The novel and the crown: *O Leandros* and the politics of Romanticism

*Dimitris Tziovas*

In the last twenty years or so there has been a growing interest in the fictional output of nineteenth-century Greece. Forgotten novels have been reassessed and reprinted (often more than once), new studies have been published and conferences organized, which confirms that nineteenth-century Greek fiction has attracted special attention from scholars and publishers. The cosmopolitanism of the Greek fiction of this period, as well as the wider cultural questions it raises, also appeal to contemporary Greek novelists, who are similarly preoccupied with issues of identity, otherness, and multiculturalism and trying to invent a missing Greek tradition of fiction in the nineteenth century centred around its heavyweight authors: Roidis, Vizyinos, and Papadiamantis.

To discuss the fiction of this period, several approaches have been developed. The first was to trace the influence of European writers or texts on specific novels. The second was to see the development of nineteenth-century Greek fiction in terms of literary movements (Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism), genres (picaresque, historical novel, *apokrypha*) or modes of writing (*ethographia*). In particular the issue of realism has been revisited and the realist features of nineteenth-century Greek prose reassessed. Whereas in the past it had been thought that the publication of the novel *Thanos Vlekas* by Pavlos Kalligas in 1855 marked the introduction of critical realism into Greek fiction, it has now been argued that some form of critical attitude towards Greek society existed in novels before that, while linguistic realism, particularly in dialogue, makes its appearance well before 1870 (Vayenas 1994, 187–98). A third approach, which has not so far been fully developed, is to examine to what extent developments in nineteenth-century Greek fiction coincide with

---

1 Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774/1787), Ugo Foscolo’s *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1798/1802) and Chateaubriand’s *Rene* (1802) have been examined as sources for Soutsos’s *O Leandros* (Tonnet 1995; Veloudis 1996); *Gil Blas* (1715) and the picaresque tradition for Palaiologos (Tonnet 1989; Farinou-Malamatari 1991); Walter Scott for Rangavis (Denisi 1994); Berthold Auerbach for Vizyinos (Veloudis 1992a); while Maupassant, Chekhov, and Dickens have all been compared with Papadiamantis (Politou-Marmarinou 1996).
the process of state-building and the transformation of Greek society. This invites a more holistic approach to the nineteenth century instead of focusing on artificial time periods by drawing lines at 1850 or 1880. As I have argued elsewhere, Greek fiction of this period is more susceptible to the application of an interdisciplinary approach informed by developments in the area of cultural studies, since it raises questions regarding popular literature and culture, the role of translations, book production, the relationship between commerce, politics, and the novel, and the engagement of some writers with developments in the West, including colonialism and Victorian thought (Tziovas 2005).

So far there have been broadly two ways of looking at the relationship between society and fiction in nineteenth-century Greece. The first examines the social and cultural parameters of the production and consumption of fiction, including the translation of popular foreign novels, the social origin of writers and readers, and the geography of nineteenth-century fiction. Some interesting points have been made regarding the different attitudes towards fiction and its role in commercial centres of Hellenism such as Constantinople, Smyrna, or Syros as compared to Athens (Politis 1993, 1999, 2005a, and Chapter 17 in the present volume), while the status of the novel in the Ionian Islands has been much debated (Tziovas 1994, 2002a, 2002b; Vayenas 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Politis 2003). Though distinct from and more advanced than that of mainland Greece, Ionian society seems not to have promoted and cultivated the novel as a genre to the degree that might have been expected. The other main approach to the relationship between society and fiction during the nineteenth century in Greece is to look at how social issues and concerns are represented in the texts themselves, and to what extent one can trace the phases and patterns in this relationship. This approach raises the broader issue of the relative importance of European literary movements or systems of thought in shaping the character of these narratives compared to the social and political problems in Greece of the time.

