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What's in a name?

*Fragments of a writer's continuing, personal odyssey
between two languages*

This is a personal statement by an author who lives, works and writes in two languages, Greek and English. As I am describing a journey, a life's journey – for an author's work is also, to a great degree, his life – I shall follow the narrative flow of autobiography.

I was born in Australia, of Greek parents, but I have no memories of that country – my family, and I with them, left to return to Greece when I was still an infant. So, I was raised a Greek, by Greeks, in Greece. There was no English nanny and my parents did not share the refined bourgeois habit of addressing their children in a language other than their own, like those decrepit Russian aristocrats in Tolstoy's novels, speaking to one another in French. No. I was raised a Greek, by Greeks, in Greece and in Greek.

When I was five or so, a kindly Englishman living in Athens was employed by my parents to teach me his language. But as I did not take kindly to instruction – still don't in fact, in the little I have learned in my life I am an autodidact – this attempt soon was abandoned. My next brush with English was when I was in the *Tetarti Demotikou*, the fourth year of Greek primary school, when I was transferred from my wonderful co-ed school where I had been since the Nursery to 'Athens College', a strict boys' school, founded and run by Americans. Here, although the basic syllabus was taught in Greek, there was a heavy emphasis on language, with one hour of English (or should I say American?) a day and many of the scientific subjects (math, physics, chemistry, etc.) taught in that language in the last years of school. But, fortunately, the indigenous Gods pitied me and I did not stay long enough at Athens College to undergo this additional torment. What I had to suffer for the five years I stayed there was English -- the learning of.

I repeat: by nature, I am averse to instruction. I just do not like this situation, of sitting and listening to someone telling me something which it is expected of me to learn and repeat sometime in the near future. I find it deadening to the mind, to imagination, to the creative – i.e., the human – faculty. And although I loved, and still do love learning things, either through books, conversation, films, plays, experience, painting, life, whatever, the teaching situation, at least in its more institutionalized form (and Athens College was nothing if not institutional) always tended to put me off.

Still, I could not avoid learning some English. Year in, year out, there was a growing residue of words, grammar, syntax, rules, rules, rules, words, words, words. But no love was lost in this affair. Mathematics and English were my two most hated subjects back then and I know why: they depended heavily on a load of technicalities (rules), specific ways to do things which you had to learn and apply every single time. And if I sometimes enjoyed a poem by Robert Frost or a short story by Saki (that type of thing) I always hated – still do in fact – the technicalities of grammar, tenses, the sense that to know a language you have to be constantly applying a complicated set of do's and don'ts. And although as a writer I will often spend many hours searching for *le mot juste*, go elbow-deep in dictionaries, thesauri and suchlike, and also enjoy and sometimes apply with a clear conscience the crystalline injunctions of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, I still cannot for the life of me define a 'subjunctive' or a 'gerund' and cannot tell you the past perfect of 'to go'. Oh, I am sure I will recognize it when I hear it and comfortably take in stride in a piece of writing – but I do not know it by name, you see. Nor wish to learn it.

When I was twelve, although my English had progressed enough for me to be transferred to the 'advanced' class (I think there was by now also some home instruction, though I cannot be sure: it rings a bell, but the core of the memory has been totally repressed) I was still, in essence, averse to it. But this year I became lucky for I had, for the first time, an excellent teacher, a certain Mrs. Cuthbert, a young and very good-looking (I think this was a big help, by the way) Canadian lady, who loved her subject. But not me. Not at first, anyway – and I don't blame her for it. I could not care less about what she taught and made no effort to hide it. But charming Mrs. Cuthbert was a formidable foe. She was intent to make me better, and for this used every means at her disposal, even hits-under-the-belt, the worst of which was

humiliation. And although trying to humiliate the students was common educational practice in this suburban and, oh-so-enlightened place of torture and my hide had grown rather thick by now, being humiliated by a young and pretty woman was suddenly more than I could bear. I had two options available: the first was to commit emotional suicide. The second was to show that terrifying and beautiful Mrs. Cuthbert who I really was. I chose the latter.

Very soon, my grades improved, I moved from the disgrace of an ‘F’ to the mediocrity of a ‘C’, then began to see the surface, at ‘B’ level. On the last day of school of that year, when Mrs. Cuthbert announced our grades, my ‘A’ was accompanied by an even greater gift – a big smile. Oh, Mrs. Cuthbert!

