Odysseus Elytis' use of Romanos the Melodist: a case of 'modernization and distortion'?

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Odysseus Elytis, Greece's second winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, owes his greatest fame to *The Axion Esti* (1959). The poet had long been in search of a poetic theme and a form that would serve his intention to evade the classical world and foreground the eastern values of Greek tradition. Ecclesiastical liturgical forms provided him with the meaningful structure he was looking for. With *The Axion Esti* the Byzantine aspect in Elytis' poetry becomes an indispensable point of reference for any critical approach to his work. In Lignadis' detailed commentary (1971) on *The Axion Esti*, the Orthodox tradition is the compass that guides the commentator's quest for inter-textual resemblances. Through his prism of interpretation it is Romanos the Melodist who appears to be the most influential source both for the content and the form.

Romanos has attracted the interest of Byzantinists more than any other hymnographer. His hymns (*kontakia*) were sermons in verse accompanied by music, which is unfortunately lost for us. The complete presentation of their metrical structure can be found in the standard critical edition of Maas and Trypanis who, in 1963, published a volume of Romanos' genuine *kontakia* and in 1970, a volume of the dubious ones.

Sixteen years after the publication of *The Axion Esti*, in 1975, Elytis wrote a critical essay on Romanos the Melodist, which was first published in 1986. In the meantime, between 1970 and 1974, he had written *The Little Seafarer*, eventually published in 1985. As we shall see below, Romanos' presence in that poem is dominant. The name of Romanos and fragments of his *kontakia* also appear elsewhere in Elytis, mostly in texts with a polemical character where the poet contrasts the elevating power of poetry with the rationalism of modern society. In these texts Elytis mentions Romanos together with Archilochus and Sappho or even with Solomos and Rimbaud, treating him as a genuine poet and not simply as a religious writer.

My basic claim is that Elytis attempts to appropriate Romanos as a poet rather than to uphold his value as a liturgical writer. This appropriation is revealing of his idiosyncratic perception of the Byzantine tradition. In order to evangelize the redemptive role of poetry, Elytis, in his essay and in his book of poems *The Little Seafarer*, attempts to 're-esteem' and 're-write' Romanos through powerful 'revisionary replacements'[1] of his precursor's tropes. His 'misreading' of Romanos is not realized in terms of the latter's own epoch and culture; rather it falls into the category that Bakhtin defined as 'modernization and distortion'.[2] Romanos' religious ideas, language and tropes are vessels which Elytis fills with new meaning in order to overcome the limitations imposed by a religious poetry, expand the notion of holiness into his own poetic universe, and finally represent these ideas in a new manner. Thus, the investigation of the ways in which Elytis reads his precursor's work helps to elucidate his poetics.

1. Misreading the precursor: Elytis' essay on Romanos

In a 1975 interview Elytis stressed the importance of what he called 'a Lyricism of Architectural Invention'[3] for a truer appreciation of his work. Elytis' essay on Romanos of the same year is also centered on the principle of 'architectural invention'. From the text of the essay we deduce that Elytis had been familiar with Romanos' work through 'irresponsible' editions that disappointed him. It was the 1963 Maas and Trypanis edition that stirred his interest: 'The image I had created for Romanos [...] at once became clear and revealed all its importance to me through the Maas-Trypanis edition.'[4] What Elytis had discovered was the variety of the metrical structure of the kontakia and Romanos' inventive exploitation of it.

Although the 1975 interview is of key importance in the interpretation of Elytis' work, its association with the poet's own writings of the same period has not been adequately stressed. An analysis of Elytis' essay on Romanos in the light of the interview will reveal that the complete metrical presentation of the kontakia vindicated Elytis' quest to find a classic representative of 'architectural invention' in poetry, whose work would sanction the validity of his own poetic choices. Moreover, the eastern descent of this precursor met the poet's need to distinguish himself from western tradition: 'There exists an oriental side in the Greek which should not be neglected.'[5]

In order to appropriate Romanos as a precursor, Elytis aims to prove that the hymnographer's work breaks through the boundaries of its own time and belongs to future centuries, that it has entered what Bakhtin called 'the great time'. In Bakhtin's formulation, great works continue to live in the distant

future: 'in the process of their posthumous life they are enriched with new meanings, new significance: it is as though these works outgrow what they were in the epoch of their creation.'[6] Future generations always discover something new in the works of the past and there lies the danger of projecting onto them something that was not there, in other words the potentiality to modernize and distort them. Elytis seems to yield to this temptation, motivated by the urge to find a precursor whose work authenticates the value of his own poetry.