In this respect, Panayotis Soutsos’s epistolary novel O Leandros [Leander] (1834) is a good example of how early Greek novelists engaged with social and political issues (Soutsos 1996). Paradoxically, in this novel, a romantic story is intertwined with evidence of strong support for King Otto, and a thinly veiled polemic against the first Governor of Greece, Kapodistrias. The political theme of the novel is placed in the middle of the narrative with the romantic story of Leandros and Koralia providing the romantic framework. Though Leandros is described as a

---

2 A renewed interest in Greek mystery stories (apokrypha) has led scholars to discuss the question of the social novel in Greece (see Denisi 1996–7).

3 Reference occasionally extends to wider social and political issues beyond Greece, particularly evident in some stories by Alexandros Rizos Rangavis. In his first story, ‘The prisons, or capital punishment’ (1837), he shows an interest in the penal system and its reform in America, while in another story, ‘Gloomymouth’ (1848), he represents the appalling working conditions of children in Victorian Britain (see also Gotsi 2006).

4 All page numbers, given in parentheses in the main text or in footnotes, refer to this edition.
progressive Greek and supporter of King Otto, living during the years 1833 and 1834, the political statements in the text tend to be general and abstract.

Soutsos sees the role of the king not only in political, but also in cultural and symbolic, terms. He argues that having accomplished the task of liberation and having done all they could by fighting, the Greeks now expected their king to unite them, and, most importantly, to lead a cultural renaissance by taking them to an enlightened future, making sure that Greece benefited from any advances or discoveries in Europe. Like Korais and Moisiodax before him, Soutsos also argues that Germany, through the king, should repay with interest its classical debt to Greece (p. 130).

Though he is well aware of literary developments in Europe, and certainly relies on the precedents by Goethe, Foscolo, and Chateaubriand, Soutsos is eager to stress the originality of his novel right from the prologue. His strong sense of Greekness (p. 46), his reference to the mutilation of the Parthenon by Elgin (p. 70) and to James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) and his ‘free America’ (p. 43), suggest that what he is trying to do is not simply follow the European trend of the epistolary or sentimental novel, but to produce a foundational narrative for the new state, a narrative that will follow the literary conventions of its time, but will also constitute a political commentary on contemporary developments in Greece. The mention of leading writers such as Rousseau, Goethe, Scott, and Foscolo in the prologue suggests a sense of literary belatedness in relation to European literature; yet there is also a sense of modernity since the renaissance of the modern nation was associated with the birth of the novel in Greece.

It should be noted, however, that Soutsos, unlike Korais, neither claims the Greek origins of the novel as a genre nor does he make any reference to the earlier Greek epistolary tradition (Veloudis 1996, 60). The references to European writers and the disregard for the Greek roots of the genre (notwithstanding other references in the text to the Greek classical past) suggest that \textit{O Leandros} adumbrates the paradox in Greek fiction that becomes increasingly apparent from the 1840s onwards. That is to say that the Greek novel ignores Greek antiquity, even though Greek society, including Soutsos himself, with his influential \textit{The Resurrection of the Ancient Greek Language Understood by All} (1853), was promoting a fervent neoclassical revival in other areas (language, architecture, poetry, drama) (Politis 2005b, 133). It seems to me that \textit{O Leandros}, more eloquently than any other novel of the nineteenth century, encapsulates the dilemma of Greece after independence: its aspirations to be classicizing and modern at the same time. Indeed, \textit{O Leandros} includes a number of disparate elements, thus reflecting both the situation in Greece at the time and the career of its author who was simultaneously a man of letters and a member of the administrative establishment of the newly established state.\footnote{For details about Soutsos’s life see Lefas 1991.}

Strangely enough, in his prologue, Soutsos gives a summary of the plot and thus diminishes the reader’s curiosity. At the same time, he appears to care about his readers, trying to avoid repetition of images or a lexicon that they
might find too demanding (τύπον τινά νευρώδους λεκτικού), arguing that he is writing for the youth of the country and urging them to complete the task of enlightening Greece. Judging by the prologue, one might expect *O Leandros* to be an extrovert narrative about ideas and progress. However, the main narrative verges on introversion and confession, while Leandros's letters and thoughts give the impression of a diary. One is left wondering how a romantic and sad story of death and suicide could be reconciled with strong political views: is this a closet drama or a political narrative?

