p. 118.
authentic being and truth. In this he appears to imitate the Modern Greek writer Kazantzakis, who also wrote in his paramythic long poem entitled *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* about his quest for truth. He used the legend because for him, according to Tziovas, the paramythi was ‘truer than truth’. Kalimnios also uses the paramythi not as a long legend but as a short and condensed riddle filled with enigma and elusive images. In *Alexipyrina*, however, he indicates that truth is but a utopia, ‘A lifetime of searching for clouds…now the blue has remained in the fog’. Like his Greek counterpart Kazantzakis, he is obsessed with ancestors and sees poetry as a spiritual and aesthetic practice as indicated in the poems ‘Askisis’ and ‘Romanos Diogenis’. The Modern Greek writer Kazantzakis, and the Antipodean young contemporary Greek poet Kalimnios, 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. I refer to the following verse in Kazantzakis’ long poem as a point of comparison:

Dear God, to build one’s coffin, to heap high the logs, to come close swiftly to your tomb with each axe-cut, to carol like a bridegroom blithely, to sink down together with the sun and swim in the cool sea!"
In ‘Ἀσκηση’ (‘Practice’), Kalimnios writes:

Νηστεύουμε από ουρανό.
Μέ τά μάτια στραμμένα
Στά χαρία τών πατέρων,
Από τό βουλωμένο στόμα μας
Δραπετεύουν χελιδόνια.

We fast, of the sky.
With our eyes turned
Towards the footsteps of our fathers,
From our sealed lips
Swallows escape.  

Both writers express silent sorrows. Kazantzakis indicates that his protagonist seeks relief from pain through the dissolution of the soul and body, merging into the nothingness of the ‘cool sea’. 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 the poem ‘Romanos Diogenis’, Kalimnios begins by quoting an Orthodox prayer hymn: ‘Do not deny the work of your hands’.  

In the following lines, he refers to the exploits of this legendary hero but shows a human dimension: ‘You will not be able to see beyond

95 Kalimnios, ‘Askisis’, Alexipyrina, p. 28.
96 Kalimnios, ‘Romanos Diogenis’, l.1 in Alexipyrina, p. 63.
the walls...and as you embark for Armenia under the blackened sun, throw back the blackness’. 97 He ends with a parody of the initial hymn prayer, ‘the works of your eyes do not deny. / Turn them inwards’, and then he repeats the opening line ‘the works of your hands do not deny’. 98 So while the Greek world which he had upheld in his earlier collections falls apart, he continues to remind his readers in the poem ‘Lexis’ (Words) that ‘the beauty of his ancestors’ relics are unbearable’. 99 He knows that what he is saying seems paradoxical, yet having searched for truth, and weighed down by what he has found and discovered in his inner journeys, he dares to put together words that can express his insane idea: ‘words are seeds of madness, which drown the ruins of the desert’. 100 In ‘Honest Truth’, the poet confesses that the myths, the gods of the Greek past, might be like ‘the gaping wound of the socket of the extracted tooth’. They are ‘declining gods who wilt away’, since they are now perceived as ‘ghosts which haunt the present, having voices which resemble the werewolf who curses, having been rudely awakened’. 101 This is the reality of Kalimnios’ Greek world. This is the downpour which has caused the destruction of the dream, which he may be alluding to in his poem ‘Downpour’ where he grieves for a past that cannot be resurrected. Instead, he writes the past’s imprints, its ‘beads have become fossilised remnants which cannot be softened’, since ‘how can that which is considered as refuse, flower again?’ 102 In ‘Metafthinoporino’ (‘Beyond Autumn’), he uses the symbolism of the seasons as in folksongs to generate hope. Just as spring is

100 Kalimnios, ‘Words’, ll. 12-3, 1-4 in Kelifospastis.
101 Kalimnios, ‘Entimi Alithia’(‘Honest Truth’) ll. 5-7, 12-3, 14-6 in Kelifospastis.
anticipated during and beyond autumn, so too, beyond the preview of death and dying creation, there lies hope of eternity, symbolised as ‘an inexhaustible azure’,\textsuperscript{103} an unending vision of beauty beyond the grave. It is the colour that signifies hope for the Greek diasporic poet. It is a colour that 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’.\textsuperscript{104} 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 traditions when they want to impart the hope that their culture has given them to counteract life’s riddles.