I don’t want you to get me wrong: I am not describing an adolescent crush. I am not attracted to older women and I find hierarchically-defined relationships inhibitive of the flow of emotion. No – it wasn’t love that way, Mrs. Cuthbert was not my Juliet, my Dulcinea, my – Heavens forbid! – Madame Bovary. But she was my muse, a very Greek thing – remember? At first, I wanted to improve for her sake. Her looks and her young age made the task more appealing, but what really motivated me was her love for the subject (a quality in short supply among the teachers I knew) and the sincerity which I saw in her displeasure at my failure. In her anger, in her punishment, I could see that *she really wanted me to do better, it was important for her*. And for a sensitive young lad, as I was, this was strong motive.

But enough about school. School was not that important to me, or my education and development, and where it not for Mrs. Cuthbert and a few rare occasions when I was inspired by something I did or heard there, I wouldn’t even devote to it the few paragraphs I did. My true teachers were my parents and my three sisters. It is to them I owe the first things of substance that I learned – most important among these being the love of learning. My father would sometimes take me to the Acropolis on Sundays, we would sit on a rock at Areios Pagos or Philopappou, or walk up the stone steps designed by his teacher, Dimitri Pikionis (my father was an architect) and he would answer my questions about anything from Ancient Philosophy to Darwin, Homer to Kazantzakis, the *glossikon zitima* (the conflict in Greek culture between the demotic, popular linguistic idiom, and the archaic language then official use) from the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, to his own years fighting the Germans, to our family history, stories from the old country, his hometown in Eastern

Romylia and my grandfather, whom I never met. But he was not at all like my bored, boring teachers at school. When he spoke, my father was on fire (a slow-burning, concentrated, but very intense flame) and therefore a true and valuable educator. And though I can't remember any very specific *things* I learned from him (he had to be away a lot – those Sundays were not that many) he did communicate to me that most important lesson, that stories and ideas and words, can be carriers of – and tools to unearth – profound meaning. My sisters (who were in their late teens when I was in my early) also helped immensely. Their rooms, like my father's study, were full of books to which I was welcome, serious books, great books, adult books, books with the paintings of Michelangelo and Goya, the poems of Cavafy and Elytis, the philosophy of Sartre... And although they did not have very much time for me (they had their own lives to go on with) they did occasionally give me what today goes by the name of 'quality time'. But this was *high* quality time, again instilling in me the idea that something very important was going on, behind appearances, that – to quote Heraclitus – *αρμονία αφανής φανεράς κρείττων*, the hidden harmony is more important than the visible. And that the *via reggia*, the Royal Road to that harmony – I was too young to learn anything else – was through words and pictures too, the works of art, culture, intelligent discourse, whether in the living form of oral communication or on the printed page. (Music was also important, I learned by hearing it, but having exactly zero musical aptitude, I never ventured beyond the role of passive listener.)

I have been asked to report on my linguistic adventures as a writer, so I must now – to speak momentarily as a mathematician, since I trained as one – bring literature into the equation. Since I am telling the story in chronological procession, *ab ovo* as it were, this is the right point for it. I was twelve (my first year with Mrs. Cuthbert, to you) when I started to feel that books of stories (literature) were an important thing. I'd always been strong on daydreaming, making up and playing my own stories, and I was inspired in this by a few things I read between the ages of six and twelve, both in Greek, from the moving historical novels by the Greek children's novelist Penelope Delta, to the serial, weekly adventures of '*Paidi Phantasma*', i.e. the 'Phantom Boy' a.k.a. Yorgos Thalassis, resistance fighter extraordinaire, as of course the endless, continuing adventures of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and company; and increasingly also in English, from Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and

Secret Seven, some Hardy Boys novels, and the complete works (these were read incessantly and repeatedly) of the great Hergé, the father of my favorite childhood and eternal hero, that inimitable, immortal, unique young gentleman, the fearless reporter, the tireless seeker after truth, the protector of the innocent, my beloved Tintin. (My French – a new torture had been added to my life, when I was ten or so – was still very poor, so I read my Tintin in English.)

But when I was twelve I also met Literature – capital ‘L’, please – in Greek, at first.

(A parenthesis: I had come in contact with Literature already, but not in a form I identified as such. By the time I was twelve I must have seen at least ten ancient Greek plays in the open air theatres of Epidaurus and Herod Atticus – one of the privileges of growing up in Greece – in performances by the Greek National Theatre and the Art Theatre of the important director Karolos Koun. And although that experience was, as a rule, moving and gratifying, I could not integrate it with the rest of my life. Together with vacations, snorkeling and ice-cream – then unavailable in Greece in any other season – ancient drama was a summer thing, an extravagant, but marginal vacation ritual.)

