

## ‘Literary Evenings’ at the Greek National Theatre, 1945–6: popular education and the literary canon<sup>1</sup>

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*This article recounts the little-known story of the ‘Literary Evenings’ (1945–6), a series of literary recitals staged at the Greek National Theatre and organized by members of the Generation of the 1930s. Set against the background of intense political rivalry that followed the Varkiza Agreement, the ‘Literary Evenings’ capture the post-war aspirations for the popularization of high culture. Drawing upon hitherto unexplored archival material, this article aims to offer a new, historically informed understanding of the Generation of the 1930s, while also directing attention to the aural consumption of literary texts as an unacknowledged force behind canon formation.*

**Keywords:** Greek National Theatre; Generation of the 1930s; Greek liberalism; oral poetry; popularization; literary canonization

After the end of the Second World War, prominent intellectuals across Europe shared a desire for popular education and culture, which was informed by progressive Resistance ideals.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the cultural reconstruction of post-war Europe, Nicholas Hewitt argues that ‘it is essential to limit the period under analysis from 1945 to 1950, when

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2 For this movement in France, see, for instance, B. Rigby, ‘The reconstruction of culture: People et Culture and the popular education movement’, in N. Hewitt (ed.), *The Culture of Reconstruction: European Literature, Thought and Film, 1945–50* (Basingstoke 1989) 140–52; for similar concerns in post-war Italy,

the debates on the directions in which European culture should go were at their height'.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Greece, however, this intense cultural activity lasted even less, due to the outbreak of the Greek Civil War (1946–9), whose prelude occurred in December 1944, when fighting broke out in Athens between the communist-led resistance organization, the National Liberation Front (EAM), and British troops supporting the government—a conflict known as the *Dekemvriana*. Hence, in order to grasp the fleeting moment when the turbulent political reality had not yet fully overshadowed the demand for popularizing high culture, I will focus my attention on the immediate post-Liberation period, that is, on the one-year period between the ceasefire agreement signed between the government and EAM on 12 February 1945 (the Varkiza Agreement) and the parliamentary elections held on 31 March 1946, which signalled the beginning of full-fledged civil war. Recent studies have come to define this period as the period of 'white terror', due to the acts of violence against known or suspected communists.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this atmosphere, the optimistic voices that expressed their faith in a future society where people would have equal access to culture not only permeated Greek public discourse, but seem to have inspired a number of educational/cultural projects. One of the most characteristic projects of this period is the 'Literary Evenings' (*Λογοτεχνικές Απογευματινές*), a series of performances of literary texts established by the Greek National Theatre (hereafter NT) during the 1945–6 season. This literary-theatrical project has not, to date, received any scholarly attention, even though it offers an illuminating case study of both the institutional strategies used to popularize literature, and the mechanisms of literary canonization in post-war Greece.

Perhaps the reason for this conspicuous critical neglect lies with the nature of the project itself; standing at a crossroads between theatre and literary studies, it has escaped the attention of scholars from both disciplines alike. On the one hand, studies which centre on the theatrical life of this period refer to this project in passing, without elaborating on its pedagogical aims in light of the context of cultural reconstruction, or its content in relation to the contemporaneous developments in the field of literature.<sup>5</sup> Literary historians, on the other hand, scarcely take into account the presence of modern Greek literature outside the printed book.<sup>6</sup> Exceptions to this are studies which focus on the transposition of literature into popular media, such as

see S. Gundle, 'The Communist Party and the politics of cultural change in postwar Italy, 1945–50', in Hewitt (ed.), *The Culture of Reconstruction*, 12–36.

3 'Introduction' in Hewitt (ed.), *The Culture of Reconstruction*, 4.

4 See, for instance, D. H. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War* (London and New York 1995) 150–88.

5 See the few lines devoted to this project in G. Koukourikou, 'Ελληνικό θέατρο και ιστορία. Από την Κατοχή στον Εμφύλιο (1940–1950)', unpublished PhD thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2001, 137–8; E. Stamatoπούλου, *Το νεοελληνικό θέατρο στα χρόνια της καθεκτικής δημοκρατίας, 1944–1967. Η πολιτική ρεπερτορίου των αθηναϊκών επαγγελματικών θιάσων πρόζας (Τόμος Α': 1944–1955)* (Athens 2017) 35.

6 Consider, for instance, Argyriou's imposing eight-volume *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας και η πρόσληψή της* (Athens 2001–7) which focuses exclusively on the study of printed sources (books and literary journals).

Papanikolaou's *Singing Poets*, which traces the intersections of poetry and popular music in France and Greece. Yet, even though Papanikolaou discusses the circulation of French poetry in oral formats during the 1940s, he situates the Greek manifestations of this phenomenon at a much later stage, particularly in the late 1950s.<sup>7</sup>

However, identifying earlier attempts to popularize poetry through performance, such as the 'Literary Evenings', can inform our understanding of the succeeding projects of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Commenting on the 1960s musical settings of poetry, Papanikolaou juxtaposes the 'popular politics' of the leftist composer Mikis Theodorakis with the eclecticism of the poets of the Generation of the 1930s, interpreting Theodorakis' strategy of 'returning high culture to the people, bringing poetry to the masses' as an 'effort to force the cut-off bourgeois poets to communicate with the people'.<sup>8</sup> Striking a similar note, Garantoudis claims that the practices of the Generation of the 1930s lacked the popularizing impulse of the cultural projects of the Greek Left; speaking of the recitation anthologies published by EAM in the mid-1940s (which will be examined below in parallel with the 'Literary Evenings'), Garantoudis views them as an effort to reconnect performed poetry with the public, adding that such initiatives 'belong to a politico-ideological space which is totally incompatible with the views of bourgeois poets, like Seferis, on poetry and its recitation'.<sup>9</sup>

This article aims to demonstrate that the Generation of the 1930s was far more receptive to ideas of popular and performed poetry than previous studies have acknowledged. The relatively unknown involvement of leading members of this generation in the operation of the NT in 1945–6 throws new light on the cultural and political agenda of this generation, elucidating more fully both its ideological position and its relations with popular culture. A key figure in this venture was the novelist Giorgos Theotokas, who was appointed director-general of the NT shortly after the Varkiza Agreement. For a group of authors that has long been the focus of extensive scholarly attention, it is curious that one of its rare collective exertions has hitherto gone unnoticed.<sup>10</sup> Treating the 'Literary Evenings' as a project that bore the definite imprint of the Generation of the 1930s, this article departs from the view of this generation as an 'abstract scheme, critical construct and rhetorical invention',<sup>11</sup> showing that, at least in the post-Liberation period, these authors indeed acted as a coherent group which attempted to reach wider audiences and influence popular taste.

7 See D. Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (Oxford 2007) 78–99.

8 Op. cit., 89.

9 E. Garantoudis, 'Η ποίηση ως ζωντανός λόγος. Από την απαγγελία στην προφορική ανάγνωση', in *Από τον μοντερνισμό στη σύγχρονη ποίηση, 1930–2006* (Athens 2007) 160.

10 Even the term 'Generation of the 1930s' is strikingly absent from all accounts of Theotokas' first term at the NT; see, for instance, K. Petrakou, *Ο Θεοτοκάς του θεάτρου. Έργα, θεωρία και κριτική, δράση* (Athens 2017) 379–401; A. Kastriņaki, *Η λογοτεχνία στην ταραγμένη δεκαετία 1940–1950* (Athens 2005) 365–6.

11 D. Tziouvas, *Ο μύθος της γενιάς του τριάντα. Νεωτερικότητα, ελληνικότητα και πολιτισμική ιδεολογία* (Athens 2011) 544. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

And while the popularizing character of the ‘Literary Evenings’ reflects the broader cultural and intellectual tendencies of this period, the question of their repertoire, i.e. the texts chosen to be performed, is directly linked to the issue of literary canonization, introducing an aspect that is rarely addressed in the existing—Greek or international—literature on the topic: the aural dissemination of literary works. In particular, discussions concerned with canon formation base their assumptions on traditional printed sources (textbooks, histories, anthologies), paying little, if any, attention to the circulation of literary texts via non-print media (live readings, radio broadcasts, sound recordings).<sup>12</sup> Even in the few cases where vocal performances of printed texts are acknowledged as an important part of an author’s reception and public image, such considerations usually apply to individual case studies,<sup>13</sup> and no systematic attempt has been made to assess the overall impact of the non-print appearances of literature on the construction of national literary canons. The study of the ‘Literary Evenings’ underlines the fact that different versions of the canon coexisted within the same period, of which the ones relying upon the printed form of the text were simply one part.

In what follows, I will try to situate the ‘Literary Evenings’ within their historical and literary context, drawing mostly on unpublished material located in the NT’s Archive.<sup>14</sup> More specifically, the first part of this article (‘Off-stage politics’) will discuss the backstage activity that framed the launch of the ‘Literary Evenings’, focusing on the NT’s attempts to maintain equilibrium amidst a highly polarized political setting. The second part (‘The European model’) will trace the origins of the ‘Literary Evenings’, bringing to the fore the internationalist scope of the NT administration as well as its influence from the practices of the French state theatre. The third part (‘Popularization’) will discuss the objectives of the ‘Literary Evenings’ in light of the educational and cultural policy of both the official state and the Left. Finally, the fourth part (‘Canonization’) will delve into the repertoire of the ‘Literary Evenings’, questioning whether the choice of texts ultimately reinforced canonical values or proposed an alternative version of the literary canon.

## Off-stage politics

Less than a month after the Liberation of Athens, Georgios Papandreou, head of the Government of National Unity, ordered the indefinite closure of both the NT and the

12 Indicative in this respect is J. Guillory’s seminal study *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago and London 1993), which uses as its primary data school and university syllabuses.

