Memory and homelands: Vizyinos, Papadiamantis and geographical imagination

Robert Shannan Peckham

I *Introduction: nationalism as a territorial ideology*

If the resurgent nationalism that has swept through the Balkans and southeastern Europe has drawn attention to any single characteristic of nationalism it is surely this: the importance of geographical awareness. At a time when commentators were writing the obituary of nationalism, a nationalist upsurge has drawn attention back to the inseparable relationship between a people's territorial affiliations and a sense of national identity.

This paper is about the exploration of space and identity in the fiction of two Greek writers: Yeoryios Vizyinos and Alexandros Papadiamantis. The four texts discussed here were written and published between 1882 and 1895,[1] when nationalist ideologies had taken firm root in Europe. While there have been attempts to assess the influence of European currents of realism on Greek regional literature during this period, no systematic study has yet been made of the geographical preoccupations of Greek fiction in the context of a political ideology that self-consciously linked territory with national identity.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how Vizyinos and Papadiamantis explored popular spatial perceptions in their work, during a period when particular importance was attached to territorial definitions of the nation. In 1844 the politician Ioannis Kolettis had famously coined the term "Μεγάλη Ιδέα" when espousing the cause of integrating the Greek populated areas of the Near East within the frontiers of a Greek state.

---

[1] The earliest text discussed is Vizyinos's "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας" which was written after 1881 and probably in 1882. See Y. Vizyinos, *Νεοελληνικά διηγήματα*. Επιμέλεια Π. Μουλλάς (Athens: Ermis 1980), p. ριε'. The last text is "Ο Μοσκώβ-Σελήμ", which was published in the April/May 1895 issues of *Εστία*.

Throughout the nineteenth century this irredentist project remained the unifying ideology in Greece. As a form of nationalism it was an explicitly territorial ideology.

Challenging traditional readings of Papadiamantis which have tended to emphasize his conservative religious and literary convictions, I argue in this paper that Papadiamantis's fiction, no less than Vizyinos's, inquires into the coincidences and divergences between the frontiers of the nation-state as an integrating system and definitions of ethnic and cultural identities. In the process the texts shed light on the ideological presuppositions that underpin popular spatial perceptions and explore nationalism's "hegemonic interpretation of the nation" as "a means of imposing cultural homogeneity within the bounds of a given territory".[2]

Vizyinos and Papadiamantis, who for a time were classmates at the University of Athens, belonged to the new current of writing which developed in the 1880s. Ηθογραφία, as it is known, is undoubtedly one of the most controversial words in the Greek language. Broadly, the designation is taken to refer to a current of folkloric realism which drew its inspiration from similar tendencies in Europe and Russia, where "the urge to give solidity to [a] particular and differentiating 'spirit of the people'" led, not only to the collecting of folklore, but to the affirmation of distinct national literatures.[3] The preferred genre of ethographic writing was the short story which centred on descriptions of local, contemporary life, with particular attention paid to rustic manners and customs. Combining naturalism's penchant for documentation with the folklorist's mission to preserve rural traditions, the movement's nationalist aims were never far from the surface.[4]

---

[2] R.J. Johnston, D.B. Knight and E. Kofman, "Nationalism, self-determination and the world political map: an introduction", in: *Nationalism, self-determination and political geography* (London: Croom Helm 1988), pp. 7, 10.

[3] Timothy Brennan, "The national longing for form", in: *Nation and narration*, ed. H.K. Bhabha (London: Routledge 1990), p. 53.

[4] For a discussion of folklore as a nationalist movement, see M. Herzfeld, *Ours once more: folklore, ideology and the making of modern Greece* (New York: Pella 1986).

Greek prose fiction in the 1880s and 1890s concentrated largely on evocations of Greek rural landscapes. "The common denominator of almost all the fiction published during the last two decades of the nineteenth century," writes Roderick Beaton, "is the detailed depiction of a small, more or less contemporary traditional community in its *physical setting* [my emphasis]."[5] Indeed, a central role was assigned to setting in ethographic literature, since the Greek landscape was conceived as a repository of Greek culture and an arsenal of national heirlooms. In a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, written in 1885, Vizyinos stressed the role of literature in keeping the Greek national identity alive in areas outside the Greek state.[6] He also emphasized the link between landscape and folklore when he requested information from the relevant Greek consulates about the geographical location of sites around which popular stories had accrued:

> ...are there any mountains, springs, streams, rivers, ravines and locations in general, or any natural phenomena such as strangely shaped rocks, caves, ancient trees etc. etc., the names of which are referred to by the local population in their folk-songs, folk-stories and legends? Are there any constructions such as castles, large bridges, ruined churches, ancient aqueducts, abandoned villages – remembered only by name – deserted cemeteries, and such things, which occupy a place in the popular belief of the local population?[7]

The list of natural phenomena singled out by Vizyinos reads like a thematic concordance to the work of Papadiamantis whose short stories focus on precisely such sites: ruined churches, springs, streams, strangely shaped rocks, the abandoned village,

---

[5] *An introduction to modern Greek literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994), p. 72.

[6] For a time Vizyinos participated in a government project to collect folkloric materials from the Greek communities of the Ottoman empire. See H. Andreadis, "Ο Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός ως πρόδρομος λαογράφος", *Αρχείον Θράκης* 181 (1975) 104-8.

[7] Quoted in K. Papathanasi-Mousiopoulou, *Λαογραφικές μαρτυρίες Γεωργίου Βιζυηνού* (Athens: n.p. 1982), pp. 14-17.

ravines, ancient trees and deserted cemeteries. Moreover, the political and determinist implications of this ethographic concern for landscape, which was value-laden and moralized, were noted by the political thinker and diarist Ion Dragoumis who observed in 1903: "Και το χώμα όμως και οι πέτρες βγάζουν πνεύματα και μόλις καθίσης σε τόπο ελληνικό δεν μπορείς να ζήσης ήσυχα από τα πνεύματα αν δεν γίνης Έλληνας."[8] For Dragoumis national traditions were environment-bound; the nation was an organic unit and Greek cultural identity could only be defined in the context of the Hellenic landscape in which it was rooted.

If one of the fundamental features of national identity is the existence of a shared historic territory, or homeland, common myths and historical memories,[9] then descriptions of the Greek landscape were conceived as an indispensable part of the nationalist project since the literary archaeology of the environment was one way of tapping into, and preserving, collective Greek memories. It was also, as Nikolaos Politis makes clear, one way of refuting the theories of Jacob P. Fallmerayer, who, half a century earlier, had drawn attention to the Slavic origin of place-names in Greece when arguing against the ethnic purity of the modern Greeks.[10] In short, the implicit project of ethographic writing was to demonstrate the historicity of the national territory, just as it reflected the territorialization of the nation's history.[11] The acquisition by Greece of Thessaly and

---

[8] *Έργα Β': κοινωνικά - πολιτικά. Ο ελληνισμός μου και οι Έλληνες* (1903-1909). *Ελληνικός πολιτισμός* (1913) (Athens: n.p. 1927), p. 3.

[9] See A.D. Smith, *National identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1991), p. 14 and *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford: Blackwell 1986), pp. 174-208. For a general discussion of the reciprocal relationship between landscape and national cultures, see S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Harper Collins 1995).

