

Happiness after death? Demetrios Capetanakis on philosophy and Proust

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Demetrios Capetanakis was one of the first writers to introduce Marcel Proust to the Greek public in the 1930s. His study of Proust's philosophy (hitherto known only in the English and Greek translations of a lecture he delivered in French) survives in manuscript form, both in French and in an earlier German version. An examination of these texts in the context of Proust's early reception allows us to follow Capetanakis' intellectual trajectory, as well as to sketch his particular joint approach to literature and philosophy, which is largely indebted to the works of Plato and Kierkegaard. Capetanakis seeks Proust's philosophy not in the universal laws put forth in his novel, but in the writer's attempt to conceal behind them the real pain and agony that marked his own life. This leads him to a rather unusual philosophical reading of Proust's novel and, in the process, of Plato's Phaedrus.

Keywords: Demetrios Capetanakis; Proust reception; philosophy and literature; *Phaedrus*

Swann ne le savait-il pas par sa propre expérience, et n'était-ce pas déjà, dans sa vie – comme une préfiguration de ce qui devait arriver après sa mort – un bonheur après décès que ce mariage avec cette Odette qu'il avait passionnément aimée – si elle ne lui avait pas plu au premier abord – et qu'il avait épousée quand il ne l'aimait plus, quand l'être qui, en Swann, avait tant souhaité et tant désespéré de vivre toute sa vie avec Odette, quand cet être-là était mort?

Marcel Proust, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*

The early reception of *À la recherche du temps perdu* seems to confirm the fact that although a work's afterlife depends upon its future readers, the work itself has a part in shaping that reading community.¹ The initial biographical and sociological approaches to Proust's novel gradually gave way to philosophical readings and eventually to an increasing interest in the work's poetics. In the short span of a decade, beginning in the

1 M. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I (Paris 1954) 531: 'Ce qu'on appelle la postérité, c'est la postérité de l'œuvre.'

mid-1920s, some of the most important studies of Proust were to see the light of publication, including those of Ernst Robert Curtius, Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, Walter Benjamin, and Samuel Beckett.² Notwithstanding their differences, these studies share a shift in emphasis from the author to the novel and its stylistic, narrative and structural particularities (or peculiarities) – that is, to the novel as autonomous artwork.³ This might come as no surprise to a literary historian: the formal and methodological concerns one traces here would, in the decades to follow, come to be identified as the core elements of New Criticism.

A restless reader, a student of philosophy with a literary bent, Demetrios Capetanakis (1912–44), who spent part of his formative years at Heidelberg and Cambridge and eventually made his name as a poet and critic in wartime London, was certainly well aware of these trends. And yet he seems to have opted for the opposite route: what one witnesses in his essays is an unswerving preoccupation with the life of people (poets, philosophers) which at times seems to weigh more than their works – a preoccupation which became all the more pronounced during the last years of his life in Cambridge and London, as can be glimpsed from the titles of his essays: ‘Rimbaud’, ‘Dostoevsky’, ‘Stefan George’, ‘Charlotte Brontë’, ‘Thomas Gray and Horace Walpole’ – not to mention ‘The Greeks are human beings’. His study of Proust is no exception.⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to view Capetanakis’ essays as mere instances of biographical criticism; his fascination with individual lives is rather to be attributed to his philosophical yearnings. The essayist does not propose to interpret a work through reference to a person’s life, but rather to use the work – in addition to other sources: biographies and autobiographies, the authors’ correspondence and diaries, etc. – to illuminate a person’s life struggle. As a thinker, Capetanakis attempted a bold synthesis of two seemingly discordant traditions, Platonism and existential philosophy, with specific references to the thought of Karl Jaspers, Søren Kierkegaard, and Lev Shestov. He did this, moreover, by turning to literature. It was through his encounter with Proust, Rimbaud, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare and the English metaphysical and romantic poets that he arrived at his view of philosophy as an expression of a person’s life. In light of this view, and of Capetanakis’ overall existentialist leanings, the question of intention

2 E. R. Curtius, *Marcel Proust* (Berlin and Frankfurt 1925); E. Auerbach, ‘Marcel Proust: der Roman der verlorenen Zeit’, *Die Neueren Sprachen* 35 (1927) 16–22; L. Spitzer, ‘Zum Stil Marcel Prousts’, *Stilstudien*, II (Munich 1928) 365–497; W. Benjamin, ‘Zum Bilde Prousts’, *Die literarische Welt* (1929); S. Beckett, *Proust* (London 1931).

3 Walter Benjamin’s essay on Proust might constitute an exception (a fact which accounts for its greater affinity to Capetanakis’ study), although its very title (‘The image of Proust’) and introductory section also suggest the problematics of biographical and autobiographical writings and readings in the post-romantic era. Proust’s ‘lifework’ is discussed in terms of the exceptional.

4 Some of these essays were initially published in John Lehmann’s periodical publication *New Writing and Daylight*. All of them are included in J. Lehmann (ed.), *Demetrios Capetanakis: A Greek Poet in England* (London 1947) – henceforth *GPE*.

becomes one of primary importance in his work (and is not to be limited to what we would habitually qualify as 'authorial').

If it appears curious that a thinker who is so preoccupied with philosophical truth as it relates to the lives of individual historical subjects, who believes moreover that people's lives can be of greater interest than their works, should turn to literature in order to articulate his thought, this might have more to do with the postmodernist legacy that has shaped the sensibilities of our age than with Capetanakis' project itself. The issue is more complex, however, given the fact that two most significant influences on him, Plato and Kierkegaard, were both thinkers straddling the borders between literature and philosophy, consciously employing literary features to distance themselves from their works (most notably, the dialogic form and pseudonymous authorship).⁵ An attempt to disentangle these matters and to explain Capetanakis' choices would inevitably entail an understanding of his notion of philosophy and its relation to literature.

My aim in this article is to explore Capetanakis' joint approach to philosophy and literature through an examination of his study of Marcel Proust.⁶ Because of its subject matter (Proust and philosophy), as well as its complex composition and publication history, the study presents us with several intellectual and methodological challenges, while serving as a good introduction to Capetanakis' own life and work.

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Demetrios Capetanakis' life would certainly cause trouble to any prospective biographer seeking a vantage point from which to narrate it. His premature death – from leukemia in a London hospital on 9 March 1944 at the age of thirty-two – put an abrupt end to a career he was just starting to establish as a poet and essayist in wartime London. To suppose, however, that by that time he had found his niche and voice would be as unwarranted as to entertain the thought of his return to Greece after the end of the war. It is equally likely that the Greek poet would have chosen instead to move to the New World.⁷ What his life trajectory shows (and his essays confirm) is that he was one of those people for whom settling has neither a personal nor an intellectual appeal. Ever since his first uprooting from his native Smyrna in 1922 at the age of ten, Capetanakis' life is marked by a series of displacements which could only partly be attributed to historical circumstance.