13 It seems that the issue of performance enters the discussion either in relation to nineteenth-century literary practices, or in relation to individual authors who have a reputation for being prolific reciters; see, for instance, G. Papatheodorou, *Ρομαντικά πεπρωμένα. Ο Αριστοτέλης Βαλαωρίτης ως ‘εθνικός ποιητής’* (Athens 2009), in particular 241–323, and A. Vogiatzoglou, *Η γένεση των πατέρων. Ο Σικελιανός ως διάδοχος των εθνικών ποιητών* (Athens 2005) 127–62.

14 Strangely, although the largest part of this Archive was recently digitized (2008–11), all files related to the ‘Literary Evenings’ (printed programmes, newspaper clippings, etc.) were left out of this process, and do not currently appear in the NT’s online database (<http://www.nt-archive.gr/>). Accessed 1 March 2019.

National Opera and called for their immediate reorganization.<sup>15</sup> Vasilis Kanakis, one of the few chroniclers of the NT's history, blames this development on the internal conflict that had broken out between two leftist actors of the troupe, Giorgos Glinos and Tzavalas Karousos, who, bypassing the authority of the appointed director-general, Nikolaos Laskaris, were engaged in a struggle for dominance.<sup>16</sup> Press reports did not go into such detail, but pointed to the declining artistic standards of the NT's wartime productions, which had allegedly caused general disappointment: 'Athenian intellectual circles fully endorse the government's decision to close down the National Theatre until its reorganization and return to its former artistic path, from which it deviated during the occupation'.<sup>17</sup>

Such an unreserved alignment with Papandreou's policy was perhaps to be expected, given that the above lines appeared in the pro-government daily *Καθημερινά Νέα*, run by a close associate of Papandreou, Loukis Akritas, who at the time served as undersecretary for Press and Information. A regular contributor to *Καθημερινά Νέα* was the succeeding director-general of the NT, Theotokas. In his articles from the early post-Liberation days, Theotokas openly supported Papandreou, arguing that his opposition to political fanaticism might prove highly beneficial to the country, preventing the possibility of civil war.<sup>18</sup> It is thus plausible that Theotokas' appointment at the NT was related to his personal ties to Papandreou;<sup>19</sup> the theatre director Sokratis Karandinos, a member of the NT's Artistic Committee during the war, recalls that, in the spring of 1944, Theotokas received a message from the government-in-exile, asking him to prepare a plan for the post-war reconstruction of the NT.<sup>20</sup> This information does not appear in Theotokas' diary, which instead recounts that, shortly after the Liberation, Papandreou offered him a place in public office.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, the events of the *Dekemvriana*, and Papandreou's ensuing resignation, postponed the reorganization of state institutions. It was after the formation of a new government under the centrist Nikolaos Plastiras that the Minister of Education,

15 See 'Ο νόμος διά το "Εθνικόν"', *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 4 Nov. 1944.

16 See V. Kanakis, *Εθνικό Θέατρο. Εξήντα χρόνια σκηνή και παρασκήνιο* (Athens 1999) 49. For acts of resistance at the occupied NT, see P. Mavromoustakos, *Το θέατρο στην Ελλάδα 1940–2000. Μια επισκόπηση* (Athens 2005) 43–4.

17 'Το Εθνικόν Θέατρον', *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 4 Nov. 1944; also quoted in Kanakis, *Εθνικό Θέατρο*, 53.

18 See, for instance, G. Theotokas, 'Ο "τύπος Παπανδρέου"', *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 19 Nov. 1944, republished in G. Theotokas, *Πολιτικά κείμενα* (Athens 1976) 401–2.

19 In 1942, Theotokas' text 'Ideological directions' served as a manifesto for Papandreou's Democratic Socialist Party; see E. Hatzivassiliou, *Ελληνικός φιλελευθερισμός. Το ριζοσπαστικό ρεύμα, 1932–1979* (Athens 2010) 142.

20 See S. Karandinos, 'Ο Θεοτοκάς στο Κρατικό Θέατρο Βορείου Ελλάδος', *Νέα Εστία* 1114 (1973) 1634; this is also mentioned in Petrakou, *Ο Θεοτοκάς του θεάτρου*, 380.

21 '[...] he [Papandreou] took me aside and asked me from which position I would like to offer my services', diary entry, dated 18 Oct. 1944; G. Theotokas, *Τετράδια ημερολογίου, 1939–1953*, ed. D. Tziouvas (Athens 2014) 501.

Konstantinos Amantos, invited Theotokas to become director-general of the NT.<sup>22</sup> A drastic intervention in the public sphere might contribute to the quick recovery of the nation, or, at least, this is what Theotokas had in mind when he took up that post in February 1945: ‘the proposal was acquiring the character of an intellectual recruitment in times of national crisis’, as he argued.<sup>23</sup> Next to Theotokas, other distinguished intellectuals served either as members of the Administrative Board, or as members of the Artistic Committee, or even offered their assistance voluntarily in the preparation of individual projects.

In particular, the members of the NT’s Administrative Board included Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (vice-president), G. K. Katsimbalis (secretary-general), Theodoros Synadinos, Kostas Karthaios, Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Gkikas, and George Seferis (members). In the Artistic Committee we encounter Angelos Terzakis (director of repertoire), Petros Charis, Leon Koukoulas and Michael Rodas (who later resigned and was replaced by Takis Papatsonis),<sup>24</sup> as well as the NT’s directors, Sokratis Karandinos and Pelos Katselis (fig. 1). With regard to the project under discussion, the programmes of the ‘Literary Evenings’ reveal that the following were responsible for arranging the repertoire: Theotokas, K. Th. Dimaras, and the poets Odysseus Elytis and Nikos Gatsos. Also, it was under Theotokas that the NT began recruiting painters, such as Nikos Engonopoulos and Yannis Tsarouchis, as set and costume designers. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Theotokas insisted on portraying his term at the NT as a ‘collective intellectual endeavour’.<sup>25</sup>

The marked presence of authors who are linked with the Generation of the 1930s should be viewed as part of the broader attempts of this literary group to shape national cultural politics after the Liberation. In addition to the NT, another site apparently associated with the post-Liberation activity of the Generation of the 1930s was the National Radio Foundation (EIR). In 1945, Seferis, at that time director of Archbishop Damaskinos’ political bureau, contributed to the reorganization of the national broadcasting network by preparing the new broadcasting legislation and serving as a member of EIR’s first Administrative Board.<sup>26</sup> In the same period, both Elytis and the literary critic Andreas Karandonis joined EIR — ‘encouraged by Seferis’,

22 The literary and theatre critic Aimilios Chourmouziος would later insinuate that Amantos’ decision to appoint Theotokas was influenced by their common origin from the island of Chios; see A. Chourmouziος, ‘Το Εθνικό Θέατρο (Ένας έλεγχος και μια προοπτική)’, *Φιλολογικά Χρονικά* 43 (1946) 225–6.

23 G. Theotokas, ‘Η πρώτη μεταπολεμική περίοδος του Εθνικού Θεάτρου (Απολογισμός)’, *Νέα Εστία* 451 (1946) 460.

24 In October 1945, Papatsonis too resigned due to workload, and was replaced by the theatre historian Giannis Sideris; see National Theatre of Greece, Archive, Administrative Board Meeting Minutes, 16 Oct. and 13 Nov. 1945.

25 G. Theotokas, ‘Η λογοτεχνία προς το λαό’, *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 11 Nov. 1945, republished in G. Theotokas, *Πολιτικά κείμενα*, 178–80.

26 On the role of the Generation of the 1930s in mid-century Greek radio programming, see F. Antonelaki, *Ποίηση στο ραδιόφωνο, 1945–1960. Πολιτιστική πολιτική και οι ποιητές της ‘γενιάς του τριάντα’*. Available online: [https://www.miet.gr/userfiles/b43b6205-bc09-4b97-8795-a6b100f44a81/Ποίηση στο ραδιόφωνο \(PDF\).pdf](https://www.miet.gr/userfiles/b43b6205-bc09-4b97-8795-a6b100f44a81/Ποίηση στο ραδιόφωνο (PDF).pdf). Accessed 10 June 2019.



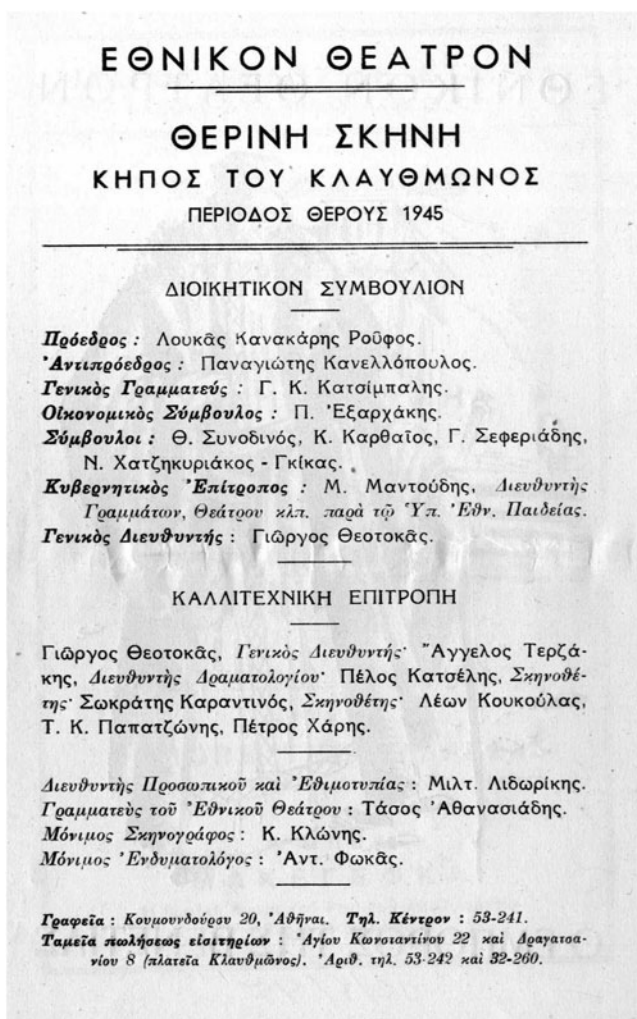


Fig. 1. National Theatre Board/Artistic Committee, 1945. © National Theatre of Greece.

as Elytis later admitted.<sup>27</sup> Parallel to their involvement in state cultural institutions, several members of this literary group collaborated with centrist newspapers of the day: Theotokas, Terzakis and Gatsos contributed to *Καθημερινά Νέα*,<sup>28</sup> and Elytis wrote a series of articles for the daily *Ελευθερία*, published by Panos Kokkas.<sup>29</sup>

27 O. Elytis, 'Το χρονικό μιας δεκαετίας' (1974) in *Ανοιχτά χαρτιά* (Athens 2009) 435.

28 Terzakis' daily column ('Στο φτερό της πέννας') gave amusing snippets of Athenian everyday life; Theotokas' and Gatsos' articles, which ranged from aesthetic to sociopolitical topics, appeared in the Sunday issue of the newspaper. A selection of Theotokas' articles (1944–7) can be found in the volume *Πολιτικά κείμενα*; the absence of other theoretical writings underlines the need to catalogue and analyse Gatsos' contributions to *Καθημερινά Νέα* (June–Sept. 1945).