[10] See N.G. Politis, *Μελέτη επί του βίου των νεωτέρων Ελλήνων*, vol. I, *Νεοελληνική μυθολογία* (Athens: Karl Wilberg and N.A. Nakis 1871), p. 3.

[11] This is a paraphrase of N. Poulantzas's assertion that a nation's unity is achieved through the "historicity of a territory and territorialisation of a history". See *State, power and socialism* (London: New Left Books 1978), p. 114.

the Arta region of Epirus in 1881 was another spur to folkloric literature which, as in Macedonia after 1913, was deployed to consolidate Greek national identity in the newly acquired territories by displaying the continuity of Hellenism over time and space.

An examination of the role of formal geographical and environmental culture in the promotion of Greek nationalism remains beyond the purview of the present discussion. Nevertheless, the importance attached to place in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature needs to be seen in the context of contemporary geographical preoccupations. The production of geographical knowledge in Europe, for example, was intimately bound up with military and governmental concerns. The proliferation of geographical schools in Britain, France, and after 1871 in Germany, underlines geography's role in the imperialist project.[12] Although the Ελληνική Γεωγραφική Εταιρεία was founded belatedly in 1901, and from 1904 published a short-lived *Γεωγραφικόν Δελτίον*, the political importance of geographical knowledge in Greece was widely appreciated. Newspapers and journals such as *Πανδώρα* and *Εστία* contained sections devoted to geographical themes. In his article "Περί της ωφελείας των γεωγραφικών επιστημών" published in *Εστία* in 1877, for example, the historian and geographer Antonios Miliarakis, a founding member of the Ιστορική και Εθνολογική Εταιρεία της Ελλάδος with Politis (1881), stressed the ideological role of geographical studies devoted to Greek lands still under Ottoman rule.[13] Such studies constituted a direct affirmation of what Yeoryios Drosinis, employing a geological metaphor, called "the granite-

---

[12] For a discussion of the relationship between the rise of academic geography and imperialism, see F. Driver, "Geography's empires: histories of geographical knowledge", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992) 23-40.

[13] See C. Koulouri, *Dimensions idéologiques de l'historicité en Grèce (1834-1914)* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 1991), pp. 418-19. Miliarakis accompanied the committee sent to Preveza in 1879 by the Greek government to review Greece's frontiers and, together with Politis, was appointed to the commission in charge of reviewing the names of regional municipalities.

like foundations of [Greek] moral and spiritual superiority".[14] Similarly, a brief notice in *Εστία* on 9 February 1887 drew attention to the efflorescence of geographical societies in Europe and Russia, commenting on their political and economic role in promoting national interests.

From this perspective, Greek ethographic interest in place should be viewed in the light of the increased political importance attached to geography and to geographical knowledge during the 1880s and 1890s. Nationalist movements were active in Macedonia, as Greeks, Slavs and Turks jostled for supremacy. This territorial struggle over Macedonia led to the so-called "map mania" in Greece,[15] while towards the end of the century, and especially after the Greek defeat by the Ottomans in 1897, tensions began to show in Greece in the hitherto unquestioned coupling of nation and state; tensions which were forcefully expressed a little later in the writings of Dragoumis.

It is against this background, then, the increasingly political preoccupation with geography and the emphasis on place in the creation of a national culture, that I propose to examine two texts by Vizyinos, "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας" and "Ο Μοσκώβ-Σελήμ", and two texts by Papadiamantis, "Ο Αμερικάνος" and "Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα". Both stories by Vizyinos take place outside the frontiers of the Greek state and yet, in each, the narrative subverts conceptions of nationalism as an ideology that requires the congruence of ethnic, cultural and political boundaries.[16] As in Papadiamantis's fiction, particular attention is paid in the texts to borders. In all four stories the national community as an organically defined, fixed and unequi-

---

[14] Quoted in G. Augustinos, *Consciousness and history: nationalist critics of Greek society 1897-1914* (Boulder: East European Quarterly 1977), p. 30.

[15] See K.Th. Dimaras's account of the importance of ethnographic maps of Macedonia, and particularly of Kiepert's 1876 map, which was used by the delegates at the Congress of Berlin, *Κωνσταντίνος Παπαρρηγόπουλος: η εποχή, η ζωή του, το έργο του* (Athens: Morfotiko Idrima Ethnikis Trapezis 1986), pp. 335-51. For an analysis of the various controversial ethnographic maps of Macedonia produced during this period, see H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps and politics: a review of the ethnographic cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1951).

[16] See, in this context, E. Gellner's pertinent remarks in *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell 1983), pp. 1-7.

vocal entity gives way to instability and heterogeneity through repeated acts of transgression. The exclusivity and authority of those "primordial" elements upon which nationalism is founded – such as race, language and cultural tradition – are thereby called into question.[17]

II *Vizyinos: the invention of homelands*

Appropriately for a writer whose work explores the reciprocity of place and identity, Vizyinos took his name from the village of Βιζώ or Βιζύη where he was born in Eastern Thrace, then a province of the Ottoman Empire. Of Vizyinos's six better known short stories, only two are set in areas other than his native Thrace and Constantinople; one is set aboard a ship between Greece and Italy and another, entitled "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας", Vizyinos's longest text, takes place in Germany: first in Göttingen, where the author himself studied,[18] and later in the Harz mountains. Yet, although the setting is unfamiliar, this is a text which refers frequently to Greece since it concerns two Greek students who experience homesickness abroad.

The narrative centres on the experiences of a Greek student of psychology (who is also the narrator) at the University of Göttingen who is invited by his doctor to visit a mental asylum, where he meets one of the inmates, a beautiful young German girl. Later, in order to recuperate from an illness and to visit a compatriot from his school days who has been studying at Freiburg, the narrator travels to the Harz mountains. It is there that his mineralogist friend, Paschalis, who is gaining practical experience in the mines, relates the story of his love for a German girl called Klara whom he has nevertheless rejected. In Athens Paschalis had fallen in love with the daughter of his laundress who had treated him callously, walking off with a rival. This experience has left Paschalis with a feeling of self-disgust which prompts him to reject Klara, despite their mutual love. After his rejection, Klara goes mad in her despair. It dawns

---

[17] See Johnston et al., "Nationalism, self-determination", p. 7.

[18] For a biographical discussion of Vizyinos, see V. Athanasopoulos, *Οι μύθοι της ζωής και του έργου του Γ. Βιζυηνού* (Athens: Kardamitsa 1992).

on the narrator that Paschalis's Klara and the beautiful inmate of the asylum are one and the same person. In the end Paschalis has a vision of the girl on the night she dies and later he himself suffers a fatal heart attack in the mine at Clausthal.

Such is the brief outline of the story and a paraphrase of Vizyinos's text reads like a subversion of Politis's prescriptions for a literature which was to consist "εις περιγραφήν σκηνών του βίου του ελληνικού λαού".[19] A fact that accounts in part, perhaps, for the text's critical neglect, although Vizyinos's description of the Harz mountains has often been praised.[20] True, the narrative contains numerous allusions to folklore and landscape, but the action takes place in Germany. Indeed, one of the conspicuous features of "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας" is the way in which Germany is persistently juxtaposed to Greece.