While *O Leandros* used to be considered a typical example of ‘unrestrained romanticism’, rendering the novel unappealing and unreadable (Sachinis 1991: 46), more recently its political character has been highlighted, and the impact of Saint-Simon detected (Vayenas 1997). The brothers Panayotis and Alexandros Soutsos were likely to have come across the ideas of Saint-Simon while they were in Paris at the end of 1820s, and possibly through Frangiskos Pylarinos, who published two articles on Saint-Simon in the newspaper *Ilia* that the brothers edited in Nafplion in 1833. The term *koinonismos*, apparently a translation of the French *socialisme*, is also found in the novels of the two brothers, *O Leandros* and *O Exoristos tou 1831* (*The Exile of 1831*) (P. Soutsos 1996: 124; A. Soutsos 1994: 78). The term is mentioned in both novels in connection with the arrival in Argolis of the ancient king Danaus and his modern equivalent in 1833, King Otto. Vayenas argues that ‘Leandros is a utopian socialist who ultimately succumbs to the burden of romantic melancholy’ (Vayenas 1997, 49), thus suggesting that the romantic prevails over the socialist element.

These different approaches to the novel raise the question whether *O Leandros* should be considered a Romantic, a social, or a political novel. In other words, does the novel place greater emphasis on the freedom of the individual, on the organization of society, or on the political developments in Greece at the time? Perhaps the contradictory trends in the novel have to do with the fact that its readership is not clearly defined. Soutsos, in his prologue, addresses Greek youth, but it is not clear why he is writing the novel. Is it to tell a romantic story that might appeal to a wider audience, to castigate political developments in Greece, to encourage the young (including the young king) to contribute to the enlightenment of Greece, or to compete with the European practitioners of the epistolary novel and claim the introduction of the genre into Greece? The aim of the novel is not clearly spelled out because the narrative contains diverse elements. In this respect,

---

6 Leandros, in his first letter, refers to opening a little book in which he had deposited his memoirs, thus reinforcing the textual allusions of the novel.

7 See the introduction by Alexandra Samouil in Soutsos 1996, 17, and Beaton 2006. Henri Tonnet (1996), on the one hand, describes the novel as ‘un pur roman romantique’ (p. 87), and on the other, refers to Leandros as ‘le premier héros de roman grec qui ait des convictions politiques’ (p. 90).

8 Veloudis disagrees with Vayenas and argues that the term *koinonismos* in these novels simply refers to ‘social organization’ rather than to the word *socialisme* (Veloudis 2004, 88, 91). Elsewhere, with reference to a passage from Rangavis’s *Memoirs*, he associates *koinonismos* with *politismos* (civilization) (Veloudis 2001, 347).
the novel represents the fluid and unshaped character of Greek society and the dilemma as to whether priority should be given to individual freedom or to social commitment. To deal with all these issues we should examine different aspects of the text.

Whatever the influence of Saint-Simon might be, or the particular meaning of the word *koinonismos*, society in the novel is portrayed in either abstract or negative terms. The perception of society as a form of slavery (p. 60) and the emphasis on freedom suggest that one of the central concerns of *O Leandros* is the issue of the ideal balance between duty and freedom, convention and feeling, and ultimately between society and the individual. However, this balance does not seem to be struck in the novel: the individual is presented as being oppressed by social conventions, the stifling of feelings, authoritarian practices, and the hypocrisy of politicians (p. 109). The gap between society and the individual seems unbridgeable (p. 185). Leandros has lost faith in his social world, as the following quotation suggests:

> I have seen, tasted, seen again and tasted again to excess the futility of the social world. [...] I live isolated in turbulent Nafplion and I am afraid to propel myself into a world which has nothing to say to me. I am fed up with people and have confined myself to the wilderness (p. 107).