The poet-philosopher's geographical and intellectual trajectory allows us to follow important moments in European interwar thought. Educated at the universities of Athens, Heidelberg, and Cambridge, Capetanakis managed, in the short span of his life, to develop ties with an impressive range of intellectuals and artists. As a young scholar in Greece, he studied under the neo-Kantian philosophers Ioannis Theodorakopoulos

5 It is worth noting that Nietzsche, whom Capetanakis read from a very early age, is completely absent from his later writings. His influence is mostly felt in Capetanakis' early study *Από τον αγώνα του ψυχικώς μόνου* (Athens 1934). This might have something to do with Capetanakis' tenet that philosophy (or art) is the expression of one's life and not the other way round.

6 I use the word 'study' as opposed to 'essay' or 'text' for reasons that will become apparent.

7 See Lehmann, 'Introduction', in *GPE* 15.

(1900-81), Constantine Tsatsos (1899-1987), and Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (1902-86), contributing to their quarterly philosophical journal *Αρχαίον Φιλοσοφίας και Θεωρίας των Επιστημών*. He was also a disciple of the renowned classicist Ioannis Sykoutris (1901-37), known for his Platonic fervour and his passion for teaching. At the same time, he associated with a number of representatives of the Generation of the Thirties, including the poet George Seferis with whom he kept a correspondence and the painters Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas and Yannis Tsarouchis, whose work he was among the first to review. At Heidelberg, he studied under Karl Jaspers and was admitted into the circle of Stefan George's students. During the last years of his life in Cambridge and London, he moved in the circle of the British poets of the Thirties, including Edith Sitwell, William Plomer, and Stephen Spender. The most important relationship of his life, however, was his intellectual friendship with the poet and publisher John Lehmann. It was through Lehmann's periodical publications that Capetanakis established himself as a poet and critic in England and acted as a spokesman for Modern Greek culture.⁸

'All poets,' Capetanakis remarks in his essay on Stefan George, 'are made poets by an experience we could call revelation, which during their youth has moved them so deeply that they have to try to express it and speak about it to the world.' And he proceeds with his examples: 'Wordsworth was made a poet by the revelation of nature, Baudelaire by the revelation of sin, Rimbaud by the revelation of happiness and unhappiness, and George by the revelation of the miracle of the human body.'⁹ If the statement has any relevance in his case (which means for the thinker as well as for the poet), we need not go far to discover the self-transforming revelation Capetanakis experienced in his youth: it was, I suggest, his disillusionment with George.¹⁰ His gradual distancing from the aestheticist ideal of the 'dictator poet,' as he calls him, certainly accounts for a marked ethical turn in his later thought. Out of it also emerged his particular view of poetry as the struggle between solidity and dissolution – a view that informs both the remarkable, and yet unpublished, essays on English poetry that he penned during his time at Cambridge¹¹ and his own beautifully crafted cryptograms,¹² which made their way into the *Golden Treasury* of English poetry.¹³

8 Capetanakis' role in the reception of Modern Greek literature, particularly poetry, among English-speaking audiences was pivotal and has yet to be fully acknowledged.

9 'Stefan George', in *GPE* 74.

10 See in particular, *op. cit.*, 73–4. This is one of the rare instances in Capetanakis' essays where the first person is used in an autobiographical/confessional context. Accounts of his disillusionment with George are given by both Lehmann ('Introduction', in *GPE* 13) and Kanellopoulos ('My friend Demetrios Capetanakis', in *GPE* 174).

11 The manuscripts of these essays are housed among the Demetrios Capetanakis Papers in the Gennadius Library in Athens.

12 Used by the poet himself in 'A saint in Piccadilly', the word describes, I believe, all his English poems, where the allusiveness of the language is combined with a puzzling imagery and structure.

13 The poems 'Abel' and 'The Isles of Greece' were included in the 5th edition of *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language, selected and arranged by Francis Turner Palgrave; with a fifth book selected by John Press* (London and Oxford 1964) 523–4.

Capetanakis' reception was largely determined by the editorial choices made in the posthumous collections of his works. Thus, while in the English-speaking world he became known as a 'Greek poet in England', in Greece he is today mostly remembered for his essays on aesthetics.¹⁴ As a consequence of its editorial division along linguistic lines, his written corpus has not been studied systematically as a whole. And yet, it is precisely the dialectics between the parts, periods, and languages of his work that reveal the complexity of his case and merit our attention.

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Capetanakis must have read Proust for the first time as a boy in Smyrna or shortly after he settled in Athens.¹⁵ In his account of their first meeting in Cambridge, Lehmann notes that he was certain to feel intimidated by one who – rumour had it – 'had read *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* through fourteen times'.¹⁶ The French novelist was therefore not just a significant chapter in Capetanakis' life, but a point of constant return. His essay on Proust was first published posthumously in the 1945 volume of *New Writing and Daylight*, translated from the original French into English by Lehmann.¹⁷ The editor notes that this is the translation of a lecture Capetanakis delivered to 'a French Society at Cambridge' and adds: 'An earlier and longer version in German has unfortunately disappeared.'¹⁸ Subsequently, the essay was included in the 1947 volume *A Greek Poet in England*, edited by Lehmann and containing Capetanakis' English poems and essays. At the same time, it was translated into Greek and published in the 1946 tribute volume to Capetanakis of the journal *Nέα Εστία*. The Greek translator, who signs as 'A. A. Σ.', was Anna Sikelianou, Angelos Sikelianos' second wife, who had been acquainted with Capetanakis in Greece. It is almost certain that Anna had no access to the original French lecture but based her translation on Lehmann's English version. To sum up, we are here dealing with four versions of a text in four different languages, of which the two 'originals' (German and French) have never seen the light of publication. In other words, Capetanakis' study of Proust has reached the Greek and English-speaking public only in translation. Luckily, however, the manuscripts of the two 'originals' do survive: that of his French lecture is housed in the Demetrios Capetanakis archive at

14 Until the 1980s, the only edition of Capetanakis' works available to the Greek public was that of *Δοκίμια* (Essays) in the popular Galaxias series (Athens 1962), which included 'Μυθολογία του ωραίου' and 'Έρωσ και χρόνος'. The Harvey edition *Μυθολογία του ωραίου. Δοκίμια και ποιήματα* (Athens and Limni 1988), which is the one available today, includes translations of some of Capetanakis' English essays and of his English poems. Nevertheless, the title and cover of this edition reinforce the image of Capetanakis as a writer on aesthetics with primarily classical sympathies.

