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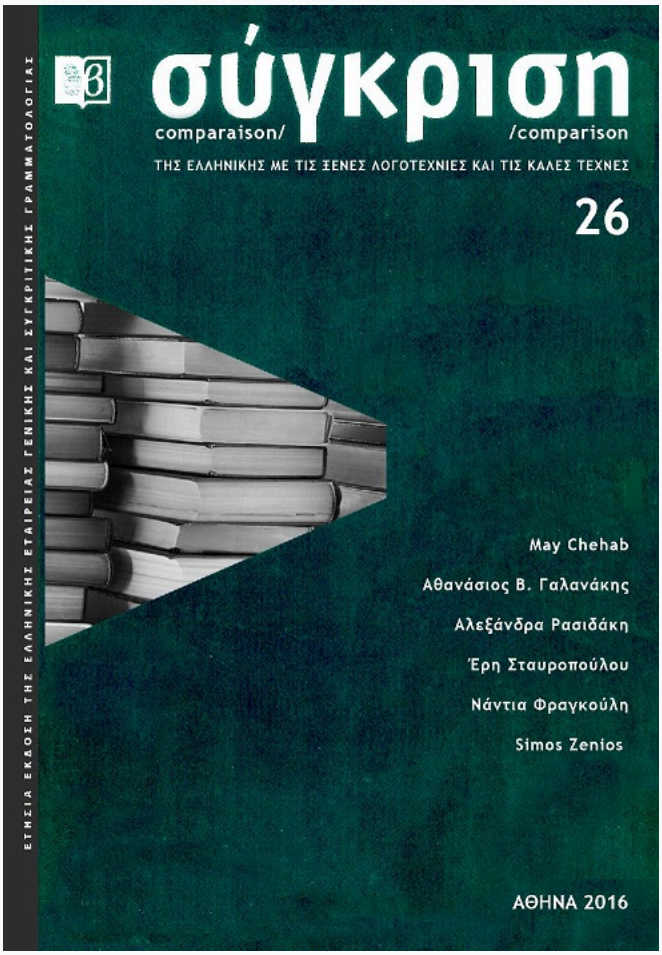

Ο ποιητής ως προφήτης και ως πιερότος στην ποίηση του Ρώμου Φιλύρα: Οι επιβιώσεις της ρομαντικής ιδεολογίας

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The Poet as Prophet and Pierrot: Romos Philyras and the Afterlife of Romanticism[1]

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1. Introduction

During the last years of his life – and while receiving treatment in Dromokaitio for schizophrenic hallucinations – Romos Philyras (1889-1942) composed two poems that invite the reader to treat them as a retrospective of the poet's entire poetical output. The first, bearing the title «Ποιητής» ("Poet," 1940), posits the lyric subject as a gifted individual with visionary insight:

> Επειδή και είχα χάσει το ρέγουλο, είμαι
> ο εμπνευσμένος ονείρων και κόσμων προφήτης,
> ο πηγαίος ποιητής που στο σύννεφο κείμαι,
> ο μεγάλος, ο θείος των ρυθμών υποφήτης! (II, 378, l. 9-12)[2]
>
> [Because I had lost regulation, I am
> the inspired prophet of dreams and worlds,
> the springing poet living in the clouds
> the great, the divine interpreter of rhythms!]

This self-reflective representation, characteristic of a romantic understanding of the aesthetic act, is a common *topos* in symbolist and modernist literature.[3] The speaker's confidence regarding the force of his poetic utterances and his ability to create a universe where dream and world, spirit and matter are no longer divided classifies this poem under the broader, "major" orientation of Philyras' work, according to Giannis Dallas' astute distinction.[4]

The second poem, «Πιερότος» ("Pierrot," 1936), presents a different poetic persona. Donning the costume of Pierrot, a character from the *Commedia dell'*

[1] Professor Panagiotis Roilos encouraged my research on this topic and our numerous conversations strengthened my argument. His comments on earlier versions of the manuscript, as well as those by Professors John Hamilton and Nikos Mavrelos, and by Argyro Nicolaou, were decisive for the sharper formulation of my ideas; all four have my deepest gratitude.

[2] Throughout this article, citations to Philyras' poetry refer to the recent two-volume edition of his works by Karaoglou and Xynogala. Quotations are followed by the volume number in roman numerals, the page number, and the line number. Greek literary texts are given in the original accompanied by a translation that aims for semantic precision rather than a style-oriented rendition of the original. In all other cases, including theoretical and critical scholarship in Greek and French, a translation of the text in English is provided, which unless otherwise stated, is the author's own.

[3] For a systematic approach to this *topos* in the tradition of the European avant-garde, see Russell. His definition of the poet-prophet is pertinent for my purposes here: "[T]he poet as seer, a discoverer of realms of beauty, mystery, and significance heretofore inaccessible to humankind; the poet as innovator, inventor of a language which articulates the poet's new vision […] the poet as prophet […] as bohemian rejector of bourgeois life and seeker of an alternative, if alienated lifestyle" (39).