The first serious book I read was – though perhaps I shouldn’t say this to an audience of non-Greeks, who may get the wrong ideas – Nikos Kazantzakis’s *The life and times of Alexis Zorbas* (a.k.a., after the film, as ‘Zorba the Greek’). I have never re-read the book and do not trust a young teenager’s tastes to report on its quality to you. But I remember that this was an intense experience, reading it I definitely had a sense I had entered a fascinating, new *terra incognita*, a land where *words really count*, where they function as passageways to hidden treasure – mostly emotional. Kazantzakis language has come under attack, even ridicule, by modern Greek writers and aesthetes. It is considered an artificial and uneasy amalgam of a rather extreme form of ‘demotic’, popular, often strongly idiomatic speech, with a heavy philosophical conceptual structure, a Nietzschean philosopher speaking in enigmatic, half-invented peasant tongues. (Kazantzakis habit of constantly creating new words, either by combination, or exotic grammatical transformations, nouns becoming verbs, verbs becoming nouns, an adjective plus a noun becoming a verb, unusual endings of x provenance stuck on words of y provenance, and so on, does not make life easier for the reader.) And although this criticism to his neologisms and ‘creative’ (to put it

politely) application of rules is doubtless justified to a great degree, it does not, in my mind, diminish his stature as a writer. (James Joyce did the exact same thing, really, and no one would dare call him a bad writer – though, it has to be added, no one considers *Finnegan's Wake* their favorite bedtime reading.) No, I believe that Kazantzakis was a very important, if perhaps not a great, writer, and most certainly a true writer, a man who was passionately involved in communicating an interesting and intense vision, and had the drive, the energy and the tools to do it with. And I'd rather have his 'failed' novels (if 'failed' they are, as many of my Greek colleagues feel) than a legion of technically proficient, faultlessly written but, at the end of the day lacking-in-intensity-of-life artifacts that go today by the name of 'literature'.¹

But this kind of criticism came later. In those years, the conservative powers that be (most schoolteachers among them) accused Kazantzakis mostly of irreverence, found him obscene, disrespectful of tradition and authority. But these accusations were, to my ears, accolades, so I was hooked on Kazantzakis for a while and read all his major novels, *Christ crucified*, *The Last Temptation* and his greatest, *Kapetan Michalis* (published in English as *Freedom or Death*).

I have perhaps to explain, before I proceed – as we are primarily interested in language, here, and this is very pertinent – the importance of his exotic idiom to me. If I wanted to re-read Kazantzakis today (and I do: but time, alas, is a commodity in limited supply and there are other more pressing priorities) I would probably read him in English. I find the going much easier, the linguistic excesses are dulled, and meaning is communicated more directly – which perhaps goes to show that I agree with a lot of the criticism, yes, indeed, Kazantzakis often carries innovation and idiosyncratic expression beyond the limits of reader-friendliness and to me this is a capital crime for an author. But had I read him in anything but the original language when I first did so, I do not think he would have had the same effect on me. You see, his language – by virtue of its being so unusual, to say the least – carried another, secret meaning, and I will remind you once again of the words of Heraclitus: hidden meanings are more important than obvious ones. And this meaning resided,

¹ If I may perhaps, pause for a moment and pay tribute to the great writer whose name, with that of his wonderful brother, adorns this School. I believe that in many ways Lawrence Durrell is the same type of creature. Reading the criticism of his work by some contemporary cultural policemen brings to mind a lot of the criticism levelled against Kazantzakis. But *The Alexandrian Quartet*, to name only his most famous work, is important despite any flaws it may have. And many flawless (supposedly) works are not.

paradoxically, in its very eccentricity, its very dislocation from the center of life-as-lived. In Kazantzakis' voice, this unusual, new voice, I could feel the writer as outsider, the writer who, by virtue of living outside our own experience (and so-called 'real life' was not yet very interesting for me) can comment on it as an outsider, a linguistic outsider in this case, and thus his pronouncements acquire the value, if not of prophesy, then at least of added insight.

By recounting feelings I also had felt and describing places and landscapes I had also seen in this fiery, weird, linguistic *mélange*, I felt Kazantzakis was giving me, again and again, this message: 'the word is not as you see it, there is more to it than meets the eye, do not trust the ideas that have been handed down to you, don't go by the book, hidden harmony is more important than apparent, find your own meaning, do your own thing.'