The female writers: journeys towards self-consciousness

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 with, 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 Hellenic values and beliefs even though they do use the paramythi. They draw on their oral tradition and

\textsuperscript{103} Kalimnios, ‘Beyond Autumn’, l. 7 in\textit{ Kelifospastis.}
\textsuperscript{104} Kalimnios, ‘Beyond Autumn’, ll. 7, 9-10 in\textit{ Kelifospastis.}
write cryptically, or ‘in slant’ as a narrative strategy of subversion.\textsuperscript{105} 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 that 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 Hellenic 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 Greek centre because their relationship with the centre is ambivalent. Nickas, in her introduction to \textit{Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children}, argues that ‘all of Kefala’s work has been, in a sense, a tale of exile’\textsuperscript{106} because this modernist writer depicts life away from home (Europe). Maggie Humm argues that the experience of exile, geographically or imaginatively, was crucial to male modernists.\textsuperscript{107} Here we have a female modernist writer and a postmodernist female writer who write of their impressions of the homeland. However, unlike the male modernists, they do not use the discourse of exile in the same way. The Greek centre does not signify a place of 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 fairytale that was violently cut in the middle, since the ‘strolls through gardens with cupids’, the moon

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gazing, and the dining on ‘black cherry confiture and sherbert’\textsuperscript{108} 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 ‘other’ for the first time, as discussed in the previous chapter. 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.\textsuperscript{109} 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’,\textsuperscript{110} 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 fairytale, which in her situation was cut in the middle, and re-writes a new fairytale that is, as Nickas points out, ‘no ordinary

\textsuperscript{108} Kefala, \textit{Alexia}, p. 46.  
\textsuperscript{109} Nickas, \textit{Alexia}, p.15.  
\textsuperscript{110} Kefala, \textit{Alexia}, p. 36. 
tale’.\footnote{Nickas, \textit{Alexia}, p. 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’.\footnote{Nickas, \textit{Alexia}, p. 16.} 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’.\footnote{Nickas, \textit{Alexia}, p. 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 that no longer exists, since the Greek economic migrant community that she had been part of in Romania, were dispersed after World War Two. Therefore, she was forced to come to terms with herself as ‘other’ 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, fairytale, 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’\footnote{Kefala, \textit{Alexia}, pp. 42, 46, 58, 86.} she had once known.
The emphasis in Epanomitis’ tale, *The Mule’s Foal*, is not on migration or on social change, but on the internal changes women undertake in their struggle against patriarchal domination. 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 sees herself as both an insider and an outsider, however. She is Greek when in Australia, and Australian when in Greece. She writes a provocative tale that 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 feminist strategies, as described by Maggie Humm, 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, she is also playing with genre as discussed in Chapter Five. 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 doesn’t 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

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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.  

Here, she may be indicating an inter-cultural dialogue through the stories of strangers
and foreigners, or she may be feeling a curious 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’.  
Her female protagonists are hybrid characters: Agape is the child of a starving
Turkish widow, Meta has a name which signifies transformation, and 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’. The mysterious
happenings, emotions and desires that the storyteller reveals show that this is a

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woman’s tale exposing 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’. 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.

**Tsiolkas’ anti-traditional tale**

Who is Tsiolkas and what values does he represent? If we note the way that he defamiliarises his own extreme realist novel by merging it with the gothic paramythi, then we see certain similarities to the counter-cultural style deployed by American novelists, and the recent postmodern Greek novelists, alluded to previously. These novelists have reacted against realism, since they view the realist novel as a literary equivalent of official structures of power and oppressive social convention. Tsiolkas’ explicit realism challenges transnational themes of migration, race representation and traditional notions of racial and cultural supremacy. His gothic paramythi is a narrative of trauma, where the discourse of memory merges with photographic depictions of the protagonist’s outer journey. It is very different from the traditional diasporic success story, or the familiar nostalgic epic of the first generation of migrant Greek writers. Like the anti-traditional female writers Kefala

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and Epanomitis, Tsiolkas’ real and remembered journey to Greece does not pay homage to the authenticity of folk culture, the ideal community nor 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’.

Instead, there is a lot of anger, but also 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, implies a complicity in collective crimes against other, by stating ‘I knew enough to know that I was ashamed of being human’.

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 inherited from one’s parents. Isaac’s father identifies with atheism and Marxism, is misotheistic and a chauvinist, as indicated in the scene where Rebecca remembers

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122 Vaughan, ‘What’s Haunting Dead Europe?’ p. 5.
123 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 226.
124 Misotheism means hatred of God or the gods.
that the only icon allowed in their home was a picture of Lenin. He controlled his wife by demeaning her and naming her a peasant. He reticently allowed her very few religious icons.