In the beginning, Germany's inauspicious weather is compared with the temperate Greek climate. The narrator remarks on his fellow German students' tolerance for foreigners (188),[21] while Paschalis lauds "την φιλοξενίαν αυτών [of the Germans] προς τους αλλοδαπούς, ιδία προς τους Έλληνας συμπάθειαν" (229), and the doctor warns the narrator that the Harz mountains can be harmful "εις τους ξένους" (204). He adds that none of the Greeks he has ever known have been able to integrate fully into a foreign society; instead they create their own homeland, so to speak, when they go abroad:

> You can't be separated from one another, you can't forget that you're abroad. And when you're abroad, wherever you run into a fellow speaker of Greek, even if he's from the other end of the world, there is your fellow countryman, there in some sense is your fatherland. And so you make, as they say, "a village"...[22]

---

[19] Quoted in P.D. Mastrodimitris (ed.), *Ο ζητιάνος του Καρκαβίτσα* (Athens: Kardamitsa 1985), p. 270.

[20] See, for example, A. Sahinis, *Παλαιότεροι πεζογράφοι* (Athens: Estia 1973), pp.174-6.

[21] All references are to Y.M. Vizyinos, *Τα διηγήματα.* ed. V. Athanasopoulos (Athens: Idrima Kosta ke Elenis Ourani 1991). Page references are given in brackets in the main text.

[22] Translations of Vizyinos into English are from W.F. Wyatt, *My mother's sin and other stories by Georgios Vizyenos* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England 1988), p. 113.

These notions of exclusion and foreignness are amplified in the description of the impregnable asylum (191) and by the young German girl who bawls at the Greek narrator, "ως εάν απετείνετο προς τους οροφύλακας της πατρίδος της" (200):

> "Shut the gates," she cried out like one in danger. "Throw the foreigners out and shut the gates!"[23]

Finally, the protagonists' shared memories of their lives in Athens and Paschalis's rejected love in Greece are pitted against their experiences in Germany.[24] Hence the story's title: the consequences of what happened in Athens unfold in Germany.

There is then, a noticeable tendency in Vizyinos's story to pit Germany and Germans against Greece and Greeks, thereby emphasizing the fact that the two protagonists are foreigners living outside their native country and cultural community. The doctor cites lines from Homer about the wandering Odysseus, again underlining the exiled status of the two Greek protagonists (188, 193).

Yet if Germany and Greece are contrasted they are also equated. At the beginning the narrator describes dusty and shabby Göttingen as Athens-like in the summer (187) and in the course of the narrative a paradoxical inversion takes place: the Germans turn out to be more Greek than the Greeks, and the Greeks more German than the Germans. "Ζήσε με τους Γερμανούς, ως Γερμανός" (205), admonishes the doctor, while the narrator, when recounting his trip with Paschalis to a beer house in Athens, asserts: "Μετ' ολίγον εμέλλομεν αμφότεροι να μεταβώμεν εις Γερμανίαν: να γείνωμεν Γερμανοί" (208). It is the German protagonists who quote Greek poetry and the Greek characters who recite German poetry. The doctor proclaims Homer's *Odyssey*, while, ironically, the insane German girl's song about the brook is of her own (that's to say Vizyinos's)

---

[23] Ibid., p. 109.

[24] The juxtaposition Germany/Greece is further accentuated when Paschalis confides that Klara asked him to describe "τας σκηνάς του εθνικού ημών βίου". Ironically, Klara's request echoes, almost exactly, Politis's call for ethographic literature to devote itself "εις περιγραφήν σκηνών του βίου του ελληνικού λαού".

composition.[25] Paschalis and the narrator both declaim Goethe's celebrated "Über allen Gipfeln" in Greek (214, 261).[26]

The shadow of Goethe looms large in Vizyinos's text and, as Nietzsche observed, Goethe represents "not just a good and great man, but an entire culture".[27] Paschalis is linked to the German poet through his recitation of "Über allen Gipfeln", through his intimacy with the Harz mountains where, as he points out, the "Walpurgisnacht" scene in *Faust: part one* is set, and through his passion for geology.[28] Dressed in his leather mining apron Paschalis appears to the narrator "ως εν των αγαθοποιών εκείνων πλασμάτων της γερμανικής μυθολογίας, εις τας χείρας των οποίων υποτίθεται εμπεπιστευμένη η παραγωγή και η επιτήρησις των θησαυρών της γης" (220). Finally, Paschalis is compared explicitly to Wagner's dark-haired Flying Dutchman who is Klara's acknowledged ideal (231).

The conflation of German and Greek cultural identities continues when Goethe is characterized as Homeric (204). This comparison develops an earlier contrast between the Harz mountains, which Goethe climbed and which inspired some of his most famous verses, and Parnassus, the classical home of the Muses which is associated with the worship of Apollo. According to the doctor the ragged peaks of the German mountains are haunted by στρίγγλες and καλλικάντζαροι, traditional spirits in Greek folklore (204). Medieval German and Greek myths merge here with the spirits of Goethe's *Faust*, and the narrator notes that the calm of the mountains is a rare phenomenon in Germany (211). The Harz mountains are described by the narrator as a paradise, just as the German girl in the

---

[25] See Wyatt, *My mother's sin*, p. 98.

[26] For an account of Vizyinos's engagement with Goethe's poem, see W.F. Wyatt, "Goethe's 'Wanderer's night song' in Vizyenos", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1993) 97-105.

[27] Quoted in N. Boyle, *Goethe; the poet and the age Vol. 1: The poetry of desire (1749-1790)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991), p. 6.

[28] The narrator notes that Paschalis owns a volume of Carl Vogt's *Geology*, which saw four editions between 1846 and 1879. On Goethe's interest in geology and his friendship with Johann Voigt, who was a student of the great geologist Werner at the Freiburg Mining Academy where Paschalis is a student, and with whom Goethe visited the Harz, see ibid., pp. 336, 347.

asylum sings Goethe's song from *Wilhelm Meister*, of longing for the paradisal Mediterranean, Greek landscape of lemons and oranges.[29] Moreover, the conflation of Homer and Goethe hints at the preoccupations of *Faust: part two* where Faust, in his quest for Helen, journeys to Greece like a philhellene scholar elucidating mythological characters from his reading of Homer.[30] Faust's union with Helen, moreover, represents a "symbolic synthesis of [their] cultures", of the classical and the Romantic: the assimilation of ancient Greece into modern Western culture.[31]

In suggesting differences between German and Greek cultural identities and then inverting them, Vizyinos engages here with the ideas of Goethe's friend, Herder, with whom he was certainly familiar after studying the history of philosophy in Germany. While Herder had condemned the coercive uniformity of the state, he had emphasized the importance of national character. According to Herder the nation was a community that drew its kinship from cultural affinities which were shaped by numerous factors including education, climate and geography.[32]

---

[29] See, in this context, Beaton's remarks in "Realism and folklore in nineteenth-century Greek fiction", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8 (1982/83) 116.

[30] See J.R. Williams, *Goethe's Faust* (London: Allen & Unwin 1988), p. 148.

