

Tradition and the individual talent: remarks on the poetry of Michalis Ganas

DAVID RICKS

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. (T.S. Eliot)¹

Michalis Ganas is both a highly individual talent and, as I hope to show here with respect to an inevitably small selection of key poems, a highly traditional one. He is, moreover, peculiarly self-conscious about the implications of such a view as Eliot's for the responsibilities of the poet. The consciousness of tradition in Ganas' work may be seen as taking three forms.

The first and most visible concerns poetic form itself. Ganas has recently been associated, along with some younger contemporaries, with a return to the metrical and rhymed forms of Greek poetry which have been marginal since the 1930s.² This would seem to make him, in ugly American parlance, a New Formalist; but Ganas' use of such forms predates the Greek and even the American New Formalism, so he can't be accused of having joined a bandwagon.³ The title of a 1993 conference on Greek poetry, 'From metrical forms to free verse, 1880-1940', reflected both the fact that almost no Greek verse of importance other than free verse has been written since 1940 and, at the same time, a sense that the era of free verse as, so to speak, the default mode is now

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the individual talent', *The Sacred Wood* (London 1976), 47-59; quotation from p. 49.

2. See Michalis Ganas, Dionysis Kapsalis, Giorgos Koropoulos, Ilias Lagios, *Ἀνθοδέσμη* (Athens 1993).

3. See the article on the New Formalism in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton 1993), 834-5. Strictures against the New Formalists by (so to speak) an Old Believer are to be found in Thom Gunn, *Shelf Life* (London 1993), 227-8.

over. And in the proceedings my own paper on Skarimbias, for example, is a plea to look at how he uses the forms he does, rather than simply assigning them to an obsolete category.⁴

The second aspect of tradition concerns Ganas' typically overt, and indeed respectful, borrowings from the dead poets. While he is not exactly a bookish or philological poet in the manner of Seferis, his work reveals unusual care and self-consciousness in this regard — and this merits extended discussion.⁵ This is so not least because of the variety of identifiable poets who make up Ganas' canon in action: Solomos, Cavafy, Sikelianos, Karyotakis, Seferis, the folk poets — and perhaps, as I shall tentatively suggest below, T.S. Eliot himself.⁶

The third way in which tradition is important is more general: it concerns what may be called Ganas' *pietas* towards his family and by extension his Epirot homeland. Faced with an Athens unpropitious for poetry, he turns to an older provincial home, to the dead poets, and to dormant forms which may be restored to life, in order to overcome the threat of aphasia.⁷

Where these three threads come together is in Ganas' most recent collection, with which this paper will tentatively end. Up to that point I shall take a small selection of poems in mainly chronological order, in order to exhibit sufficient formal variety, but also in the hope of assessing what such formal manoeuvres amount to. We might usefully bring to mind here an apophthegm of another Greek poet: 'Power in poetry begins with anxiety.' The statement comes from Demetrios Capetanakis, a poet so anxious about himself that he found success writing in English verse rather than Greek.⁸

4. See Nasos Vayenas (ed.), *Η ελευθέρωση των μορφών* (Herakleion 1996) and my paper in that volume, 'Παράδοση και πρωτοτυπία: η περίπτωση του Σκαρίμπα' 175-85.

5. Ganas, however, is averse to both epigraphs and notes (for a significant example of the latter see n. 64 below). This distinguishes him from Seferis, let alone from his post-Seferian contemporary Kyriakos Charalambides; see especially the latter's *Μεθιστορία* (Athens 1995).

6. On Ganas and the canon, see Michalis Pieris, rev. of *Μαύρα Λιθάρια, ΌΠολίτης* 39 (Dec. 1980-Jan. 1981), 69-73.

7. See, on the question of Epirot localism, G.P. Savidis, rev. *Γυάλινα Γιάννενα*, now in *Καστανόχωμα* (Athens 1989), 224-7.

8. The quotation comes from *Demetrios Capetanakis: A Greek Poet in England* (London 1947), 126. See further my article with the same title, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 22.1 (1996), 61-75.

The particular type of anxiety with which Ganas' career represents an attempt to deal is exhibited with some clarity, albeit in a relatively primitive form, in the third, highly programmatic, poem from his first collection (1978):

ΑΤΑΦΗ

Παράξενη λιτανεία μυστικῶν ἁγίων
στούς δρόμους μιᾶς πολιτείας πόρνης.
Τά μάτια τους, βαθιά, φωσφορίζοντα,
τρελαίνουν τά σκυλιά καί τούς νοικοκυραίους.
Μιά φυλή ὀνείρων ἐπαναπατρίζεται στό αἷμα μου,
λίκο τῆς πιά μεγάλης ξενιτιάς,
πανεῖ τό αἷμα μου σά μυρμήγκι πληγωμένο,
ἀπαράτηρητο, ὑπόγειο, ἐργατικό,
τό αἷμα μου ἀποκρίνεται σέ κάθε τί πού ἀγγίζω.

Βαθαίνεις τήν ἀφή μου ἀνυπόφορα,
μουσική πατρίδα,
ἄταφη σ' ὄλα τά τραγοῦδια μου.⁹

The initial setting is sharply reminiscent of the nightmarish Athenian scenes in the work of Lefteris Poullos.¹⁰ The poem, however, particularly takes its colouring from the word ξενιτιά. The saints that appear are revenants flocking to the lifeblood of the poet as the shades in Hades flock to the blood of the ram slaughtered by Odysseus: hence the reference to the δῆμον ὀνείρων of *Odyssey* 24.12, but more relevantly of Seferis' 'Ὁ Στράτης Θαλασσινὸς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀγάπανθους' (1942).¹¹ The homeland is both 'musical' because it evokes the world of folk song in which death and exile are seen as equivalents, and 'musical' in that it is the only authentic home of the Muses, of inspiration — but it is also a noun, 'music': by now the homeland itself has disappeared and only its echo remains. Perhaps most programmatic of all, Ganas chooses the word 'songs': the word 'poems' would have altogether a different effect. It is a declaration of allegiance to a subterranean tradition, reinforced by the *dekapentasyllavos*

9. Ganas, *Ἀκάθιστος Δεῖπνος* (Athens 1978), 8.

10. See also Ganas, *Ἀκάθιστος Δεῖπνος*, 33, and Lefteris Poullos, 'Ἀθήνα', *Ἐπιλογή* 1969-1978 (Athens 1982), 57-9.

11. Giorgos Seferis, *Ποιήματα* (Athens 1982), 196-7.

of 1.9. 'Unburied in all my poems' would look merely ghoulish (more like one of Ganas' acknowledged masters, Sachtouris): 'unburied in all my songs' endows the songs with a liturgical role and takes the poem full circle.¹²