29 M. Psalti offers a brief exposition of these articles, though without situating them in the broader context of the post-Liberation activity of the Generation of the 1930s; see M. Psalti, 'Ο Ελύτης ως μεταπολεμικός

A central (and common) aspect of their newspaper contributions was their condemnation of political polarization; speaking of the current responsibilities of Greek intellectuals, Elytis argued that ‘escaping the clashing orthodoxies (‘Συμπληγάδες των ορθοδοξιών’) is the primary goal that every bright mind needs to accomplish’.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Gatsos concluded that youth would find its way to freedom by ‘ignoring and bypassing the dogmas and orthodoxies of our times which are suitable only for the Middle Ages’.<sup>31</sup> Equally appalled by the ‘two abnormally swollen political extremes’, Theotokas declared that ‘we do not want violence, we do not want fanaticism. We refuse to accept that, in order to straighten out the affairs of this ill-fated country, a huge amount of hate, madness and blood needs to be expended’.<sup>32</sup> According to Theotokas, it was the same desire to appease political passions that primarily informed his policy as director-general of the NT:

Everyone should feel that a spirit of justice, impartiality and freedom prevails within the workplace, and that no one will be sidelined for ideological, partisan or personal reasons [...] It is the simple, healthy method of applied Democracy, which we wanted to transfer, without any distortion, to this small sector of public life.<sup>33</sup>

This claim of commitment to democracy was evidently matched by a series of analogous actions. In early 1945, as the NT troupe reassembled after the *Dekemvriana*, Theotokas decided to rehire three leftist actors (Tzavalas Karousos, Andonis Giannidis and Giorgos Pappas), despite the reservations expressed by some members of the Administrative Board.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, a leading figure of the Greek Left, Kostas Varnalis, was also recruited by the NT as a translator of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*.<sup>35</sup> Lastly, the Board rejected a request to install a wall plaque to commemorate the death of the NT actress Eleni Papadaki, who was murdered during the *Dekemvriana*, finding this gesture ‘premature’.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this evidence of a moderate policy, it was not long before the NT was accused of promoting particular political agendas; the NT took the first blow in June 1945, when the on-stage appearance of Karousos provoked violent reactions from members of the anticommunist ‘X’ organization, who were among the audience. This incident was

επιφυλλιδιογράφος. Τα πολιτικά του κείμενα στην εφημερίδα *Ελευθερία*, *Νέα Ευθύνη* 23 (2014) 305–16, and ‘Τέσσερις αθησαύριστες πολιτικές επιφυλλίδες του Ελύτη στην εφημερίδα *Ελευθερία*, *Νέα Ευθύνη* 34–5 (2016) 267–80.

30 O. Elytis, ‘Πνεύμα και πολιτική’, *Ελευθερία*, 22 July 1945.

31 N. Gatsos, ‘Το δράμα της νεότητας’, *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 30 Sept. 1945.

32 G. Theotokas, ‘Το δράμα των ελεύθερων ανθρώπων’, *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 1 July 1945.

33 G. Theotokas, ‘Η πρώτη μεταπολεμική περίοδος του Εθνικού Θεάτρου’, 462.

34 See Board Meeting Minutes, 3 April 1945.

35 See Board Meeting Minutes, 1 May 1945.

36 ‘Το Συμβούλιον αποφαινεται αρνητικώς [...] θεωρών πρόωρον έτι την ενέργειαν ταύτην’; Board Meeting Minutes, 15 May 1945; also quoted in Petrakou, *Ο Θεοτοκάς του Θεάτρου*, 388.



part of a coordinated attack which was mainly directed against the leftist 'United Artists' theatre company.<sup>37</sup> Still, the fact that these assaults reached the national stage implies that, within this electrified political atmosphere, the NT's moderate agenda ran the risk of being interpreted as pro-communist.

The noose tightened even more around the NT after the elections of March 1946, from which the Communist Party abstained, leading to a distinct victory for the royalist People's Party (*Λαϊκόν Κόμμα*). From its new position of strength, the right-wing press unleashed a harsh polemic against the NT, accusing it of promoting alleged communists, such as Nikos Kazantzakis and Angelos Sikelianos. For instance, the daily *Εστία* objected to the staging of Kazantzakis' play *Καποδίστριας*, expressing concerns about the next steps of the NT: 'Will the meagre resources of the people continue to be wasted on [the production of] ridiculous plays of "comrades" who praise each other?'.<sup>38</sup> Under these suffocating pressures, Antonios Papadimos, Minister of Education in the new government, reinstated the 1930 National Theatre Act, with the excuse that all subsequent laws had been enacted by authoritarian regimes. On a practical level, the return to the prewar legislation led to the immediate dismissal of the NT administration.<sup>39</sup> In May 1946, Theotokas was replaced by the former NT director Dimitris Rondiris, who was favoured by the new government.<sup>40</sup> The right-wing press greeted this development with satisfaction, as is evident in pompous headlines such as: 'The National Theatre returns to Greece. The communist mob is permanently dismissed' (*fig. 2*).<sup>41</sup>

At the final meeting of the outgoing administration, Seferis referred to this headline, in order to condemn the blatant intrusion of party politics into essentially intellectual matters:

Nobody has the right to monopolize Hellenism, and, all the more so, as happens in some cases of this nasty polemic, when the monopolizers are a disgrace to this nation. This is not real public opinion, but a tactic that aims to subordinate the

37 On this series of assaults, see 'Το πνεύμα σε διωγμό', *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα* 8 (1945) 1–2. On the short-lived troupe of the 'United Artists' ('Ενωμένοι Καλλιτέχνες') and its connections with EAM, see G. Koukourikou, 'Ελληνικό θέατρο και ιστορία', 147–60; Stamatopoulou, *Το νεοελληνικό θέατρο στα χρόνια της καχεκτικής δημοκρατίας*, 93–106.

38 'Θέατρον ή φαρμακείον', *Εστία*, 10 April 1946.

39 For the written protest against this ministerial decision, signed, among others, by Sikelianos, Kazantzakis, Elytis, Karandonis and I. M. Panagiotopoulos, see the full text in G. Theotokas, *Τετράδια ημερολογίου*, 554–5.

40 Symptomatic of the NT's vulnerability to political manipulation is the fact that, when a centrist government was formed after the 1950 elections, Theotokas returned to his position as director-general, only to be replaced again by Rondiris after the 1952 elections, won by a right-wing party; for Theotokas' second term at the NT see Theotokas, *Τετράδια ημερολογίου*, 627–81; see also Petrakou, *Ο Θεοτοκάς του θεάτρου*, 401–25.

41 *Ελληνικόν Αίμα*, 30 April 1946.



Fig. 2. 'The National Theatre returns to Greece'. *Ελληνικόν Αίμα*, 30 April 1946.

function of art to party fanaticism; [...] Hence I believe that I am obliged to react [...] against a system which I regard as destructive to all intellectual activity.<sup>42</sup>

In spite of its short duration, however, this 'collective intellectual endeavour' managed to introduce some innovative concepts into Athenian theatrical culture, including the 'Literary Evenings'. In the following sections I will show how the aims of this project exemplify the demand for popular culture that prevailed in the post-Liberation era, starting with a comparison between the 'Literary Evenings' and their immediate model, the 'Matinées poétiques' of the Comédie-Française.

### The European model

When, in February 1945, Theotokas took up his duties, he promptly announced his intention to place the state theatre at the service of cultural diplomacy. He specifically

42 Board Meeting Minutes, 30 April 1946. Cf. G. Seferis, *Μέρες Ε' (1945- 1951)* (Athens 1977) 32–3.

argued that, under the present circumstances, the NT too was required to contribute to the strengthening of Greece's international image:

Nowadays, when Greece, with both its heroism and its suffering, has become one of the centres of international attention of this great War, the National Theatre, parallel to its distinct artistic and educational purpose, is required to contribute, with all the means at its disposal, to the elevation and maintenance of our national status among the United Nations.<sup>43</sup>

This desire to raise the theatre's international profile was perhaps to be expected as both Theotokas, and other members of the Generation of the 1930s who joined him at that venture, shared a strong internationalist outlook that was already evident in their writings from the 1930s.<sup>44</sup> In 1942, Theotokas spoke of the possibility of a 'Federal Union of European Nations', while Kanellopoulos envisioned the post-war rise of a 'new Europe', founded upon a 'supranational political system'.<sup>45</sup> Motivated by these ideals, the NT administration attempted to elevate the Greek state theatre to the level of its European counterparts and, to this end, it imported several concepts which had already been tested abroad, such as the 'Alternating Repertoire System' and the 'Literary Evenings'.