[4] Dallas uses the distinction between major («μείζων») and minor («ελάσσων») poetry as a classificatory instrument and not as an evaluative judgment. Specifically, he employs the term "major" to designate "poets of a universal vision," whereas "minor" is the poetry of the ephemeral (373). In this respect, Dallas represents a relatively recent strain in Philyras' critics that emphasizes the poet's oscillation between these two voices and differs from earlier – and more recent – views that saw Philyras as the poet of every-day urbanity. See, for instance, Agras (955) and Vitti (368).

arte that had populated European literature since the middle of the 19th century, Philyras seems to posit the demystifying potential of poetic expression:

> Δεν είχα στη ζωή μου άλλο πορτρέτο θείο,
> που λίκνιζε η λατίνα φυλή σ' έναν ειρμό,
> θυμόσοφο, ανοικτίρμον' αιματηρό και λείο,
> από του Πιερότου το μάγο καγχασμό. (II, 131, l. 9-12)
>
> [In my life I had no other divine portrait
> that the latin race swayed in a movement
> contemplative, mercilessly sanguine and smooth
> than the Pierrot's enchanting guffaw]

The disenchanting role of the pierrot and the clown in general, which undermines the solemnity of other characters as well as his own, cannot be seamlessly subsumed under the same order as the aforementioned visionary and prophetic character of poetic discourse. How are we to understand the apparently equally powerful claim of these conflicting personas in an overall assessment of Philyras' work? Pierrot and prophet; is a reading that preserves the paratactical dimension of the conjunction (pierrot *and* prophet) a viable one, or does Philyras' work only justify a reading that underlines the incongruity between the two directions, opting, that is, for a disjunctive relationship between the two (pierrot *or* prophet)?

This article will argue that despite their incongruities, the personas of poet and prophet can work together in Philyras' *œuvre*. More specifically, I argue that the two personas share a common structural element, namely the undermining of the self-reflective *logos* of the modern subject.[5] In contrast to the work of other post-symbolist poets, like Kostas Karyotakis, the undermining of the poetic subject's self-consciousness in Philyras does not represent metonymically the awareness of the disenchantment of poetic discourse. In Philyras' work, the poetics of the pierrot can perform two functions: On the one hand, it destabilizes modern subjectivity, something which serves as a prerequisite, and not as a barrier, for the articulation of a transcendent poetic vision. On the other hand, it brings to the fore the forceful character of aesthetic transubstantiation and thus pushes the romantic ideology of "naive" subjectivity to its limits.

Following a critical discussion of existing approaches to these two directions in Philyras' work, this article will document the proposed dialectical relationship through a close reading of «Ο Πιερότος» ("The Pierrot," 1922), Philyras most influential pierrotic poem. It will first demonstrate how the formal and prosodic elements of the poem resist and undermine the expressed will of the poem's speaker to humanize the pierrot-puppet and will go on to contextualize the relationship between prophet and poet by examining related tendencies in European thought (Henri Bergson) and literature (Heinrich von Kleist), proposing thus a genealogy of the puppet-visionary that draws from the tradition of German idealist aesthetics. The article will conclude by turning to other poetic and prose works by Philyras in order to examine the representation

[5] See also Dimitris Polychronakis' discussion of the crucial role of self-consciousness in the Philyras' poetics of the pierrot (*Poets as Pierrots* 432-444).

of the puppet and the non-reflective poetic subject both as a vehicle for visionary discourse and as a marker for its inherent violence.

2. The pierrot as poetic persona in European and Greek critical discourse

The very genealogy of the pierrot and the clown figure in general, as it is commonly employed in the European poetic tradition, can be traced to a conscious engagement with and opposition to the high ambitions of visionary poetry. It can even be argued that the poet-clown, among other related personas and types, emerged in modern European literature in order to express the disillusionment that followed the high-minded aspirations of the romantic period. Jean Starobinski, in his important study of the use of the clown persona in modern painting and literature, points out that the first visual representations of this figure in mid-19th century should be attributed to a turn towards down-to-earth and every-day themes (14). Following an initial "naïve" period during which the deft and elegant clown symbolized the vitality and innocence of folk culture,[6] he quickly became an allegory, especially in post-Baudelairian symbolist poetry, for the inescapable artifice and inauthenticity of the poetic craft (22-23). Commenting on this later stage, Starobinski argues that archaic images such as the clown figure represent simultaneously a lost universe and the desire for its recovery: "The artist cannot forget the nostalgic reflection that invited him to discover a primal art; he cannot dive into the fountain of Youth and forego all knowledge so that he can live and create in a moment of regained spontaneity" (25). In a similar vein, Green and Swan, in their history of C*ommedia dell' arte*'s influence on modern art during the symbolist period, point out that the increasing use of the clown figure can be ascribed to a need for a counterpoise to the high aspirations of poetry. The clown, a pathetic, all-too human figure trapped in its own corporeality, or a devilish creature laughing at the expense of others and himself, comes to stand for the modern artistic predicament: he represents the diminishing power of art in modernity and provides "the other element (of self irony, self-parody, self-conflict, self-fragmentation) that is just as vital a component of the modern sensibility" (13).

Similar classifications structure some of the most comprehensive readings of the post-symbolist poetry in Greece.[7] The juxtaposition of the poet-clown with the poet-prophet has been prominent in the poetry of the most influential figure of the group, Karyotakis. Dimitris Angelatos, for example, considers Karyotakis' *clownesque* poetics as part of a more general stance against both the "neo-romantic outbursts" of the symbolist poets and Kostis Palamas' poetic example (33-34). Thus the figure of the tragic clown, the symbol *par excellence* of

[6] Starobinski employs Friedrich Schiller's influential distinction between naive and sentimental poetry, which was put forward in the latter's essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (*On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, 1795). The distinction between the transparency of naive art and the self-reflective awareness of sentimental poetry is crucial, as we shall see, for the poetics of the puppet in Kleist. For the mediating role of Schiller's essay between Kantian idealism and the Jena romantics, see Polychronakis (*Romantic Irony* 11-36).

[7] Philyras is considered to be the first Greek poet to have introduced post-symbolist elements in his work (Philokyprou 14).