Though Greek society is presented as narrow, lacking the boundless horizons (p. 61) offered by the immensity of nature where great ideas are to be found (pp. 106, 144), the hero’s attitude towards society is rather abstract and often takes the form of manifesto-style statements. One has the sense that he is referring to humanity in general rather than to Greek society in particular. In his prologue, Soutsos describes the correspondence of his main character as being sarcastic about all societies (p. 44), while in one of his letters Leandros states that man has not been created to rule other men and thus feels angry when he sees the powerful exploit their fellow men (p. 50). Human societies do not appear to represent a higher form of organization that people might aspire to, because human beings in the novel are not shown as superior to animals (pp. 81–2), but as monstrous creatures with two opposing natures (p. 84).

If the aim of Saint-Simon was to seek ‘universal and underlying principles that hold society together against the historical or accidental tendencies that pull it apart’ (Carlisle 1987, 25), there is no such evidence in *O Leandros*. Instead, the hero seeks isolation and shuns the corruption of society as far as he can. There is no evidence in the novel that the crisis in modern society could be resolved by the development of a new religion based on positivism, as Saint-Simon had argued, or that through the application of scientific positivism it might be possible to discover the laws of social change and organization. If Soutsos’s aim had been to introduce some of Saint-Simon’s ideas in fictional form, then greater emphasis would have been given to the social vision or to a new social structure. Instead, society is associated with imprisonment and not with the goal of social harmony.
nor with the development of the individual.\footnote{Society is also presented as a form of theatre in which people wear hypocritical masks (pp. 107, 111).} Though one passage from Efrosyni’s letter to Koralia (p. 75) could be seen as a sign of women’s emancipation and Saint-Simonian feminism,\footnote{See the introduction by Alexandra Samouil in Soutsos 1996, 21–2.} it is Koralia’s respect for marriage and social conventions that leads to her death. While men are happier because of their exposure to war or their ability to travel, women are presented as suffering, confined to the house (p. 159), and as more vulnerable to the loose and dangerous morality associated with Europe (p. 76). Thus, neither is the role of women clearly articulated in the novel nor is any plan of social change or development.

The idea of freedom emphasized in the prologue to the novel, where the ideas and feelings of Leandros are listed, and described later as the Goddess of Leandros’s heart (p. 72), does not seem to be compatible with the authoritarianism implicit in Saint-Simon’s thought, which has led to his being ‘seen as an ancestor of both communism and fascism’ (Carlisle 1987, 25). The main thrust of the novel seems to emphasize the freedom of the individual rather than social organization, and, therefore, reading the novel as even a distant echo of Saint-Simonian ideas is problematic.

In this novel, nature, the individual, and freedom seem to be allied against society. Consistent with its romantic origins, the novel stresses the opposition between the social slavery associated with the cities and the freedom of nature. However, descriptions of nature are abstract or idealized and lack realism. For example, in the middle of winter, nature is presented as idyllic, arcadian, and vernal:

Beautiful day, spring day! In the valleys the flocks, the shepherds and their dogs; in the ploughed fields, the rustic huts and the innocent Greek peasant woman with thyme and sage adorning her head; Oh, the pure pleasures of rural life! Oh, the pure freedom of the countryside! (p. 53).

The individual here appears to be identified with nature. It seems that the representation of nature, much as happens in \textit{Werther}, is determined by the mood of the protagonist. Nature seems not to exist independently from the inner self and is simply represented according to the mood of the main character (p. 103). Hence the representation is not realistic but a mental construct, with the inner self projected onto nature (pp. 85–6), while memory and imagination appear more important than reality. Therefore, the realistic representation of nature is undermined by its reflection of the emotional state of the protagonist. Nature is on the side of the individual, not only because it reflects his feelings, but because it also offers peace and solitude for reflection and communion with God (p. 97). Political realism seems to lose out to the subjectivity of nature.