These elements will be developed and enriched in Ganas' subsequent work, and at this point it will be useful to provide the essential details of his career. Ganas was born in Tsamandas, Thesprotia, in 1944 and has lived since 1962 in Athens. He has worked as a bookseller, a television producer and scriptwriter, and since 1989 as a copy-writer in an advertising agency. (Perhaps, a mordant commentator might observe, the three professions most inimical to poetry.) Ganas has translated the *Clouds* for Karolos Koun (1991) and is the author of a prose work, *Μητριά Πατρίδα* (1981). But he is best known for four collections of verse, of which the last won the 1994 national poetry prize. These are as follows: *Ἀκάθιστος Δεῖπνος* (1978), *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια* (1980), *Γυάλινα Γιάννενα* (1989), *Παραλογή* (1993). Ganas' poetic *oeuvre* now totals 178 pages, nearly all of the poems under a page long, but sometimes in sequences. Several — and this is an important point — have been set to music by well-known composers, and like Gatsos before him Ganas is now producing lyrics for popular songs.¹³

Ganas' first collection contains many good moments, and it is certainly free of the customary faults of the period, but it is in his second collection that he moves into more ambitious territory, as in the following poem:

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ

Εἶχαμε πάρει τό μονοπάτι γιά τό σπίτι
θάλασσα δλοῦθε μπαμπακιά δ'Απρίλης
κι ὄσο χωνόμαστε μέσ στά πλατάνια
τόσο σπαίρναι δέ φυσοῦσε
μόνο πού μέ κοιτάζαν ἀπό μέσα μου
νωπά τά μάτια της ἀπ' τά κεριά
καί σφύριζα θυμᾶμαι τό Χριστός'Ανέστη.

12. For a Sachtourian touch see Ganas, *Ἀκάθιστος Δεῖπνος*, 18.

13. In giving biographical information, I confine myself to the collections' dust-jackets. Two recent recordings show Ganas' lyrics to advantage: Eleftheria Arvanitaki-Ara Dinkjian, *Τα κορμιά και τα μαχαίρια* (Polydor 527 059-2, 1994 and Mikis Theodorakis-Vasilis Lekkas, *Ασίκικο πουλάκη* [sic] (Sony AKT 483867-2, 1996)

Ὁ οὐρανός πού λίγο πρὶν ἀστροφοροῦσε
σ' ἄσπρο σεντόνι γύριζε καί σέ βρεγμένο.

Δυό βήματα ἀπ' τή βρύση ὁ ἀδερφός της,
ἔσταζε τό βρακί καί τό παγούρι του
— Χριστός Ἀνέστη, πῶς περνᾷς, τί νά περνοῦσε
κόντευε χρόνο πεθαμένος.
Γύρισε νά μᾶς δεῖ κι ἔφεξε ὁ τόπος
σάν κάποιος νά μᾶς φωτογράφιζε τή νύχτα.¹⁴

The poem is one of longing for revelation in the tradition of Seferis' poem 'Μνήμη, α', and verbal and thematic echoes are not hard to find: the path home (ἔτσι προχώρεσα στό σκοτεινὸ μονοπάτι) or the tune (συλλογίστηκα νὰ φυσήξω ἓνα σκοπό); yet the epiphany that takes place has nothing of the restorative effect of light in Seferis' work. This is the case, above all, because of the light's mechanical and menacing character: the photographer in the simile recalls not just a malign agent of the security forces but the duplicitous Charos of folk tradition.¹⁵ Ganas' poem here enters a pessimistic dialogue with Seferis' albeit tentative visionary moment:

Θὰ γίνει ἡ ἀνάσταση μὴν ἀγῆ,
πῶς λάμπουν τὴν ἄνοιξη τὰ δέντρα θὰ ροδαμίσει
τοῦ ὄρθρου ἡ μαρμαρυγή.

In Ganas' poem the phrase 'Christ is risen' brings no message: the gap between the quotidian greeting and the hymn whistled by the poetic voice in the first part is unbridgeable. Or rather, if it is bridgeable, if there is a Resurrection, it is the sinister and temporary one of the ballad of the Dead Brother. The poem, despite its clean lines, is bleak and mysterious, not least in that we never discover who the female figure is (though *νωπά* hints that she too is dead); and there is some ambiguity as to who turns to look at us at the end. Such ambiguity becomes more systematic and challenging in another poem with an ostensibly religious theme, this time from the next collection:

14. Ganas, *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια*, 8.

15. Seferis, *Ποιήματα*, 245-6. For the various guises of Charos, see G. Saunier, *Adikia* (Paris 1979).

ΤΗΣ ΑΝΑΛΗΨΕΩΣ

Πατήματα στό χιόνι σάν
 του μικρού παιδιού κι όμως
 δέν ήταν, ούτε ζώου γνωστοῦ ήταν
 κανενός, ὄλη τή μέρα ψάχναμε κι ὄλη
 τή νύχτα μέ φακά, χάσαμε
 δυό στά δύσβατα φαράγγια, ἓνα
 τόν σέρναμε μέ τίς τριχιές καί
 ποιό τό ὄφελος, ἐκεῖ πού σταματάει
 το ἔλατο καί συνεχίζει μόνο
 τό βουνό, ἄξαφνα ἀπάτητο τό χιόνι, χωρίς
 κανένα ἴχνος πάλης ἢ αἵματος.
 Καθίσαμε ὡς τά ξημερώματα πίνοντας
 ὄλο τό κονιάκ καί τρώγοντας σταφίδες, ὄσπου
 στό φῶς τῆς μέρας τρομάξαμε ὁ ἓνας
 ἀπό τήν ὄψη του ἄλλου, ρίξαμε δυό
 φωτοβολίδες, ἦρθαν μέ τά ἑλικόπτερα ἀπό
 κάτω, μᾶς σηκῶσαν, τό χιόνι γύρω
 ἀπάτητο χωρίς κανένα
 ἴχνος πάλης ἢ αἵματος.¹⁶

This poem too, like the previous one, is attracted by but comes to deny the language of revelation — in that sense it stands at the opposite extreme from, say, Vaughan's poems on the Ascension.¹⁷ It locates itself, rather, in the poetry of quest, represented in Greece by Sikelianos' 'Τὸ Τραγούδι τῶν Ἀργοναυτῶν' (1928) and Seferis' much better known response to it in, especially, 'Ἀργοναῦτες' from *Mythistorema* (1935): the clinching reference here is 'τρομάξαμε ὁ ἓνας ἀπό τήν ὄψη του ἄλλου'.¹⁸ The title puns on 'undertaking' and 'Ascension': the undertaking was made, by a group, but the Ascension never comes about, except in the form of the mechanical agency of the helicopters,

16. Ganas, *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια*, 15. The poem's first publication (Tasos Korfis, ed., 58 *Φωνές*, Athens 1981, 23) capitalises 'Αναλήψεως'.

17. Henry Vaughan, 'Ascension-Day' and 'Ascension-Hymn', *The Complete Poems* (ed. Alan Rudrum, Harmondsworth 1976), 243-6.