As Harold Bloom notes, 'strong' poets 'tend not to think, as they read: "This is dead, this is living, in the poetry of X"... For them to be judicious is to be weak, and to compare, exactly and fairly, is not to be elect.'[7] This remark is a fair description of Elytis' stance towards the scholarly view of Romanos. In order to counteract in advance the academic rejection of his interpretation, he criticizes scholars for their failure to evaluate the poetic aspect of his precursor's work. Their interest in the examination of sources, the evolution of the genre and the historical events, limits the significance of the poet. Elytis is dismayed, for they are the only ones who could point out the syntactic and linguistic peculiarities of Romanos and prove whether 'the poet was audacious out of ignorance or idiosyncrasy.' In Bakhtin's terms we could say that Elytis accuses the scholars of 'enclosing' the work 'within its epoch', that is, 'explaining it solely in terms of the conditions of its epoch'. This kind of understanding does not allow us to penetrate into the semantic depths of a work and prove its contemporaneity.

It is doubtful if scholars could ever provide an answer to the question that Elytis poses. Mitsakis' study *The Language of Romanos the Melodist* (1967) is devoted to the peculiarities in grammar, syntax, phonology and figures of speech, as well as the unconventional use of words of which he cites a long list. Grosdidier de Matons (1977) also dedicates a chapter to Romanos' language. But there is no possible way for an analyst to be certain whether a poet's linguistic choices are made out of ignorance or idiosyncrasy, even if the poet is a contemporary one. The emphasis in Elytis' question is placed on the word τόλμη (daring), which reminds us of his earlier study of Kalvos. For Elytis, Romanos' audacity is indisputable, only his motivation could be questioned. As in the case of Kalvos, a question may easily arise in a careful reader's mind: were these features that Elytis characterizes as audacious considered to be so in their own epoch? A close examination of the main points in his reading aims to pave the way towards an answer which will also indicate the degree of modernization and distortion in his approach to Romanos' work.

The pivotal points, on which Elytis bases Romanos' 'audacious' revisionism, are:

1. Romanos' mode of expression continues the ancient Greek poetic tradition and remains intact up to the present day.
2. His expressive innovations are a result of his divinely originated personal audacity, and not of his epoch.
3. Romanos re-introduced into poetry the following elements: purification of language, disciplined metrical form, structural versatility and, finally, 'prismatic expression'.

All the commentators on Romanos' work are cautious in approaching the Synaxarial tradition and speaking about the poet's life. Elytis' reading, however, shows no such caution. On the contrary, he demonstrates a certainty manifested in polemical terms. In the opening and closing sections of his essay, Elytis settles the biographical discontinuities in Romanos' life in an arbitrary but confident manner by drawing vivid images of his precursor. He has no doubt that Romanos remained a deacon until the end of his life, wrestling with words as, in their own ways, Solomos and Palamas were to do.

The first important point in Elytis' interpretation is that Romanos' poetry not only exhibits his faith in and dedication to the Church, but is nourished by the ancient Greek tradition, regardless of the opposition that existed in the sixth century between the pagan spirit and that of Christianity. For Elytis this tradition managed to enter the 'rival camp' through language and peacefully prevail against it.

Trypanis, in his introduction, acknowledges Romanos as the poet 'who gave new life to the long and glorious tradition of Greek poetry' on the basis of metrical perfection and variety.[8] He also stresses the disciplined way 'in which argument and form were clearly and closely integrated in a manner which is essentially Greek.' Elytis reproduces the same observation in terms of his own poetics. The disciplined metrical pattern is for him 'the factor of architectural features' which plays a crucial role in the formation of meaning: 'meaning is born together with and through its prospective form of expression' (p. 38). Although he agrees with Trypanis that Romanos revived the poetic achievements of the fifth century BC in the sixth century AD through disciplined structure, when he asserts that Romanos managed 'to transfer from the trunk of ancient to the trunk of medieval Hellenism, a specific way of expression that remained intact up to today' (p. 35), he is referring both to the structure and the language of the *kontakia*. But we shall examine this view below, in the discussion of the elements that constitute Romanos' daring.