[31] Ibid., p. 171. German unification in 1871 led to a spate of articles in Greek periodicals discussing German society and culture. On 1 November 1871 *Πανδώρα* ran an article discussing the legend of Faust, in which the author suggested that many of elements of the Faust legend were present in the Greek myths. Discussing Goethe's Faust he pointed out the importance of Homer. For an analysis of Goethe's engagement with Homer and the Greeks, see H. Trevelyan, *Goethe and the Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1941).

[32] Climate, as M. Alexiou notes, is a recurrent preoccupation in Vizyinos's story. See "Writing against silence: anthithesis and ekphrasis in the prose fiction of Georgios Vizyenos", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993) 273. On the importance of "Klima" in Herder's thought, see I. Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (London: The Hogarth Press 1976), p. 148. Herder had argued that a country's "Klima" was a chief instrument in shaping its cultural history. Significantly, although Herder considered Homer to be the greatest Greek, he also argued that his greatness was confined to his language and locality. Herder's emphasis on environment was to influence, among

In Greece, one of the chief proponents of the determinist view of culture was the German educated Konstantinos Mitsopoulos, a founding member of the Ελληνική Γεωγραφική Εταιρεία, who, between 1888 and 1899, attempted to demonstrate the inter-relations betwen ancient Greek culture and the country's physical characteristics, echoing Jules Michelet's dictum "telle patrie, tel peuple".[33] Environmentalist preoccupations with climate and topography overlapped, here, with spatial concerns for borders and territorial attachment. In Vizyinos's story the relations between cultural community, climate and place are turned upside down, the text thereby focusing on the determinants of an individual's identity. Just as the mad girl in the asylum turns out to be Paschalis's beloved Klara, so Germans turn out to be sham Greeks and Greeks to be sham Germans in a "world of conflicting realities and merging identities".[34]

Vizyinos's text intimates that national cultures are not hermetically sealed and it is in this context that the analogy between Goethe and Homer assumes a new dimension. The German doctor's perpetual quoting and mispronouncing of Homer, while it suggests an idealist outsider's view of modern Greek culture, also hints at the importance of classical Greece within German culture. Just as Paschalis the Greek is the ideal of a

---

others, the geographer Alexander Humboldt. On the impact of Herder on German representations of landscape, see T.F. Mitchell, *Art and science in German landscape painting 1770-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), pp. 3-6.

[33] Quoted in C. Koulouri, *Ιστορία και γεωγραφία στα ελληνικά σχολεία (1834-1914): γνωστικό αντικείμενο και ιδεολογικές προεκτάσεις* (Athens: Yeniki Grammatia Neas Yeneas 1988), p. 66. Mitsopoulos studied geology, mineralogy and the natural sciences in Freiburg, like Vizyinos's protagonist Paschalis, in the early 1870s. He was the author of numerous articles and pamphlets, including a geological history of Greece (1901). For a discussion of the influence of Ratzel and Darwin on Mitsopoulos, see also Koulouri, *Dimensions idéologiques*, pp. 422-33.

[34] The quotation is from Beaton's introduction to Wyatt, *My mother's sin*, p. xii. The relationship explored by Vizyinos in this text between psychology and group identity again owes much to theories of social psychology, a discipline which, as Berlin has observed, Herder all but founded. See *Vico and Herder*, p. 147.

German woman, so Greece was a cultural ideal sought by German Romanticism. The repeated allusions to the Acropolis in Athens where Paschalis and the narrator studied further accentuate the connection. Thus, when Ludwig I of Bavaria commissioned a memorial to German heroes, known as the Walhalla, its name was borrowed from the paradise of heroes in northern mythology, but it was designed by Klenze along the lines of the Parthenon in Athens.[35] The "consequences of the old story" assume a cultural resonance here: the consequences of the cultural explosion which took place in ancient Athens unfold in early nineteenth-century German Romanticism where artists and poets immersed themselves in the ancient culture of Greece as much as they did in the golden age of German medievalism.

This exploration of Greekness and Germanness at the heart of Vizyinos's story undermines both the notion of an unambiguous national identity and the correlative foreignness expressed in the mad girl's allusion to border controls. Yet one of the ironies of the girl's plea to have the borders closed and the aliens ejected is the fact that she is speaking from within the confines of a mental asylum, cut off from the world outside. In other words, it is Klara, the archetypal German with her blond hair and blue eyes, who is ostracized, while the Greek remains inside. Indeed, the narrator's misunderstanding with the gatekeeper as he suspects that he is being admitted to the asylum as a patient draws attention to the dichotomy of inside and outside, as does the detail that the narrator and Paschalis are both τουρκομερίτες, like the Ottoman-born Vizyinos himself: Greeks from "enslaved" Hellenic lands outside the bounded territory of the Greek state (192, 206, 209).

Allusions to enclosed spaces pervade Vizyinos's narrative, most notably in the description of the asylum. Other notions of containment are conveyed in the description of the narrator's confinement indoors due to the bad weather in the Harz mountains. The narrator's confinement is further set off against Paschalis's incarceration in the depths of the mines.

---

[35] Ludwig was the father of King Otto of Greece. The fact that the first ruling dynasty of Greece was German adds poignancy to the contrast between Germans and Greeks in Vizyinos's story.

The Harz mountains offer a contrast to the closed interior spaces in the text, just as the circumscribed domestic world in Goethe's *Faust* is pitted against a violent mountain imagery. Ideas of bounded space in the narrative are set in opposition to Romantic vistas of German wilderness. The asylum outside Göttingen is situated "επί τερπνοτάτου λόφου, εν μέσω χλωρών λειμώνων και σκιερών κήπων, παρέχον εις την όψιν του θεατού την υπέρ παν άλλο γραφικωτάτην περί την πόλιν ταύτην χωριογραφίαν" (189). Subsequently, the narrator alludes to the landscaped hill and describes the asylum as having a neo-Gothic façade (191) – an expression of Germany's Christian, northern heritage. The asylum is therefore a deliberately constructed landscape which contrasts to the wild mountain topography, which, with its rugged peaks and mist, connotes freedom and independence.

Yet the text emphasizes that the landscape of the Harz mountains is, in one sense, equally as engineered as the grounds of the Gothic mansion. The mountains are inseparable from a tradition of Romantic literature associated with Goethe. They are evocative of the towering, misty peaks of Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes. With their dense forests and storm-torn cliffs they are also emblematic of a militant chauvinism which drew on earlier Romantic literature, and particularly on Goethe, for its inspiration. The landscape is a place "of veneration and exaltation whose inner meanings can be fathomed only by the initiated" and it is ideologically associated with folklore and episodes from German cultural history.[36] Significantly, the narrative takes place in the 1870s, the decade of German unification, and the narrator comments on Bismarck's centralizing policies and his plans of transferring the mining academy in Clausthal to the Reich's newly established capital at Berlin (210). Ideas of containment reach their culmination in this allusion to the formation of the nation-state, which Anthony Giddens has aptly called "the pre-eminent power-container of the modern era".[37] The landscaped enclave of the Gothic asylum outside Göttingen is, the narrator notes, an "ίδρυμα της πρωσσικής κυβερνήσεως" (189).

---

[36] Smith, *National identity*, p. 9.

[37] *The nation-state and violence* (Cambridge: Polity 1985), p. 120.