18. See Seferis, *Ποιήματα*, 46-7, with my 'Seferis and the classics: a note', *Classical and Modern Literature* 9.4 (Summer 1989), 359-62. This passage of Ganas' poem also bears an affinity with Odysseas Elytis, 'Ἡ πορεία γιὰ τὸ μέτωπο' from 'Τὸ Πάθη' in *Τὸ Ἀξίον Ἐστί* (Athens 1977), 30-2.

which still leaves the real ascension of the One unsolved. Indeed, the cognac and raisins have the atmosphere rather of a wake, while we wouldn't expect to find snow as late as Ascension Day.

But what makes the poem most challenging is its form, the jagged intersection of syntax and line-endings leaving the referent often unclear and suggesting a tortuously exploratory mode: note how often a line ends with a conjunction, a preposition, or whatever — always the weakest word. The syntax 'appears to repeat, to stand still but is nevertheless proceeding in the most deliberate and orderly manner'.¹⁹ This last assessment actually comes from Eliot's essay on Lancelot Andrewes, and Eliot embodied his criticism in a celebrated poem with which Ganas' poem is perhaps in dialogue. For Ganas' *Ascension* is in a form as chilly as that of Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* (1927), which conveys a comparable emptiness. Space here does not permit a full discussion, but there are evident thematic connections: in each of the poems the snow line and the tree line respectively play a similar structural role, as does the transition in each poem from night to day. But while Eliot's Magi are setting out on the journey to the Epiphany, Ganas' doubting Apostles are setting out on an inverse journey. What the two poems have in common above all is a strikingly similar syntax; compare these line-breaks in Eliot:

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death?²⁰

Yet this apparent formal and thematic interlocation with Eliot's poem does not in the least make Ganas' poem a derivative one: rather, it adds depth and circumspection to its self-reflexiveness.²¹

19. Eliot, 'Lancelot Andrewes' in *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London 1970), 11-26; quotation from p. 22.

20. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London 1974), 109-10.

21. If I am right in detecting a verbal echo from Seferis 'Ο Στράτης Θαλασσινός ανάμεσα στους ἀγάπανθους' (*Ποιήματα*, 196-7), then the notion that Ganas' poem concerns itself with the nature of inspiration becomes persuasive:

οἱ ἀγάπανθοι προστάζουν σιωπή
σηκώνοντας ἓνα χεράκι μαβιουῦ μωροῦ τῆς Ἀραβίας
ἢ ἀκόμη τὰ πατήματα μιᾶς χήνας στὸν ἄερα.

Later in the same collection Ganas engages in a different dialogue with tradition in a different though related form, the prose poem. The sequence of prose poems is called *Τά άγρια καί τά ήμερα* and bears the dedication: 'Στόν Κώστα Κρυστάλλη, μικρότερο αδελφό'.²² Is this a gesture of affection or condescension? I think the explanation offered by Michalis Pieris is the right one: that the later poet invites his fellow Epirot to the ancestral homeland, but in order to point out in a fraternal way those things which Krystallis' mainly romanticised poems have left out. (Though the very late poem 'Ο ψωμοπάτης' brings in but then evades the dark sexual conflicts explicit in the second poem in Ganas' sequence.)²³ But we may also add that, in completing his sequence in 1980, Ganas has reached the age of 35, while his fellow exile to Athens died in 1894 at the age of only 26: in that sense too, Krystallis is (always now) a little brother. Krystallis, though not a good poet, has meant much to better — Sikelianos and Embiricos, for example — but for Ganas it is their shared homeland which has pride of place.²⁴ But it is not a homeland portrayed as Krystallis portrayed it, as the opening poem of the sequence shows:

Έρχονται τά παλια πουλιά καί πέφτουν μέσα μου μέ όρμη. Ψηλώνω σάν τοπίο, δέ βλέπω τίποτε άπ'τή σκόνη.

Είναι όλα άσπρα κι ύστερα όλα μαυρα κι είμαι μιά κουκίδα στίς άστραπές τών χρωμάτων τους. Μέ μάτια κλειστά, άνοιχτό συκάτι καί βλέπω. Βλέπω το θαύμα τής δημιουργίας σέ μιά τερατώδη άναπαράσταση. Όπου όλα πρωτόπλαστα έγκαταλείπουν τόν Παράδεισο κακήν κακώς. Φεύγοντας. Για λίμνες κι άγρια βουνά. Γι' άγνωστα μέρη.

Τό βόρειο πλάτος και τό μήκος τους έγώ. Άγεωγράφητος βιότοπος, φορώντας πάνω άπ' όλα αυτά ένα παλιό μπουφάν.²⁵

The Greek prose poem has flourished in other able hands, notably those of Jenny Mastoraki, and a comparison of this sequence with her

22. Ganas, *Μαυρα Λιθάρια*, 21.

23. Pieris, rev. *Μαυρα Λιθάρια*, 71; see [Kostas] Krystallis, *Άπαντα* (ed. Michalis Peranthis, Athens 1952), 291-8.

24. See Andreas Embiricos, 'Του αϊγάγρου,' *Όκτάνα* (Athens 1980), 32-4; though one feels that the reference to Krystallis is merely brought in for the pun on κρύσταλλα earlier in the sentence (p. 33).

25. Ganas, *Μαυρα Λιθάρια*, 21.

work of the same period would be revealing.²⁶ But Ganas' sequence has its origin, not in Krystallis, though his antithetical title resembles the title 'Ο τραγουδιστής τοῦ χωριοῦ καὶ τῆς στάνης (1892): instead it comes from Stephanos Granitsas' popular natural history book (first published in instalments in 1912-14), *Τὰ ἄγρια καὶ τὰ ἡμερα τοῦ βουνοῦ καὶ τοῦ λόγγου*, which includes several of the same animals.²⁷ Yet it's perfectly clear from this opening poem that traditional material is being used in a new way, not just through the allusion to Prometheus, but also through the concluding anachronism. Like a Titan, the figure of the poet is here seen as lying hugely beneath the earth (in this case at the far Northwest of Greece), but the poem's last word is foreign, urban, modern and self-deprecating. It is striking that such an ironic self-mythologising of the poet, in exactly the same form, had appeared a few years earlier in Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (1971); though this, I imagine, is to point out a significant convergence rather than a direct influence. The sixth poem of Hill's sequence may be compared for its similar chthonic emphasis and indeed comparable dénouement:

The princes of Mercia were badger and raven. Thrall to their freedom, I dug and hoarded. Orchards fruited above clefts. I drank from honeycombs of chill sandstone.

'A boy at odds in the house, lonely among brothers.' But I, who had none, fostered a strangeness; gave myself to unattainable toys.

Candles of gnarled resin, apple-branches, the tacky mistletoe. 'Look' they said and again 'look.' But I ran slowly; the landscape flowed away, back to its source.

In the schoolyard, in the cloakrooms, the children boasted their scars of dried snot; wrists and knees garnished with impetigo.²⁸

In another part of his rich collection, significantly titled, 'Βήματα πίσω', Ganas engages with the most flag-wavingly traditional form

26. Jenny Mastoraki, *Ἱστορίες γιὰ τὰ βαθιά* (Athens 1983), with discussion in Karen Van Dyck, *Kassandra and the Censors* (Ithaca, NY 1997).