In his interview, Elytis overtly expresses his disaffiliation from contemporary poetry, which he does not understand because 'it employs the

language of the street and approaches prose.'[9] Therefore his assertion that Romanos' mode of expression remained intact up to today alludes to his own concern not to 'borrow' but 'to transfer the old linguistic material onto the tree of modern poetry.'[10]

Impressed by the metrical variety of the *kontakia* as it is presented in the metrical appendix of the Maas-Trypanis edition, Elytis cites the patterns of four hymns rewritten in a simplified code which aims at presenting a more disciplined pattern than the one we get from the appendix. In order to describe the function of metre, Elytis employs polemical terms: 'this armour, during a particularly transitional and unsettled epoch, seems indispensable' (p.40). It is doubtful whether the hymnographer employed these features as a shield against a turbulent age. Romanos was a hymnode and his poems were meant to be chanted in church. The disciplined versification, the abundance of proparoxytones and oxytones, the double or triple caesura, mainly serve the purpose of adjusting the words to music. Elytis' comment reflects his own belief in morphological perfection against the widespread disregard for formal considerations in the poetry of his contemporaries.

In order to buttress his argument that Romanos' innovations are a product of his audacious creativity, Elytis makes a brief reference to the origins of the *kontakion*. He accepts the eastern influence in the work of Romanos but he disagrees with scholars: 'the *kontakion* is not a gradual transition from rhetoric to versification, moreover, it is not a spurious genre, as Grosdidier de Matons would like us to believe; it is a personal invention' (p. 37). This comment leads me to suggest that during the eleven years that intervened between the first writing of the essay in 1975 and its first publication in 1986, Elytis augmented it after reading Grosdidier de Matons' 1977 study of Romanos. In his introduction to the first volume of Romanos' hymns (1964), Grosdidier de Matons makes only brief reference to the origins of the *kontakion*, but in his 1977 study, he stresses the similarities between the hymns, the texts of the Second Sophistic and Syriac religious writings.[11] Elytis' overt attack, quoted above, can only be understood as an answer to Grosdidier de Matons. Far from suggesting that the *kontakia* comprise a spurious genre, the scholar acknowledges them as an original creation of Greek genius, which shares with the poetic homily many common rhetorical figures such as parallelism, isocolon, parechesis, homoioteleuton and syntonia. In order to emphasize the individuality of Romanos' style, Elytis rejects the scholarly explanation for the evolution of the genre. Although earlier on he spoke of transference of expressive means, he ascribes the hymnographer's achievements to the divine vocation, which is a symbol of the parthenogenesis of a poet and a guarantee

of his uniqueness: 'It comes as a whole out of a poet's genius, who, the greater the obstacles he sets to himself and manages to overcome, the closer he is to his utmost target' (p. 37). Elytis speaks of his own poetics in more or less the same words: 'I, however, set up difficulties expressly in order to be able to overcome them, in order to restrain myself, to make myself operate within set limits. It is for this reason that I speak of "architectural invention".'[12] What we detect in these two excerpts is that Elytis judges Romanos by modern poetic criteria, which, tellingly, match the concerns and values of his own poetics.

Elytis enriches his audacious portrayal of Romanos by suggesting that his precursor is fundamentally less concerned with the religious ideas that he expresses than with the manner in which he expresses them. Scholars, who examine the *kontakia* through a historical perspective, explain Romanos' poetic achievements in relation to his epoch. Trypanis notes that 'Romanos represents the spirit of expansion and innovation which characterizes the era of Justinian in so many fields',[13] and Grosdidier de Matons stresses the importance of the fact that Romanos lived in the sixth century, since it was a privileged moment that allowed the poet to take on the role of the preacher.[14] Elytis' explanation of the hymnographer's felicitous poetic moments as a product of his own poetic consciousness originates from his consideration of the poetic Self as a protagonist and a unifying link that integrates the disordered experiences of the modern world.

We shall now examine the specific elements that, for Elytis, comprise Romanos' daring and result in the reviving of the authentic ancient Greek tradition. Apart from the metrical devices, Romanos' poetic 'shield' according to Elytis is made up of two more elements: a) the acrostic and b) the refrain, in the use of which the hymnographer indeed presents a remarkable variety and flexibility already noted by his commentators. Elytis contends that Romanos was the first to introduce into Greek language the phenomenon, which he describes as the principle of 'regular variant form' (p. 41). This 'principle' is the equivalent of the 'variante régulière', a term originally employed by Krumbacher in order to describe the way in which certain colons could exhibit two different metrical forms within a single hymn.[15] Elytis expands the meaning of the term so as to include all the formal variations observed in the *kontakia* and to suggest that it is a major discovery, which constitutes an element of content rather than form. If we accept the importance of such a principle for poetry then we cannot find a more consistent representative of it than Elytis himself: 'The world has remained for me the same down to the present day. I do try to change my expression, however. I do not want to write continually in the same way, because I have the feeling then of repeating myself. I want to find

new forms, new ways of expression.'[16] Elytis' entire work is the embodiment of the Heraclitean doctrine of change: 'while changing it rests.'[17] The 'regular variant' is related to his idea that the greater the obstacles to expression, the higher will be the poetic achievements. Solomos' conception of the poem as a 'mathematically graduated world'[18] reflects the same idea, and Palamas' quest for alternative ways of expression through morphological versatility signifies analogous concerns. Elytis' perception of the parallel between Romanos and these two poets is not without basis.