The lush, overtly poetic description of the Harz landscape draws attention to the text's rhetoricity, to the fact that landscape, here, is a literary construct and that territory has been internalized. The view of the mountains prompts Paschalis to recite Goethe's poem:

> Now we're not merely about to mimic foreign ways, to learn how the tragicomic scenes of German drunkenness are acted out, but to come to know the locations in which the most sober dramatist of this country imagined the most magical and extravagant scenes of *Faust*.[38]

Paschalis indicates the plateau of the Brocken Mountain where Goethe set the orgies and dances of the witches' Sabbath on "Walpurgisnacht" (216), just as he has previously pointed out the location of the inn under the peak where Goethe wrote "Über allen Gipfeln" (215). If the scenic beauty of the mountains inspires poetry, so, too, particular locations are named after fictive events. In front of the plateau Paschalis declares that there is a deep chasm "το οποίον και σήμερον ακόμη ονομάζεται: 'ο Λέβης των Στριγγλών'" (216). The inextricable relationship between landscape and literature is further developed through analogies of reading. Mining metaphors are employed in the text, for example, when the narrator digs out the meaning "ως εάν επρόκειτο ν' ανακαλύψη τα λεγόμενά μου υποκάτωθεν των ψηφίων του καθηγητού, ή εν αυτή τη υφή του χάρτου κεκρυμμένα" (248), suggesting both the stratified nature of language and the textual characteristics of the landscape. In the account of the multiple interpretations which the letter from Klara's relative to Paschalis informing him of the girl's madness, elicits, notions of interment and disinterment are extended to the sub-reading of a literary text. The narrator probes below the surfaces of the German language, just as Paschalis digs away in the subterranean shafts below the German landscape. In fact, Vizyinos exploits here the associations between geology, religious and political freedom and literature which were developed by Romantic writers and poets such as Novalis and Goethe who "saw the Wenerian

---

[38] Wyatt, *My mother's sin*, p. 121.

account of the history of the earth as extending backwards in time the histories written by political and cultural historians".[39] "Aesthetic theory [thus] merged with cultural geography" and it was no coincidence, as Timothy Mitchell has shown, that the golden age of German Romanticism was also the golden age of geology and geographical discovery.[40] At the same time, the development of an organic concept of culture, which found expression during the last decades of the nineteenth century in folkloric studies, was stimulated by evolutionism in the natural sciences, and particularly, in geology. Just as fossils were employed as a means of reconstructing a geological history, so the study of folklore was conceived as a way of reconstructing an ancient cultural heritage. As Gillian Bennett has observed: "European folklore was to the history of human civilisation what the fossil record was to earth history".[41]

Landscape in Vizyinos's story displays a culture and becomes the symbolic expression of German cultural values.[42] If the hyperbolic description of the Harz mountains is reminiscent of

---

[39] R. Laudan, *From mineralogy to geology: the foundations of a science, 1650-1830* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987), pp. 111-12. D. Lowenthal draws attention to the way in which metaphors of excavating and disinterment were used during this period by Freud. See *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), pp. 252-3. In Vizyinos's text the psychological dimension of the mining metaphors are drawn out, as when the narrator speaks of the "σκοτεινοί μυχοί του εγκεφάλου" (226). There is a latent pun in German between the toponym Harz and "Herz", meaning heart. The sardonic tale of Heine's descent into the mine and the association of the mine with dirt and women – it is called Caroline – (257) further underline the sexual and psychological aspects of the mining metaphor, as does Klara's description as a "θησαυρός" shut away inside her father's house (230). For an account of Vizyinos's own preoccupations with mining towards the end of his life, see Athanasopoulos, *Οι μύθοι*, pp. 26-7.

[40] Mitchell shows how the discovery of geological time interacted with Herder's concept of "Klima" and profoundly shaped German Romantic thought. See *Art and science*, pp. 2, 6.

[41] "Geologists and folklorists: cultural evolution and the 'science of folklore'", *Folklore* 105 (1994) 29.

[42] See D.W. Meinig (ed.), *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1979), p. 3.

Romantic literature's preoccupation with the hardy independence symbolized in mountain scenery, it also recalls the topophilic myths of the fatherland which pervade the histories of nation-states. For the German Romantics "the bonds between nature and the national character were perceived as [...] organically melded".[43] The irony of Vizyinos's text is that it should be Paschalis the Greek who is mining underneath the seams of the Romantic German landscape, highlighting in this way the Greek foundations of Romanticism. Indeed, while the earlier, neo-classical phase of nationalism had sought its models in Sparta, Athens and Rome, Romantic nationalism retained this admiration for the classical past.[44] Furthermore, Vizyinos's story is set in the 1870s, the decade in which the German archaeologist Schliemann, in his quest for the Homeric world, was excavating the Greek landscape and uncovering the cities of Mycenae and Troy.

"Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας" centres on the dichotomy of belonging and alienation. The text explores the relationship between cultural community and national identity by playing with stereotypes of Germanness and Greekness, figuratively undermining the absolute differences which these imply and calling into question the notion of cultural "purity".[45] Moreover, Vizyinos demonstrates how landscape functions as a means by which shared cultural values are consolidated and become intelligible. Paradoxically, while a nationalist German discourse manipulates the mythopoeic character of the territory it lays claim to, that discourse is itself shaped by a protracted engagement with a foreign, namely Greek, culture. As a contemporary American commentator observed, Greece for the Germans was used "as a stalking-horse for Teutonic psycho-

---

[43] Mitchell, *Art and science*, p. 149.

[44] See J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994), p. 5. For an interpretation of Vizyinos's story as an engagement with the rhetoric of Romanticism, see M. Chrysanthopoulos, *Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός: μεταξύ φαντασίας και μνήμης* (Athens: Estia 1994), pp. 89-109.

[45] As Alexiou points out, notions of purity recur in Vizyinos's text, often correspondingly linked to dirt and illness. See "Writing against silence", p. 272.

logy".[46] It should be noted in this context that while German folkloric studies (particularly the contribution of the brothers Grimm) were greatly influential in the development of Greek λαογραφία, ironically, Greek folklore was conceived as a response to the aspersions made against Greek racial continuity by Fallmerayer. These two contradictory influences are conspicuous in Politis's early study *Νεοελληνική μυθολογία* (1871), which is manifestly indebted to German scholarship – Politis himself having studied in Germany.[47]

Issues of national identity and landscape are also explored in Vizyinos's short story "Ο Μοσκώβ-Σελήμ". The narrative opens with a first hand account by a Greek about his meeting in Eastern Thrace with a Turk who is possessed of a passion for Russian culture. In fact, the narrator is momentarily deluded into thinking he is in Russia by the appearance of Moskov-Selim's log cabin and the surrounding landscape. The Turk himself appears dressed in Russian clothes and peppers his language with Russian words. This infatuation is all the more bizarre in the light of Turkey's historical antagonism for Russia. After this introduction, the majority of the story is taken up with the narrator's reporting of Moskov-Selim's biography: how he joined the army at 18 as a substitute for his cowardly brother, how he served his country in the Crimea (1854) and later in the Balkan uprisings (Herzegovina 1862, 1875), and finally, how he was captured by the Russians at the siege of Plevan (1877). During

---

[46] J.J. Chapman, quoted in Herzfeld, *Ours once more*, p. 5.