27. Stephanos Granitsas, *Τὰ ἄγρια καὶ τὰ ἡμερα τοῦ βουνοῦ καὶ τοῦ λόγγου* (Athens 1976); see Pieris, rev. *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια*, 70.

28. Geoffrey Hill, *Mercian Hymns* (London 1971), VI. The possibility of influence on Ganas is small, but it is worth noting his translator John Stathatos' publication, 'Σκοτάδια: εισαγωγή στην ποίηση τοῦ Geoffrey Hill', *Χάρτης* 2 (September 1982), 172-5.

available, the sonnet, and in taking this path he is rather more out of step with the 1970s:

ΤΟΝ ΤΑΦΟ ΜΟΥ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΛΩ ΣΤΑ ΧΑΥΤΕΙΑ

Ἄφισες μέ τραβοῦν ἀπ' τό μανίκι,
Ἄθῆνα μου γεμάτη καλλιστεῖα.
Τόν τάφο μου τόν θέλω στά Χαυτεῖα,
εἴκοσι χρόνια σοῦ πληρώνω νοῖκι.

Στόν ὕπνο νά περνοῦν βουνά καί δάση,
νεράιδες φασκιωμένες μαῦρα ροῦχα.
Κάτι σάν ἄχτι μουλαριοῦ πού σοῦ ἔχα
σέ ποιό λεωφορεῖο τό ἔω χάσει.

Ποιά τρέλα, πές μου, μέ χτυπάει στίς φτέρνες
καί φεύγω καί κυλάω σάν τό τόπι,
μέ γήπεδα βουβά καί μέ ταβέρνες

στά σωθικά. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι κι οἱ τόποι,
ξένοι πού μοιάζουν στίς φωτογραφίες
πού βγάξαμε σέ ἄλλες ἡλικίες.²⁹

The opening lines have a distinct ring of popular song and are a reminder that in the heyday of free verse it was only popular song, particularly in the masterly hands of Gatsos, that kept traditional forms alive — the fact that Ganas' poems have been set to music reinforces this connection. I fancy that the reference to the lost ticket should also put us onto a so-called 'traditional' poetic voice rediscovered in the 1970s after decades of neglect, and Skarimbas' delicious poem, 'Τὸ εἰσιτήριο'. There the speaker's escape from this world is frustrated by the mere mislaying of a ferry ticket, leaving him sadly concluding: 'καὶ ὄλο γιὰ κεῖνο τὸ εἰσιτήριο νὰ λέω'.³⁰ The same post-Symbolist yearning characterises Karyotakis, also with a strong dose of irony, so it is fitting that Ganas' poem begins with a phrase which echoes the start of Karyotakis' 'Ἐμβατήριο πένθιμο καὶ κατακόρυφο': 'μαϊάνδροι

29. Ganas, *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια*, 37.

30. Giannis Skarimbas, *Ἄπαντες στίχοι* (Athens 1970), 53-4. Another cult figure who had preserved the idea that a living poet could be writing formal verse was of course Nikos Kavvadias; a younger poet who was using traditional forms satirically, Christos Valavanidis.

στό χορό τους με τραβᾶνε'. Just as Karyotakis in 1927 ironically praises a factory-produced plaster ceiling, so Ganas' poem expresses an attraction for a hellish part of town and for Athens as still, in however debased a sense, the home of *to kalon*.³¹

The sonnet's sestet introduces the idea of escape from Athens, but escape there is none. In fact the rural past as dreamt of in lines 4-5 is irrevocably dead, and the yearning for it a poetic Achilles' heel. All of Greece is contaminated by the image of urban life, and the homophonous rhyme, τόπι-τόποι carries a sense of stultification derived in part from another poetic antecedent, Cavafy. We may recall the τείχη-τύχη rhyme in 'Τείχη' but also the general spirit of 'Ἡ πόλις': 'Καινούριους τόπους δὲν θὰ βρεῖς . . . Ἡ πόλις θὰ σὲ ἀκολουθεῖ.'³² The milieu depicted, then, may be much like that we find in Poullos' often vivid poetry of modern Athens, but it is here described with an allusive coolness rather than frenetic heat.

A somewhat higher emotional temperature, and an apparently closer relation to the traditional aspirations of the Greek sonnet, comes in the following poem:

ΠΙΝΙΓΜΕΝΟΣ ΤΟΣΑ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ

Στόν Θεόφιλο Σωτηρίου

Πνιγμένος τόσα χρόνια κι εἶσαι πάντα
 μπηγμένος ἀχινός στόν οὐρανό σου.
 Περνοῦσε χθές ἐπάνω στό κανό σου,
 ἄηχη τῶν Φιλιατῶν ἡ μπάντα.

Στή θάλασσα, στό χῶμα θά' ταν ἴδια
 ἄσπρα τά κόκαλά σου καί γλειμμένα.
 Ὅλα βουβά καί ὄλα μιλημένα,
 λόγια μου λυπημένα κατοικίδια.

31. K.G. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα καὶ πεζά* (ed. G.P. Savidis, Athens 1988), 113, and Savidis' introduction to that volume, with my further remarks in *The Shade of Homer* (Cambridge 1989), 139-40.

32. C.P. Cavafy, *Ποιήματα* (ed. G.P. Savidis, Athens 1981), I, 106, 15. Another allusion to 'Ἡ πόλις' is to be found in Ganas' 'Δίπτυχο II', *Γυάλινα Γιάννενα* (Athens 1989), 18; this poem's last lines also echo Karyotakis' 'Ἰδανικοί αὐτόχειρες', *Ποιήματα καὶ πεζά*, 114.

Τό χέρι πού στά φύκια σ' ἔχει ρίξει
 νά τό κοβα ψηλά μ' ἕνα δρεπάνι,
 ὁ κόσμος σάν μυλόπετρα νά τρίξει,

νά βγοῦν ἀπ' τό θεόρατο τηγάνι
 τά ψάρια τοῦ καλόγερου καί πίσω
 τήν πόρτα ἀνάμεσά μας νά μήν κλείσω.³³

The place-name mentioned in the poem is a reminder of the close proximity to Epirus of Corfu, which with the other Ionian Islands is the prime home of the Greek sonnet, including several famous elegies. Again, the echo of Karyotakis' 'Πρέβεζα' (1928) with the rhyme on *μπάντα* is not merely ironical but wistful — a sign of the depopulation that Ganas refers to more explicitly elsewhere.³⁴ So this is a very geographically and poetically *located* poem (where, one might add, so many of Ganas' contemporaries are dislocated, even deracinated).³⁵

The octave expresses grief and poetic powerlessness: words are *κατοικίδια*: urban-dwelling, tamed, even (so to speak) de-clawed. It is, then, in the sestet that the hope for power and transcendence takes shape, in terms which owe much to the traditional sonnets of Mavilis and Sikelianos. Significantly, a sonnet of Sikelianos *on Mavilis* ends with a picture of the dead hero as being between sky and sea like a setting sun.³⁶

Of course, Ganas has taken an unheroic victim of drowning for his subject, but the sestet not only suggests an heroic act, with the scythe recalling Cronos' castration of Uranus (and of course οὐρανός appears in line 2), but also engages antagonistically with earlier texts, and in particular with Mavilis' sonnet 'Κέρκυρα' (1895), which refers to the

33. Ganas, *Μαῦρα Αιθάρια*, 39.

34. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα*, 141-2.