Elytis' appropriation of Romanos becomes more evident in his evaluation of his precursor's language. Scholars agree that the language of the *kontakia* is Hellenistic Greek of the Byzantine period, influenced by popular idiom and free from archaisms. On the basis of a large number of semitisms, Maas had speculated that Romanos might have been of Jewish origin. Although this is still a vexed problem rather than a settled question, Elytis departs from the scholarly view in order to suggest that the hymnographer handled the language 'with the hesitant and stumbling manner of a foreigner' (p. 36), just as Solomos, Kalvos and Cavafy did.[19] This comparison enables Elytis to sustain the argument that these major poets purified the language precisely because they were originally unfamiliar with it. At the same time he uses modern criteria to interpret Romanos establishing a connection between these three poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and a poet of the sixth century.

Elytis challenges the philological view of the hymnographer's language by bringing forward two crucial questions: first he asks if Romanos could have coined some of the words he uses, and secondly if he could have drawn some words from older periods of the language or unconsciously used their altered forms (pp. 41-2). Elytis does not propose an answer but instead cites a list of 196 words from the *kontakia* in order to approach the phenomenon of Romanos by 'another path.' His choice and arrangement of words in the glossary is designed to convey a feeling of awe to the contemporary reader unfamiliar with the sixth-century spoken language.

In order to elucidate the nature of Elytis' queries, I have investigated the origins of the words that comprise his list. The results of the examination reveal that seventy-one of these words have already been listed either by Mitsakis or Grosdidier de Matons as characteristic of Romanos' vocabulary. Their lists do not necessarily include words that Romanos coined himself, but mainly words that, though they can be traced to other sources, have in the *kontakia* a different, otherwise usually unattested, sense. Grosdidier de Matons' criteria for the composition of his list seem to be more strict, since he includes words that cannot be found in Liddell and Scott in the meaning that they have in the

kontakia. Thus, we could consider his choice more trustworthy in presenting Romanos' innovative use of language. Almost all of the remaining words can be traced either in ancient Greek literature or in the Septuagint, the New Testament and the writings of early Fathers of the Church. Elytis' criterion for the composition of his list is the euphonic effect[20] of the words and not the uniqueness of their origin. This is evident at points where he includes ordinary adverbs or common verbal forms only for their sound-effect. Among the Atticizing or Biblical forms, Elytis places some words whose form is reminiscent of the demotic idiom.[21] In this way he underlines the indivisibility of the Greek language as we witness it in his poems, especially *The Axion Esti*. His dialogue with Romanos is realized through the function of language as he described it in his interview: 'I situate the words in such a way as to bring out their rarity.'[22] Elytis' questions reflect his own concern to demolish the boundaries between different periods of Greek language by modernizing ancient words or coining new ones on ancient models.

Romanos' vocabulary may sound unfamiliar today, but in the sixth century it was particularly appropriate for calling the people to church.[23] His idiom shows a notable influence of popular language;[24] it is not a poetic diction in the strict sense since it is meant to be accessible to the public and not just to the 'lettrés' and the 'délicats'.[25] Elytis himself juxtaposes fragments of Hellenistic epigrams with the language of the *kontakia*. But he does not seem to realize that the difference between the two linguistic systems is equivalent to the difference between a purist and a popular idiom; the first is alienating and distant while the second is familiar and meaningful to the reader. This detail escapes his notice since his attention is focused on Romanos' audacity and not on the definition of the pragmatic nature of his choices.

As regards Elytis' second question (whether Romanos draws words from older periods of language or unconsciously uses their altered forms) one must be cautious. Let us not forget that many centuries and many scribes have intervened between the writings of Romanos and the contemporary reader, so that we can never be absolutely sure about the initial form of certain words. Moreover Elytis does not really take into account one very important fact, namely, that Romanos shaped his words according to the demands of the strict rules of isosyllabism and homotony. Many alterations must be seen in conjunction with the metrical requirements that were interrelated with the tune that accompanied the hymn.