The novel, in turn, displays contradictory trends. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on the visual with frequent references to scenes, pictures or tableaux, and on the other, given that Soutsos himself in his prologue states that the words of the novel should be like ‘signs of ideas’ (p. 46), symbolism is a central element.
Moreover, Leandros’s political involvement is contrasted with his desire to be alone. Is he, however, simply melancholic, love-stricken, and withdrawn, or is he a symbol of an emerging individualism and liberalism? Though the novel focuses on political passions and human emotions, its epistolary character and the quotations from ancient writers tend to make the narrative seem more dispassionate and distant. In other words, in the novel there is a tension between representation and symbolism, political realism (associated with Nafplion)\textsuperscript{11} and romantic abstraction (associated with Athens),\textsuperscript{12} human passion and textual distance. As a result, the romantic despondency of the novel is contradicted by its political realism, thus confusing its generic identity.

Though Leandros is described in the prologue as a supporter of progress and therefore a supporter of Otto,\textsuperscript{13} it is not clear in the novel whether the emphasis is on the past or the present. In some parts of the text modernity is celebrated:

\begin{quote}
Everything is new; a new generation succeeds the old; a new state of affairs, ideas, mores, customs, dress enter the gates of Greece silently and sit on the ruins of the old world while Greece is a hart thirsting for enlightenment and modernity (νεωτερισμών) (p. 126 [cf. Psalm 41]).
\end{quote}

Elsewhere the passage of time is highlighted:

\begin{quote}
Look at the world, which you first saw when you came to Greece, and how it is today; new people on the scene, new interests have arrived; new ideas; a new world has succeeded the old; everything passes over us and is ephemeral like us; others open the way to us and we open the way to others; the future succeeds the present and the future also becomes past, therefore the old picture of the world is constantly re-made (p. 183).
\end{quote}

In other parts, again, the comparison of Greece’s past glory and its ‘diminished’ present is a cause of regret (pp. 51–8). Leandros’s wanderings through various places in Greece constitute a re-enactment of history (pp. 149–50). The landscape becomes a palimpsest of the ancient past and the recent events of the War of Independence. Thus, a personal story is blended with the historical past, but Leandros’s chief aspiration is to revive the ancient glory: ‘O Hellas! When I see you glorious, as in the era of Pericles, alive and not silent [...] then death, death may close my eyes’ (p. 129). \textit{O Leandros} is a novel that aspires to be at the same time romantic and classicism, heart and mind, past and present, freedom and restraint.

\textsuperscript{11} Nafplion in the novel is described as a quicksilver city (υδραργυρούπολις), representing the strange hybridity of the Greek state and its architecture (p. 125).

\textsuperscript{12} For a comparison of \textit{O Leandros} with \textit{O Zografos} by Palaiologos, regarding the attitude towards antiquity and the representation of Athens and the Acropolis, see Voutouris 1995, 96–105.

\textsuperscript{13} Though he had praised the king upon his arrival with his ‘The Shepherd of Argolis’ (1833), Soutsos would later describe him as a tyrant when Otto was dethroned in 1862. For details, see Lefas 1991, 33, 77, 99.
One could argue, however, that what the two overlapping storylines (romantic and political) in the novel have in common – indeed what brings the apparently opposing elements of the novel together and becomes the central theme of *O Leandros* – is the overcoming of separation and discord. Separation is emphasized not only by the physical separation between the two characters but even by the epistolary nature of the narrative. Koralia and Leandros had had a happy childhood and for three years lived together in Transylvania (pp. 68–9). Moreover, judging from one of Leandros’s last letters, it was the enmity of their parents that had separated them (p. 163). Thus, the novel could be seen as expressing a desire to overcome separation on an individual level, but this could be extended to society as a whole. Harmony and unity achieved at an early stage, associated with childhood and nature, should be maintained at a later social stage. Therefore, the elusive ideal formulated in the novel could be seen as political unity and the social harmony that could be found in nature or the past (either the ancient past or childhood), but not in the newly founded Greek state.

