

Elisavet Kotzia, *Ελληνική Πεζογραφία 1974–2010: Το μέτρο και τα σταθμά*. Athens: Polis, 2020. Pp 751.  
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Fourteen years after the publication of *Ιδέες και αισθητική: μεσοπολεμικοί και μεταπολεμικοί πεζογράφοι 1930–1974*, in which Kotzia convincingly dealt with the ideology and aesthetics of Greek modernism in fiction, she has produced another major work of reference on prose fiction after 1974 (the accepted symbolic *terminus ad quem* of Greek post-war literature). In the present volume, K. delivers her own assessment of a substantial number of works of fiction and investigates how these works reflect or illuminate their socio-historical, cultural and financial context. Whilst in her previous study, the arguments and conclusions were almost exclusively based on the views of the writers themselves and the critics of the time, thus permitting readers to draw their own conclusions through the juxtaposition of often conflicting perspectives, in the present volume, K. decides which works are given centre stage on the basis of her own evaluative criteria.

Rather than constructing a history of Modern Greek prose fiction for the period defined, K. focuses on how these literary works connect with their cultural and historical circumstances – a subjective process, as she herself accepts. In other words, K. constructs a ‘canon’ of Greek fiction, 1974 -2010, with some reference to earlier and later works.

Establishing a canon is not for the faint-hearted, especially in the present anti-canonical climate, and K. acknowledges that her ‘canon’ is personal and subjective, and in nowise intended as prescriptive, representing tastes developed in the course of thirty years’ reviewing for *Kathimerini*. The book opens with an extended discussion of the pros and cons of establishing and using canons for the study of literature, as well as the ideological reasons for their current unfashionability.

What constitutes ‘real’ literature is another vexed issue from which K. does not shy away. She discusses how she formulated her criteria developed over a 30-year period, during which literariness came to be defined as a dynamic, rather than static, attribute. This gives us a rare insight into what it meant to work as a critic during a period of major changes (aesthetic, ideological, socio-cultural and financial), in ‘80s and ‘90s Greece. Several factors, such as the introduction of literary theory to Greece, chiefly by young academics educated abroad, with different, supposedly more ‘objective’ criteria for assessing literature; the shift in emphasis from the literary work itself and its creator to the socio-cultural conditions of its production; its commercialization in a booming book market and the blurring of distinctions between high and low literature, meant that such a critic was accorded near-pariah status in most literary discussions and academic fora, as representative of an out-dated, impressionistic approach that judged works on the basis of quality and not of other extra-textual factors. In this climate, critics had to expand their frame of reference to include best-sellers and the kind of literature discussed in the mass media. To ignore such

literature would risk the accusation of being out of touch with the times in failing to acknowledge the impact of significant socio-cultural and ideological changes on the themes, aesthetics and ideology of the fiction being produced.

All this is not to say that this book is a sort of anthology based purely on arbitrary personal taste. On the contrary, it is a product of meticulous research, which takes account of literary theory as well as local and international socio-historical conditions. It also offers readers a fascinating trek through the events and changes that marked post-1974 society, particularly of the 80s and 90s, right up to the financial crisis, which tore Greek society apart, and well beyond, providing at the same time a wealth of useful statistical data on the fiction market and the demographics of novel-writing in Greece.

The volume is divided into three parts, with an Introduction, Epilogue and Annexe. In Part 1, 'Issues of Methodology', K. discusses her aims and methods as well as of literary theory and socio-cultural ideologies. The second part, 'Hermeneutical Criticism', is divided into seven chapters, corresponding to the seven genres of fiction discussed. Here, a substantial number of novels and short-story collections are approached from various perspectives, such as national/cultural identity, political ideology, religion, gender, multiculturalism, urbanization, globalization, the relationship with the Greek literary tradition. This is followed by a shorter section on narrative techniques and form in general. In the third part, 'Evaluative Criticism', K. discusses all the works of these writers (interestingly, fewer writers than those included in the second part) on the basis of her own evaluative criteria. Finally, in the Annexe, K. presents statistical tables of fiction production in Greece for the period 1987–2005, during which, according to her, major socio-cultural changes affected the number of titles published, the gender of writers and the generally increasing page count in works of fiction.

This is an original, incisive, meticulous and audacious study, the legacy of a renowned Greek literary critic to future generations of scholars and students of Modern Greek literature. Beautifully written, K.'s book is not only an indispensable work of reference but also a joy to read. No Greek scholar's bookshelves or university library should be without it.

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