The latter was directly modeled after the 'Matinées Poétiques', a series of poetry readings which occupied a permanent place in the repertoire of the Comédie-Française ever since its launch during the 1920–1 season. Theotokas personally suggested the transposition of this concept to the Greek NT, and the Board accepted his proposal.<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that both Theotokas and Seferis were particularly familiar with the French 'Matinées' from the years they had spent in Paris back in the 1920s.<sup>47</sup> By the mid-1940s, the 'Matinées' was a long-running project, which showed all the characteristics of a well-grounded tradition, and yet its organizers decided it was time to redefine its mission and redesign its structure. Not coincidentally, this happened right after the Liberation.

More specifically, introducing the new cycle of 'Matinées', scheduled for the 1944–5 season, the Administrator-General of the Comédie, Pierre Dux, argued that the content of these productions would no longer resemble a haphazard mixture of poems chosen to match the skills of the actors/reciters, for it would now be arranged by a specialized committee, according to a broader plan ('un plan général'). By doing so, the organizers hoped to redirect audiences' attention from the famous performers to the performed texts, and ultimately present high-quality productions of a pronounced pedagogical

43 'Ανακοίνωσις προς το προσωπικόν του Ε.Θ.' (16 Feb. 1945), American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Gennadius Library Archives, George Theotokas Papers, Box 39, Folder 1; see also 'Πώς θα λειτουργήση το Εθνικό Θέατρο', *Η βραδυνή*, 3 Feb. 1945.

44 For Theotokas' vision of economic interdependence among nations, first expressed in his 1932 essay *Facing the Social Problem* [in Greek], see Hatzivassiliou, *Ελληνικός φιλελευθερισμός*, 54–5.

45 Quoted in Hatzivassiliou, *Ελληνικός φιλελευθερισμός*, 195–6.

46 See Board Meeting Minutes, 6 March 1945.

47 For Seferis' regular attendance at the 'Matinées Poétiques' of the early 1920s, see I. Tsatsou, *Ο αδελφός μου Γιώργος Σεφέρης* (Athens 1980) 122, 124–5, 139–40, and 149.

character.<sup>48</sup> Closing his brief note, Dux referred to the public as the ultimate judge of this experiment: ‘The public will tell us if it approves of us’.<sup>49</sup> In short, the changes in the structure of the ‘Matinées’ primarily intended to benefit the audience—the noun ‘public’ itself appearing four times in Dux’s one-page note.

Although it might be expected that a state theatre highlights its service to the people, it would be interesting to look at the way in which the aims of the ‘Matinées’ were summarized by Louis Payen, under whose management this project was launched. Introducing the publication *Anthologie des Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie Française*, Payen stated in 1927: ‘The poetry matinees have so nobly served the poets, revealed the great reciters (‘diseurs des vers’), and added the final jewel to the artistic crown of the Comédie-Française, which will be preserved and further embellished’.<sup>50</sup> Thus first came the poets, then the masterly reciters and, finally, the institution itself, whose prestige was augmented by this project. The lack of reference to the audience implies that the ‘Matinées’ were not originally conceived as an educational project, or, at least, that their organizers were not so concerned with stressing that aspect, as they were in 1945, when the French Ministry of Education was developing new strategies to ensure that ‘culture and people will finally be reconciled’.<sup>51</sup>

## Popularization

In Greece, Theotokas employed a similar rhetoric when he claimed that the main objective of the ‘Literary Evenings’ was to make literature accessible to the masses. In his words:

The aim of the Literary Evenings is easily understandable. We want to assist in making the treasures of our literature the property of the wide popular masses; so that they cease to be confined to a few connoisseurs, and become, as far as it is possible nowadays, intellectual nourishment for the masses.<sup>52</sup>

In the same article, eloquently titled ‘Literature to the people’, Theotokas further elaborated on the popularizing character of this project, pointing to the affordable ticket prices and the inclusion of explanatory comments that would facilitate audience understanding (‘a speaker [...] will explain in a few words the performed texts [...] and will highlight which parts deserve most attention’). Lastly, Theotokas called on other intellectuals for their assistance in advertising this project (‘We are making an effort to bring literature closer to the people, but people should be aware of it’).

48 P. Dux, ‘Les Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie-Française’, in *Les Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie-Française: Programme de la saison 1944–1945* (Paris [n.d.]).

49 Dux, ‘Les Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie-Française’.

50 L. Payen, ‘Avant-propos’ in *Anthologie des Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie Française. Tome second: 1921–1925* (Paris 1927) 2.

51 Quoted in B. Rigby, ‘The reconstruction of culture’, 147.

52 G. Theotokas, ‘Η λογοτεχνία προς το λαό’.

One of the first bodies that responded to Theotokas' call was the left-wing journal *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα*, which, in November 1945, note: 'We congratulate those who conceived this worthy initiative [...] because it will contribute to a broader understanding of our literature from our audience'.<sup>53</sup> This is admittedly strange, considering that the 'Literary Evenings' was a product of the official state, whereas the *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα* often voiced harsh criticism of the post-*Dekemvriana* state policies. Yet the philosophy of the 'Literary Evenings' was so astonishingly close to the theoretical proclamations of the Greek Left that this seems to have outweighed any reservations relating to the institutional profile of this project.

As far as educational policy is concerned, the position of the Left was clearly articulated in May 1944, at the first meeting of the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA) which was established in 1944 to administer the liberated areas controlled by EAM. The views expressed back then by PEEA's Secretary of Education were later reproduced in the pages of *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα*, under the heading 'Popular Education': 'In the emerging people's state, which is founded upon the heroic struggle of the Greek people, education should be the property of the people'.<sup>54</sup> As was seen above, the claim to make knowledge accessible to the public ('κτῆμα του λαού') was also invoked by Theotokas as the aim of the 'Literary Evenings' ('κτῆμα των πλατύτερων λαϊκών στρωμάτων'). This coincidence cannot be interpreted as evidence of EAM's influence on Theotokas, for equality of educational opportunity was high on the agenda of Greek radical liberals even before the war.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, when, in November 1944, Papandreou announced his intended educational reforms, he affirmed that his programme aimed at 'elevating the intellectual level of the large masses'.<sup>56</sup>

After the collapse of the Papandreou cabinet, the succeeding Plastiras government moved in the same direction in terms of its educational policy. As Minister of Education, Amantos prepared a draft bill for the establishment of local libraries throughout rural areas.<sup>57</sup> A few months later, the same issue would be taken up by the left-wing *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα*: 'Today, even in the smallest mountain villages, there is a true thirst for knowledge and learning'.<sup>58</sup> Having previously observed the developments at the NT, it comes as no surprise that Amantos' bill elicited mocking responses from the right-wing press.<sup>59</sup> These examples aptly illustrate that, despite

53 'Μια καλή ιδέα' [unsigned editorial note], *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα* 28–9 (1945) 2.

54 Quoted in R. Imvrioti, 'Η λαϊκή παιδεία', *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα* 22 (1945) 12.

55 See Hatzivassiliou, *Ελληνικός φιλελευθερισμός*, 194–5.

56 G. Theotokas, 'Εκπαιδευτική πολιτική', *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 21 Nov. 1944, reprinted in *Πολιτικά κείμενα*, 175–7.

57 See K. Amantos, 'Η Δημοτική γλώσσα και η Παιδεία', *Νέα Εστία* 435 (1945) 618.

58 'Βιβλία και βιβλιοθήκες για το λαό' [unsigned editorial note], *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα* 7 (1945) 2.

59 See 'Ζαφειρίτσας φερετζές', *Εστία*, 30 March 1945; yet Amantos was explicitly accused of being a communist when he attempted to legislate demotic as the official Greek language; see Amantos, 'Η Δημοτική γλώσσα και η Παιδεία'.

their profound ideological differences, both the centrist governments of the post-Liberation period and the Left argued for the democratization of education—a cause which made them a common target for the Right.

Alongside the demand for popular education, left-wing intellectuals similarly underlined the need to popularize literature and the performing arts; ‘people are thirsty for spectacles’, as the leftist author and playwright Giorgos Kotzioulas wrote in 1944.<sup>60</sup> However, the conviction that the war had brought about a change in the relationship between art and the public was at the time shared by numerous intellectuals, regardless of their ideological background. In 1945, for instance, Sikelianos declared, through an allusion to the ‘Ode to Joy’ from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, that the end of the war signalled the beginning of an era in which the gap between artist and society was being bridged: ‘the Craftsman will be the first to announce [...] the beginning, the triumphal inner route, the genuine culmination of the long-awaited Universal Social Symphony: Joy! Joy!’.<sup>61</sup> In the same vein, Elytis maintained that ‘his [intellectual’s] engagement to the state is now confirmed’.<sup>62</sup> Elias Venezis sounded equally optimistic when arguing that, in 1946, theatre held unprecedented sway among popular audiences: ‘Now that, for the first time, the popular masses have moved to the front line of public life, this brings them closer to theatre, where they seek joy and emotion’.<sup>63</sup>

Theatre’s growing popularity, observed from mid-1943 onwards,<sup>64</sup> was intertwined with the spreading of the resistance movement, and was heightened by the fact that theatrical performances offered a rare opportunity for collective gatherings in occupied Athens. The renewed social function of theatre might explain why many members of the Generation of the 1930s, who joined the NT in 1945, started their involvement with theatrical affairs during the war. Besides Theotokas, and his wartime turn towards dramatic form,<sup>65</sup> Gatsos too was preoccupied with translating Lorca’s *Blood Wedding*, which was published by the Ikaros publishing house in 1945.<sup>66</sup> As for Dimaras, he taught literature at the NT’s Drama School (1941–6),<sup>67</sup> while both

60 Diary entry, dated 10 July 1944; quoted in G. Kotzioulas, *Θέατρο στα βουνά* (Athens 1976) 44–5.

61 A. Sikelianos, ‘Η τέχνη και η εποχή’ [survey], *Νέα Εστία* 433 (1945) 510.

62 O. Elytis, ‘Πνεύμα και πολιτική’; also indicative of Elytis’ confidence in this newly forged relationship is his article’s subtitle: ‘The war opened up new intellectual horizons for popular masses towards a new, better era’.