After the citation of Romanos' characteristic vocabulary, Elytis feels free to bring his precursor into the nineteenth century by comparing him with Kalvos, who was also an inventor of personal metres that 'drew ... from

Pindar', hence the continuity is firmly established: 'The three columns that hold the curves of the arches in one of the facades of the undivided Greek language: Pindar, Romanos the Melodist, Andreas Kalvos' (p. 45). Elytis here repeats the erroneously Hellenocentric explanation of Kalvos' metrical innovations based on the ignorance of the poet's long apprenticeship in Italian metres.[26] (Trypanis had also pointed out a resemblance between Pindar's *Odes* and the metrical character of the *kontakia*, but he attributed it to the fact that in both cases the music determined the form).[27]

This resemblance motivates Elytis to expand on the notion of purification of language and the poetic enchantment that it creates. Although he accepts Grosdidier de Matons' assessment that Romanos neither made use of an esoteric vocabulary nor gave a more virginal sense to the words of the tribe[28] and admits that purification of speech was not in Romanos' mind when he was writing, he contends that the poet achieved it *ambulando*, captivated by the magical power of language. The achievement that Elytis projects onto Romanos has a self-referential character and it will be better understood if we see it in conjunction with his description of the writing process in his interview: 'often I am guided by language itself into saying certain things which I otherwise might not have thought of [....] But I *want* the text to be completely virginal and far removed from the everyday usage of words.'[29]

In order to demonstrate Romanos' purifying renewal of language Elytis cites samples of his verses that exhibit a notable versatility in the use of figurative schemes. From the rich range of tropes he chooses to highlight unusual adjectives, alliteration, paratactic formation of verses, metaphorical expressions, figures of comparison and antithesis. His choice is not a random one since these are tropes that prevail in his own poetry as well. A distinct feature of the quoted lines is the metaphorical use of light. In religious texts Christ is identified with light whereas sinful deeds belong to darkness. Elytis' 'heliocentric' poetry finds here its ideal representation since the chosen lines implicitly demonstrate the poet's belief in the sacredness of light.[30]

In addition to all the aforementioned figures of speech, what consolidates Romanos as a poet for Elytis is the 'euphony' of his verses, the 'magical element' that makes his expression limpid and soaring. Thus, Elytis, retrospectively, portrays the hymnographer as the representative *par excellence* of what he defines as 'prismatic expression', a condensed and highly charged mode of expression, which is authentically Greek since it is found in Aeschylus and Pindar and appears again in Kalvos.

In order to demonstrate the superiority of 'prismatic expression' over the plain style of Cavafy and Seferis and its relation to his own version of surrealism, Elytis employs Romanos' words 'μυρίσαι τὸ ἄριστον' to

introduce thirty-two individual lines from different *kontakia*, taken from the Maas-Trypanis edition as the corrected forms of some words reveal. The choice and the arrangement of lines are devised so as to convey the impression that Elytis is composing a new poem using his precursor's diction. His re-writing follows the surrealistic techniques of 'free association' and 'spontaneity' that the poet employed from his first poems onwards.[31] Most of the lines exhibit a metaphorical audacity mainly embodied in natural images. Elytis' interpretation of this feature is that Romanos 'unwittingly reshapes a theological perception into a naturalistic one' (p. 54). Elytis, with the licence of surrealism, substitutes for Romanos' Christian mysticism his own 'cosmic optimism',[32] which has a pre-Christian origin.

Elytis concludes that Romanos 'unwittingly' ended up a pagan in his writings; rather as he says of himself: 'I am an idolater who, without wanting to do so, arrives at Christian sainthood.'[33] This statement reveals Elytis' belief in the Homeric notion of the poet as a vessel of divine inspiration,[34] which he also finds in Romanos: ' "I have the request stamped on the map of my soul" he says' (p. 55). These words that the poet puts in his precursor's mouth come from the *kontakion* 'On the Healing of the Leper' where the leper speaks to Jesus. Romanos, who used to include his name in the acrostic, accompanied by the adjective ταπεινός (humble), and to plead for redemption in the opening and closing sections of his *kontakia*, would never have declared his mission in such a self-foregrounding manner. The 'individual consciousness as a protagonist'[35] is a surrealistic feature that Elytis projects onto Romanos so as to complete his portrayal of the latter as a daring poet.