Her husband had mocked faith all his life and had been furious when she tried to introduce religious icons into the house. He had allowed one small icon of the infant Jesus in the children’s bedroom, and he had allowed her an icon of Agia Eleni in the kitchen. But he had forbidden anything else and insisted that there be nothing of God in the rooms in which he dwelt…Instead a painting of a severe Lenin…When her husband died, she had filled the walls with God and the saints. She had left Lenin in his place, in memory of her husband. ¹²⁵

Isaac inherits the tension which marred his parents’ lives, since they had such antithetical beliefs and world views. The matter of faith appears to trouble him, as indicated by his discussion with Colin, in which he interrogates his belief in God. He acknowledges that by believing in God, he would be required to renounce Colin, ‘So for me to believe in God, I have to believe that loving you…is a sin and I am damned to Hell forever?’ ¹²⁶ This notion of exile haunts him, and just as his father had been exiled because of his political ideas, he also becomes internally exiled from his community because of his homosexuality. He is torn between the inability to respond to questions about his beliefs, and his attraction to a working class man who is of another race, creed and culture. Isaac shows that his belief system is detached from

¹²⁵ Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 393. ¹²⁶ Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 390.
his culture’s religious tradition when questioned by Sula, Maria, and Zivan: ‘what do you believe?’ For him, Colin represents the only tangible sense of security that he has: ‘I felt myself praying to him, I would return, I would stay safe in the home he had created for us’. Tsiolkas’ protagonist is filled with contradiction because, not only does he toy with matters of faith and with different ideologies, he also mimics the repentant sinner: ‘I was sick to the soul of wanting, desiring greatness, of never being satisfied. I disavowed my ambition and my art’. For the sake of his lover, he is willing to forsake his community and his art. However, it is the protagonist’s reaction to his own art which 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 that Isaac had taken, when they debate whether these represent ‘his Hell’, or the ‘truth of Europe’, 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’. 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

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127 Tsiolkas Dead Europe, p. 378.
128 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 332.
129 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 332.
130 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 340.
131 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 404.
132 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 379.
133 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 379.
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’ mouthpiece 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’. The aesthete and hedonist protagonist
vacillates between guilt, the indifferent scorn of powerful institutions, and anger
against racism, sexism and consumerism. He shows how he and Western society have
an insatiable appetite to consume the other: ‘I will feel no guilt, experience no
shame’. When he does feel shame, as in Gerry’s warehouse of horrors, he
continues to take photos because ‘it is all I know to do’. The final scenes depict the
protagonist’s final breakdown and disconnection 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 of what they state. This is a strategy used in
subversive paramythic tales. Tsiolkas’ strategy of merging counter-cultural and very
explicit realism with a gothic fairytale has the effect of deconstructing binaries. It
questions what is real and what is imagined. It also makes a powerful statement about

134 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, pp.105-6.
135 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 302.
136 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 302.
137 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 304.
138 Tsiolkas, Dead Europe, p. 304.
the contradiction that is modern society, and the individual living between two very different worlds.

The writers that I have discussed in this chapter are all very different from each other, with different pasts and experiences. I have focused on how they have drawn from the paramythi in order to translate their values and world views. 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. Charkianakis’ identity is defined by his custodian position, as hierarch of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, and so he uses the paramythi as a parable to impart his beliefs to his readers. Kalimnios begins with allusions and images, which indicate his pride in his Hellenic origins, but his more recent collections of poems, indicate that he is disheartened by Greece’s recent economic demise. He looks for hope beyond the hard exterior of rational thought however, and draws not only on the beliefs and traditions of his ancestors, but also on Eastern cultures which have directly, or indirectly influenced Hellenism. Both poets subscribe to the idea of a borderless Hellenism. They invite their readers into Eastern Orthodox and Greek folk-traditions that do not exclude non-native Greeks, even though they use enigmatic imagery and the Greek language.
The women writers, Kefala and Epanomitis, by contrast, are not Hellenists. They look back at their home culture, 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 an outsider, in both their home and host cultures. Like the anti-traditional Tsiolkas, they 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 their strange paramythi. The latter group is showing that the traditions and beliefs of the past are no longer relevant to them, but because they do 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 that is alienating, multiple and often self-contradictory.

All of my chosen writers negotiate their different identities, and their sense of selfhood amidst the process of internal and external change, but the fact that they deploy elements from the oral traditional form of the paramythi shows that their past continues to inspire or haunt them, while affecting the way that they represent themselves through their texts.
CHAPTER EIGHT:

CONCLUSION

No matter how much we each desire recognition and require it, we are not therefore precisely the same as the other – there is an irreducibility to our being, one which becomes clear in the distinct stories we have to tell, which means that we are never fully identified with any collective “we.”

In this thesis, I have traced the meaning of paramythi through the debates surrounding its origins. I have also distinguished paramythi from myth by conceptualising it as situated on the lower rung of a hierarchy of genres within the myth narrative formations. But, more importantly, I have used paramythi as my lens in order to explore the ways in which diasporic Greek Australian writers negotiate identity and how they see themselves in relation to their past traditions and their home and host cultures. When Styllianos Charkianakis, Dean Kalimnios, Antigone Kefala, Fotini Epanomitis and Christos Tsiolkas draw on elements of paramythi, I argue that it is not in the same way as their Modern Greek counterparts. I argue this on the premise that ‘all forms of culture’, according to Homi Bhabha, ‘are continually in a process of hybridity’.