An allegorical reading of the text, which would bring together the two opposing themes, the political and the romantic, would highlight the necessity for strengthening social and political unity in order to overcome the social alienation of the individual (p. 185). Leandros and Koralia respect the institution of marriage and social conventions, implying that a society should be based on the principles of duty and honour, and people should not suffer from conflict or authoritarianism. This reading presupposes that much emphasis is placed in the novel on the organization of society in order to ensure equality, stability, and consensus. However, the pessimistic ending of the novel suggests that the individual is not able to overcome his social alienation or his separation from the beloved and is driven to suicide.14

Only a belief in the immortality of the soul could ensure a posthumous reunion of Leandros with his beloved. The theme of immortality, which according to Soutsos’s prologue is one of the main ideas of the novel, is something that has not until now been discussed in relation to this text. It indicates a movement away from materiality towards spirituality and adds a metaphysical dimension to the story. The immortality of the soul and the idea of reunion after death suggest, however, a personal and spiritual solution to the problem of separation rather than a social or political one. This further reinforces the individualistic character of the narrative and diminishes its social or political purpose. Hope and the solution of earthly problems are transferred to another world and to a higher divine reality. The metaphysical or imaginary transcendence of hard social reality can also be found in later novels, and particularly the mystery novels (*apokrypha*) (Gotsi 1997, 153, 156). Thus, *O Leandros* sets the pattern for suggesting that social ills can be overcome by aspiring to a higher moral and spiritual condition.

The conflicting descriptions of *O Leandros* as a romantic and a political novel (though these descriptions cannot always be considered mutually exclusive) raise

---

14 Veloudis 1992b, 120 claims that what drives Leandros to suicide is not the death of his beloved but the hated monarchy. This erroneous claim is not repeated in his subsequent studies.
the question whether the emphasis lies on the improvement of society or on the freedom of the individual. Though one can argue that the former is a prerequisite for the latter, the novel does not suggest that political or social reform is enough to keep Leandros alive. Political or social novels tend to have specific goals. In his prologue, Soutsos represents his character as being angry, on returning to Naflplion, at the corrupt politicians, but he points out that 'his strictures do not contain any reference to a specific person' (p. 45); that is, they do not have any particular target. Instead, his strictures could be seen as generalized and moralizing pictures for didactic purposes: ‘They are paintings in which evil is portrayed with dark colours and in which the guilty could mysteriously see into their corrupt souls, become ashamed and improve themselves’ (p. 45). Politics give way to morality and thus the political character of the novel seems to be undermined. Soutsos faces the dilemma that others will encounter later: how do you combine politics with a romantic story, ideas with emotions? By conflating the universal values of Enlightenment, with its references to egalitarianism, and the Romantic aspirations to portray the local, O Leandros becomes a syncretic text. It manifests the tensions between the national and the transnational, the physical and the metaphysical, the individual and the political that we see to be characteristic of a number of romantic poets, including Solomos (discussed further by Vassiliki Dimoula in chapter 15 above).

The novel is structured around two starkly contrasted themes: political criticism and romantic idealism, which underpin other oppositions: society–nature, ideas–feelings, engagement–distance, though not all of them can find a synthesis, and have to exist in a kind of syncretic tension. The novel, however, as a genre normally presupposes some sort of synthesis of disparate situations. What we have here is a number of oppositions that cannot share a middle ground. One of the reasons for not achieving this synthesis is the uncompromising moral opposition between virtue and evil that underpins most romantic novels. O Leandros, in a sense, offers the antithetical structure that sets the pattern for the development of Greek fiction until 1880. The two opposing trends: the critical and the idealistic, which remain incompatible in Soutsos’s novel, will constitute the two strands that later writers will follow.