[47] Among the influential German scholars of Greek culture, the importance of Johann Hahn should be stressed. See his *Griechische und Albanesische Märchen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: W. Engleman 1864). Rennel Rodd remarks of Hahn that he showed convincingly how many of the popular Greek tales "bear strong analogy to the German folkstory". See Rodd, *The customs and lore of modern Greece* (London: David Stott 1892), p.xiii. B. Olsen has further explored the German appropriation of the Greek tales translated by Hahn. See "Η γερμανοπρέπεια των ελληνικών παραμυθιών στη συλλογή του J.G. von Hahn", *Ελληνικά* 41 (1990) 79-93. On the dominant influence of German geology and Ritterian geography in Greece, see Koulouri, *Ιστορία και γεωγραφία*, p. 27 and *Dimensions idéologiques*, pp. 408-15. Thus, the Greek geographer Mitsopoulos studied geology and mineralogy in Germany (1869-1875), later becoming professor of Natural History at the University of Athens.

his captivity he learned to love and respect his former enemies, the Russians. Indeed, Moskov-Selim's treatment at the hands of the Russians is juxtaposed to his humiliation by his own countrymen on his release. The story ends with the news of Alexander of Battenberg's dethronement in Bulgaria (1886) and the Turk suffers a stroke on the news that the Russians are invading. Later, when the rumours are denied by the narrator, Moskov-Selim dies of a heart attack because of his joy. As the narrator remarks: "ο Τούρκος έμεινε Τούρκος" (386).

As in "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας", "Ο Μοσκώβ-Σελήμ" focuses on the relationship between cultural community and national identity; about what does and does not constitute "our own".[48] It is set against a background of nationalist uprisings and of Turkish/Russian and Turkish/Greek hostilities. Narrated by a Greek about a Turk who imagines himself to be a Russian, the text centres on the environmentally determined nature of an individual's identity, as well as on the differences and congruities between national communities. As Moskov-Selim remarks to the Greek narrator: "δύο άνθρωποι μπορεί να είνε τόσο ξένοι μεταξύ τους, και όμως η ψυχαίς τους να είνε αδέλφια" (339). These themes of identification and variance are highlighted in the Greek narrator's preface where he notes that fanatical Turks will doubtless condemn Moskov-Selim for being a turn-coat (327). The narrator is also aware that his equally zealous nationalist compatriots will not understand why as a Greek author he has chosen to write about a Turk (327) – after all, we are far removed here from the scenes of national Greek life advocated by Politis.

A good deal of attention is paid in the beginning of the narrative to the landscape. When he first sees the location known as Kaïnartza, where Moskov-Selim lives, the Greek narrator imagines that he is in southern Russia, although he later admits to Moskov-Selim that he has never visited Russia (333). These are archetypical images of Russia; a caricature of a real landscape with rolling steppes and beech trees, an izba with a rising plume of smoke, a bubbling brook, and samovar (329-330). It is, in other words, Russia seen from the perspective

---

[48] See Wyatt's comments on the story "Το αμάρτημα της μητρός μου" (1883), *My mother's sin*, p. 2.

of a non-Russian. As such it relates to the Greek description of the German landscape, or the German vision of Greece in "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας".

Kaïnartza derives from the Turkish word for hot spring and the verdant spot is an oasis in the parched Thracian countryside (328). Here, again, as in the evocation of the Harz mountains, the exuberant, overtly poetic language draws attention to the literariness of the landscape; a fact which the narrator later admits when he acknowledges that his interpretation of the place was a momentary self-deception. The cabin is only a "προφανής απομίμησις" of a Russian dwelling (329):

> How could I have been so deceived yesterday evening? What does this charmingly musical, warm, sweet-smelling landscape have in common with the dumb, dry, gloomy scenes of northern climes?[49]

Although Moskov-Selim appears from his cottage dressed in Cossack boots and shouts greetings in Russian – convinced that the Greek narrator is in fact Russian – it transpires that Moskov-Selim is a local Turk who is considered mad by the local population (330). Madness here relates not only to the subversion of the boundaries which separate what is real from what is not, but also to the undermining of those differences which mark off one national community from the "other". The very name Moskov-Selim – or Selim the Moscovite – points to the character's equivocal national identity.

The ambiguous identity of the landscape is clearly linked to preconceptions about national differences, about what is or is not Greek, Turkish and Russian. This confusion acquires an added resonance in Eastern Thrace, a territory contested by Greeks, Turks and Bulgarians during this period, where territorial, ethnic and religious divides overlapped and conflicted. Furthermore, the duplicitous landscape is inextricably bound up, not only with Moskov-Selim's own paradoxical appearance, (with Russian buttons on his tunic and a tall Turkish fez), but with notions of individual identity. In recounting his life story, for example, Moskov-Selim explains how he was brought up in

---

[49] Ibid., p. 194.

girl's clothing and confined with his mother in the harem (341-2). From the first paragraphs of Vizyinos's story when the narrator informs the reader that he is about to transgress the conventions of ethographic writing by discarding Greek themes and describing the life of a Turk, the text develops this notion of subverted or inverted boundaries which separate the most sacred areas: the real from the fantastic, the Greek from the Turk, the Turk from the Russian, woman from man.

Does Vizyinos's text amount, then, to a rejection of nationalism? This is one interpretation and may explain why the publication of "Ο Μοσκώβ-Σελήμ" was delayed until 1895, by which time Vizyinos had been admitted into the insane asylum at Dafni. If the narrative suggests that cultural differences are, in the final analysis, unbridgeable, it also hints at the fact that national identity is based upon a series of imagined differences. While many critics have noted the way in which Vizyinos takes up the challenge of realism in his fiction by questioning its conventions, a connection has rarely been drawn between this and his questioning of the assumptions of nationalist ideology. Instead of scenes of Greek life, Vizyinos's texts focus on disputed identities, while his protagonists, in their eccentricity, expose the fragility of shared conceptions of identity. The battle in the Balkans for national independence and the assertion of state frontiers which form the historical background to "Ο Μοσκώβ-Σελήμ" give an added dimension to the subversion of national identity and gender boundaries within the narrative.

The landscape at Kaïnartza which momentarily deceives the narrator is inextricably bound up with the history of Moskov-Selim. "Σε φαίνεται παράξενον", the Turk declares of his behaviour, "διότι δεν γνωρίζεις την ιστορία μου" (337). The Russian landscape similarly needs to be placed in the context of a story to be elucidated. In other words, landscape requires to be situated within an history if it is to be understood; as Marwyn Samuels has observed, landscapes too have their biographies.[50] This notion of the landscape's biography is intimated in the parable of the rocks which speak of their grief and thus become lighter, just as Moskov-Selim finds comfort in

---

[50] See "The biography of landscape", in: Meinig, *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes*, pp. 51-88.

pouring out his own grief to the Greek narrator (339). We have returned, here, to that list of natural phenomena about which Vizyinos requested information in his letter to the Ministry: rocks and streams and bubbling springs. Back, too, to Dragoumis's defiant spirits which issue forth from the Greek land.