15 See A. Veinoglou, 'Αναμνήσεις και εντυπώσεις', *Νέα Εστία* 39 (1946) 275–9.

16 Lehmann, 'Introduction', 14.

17 D. Capetanakis, 'A lecture on Proust', trans. J. Lehmann, *New Writing and Daylight* 6 (1945) 107–17.

18 Op. cit., 107. The note is omitted in *GPE*.

the Gennadius library, while the longer German version, which was written as part of Capetanakis' coursework at Heidelberg, is housed among the Lehmann Family Papers at the Firestone Library, Princeton University.¹⁹

There is more to the story. While working on his German dissertation on Eros and Time (*Liebe und Zeit*, Heidelberg 1936) Capetanakis rewrote and incorporated a significant part of his work on Proust – a part, it should be noted, which plays a pivotal role in the structuring of his argument and to which I will come back. Upon his return to Greece, the author decided to translate his dissertation into Greek.²⁰ For the purposes of this translation, which remains to date one of his best known works among Greek readers, he had to translate the Proustian passages that he cites. This in itself makes Capetanakis one of the first people to introduce Proust to the Greek public in the 1930s,²¹ when the French novelist was read only by privileged readers who had access to the original French – as was the case in most European countries.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to look at the reception of Proust in Greece, I would like to add this brief note which I hope to explore in detail elsewhere. During the period 1936–9 that Capetanakis spent in Greece (between Heidelberg and Cambridge), he would often travel to Pelion and stay at Zagora, the village his family came from and which served as his retreat. It was during these visits that he probably met Anna Sikelianou, at the time Karamani.²² This was the same period when George Seferis, then posted in Albania, would travel to Pelion, where he also met Anna Sikelianou; it was in Zagora that Seferis was inspired to write 'Piazza San Nicolò' (1937), a poem which is largely indebted to Proust. There is no evidence that the two men met at the time,²³ but the coincidence is striking.²⁴ At any rate, Seferis uses Proust's opening ('Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure') as an epigraph and begins his poem

19 The two manuscripts are: 'Une lecture sur Proust', Demetrios Capetanakis Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Gennadius Library and 'Das Philosophieren von Marcel Proust', Lehmann Family Papers, Box 155, Folder 10; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

20 It was published in two installments in *Αρχαίον Φιλοσοφίας και Θεωρίας των Επιστημών* 8.4 (1938) 433–67 and 9.1 (1939) 25–57 and subsequently as a separate volume (Athens 1939).

21 The other two were Xenophon Lefkoparidis and Nasos Detzortzis. For an account of Proust's early reception in Greece see P. Poulos, 'Destin d'À la recherche du temps perdu en Grèce', *Revue d'études proustiennes: Traduire À la recherche du temps perdu* 1 (Paris 2015) 153–253.

22 See M. Andromida, 'Η ζωή και το έργο του Δημητρίου Καπετανάκη', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Athens, 1998, 124. Andromida's dissertation, the product of thorough and meticulous work that has resulted in the first systematic cataloguing of the author's publications and the compilation of an exhaustive bibliography on Capetanakis, has been an invaluable guide in my research.

23 The letters exchanged between Seferis and Capetanakis are housed among the Demetrios Capetanakis Papers and the George Seferis Papers in the Gennadius Library. The two men began their correspondence in 1941, though their acquaintance must have dated from several years earlier. Seferis was present at a lecture Capetanakis gave on the poetry of Andreas Kalvos at the Parnassos Literary Society in 1938, the same lecture at which Anna met Angelos Sikelianos. See A. Sikelianou, *Η ζωή μου με τον Άγγελο* (Athens 1985) 74.

24 Poulos, 'Destin d'À la recherche du temps perdu en Grèce', 162, argues persuasively that in his 1971 essay on Proust that appeared in the *Figaro*, Seferis makes an implicit reference to Capetanakis as one of the early Greek readers of Proust.

with a Greek translation of this line: *Για χρόνια πλάγιαζα νορίς*. Many years later, during the military dictatorship, his young friend Pavlos Zannas was to undertake the translation of Proust's voluminous work while serving his term in jail as a political prisoner. In his introduction to the first volume of his translation, Zannas acknowledges his debt to Seferis: his translation picks up exactly where Seferis left off, having incorporated the first line of 'Piazza San Nicolò'.

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In this section I will be discussing Capetanakis' reading of Proust, following for the most part the English rendering of his French lecture, but also referring to the earlier German version as well as to his doctoral dissertation. My primary intention is not to distinguish between different texts or readings, but rather to try to synthesize them, in an attempt to approach the main issue at stake. This, I believe, is more in line with Capetanakis' own approach to philosophy, an approach that is indebted to Socrates in *Phaedrus*: what matters is not the fossilized text but the speaker's attempt to communicate a certain truth to his/her interlocutor. For, here too, we are dealing with a speaker addressing specific audiences and striving to communicate. But since context and variation certainly matter, perhaps more so in this approach, I would like to add a few introductory remarks.

Capetanakis' German study is undated, but was certainly completed during his Heidelberg years (1934-6). It was prepared – that much can be deduced from the manuscript – as an oral presentation for a philosophy seminar; addressed, that is, to an audience of fellow-students. It is thus that, at an early point, the speaker finds it necessary to explain, if only in a side comment, why and how the study of a novel can be both legitimate and fruitful in a philosophical context.²⁵ In the French lecture, on the other hand, which was delivered to an audience with presumably broader interests, that of a French Society at Cambridge, what needs to be justified is the decision to make philosophy the object of his talk on Proust. Both demands, though, force him to reflect upon the relation between philosophy and literature. The introduction to the French lecture (which will be discussed in the following section) is perhaps the only part of the study that is radically revised and shows precisely that Capetanakis is becoming increasingly conscious of his choice of literature as a privileged field for philosophy: a field where the important philosophical questions are approached in a manner that can be more genuine than that adopted in most systematic philosophical treatises.

The other marked difference between the two works is not to be found in any particular passage but can be rather described as an all-pervasive shift in scope. I am referring to Capetanakis' approach to the notion of individuality. While in the German paper the term is used mostly with reference to aesthetic categories (for instance, the

25 This is so because the open nature of literary works – in this case of a novel, in which everything keeps changing ('in dem alles wird und sich immer weiter bewegt') – lends itself to more genuine philosophical thinking than does a systematic philosophical treatise. This point is not elaborated further in the German lecture, although Capetanakis draws an interesting parallel with the philosophical practice of Socrates.

individuality of the novel as an artwork, individuality being a distinctive feature of beauty), in the French lecture it is discussed in the context of a metaphysical/ethical quest. Indeed, these two categories become intertwined, particularly in the speaker's treatment of eros, where one senses the existentialist traces in his thought. Capetanakis' growing concern for the author's life – for the author as an individual – is also, I believe, symptomatic of this tendency.