The early modern Greek novel is based on the antithesis between nature and society, romantic idealism and political realism, and it could be argued that O Leandros was instrumental in setting up this pattern. During the so-called ‘Romantic’ period (1830–1850), prose writers engaged with social and political issues by demonstrating on the one hand a tendency towards social escapism and, on the other, engagement in the political struggles of the period. Though some writers openly supported the young Otto or demanded a democratic constitution, they were at the same time disgusted by the corruption of the cities and sought the innocence of nature or the peace of rural life. Society was considered oppressive and corrupt and the cities as prisons.\footnote{See respectively: O Leandros (1834) (P. Soutsos 1996, 50, 53–4, 60, 106, 112–13, 181, 185);} Return to nature and rural life is seen as a
prerequisite for peace and happiness, while nature is identified with imagination, freedom, and innocence. Though the desire to get away from society could be associated with the views of Rousseau or the arcadianism of the ancient novels, it suggests that these first novelists of independent Greece see the retreat to nature or to the past as a solution to the political and social problems of Greece. Engagement and utopia, political passion and abstract ideas, are the defining characteristics of these early novels.

Soutsos’s novel introduces the antithesis between nature and society, which is a dominant feature of the early Greek novels, and will gradually become less abstract when transformed into an opposition between rural and urban life. Though Palaiologos with his novel, O Zografas [The Painter] (1842), and Dimitrios Ainian, in his short stories, tackled similar issues, Thanos Vlekas by Kalligas (1855) was the first novel usually considered to have raised awareness of the plight of Greek peasants living at the mercy of brigands as much as of the central administration. If the main concern of the earlier so-called romantic novels is the freedom to be found in nature away from the corruption of the cities, a number of novels written around the mid-nineteenth century focus on the inefficiency of Greek institutions and the tribulations of Greek peasants, by contrasting the metropolis with the countryside. Thanos Vlekas, in particular, seems to follow the line of O Leandros by combining political criticism with romantic idealism. Though Thanos Vlekas has been seen in the past as the starting point of realism in Greece, I tend to agree with those who stress its romantic and idealistic aspects.16 Kalligas’s novel is closer to O Leandros than to Palaiologos’s O Zografas, since its hero embodies an ideal of virtue.

O Leandros stands at the crossroads of Greek fiction and points to its future directions.17 One could argue that two main types of narrative have been developed in Greece since the 1830s: the critical–satirical and the moral–idealistic, and they, in turn, represent two different attitudes towards Greek society. The former type, represented by Palaiologos’s O Zografas, Pitzios’s O Pithikos Xouth [Youth the Ape] (1847), Roidis’s I Papissa Ioanna [Pope Joan] (1866), the anonymously published I Stratiotiki Zoi en Elladi [Military Life in Greece] (1870–1), being the more critical, tend to satirize either the awkward cosmopolitanism and the nouveau riche mentality of Athenian society or the institutions of the church and army. The latter category tends to be more idealistic and constructive in trying to offer models of virtue, honesty, and enterprise with texts such as I Orfani tis Hiou [The Orphan-Girl of Chios] (1839) by Pitzios, Thanos Vlekas (1855) by Kalligas, I Charitini (1864) by Panayotis Soutsos, and Loukis Laras (1879) by Dimitris

O Exoristos tou 1831 (1835) (A. Soutsos 1994, 76, 120, 128); O Polypathis (1839) (Palaiologos 1989, 232); O Thersandros (1847) (Frangoudis 2002, 58).

16 Tonnet argues that ‘le livre par son écriture et sa philosophie est romantique’ (1996, 110), and Takis Kayalis points out that ‘Thanos is a bourgeois fantasy of the ideal peasant, an example of people who never existed and in urgent need to be constructed’ (1996, 180).