III *Papadiamantis: the unfenced vineyard*

I have concentrated in some detail on these two short stories by Vizyinos because they highlight, in a particularly striking way, the manner in which Vizyinos engaged with the nationalist preoccupations of ethographic writing: more particularly, the call for descriptions of national Greek life in a physical setting. In these texts, Vizyinos breaks down the generalized components of identity and setting to show how they are ideologically underpinned. What is perceived as natural turns out to be contingent and suffused with political purpose. At the same time, the questioning of those sacred boundaries which demarcate cultural identities also hints at the arbitrariness of spatial categories.

It is in this context that I wish to spend the final part of the present paper briefly considering two of Papadiamantis's stories: "Ο Αμερικάνος", published in 1891, and "Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα", which was actually subtitled "a novel" on its serial publication in 1893. My purpose is to offer readings of Papadiamantis's texts in the light of the questions raised in the previous discussion about the constitution of national identity.

Set in the 1870s, "Ο Αμερικάνος", which is a modern version of Odysseus's return to Ithaca, can be read as an epilogue to Vizyinos's "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας". The narrative describes the return of a Greek islander after years of absence in America. Indeed, he has been living outside Greece for so long that he has forgotten most of his Greek, as well as his geographical knowledge of his homeland. None of the islanders recognize him, although it transpires that the "American" is looking for his fiancée whom he had promised to marry on his return and the story ends with their eventual reunion. The central irony in Papadiamantis's short story is thus the fact that the "American", referred to throughout as a stranger (ξένος), is in reality a "Greek". The text can be seen, in this way, as an exploration of the consequences of the loss of those two crucial

constituents of identity which Psycharis predicated in his work: language and geographical awareness.

"Γλώσσα και θρησκεία είναι τα κυριώτερα γνωρίσματα έθνους", Papadiamantis remarked in an essay entitled "Γλώσσα και κοινωνία" (1907).[51] In this article, Papadiamantis reflects upon the etymology and grammatical forms of specific words which appear in the contemporary Greek press and draws attention to the inconsistencies between colloquial and written Greek. As Yeoryios Valetas remarked, the 1907 treatise is evidence of Papadiamantis's engagement with the so-called language question and suggests the degree to which he had thought through his own linguistic position.[52] Drawing attention to the arrival of the international language of Esperanto in Greece, which claimed to reduce national languages "to the domestic and sentimental role of dialects",[53] Papadiamantis also focuses on the relationship between Greek and foreign languages. He illustrates his argument with the spatial metaphor of a closed building into which a foreign influence must inevitably infiltrate:

> If the door is closed, it will enter through the windows; if the windows are shut, it will come in through the chinks and crevices; if the crevices are filled up, it will enter unseen through the solid structure of the building (5.296).

The architectural image employed here, together with the notion of linguistic transgressions into the constructed space of a national language, finds its correlative not only in the images of architectural closure which abound in Papadiamantis's fiction, but in the numerous allusions to national boundaries. In fact, the uncompromising relationship between national frontiers and language asserted by Psycharis in *Το ταξίδι μου* (1888) stands at odds with the position adopted by Papadiamantis, that the

---

[51] Papadiamantis, *Άπαντα* ed. N.D. Triantafillopoulos, vols. 1-5, (Athens: Domos 1988) 5, p. 290. Henceforth, volume and page numbers will be given in brackets in the main text.

[52] *Παπαδιαμάντης: η ζωή, το έργο, η εποχή του* (Athens: Sakalis 1955), p. 458.

[53] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, revised ed. 1992), p. 38

Greek language should follow a middle course. In Papadiamantis's texts, moreover, the permeable nature of state borders is suggested, not only by the ease with which characters disappear over them, but by the absence of any clear-cut linguistic boundaries. The linguistic community is not contiguous with the frontiers of the nation-state. On the contrary, in a number of texts Papadiamantis indicates "that linguistic surfaces are in fact continuous, not subject to the kinds of breaks and discontinuities required for simple cartographic representation."[54]

The equivocal relationship between language, geography and the notion of origins is explored in some detail by Papadiamantis in "Ο Αμερικάνος". The preoccupation with linguistic comprehension occurs in the text's first paragraph, where Dimitris Berdes's shop is likened to a boat caught in a gale, while the crew give and take orders in an incomprehensible language. A few lines later, the narrator again focuses upon the truncated linguistic expressions used in the shop, when he remarks of Christos, Berdes's fifteen-year-old nephew and assistant:

> With an apron tied high over his chest, he kept yelling "Right Away!" in a number of different tones and pitches – a phrase that as time went on he managed to truncate to "Rightway," then to "Right" and finally to a simple "Ri!"[55]

The emphasis on linguistic unintelligibility and the corruption of standard Greek anticipates the arrival of the foreigner who speaks broken Greek and is virtually incomprehensible to the local islanders, who interject with both English and Italian words to make the foreigner understand. As Captain Yiannis explains to the gathering inside the café: "τα ολίγα λόγια που μου είπε ρωμέικα, τα είπε μ' έναν τρόπο δύσκολο και συλλογισμένο" (2.258). The foreigner's incongruent appearance is therefore matched by a linguistic ambiguity which prompts

---

[54] P. Jackson, *Maps of meaning* (London: Routledge 1992), p. 156.

[55] Translations into English are from Alexandros Papadiamantis, *Tales from a Greek island*, trans. by E. Constantinides (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1987), p. 153.

speculations about his national identity. "Μου φάνηκε", Captain Yiannis observes, "σαν Εγγλέζος, σαν Αμερικάνος, μα όχι πάλι σωστός Εγγλέζος ούτε σωστός Αμερικάνος" (2.258). The locals are unable to place the foreigner geographically, just as they find it difficult to interpret his language.

Geography and language are explicitly linked in "Ο Αμερικάνος". When the stranger is engaged in conversation by the islanders, he speaks in Greek, but incorporates two key English words in his sentences. "Ευχαριστώ, κύριοι," the foreigner remarks, "δεν είμαι να καθίσω να κάμω *τώκ*, και δύσκολο σ' εμένα να κάμω *τώκ* ρωμέικα" (2.260). On the second occasion, he declares: "Δεν κάθομαι, πάω να κάμω *γουώκ*, μα φέρω γύρω, πως το λέτε;" (2.261) There is a conspicuous connection in this text between "talk" and "walk"; between notions of linguistic and geographical disorientation. When the foreigner disembarks on the island, the narrator observes that he looks around "ως να μη εγνώριζε που ευρίσκετο" (2.259). The protagonist's inability to express himself in the native language is matched by his difficulty in locating himself geographically.

On one level, therefore, "Ο Αμερικάνος" can be read as "a modern-day recreation of Odysseus's return to his faithful Penelope".[56] From this perspective, it is a text that describes the return of the native and concentrates on the stripping off of the protagonists' sophisticated foreign ways back to his "origins". As the narrator remarks when describing the stranger:

> It would have been difficult to guess what latitude [κλίμα] or people [φυλή] claimed him. He seemed to have acquired, like a film over his face, a sort of mask from another part of the world, a mask of cultivation and good living under which his true origins were concealed. He walked hesitantly, glancing with uncertainty at the faces and objects around him, as if he were trying to get his bearings.[57]

The allusion here to environmental and racial differences is reminiscent of Vizyinos's "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας", while the description of the American who turns out

---

[56] Papadiamantis, *Tales from a Greek island*, p. xiii.
[57] Ibid., p. 154.

to be a local Greek, is strikingly reminiscent of Vizyinos's Russian who turns out to be a local Turk. In both cases the narratives explore the deceptiveness of the protagonist's appearance and raise larger questions about an individual's relationship to his cultural environment and homeland.