Both groups of writers, the Modern Greeks and the Greek Australians, have created literary texts by drawing from their cultural oral traditions. They have merged the low-brow form of paramythi with modernist and postmodernist genres, but in the Greek

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Australian diasporic group, the use, transformation or subversion of paramythi can be used to note how each writer is positioned in relation to their cultural heritage, since their varied use of paramythi has shown that they have been affected and shaped by their oral tradition in different ways.

In this thesis, I examined how my chosen set of diasporic writers, who have drawn on various elements of paramythi, represent themselves through their choice of language, and how they have blended or distorted the traditional roles and conventions of paramythi. I explored how the traditional and anti-traditional writers have imagined and conceptualised the idea of home, whether they have a sense of belonging to their home or host culture, or not, and in terms of who they see themselves as being and becoming. These issues are significant for any minority or marginal group struggling to negotiate its place in the world and within mainstream society.

The method which I have used has trodden new ground because, in the Greek context, paramythi was studied by folklorists. It was framed as a variation of myth since, in Greek story-telling practice, the terms myth and paramythi are used interchangeably. While I have conceptualised paramythi as belonging to the lower rung of the mythic narrative order, I have not used myth criticism or folkloric methods to explore the symbolic function of paramythi, or how a particular paramythi operates in a literary text. Instead, I have focused on how paramythi circulates in various literary ways either metaphorically, symbolically, or through
a rhetorical tone which borrows from, or imitates the tone of the paramythi. The way I have read the texts of my chosen Greek Australian, and Greek writers who creatively use the paramythi as a literary trope has been influenced by insights from literary and feminist practice, as well as cultural studies, to interpret how each writer constructs and deconstructs meanings through this highly symbolic practice of representation and reproduction. This has shifted the study of these Greek Australian texts from an ethnographical and linguistic focus and, by contrast, concentrated on how texts, which merge the low-brow paramythi with high-brow or postmodern strategies, represent culture. The reason that I have used this method is because I found that, by deploying elements of paramythi in their texts, these writers are showing that they have moved away from the well-worn diasporic themes of nostalgia and, therefore they do not reinforce the desire to return to the ancestral homeland. For this group of writers, their past and its culture matter, but not in the way that it did for the Modern Greek writers who were insiders, using their traditions to promote a national identity, and reinforcing a sense of being within a Greek topos both in a geographical and cultural sense. My chosen writers live outside Greece. They can travel between their host and home countries, and therefore imagine Greece, the past and home in very different ways. Such a study invites readers to see beyond the surface of ‘Greekness’, and to see each writer’s world from another point of view. This is because the deployment of elements of paramythi in their literary texts tells their tale by reworking the conventions of a traditional oral narrative practice. Tsiolkas, in his interview with Catherine Padmore, admits that Dead Europe is ‘a book about

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3 My feminist theorists are Toril Moi, Julia Kristeva, Rosemary Jackson, Jen Ang, Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler largely chosen because they explore notions of otherness through narratives.
myself”. He also states that Isaac, his photographer protagonist ‘is the most autobiographical element’ because he is an artist driven by an ethical agenda when telling his story.\(^4\) So, in fact, I am reading these texts as works about culture, but also as works about ‘who’ the writers see themselves as becoming, and what they represent.

This thesis expands, and builds primarily upon the foundations laid by multicultural critical theorists, Sneja Gunew, Wenche Ommundsen, Smaro Kamboureli, while also drawing upon work by Modern Greek scholars in Australia, George Kanarakis, Con Castan, Helen Nickas, Konstandina Dounis, Stathis Gauntlett and Margaret Carroll. I have, however, avoided re-tracing the well-worn themes of nostalgia and the migrant experience of the first generation discussed by these critics, and although I included Kefala and Charkianakis who are first generation migrant writers, I compared them with the writers, Epanomitis, Tsiolkas and Kalimnios from second generation of migrants. I did not examine their texts as a Neo-Hellenist, but as a bi-cultural and bi-lingual literary scholar whose perspective has been influenced by English language literary criticism. Using this knowledge, I compared how paramythi had been used by the Modern Greek poets with the ways in which the chosen Greek Australian writers used and transformed paramythi. In both cases, in the Modern Greeks and the diasporic Greek Australian writers, I was seeking to understand how paramythi works as a dynamic signifier not of an essence, but of an attempt to work out how each writer’s idea of home and belonging is imagined and represented by using