The Nietzschean meaning of the book – I'm sorry to say it, but Alexis Zorba has more of the Nietzschean Superman than the 'typical Greek' he is usually sold as – the iconoclasm of the ideas and the force of the language, this new thing, define I think my prime debt to this man: the debt for his making me realize my own calling – though this calling did not fulfill itself for another decade, almost.

Now back to language and, soon, Mrs. Cuthbert.

After devouring the novels of Kazantzakis, I went on to read some of the better-known Greek novelists, Stratis Myrivilis, M. Karagatsis, Yorgos Theotokas, Angelos Terzakis, Angelos Vlachos, mostly the writers of the so-called 'Generation of (nineteen) thirty'. I also had my first experience of poetry, reading and loving, though not always 'understanding' -- whatever that means -- Cavafy, Solomos, Seferis, Elytis. For a year or so, I was in a state of bliss. A whole new world had opened up, the resplendent world of literature, of meaning carried by language, deep meaning, meaning that was irreducible to its primary elements, complex meaning that *had to be in this narrative and/or lyrical and/or dramatic form because it couldn't be in any other*. And all this was in Greek, my language, the only one that I knew well enough, the only one that had roots in my soul, that made emotional sense for me.

And, you know, that's so important. A word is never reducible to one or multiple specific meanings – a dictionary gives us a consensus, a middle-of-the-road, the resolution of some invisible committee, agreeing what a word means. But personal

and social factors influence the way this meaning is lived by every one of us. And as different languages create words to cover the needs of the people that use them (famously, Eskimos have thirty words, or something, to describe ice, whereas Swahili, before refrigeration was invented, had none) every word is invested, either through onomatopoeic associations, or through a bundle of conditioned reflexes growing around use, with a resonance that is beyond reason, beyond the ‘pointing’ that Wittgenstein tells us creates language. (You point at a book and say ‘book’, you see – and thus associate words to things.)

To me, a native Greek speaker, a Greek raised in Greece, by Greeks, the word *θάλασσα* (*thalassa*) carries the whisper of soft waves gently caressing a rock, somewhere in the Aegean, at some irretrievable moment in my childhood. And the sea to me will always be *thalassa*, this sea I grew up with, this sea surrounding this island, this blue sea, this often *οίνωπας πόντος* (*oenopas pontos*) what Homer calls the ‘wine-dark sea’ causing philologists endless troubles, making them organize symposia and conferences to discuss the matter, going to the extent of searching for oceanographic indications that the sea was indeed red back in those times (something having to do with algae, I think) or that the wine was blue (some fungus no doubt).

But to me, to a Greek, this is no puzzle. ‘Wine dark’ sounds just right. This is our sea and Homer’s too. We live in it. We know it. And, oh, I shouldn’t be calling it sea, or *mer* or *mare* or *Meer* or whatever. Look around you, look at the dark substance surrounding this beautiful island, this dominion of Prospero. It is not the sea. It is *thalassa*. And it is wine-dark, don’t you see it?

In this sense, a writer is not so much born in a country as in a language. The language is his home. His salvation – the means of it, anyway. He is defined by it, and that is a useful thing. Like Archimedes, when he proposed to move the world with the mechanics of levers, a writer needs a *πα στω* (*pa sto*) a ‘where to stand’ in order to be able to perform his magic – whatever dose of magic it is his privilege to be able to perform. And this place, where he can stand, where he begins from, his axioms (the mathematician speaking again) is his or her language. His, or her home.

Yet, every coin has two sides. And writers are creatures with a rather developed sense of ‘negative capability’ this quality, or burden, so wonderfully defined by the sublime John Keats whereby a human being ‘is capable of being in

uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. And although some writers do feel at least some degree of irritable reaching after fact and reason (I often do anyway, but maybe this just shows I am not much of a writer) I think it is their capacity to resist it, not to exercise it to any excessive degree, that constitutes the spine of an author's persona. We've all doubtlessly heard, countless times, an author answering in an interview, when asked to give his or her book's ulterior meaning, that 'if I could put it in one sentence, I wouldn't need to write the book' and custom and repetition do not diminish this statement's essential meaning. It is true. If a theorem, or a philological analysis, or some statistics, an Excel spreadsheet or a diagram or an essay or a combination of the above, can give your intended meaning more precisely, then by all means go for those. Go for clarity. Go for precision. Go for intelligibility. The world is complicated enough as it is. We must not speak to one another in cryptograms if we can avoid it. If a thing can be said clearly, let it be so said, by all means. If all you want to say is 'the pen is on the table' say just that. As Hemingway taught us, there can be a lot of truth in a simple declarative sentence; it can also be Literature. And if all you want to say is 'I want to buy a motorbike', then again say so and, ideally, do it, go out and buy it – don't write a short story about it instead and (please!) not a novel. But if you want to buy a motorbike and your parents (or your partner or spouse or friends or children or conscience or any combination of the above) won't let you, well thereby hangs a tale. When reality gets complex (and it often does, as you may have noticed) the analytical language is not sufficient. To describe reality, it has to cut it down and recombine it and, more often than not, the essence of the situation is somehow, mysteriously, lost in this process. We need magic to recover it, to represent it whole. To go some way towards understanding a complex human reality, we need magic, simple magic: the magic of narrative. We try to tell the events in some temporal order and let them speak their own meaning only through a story. A story may or may not move the listener – there is no accounting for taste – but it should never, never, be reducible to its constituent elements.