Karyotakis' *κλαυσίγελως*,[8] and the figure of the puppet are read as extreme instantiations of the social and anti-romantic outlook of his poetry. In poems such as «Άλογα μαύρα, θίασος…,» ("Black horses, troupe…,") the artist-jester is shown to "reverse the bright image of the creator-Sun, suggesting a different, far from easy, type of wisdom, a different way of artistic vigilance," while the speechless body of the puppet foreshadows Karyotakis' silence as an extreme version of his dialogic poetics (64-65). Drawing from Bakhtin's dialogic understanding of language and expanding the Russian theorist's insights in the field of poetic discourse, Angelatos puts forward a compelling reading of Karyotakis' poetry as a demand for the "human" aspect of our endeavors, "beyond (the Romantic) arrogance of a god-like poet-creator" (64-65).

Even if we broaden our synchronic and diachronic perspectives, we can see that the demystifying effects of *κλαυσίγελως* were often used against the grandiose ambitions of major poetry. Roderick Beaton, for example, argues that the majority of the post-symbolist poets in Greece produced work with a critical outlook towards Kostas Varnalis, Angelos Sikelianos, and Nikos Kazantzakis, a triad of poets that "shared, along with Palamas, the view that the poet assumes the role of the prophet" (153). C. Th. Dimaras, in his study of the lacking reception of Heinrich Heine, argued that the presence of the "minor-voiced and homely lyricism" of the German poet, either through translations or creative influence, represents an ironic and tempered strain in European romanticism that only belatedly took roots on Greek soil as an antidote against the "romantic grandiloquence" and "hyperboles" of the Athenian School (289).

3. Philyras' major and minor voice in the literary history of the period

Returning to Philyras' work, and to the questions already posed with regards to the extent to which the personas of pierrot and prophet should be considered as diverging or converging, current scholarship on the poet has offered two interpretative routes. The first is that the two personas are adopted by Philyras in a nonsystematic manner and remain distinct from each other without entering into any relationship whatsoever. Thus, their claim to be treated metonymically as encapsulations of his whole work should not be taken at face value. Instead, they ought to be attributed to the scattered efforts of a poet whose unfortunate personal history did not permit the elaboration of a cohesive poetic design. Admittedly, the threat of partial and uncertain interpretations remains a perpetual possibility, especially when dealing with a body of work whose larger part was not available until very recently to general and scholarly readership. Thus, the desire for hermeneutic closure should not exclude this threat which is already inscribed spectrally in any possible interpretation of the work in question. However, an acceptance of this threat in its totality, that is, an acceptance of a reading that sees the various parts of Philyras' poetry as radically incommensurable fragments should be adopted only once all the other answers to this interpretative question prove unsatisfactory.

[8] *Κλαυσίγελως* is not a term that lends itself easily to translation. Already in ancient Greek, the word denoted the physiological co-presence of laughter and tears. However, in twentieth-century Greek criticism, it becomes a marked term that refers to literary works – especially of the interwar period – that are distinguished by a spirit of bitter humor.

A second possibility, implicitly put forward in the relevant scholarship, posits a polemical relationship – and not merely an incongruent one – between the prophetic and the clownesque roles, not unlike the one proposed by Angelatos for Karyotakis' work. The clown, in this reading, would serve as the satirical mask donned by the disillusioned poet in order to turn against the grand claims of other poets. The difference in this case would be that the field of struggle would comprise the work of a single poet. Such a reading has been proposed by Stergiopoulos: "[Philyras], besides the magical ability to seek after the dream, he had inside him the clown" ("Philyras" 119). Such a solution has many merits. First, it adequately describes the demystifying operations carried out by some of Philyras' pierrotic and clownesque poems. In «Αποκριάτικο» ("Carnivalesque," 1927), for example, the speaker addresses the figure of Pierrot:

> Παίξε, αναγέλα τις ψευτιές, τις πλάνες,
> τις αγάπες, τα μίση και τα πάθη,
> ώσπου να μπούμε μες το χώμα με καμπάνες
>
> γελώντας, όλοι πιερότοι, ποιος να μάθει
> μπορεί το μυστικό του υπερπέρα;
> Άνθρωπε, χάσκε ώσπου να ανέβεις στον αιθέρα… (II, 56, l. 9-14)
>
> [Play, laugh at the lies, the deceptions,
> the loves, the hatreds and the passions
> until we are buried with bells tolling
>
> laughing, all of us pierrots, who can know
> the secret of the great beyond.
> Stand with your mouth gaping man, until you rise up in the air…]

A second merit of this reading is that it enables a systematic grammatological mapping that contextualizes Philyras' poetry. In such a scheme, Philyras' clownerie, in its *entirety*, would be the forerunner for the clownesque poetry of the interwar period that culminates in Karyotakis' work. A problem with this type of readings, however, is that the great interest shown in the end-point of the evolutionary line tends to lead to an overlooking of any non-inherited particularities of the antecedent phases. It is telling that a rhetoric of incompleteness can be discerned in these readings. Stergiopoulos, for example, displays both the moment of retrospective antecedence and that of incompleteness in his tracing of Philyras' influence in Karyotakis. First, building and expanding on Agras' laconic remarks that place Philyras between Karyotakis and Malakasis, Stergiopoulos claims that Philyras "presented [in «Ο Πιερότος»] the human-marionette, with a clownerie and a bitter expression that prepared the ground for the stylization and the automatism in the movements of the persons in Karyotakis' satire" (*Influences* 166). The moment of incompleteness soon follows: "[Philyras' satire] does not maintain, within its confines, the density and self-sufficiency of the dramatic element; the acerbity has been expelled alongside the material resistance and what remains lies between farce, the mimic of a clown, and self-ridicule" (*Influences* 213).