elements of a sub-literary form, in what announces themselves as ‘literary’ texts. When I translated, it was in the opposite direction to Nickas, who translates English texts such as Kefala’s *Alexia, A Tale for Advanced Children* into Greek. For Nickas, Greek signifies the dominant language, but it also identifies the type of audience which she targets. I, however, am not (as Susan Bassnett would say) using ‘the language of the ‘Greek’ explorer to reveal the undiscovered and the unknown’ to a non-Greek audience but I am showing that language use is not as transparent as might be imagined.\(^5\) When I translated Kalimnios’ poetry into English, for example, I found that this Greek Australian writer was acknowledging many cultural traditions and languages, even though he used the Greek language. His cryptic detours through such a variety of languages, and words which included paramythic traces, showed the contradictions inherent in the bi-cultural condition. Kanarakis’ more recent historiographic study, *Aspects of the Literature by Hellenes in Australia and New Zealand*,\(^6\) discusses issues such as language and cultural identity from a sociological, linguistic and historiographical perspective, while my focus is also on these issues, but the difference is that I use an comparative textual analytic method which draws from multicultural critical theory as well as cultural studies and feminist theorists, particularly Gunew and Kamboureli. The problem of identity was discussed by Con Castan who had established a theoretical framework for the study of literary texts by Greek Australian writers during the landmark period of Australia’s bicentenary in which literature by migrant non-Anglo-Celtic writers became part of wider literary and cultural debates on what constitutes an Australian national

\(^5\) Translating ‘in the opposite direction’ takes into consideration the target audience, but it also highlights that I am approaching a Greek tradition from a new perspective. See Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 106.

identity. Castan’s, Kanarakis’ and Nickas’ work permitted scholars to undertake comparative studies between the dominant Australian canon and hyphenated Greek Australian literatures. This study enters this continuing debate twenty-five years later, but, rather than comparing my chosen writers with a dominant Australian (Anglo-Celtic) literature, it shows that Greek Australian literature can be part of a wider trans-cultural dialogue with other diasporic groups which also draws upon each group’s respective oral tradition.

It was the critical work by Gunew, Ommundsen, and Kamboureli which principally guided my direction in this study since they critically engage with diasporic writing, translation and the politics of representation on a global scale. Ommundsen, following Gunew, highlights the problem of difference, and the reception of minority writing in Australia, and how minority literature is received in the homeland (in the Chinese case). In the case of Greek Australians, Kanarakis has noted the continued reluctance by the Greek centre to acknowledge the literary contribution of diasporic Greek Australian literature. So, a study such as this which translates and examines the politics of representation through language, invites dialogue between the Greek centre and the Greek Australian as well as other diasporic groups with a strong oral tradition. This is where my study differs from Kamboureli’s, since it focuses on the particular comparison between diasporic Greek Australian writers, with their mainland Greek counterparts,

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whereas Kamboureli in *Making a Difference* introduces the many voices of Canada’s multicultural literary community. My study shows in a concrete way the need for translation across both sides of this divide, the Greek into English and English into Greek, since linguistic translation can begin the process of opening up the others’ worlds. By translating foreign language texts, as I have done in the case of Kalimnios’ and Charkianakis’ poems, I am showing that literal and cultural translation can invite a wider audience to appreciate works of representation by diasporic writers whose ‘forms and contours’, according to Kamboureli, ‘make us perceive ourselves and those around us otherwise’.

However, this opening up through translation and representation is, as Kamboureli says, ‘an often serious game’, since it can ‘dis-close who the writer represents’. A few decades ago, Castan had argued that ‘the Greek genre of Australian literature revealed the conflicts felt by writers who negotiate between and within the two homelands’. I found that this space of conflict persists in contemporary writing, perhaps even more intensely in the works of writers from the second generation, as indicated by the production of the violent transgressive texts by Tsiolkas and Epanomitis, who disclose the unspoken areas of the psyche through their stories. So, by using paramythi as my lens to examine and compare the way that both generations of Greek Australian writers represent themselves and their conflicts, I have shown how an oral tradition can be used in literature in an interrogative way, but also as a postcolonial strategy of enunciation, which has, as

Gunew says, a ‘shifting and shifty role’.\(^{12}\) By taking paramythi out of its traditional context and using it a new way to explore representation, it has become ‘denaturalised’.\(^{13}\) Its transformational uses are examples of a ‘breach in the promise,’ as Kamboureli says in her study of the Canadian long poem.\(^{14}\) This breach becomes a way to interpret how diasporic writers speak through storytelling and language, or as Lyotard says, ‘to fight, in the sense of playing’.\(^{15}\) I explored these serious games in the work of Charkianakis, Kalimnios, Epanomitis, Kefala, and Tsiolkas, and I found that their enigmatic and symbolic images, metaphors and narratives unveiled the othered self in often unexpected or confronting ways. Despite their generational, ideological and gender differences, I was able to compare my set of very different writers and writing because they all shared a common denominator, the paramythi. So I explored the issue of identity using a unique lens, the paramythi, a cultural phenomenon which has not been exploited in the same breath and depth by multicultural critics in the past, within and outside of Australia.