35. Savidis, rev. *Γνώρινα Γιάννενα*, discusses the question of Ganas' Epirot roots (if it exists) School; the issue of the extension of a national poetry's geography is raised by Helen Vendler in her introduction to *The Faber Book of Contemporary American Verse* (London 1987), 14-15. It might be rewarding to compare Ganas' work with that of James Wright on his childhood in the depressed Appalachian town of Martins Ferry, Ohio. The deliberate pace of Wright's short lines, his speaking for a family outside the world of letters, and his search for an ancestor in the neglected form of Sherwood Anderson, all present parallels to elements we have detected in Ganas' work. See *Above the River: The Complete Poems of James Wright* (Newcastle 1992).

36. Angelos Sikelianos, 'Πορτραῖτο τοῦ Μαβίλη', *Λυρικός Βίος* (Athens 1981), II, 90.

legend that the Phaeacians sprang from the god's severed genitals.³⁷ The wish to restore the dead friend to life is at the same time an attempt to lay violent hands on the tradition and to wrench it into harmony with the poet's wishes.

For the reference to φύκια surely recalls the seal's lament for the drowned child at the end of Papadiamandis' 'Τὸ μυρολόγι τῆς φύκιας' (explicitly alluded to by Ganas elsewhere).³⁸ The reference to the mill-wheel has personal resonances, for the poet's grandfather's mill is prominent elsewhere in the collection — but the expression is unusual enough that we might well want to relate it to an arresting phrase early on in Sikelianos' *Ἀλαφροῖσκιωτος*: 'σὰ μυλολίθαρo τρίζει ὁ ἥλιος'. (Let us not forget that a large part of Sikelianos' poem consists of an elegy for a dead childhood friend who excelled at swimming.)³⁹ The monk's fish are interestingly used. In the familiar folk tradition, when Constantinople was about to fall, a monk was frying seven fish and vowed that he'd never believe the Turks would prevail until his fish came back to life — which they then of course did.⁴⁰ But where the miracle was in tradition a bad portent, Ganas makes it a version of the lover's adynaton linking the dead man's life on earth and death by water.⁴¹ And finally, after all this dense and strenuous wrestling with the elements of tradition, the poem ends with the lost hope not to shut the door between life and death. The poem's last line quietly, modestly shuts a door on the aspirations generated in the poet by the inherited heroic form of a Mavilis or Sikelianos sonnet.

The point is that, while many poets of Ganas' generation do little more than assemble more or less arresting images, his is a voice haunted (but not hag-ridden) by the lines of earlier poets.⁴² A much more overt use of tradition as a reference point in his next collection *Γυάλινα Γιάννενα* (1989) brings this out in ingenious fashion. The poem in question is

37. Lorentzos Mavilis, 'Κέρκυρα', *Τὰ Ποιήματα* (ed. Georgios Alisandratos, Athens 1990), 68.

38. Ganas, *Παραλογή*, 22.

39. The mill: *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια*, 29. For the line of *Ἀλαφροῖσκιωτος*, see Sikelianos, *Λυρικός Βίος* (Athens 1981), 85; also the poem 'Μοιρολόι', 143-7.

40. N.G. Politis, *Παραδόσεις* (Athens 1904), 21.

41. The most celebrated example of such an adynaton is to be found in the *Ριμάδα κόρης καὶ νιοῦ*, cf. Hubert Pernot (ed.), *Chansons populaires grecques* (Paris 1931), 72-4.

42. So Pieris, rev. *Μαῦρα Λιθάρια*, 69.

dedicated to the late G.P. Savidis, who wrote an absorbing account of Karyotakis' poetic influence.

MNHM Κ.Γ. ΚΑΡΥΩΤΑΚΗ

Παράθυρα πού κούρασε ή θέα
στή Νίκαια, στό Μέτς, στήν Καλλιθέα
καί δέν μποροῦν ν' αλλάξουν περιβάλλον.

Τά χτίζουν ένα ένα τά καημένα
στών τοίχων τά πλευρά καί τών μετάλλων,
ἄνθρωποι σάν ἐσένα σάν ἐμένα.

Στό τέλος τά δουλεύουν οί τζαμτζήδες
γράφοντας τίς ομάδες πού ἀγαπάνε.
Φαίνεται καθαρά πόσο πονᾶνε
σ' ἐμάς τούς μανιακούς μανιστριτζήδες.

Οἱ ἔνοικοι κρεμᾶνε τίς κουρτίνες,
νά κρύψουν τί σ' ἀλήθεια κι ἀπό ποῖονε.
Ὅλοι τό ἴδιο γδύνονται καί τρώνε
καί χάνονται στοῦ κρεβατιοῦ τίς δίνες.

Γιατί νά τελειώνει λυπημένα
τό ποίημα πού τόσοι κατοικοῦνε.
Ποιός τάχα νά τό χρέωσε σέ μένα
καί πίσω ἀπό τήν πλάτη μου γελοῦνε
ἔνοικοι, ἐργολάβοι, θρωροί . . .⁴³

The poem is at first sight something of a cento from Karyotakis. Windows are familiar from the restricted world of Karyotakis' poems, and line 3 alludes to the minor poets of 'Ὅλοι μαζί', who fall victim to 'τοῦ "περιβάλλοντος", τῆς "ἐποχῆς"'. Again, καημένα of the windows echoes καημένοι of the sad mechanical civil servants. Yet the form is not one ever used by Karyotakis, but rather one which he might, with his love of the topsy-turvy, have thought up: think of the opening gambit of the poem 'Ἠλύσια', which actually begins with a bracketed sentence.⁴⁴ What we have here is a subtle variation, *à la manière de Karyotakis*, which would be almost baroque were the language not so

43. Ganas, *Γνάρινα Γιάννενα*, 21. It is a feature of this collection that all of the poems have dedications, listed in the Contents rather than above the poems: a few poems dedicated to the dead have a dedication as part of the text.

44. See Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα καί πεζά*, 82. As so often, Palamas had got there first: see no. 13 of *Σατιρικά γυμνάσματα, Ἄπαντα* (Athens n.d.), 243.

plain. We have an inverted sonnet (of course Karyotakis wrote several sonnets, notably ‘Δημόσιοι υπάλληλοι’) with a coda like the four-line envoi to a ballade (and of course Karyotakis has a ‘Μπαλάντα στους άδοξους ποιητές τῶν αἰῶνων’), except that it has an extra line which rhymes with nothing and leaves the poem suspended on its final ellipse, and indeed with a missing syllable as compared with the rest.⁴⁵ This last line is, then, radically amputated and incongruent, evoking the overwhelming over-population of Athens, which will flood over the despised poet.