We cannot – and should not try to – do without such readings; they are necessary in order to evaluate a poet that did not have the opportunity to reach

his maturity and to give a more coherent shape to his work. However, I agree with Dionysis Kapsalis when he states that "Philyras' value is neither antecedent nor simply comparative, even though we can only approach it in a comparative manner; his value, to use an oxymoron, is relatively absolute" (132). Thus, Philyras' quest for the "infinite" and the "unformed," should be evaluated "as a failure, but a failure *in itself*, and not as a simple biographical accident nor as an emancipated possibility absorbed in the subsequent achievements of [Greek] lyricism" (125). This exhortation towards the scholarly task of clarifying the specificity and particularity of Philyras' work is even more pressing when a study, such as this one, attempts to cover motifs widely used in a given period, such as the pierrot. Anne Holmes' reminder is pertinent: "[T]he Pierrot must always be 'a void' to be filled up by each artist in a different manner, and no doubt it owed some of its success [...] to its malleability to a range of private imaginings" (62).

4. Subjection and the Thrust of Meaning in «Ο Πιερότος»

My analysis of Philyras' particularity will begin with a close reading of «Ο Πιερότος». I contend that in this poem two distinct strains of pierrotic poetics can be discerned. The first one makes use, indeed, of the *topos* of Pierrot as an all-too human figure. Given the frequency of this *topos* in Philyras' work, we can even be justified in considering it as the main thematic element of the poem's design. I argue, though, that a careful consideration of the interplay between, on the one hand, this thematic design and, on the other, the formal and prosodic features enables us to recognize the articulation of a second type of pierrotic poetics.[9] This second type, in contrast to the first, renders the pierrot an object that resists the humanizing assimilation attempted by the speaker.

«Ο Πιερότος» consists of eleven quatrains in iambic meter that follow an *abab* rhyme scheme. The scene of enunciation does not present particular complexities: the poetic discourse is uttered, in its entirety, by the voice of the

[9] My treatment of the poem is not an attempt to unearth the "formal meaning" of the poem, especially if by "formal" one understands a spatialized, static meaning that sidesteps the actual reading experience. On the contrary, I will pay close attention to the temporal unfolding of meaning and to the way in which this contributes to the ironic destabilization of the humanizing ambitions of the speaker. This phenomenological approach draws partially on Stanley Fish's theoretical description of the creation of literary meaning: "[This analysis] includes any and all of the activities provoked by a string of words: the projection of syntactical and/or lexical probabilities; their subsequent occurrence or nonoccurrence; attitudes toward persons, or things, or ideas referred to; the reversal or questioning of those attitudes; and much more […] The basis of the method is a consideration of the temporal flow of the reading experience, and it is assumed that the reader responds in terms of that flow and not to the whole utterance" (27). However, whereas Fish tends to prioritize semantic operations, I also take into account the assumed experience of an informed reader of poetry by considering issues such as rhyme schemes, meter and rhythm, and enjambment. From a theoretical perspective, see Simon Jarvis' salient remarks regarding the use of the line as a unit of analysis as a way to uncover the tension between the general design of the poem and its particular prosodic instantiation: "[The line] does not merely contain ideas that the poet thought of earlier. It generates ideas, suggests them [….] Large schemata are drawn up – plot, allegory, argument, and so on – and sometimes drawn up even in prose […] for the poet then to work at recasting in verse [….]. Each of these compositional generators – line and design – is murderously disposed towards the other" (28). See, also, Politou-Marmarinou for the importance of enjambment in reader-response approaches to poetry (49-50), and Lykiardopoulos for general comments on the relation between formal innovation and *clownerie* in Greek poetry.

speaking subject that attempts to test the shared space between human and puppet. Already the first stanza establishes the dynamic and temporal nature of poetic meaning:

> Πιερότοι εσύ κι εγώ κι άλλοι κοντά του
> κι αυτός τόσο σωστός μ' άσπρη ζακέτα,
> παίζαμε με τη φόρμα του, ρίχναμε κάτου
> τ' ομοίωμά του – χρώμα σε παλέτα. *(*I, 217, l. 1-4)
>
> [Pierrots you and I and others near him
> and he so proper in a white jacket,
> we played with his form, we tossed
> his simulacrum – color on a palette.]

The absence of the verb in the first line invites the reader to assume an implied predicative syntax and to classify the characters (speaker, listener [«εσύ»], others [«άλλοι»], the entity that is referred to [«του»]) under the assumed predicate («πιερότοι»), using a common criterion of similarity. We could therefore mentally transcribe this into a simple declarative sentence identifying X and Y: we all are pierrots. The second line, however, subverts, to a degree, this identification.[10] In the first hemistich, he (we still don't know who exactly) appears to be somewhat different than the other members of the inclusive subject that was formed in the first line; his attire gives him precedence («τόσο σωστός»). The next two lines, united by the enjambment, invalidate completely the reconstructed identification of the first line on the basis of an assumed similarity. The undefined entity assumes the position of a syntactical object and is manipulated by the speaker («παίζαμε με τη φόρμα του», «ρίχναμε κάτου»). The first hemistich of the fourth line reveals that this entity is in fact an artificial object, a puppet. The relation of similarity is now reinscribed as a polarity between the speaking subject («εμείς» as living, human beings) and the pierrot puppet (material, lifeless object). The original identification based on similarity is now transformed into a relation of mastery and control. The acoustic repetition produced by the internal rhymes – partial or complete– and the regular rhyming patterns [«κοντά του», «φόρμα του», «κάτου», «ομοίωμά του»]) within the relatively narrow limits of the 11- and 13-syllable line reenacts the convulsive and mechanic movements of the controlled object.