In the preliminary section comprising the first two chapters, I defined the literal and symbolic meaning of paramythi for readers who are not familiar with the Greek language, and do not appreciate the role that this oral, traditional, narrative form has in the transmission of culture. I found that, despite its marginal position as a literary form, in cultural practice, paramythi has had a long history associated

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\(^{13}\) Gunew, ‘Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism’, p. 38.


\(^{15}\) Cited in Kamboureli, Shifting Ground of Canadian Literary Studies, p. 58.
mainly with pedagogy; with teachers, mothers and grandmothers who have nurtured, taught and entertained succeeding generations. The ritualistic way in which the paramythi is performed reinforces a sense of security and the hope of a better future. It has a narrative function, telling a story which usually has an element of truth, in order to abstract social, but also personal, fears relating to major life changes such as birth, death, migration and exile. In Chapter Three, I examined how some of the Modern Greek writers from the Generation of the Thirties used and transformed paramythi. Even though they were united in maintaining a strong connection to Greek *topos* (place), they were positioned along a spectrum since their varied uses of paramythi showed different responses to the Greek State, some siding with officialdom and others subverting its authority. They expressed themselves in a Greek *tropos* (way), deploying the demotic verse form, or merging an elitist and highly symbolic language with the demotic, and they included familiar rhythms drawn from a range of religious and folkloric forms such as Byzantine hymnology, folktales and folksongs. By revisiting the paramythi, some of these writers showed that they were using it as a counter-discourse to despair, and as a form of escapism from the horror of their times. Those writers who subverted paramythi’s traditional symbolic role showed their disillusionment following the demise of the Great Idea of Hellenistic superiority and continuity; because of political, social and civic instability during the first half of the turbulent twentieth century, but especially because of the Greek civil war, which left a lasting legacy of trauma. The Modern Greek writers showed that they were drawing on their traditions to legitimise cultural continuity. Others were borrowing from avant-garde modernist movements to emphasise
individualism, anti-heroism and resistance to the Establishment’. This non-traditional alignment, however, was subsumed within the discourse of modernity, which maintained a nationalistic focus that was very strong throughout most of the twentieth century. Individual and communal sensitivities jostled with one another, as the traditionalists and the non-traditionalists consciously or subconsciously promoted the idea of the continuity of Hellenism. National loyalties and divisive party politics persisted, making it difficult for writers to assert an individual voice in a society that was fiercely proud of its heritage and communal traditions and suspicious of difference.

This nationalistic element was not so obvious when I examined my group of contemporary literary writers in the Antipodes. However, the idea of cultural continuity and maintaining ties to the homeland was significant for some writers, Charkianakis and Kalimnios in particular, since in some of their poems they revealed their nostalgia for the past. For the others, the homeland with its traditional ways represented repressive regimes and traumatic memories, and so their stories subverted or contested traditional ways and alignments. In Chapter Four, I examined the choice of language used by the poets and by the prose writers. Charkianakis and Kalimnios showed a commitment to preserving Greek cultural traditions and the Greek language, and Kalimnios was strongly resistant to translation, despite the fact that he is so versatile in the English language in his diatribe column articles in Melbourne’s Neos Kosmos English edition newspaper.

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Greek words, rhythms and symbols are not simply an aesthetic tool for these poets, but in their case, these cultural symbols are connected to their sense of survival in Australia. Greekness, for these poets, is not limited to Greek place however, since they self-consciously promote a borderless Hellenism. Charkianakis and Kalimnios, despite their national Greek pride, are constantly revisiting and recreating the oral tradition in new ways. They also engage with other cultural traditions, personalities and ideas. We note this through the foreign sayings that they continue to include in the epilogues to many of their poems, and in the way that Kalimnios, increasingly in his more recent publications, includes foreign linguistic codes derived from such cultures such as the Arabic, Persian, Semitic and the Oriental Chinese. In contradistinction to the poets, the prose writers Kefala, Epanomitis and Tsiolkas show that survival is a matter of forging new ties, learning a new language and asserting a different identity. They are not afraid to negotiate other ways of becoming. So for them, the consoling voice of the paramythi makes way for an anti-paramythic voice which reinforces a sense of discontinuity. When Tsiolkas and Epanomitis do include the consoling oral tone, it appears sporadically, like an intermission to disturbing scenes, while Kefala’s oral tone contains ironic twists and the effects of these are destabilising.