In other respects, however, the two texts are strikingly similar in terms of both content and structure – one comes across many passages that have been simply and faithfully translated from one (foreign) language to the other. The minor revisions could, at any rate, be attributed to Capetanakis' attempt to abridge the paper (thus, his discussion of Bergson's influence on Proust is eliminated), to his newly acquired literary tastes (an interesting parallel between Proust and Wordsworth is appended), or to the new Proustian studies produced in the interim between the two talks (although of these there is little evidence).

Given the fact that both texts were intended to be read as lectures, it is not surprising that the references to critical studies we find in them are sparse. Here, as elsewhere, Capetanakis shows a preference for biographical sources, including Proust's correspondence.²⁶ The only studies and portraits of Proust which he explicitly cites are those of Léon Pierre-Quint, Henri Massis and Paul Morand.²⁷ I find it hard to believe that he was not familiar with the studies by at least Curtius and Benjamin (whose translation, however, he had not read) while he was still at Heidelberg, especially since he seems to have been aware of the first abortive attempts at a German translation of Proust's novel.²⁸ It is more plausible that he would have tacitly assimilated a number of ideas from these texts.

26 He cites a well-known passage from Proust's letter to René Blum in November 1913 (see M. Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. P. Kolb, XII (Paris 1984), letter 134) where the French novelist presents the *Recherche* as a critique of Bergson's philosophy. This letter was included in Léon Pierre-Quint's study of Proust (see below), which might have been Capetanakis' source.

27 He cites L. Pierre-Quint, *Marcel Proust, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris 1925) in his German lecture, H. Massis, *Le Drame de Proust* (Paris 1927) in his French lecture. In the latter he also incorporates P. Morand, 'Ode à Marcel Proust', which Lehmann omits from the English (most likely for lack of an existing translation).

28 For an account of Proust's fortunes in Germany see P. Fravalto-Tane, *À la recherche du temps perdu en France et en Allemagne (1913–1958): «Dans une sorte de langue étrangère...»* (Paris 2008) 161–73, 293–303. Briefly (and without going into the issue of publishers), the work was originally assigned to Rudolf Schottlaender. Following the publication of the first volume (1925), Schottlaender's translation was severely criticized by Ernst Robert Curtius and the work was assigned to Walter Benjamin and Franz Hessel. Capetanakis notes that the existing German translations are fragmentary. Although he does not mention Schottlaender by name, he was certainly familiar with his translation of the first volume, since he adopts his titles for both the novel (*Auf den Spuren der verlorenen Zeit*) and the volume (*Der Weg zu Swann*). On the contrary, he produces his own translations for the titles of the other volumes of the novel, a fact which suggests that he had not seen the Benjamin-Hessel translations of the second and third volumes (*Im Schatten der jungen Mädchen*, 1927 and *Die Herzogin von Guermantes*, 1930).

A final note on translation practices. Given the lack of a Greek translation of Proust and the fragmentary German versions available at the time, Capetanakis chooses to provide his own translations of the passages he quotes in both his German paper (where, in the margins of the translated citation he includes the respective passage in the original French) and in the Greek version of *Eros and Time* (where he footnotes his references).²⁹ Translating extensively for the purpose of citing is a practice he follows throughout his career as a scholar, lecturer³⁰ and freelance writer and which testifies to the ease with which he could move between languages³¹—although when it comes to scholarly essays he is most fastidious in his selection among available translations. In his translation of the French lecture, Lehmann uses Scott Moncrieff's English rendition of Proust, though he often introduces alterations intended to make Capetanakis' argument clearer.³² In the Greek translation by Anna Sikelianou it seems to me that the Proustian passages are rendered from the English and not from the original French, a fact which accounts for some misunderstandings (the word 'impasses', for example, is translated as 'νεκρά τέρματᾶ' from the English 'dead ends'). This is yet another aspect of this study that demonstrates how problematic the use of the term 'original' would be with respect to any of the available versions or even the relation between any two of them.

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In the opening to his French lecture, Capetanakis describes a certain approach to a poet's philosophy against which he is on his guard:

[Those who are at pains to discover the philosophy of their favourite poet] read the poet's work, [...] make a note of the most abstract passages, and then with these passages and using their own thoughts to fill in the gaps they try to construct a system, which they present to us as the philosophy of this author or that author. Of course, this construction is as far removed from true philosophy as it is from the author to whom it is attributed [...].³³

It is true that what he so aptly criticizes here is a tendency displayed by a number of critics who either attempt to identify Proust's philosophical sources, thus reducing the novel to the implementation of a certain pre-existing philosophical system (as was the case

29 Capetanakis uses the 16-volume NRF edition of Proust. Note that in his scholarly essays his references are always promptly footnoted, a practice which he abandoned in later years, when he became a freelance writer for Lehmann's periodicals.

30 I am referring to the lectures he gave in the years 1936–9 at Askraios, a school of higher education founded in Athens by Ioannis Sykoutris and Julia Terenzio. A good number of the manuscript texts for these lectures are housed in the Lehmann Family Papers.

31 Among Capetanakis' essays and lectures one can find translations from English to Greek (e.g. Shakespearean sonnets); from Greek to English (e.g. folk songs, Kalvos, Solomos); from German to Greek (e.g. Hölderlin, Goethe, George); from German to English (e.g. George); from French to German (e.g. Proust, La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld); and from German to French (e.g. Goethe).

32 Cf. Poulos, 'Destin d'À la recherche du temps perdu en Grèce', 161–2.

33 Capetanakis, 'A lecture on Proust', 90. All subsequent page references to this essay are made to the GPE edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

with Anne Henry) or try to derive the novelist's philosophy through close readings of passages that are arbitrarily chosen and which they fail to contextualize. In the second case, the philosophical system superimposed upon the novel is that of the critic (Paul De Man would be an apt example).³⁴ What is common to these approaches is what I would call a tendency to place the author in brackets, that is to be indifferent towards Proust's intentions or his work's overall structure, while citing him to corroborate their claims. How else, though, could one approach or identify the philosophy of a poet without either doing injustice to the work's poetics or falling into the intentional fallacy? The speaker does not even raise these questions, for there is something of greater import that he first needs to clarify, and that is the very meaning of philosophy.

Philosophy, he says, is not an abstract science that 'can only make ordinary healthy-minded people yawn' (90) – in fact it is neither boring nor abstract and, above all, it is not a science. Hence, we should not be referring to philosophical systems, but simply study the works of individual people who have something to say to us about life – about our own lives. And, to prove his point, he chooses to quote a philosopher who has indeed 'a reputation of being very abstract, very boring and very dry' (91). The reference here is to Aristotle – a rather unusual choice for Capetanakis:³⁵

'Being' says Aristotle, 'is better than not being, it is better to be alive than not to be alive.' Of course it is better to be alive, you will say, than not to be alive! We need no philosophy to tell us what everyone knows so well. And yet, reflect again. Does everyone really know what true life is? Is it not possible that there are people who might maintain that not being is the only kind of existence that is worthwhile, and that death is better than life? Let us take the poets. Take, for instance, Shakespeare. Listen to what Claudio says in *Measure for Measure*:

To sue to live, I find I seek to die;
And, seeking death, find life...