The second quatrain repeats the pattern of undermining an already established meaning:

> Φτιάναμ' εμείς τη στάση του μαζί του,
> ήταν τυχαία και το σύμβολό μας·
> στο πέταγμα, στην τοποθέτησή του,
> είχε τον ξένο μορφασμό και το δικό μας. (I, 217, l. 5-8)
>
> [We arranged his posture, with him,
> he was by chance our symbol;
> in his thrust, in his positioning,

[10] Philokyprou also notes a game of identification based on the unstable nature of the use of personal pronouns (41).

he had the foreign grimace and our own.]

Reading the first line, almost up to the very end, gives the impression that it repeats the meaning of the first stanza: that the puppet is completely controlled by the human subject. The last two words of the line («μαζί του») though subvert this meaning by assigning a relative autonomy to the puppet, which controls its movements in an equal way to its master. This semantic modification is further enhanced in the following line that refers to the pierrot as an artistic symbol. If the artist was initially presented as the master of his material, he is now asked to understand himself as an entity (half object, half subject) that exerts only partial control over himself. The borderline state between mastery and subjection is repeated, in reverse order but with equivalent semantic content in the last two lines of the stanza. The speaking subject acknowledges the impossibility of the absolute subjection of the puppet: Despite the fact that its mimetic powers permit it to copy human grimaces, the element of otherness in its facial expression is also present («ξένος μορφασμός»).

The fifth stanza tackles the identification between human and puppet from a different perspective. The emphasis here lies not in the attempt by the speaker to see his reflection on the puppet, but on the human modality of the latter's behavior:

Ήταν αυτός, ολόκληρος κι ωραίος,
ανθρώπινος πολύ στη μπατιστένια
στολή του, στα κουμπιά του, φευγαλέος,
βραχνάς απ' τους βαθύτερους στην έννοια. (I, 217, l. 17-20)

[He was complete and beautiful,
quite human-like with his linen
uniform, his buttons, fleeting
a heavy burden on our cares (or: understanding).]

In the unit of meaning that comprises of the first line and the first hemistich of the second one, a series of positive predicates is attributed to the pierrot («ολόκληρος», «ωραίος», «ανθρώπινος»). This series concludes by emphatically stressing the similarity between the puppet and the human form. However, the unit of meaning that takes shape if ones take into account the enjambment between the second and third line («στη μπατιστένια στολή του, στα κουμπιά του») once again undermines the general thematic design. Whereas the reader might expect, after encountering the adjective «ανθρώπινος», an enumeration of the puppet's anthropomorphic qualities, she finds instead that this identification is based on an artificial feature, the puppet's clothing, and not on any anthropomorphic features (for example, emotions, will, reason, speech). Finally, note the controlled polysemy of the last word of the stanza - «έννοια». If the internal synizesis demanded by the metric pattern of the rest of the poem is preserved («έ-ννοια») then the word denotes care or concern. However, if the word is read with an internal hiatus («έ-ννοι-α») then such a reading would prioritize a rendition of «έννοια» as "concept".[11] In both cases though, the

[11] See Frantzi for an insightful discussion of synizesis and hiatus in Philyras poetry. Frantzi convincingly refutes earlier critical views that saw instances of hiatus as indicators of technical

meaning formed disturbs the identification between subject and object by undermining either its sympathetic or its cognitive dimension.

The last case I want to scrutinize is the final stanza, which summarizes and concludes many of the issues addressed so far:

> Είχε πρωθύστερη η μορφή του σημασία
> κι όμως μας απατούσε όλους μαζί
> κι ενώ ήταν άνθρωπος σωστός, ουσία
> γυρεύαμε και θέλαμε να ζει… (I, 217, l. 41-44)
>
> [His form had a significance that was prothysteron
> and yet he tricked us all
> and while he was a proper man, an essence
> we sought and wanted him to live…]

The penultimate line poses the problem of identification between human subject and lifeless object once again. If the reader treats this line as an independent syntactical unit, she will assume that the pierrot has human qualities and the last word functions as a predicate: he was or had an essence («ουσία»). When the reader proceeds to the last line, however, she realizes that another enjambment distorts the hitherto formed meaning once again: «ουσία» moves from the predicate slot to that of the syntactical object of the verb («γυρεύαμε»). What is stated here is that human essence is nothing other than the projection of our desire for sympathetic identification on the object. The poem thus ends by confirming the radical disjunction between human and object, only this time the disjunction is not alleviated by the promise of mastery of the object by the artist. If anything, what was thought to be controlled now has, as we are told through another hyperbaton that enacts what it states, «πρωθύστερη σημασία»: the reader is invited to understand that the object precedes the subject.

Close reading has thus far uncovered the following issues: first, it should be evident that the poem's primary concern is not the identification between living subject and lifeless object, but the staging of the thwarted attempts of the speaker to humanize the puppet. Therefore, the classification of «Ο Πιερότος» as one of the early examples of the all-too human clownesque tradition of Greek poetry is not sufficiently founded. Most poems in that tradition make a different use of the pierrot figure. They usually present the speaker of the poem *already* wearing the pierrot mask in order to express his sad or tragic condition. Alternatively, they limit themselves to the description of the actions of the pierrot figure, without making much use of the speaker's (failed or successful) self-reflective discourse in the process of identification with the object. The formal design of «Ο Πιερότος», on the contrary, throws into sharp relief the strife between the living subject and the artificial object, and not their implicit or explicit identification. The second issue that needs to be pointed out is that while the tone that is prevalent in most other pierrotic poems is a (self)sarcastic or

immaturity, and demonstrates, instead, that by the publication of «Ο Πιερότος» the two phenomena are found in equal measure in Philyras' work.

(self)ironic one, in «Ο Πιερότος» this is tempered by a certain superiority of the pierrot, something which it owes precisely to its non-human nature.