What the poem actually says is admirably sharp and clear and requires little commentary. In, as it were, the poem proper, the upside-down sonnet, the glaziers’ football slogans are a parody of the poetic act, the peeping toms a sinister parody of the artist. Tenants (ένοικοι) behave as if guilty (ένοχοι), and at best their lives are as empty as those of the Preveza housewives.⁴⁶ Their disappearance looks like a suitable place for the poem to end — and very Karyotakian, too.

But there is a further twist of the knife, the envoi. As used in the original form of the ballade, it often serves as an address to a patron, and so it is here — except that here, the poet, now singular and separate from the Athenian population, wonders just who has imposed this task (χρέος) on him.⁴⁷ The city is full of promiscuous, undistinguished crowds who mock him; and in the end the poet takes on the characteristics of a rueful, ironic martyr like Karyotakis himself, whose ballade concludes with a similar self-reflexive question and vista of humiliation:

Καί κάποτε οἱ μελλούμενοι καιροί:
 ‘Ποιός άδοξος ποιήτης’ θέλω νά πούνε
 ‘τήν έγραψε μιάν έτσι πενιχρή
 μπαλάντα στους ποιητές άδοξοι πού ναι;’⁴⁸

45. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα και πεζά*, 27.

46. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα και πεζά*, 141-2. For a pun similar to the one here see ‘M.I.G’, *Άκάθιστος Δείπνος*, 28: ‘τύψεις τής καρυδιάς’.

47. The notion of χρέος underlies Solomos’ *Οἱ Έλεύθεροι Πολιορκημένοι* and Seferis’ reflections on that poem in *Δοκιμές*, I, 263.

48. See Embiricos, ‘Όταν οἱ εὐκάλυπτοι θροῖζουν στις άλλέςες,’ *Όκτανα*, 62-6; and compare Ganas’ *Παραλογή*, 31, with its further echo of Karyotakis’ ‘Έμβατήριο πένθιμο και κατακόρυφο’.

In order to complete this cursory view of Ganas as a formal experimenter, I turn to his last collection, *Παραλογή* (1993), which ties together all the previous threads of tradition in an ambitious manner, and with reference to a source which, while evident from the first collection, is now more of a shaping presence. Perhaps it would be best, if we are to take this challenging book's complexities seriously, to turn first to its opening poem in the terms it sets itself before looking at more general issues.

Έρχονται μέρες πού ξεχνάω πώς μέ λένε.

Έρχονται νύχτες βροχερές βαμβακερές όμίχλες
 τ'άλούρι γίνεται σπυρί ύστερα στάχυ
 θροΐζει μέ πολλά δρεπάνια
 άψύς Ιούλιος στή μέση του χειμώνα.
 Βλέπω τό ύφαντό του κόσμου νά ξηλώνεται
 άόρατο τό χέρι πού ξηλώνει
 καί τρέμω μήν κοπεΐ τό νήμα.
 Νήμα νερού στημόνι χωρίς μνήμη
 σταγόνα διάφανη σέ βρύα καί λειχήνες
 νιβάδα-χνούδι τών βουνών
 χαλάζι-φυλλοβόλο
 κι άξαφνα σκάφανδρο ζεστό
 στήν κιβωτό τής μήτρας.
 Άρχαίο σκοτάδι τήκεται καί τρίζει
 άχειροποίητη φλογίτσα πού τό γλείφει.

Συναγωγές ύδάτων ύετοι πρόγονοι παγετώνες
 στήν πάχνη άκόμη τής άνωθυμίας.⁴⁹

It is not hard to discern affinities between this and, in a general way, Seferis; and later poems in the collection openly allude to Solomos, Papadiamandis, Sikelianos, Karyotakis.⁵⁰ Yet, although the poem describes

49. Ganas, *Παραλογή*, 8.

50. For Seferian echoes, compare lines 3-5 with the end of 'Πάνω σ'έναν ξένο στίχο' and with 'Τελευταίος σταθμός': Seferis, *Ποιήματα*, 87-9, 212-15. Solomos is quoted on p. 8: 'Όλίγο φώς καί μακρινό σέ μέγα σκότος κι έρμος'; the title of Papadiamandis' 'Το μυρολόγι τής φάκτας' on p. 22; Sikelianos is quoted: see n. 60 below, but the sexual communion of p. 9 also has something in common with 'Τό πρωτοβρόχι', *Λυρικός Βίος*, II, 110-11; for Karyotakis, see n. 48 above.

a haunting, it has a voice both familiar and individual. The last delicately balanced line speaks volumes about the poem's purposes, which are described more fully (and clumsily) in the blurb:

Paraloge is not a collection of poems gathered into a book. As its title shows, it is a single poem, with marked narrative elements and with as its basic thematic axes love and death. A polyphonic poem. Only that the voices come from the opposite shore. As in the *Nekyia* of the *Odyssey* and in the folk ballads, the dead speak here.

Let this not sound blasphemous. We all hear 'ideal voices and beloved' speaking to us, usually in our own words.

In *Paraloge* can be heard the voice of the Dead Brother and the voices of the well loved or the never met dead, which come and tell their own stories. Words never said, unspoken loves and secrets on which death has set its seal.

The poem develops without strict formal constraints and with a metrical freedom which extends from the pure *dekapentasyllavos* and the haikuto free verse and dramatic dialogue.⁵¹

The sequence consists of twenty-seven constituent poems, all but the last under one page long, and some very short indeed. The forms, as suggested, vary widely but, as the blurb's reference to Cavafy's 'ἴδανικὲς φωνὲς κι ἀγαπημένες' might suggest, the basic rhythm is a muted sort of iambic in lines of varying length.⁵² (In fact Ganas and other formalist poets were attacked in the wake of the book's publication for being metrically retrograde, with a hidden agenda which made them much the same as royalists!)⁵³ Allusions to Greek poets are legion, and a particular importance derives from the poem's dialogue with, this time, a living poet, Sachtouris.

In 1948, Sachtouris published a collection with the pregnant title *Παραλογαίς*. Not least because of its archaic spelling, this had a number of connotations, referring not only to the name conventionally given to Greek ballads of non-historical content, but also conveying the irrationality

51. On this, see Evripidis Garandoudis' review of *Παραλογή, Ποίηση 2* (Autumn 1993), 155-8.

52. Cavafy, 'Φωνές', *Ποιήματα*, 91. On Cavafy's iambics see Peter Mackridge, 'Versification and signification in Cavafy', *Μολυβδό-κονδυλο-πελεκητής 2* (1990), 125-43. On the last page of his collection (35) Ganas actually says 'κι ἂν ἀπαγγέλλω ἕναν ἴαμβο χλωρό'.