In Chapter Five, I examined the way in which the anti-traditional writers Tsiolkas and Epanomitis cross boundaries, especially in the way that they distort the conventions of the paramythi. In contrast to the poets, I argue that these writers show through their use of transgression the contradiction and tension of inhabiting different worlds. Their experimental writing merges paramythi with very different
and even antithetical genres like the apocalyptic tale, the anti-\textit{Bildungsroman}, the travelogue, dirty or grunge realism, burlesque and satire. These fusions of genre indicate that they are mimicking postmodern transgressive genre writing. Whilst they are producing hybrid texts with literary qualities, they are appropriating the oral tradition in order to give their stories an exotic appeal. Epanomitis exploits ethnography and renders it as strange, while Tsiolkas merges violent urban realist themes together with a ghost tale within his narrative. He maintains a dramatic epic mode, even though his gothic tale, which alternates with the realist chapters, reads like a paramythi. He exposes the dark side of Europe’s and Greece’s recent history while Epanomitis exposes the unsaid of civil society by using playful satire parodying women’s tales in order to subvert the male dominance of Greek society, but also to show women’s power to survive. The timeless quality of the village she has constructed is similar to Latin American magical realism, but she infuses her tale with a dynamic and lively tone that is typical of Greek paramythia. Her Greek Australian version of magical realism inverts the traditional role of paramythi since \textit{The Mule’s Foal} highlights the demise of a communal culture. Kefala and Epanomitis both exploit their outsider position within patriarchal, Greek society, and interrogate the symbolic order through stories which exceed, or are ‘other’, to a phallocentric law. They use what Cavarero describes as feminine art\textsuperscript{17} or what Derrida refers to as the ‘genre beyond genre’.\textsuperscript{18} Epanomitis, I contend, uses the type of subversive play deployed in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. By merging the fantastical with the real, the women speak through paramythi indirectly and challenge the traditions and institutions of their past, in

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particular those that women have dominated. By contrast, Tsiolkas makes a direct challenge to modern institutions through his explicit descriptions, and his powerful paramythic narrative style, which imitates modern genres such as cinema and photography. I sought to demonstrate that the anti-traditional writers transform the ancient oral traditional form by producing new art (or anti-art) that is peopled with hybrid characters. They defamiliarise traditional gender roles and construct different kinds of histories and sexual orientations. They present unreal elements as disturbingly real and real life experiences as unreal. This shows that they use the fantastical element of paramythi in similar ways to those upheld by Judith Butler when she conceptualises fantasy ‘as what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise’. Kefala uses a more conservative approach and shows the problem of acquiring a new identity and learning to speak in a new language. She uses the paramythi to tell her experience of confronting herself as an ‘other’. Instead of belonging to an elite class as in her past, she finds herself on the bottom rung of the social ladder because of migration. These women writers, and Tsiolkas, indirectly comment on their marginal positions, but also on their unique experiences, through their texts. They assert the right to have their stories told, and to be recognised, despite being outsiders, or the ‘other’ within the symbolic order.

In Chapter Six, I examined how the diasporic group of writers have reinvented ways of representing home, and have constructed texts that do not fit into neat categories of belonging and not-belonging to a particular place or space. As

outsiders who may or may not be attached to the ancestral home, these diasporic writers are freer to move between borders and to explore what Kalimnios describes as the ‘overflow of their culture’, or what Probyn refers to as ‘heterotopias that are outside the divisiveness of categorisation’. Charkianakis and Kalimnios show a deterritorialised commitment to their homeland that appears to idealise the memory of their ancestral home. But they also show that they are aware that their sense of belonging to home is not limited to a specific place, and that it may be in many places. Epanomitis and Tsiolkas show that the homeland is not their home, but instead they look back to it with detached cynicism and a desire for something else. The women writers, Epanomitis and Kefala, indicate through their use of irony that the patriarchal order of the homeland disturbs them, and so they expose and play with this order through the carnivalesque and satirical paramythi, respectively.

In Chapter Seven, I examined the question of cultural identity. In all of my chosen writers, I found that identity is not fixed, but it continues to develop. The poets, in their more recent collections of poems, have shifted from promoting themselves as mono-culturally Greek, since they acknowledge their bi-cultural sense of becoming and belonging. The women show that they are outsiders from their home and host cultures, and they exploit this ambiguous position in order to open up and expose the silences of the past. For them, but also for Tsiolkas, the traditions and beliefs of the past are not relevant, and so by undermining these communal beliefs they are taking a stand which shows that they are not afraid to

20 D. Kalimnios, E-mail interview.
be aligned with new movements, such as the feminists and the homosexuals who assert an individual identity that is fluid, multiple and often self-contradictory. This thesis has argued that the low-brow paramythi within the literary text allows for the representation of repressed areas to emerge. Such life stories can open up silences, contest boundaries and show violent reversals of the traditional patriarchal social order. Writing, according to Smaro Kamboureli, helps ‘the displaced author to find a home’, but it also becomes a platform from which each author enunciates selfhood and mediates change. As Homi Bhabha points out, ‘culture…is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that’. The oral tradition within multicultural Greek Australian writing does not constitute an antediluvian practice, but is a creative source that can be deployed in ways that are polemic, since it is fluid and resilient. While it serves a metaphoric function, it is its transgressive use that indicates a polemic strategy that can potentially promote social transformation through dialogue and across differences. I have shown how my chosen anti-traditional writers use a narrative technique that dares to expose ‘the unsaid’ of civil society as a subversive strategy also used by other consciousness-raising groups, such as victims of racial and sexual abuse. They expose the silences of the politically fragile, the displaced and othered people. Paramythi, therefore, becomes a political act of narration which Cavarero argues ‘makes clear the fragility of the unique’.