63 E. Venezis, ‘Το θέατρο και η εποχή’ [survey], *Νέα Εστία* 450 (1946) 423.

64 See Koukourikou, ‘Ελληνικό θέατρο και ιστορία’, 33–4.

65 For Theotokas’ wartime production, which he later labelled as ‘popular theatre’ [*Θεατρικά έργα Α΄. Νεοελληνικό λαϊκό θέατρο* (Athens 1965)], see Petrakou, *Ο Θεοτοκάς του θεάτρου*, 45–223.

66 The play was originally meant to be staged at the NT in the 1945–6 season, together with other productions which were eventually left out of the repertoire, including Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in a new translation by Seferis; see Board Meeting Minutes, 29 May 1945.

67 See L. Sapounaki-Drakaki and M. Tzogia-Moatsou, *Η Δραματική Σχολή του Εθνικού Θεάτρου* (Athens 2011) 490.



Theotokas and Elytis gave seminars at the private drama school of Giannoulis Sarandidis,<sup>68</sup> which operated from 1940 to 1944.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, EAM also placed considerable weight on organizing and financially supporting various theatrical enterprises. Apart from the itinerant troupes performing in the mountains of rural Greece,<sup>70</sup> EAM was also involved in the operation of the Athenian 'People's Theatre' (November–December 1944),<sup>71</sup> and its successor, the 'United Artists' (June 1945–October 1946). In line with EAM's educational policy, these troupes programmatically aimed at popularizing the art of theatre; the mission of the 'United Artists', for instance, was clearly outlined in the organization's Statute:

(a) to reach large popular masses, (b) to offer intellectual nourishment on the basis of true art, (c) that the essence of this art should conform to the local and international reality.<sup>72</sup>

The role of theatre as 'intellectual nourishment' echoes Theotokas' statements quoted at the outset, where this metaphor was used to describe the 'Literary Evenings'. Yet, even though the NT and the 'United Artists' built on the same rhetorical ground, an essential difference lies in the means by which they sought to achieve their popularizing purposes. As will be shown, whereas the 'United Artists' presented a type of spectacle imbued with allusions to 'local and international reality', the NT chose to reintroduce the literary past or, to quote Theotokas, 'the treasures of our literature'.

## Canonization

The 'Literary Evenings' of the season 1945–6 consisted of four performances (numbered A' to Δ'), which were all restaged for at least a second evening.<sup>73</sup> The literary texts were recited by students of the NT Drama School, whereas the intervening introductory notes

68 See D. Dimopoulos, *Ένας σκηνοθέτης θυμάται...* (Athens 1998) 60; for Seferis' visits to Sarandidis' drama school in September 1940, see G. Seferis, *Μέρες Γ' (1934–1940)* (Athens 1977) 235–6.

69 The launch of (mostly short-lived) drama schools in Athens during the war, such as the schools of Sarandidis, Marika Kotopouli, Vasilis Rotas and, of course, Karolos Koun, is a phenomenon that surely deserves further scrutiny, especially when viewed in the light of theatre's importance to the national war effort and the resistance movement.

70 On EAM's 'theatre in the mountains' see, for instance, L. Myrsiades and K. Myrsiades, *Cultural Representation in Historical Resistance: Complexity and Construction in Greek Guerrilla Theater* (Cranbury, NJ 1999); A. Vogiatzoglou, *Ποίηση και πολεμική. Μια βιογραφία του Γιώργου Κοτζιούλα* (Athens 2015) 161–91.

71 On the 'People's Theatre' ('Θέατρο του Λαού') as the first politically engaged theatre group ever founded in Greece see Stamatorpoulou, *Το νεοελληνικό θέατρο στα χρόνια της καθεκτικής δημοκρατίας*, 91–3.

72 Stored in the archive of the actress/member of the 'United Artists' troupe, Aspasia Papatthasiou; quoted in Koukourikou, 'Ελληνικό θέατρο και ιστορία', 150.

73 Only the first Evening was given three times (23 Nov. 1945, 30 Nov. 1945, 2 Feb. 1946); the second, third and fourth Evenings were staged twice (14 Jan. 1946/21 Jan. 1946, 11 Mar. 1946/18 Mar. 1946 and 29 Apr. 1946/5 May 1946, respectively).

were read by senior members of the NT troupe. According to the printed programme of the first Literary Evening:

The programmes are arranged by the Directorate-General in cooperation with Mr K. Th. Dimaras, professor at the [National Theatre] Drama School, and authors, Mr Odysseus Elytis and Mr Nikos Gatsos. The artistic supervision of the Literary Evenings has been assigned to the director, Mr Sokratis Karandinos. Responsible for the [mode of] recitation of the poems included in the first Literary Evening is Mrs Elli Grigoriadi, professor at the [National Theatre] Drama School.

Not all of the above contributors receive mention in the programmes of the next Literary Evenings; only Karandinos and Grigoriadi are credited in the programme of the second Evening, while the two remaining programmes mention (besides Karandinos and Grigoriadi) that ‘the introductory notes are drawn up by the Directorate-General and Mr K. Th. Dimaras, professor at the Drama School’.<sup>74</sup> One can only speculate either that Elytis and Gatsos dropped out of this project after its premiere, or that their names were merely effaced from the programmes as their involvement in the NT had attracted some negative attention, which will be discussed below.<sup>75</sup>

In terms of overall design, the basic difference between the French ‘*Matinées Poétiques*’ and their Greek version is already evident in their respective titles: from ‘poetry’ to ‘literary’ evenings. This hints at the inclusion of prose in the ‘Literary Evenings’ which, in turn, reflects the organizers’ intention to offer a panoramic image of modern Greek literary tradition. As Theotokas put it, ‘all timbres of Greek literature will be heard, from the Akritic cycle to the present day’.<sup>76</sup> This broad chronological spectrum was not divided into four sequences/Evenings, but each Evening comprised exemplary texts drawn from all stages in the development of modern Greek literature (figs. 3, 4). In particular, each Evening was divided into two parts, of which the first opened with a folk song, followed by an excerpt from a Cretan Renaissance play, and poems representative of the School of the Ionian Islands and the Old Athenian School. The first part of each Evening closed with a prose text, dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As for the second part, it covered the poetic production of a much shorter period, stretching roughly from the 1880s to the 1920s.

Leaving aside folk poetry and three other anonymous texts,<sup>77</sup> the series presented the work of 36 individual authors. The following table lists these authors, according to the

74 *Γ' Λογοτεχνική Απογευματινή* and *Δ' Λογοτεχνική Απογευματινή* [printed programmes]; National Theatre of Greece, Archive, Press Clippings (1945–6).

75 Their contribution to the Literary Evenings, however, is acknowledged again in Theotokas’ informal report of his term of office, published in April 1946; G. Theotokas, ‘Η πρώτη μεταπολεμική περίοδος του Εθνικού Θεάτρου’, 468.

76 G. Theotokas, ‘Η λογοτεχνία προς το λαό’.

77 Two sonnets from the collection of religious poems *Άνθη ευλαβείας* (1708), included in the third Evening, and an excerpt from the pastoral idyll *Η Βοσκοπούλα* (ca. 1600), performed in the fourth Evening.

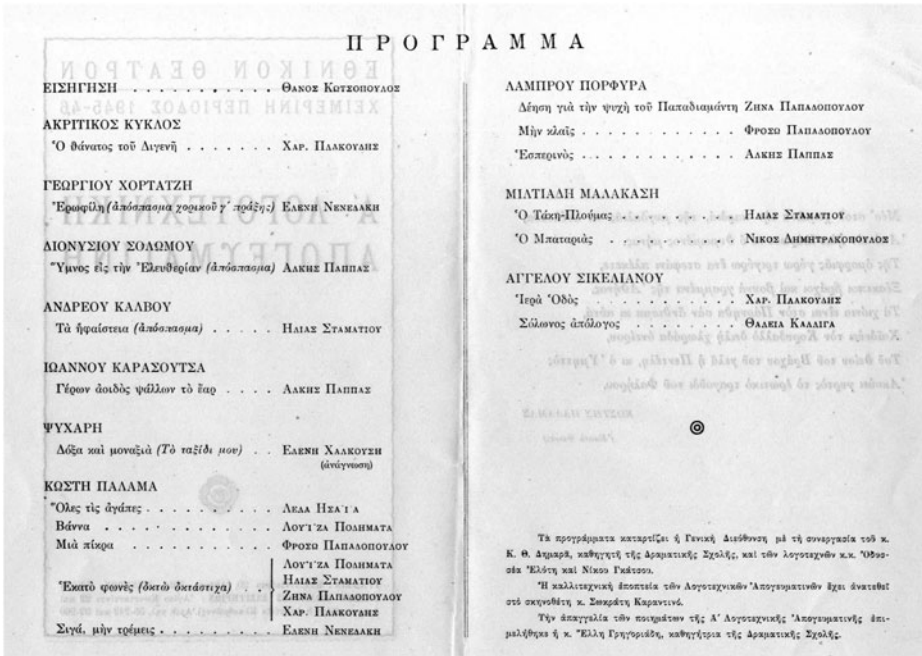


Fig. 3. Printed programme of the first 'Literary Evening', November 1945. © National Theatre of Greece.