As this small story I am telling you now is also not reducible, this story of my relationship to my two languages. Thus, I do not really hope to explain anything to you. I only appeal to your negative capability and ask you to hear out the narrative.

When I was thirteen, in my second year in high school, my wonderful sister Cali (another inhabitant of this here enchanted island) had me listen to a recording of Dylan Thomas reading his great villanelle ‘Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night’ and the short story ‘A Child’s Christmas in Wales’. I cannot describe Dylan Thomas’s voice to someone who has not heard it – and if, by chance, someone of you hasn’t, it is a treat not to be missed. But having that particular, mystically appealing voice read those particular words, the poem – which had for me the added significance that it constantly hammered on two concepts which played a big part in my emotional life even then, Death and Father – and the story brought me face to face with the reality I first experienced with Kazantzakis. Only this one was even more enchanting. And in English. (Of my first ‘serious’ readings in Greek, only the poets, and more especially Solomos, had moved me to such an extent.)

This is how ‘A Child’s Christmas in Wales’ begins:

One Christmas was so much like another, in those years around the sea-town corner now and out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep, that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six.

Enthralled, gripped by this magic, I asked for and was immediately supplied with (how fortunate I was in the circumstances of life!) Dylan Thomas’ complete works. I read some of the poems, liking some more than the others, but was enchanted by all, even those I didn’t understand at all. Dylan Thomas does verge on the totally incomprehensible on occasion, a *Finnegan’s Wake* effect. And then I also read his wonderful radio play ‘Under Milk Wood’, which begins:

To begin at the beginning: it is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobble streets silent and the hunched, courters'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloe black, slow, black, crow black fishing boat-bobbing sea.

Dylan Thomas told me this, again, in more powerful language: a writer uses language in a way that is different from everyday speech, and by virtue of the high-energy content of his expression gives us a deeper view of life. Then, soon after, I met

the work of T.S. Eliot (I could not make much of the *Waste Land* at first, but worshipped the shorter poems, especially the ‘Hollow Men’) and – another revelation – I read *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, Samuel Beckett’s dark masterpieces. I was thirteen. And I was hooked. At the end of that year, when Mrs. Cuthbert made a small speech in my honor, praising me to my classmates as a model to be emulated, saying how this ‘failing student got to be the top boy in the class’, I felt a gush of exhilarating joy – such praise from Mrs. Cuthbert was not something to be frowned upon. But it wasn’t by now that important, either. For I was now hooked. A passion with language, with expression and – more importantly for the purposes of this talk – with a second language had begun. I wanted to be a writer. My private odyssey had started, I was on my way.

...I still am of course. And don’t expect me to tell you all about it, there’s not enough time for one thing. I will very briefly cover some basic ground, I’ll just name some of the stops to come to the present day and a conclusion.

At fifteen, I did the last thing I – or anyone else for that matter – expected me to do: I fell in love with mathematics. There was no time left for literature now – not even for reading it – in the next seven years. Then life handed me a big bag of personal and family problems and, again, there was not too much time. But the problems were very pressing, the inner tensions rising since my early childhood now had gotten quite excessive and the force of outer and inner tensions colliding made literature again a necessity. The world I lived in (the inside and the outside) was too complicated to be dealt with in any other way. I began to read a lot once again, fiction and drama, and also to write.