5. Puppet, Vision, and Aesthetic Force

This alternating sequence between anterior and present meaning can serve as an entryway for a consideration of the affiliations between «Ο Πιερότος» and certain ideas on automata and other human simulacra circulating during the first decades of the 20th century. Henri Bergson's essay on laughter, *Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (*Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, 1900), offers a useful perspective for the examination of some of the issues at stake here.[12] In his examination of the origin of laughter, and the sense of the comic in general, Bergson places laughter within the domain of the human: Only a human, and not a lifeless object, can be the cause of laughter (3). However, his subsequent analysis of this human nature complicates matters. Building on the example of a man stumbling on the street while running, he argues that what makes us laugh in this case is the involuntariness of the act: "[T]hrough lack of elasticity, through absentmindedness and a kind of physical obstinacy, as a result in fact of rigidity or of momentum, the muscles continued to perform the same movement when the circumstances of the case called for something else" (9). The "mechanical inelasticity," expanded as a semantical field in order to comprehend everything that can be classified under the category of automatism –including marionettes- will come up constantly as a "leitmotiv" in Bergson's essay (21). Like the notion of automatism, it is always connected with the idea of man struggling between what has passed and what is taking place at the present. The following passage is indicative of this temporal dysfunction: "Let us try to picture to ourselves a certain inborn lack of elasticity of both sense and intelligence, which brings it to pass that *we continue to see what is no longer visible, to hear what is no longer audible, to say what is no longer to the point; in short, to adapt ourselves to a past and therefore imaginary situation*" (11, emphasis my own). This link between automatism and temporal disjunction describes the structuring of poetic meaning in «Ο Πιερότος». The dual understanding of meaning as action, as something we do and something that is done to us, allows us to realize that Philyras is actually playing an elaborate game of identification between human and object. This distortion of the sequence of meaning throws the reader into new situations while she is equipped with an already shaped yet and no longer suitable understanding. This forces her to constantly adapt her interpretation. The figure of the "absent-minded individual," the automatized individual that is absent from the present moment, is something that Bergson will press on, throughout the rest of the essay, until the definition of its comedic character culminates in the diagnosis of a lack of conscious subjectivity. Bergson's analysis, therefore, brings to light the complexities in the initial connection between the comic element and the human realm: it is the inhuman dimension in the human that is the source of laughter. The comic character is the one who lacks self-awareness: A comic person is comic only insofar as "he suffers from an ignorance of himself" (16).

[12] See Naoum for a fruitful treatment of Bergson's ideas and the genealogy of clowns and human simulacra in the work of Giannis Skarimpas.

It is, however, precisely this absence of self-consciousness that is treated in a positive light in the earlier romantic tradition of puppet literature. Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Über das Marionettentheater* (*On the Theater of Marionettes*, 1810) foregrounds the puppet as a symbol of paradisiac bliss the loss of which the modern artist must face. The novella's narrator meets a certain Herr C. who, despite being the first dancer in the opera, demonstrates an intense fascination with puppet theater and especially dancing puppets. Herr C. explains that it is not the vulgar comic elements that interest him. He is, instead, attracted to the absolute grace that he sees in puppets. It is this grace that renders them superior to human dancers. Explaining that the main advantage enjoyed by puppets is the absence of artificiality and affectation – an absence that is made possible by the separation of consciousness from the acting body – Herr C. convinces the narrator with the claim that the puppet's handler controls only the center of gravity during motion. Kleist's playful argument suggests that it is the non-human nature of the puppet that allows them, paradoxically, to avoid the artificiality of affectation;[13] the puppet is simultaneously more material and more spiritual than its human counterparts. The religious echo of man's fall from a state of grace, caused by knowledge and self-awareness, is palpable and Herr C. makes explicit the relationship between man, puppet, and the divine: "Whereto I said, that, as cleverly as he might maneuver the crux of his paradox, he would never convince me that there was more grace in a jointed mechanical figure than in the structure of the human body. He replied that it would simply be impossible for a human being to even hold his own with the mechanical figure. Only a god could measure up to inert matter in this regard; and here precisely was the point at which the two ends of the ring-shaped world came together" (269).

Kenneth Gross has argued that Kleist prioritizes the puppet's "special grace" and sidesteps "what is eerily, necessarily unnatural, even clumsy and grotesque in its movements" (64). This romantic quest for aesthetic transubstantiation is absent from Bergson, where the acknowledgment of a certain – pathetic – suffering and a grim sense of humor sets the tone of his account of automatism and human simulacra. Philyras' treatment of puppetry, as we shall see, represents an attempt to bring together both the romantic idealization and the acknowledgment of the forceful, even "grotesque" way in which spirit can be applied to matter. The combination of these two tendencies, which stresses the existing but sombre link between puppet and visionary, allows the reader to map a positive relation, and not a disjunctive one, between the two in Philyras' work.

Philyras' diary notes from his days in Dromokaitio help us trace these links. Without imposing too much of a rigid structure on these scattered notes, it seems that their main concern is to demarcate the boundaries between reason and madness. The perspective of the writer alternates between moments in which he adopts the viewpoint of a sane man who contemplates on the tragic fate of the unfortunate madmen he is institutionalized with, and other moments in which he embraces his fate as madman and laments the fact that he still has periods of clarity and presence of mind.[14] The reasons he offers for embracing

[13] For an insightful reading of Kleist's ironical framing of the story see de Man.