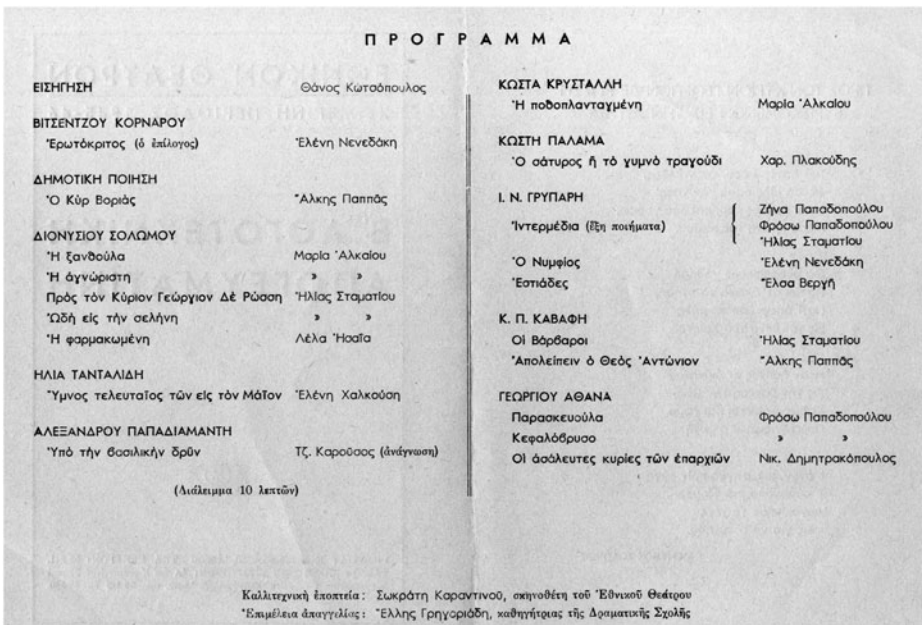


Fig. 4. Printed programme of the second 'Literary Evening', January 1946. © National Theatre of Greece.

number of performed texts corresponding to each, starting from the ones who enjoyed greater visibility in these events:

AUTHORS	TEXTS PERFORMED
Kostis Palamas (1859–1943)	8
Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857)	7
C. P. Cavafy (1863–1933)	5
Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1951)	4
Georgios Athanas (1893–1987) Georgios Drosinis (1859–1951) Ioannis Gryparis (1870–1942) Lorentzos Mavilis (1860–1912) Zacharias Papandoniou (1877–1940) Lambros Porfyras (1879–1932)	3
Konstantinos Chatzopoulos (1868–1920) Argyris Eftaliotis (1849–1923) Kostas Karyotakis (1896–1928) Miltiadis Malakasis (1869–1943) Alexandros Pallis (1851–1935) Sotiris Skipis (1881–1952) Georgios Vizyenos (1849–1896)	2
Georgios Chortatsis (1550–1660) Ion Dragoumis (1878–1920) Andreas Kalvos (1792–1869) Ioannis Karasoutsas (1824–1873) Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) Adamantios Korais (1748–1833) Vitsentzos Kornaros (1553–1613) Kostas Krystallis (1868–1894) Apostolos Melachrinou (1880–1952) Kostas Ouranis (1890–1953) Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851–1911) Dimitrios Paparrigopoulos (1843–1873) Yannis Psycharis (1854–1929) Alexandros R. Rangavis (1809–1892) Ilias Tantalidis (1818–1876) Aristotelis Valaoritis (1824–1879) Kostas Varnalis (1884–1974) Ioannis Vilaras (1771–1823) Petros Vlastos (1879–1941)	1

The largest group consists of authors represented by one text (nineteen authors), followed by those represented by two texts (seven authors), three texts (six authors), and more than three texts (four authors). However, the impression of a certain hierarchy is undermined when taking into account the varying length of the performed works. For, while the majority of these texts were poems of relatively short length, there were also many excerpts drawn from verse plays, prose texts or much longer poems.<sup>78</sup> Thus,

78 It is worth noting that only 8 out of the 85 selected poetic texts (9.41%) were sections extracted from longer poems; the latter were by Solomos, Kalvos, Valaoritis, Rangavis, Paparrigopoulos, Palamas and Kazantzakis.

although Mavilis, for instance, was represented by three sonnets and Kazantzakis by one passage from his epic poem *The Odyssey*, one can imagine that equal stage time was given to both. Such a balanced arrangement draws our attention to the prominence given to the poets who rank first (Palamas, Solomos, Cavafy and Sikelianos), whose work featured in more than one Evening.<sup>79</sup>

Another notable feature of the above table is the complete absence of women authors; yet the dominance of male voices was mitigated during the actual events, where an almost equal number of texts were assigned to female and male performers (forty-seven and forty-five texts, respectively). Moreover, out of a total of thirty-six authors, only eight were alive at the time these events took place (22%). Most of them, however, were in their sixties, and thereby belonged to older literary generations. The absence of younger authors had obvious consequences for both the form and content of the performed texts. In terms of form, free-verse poetry was left out of this project altogether; even the youngest poet featuring in the series, Georgios Athanas, was stylistically tied to the past, using traditional metre throughout his work. In addition, since none of the anthologized works was written after 1940, the series was devoid of poems that thematized recent experiences of war and resistance. This put the 'Literary Evenings' into sharp contrast with a current trend in public poetry speaking, evident both inside and outside Greece, according to which contemporary poems with a powerful topical dimension were favoured as recitation pieces.

The 'Matinées poétiques' of the 1944–5 season, for instance, commenced with a performance devoted to the 'Poètes de la Résistance' (fig. 5).<sup>80</sup> In Greece, Kotzioulas' EAM-funded theatre troupe ('Popular Stage'), which continued its tours in the first months after the Liberation, regularly performed poems inspired by contemporary events, marked in the programme as 'occasional verses' ('επίκαιροι στίχοι') (fig. 6).<sup>81</sup> More tellingly though, in 1946, EAM attempted to put forward its own canon through a recitation anthology titled *Small Anthology: Poems of Struggle for Recitation*.<sup>82</sup> A comparison between the contents of this book and those of the 'Literary Evenings' shows that, while the NT was preoccupied with the literary past, EAM concentrated on the literary present. In particular, of the twenty-two authors included in the *Small Anthology*, only one (Palamas) was not alive at the time of its publication. Women poets were also represented, albeit to a limited extent (9%). The main thread that tied the anthologized poems together was their occasional character, evident already in their titles, which alluded to sites of massacres or executions by the

79 Solomos' and Palamas' poems were heard in three Evenings (A', B' and Γ'); both Cavafy and Sikelianos were anthologized in two Evenings (B'/Γ' and A'/Δ', respectively).

80 For the oral circulation of French resistance poetry during the 1940s, see Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets*, 16–18.

81 Some of these occasional poems were both written and performed before audiences by Kotzioulas himself; see Vogiatzoglou, *Ποίηση και πολεμική*, 179.

82 *Μικρή ανθολογία. Ποήματα του αγώνα για απαγγελία* (Athens 1946). The volume appeared as a publication of EAM's local unit of the Athenian Koukaki district.

LES MATINÉES POÉTIQUES DE LA COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE	
SAISON 1944-1945	
●	
1944	
Octobre . . . . .	Poètes de la Résistance.
Décembre . . . . .	Voltaire.
	La Poésie Anglaise.
1945	
Janvier . . . . .	La Poésie Américaine.
Mars . . . . .	La Poésie Russe.
	Paul Claudel.
Avril : Samedi 21 (Abonnement)	} Paul Valéry.
Samedi 28 (Hors Ab <sup>ment</sup> )	
Mai : Samedi 12 (Abonnement)	} Jean Giraudoux.
Samedi 26 (Hors Ab <sup>ment</sup> )	
Juin : Samedi 16 (Abonnement)	} Charles Péguy.
Samedi 23 (Hors Ab <sup>ment</sup> )	
●	

Fig. 5. Performance dates and contents of the 1944–5 ‘Matinées poétiques’ of the Comédie-Française. Published in *Les Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie-Française: Programme de la saison 1944–1945* (Paris [n.d.]).

Nazis (e.g. ‘The song of Distomo’, ‘Kaisariani’, ‘Kokkinia cries out’).<sup>83</sup> The emphasis on thematic over stylistic criteria explains why, next to well-known leftist authors such as Markos Avgeris or Nikiforos Vrettakos, we encounter amateur poets such as the actors Aimilios Veakis and Dinos Dimopoulos.

By contrast, the modernist writers behind the ‘Literary Evenings’ viewed the resurgence of occasional poetry with overt scepticism. Theotokas, for instance, clearly distinguished between ‘great popular art’ and works imbued with topical references:

Tomorrow’s society will most likely turn to a similar ideal of great popular art. I use the adjective ‘popular’ here in its broad and essentially intellectual sense, in the sense that the tragedies of Aeschylus or Shakespeare constituted ‘popular’ art [...] As for the works of sociopolitical topicality, preaching, polemic, and propaganda, [...] every well-informed individual knows that they are destined to quickly fall into oblivion.<sup>84</sup>

Likewise, Gatsos noted that ‘our Albanian war and the Greek people’s struggle for resistance should not end up being themes — as they are about to — for ephemeral

83 See N. Vranas, ‘Το τραγούδι του Δίστομου’, K. Kalantzis, ‘Καισαριανή’, and K. Marinis, ‘Η Κοκκινιά βροντολαλεί’ in *Μικρή ανθολογία*, 9, 13 and 14 respectively.

84 G. Theotokas, ‘Οι πνευματικοί μας άνθρωποι εμπρός στα μεταπολεμικά προβλήματα’ [survey], *Ελεύθερα Γράμματα* 15 (1945) 4.