Remember also the words of Iphigenia in Goethe's play:

A useless life is nothing but a premature death...

Even La Fontaine, the La Fontaine who wrote the *Fables* and whose life was so varied and so delightful, even he complained at the end of his career that in spite of his life as a 'butterfly of Parnassus flying from flower to flower and from object to object,' he had not really lived. (91)

34 See Paul De Man's essay 'Sign and symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*', *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (Summer 1982) 761–5, where the critic uses Proust's memory categories and his narrator's reflections on Giotto's allegories to deconstruct Hegel's aesthetics of symbol, all the while arguing for the incompatibility between poetics and aesthetics, literary experience and literary theory.

35 Capetanakis makes few references to Aristotle throughout his work. The choice here can be explained in view of his attempt to introduce an ethical element in his reading of Proust and, most importantly, of Aristotle's affinity with the philosophy of *Existenz*. Here as elsewhere, however, Plato remains his main interlocutor.

Capetanakis refers us to literature as a source of wisdom. His choice of poets is not in the least arbitrary: they are the poet-philosophers of the three great European traditions: Shakespeare, Goethe and La Fontaine (who is to give way to Proust). The importance of this gesture is clearer in the French: ‘Ouvrons nos poètes. Ouvrons Shakespeare,’³⁶ he says, as if he is inviting us to consult the authorities – which is very different from merely taking the example of the poets as the Greek and English translations suggest.

In all three excerpts that he cites, life is weighed against death and the scales seem to balance. Let me pause for a moment at Shakespeare’s puzzling lines.³⁷ In a certain reading, one that would assume a figurative meaning of death (as that which is the opposite of life), Claudio’s two statements seem tautological and their overall effect is ironic. It is, I would venture to argue, the kind of irony that Kierkegaard associates with Socrates, the irony of infinite negativity. But if we look at the lines more closely, the possibility of a different reading emerges. Perhaps the conjunction ‘and’ does not denote a relation of simultaneity, but one of succession in time: it is only when one is faced with the actuality of death that one sees life as something other than non-death, something worth hanging on to. In this second reading, irony has given way to what the ancient Greeks called *palinode* (recantation). Accordingly, the second statement, by negating the first, restores our faith in life, in human values and/or the divine order. I believe that this is precisely what Capetanakis seeks in literature and philosophy alike: the human (and living) subject of a *palinode*.

Proust was, for Capetanakis, one of those people who are a little ‘out of the ordinary’ (91) – and those are the true philosophers – who devote their lives to the search for being. To stress this point, he paraphrases the title of Proust’s novel: ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’ becomes ‘À la poursuite de l’être’. An unmistakable sign of Proust’s philosophical nature was his interest in the individuality of things and of people. It is the perceived uniqueness of a person or a thing which arouses in us a desire to know them – more so: to possess them. Since, however, the individual is not something that our reason can ever grasp, this desire is bound to be frustrated. Hence, the question of being remains what Aristotle once proclaimed it to be: a question with no answer (ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον).³⁸ This is the philosophical struggle that Proust’s work elucidates and it does so mainly through the paradigm of *eros*.

36 The Greek translation (‘Μια διάλεξη για τον Προυστ’, trans. A. A. S., *Νέα Εστία* 39.448 (1946) 93) reads: ‘ΑΣ πάρομε τους ποιητές. Ας πάρομε π.χ τον Σαίξπηρ.’

37 See *Measure for Measure* III.1. I make no references to context in my discussion, for this would take me into a long digression. Briefly, then: In the narrow context, Claudio, who has just received a death sentence, is here echoing the words of the Duke: if life is but a short breath, an on-going process of withering, then death must be preferable to it. Shortly after, however, Claudio finds out from his sister Isabella that the villain Angelo has vowed to save his life in exchange for the ‘treasures of her body’. The meaning of these lines alters dramatically once Claudio is faced with an ethical dilemma. In his new state, he is awakened to the real value of life, which he now has to give up of his own accord.

38 *Metaphysics* 1028b3–4: ‘καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τὶ τὸ ὄν’.

In his doctoral dissertation,³⁹ Capetanakis tries to analyse the paradox of eros by referring to two clashing principles that it gives rise to and, in turn, is determined by: the desire for eternity and the necessity of temporality.⁴⁰ The lover, who would like to be united forever with his beloved or, to use Aristophanes' image in the *Symposium*, to be cast into one mould, is entrapped in the inexorable law of temporality – not necessarily because of the other's infidelity or of the infamous waywardness of death (the Proustian *hasard*), but because of the lover's own change of heart. This, Proust suggests and Capetanakis repeats, is simply the experience of death in our everyday life. When our heart changes, then we are no longer the same person – our old self who willed the eternal union with the beloved has died. Hence Proust shows that we cannot escape the law of time, because we can never be situated outside time – time is ourselves. And he manages to do so in this voluminous novel, where the difference between fictional and real time is blurred. One is here tempted to recall the original title of Proust's work – 'Les intermittences du coeur' – which, placed next to the actual one, strengthens Capetanakis' philosophical reading.

This unbearable realization, Capetanakis continues, brought Proust to the threshold of despair. It was thus that he turned to his art in his attempt to assuage his fear, to escape the fetters of time. Convinced that the living individual – eros – could not give him the happiness and fulfilment that he sought, he tried at least to articulate general laws, to come to some other form of objective and extra-temporal knowledge. But the knowledge which Proust attained – and here one thinks of all the maxims and incisive observations about the human psyche that his work is replete with – comes at a cost. It is the knowledge of one who has suppressed his desire for the pleasures in life, indeed has given up on life. That is exactly what Proust chose to do, by becoming an ascetic in order to complete his great novel. Thus seen, his novel is but the attempt to drown his sorrow in knowledge, to hide it behind general laws, which also means an attempt to hide his own life. 'We know nothing of the love affairs of a man who has spoken to us so much about love,' says Capetanakis (92), echoing Henri Massis, who, in a study that had been published a few years earlier, had claimed that Proust worked systematically to conceal himself.⁴¹ And one can also think of Walter Benjamin's essay on Proust which ends with the heartbreaking image of the author looking up from his deathbed at

39 All subsequent page references are made to the Greek of the Harvey edition ('Ερως και Χρόνος', in *Μυθολογία του ωραίου*) and are included in the text. The translations are mine.