It took me a couple of years to develop the habit of writing every day and almost ten years to write something I felt was good enough to publish – an eighty page novella, called *A Parallel Life*. A novel followed two years later, and so on... A writer’s life. My first four novels and all my other writing was in Greek, I was a one-hundred-percent Greek writer and yet my reading was increasingly in English, and a writer’s life is not just the books written or being written but the books read or being read. And here there was a discrepancy, a schism. For after I read and re-read the authors I was really interested in, in my language (apart from the ancient writers, some Byzantine historians and of the modern ones no more than a handful) I realized I was not all that interested in what was going on in the contemporary literary life of

my country, especially the fiction. And I do not mean to be unfair to writers writing in Greek – I am one of them, after all, and by denigrating them I would be doing a disservice, first, to myself. What I am saying really is that being proficient in other languages, having lived abroad for about eight years and having an assortment of interests that – many of these anyway – are cultivated the world over, I never saw any need to restrict my view to one nation or language. And although a Greek writer is to me, as a rule, more interesting than a Finnish or a Bolivian writer, the bulk of good and interesting writing going on outside Greece, now and earlier, is in its totality of more interest to me than the books written in Greece, now.

Also, please take into account that as the years go by I read less and less fiction and more and more non-fiction – and when it's fiction, it's usually re-reading the older stuff that has been important in my development. I do not have much time available (I write most of the day) and in the little that I have, if it is available for fiction reading, I take the view – to put it bluntly – that it can be more profitably spent rereading *Moby Dick* or *The Idiot* or *L'Étranger*, than indulging in the latest fashionable novel. (I am aware that this argument can be applied by other also against the reading of my own books, but losing to Melville or Dostoyevsky or Camus is to be expected.) Anyway, most of my reading is a necessity to me, and has to do with my work as a writer: my books and writing projects as a rule require a large amount of research, so I am more or less constantly reading something directly or indirectly related (sometimes just to get or stay in the right atmosphere) of a project in development.

Still, until quite recently I had never thought I would write in English.

The first time it happened was chance. Four years ago, I tried to translate my book *Uncle Petros and Goldbach's Conjecture* (originally written and published in Greek, in 1993) into English. But as the translation advanced I realized, to my horror, that I did not like the book – that it required a lot of improvement. So I started to work on it, not as a translator anymore, but as a writer doing a new draft. And this went on and on and finally I discovered I was writing, really *writing* (they say, you know, that all writing is re-writing) in English, to my, well, surprise – a surprise that shouldn't have been there, as ninety-nine percent of my reading was, by now, in English. Then, when *Uncle Petros* was published in the UK, and then America, I had the joy of reaching a much wider public than I ever thought was possible.

My next project was a play about Jackson Pollock. I wrote this in English as it was Pollock's language, and I thought that making him a Greek speaker smacked a bit of the ridiculous. That too came naturally.

Now, three years later, I have just finished another play, in English. It takes place in the United States. Its protagonists are American and Austrian – why write it in Greek? English, by now, comes as naturally to me as my own language. I am also writing a novel, in English. The action takes place in Europe (but not Greece) there are no Greeks in it. Again, why write it in Greek? It seems to me that having by now become (though not born or raised) bilingual, I move between the two languages effortlessly and naturally, as I would travel from here to there without giving it too much thought. I live and will continue to live in Greece. I love living here, Greece is my country. But my culture is Greek and something else, as is modern Greek culture itself – even here, it is Greek and something else. And although globalization is a beast we all (or most of us) fear, and though I too shudder at the prospect of a one-language, one-culture future monolith, I do not think it too likely to happen.

Greek is my language. I speak in it most of my day, I often (but not always) think or dream in it; I often write in it, both personal things, and poetry. I lecture in it, I relish in it, I love it. And for the things it does for me, I love it more than anything else. There are things I can do in it I would not do in any other language, both personal and professional. (But to a writer of course, personal and professional often mix.) And if I write another novel with Greek protagonists, set in Greece, I will write it in Greek – nothing else would do. Or, if I write something that must depend for its emotional content on inner territory which is inaccessible to me by any other means, I will use Greek to fathom it. It is a beautiful language, full of rich treasures and on top of that it is also my language, the language of my childhood and family and most of my friends. But it is also just another human language – I love it but I don't want to idealize it. It cannot do everything for me. Some things I would rather write about in English, for reasons of content, subject-matter, period, time, theme, whatever – a writer is not an accountant, he does not have to account, thank God, for every creative penny spent. The wide avenues first shown to me in my first adolescent encounters with Literature, in the works of Kazantzakis and Dylan Thomas, Greek and English are both open to me, and I want to be in both – though not at the same time! I will never get Greek out of my life. It is my home. But as I can move, on occasion, from

home to home without inner suffering, I want also to be able to move from my language.

Again: Greek is my home and I love it for it. But I do not want it to become my prison.