17 It should be noted that two other novels seem to imitate O Leandros. These are O Megaklῆς ἢ o στυχοντος ἔρως (1840) by Georgios D. Rodokanakis, and O Θερσανδρος (1847) by Epameinondas Frangoudis (on which see also n. 15).
Vikelas (on which see further chapter 18 by Michalis Chryssanthopoulos in the present volume), or through reference to history and to the recent events of the War of Independence. Both categories will find their extension or continuation either in the mystery novels (apokrypha), which describe the seedy and often violent aspects of urban life, or in some of the idyllic stories of ethographia, respectively. Though this distinction is not always clear cut, since novels of both categories appear to share critical, satirical, romantic, or idealistic features, it should also be pointed out that writers of the first category, such as Palaiologos and Roidis, maintain an ironic distance from their main characters, while writers of the second category tend to identify with them. O Leandros, torn between romanticism and politics, seems to adumbrate both trends. Though critical of the political situation, the novel lacks the satirical or ironic tone of the later critical narratives, while its abstract idealism is personified later in more clearly defined role models in Thanos Vlekas and Loukis Laras.

Indeed, O Leandros maps out the oppositions and the contradictions in Greek society after Independence. Romanticism vies with Enlightenment, the glory of the past with disappointment in the present, rejection of society with utopian socialism, politics with metaphysics, nature with culture. In his novel, Soutsos neither resolves the contradictions nor overcomes the oppositions, and so fails to produce a synthesis that is normally the prerequisite for realism and a successful novel. Though one could say that in Soutsos’s novel these oppositions are represented more or less in equal measure, later novels tend to emphasize one side of the oppositions outlined above, at the expense of the other. Thus, one could claim that O Leandros introduces a polarity that will leave its mark on Greek fiction for years to come. Indeed, the opposition between the real and the ideal would become a central theme of critical developments during the second half of the nineteenth century (Angelatos 2002) and this is evident in Palamas’s description of Karkavitsas in 1892 as both realist and idealist (idanistis) (Palamas, 166–7).

O Leandros also marks a more individualistic approach to Greek politics and society which will only give way to a more community-based approach towards the end of the nineteenth century. This can be seen from the titles of novels, which instead of using the personal names of the main characters, tend to emphasize their social characteristics. From the 1880s onwards Greek fiction would try to overcome the polarity of O Leandros by focusing on the village as a liminal space between the primitivism of nature and urban culture, or by introducing the question of social justice as a new parameter in the old oppositions (Tziovas 2006). Novelist such as Andreas Karkavitsas with O Zitianos [The Beggar] (1896),18 Alexandros Papadiamantis with I Fonissa [The Murderess] (1903), and Konstantinos Theotokis with Katadikos [The Convict] (1919), raise the issue of justice, thus adding a new dimension to the relationship between society and fiction in nineteenth-century Greece, and transcending the old oppositions that begin with O Leandros. At the end of the nineteenth century the issue of justice, whether social or moral, will

---

18 It should be noted that the last chapter of this novel bears the title ‘Justice’.
override the oscillation between romantic idealism and political criticism that marks Greek fiction until at least 1880 and seems to have its origins in Soutsos’s novel.

How central, therefore, one might ask, is Soutsos’s novel to understanding the relationship between society and fiction in the nineteenth century? First, by containing antithetical preoccupations such as politics and spirituality, individualism and monarchoism, progress and antiquarianism, *O Leandros* becomes a complex novel that mirrors the wider (con)fusion within the Athenian intellectual context of the period and the awkward blend of Romanticism and Classicism that Panayotis Soutsos himself practised in his life. In this respect, *O Leandros* represents the contradictions and dilemmas of Greek society, and particularly of the intellectual élite during the first half of the nineteenth century.

References


Tziovas, D. (2005), 'Η πεζογραφία του δέκατου ένατου αιώνα', To Vima, 21 August.