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This thesis has shown that my writers are very different from one another, despite the fact that they all draw from the same oral traditional practice, but in different ways. This shows that the myth of a fixed, homogeneous diasporic identity, like other myths or essences, can be deconstructed by diasporic writers in ways similar to the ways in which feminist writers challenge the symbolic order. When this previously under-valued voice of paramythi is listened to and interpreted, it can challenge readers to think beyond the boundaries of English and Greek language and culture, since the heterogeneous voices, which are fused in a syncretic way, show that the writers have multiple influences and experiences. It indicates that each writer’s consciousness is forged as a result of the creative tension between their past and their present. Their story does not contain a sense of closure typical of traditional paramythic forms. There are many voices (a type of polyglossia) evident within each text, despite the fact that the writers might not have a polyglot identity. As these writers engage with current concerns of being and becoming, as well as controversial socio-cultural issues such as belonging, their stories can touch diverse identities living in Australia.

This thesis has aimed to demonstrate how current Greek Australian writers have refashioned new forms in innovative ways. It has shown, for those interested in diasporic literature, the resilient force of the oral tradition and the creativity with which it can be remobilised in new contexts. This tradition may be used for its own sake, or might be merged with various genres such as memoir, autobiography, travelogue and magic realism. New art has emerged from such an interaction, which results from Jakobson’s two orders, ‘the traditional canon
intersecting with artistic novelty’.  

25 The various uses of the paramythi in the Antipodes indicate a major shift from its original function of transmitting the beliefs and values of a highly traditional society and promoting a pure, national Greek identity. I have shown that my chosen set of writers have different concerns from their predecessors. They exploit popular and traditional cultural forms, without necessarily identifying with Greekness in the traditional way. While they show the need to form connections, it is not necessarily with community, religious and cultural organisations. As Kanarakis pointed out, contemporary Greek-Australian writers have a more realist or experimental style and have moved beyond the romanticism of a past which was often idealised nostalgically.  

26 While these writers use their oral antecedents, nevertheless they have moved beyond stereotype, essentialist notions and set templates. Their work with its experimental forms, subversive paramythia, parody and surreal images in highly symbolic poetry are examples of individual ways of imagining, and artistically showing, current concerns which are often controversial, and have to do with the way they are trying to make sense of their responses to change, dislocation and trauma. The second generation of migrant writers, as indicated in this thesis, is especially non-traditional and provocative in comparison to the first (with the exception of Kalimnios). Could this extreme type of reaction against the institutions of the past be the result of internalising the conflicts that the first generation faced, but did not speak about? This is an area which could potentially be examined in collaborating with other cultural groups and researchers. Another area could be to extend this study into the performative arts, which creatively interpret paramythi


26 Kanarakis, Aspects of Greek Literature, p. 257.
through other media. In Australia, Greek folk dance, popular music and live theatre continues to attract wide audiences from the second and third generation. Such a study of these popular cultural forms might build upon insights gained from this study, and could explore how cultural representation is changing in the diaspora as a consequence of interactions with other cultures and artistic trends in the Antipodes.

In a cultural-political sense, we could interpret this study as revisiting the protest of migrant or ethnic writing against marginalisation referred to by Gunew, Castan, and Ommundsen, who, in the 1990s and more recently, challenged the Australian literary establishment’s mono-cultural bias. However, this study treads new ground since there has been an obvious engagement with literatures in Australia, written in languages other than English. The main focus of this project has been another type of protest, of the part against the whole. It has focused on revealing the creative potential of the paramythi, which has had a marginal status since it has been considered as an anti-literary trope associated with demotic movements. This study, influenced by the foundations of this renewed interest, has extended it to include texts by GreekAustralian writers who have made either conscious or unconscious use of this traditional storytelling mode of communication. By analyzing various writers’ uses and transformations of the paramythi in the Antipodes, I believe that the paramythi can function both as a

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28 Ever since Plato and the Ancient Greek philosophers, there has been an apparent conflict between the oral and the written tradition and this has been discussed by many critics, ranging from Eric Havelock and Walter Ong to Jacques Derrida.
sign and symbol of the tensions and contradictions experienced by the diasporic
subject when caught between different words and worlds. The presence of the
paramythi functions not as a dividing line between past and present, but as a
trajectory from which the bi-cultural writer can negotiate a sense of selfhood. By
studying this paramythic element in diasporic texts, we gain an understanding of
the complex and tortuous process which is cultural identity for those who come
from other places and speak in other languages.
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358


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