40 The word 'ανάγκη' is used in both subheadings. If I am reading correctly, its meaning shifts from that of the individual's desire or longing ('Η αιωνιότης σαν ανάγκη στον έρωτα') to the necessity of physical laws ('Η παροδικότης σαν ανάγκη στον έρωτα').

41 See Massis, *Le Drame de Proust*, 97: 'Le but de sa vie, de son art, son intention profonde, les voilà. Il semble qu'il cherche – avec quelle dévorante inquiétude! – à se garder une chance: la chance de n'être pas identifié, reconnu, découvert.' Massis attempts an ethical reading of Proust, according to which the novelist, experiencing a sense of guilt for his moral weakness, seeks in his art a remedy for his life.

the microcosm of his own painting like another Michelangelo gazing at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.⁴²

But it is not in the general laws that he formulates, in the objective knowledge that he acquires at the cost of his own life, that Capetanakis detects Proust's philosophical significance – his importance for philosophy. On the contrary, he considers Proust's artistic solution to the problem of individuality as a philosophically flawed one. To explain this, I will now turn to his discussion of Proust in his dissertation. What is interesting about this discussion – which otherwise does not add much to the points he makes in his other studies – is the way it is contextualized. In a stroke of brilliance, Capetanakis chooses to insert Proust in between Socrates' two speeches in *Phaedrus*. This leads him not only to a daring and fascinating interpretation of Plato, but also to a questioning of the nature of all knowledge and particularly of its objective status.

The discussion begins in the second section of his dissertation, where the critic exposes the necessity of temporality in eros. The idea of eros as a fleeting passion surfaces in Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus*, which is conceived, at least in part, as a parody of Lysias' speech.⁴³ Lysias claims that it is preferable to give oneself to one who is not in love and thus, among other things, more likely to remain faithful. So does

42 See W. Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust', in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York 1969) 215: 'For the second time there rose a scaffold like Michelangelo's on which the artist, his head thrown back, painted the Creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: the sickbed on which Marcel Proust consecrates the countless pages which he covered with his handwriting, holding them up in the air, to the creation of his microcosm.'

43 It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Capetanakis' argument in light of the reception of *Phaedrus*. I simply note some currents of interpretation, my focus always being on Socrates' first speech, which has never ceased to be a point of controversy among critics. (The controversy, in turn, springs in part from the disagreement over the main theme of the dialogue. Friedrich Schleiermacher was among the first to argue, in the early 1800s, that the *Phaedrus* is in fact a dialogue about philosophy – as it relates to rhetoric – and not about eros, a view that has been espoused by many contemporary critics. Capetanakis does not address this issue directly, but his overall approach does not seem to contradict the argument). A line of criticism going back to G. M. A. Grube (*Plato's Thought*, London 1935) and R. Hackforth (*Plato's Phaedrus*, Cambridge 1952) read the speech quite literally and mostly in light of Socratic intellectualism, stressing its moral content. Others, including C. J. Rowe (*Plato: Phaedrus*, Warminster 2000) underline the element of rhetorical strategy, focusing on its incompleteness, and in particular its failing to make the distinction between *epithumia* (as bestial madness) and *eros* (as divine madness), as does Socrates' second speech. They thus view the speech as a link between the themes of eros and rhetoric. G. R. F. Ferrari (*Listening to the Cicadas*, Cambridge 1987), whose bold interpretation comes quite close to Capetanakis' argument, reads the speech as one of self-hate (assuming Socrates to be a lover yearning passionately for Phaedrus and covering up his passion with his logos). Equally interesting with respect to Capetanakis' reading is the claim made by Martha Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge and New York 2001) and espoused by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (*Phaedrus*, Indianapolis and Cambridge 1995) that in the *Phaedrus* (as opposed to the *Symposium*) Plato explores more fully the role of non-rational elements in eros, as well as Graeme Nicholson's argument in *Plato's Phaedrus: The Philosophy of Love* (West Lafayette, 1999) that Socrates sets up a false opposition between *epithumia* (desire) and *doxa* (common opinion), linking the latter to prudence, an opposition which he will undo in his second speech.

Socrates in his first speech, where he presents eros as a fatal sickness (as opposed to a divine madness). Here is how Socrates depicts the change of heart in the lover:

τότε δὴ δέον ἐκτίνειν, μεταβαλὼν ἄλλον ἄρχοντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ προστάτην, νοῦν καὶ σωφροσύνην ἀντ' ἔρωτος καὶ μανίας, ἄλλος γεγονὼς λήληθεν τὰ παιδικά. καὶ [...] ὑπ' αἰσχύνῃς οὔτε εἰπεῖν τολμᾷ ὅτι ἄλλος γέγονεν, οὔθ' ὅπως τὰ τῆς προτέρας ἀνοήτου ἀρχῆς ὀρκωμόσιά τε καὶ ὑποσχέσεις ἐμπεδώσῃ ἔχει, νοῦν ἤδη ἐσχηκῶς καὶ σεσωφρονηκῶς, ἵνα μὴ πράττων ταυτὰ τῷ πρόσθεν ὁμοίως τε ἐκείνῳ καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς πάλιν γένηται. φυγὰς δὴ γίγνεται ἐκ τούτων [...] (241a1-241b6)

Now, when he should be paying what he owes, he changes in himself and adopts a different ruler and master, sense and sanity in place of love and madness, and has become a different person without his beloved's realising it [...] and governed by shame he cannot bring himself to say that he has become a different person, nor is he able to make good the oaths and promises of his previous mindless regime, having now regained his mind and come to his senses; for if he did the same things as his previous self did, he would become like that self again, the same person. So as a result he becomes a fugitive [...].⁴⁴

Next to which one can read the passage where Swann falls out of love (and let us not forget that Swann's affair with Odette prefigures that of the novel's hero with Albertine):⁴⁵

Jadis ayant souvent pensé avec terreur, qu'un jour il cesserait d'être épris d'Odette, il s'était promis d'être vigilant et, dès qu'il sentirait que son amour commencerait à le quitter, de s'accrocher à lui, de le retenir. Mais voici qu'à l'affaiblissement de son amour correspondait simultanément un affaiblissement au désir de rester amoureux. Car on ne peut pas changer, c'est-à-dire devenir une autre personne, tout en continuant à obéir aux sentiments de celle qu'on n'est plus.⁴⁶

Capetanakis may have hit here on a fascinating affinity between Plato and Proust, if not a source for the Proustian motif of the intermittences of the heart. (But Capetanakis was not a literary scholar; the question of sources would not have been of particular interest to him.) A close look at the Proustian passage allows us to get a better grasp of Capetanakis' argument. The narrator starts by explaining how Swann's falling out of love is accompanied by a weakening of his determination to hold on to his love. This, however, means that the old Swann, the Swann in-love, is now *mort à jamais*, forever dead. What is striking is the shift of focus in the last sentence from Swann to 'one' (the impersonal pronoun *on* in the French) – the same shift that arguably takes place in

44 I am using C. J. Rowe's translation with slight modifications.

45 Capetanakis does not actually juxtapose the two passages, but it is clear from his discussion that he does draw this parallel.