[14] «Ζήτω η τρέλλα! Εγώ ο Ρώμος το φωνάζω. Αλλά δεν φτάνω δυστυχώς στο ύψος μερικών εδώ μέσα. Βλέπετε διατηρώ ακόμη κάποια λογική και αυτό με μειώνει […] Καταραμένη λογική που σ' άφησε μέσα μου ατόφυα ο ανηλεής σπειροχαίτης, πότε θα την πάρη και αυτήν τελειωτικά. Ναι. Θέλω να αποτρελλαθώ, να μη νιώθω πια τίποτα, τίποτα. Ζήτω η τρέλλα!» ["Long live madness! I, Romos, shout

the role of the madman are of special interest for this study. Madness allows for vision, without obstruction from outside reality: «Εδώ τουλάχιστον γινόμαστε και θεοί, πλάθει η φαντασία μας κοσμογονίες και σαν κεραυνοί σχίζουν το διάστημα οι εγκεφαλικές συμπιέσεις, που υποβάλλουν τη συντέλεια, τη δεύτερη παρουσία […]. Το τριβέλι της ενέσεως, η πάλη των μικροβίων, οι οραματισμοί, ούτε χασίς ή όπιον να έπινα» ["At least here we become gods, our imagination creates cosmogonies and cranial pressures tear up space like lightnings, foreboding the end of the world the second coming… The dizziness of the injection, the battle of the germs, the visions, these far exceed hashish and opium"] ("Life" 96-7). Addressing the assumed reader of these notes:

> Και όμως πόσον ανώτεροι είνε από σένα, παληέ μου γνώριμε, οι καινούργιοι τούτοι σύντροφοι. Το θείο ανυπόκριτο παιχνίδι τους πόσο αγνότερο, τιμιώτερο από το δικό σου […]. Εδώ ο καθένας είναι συνεπαρμένος από την τραγική πνοή του εμβατηρίου που παίζει δημιουργώντας και καταστρέφοντας έξω από συνθήκες, νόμους και θεατές το χιμαιρικό της ζωής του όνειρο. Ω θείοι, μοναδικοί μονόλογοι, ντελίρια, πόνοι και καγχασμοί των ανευθύνων! ("Life" 99)
>
> [And yet, how far superior these new partners are, compared to you my old friend. How much purer and more honest is their divine, unaffected game than yours […]. Here, everyone is enthralled by the tragic breath of his song, creating and destroying the chimeric dream of his life beyond constraints, laws and spectators. O, divine monologues, deliriums, pains and guffaws of those without responsibility!]

These visionary experiences are marked by their absoluteness; they do not permit the intrusion of outside reality:

> Ό,τι χαρακτηρίζει την τρέλλα είνε ένας απόλυτος και αθώος εγωισμός που αιχμαλωτίζει αδιέξοδα την ψυχήν μέσα εις τον ίλιγγον των υποκειμενικών παραισθήσεών της. Καμμιά επικοινωνία με την πραγματικότητα, καμμιά επαφή με τους "άλλους" […] καθένας κλεισμένος στον εαυτό του […] οι τραγικοί παραισθητικοί δεν έχουν παρά να ανοιγοκλείσουν τα χέρια τους στον αέρα διά να περιπτυχθούν τας χιμαίρας των. ("Life" 92-3)
>
> [What characterizes madness is an absolute and innocent egoism that captures, with no way out, the soul in the vertigo of its subjective hallucinations. No communication with reality, no contact with "others" […] everyone enclosed in himself […] the tragic hallucinated ones need only to embrace the air in order to find themselves in the arms of their chimeras.]

The crucial point to notice, though, is that confinement within the limits of the self does not amount to any notion of an autonomous, self-sufficient subject, precisely because the madman lacks any form of self-consciousness, any point from which he can look back at himself. Instead, there is a hollowing out of

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this. Unfortunately, I cannot reach the heights of some of those in here. You see, I still possess some logic and this brings me down […]. Damned logic, left intact within me by the merciless tuberculosis, when will you be taken away once and for all? Yes, I want to go completely crazy, to feel nothing anymore, nothing. Long live madness!"] ("Life" 86).

personality and subjectivity in the sense that he does not possess any form of self-consciousness: «Τώρα δεν είνε καθένας παρά ένας ήσκιος ανθρώπου, μια αχνή σκιαγραφία ανθρώπου, σχεδόν απροσδιόριστη» ["Now, they all are but a shadow of a man, a vague sketch of the human, almost undefinable"] ("Life" 93).

The connection between vision and the empty subjectivity of a human simulacrum brings us back to the question of the puppet. Seen from this perspective, the rhetoric of the numerous descriptions of the figures of the madmen is not that different from the description of the movements of a marionette:

> «Χέρια αποσκελετωμένα πασπατεύουν μέσα στην αχλύ σαν να κυνηγούν μια φευγαλέα ακτίνα απατηλή, κορμιά βασανισμένα σπαράζουν επάνω στις κλίνες, άλλα ταράζονται από τους σπασμούς, αναπετούνται ολόρθα σαν άλυωτοι νεκροί, που αναπηδούνε ολόσωμοι απ' τους τάφους των [...] Κι άξαφνα τινάζονται. Σα σε πρόσταγμα».
>
> [Bony arms grope in the fog as if they hunt a fleeting, deceitful ray, tortured bodies trembling in their beds, others shaken by spasms, jump up like unspoiled corpses that rise up from their graves [...] And suddenly they jump up. As if an order was given] ("Life" 87-88).
>
> This implied connection between madman and puppet is stated unambiguously later on: «Πόσες φορές δεν ονειρεύονται [το θάνατο] στον ύπνο τους και τον ξύπνο, τα πολυβασανισμένα νευρόσπαστα των ψυχώσεων, στα τραγικά φωτεινά τους διαλείμματα» ["How many times don't they dream [of death] while awake and asleep, these tortured marionettes of psychosis, in their tragic breaks of light..."] ("Life" 103).