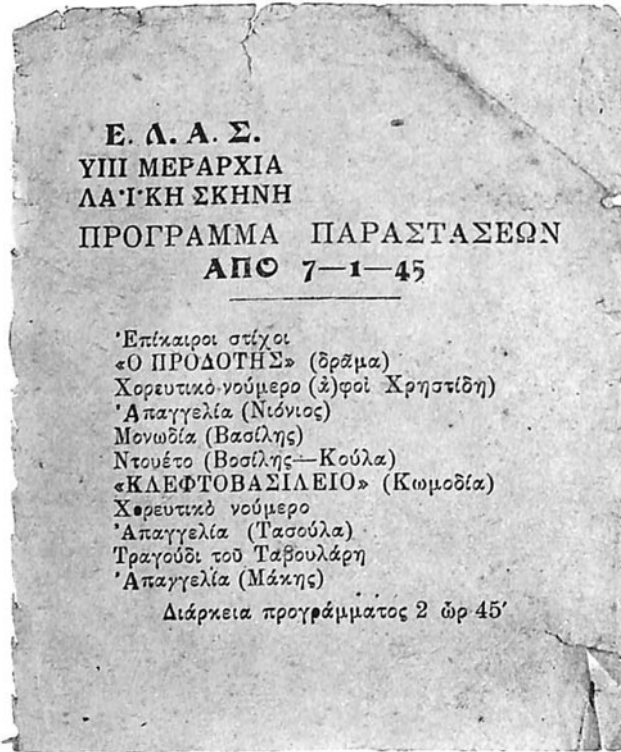


Fig. 6. Printed programme of the ELAS 'Popular Stage' touring troupe, January 1945. Reproduced in G. Kotzioulas, *Θέατρο στα βουνά* (Athens 1976) 48.

successes or political exploitation'. Instead, Gatsos pointed out that what Greek intellectuals have yet to accomplish is to introduce the national literary tradition to a wider public: 'It was the duty of our intellectuals to familiarize thirsty audiences with the most enduring values of our land; Kalvos, Solomos, Papadiamantis, Karkavitsas, Makriyannis, Dragoumis, Palamas, and so many others'.<sup>85</sup> The remainder of this section shows how the image of literary tradition created through the 'Literary Evenings' represents a new approach, one that embodies the conception of the canon put forward by the Generation of the 1930s.

Although the great variety of texts that marked the programmes of the 'Literary Evenings' may give the impression that this project conveyed a conventional image of the canon, it appears that this image did not match any of the versions of the canon already in place. The literature curriculum at school and university level offers a useful benchmark against which the contents of the 'Literary Evenings' can be contrasted. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the war suspended the publication of the University of Athens yearbook for most of the 1940s (1940–8); still, the pre-1940 issues provide an

85 N. Gatsos, 'Η κρίση της πνευματικής ζωής', *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 24 June 1945.

adequate picture of the courses in modern Greek literature taught by Nikos Veis, Professor of Medieval and Modern Greek Literature (1925–46), whereas the post-1948 yearbooks outline the courses designed by Georgios Zoras, holder of the second chair in this subject from 1942 to 1982. Thus the surviving yearbooks dating from 1930 to 1950 reveal that the literature curriculum hardly extended beyond the production of the Generation of the 1880s. The only references to twentieth-century literature appear as part of two courses on Greek prose writers, given by Veis in 1936–7 and 1937–8.<sup>86</sup> In October 1945, most faculty members voted against the conversion of the second chair in Medieval and Modern Greek into a chair devoted exclusively to Modern Greek, one of them arguing that ‘modern Greek literature has been scantily cultivated’.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps it was the limited scope of the university canon that urged Gatsos to make the rather exaggerated claim: ‘The School of Philosophy of the University [of Athens] does not even really acknowledge Solomos’.<sup>88</sup>

Turning to the school textbooks of the same period (*Νεοελληνικά Αναγνώσματα*), published by the state-run Organization for the Publication of School Books (OESV), their broad chronological scope, which embraced the post-Palamas literary generation, brought them closer to the ‘Literary Evenings’. Yet two of the most visible authors in the NT productions, Cavafy and Sikelianos, were absent from the literature textbooks of the mid-1940s, and would enter the school canon as late as 1976.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the only left-wing poet presented by the NT, Kostas Varnalis, was also excluded from school textbooks until 1976, a year in which the school canon opened up to include other authors whom we encountered in the ‘Literary Evenings’, such as Kazantzakis and Karyotakis.<sup>90</sup>

A different take on the canon can be traced in the literary histories published before the war. The two most comprehensive endeavours of this kind were the histories written by Elias Voutieridis (1924–7 and 1933) and Aristos Kambanis (1925), which both covered the period up to the 1930s.<sup>91</sup> Even though these publications agree, in terms of their scope, with the ‘Literary Evenings’, their adherence to the agenda of demoticism distances them from the canonical scheme proposed by the NT. Kambanis,

86 See ‘Μυθιστόρημα και διήγημα του ΙΘ και Κ αιώνας’, *Επετηρίς του Πανεπιστημιακού Έτους 1936–1937* (Athens 1937) 125; ‘Διηγηματογραφία του ΙΘ και Κ αιώνας (1850–1930)’, *Επετηρίς του Πανεπιστημιακού Έτους 1937–1938* (Athens 1938) 123.

87 See ‘Συνεδρία Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής’, 15 Oct. 1945; Historical Archive of the University of Athens.

88 N. Gatsos, ‘Η πνευματική προπαγάνδα στο εξωτερικό’. *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 22 July 1945.

89 Prior to 1976, Cavafy and Sikelianos were represented (by one poem each) in a textbook published in 1931, which fell out of use after the establishment of OESV in 1937; see Ch. Koumbarou-Chanioti, *Τα Νεοελληνικά Αναγνώσματα στη Μέση Εκπαίδευση. Συγγραφείς και ανθολογημένα κείμενα (1884–1977)* (Athens 2003) 78 and 152, respectively.

90 See Koumbarou-Chanioti, *Τα Νεοελληνικά Αναγνώσματα*, 47, 78 and 86, respectively.

91 See E. Voutieridis, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας. Από των μέσων του ΙΕ΄ αιώνας μέχρι των νεώτατων χρόνων*, 2 vols (Athens 1924–7), and *Σύντομη ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας (1000–1930)* (Athens 1933); A. Kambanis, *Ιστορία της νέας ελληνικής λογοτεχνίας (1000 μ.Χ.-1900)* (Alexandria 1925), and *Ιστορία της νέας ελληνικής λογοτεχνίας (έως το 1932)* (Athens 1933).

in his preface, stated that 'the main subject of this work is demotic [literary] production', paying scant attention to works written in the purist (*katharevousa*) language.<sup>92</sup> Voutieridis appeared to be less militant, claiming that he made no discrimination based on linguistic criteria.<sup>93</sup> This statement is undermined, however, by his negative stance towards poets who wrote in a more idiosyncratic language, such as Kalvos and Cavafy. Commenting on the latter, for instance, Voutieridis found his philosophy to be 'shallow and trivial', and went on to interpret his widespread fame as 'merely a trend, which will soon fade away'.<sup>94</sup>

As Giorgos Kechagioglou notes, the first literary history to reinforce Cavafy's canonical status and overcome the 'demotocist syndrome' was Dimaras' *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας*, published two years after the project under review (1948–9).<sup>95</sup> This brings more attention to the role of Dimaras in arranging this project, which becomes particularly apparent in the way the NT presented poets who wrote in *katharevousa*; introducing Ioannis Karasoutsas, for instance, the NT underlined the poet's 'subtlety of emotions' and 'delicate appreciation of the natural world',<sup>96</sup> in a manner echoing the way the same poet was portrayed in Dimaras' *History*: 'The new element which he [Karasoutsas] introduces is a true sensitivity towards nature'.<sup>97</sup> The inclusion of *katharevousa* in the staged events extended the vocal palette of the series, generating audible contrasts between the performed works. In the first Evening, for instance, Karasoutsas' poem 'Γέρων αοιδός ψάλλων το έαρ' was delivered immediately before the manifesto of the demotocist movement, Psycharis' *To ταξίδι μου*.

By combining *katharevousa* with demotic, prose with poetry, and oral with written literature, the 'Literary Evenings' proposed a version of the canon that defied generic, linguistic or stylistic oppositions. According to Theotokas, this new approach to the canon should be entirely attributed to his own generation; in reviewing the first volume of Dimaras' *History*, Theotokas regarded it as evidence that 'our generation has apparently reached intellectual maturity'.<sup>98</sup> Also, when, in 1947, Theotokas gave his first lecture on the Generation of the 1930s, he noted among its achievements:

[...] assimilation and appropriation of the modern Greek intellectual past in its entirety. Overcoming the old antitheses. Merging them into a broad modern Greek synthesis which harmonically combines: demotic tradition, Solomos

92 See Kambanis, *Ιστορία* (1925) 9; cf. V. Apostolidou, 'Δημοτικισμός και ιστορία της λογοτεχνίας: Αρίστος Καμπάνης', in *Ο Κωστής Παλαμάς ιστορικός της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας* (Athens 1992) 360–4.

93 See Voutieridis, *Ιστορία*, II, 121–3.

94 Voutieridis, *Σύντομη ιστορία*, 387.

95 See G. Kechagioglou, 'Οι ιστορίες της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας', *Μαντατοφόρος* 15 (1980) 18.

96 See 'Α' Λογοτεχνική Απογευματινή. Εισήγηση', ASCSA, Gennadius Library Archives, George Theotokas Papers, Box 39, Folder 1.

97 K. Th. Dimaras, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας. Από τον ρομαντισμό ως την εποχή μας* (Athens 1949) 33.

98 G. Theotokas, 'Κ. Θ. Δημαρά: *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας. Τόμος α'*', *Νέα Εστία* 521 (1948) 382.

and Kalvos, Makriyannis, Psycharis and Papadiamantis, Palamas and Cavafy. Hence: a synthesis of modern Greek intellectual traditions which, till yesterday, seemed incompatible.<sup>99</sup>

The concept of a ‘broad modern Greek synthesis’ was already implied in Theotokas’ landmark essay *Free Spirit* (1929), where he argued that the essence of the modern Greek character would be best captured by ‘a cluster of contradictions: Korais-Solomos-Psycharis-Palamas-Dragoumis’. To these names he then added Cavafy,<sup>100</sup> but rushed to clarify that ‘this catalogue should by no means be restrictive’ but ‘open to the unexpected possibilities the future holds’.<sup>101</sup> Seferis, in his influential essay ‘Dialogue on poetry’ (1938), leaned towards an equally ‘open’ approach to the canon; denying the validity of stable aesthetic principles, Seferis argued in favour of the ‘constant renewal’ of art, as ‘every work of art that comes to be added to the series [of great works of art] affirms and at the same time modifies the meaning of the older masterpieces’.<sup>102</sup> The question that arises at this point is whether, in their plea for an open-minded approach to literary tradition, the members of the Generation of the 1930s intended to create a canon flexible enough to later accommodate their own modernist output.