46 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I, 371.

the *Phaedrus*.⁴⁷ It is one of those instances when Proust resorts to a universal law (that is, according to Capetanakis, to pseudo-philosophy), under which the individual case is subsumed and hence obliterated.

It is a point of agreement among most critics that Socrates' first speech is at best incomplete and limited in scope, hence inauthentic, even if what it articulates may be partially true. For Capetanakis, however, this is not exactly the case. The inability of readers to detect the nature and measure of truth in this speech, he says, stems from the fact that they associate truth with objectivity and permanence. And he asks:

Could the same statement be true on the lips of one person and false on those of another, could it be true at this moment, become false shortly after, and yet remain always true? To the mind of one who, not having the power to conceive of a living and moving truth, gives a negative answer to this question, the space of Platonic dialogues remains forever closed. (103-104)

Socrates' first speech, then, is truthful not because it articulates a universal law of psychology – that the human heart is fickle, that love is a malady – for so does Lysias' speech which is outright false (and so does Proust from his deathbed); its truthfulness is rather to be sought in the speaker's seriousness and his didactic purpose. Let us examine these two parameters separately.

The fact that what distinguishes Socrates' speech from that of Lysias is the ethos of the speaker is a point on which most readers and critics would agree. However, Capetanakis deduces his seriousness not merely from his projected goal, but from the inner struggle which gives birth to it:

The movement in Plato's dialogues does not follow the unbridled wandering of an uprooted and anaemic thought, but the dramatic struggle of an individual who does not express his being only through thoughts, but also with a weighty logos and body gestures [...]. In such a struggle, it is not dry thinking that matters most. The relation of thought to truth is not defined by its relation to correctness. The forces that establish the truth of these thoughts are the depth from which they spring, the seriousness that binds them, the genuine effort that engenders them, the eros that fuels them – passion and ethos (104).

It is true that the law of temporality that Socrates exposes is false on account of its claims to universality and objectivity. That is why Capetanakis pays close attention to the philosopher's gesture of covering his face while he speaks,⁴⁸ a gesture which is only

47 I am referring to the original framing of Socrates' speech, according to which the words are addressed to a beloved by a man in love (played by Socrates) who wants to hide his true feelings. In his treatment of love as a malady, Socrates goes on to provide hypothetical examples.

48 Socrates' gesture of covering up his face before he begins his first speech (237a4–6: "Ἐγκαλυψάμενος ἔρῳ, ἴν' ὅτι τάχιστα διαδράμω τὸν λόγον καὶ μὴ βλέπων πρὸς σέ ὑπ' αἰσχύνης διαπορώμαι") has been interpreted in various ways, which are always in line with the critics' appraisal of the content, or form (or both) of his speech. It has thus been viewed as a parody of Phaedrus who hides Lysias' speech, as a contrived symptom of his poetic madness or even in the context of the opposition between rhetoric and dialectic.

too reminiscent of his argument about Proust: the person who resorts to a kind of general wisdom does so in an attempt to assuage his frustration over the individual, that is to conceal his own self.⁴⁹ If I am reading the passage correctly, Capetanakis is almost emptying the Platonic logos of its irony, choosing to see behind any apparent contradiction not a rhetorical device but a dramatic struggle – indeed, to read Socrates as a tragic figure.

On the other hand, Socrates' speech is intended to have a didactic effect: Capetanakis reminds us that the logos is *ψυχεγεργτικός* as opposed to Lysias' which is merely *επιδεικτικός*. Again, this is not so because by parodying Lysias' speech he brings out the falsity in his argument, but because by adopting this line of argument to the extreme, he gives voice to a most dreadful consideration. Anyone listening to Socrates exposing so blatantly the vicissitudes of the human heart is bound to be plunged into despair. But despair is not an altogether negative thing, for though 'as an ultimate danger, it threatens to destroy everything, should it manage to engender in us faith, it can also lead to salvation' (98). One cannot miss the Kierkegaardian echo in this passage. Karl Jaspers, who must have played a part in setting his young tutee on Kierkegaard's track, had a term for such circumstances where one is brought to the brim of the abyss; situations which have the potential of triggering a philosophical awakening: he called them *Grenzsituationen*.⁵⁰

Plato, as we well know, does not stop there. In his second speech, Socrates uncovers his face, acknowledges that he has been blasphemous and proceeds to extol the merits of eros as a divine madness in what has become known as the myth of the psyche. Surprisingly, Capetanakis' commentary on this second speech is neither as extensive⁵¹ nor, I think, as interesting, so I will limit myself to a couple of observations. The essayist accepts that Socrates' second speech gives a truer philosophical answer to the question of eros. Why? Precisely because philosophical truth is, for him, not the truth expressed by universal laws, not the truth of psychology that is derived from common everyday experience, but a higher truth. It is the 'truth that would lead us to realize the highest potential of our existence.' (135) By turning to myth, Socrates opens up an entirely

49 The issue of self-concealment has recently been addressed with respect to Capetanakis' own poetry, from the perspective of queer theory (see D. Papanikolaou, 'Demetrios Capetanakis: a Greek poet (coming out) in England', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 30.2 (2006) 201–23). I do not follow this line of thought, but limit myself to the philosophical implications of the issue – as does Capetanakis in his essays.

50 The concept of 'ultimate situations' is first introduced in Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) in a psychological context; it is systematically elaborated in the *Philosophie* (1932), where ultimate situations (death, suffering, struggle, guilt) are discussed as offering access to the illumination of *Existenz*.

51 This, I presume, is due to the fact that he is not interested in the Platonic ideal as an abstract concept. In general, I would argue that he downplays the metaphysical substratum of Plato's philosophy in his attempt to introduce an existential strand in his thought. Accepting Plato's Theory of Ideas might create a contradiction in his argument, because then he would be hard-pressed to defend the notion of truth as inextricably linked to individuality. Capetanakis never makes the Platonic move from the human body to the abstract idea of the beautiful or the good – his thought is well grounded in the tangible reality of human bodies.

different dialectic in which objective knowledge gives way to myth or, in Kierkegaardian terms (for here is, indeed, an instance of fusion), to faith. Capetanakis acknowledges as much: even if reason tells us that eternal love is unfeasible, we have to keep on living with, and believing in, this ideal; we have to struggle to realize this ideal, if only in the moment. This, then, is precisely how Capetanakis understands palinode: as a movement from negation to affirmation, from despair to faith; if it is a kind of catharsis or exoneration, that is because it constitutes an attempt to keep the philosophical struggle alive and not to seek knowledge in death. Palinode, then, seen not as a genre or a figure of speech, but as a natural tendency of a mind that is philosophically inclined, is Capetanakis' choice over and above irony, including Socratic irony.