53. Garandoudis, rev. *Παραλογή*, expresses reserve more temperately.

(παράλογο) of those troubled years.⁵⁴ As Sachtouris' career has gone on he has produced several intersections, semantic and rhythmical, with the violent and troubling world of the folk ballads, and it is to this heritage that Ganas here pays tribute. (He has done so more openly in 1995 with a poem dedicated to Sachtouris.) So it is not surprising to find love and death treated with the dark colours of the ballads and Sachtouris' variations on them, or to find Ganas using two staple folk metres in the collection.⁵⁵ But the particular originality of the book lies centrally elsewhere.

The twenty-seven poems move in sequence, but while most seem to be in the albeit haunted persona of the poet, twelve are in italics, representing other voices which the speaking voice's modest and semi-involuntary necromancy has summoned up. While we begin and end with the central poetic voice, the seven poems at the book's heart are in the voice of a forger, Grigoris Raptis, who murders his female lawyer out of unrequited love, and in other places we have the imagined words of friends and family.⁵⁶ Now this 'polyphonic' method is familiar from recent Greek fiction, some of it distinguished. Yet one may relate this elaborate scheme very particularly to Ganas' homeland on the Albanian border, and to provide a pressing reason for this polyphonic method's being employed with so much colouring from the anonymous poetry of the Greek folk. For Ganas comes from the only part of Greece with a polyphonic tradition of folk song, once heard never forgotten, and with a clearly important affinity with church music. A simple song, say, of ξενιτιά becomes highly complex, with two main voices, a drone, and a fourth voice which moves above and below the melodic line in a curious

54. See Miltos Sachtouris, *Ποιήματα 1941-1971* (Athens 1971). For graphic examples of the use of folk poetry's rhythms and motifs by Sachtouris see, e.g. the following poems from that volume: 'Η λησιμονημένη' (32), 'Η πληγωμένη άνοιξη' (40), 'Ο βυθός' (50), 'Τοῦ πύργου' (78), 'Η πηγή' (109). See also Giannis Dallas, *Πλάγιος λόγος* (Athens 1989), 338-56. Ganas' poem dedicated to Sachtouris (a reworking of one of the latter's poems) appears in *Ρεύματα* 28 (Nov.-Dec. 1995), 101.

55. These metres are, of course, the *dekapentasyllavos* and the Maniat eight-syllable metre found on p. 12 of the collection, which recalls the Maniat version of the Dead Brother: see Giorgos Ioannou (ed.), *Τό Δημοτικὸ Τραγοῦδι. Παραλογές* (Athens 1983), 41-3. Earlier palpable quotations from folk song in Ganas' work include 'Πολλά βήματα πίσω', *Μαύρα Αιθάρια*, 36, 'Χριστουγεννιάτικη ιστορία', *Γυάλινα Γιάννενα*, 14-16.

56. I presume this is a real case.

yodel. This last voice is significantly called κλώστης — very significantly, in the light of lines 6-8 of Ganas' opening poem.⁵⁷

Ganas is of course only the latest in a succession of Greek poets who have drawn on folk song; but the way in which he weaves a tradition of both anonymous and authored poetry into a pattern is highly original. Above all, the revelatory idiom of three earlier poets to whom folk poetry was important is strongly but subtly present: Solomos, Sikelianos, Seferis. It is only with the last poem that this balancing of tradition and the individual talent perhaps comes unstuck, and Ganas' claim to being (in Harold Bloom's terms) a 'strong poet' looks weaker.

The last line of the twenty-second poem would have made a nice ending to the collection: 'Καί σβήνω δίπλα μου τή λάμπα'.⁵⁸ Instead, Ganas presses on, ending with the longest poem. This begins with a Solomian address to the πατρίδα (recall 'Ἄταφη' at the beginning of this paper), and culminates by quoting Sikelianos and (more or less) Seferis.⁵⁹ The poetic voice wanders much like the voice at Seferis' *Asine*, seeking an apparently lost homeland, and concludes:

καί λέω ναί - ἐδῶ - στό φῶς θανάτωσέ με.

Γιατί τό φῶς θά μᾶς δικάσει
κι ἀλίμονο σ' ὅποιον φοράει ματογάλλια.

The first phrase quotes Sikelianos' poem 'Μαβίλης', itself translating Ajax's famous words in Homer: ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὄλεσσον - 'στό φῶς θανάτωσέ μας'.⁶⁰ I am not sure about the wisdom of this; and so too with the last, intensely Seferian lines: there is to my mind a tonal problem here. It is rather clamorous, as if Ganas, in writing a sequence of this sort, is setting out to vie with *Mythistorema* and *Thrush*. And so many are the echoes of Seferis in Ganas' poem that it looks at times

57. See Simon Karas, sleeve-note to *Τραγούδια τῆς Ἠπειροῦ* (Σύλλογος πρὸς Διάδοσιν τῆς Ἑθνικῆς Μουσικῆς 111) (Athens 1975).

58. Ganas, *Παραλογή*, This is a Cavafian touch: see e.g. 'Καισαρίων', 'Ἐν ἐσπέρῃ', *Ποιήματα*, 69-70, 87.

59. Solomos, *Ποιήματα καὶ πεζά* (ed. Stylianos Alexiou, Athens 1994), 237.

60. Ganas, *Παραλογή*, 35; Sikelianos, 'Μαβίλης', *Λυρικός Βίος*, II, 68-9.

almost like a cento.⁶¹ Ganas wouldn't be the first or the last post-Seferian poet (Sinopoulos is a distinguished example) to show that head-on confrontation with the master isn't the way forward. Yet the fact that Seferis himself could at his weakest be under the influence of Cavafy and Eliot is to make us strike a note of caution — quite apart from the etiquette of ending this paper on a carping note.⁶² So I shall conclude by looking at a poem from this collection striking in form and feeling:

Νά μέ θυμᾶσαι – βασιλικά νά τρίβεις στίς παλάμες σου γιά νά θυμᾶσαι – καί δάκρυα πολλά νά χύνεις όταν μέ θυμᾶσαι – όταν σημαίνει Ναύπακτος- Ἀράχοβα-Δεσκάτη – όταν περνᾶς Γαλήνης 18 – πού δέν περνᾶς – νά μέ θυμᾶσαι – ἐκεῖ χαρτιά μισογραμμένα – παιδιά πού μεγαλώνουν – Ἡλίας – Γιάννης – τά παιδιά μου – ἐκεῖ παράπονο Ερμόνη – περαστικός Μιχάλης καί Χρῆστος τῶν χρωμάτων – βασιλικά νά τρίβεις γιά νά μέ θυμᾶσαι όταν σημαίνει Σάββατο – Μαυρομιάλη 8 – ὁ Φίλιππος μαζί μας – ἄχ Γεωργία – Γιάννη – Ἐκτορα – Νίκο – Γιῶργο – νά τοὺς πεις . . . – νά μέ θυμᾶστε – Ὅβρηνοβιτς καί Πανσανίου – ὅπου πᾶτε μέ Πόπη καί Μυρσίνη καί Γιάννακη – καί μή μοῦ γράφεις – δέν σκέφτεσαι ἐμένα όταν γράφεις – σκέφτεσαι αὐτό πού γράφεις – κι ἐγὼ ζητῶ μνή-μη – πεινάω μνή-μη καί διψῶ μνή-μη – καί μή σᾶς βγάλω ἀπ' τή ζωή σας – δέν τό θέλω – ἐσύ τό θέλησες – θυμήσου – χωρίς ἐσένα δέν ὑπάρχω – χωρίς ἐμᾶς εἶστε μειοψηφία (ΟΛΟΙ ΜΑΖΙ) χωρίς ἐσᾶς ὁστά γεγυμνωμένα – καί μήν ἀκοῦς πάνω καί κάτω κόσμος – εἴσατε ἡ πατριδα μας κι ἐμεῖς ζενιτεμένοι.⁶³