In this respect, the period examined here has a twofold significance for our understanding of the relationship of the Generation of the 1930s to the literary canon. For this period not only saw core members of this literary group publicizing their readings of the canon,<sup>103</sup> but also witnessed a series of attempts to present this generation as the newest addition to the canon. For instance, while the modernist writers engaged with the NT popularized Cavafy and Sikelianos through the ‘Literary Evenings’, Andreas Karandonis, in the pages of the *Anglo-Greek Review*, portrayed the same modernists as ‘the Palamas, Cavafy and Sikelianos of our times’.<sup>104</sup> This article gave rise to the earliest attacks against the Generation of the 1930s and its networking strategies; the theatre and literary critic Michael Rodas, a former member of the NT’s Artistic Committee, wrote an the article entitled ‘A new kind of...

99 ‘The literary generation of the 1930s’ (outline of Theotokas’ lecture given on 22 November 1947), reprinted in Tziouvas, *Ο μύθος της γενιάς του τριάντα*, 566.

100 G. Theotokas, *Ελεύθερο πνεύμα* (Athens 1929) 28; for Theotokas’ contribution to the canonization of Cavafy, see V. Apostolidou, ‘Ο Θεοτοκάς και η λογοτεχνική παράδοση’, *Νέα Εστία* 1784 (2005) 987–8.

101 Theotokas, *Ελεύθερο πνεύμα*, 29.

102 G. Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, trans. R. Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (London 1967) 81.

103 In addition to the ‘Literary Evenings’, consider a series of ten lectures held at the Parnassos Literary Association (1946), five of which were delivered by intellectuals associated with the NT (Theotokas, Dimaras, Seferis, Elytis and Karandinos), presenting topics such as Greek Romanticism, *Erotokritos*, and the Memoirs of General Makriyannis.

104 A. Karandonis, ‘Η σύγχρονη ελληνική ποίηση’, *Αγγλοελληνική Επιθεώρηση* 1.9 (Nov. 1945) 9; the poets presented in this article were Seferis, Elytis, Embiricos, Engonopoulos, Andoniou, Sarandaris, Drivas, and Gatsos.

“intellectual collaborators”. The “heirs” of Solomos’, which appeared on the front page of the widely circulated daily *Ta Néa*.<sup>105</sup> Using the heavily charged term ‘collaborator’,<sup>106</sup> Rodas targeted Seferis, Gatsos, Embiricos and Engonopoulos, pointing both to their strong presence in the public sphere (‘they penetrate into esteemed intellectual and artistic institutions’), and their representation as legitimate successors of canonical poets (‘[they] will be “incorporated” into the modern Greek poetic tradition!’). Speaking of Gatsos, Rodas referred to him as a co-organizer of the ‘despicable Literary Evenings’, ironically suggesting that his poems might as well be presented at the NT.

Despite a tone of bitterness stemming from Rodas’ recent departure from the NT,<sup>107</sup> there may be an element of truth in the allegation that the ‘Literary Evenings’ implicitly paved the way for the canonization of modernist works. The appearance of prose texts in these events supports this hypothesis, given that a common complaint about modernist verse was that it blurred the boundaries between poetry and prose. The ‘Literary Evenings’ too undermined rigid distinctions between these genres, not simply by juxtaposing them, but also by smoothing out their differences at an auditory level. This brings us to another aspect of this project which further validates its modernist profile: the mode of oral delivery. This aspect was briefly touched upon by Theotokas, who argued that it was the NT’s responsibility to establish a normative manner of reading poetry aloud:

The National Theatre should thus be the place [...] where Greek verses are performed in an exemplary way. [...] The main tendency will be towards simplicity. The old-fashioned pomposity will be abandoned.<sup>108</sup>

Rendered in a ‘simpler’ manner, metrical verses lost something of their sing-song effects, thereby assuming more prosaic overtones. At the same time, this kind of vocal rendering was diametrically at odds with the ‘musical’ approach to recitation cultivated by the NT’s former (and succeeding) director, Rondiris.<sup>109</sup> Themistoklis Athanasiadis-Novas, an eyewitness to the ‘Literary Evenings’, objected to the actors’ performance style, arguing that it aurally equated traditional and modernist poetry. As he remarked in 1949:

If we are to exchange heated pomposity for the coldness of prosaicness, then it is a thousand times better to stick to the pomposity. [...] Modernist poetry is cold,

105 M. Rodas, “Ένα νέο είδος...“πνευματικών δοσιλόγων”. Οι “κληρονόμοι” του Σολωμού”, *Ta Néa*, 6 Dec. 1945.

106 The use of the term provoked the reaction of Theotokas (‘Περίεργα ήθη’, *Καθημερινά Νέα*, 27 Jan. 1946), urging Rodas to reply that he simply made an ‘innocent pun’ (‘Η ελευθερία του πνευματικού ελέγχου’, *Ta Néa*, 30 Jan. 1946).

107 For Rodas’ resignation, due to his disagreement over which director should undertake the staging of Greek tragedies, see his memo to Theotokas, dated 23 April 1945; ASCSA, Gennadius Library Archives, George Theotokas Papers, Box 39, Folder 1.

108 Theotokas, ‘Η λογοτεχνία προς το λαό’.

109 See A. Glytzouris, *Η σκηνοθετική τέχνη στην Ελλάδα. Η ανάδυση και η εδραίωση της τέχνης του σκηνοθέτη στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο* (Heraklion 2011) 386–7.

and so is its recitation. But what about the old poetry of the heart? I've heard an artist reciting in a 'conversational' manner 'Mesolongitiko' by Malakasis, a poet whose verses should not be recited but almost sung!<sup>110</sup>

Thus, far more than the individual texts performed, it was the idea of synthesis underpinning this project, as well as the style of oral delivery, that reflected the modernist aesthetic of its organizers.

As the new director-general of the NT, Rondiris recommended that the 'Literary Evenings' be discontinued, despite their low production costs and the considerable audience numbers they were beginning to attract. Unfortunately, the NT's Archive records the total revenue from ticket sales but not the number of tickets sold. The latter can be estimated only with regard to the first Evening, for which we know the exact price per ticket.<sup>111</sup> Thus the opening Evening, as well as its restaging, gathered an audience of approximately 500 each, which is a low turnout by the standards of the NT, but a rather satisfactory one, if we take into account the specialized nature of this project as well as the severe crisis faced by all Athenian theatres.<sup>112</sup> This project would enjoy impressive commercial success in its subsequent form, the 'Poetry Evenings', launched during Theotokas' second tenure of the same position (1950–2), and permanently discontinued after his final departure. However, as the change in the project's title already implies, the 'Poetry Evenings' of the early 1950s lacked the broadened scope of their predecessor, each Evening being devoted to a specific poet or school of poets, with no ambition to introduce an alternative approach to the literary canon.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusion

Using the 'Literary Evenings' as a paradigm, I have tried to show that, despite the possibility of civil war lurking in the background, Greek cultural life of the years 1945–6 was marked by the same 'oddly optimistic mood' that, according to Tony Judt, transpired across Europe in the aftermath of Liberation.<sup>114</sup> The European origins

110 Th. Athanasiadis-Novas, 'Ποίηση και απαγγελία', *Ελληνική Δημιουργία* 34 (1949) 36; for a positive assessment of the NT's performance techniques, see A. Thyrylos, 'Α' Λογοτεχνική Απογευματινή', *Νέα Εστία* 443 (1945) 1109.

111 Initially, ticket prices were 100 drachmas (full) and 50 (reduced). In 1946, due to inflation, ticket prices—for the other NT productions—soared to 1,200 drachmas (Board Meeting Minutes, 3 Jan. 1946); ticket prices for the 'Literary Evenings' increased as well, but, given Theotokas' intention to keep tickets affordable, we cannot determine the extent.

112 For the several causes of the theatrical crisis of the early post-war period, see G. Ioannidis, *Ξένοι συγγραφείς στο ελληνικό θέατρο (1945–1967). Από τη μεριά των θιάσων* (Athens 2014) 27–40.

113 For instance, the most successful Evening of this second cycle was the one dedicated to the School of the Ionian Islands, which was given four times (January–February 1952), attracting a total audience of 2,872; see National Theatre of Greece, Archive, Press Clippings (1951–2).

114 T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London 2007) 64.



of the 'Literary Evenings', alongside the general international orientation of the NT, reflect the hopes for a new era in international relations exemplified by such bodies as the United Nations. The popularizing nature of this project embodies the post-war quest for the democratization of culture, while the medium of performance itself points to the renewed significance of the spoken word as a means to reach, guide and enlighten popular audiences.

As a mechanism of canonization, the 'Literary Evenings' capture the desire to rewrite literary history after the end of the war, and may be retrospectively identified as heralding iconic canonizing projects, like Dimaras' 1948 *History of Modern Greek Literature*. Though certainly not exhaustive, the content analysis of the 'Literary Evenings' has revealed that the programmes exemplified the broadened approach to the literary canon endorsed by its modernist organizers. On the whole, the appearance of leading exponents of the Generation of the 1930s, such as Theotokas, Seferis, Elytis, and Gatsos, as popularizers, canonizers, but also alleged communists, paints a profoundly different picture of this generation than that of a bourgeois literary group, aloof from the popular aspirations of its time. The 'Literary Evenings' thus open up an important and hitherto unexplored chapter in the history of Greek modernism, inviting further investigation into post-war modernist practices.