In this sense, one can argue that Philyras' understanding of the role of poet-prophet poet is closer to what Plato described as «μάντης» in the *Timaeus*. According to Gregory Nagy, "mantis is being recognized as one who speaks from an altered mental state, let us call it inspiration" (26). Commenting on Plato's philosophical connection between *μάντης* and *μανία*, Nagy proceeds to verify it etymologically: "[T]he etymology of mantis is 'he who is in a special [i.e., marked or differentiated] mental state' (from the root **men*-, as in Latin *mens*, *mentis*), while that of mania is 'a special [i.e., marked, differentiated] mental state' (again, from root *men-)" (26). Indeed, the lyric speaker in the «Ποιητής» attributes the ability to write prophetic poetry precisely to his "altered mental state:" «Επειδή και είχα χάσει το ρέγουλο, είμαι / ο εμπνευσμένος ονείρων και κόσμων προφήτης».[15]

The connection between madness and prophetic poetry – especially when we keep in mind that madness is characterized by a distorted subjectivity – can be detected in various ways in Philyras' poetry. For instance, one can interpret his often commented-upon disordered syntax as a formal strategy for the representation of the "extreme disjunctiveness" of the manic mode of writing (Hawes 11).[16] Subtler ways are also available to represent the reconfigured

[15] See here, p. 1.

[16] See Varnalis' brief but suggestive remarks on Philyras' writing in a condition of "pythic enthusiasm and introxication" (222). Agras comments on Philyras' marked syntax are pertinent: "The poem moves along, nice and strong, with its noble breath, the extravagance of its images, its dainty mood, its airy rhythmical sway… - and then, suddenly, this rhythm gets tangle up, it becomes something that could only somewhat be named asyndeton, hyperbaton or anacoluthon, - a kind of vertigo of poetic thought, a

subjectivity of the prophetic. For example, the poem «Νάρκισσος», begins with a characteristic example of self-consciousness. The speaker of the poem is speaking to his soul:

Είπα της ψυχής μου:
- Θρύλος είσαι συ,
άγγελος εσύ 'σαι
θρύλος τόσου κόσμου,
[…]

Είχες ανεβεί,
με κίσσους και μύρτα
στολιστή,
προς το φως απάνου,
λούλουδα στεφάνου
στα μαλλιά […] (I, 228, l. 1-4 and l. 11-16)

[I said to my soul:
-You are a legend,
an angel is what you are
a legend for all the world
[…]

You had risen
with vines and flowers
crowned,
up high towards the light
laurels are on your hair…]

The next movement of the poem sees the poet abandoning the dialogic form, in order to dwell deeper in his newfound subjectivity:

Έχω αναστηθεί
σ' έναν εαυτό μου,
άπειρο, βαθύ,
πλάσμα του εαυτού μου (II, 228, l. 20-23)

[I have risen
into a self
infinite, deep,
a creation of my own self"]

In the two magnificent last stanzas of the poem, the speaker becomes restricted to the perspective of an outsider; he describes himself as an observer:

Θρύλος ο Φιλύρας,
θεοτικό στοιχείο,
στάλαγμα αιθερίων,

kind of eddy…" ("Philyras" 955). In his discussion of the sonnet «Κόπος» ("Toil") Kapsalis juxtaposes the poem's disordered syntax and its mantic tone (127).

δροσερών πηγών,
[…]

πάνω σ' άσπρον άτι,
της Αγάπης ήρως,
πάει στον ουρανό. (II, 229, l. 28-31 and l. 41-43)

["Philyras is a legend,
an element divine,
the drop of ethereal,
cool springs
[…]

riding a white horse,
a hero of Love,
he goes to the sky.]

6. Conclusion: At the Limit of Romantic Vision

The appearance of the prophetic mode in Greek romantic poetry is marked by the lyric subject's confidence in the idealizing force of his vision and utterance. The minor prophet in Dionysios Solomos' «Εις Φραγκίσκα Φράιζερ» (1849) is not burdened by ambivalence or doubt. It is with joy («χαρά γιομάτος») that he addresses the Girl and sees the moral world in which she participates («[…] το μέσα πλούτος. / Όμορφος κόσμος ηθικός, αγγελικά πλασμένος! » ["[…] the inner wealth. A world beautiful, moral, angelically created"]). The sensible world of matter in this imaginative universe both accords with the intelligible world of spirit («Κι αν για τα πόδια σου, καλή, κι αν για την κεφαλή σου / κρίνους ο λίθος έβγανε, χρυσό στεφάν' ο ήλιος» [If for your feet, dear, and for your head / the rock sprouted lilies, the sun offered a golden wreath]) and is benevolently regarded as somewhat lacking («δώρο δεν έχουνε για σε» ["they have no gift for you"], 299).

This happy subjectivity of the prophetic mode is a possibility forever lost in Philyras' poetry. However, the awareness of this loss does not lead to the representation of an exclusively disenchanted world. Among other modalities, Philyras explores the pierrotic poetics and thematics in order to articulate the particularity of visionary experience in modernity. The close reading of "Ο «Πιερότος» in this article demonstrates that the poem cannot be simply read as a forerunner of the interwar *κλαυσίγελως*. On the contrary, through the destabilization of the notion of a self-sufficient and creative self, Philyras assigns to his pierrot a significantly more complex role that both draws from and resists the romantic tradition. The subsequent treatment of the *topos* of the Pierrot in relation to the representation of madness by Philyras foregrounds the violence of the aesthetic. The emphasis on the force with which spirit in-forms matter disarticulates the romantic ideology of the aesthetic and grants Philyras a radically modern and "relatively absolute" position in the poetry of his era.

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