To sum up: For Capetanakis, the philosophical significance of the *Recherche* is not to be sought in the attempt to break the fetters of time by reaching an extra-temporal perspective through art – much less in the author's ability to turn individual experience into a universal principle. The novel's importance for philosophy can only be sensed in this back-and-forth – the intermittences in thought mirroring those of the heart – which are, I would argue, the equivalent to the Platonic palinode.

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I would like, by way of a conclusion, to return to the question of Capetanakis' joint approach to writers' works and lives – not unrelated to his joint approach to literature and philosophy – an approach that is manifested throughout his essays and lectures but becomes progressively more pronounced. On the surface, the essayist may seem to be violating a basic rule of literary scholarship, a legacy of New Criticism which few people would dare to challenge: that one should never confuse the narrator of a novel with its author or the speaker of a poem with the poet. Capetanakis' essays often give the impression that he is doing just that, but this is merely an impression: one would have a hard time looking for precise instances where this *faux pas* actually takes place. What is even more peculiar, which I have already hinted at, is that this quest of his for the real events in a writer's life most often comes to a dead end: 'I do not know if we will ever come to learn the concrete facts of Proust's life which led him to despair,' he writes (92). Similarly, in his George essay he laments the fact that we will never know anything about the miracle which changed his life (his encounter with Maximin): 'His biographers avoid revealing more than the poet himself revealed [...]. The whole story is presented like a myth, a legend stripped of all human interest.'⁵² Regarding Charlotte Brontë he remarks that 'one is not so much interested in the adventures of [her] principal characters as in the misfortunes of the writer which these adventures reveal to us' and yet points out that Elizabeth Gaskell's biography, despite its merits, 'ignores or even misinterprets [her] misfortunes, which, as her novels show, had the most important bearing on her life.'⁵³ Why, then, does his fascination persist and how does it relate to his overall approach to literature and philosophy? His lecture on Proust gives us a clue.

⁵² 'Stefan George', 81.

⁵³ 'Charlotte Brontë', in *GPE* 148. It is interesting to note that despite Capetanakis' fascination with biographies, he seems convinced that literary works reveal much more about an author than the former.

In the first part of the lecture, before Capetanakis proceeds to give his audience some biographical information on Proust, he finds it necessary to justify this choice. It is in this context that he exposes his view of philosophy as the expression of an individual's life. 'Behind all philosophies there are living men, whose expression they are' (92).⁵⁴ This being the case, it would seem only natural that in seeking to understand a philosophy one should first seek to approach the person whose expression it is – seek, that is, to discover the individuality of that person, just as a lover seeks to possess his/her beloved or the beholder of an artwork seeks to unlock its mystery. And indeed, in his German study, this parallel is made explicit: to understand a work, one needs to understand the author, which means nothing less than to love the author. But, to press this analogy further, just as it is impossible to know and possess the beloved, so is it impossible to unlock the mysteries of an artwork or penetrate into the life of its creator. The closest we can come is by getting a fleeting glimpse of it in some rare moment of revelation, in the blinking of an eye (*augenblicklich*) – an image which, incidentally, recalls Plato's myth of the psyche.⁵⁵

Edith Sitwell once noted that Capetanakis 'did not remain a thing apart from the element he explored. He *was* the element itself.'⁵⁶ Her comment provides a shrewd insight into Capetanakis' reading habits, which could not have been further from those of Proust. For, if for the latter 'becoming the thing itself' presupposes seclusion and appropriation, for the former it marks an attempt to enter into the other's space, to identify with the other subject. To understand what is at stake in this opposition, one need only revisit Proust's extraordinary meditation on reading ('Sur la lecture') that prefaces his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*.⁵⁷ There, the French novelist opposes Ruskin's view of reading as a conversation, stressing instead the solitary nature of this activity. While he, too, acknowledges that one strives in vain to seize the other's truth, this realization sets him on a very different quest. Reading, for him, becomes an activity of re-creation. What this presupposes is that one understands, accepts, and even celebrates, the laws of vision⁵⁸ – what we would call individual perspective. And yet, a few pages

54 Capetanakis' position is that any philosophy is the expression of a living person and not the other way round. One does not fashion oneself through philosophy (a view which would be closer to Nietzsche's position); rather, one expresses one's life in one's philosophy (which might mean that one's philosophy reflects one's life).

55 In the German lecture Capetanakis remarks: 'Dieses Individuelle [the beauty of an artwork, in this case of Proust's novel] aber ist nur fassbar in dem persönlichen Umgang mit dem Schriftsteller. Und nicht für jedermann. Um einen echten Schöpfer zu verstehen: einen Dichter oder einen echten Philosophen muss man ihn lieben. Nur der Liebende kann das absolut Individuelle des Anderen fassen, augenblicklich fassen, aber nicht besitzen.'

56 E. Sitwell, 'The poetry of Demetrios Capetanakis', in *GPE* 35.

57 J. Ruskin, *Sésame et les lys: Des trésors des rois. Des jardins des reines*, translated, annotated and with a preface by Marcel Proust (Paris 2014 [1906]).

58 M. Proust, 'Sur la lecture', 33: 'Mais par une loi singulière et d'ailleurs providentielle de l'optique des esprits (loi qui signifie peut-être que nous ne pouvons recevoir la vérité de personne, et que nous devons la créer nous-même), ce qui est le terme de leur sagesse ne nous apparaît que comme le commencement de la nôtre [...].'

later in the essay, Proust goes on to claim that authors (books) remain our only true friends. Why is this so? For the simple reason that they are dead: they can be taken up or returned to their shelf at any time; they can be enjoyed in silence; one need not fret about complimenting or reproaching them; neither does one have to please them; and one is never scared of being rejected by them. One's relationship to them seems very similar to that of a married couple: Swann and Odette, for example (but – alas! – Swann was granted this happiness 'posthumously').

Capetanakis' approach to reading, on the other hand, is the approach of the lover who would like to be united forever with his beloved. This kind of identification can only materialize as the fleeting experience of one reading, say, poetry or fiction. This is why the 'young aesthete' who grew into a 'Greek poet in England' chose to pursue his philosophical quest through a turn to the poet philosophers. To read an author philosophically meant for him to try to solve the enigma of poetry, that peculiar form of writing where one struggles to conceal one's innermost secrets and, in doing so, infinitely exposes oneself. This is certainly not a Proustian reading, but it is a most insightful philosophical reading of Proust.