A summary of Papadiamantis's story as a retelling of the Odysseus myth therefore ignores the hesitancy of the narrator's pronouncements when alluding to the American's racial origins, as well as the repeated instances of linguistic and geographical confusion in the narrative. It is paradoxical, for example, that the locals inside the café are themselves not all indigenous. One of the three men described in the shop, Stoyiannis Dobros, is of Serbian-Macedonian descent. The repetition of the noun καταγωγή in the context of both the American, who is described repeatedly as a ξένος, and of the reveller in the shop, serves to undermine another tendency in the narrative to polarize the foreigner with the natives. Furthermore, it transpires that another ostensible native, the mayor's bailiff, Uncle Triantafillos, is not from the island either (2.270). An inversion therefore takes place in "Ο Αμερικάνος". It turns out that the outsider who speaks broken Greek is not an alien at all, and that the natives themselves, fluent in Greek, are not all natives. As intimated by the narratorial comments at the beginning of the text, the locals themselves often speak in a truncated idiom which parallels the professed foreigner's own broken Greek.

Language and geography are not clear-cut issues in Papadiamantis. On the contrary, his narratives often probe the tensions that result in a society characterized by geographic and linguistic diversity. Within the state, as described by Papadiamantis, the national language differs widely and, as in "Ο Αμερικάνος", the issues of idiolect and dialect raise questions about what constitutes standard, normative Greek, as well as about national identity.

Perhaps the most complex exploration of social boundaries in Papadiamantis, occurs in "Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα". Set against the backdrop of the 1865 cholera epidemic, the narrative hinges on the exploits of the female protagonist Skevo who illegally enters the quarantine, disguised as a man, in order to rescue her cholera-stricken son. If the cross-dressing here is reminiscent of Vizyinos's fiction, as in "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας",

attention is paid to notions of containment, to metaphors of illness and purity and to distinctions of inside and outside.

The image of the quarantine is central in Papadiamantis's text. On the one hand, it represents the state's practical initiative to contain the plague. As the narrator remarks:

> Because the cholera was decimating the population in regions of Turkey, the Greek government had ordered a strict quarantine. Besides the existing lazaretto on the island, an extra makeshift lazaretto was ordered to be built on the deserted island of Tsoungria (2.562-563).

The confines of the quarantine mirror the rigid contours of the state with its national frontiers. It is thus ironic that the supervision of the quarantine's boundaries is in the hands of a foreign Bavarian doctor who speaks Greek only imperfectly.

The quarantine represents a cruel prison-like isolation for those afflicted, who are locked away and deprived of sufficient food. The narrator puns in this context on the literal and figurative connotations of the noun στενοχώρια, which connotes both confinement and anxiety (2.567). So miserable are conditions within the quarantine that the cholera victims break out and attempt a forced landing on Skiathos (2.628-32). This act of transgression is one of many in a novella which is characterized by the repeated subversion of both physical and social perimeters.

In the first place Skevo leaves her house and illicitly embarks for Tsoungria disguised as a guard, thereby subverting the codes which regulate admission to the quarantine. On the island, the monk Nikodimos gives up his hermitage to Skevo and her son, while he retires onto the mountain. The motif of the key recurs in this context, for before his departure, Nikodimos, in a symbolic gesture, presents Skevo with the key to the storeroom. Earlier, the narrator observes that before leaving her house Skevo is careful to bolt the door. On her return from the town, Skevo is devastated by the news that her son is suffering from cholera and the narrator inquires: "Πως ημπόρεσε να γυρίση το κλειδί εις την κλειδότρυπαν;" (2.576). Keys in Papadiamantis are important symbols for the control of boundaries

and if they stress the sanctity of the threshold, they also imply the possibility of violation from the outside.

Contending images of closure and accessibility are thus opposed throughout the text, just as exile on Tsoungria is compared to the dilapidated former lazar-house which has become redundant and exposed to the elements. "Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα" is structured around a series of evasions as Skevo eludes her female role as guardian of the house to dress as a man and become a guard in the quarantine. Similarly, the cholera victims escape from their quarantine, and Nikodimos withdraws from his hermitage.

The polysemous significance of boundaries is intimated by the narrator when he compares the East figuratively to a vineyard across which the epidemic is dispersed:

> Finally, 1865 came, and the cholera devastated the Near East, in all probability, as always, because of the muslim pilgrims to Mecca. [...] The poor, wretched East was even then, as it is now and always will be, from the geographical and the social, from the political and religious points of view, an unfenced vineyard. But Christ speaks about a time in the future when the master of the vineyards will come... (2.569)

Here, the colloquial expression, rendered into katharevousa ("άφρακτος αμπελών" [sic]), is employed as a metaphor for the vulnerability of the East which lacks any political, geographical, or religious coherence but is susceptible to whatever wind may be blowing at the time. In the final line of the passage the narrator further extends the trope by alluding to Christ's parable of the vineyard from Mark (12:1) and Luke (20:10) in which "a man planted a vineyard and put a wall round it, hewed out a winepress, and built a watch-tower". The parable prepares the way for a further metaphor when the paradise of Tsoungria is transformed into a living hell (2.571). The narrator here seizes upon the symbolic dimension of boundaries which he explores in a political and theologic context.

If "Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα" registers a series of transgressions across physical and social boundaries, there are frequent episodes in Papadiamantis's fiction when protagonists encroach on foreign territory. At the same time, the prospect of

an invariable, homogeneous national language in Papadiamantis's texts appears remote and absurd. In "Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα" notions of purity and pollution, as in "Αι συνέπειαι της παλαιάς ιστορίας", operate on a figurative level to undermine the idea of a bounded, inviolable community. Like the concept of the nation-state's exclusive, unequivocal frontiers, the notion of a linguistically defined and historically determined territory is inextricably bound up with the terrain of an imagined community.

IV *Conclusion*

Greece at the end of the nineteenth century was still in pursuit of a national identity. The principal ideology determining a writer's task was nationalism and, more particularly, the obligation to uncover the deep-rooted Hellenic tradition which lay dormant within the terrain of the Greek homeland. Ethographic prose fiction became a tool in the construction of a national identity and texts were read in this light.

This paper has attempted to show, however, how two Greek writers of the period, Vizyinos and Papadiamantis, did not simply reflect popular perceptions of space in their work. Instead, they attempted to explore the shifting associations and overlappings of nation, state and territory, highlighting the contradictions which nationalist ideologies "encounter in unifying what is within and distancing themselves from what is outside".[58] Their fiction violates and explores the conventional distinctions between what is inside and outside, to show that "what is thought of as external and internal is the product of a reciprocal process of constitution."[59] In failing to recognize the broader political and cultural context of their writing, critics have ignored what is perhaps their most important contribution and it is in the hope of an imminent re-evaluation that this paper is offered.

King's College London

---

[58] Johnston et al., "Nationalism, self-determination", p. 8.

[59] Derek Gregory, *Geographical imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994), p. 8.