In the poem that precedes this one, an echo of the liturgy (γλυκύ μου ἔαρ) sets off the opening lines of a ballad in which a merchant is ambushed and killed by what turns out to be his own brother. This in turn, via a painfully slow and child-like act of writing, and then in turn an echo, leads to another italicised quotation this time identified by a note at the back of the book. It comes (adapted) from a poem by the late

61. The atmosphere in the poem comes out of recollections of Seferis, 'Δημοτικὸ τραγοῦδι', 'Ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς Ἀσίνης', 'Κίχλη', 'Ἀγιάννα Α' (Ποιήματα, 25, 185-7, 217-29, 233). Notable is the introduction of ancient settings (even if Cassope is in Ganas' native Epirus) and words (σῦλος, ἀσπίδα, δόρυ) not met with in Ganas' earlier work. It would be arbitrary to see these as off limits for Ganas just because they are new here; yet they do not perhaps so naturally fit into what Cavafy would have called the περτοχή of his poetry.

62. See my paper, 'George Seferis and Theodore Roethke: two versions of Modernism' in Dimitris Tziouvas (ed.), *Greek Modernism and Beyond* (Lanham, Md. 1997) 167-79.

63. Ganas, *Παραλογή* 27.

Christos Bravos, a native of Grevena (about whom both Ganas and Sachtouris have written poems) and it challenges the folk belief that there is no music in the Underworld: εὔτου βιολιά δὲν παίζουνε.⁶⁴ Tradition, as summoned up by Ganas, here subsumes namedness and anonymity within a consoling ceremony.

But Ganas' necromancy brings us in the next poem the imagined words of the dead poet Christos Bravos. Though written out as prose, each constituent part between the fragmenting dashes is iambic: the voice that comes from the underworld keeps getting cut off as if by a bad connection but still consists of, or coalesces around, poetic kernels. The recollections of the pleasant life of the world echo those of the rich young men in Hades who address the narrator in *Apokorpos*. This early fifteenth-century Cretan work, the first poem in the modern language to be printed (1509), is itself indebted to folk tradition: Ganas actually echoes the Cretan poem with the words 'ὅταν σημαίνει Σάββατο'.⁶⁵ But the passage also presents us with the sort of real-life details familiar from Sinopoulos' *Νεκρόδειπνος* or, even more appositely, Anagnostakis' poem 'Ὅταν ἀποχαιρέτησα . . .'.⁶⁶ The dialogue with these recent and highly self-reflexive poems is a reminder that the feelings of separation from the living which the dead *poet* feels are greater still than those felt by others. The dead in *Apokorpos* are tormented by the knowledge that

64. For the ballad see Ioannou (ed.), *Παραλογές*, 31-43. Other poems for or on Bravos are in Sachtouris, *Ἐκτοπλάσματα* (Athens 1986), 10-11 and Ganas, *Γυάλινα Γιάννενα*, 8, 28. Ganas' note on Bravos is on p. 36; for violins and the underworld see e.g. N.G. Politis (ed.), *Ἐκλογαὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τραγῳδία τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ* (Athens 1979), 219 (no. 209).

65. Bergadis, *Ἀπόκοπος* [with *Ἡ Βοσκοπούλα*] (ed. Stylianos Alexiou, Athens 1979), 31 (line 449); see also Margaret Alexiou, 'Literature and popular tradition' in David Holton (ed.), *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete* (Cambridge 1991), 239-74. G.P. Savidis, in a communication delivered in 1991 which Ganas may have known of, identifies the work as the starting point of Modern Greek literature: 'Πότε ἀραγε ἀρχίζει ἡ νεότερη ἑλληνικὴ λογοτεχνία;' in Nikolaos M. Panayotakis (ed.), *Origini della letteratura neogreca* (Venice 1993), I, 37-41.

66. Manolis Anagnostakis, *Τὰ ποιήματα 1941-1971* (Athens 1992), 128-9. Also relevant is Takis Sinopoulos' title poem from *Νεκρόδειπνος* (Athens 1972), with its truncated phrases; though the manner in which they are truncated is visually and rhythmically different. Traces of Sinopoulos' manner are to be found in Ganas' first collection, and Sinopoulos' last book, *Τὸ γκρίζο φῶς* (repr. Athens 1995) is not without affinities. Note in particular Sinopoulos' poem, 'Σημειώσεις VI' in *Συλλογὴ II* (Athens 1980), 112: 'Νά γράψω μιὰ παράγραφο-παραλογὴ γιὰ τὸν Χριστόφορο'.

they are forgotten on earth, even by their wives, but the poet's need for remembrance is more urgent still. This is where the concluding reference to Karyotakis comes in (by the most Karyotakian device of an ungainly set of brackets). In 'Όλοι μαζί' Karyotakis satirises the tribe of poets (himself included) who go around together in a lumpen kind of way.⁶⁷ The voice of the dead poet in Ganas' poem warns that poets will actually come to lose their poetic individuality if they are not in communion with tradition and what is paradoxically the still bigger group of the dead.⁶⁸ And yet, in the poem's very traditional-sounding last line, only this world is seen as our home. It is on the horns of this dilemma that the poem ends, in a manner which exemplifies Ganas' distinctive gifts of technique and feeling.

From *Apokopos* to *Anagnostakis*: Ganas is, I hope to have shown, a resourceful poet in that, among other things, he draws on the full resources of modern Greek poetry in order to create his own voice. To read him is to be inspired to re-read a whole tradition through him — including poetry (folk poetry, say, or Sikelianos) which has in recent years slipped out of the living dialogue, if not always out of curricula. The continuity of Ganas' themes is evident, the way in which he keeps reinventing himself versatile without being showy. It is of such poets, at the height of their powers, that Eliot speaks in the irresistible phrase, 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.'⁶⁹

King's College London

67. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα και πεζά*, 103.

68. Demographers, however, inform us that it will very soon cease to be true that the dead are the majority.

69. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', *The Sacred Wood*, 123-43; quotation from p. 125.