The fact that Romanos was a religious writer devoted to the Christian ideal does not prevent Elytis from canonizing him as a poet by transposing his religious vision of future life into a poetic vision of the present life, as Elytis himself perceives it: 'It is enough to imagine as 'future' the present [life], purified, in an ideal perfection, in order to measure the degree of *rectification* that he conveys with his poetic work to the world of appearances' (p. 55). There is no clearer evidence for Elytis' 'misreading' than this statement. By the term 'misreading' I characterize the poet's act 'as a corrective movement, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.'[36] All the essence of Elytis' own poetry is projected here onto Romanos in order to vindicate Elytis himself as a powerful descendant who corrects and completes his precursor's achievements. Elytis situates Romanos' work as a link between ancient and Modern Greek poetry in a manner which authenticates his own poetic choices and proves their superiority against the works of his contemporaries.

Elytis' anxiety regarding the reception of his work and the related need to validate his poetic space accounts for the polemical nature of his essay. The same motivation underlies the parallel he draws between Romanos' innovations in poetry and the strategic decisions of Constantine the Great, as well as his confidence regarding the details in his precursor's life, which conveys the notion that the poet speaks as a reincarnation of the hymnographer.

Elytis' choice of Romanos as a precursor discloses the nature of his belief that 'it is possible for the modern experience to enter its classical period.'[37] If we accept Kierkegaard's definition of greatness – 'we become great in proportion to the greatness we fight against, whether that greatness belong to a man, an idea, a system, or a poem' then we can realize the importance that Elytis ascribes to his work.[38] In the following section we shall discuss Romanos' presence in *The Axion Esti* so as to reassess the dialogue between the two poets in the poetry itself. We shall find that the critical views expressed by Elytis in subsequent years are rather a retrospective justification than a faithful account of Romanos' presence in *The Axion Esti*.

2. Romanos and *The Axion Esti*

We have seen that Elytis' essay on Romanos, written long after *The Axion Esti,* was prompted by Maas-Trypanis. Yet *The Axion Esti* was written earlier than their edition and this should lead us to reassess the verbal and formal resemblances between Elytis' poetry (especially in *The Axion Esti*) and Romanos.[39]

In his study of *The Axion Esti*, Lignadis considers the Old and the New Testaments, hymnography and above all Romanos as the most important sources.[40] His analysis is centered upon the discovery of inter-textual morphological, thematic and verbal similarities. In the discussion that follows we shall examine each of these themes separately.

As far as the morphology of the poem is concerned, Lignadis (p. 30) contends that the 'Odes' (which he calls 'songs') follow the structure of Romanos' *kontakia*. He cites the 1963 Maas-Trypanis edition as evidence without noticing the significance of the publication date. The 'Odes' really seem to follow the Byzantine metrical system but this is not enough to consider Romanos as a source. Romanos himself used to 'compose *kontakia* to fit famous metres and tunes composed by others'[41] like *kontakion* 44 which was shaped on the metres of the *Akathistos Hymn*. In order to exemplify the alleged resemblance Lignadis does not even choose an example from the aforementioned edition. Instead he cites a fragment of an anonymous early Byzantine *kontakion*, which Trypanis published in 1965. In the same fragment

he detects certain expressive techniques that Elytis borrows such as figures of assonance, parechesis, homoioteleuton.

In the analysis of the first part of 'Genesis' (p. 57) Lignadis concludes that the whole morphological 'appearance' is influenced by the aforementioned edition. His inference is based on the typographical effect of the poem and not on a careful metrical examination, thus his evidence is again inadequate to sustain a formal relation between the two poets.

The thematic resemblance between the *kontakia* and *The Axion Esti* is also poorly defined. Elytis' use of the Biblical motif of the wood in 'Genesis' is interpreted by Lignadis as an allusion to the *kontakion* 'On the Nativity' (p.86). As in many other cases he associates both passages with the Old Testament, which is truly the prime source, without providing an account for the purported relation between the texts.

In the 'Fifth Reading', apart from the obvious thematic allusion to John x.7 'the gate of sheep', Lignadis detects allusions to the *Akathistos Hymn* and to the *kontakion* 'On Peter's Denial'. His interpretation evades the responsibility of deciding which is the strongest reference and for what reasons. The notion of holiness that runs through the poem leads Lignadis to make impetuous connections with Romanos, overlooking the real nature of the theme as in 'Psalm XI', where he contends that the whole idea of the fountain is taken from the *kontakion* 'On the Woman of Samaria'.

Lignadis' perception of the verbal similarities is evident in his analysis of the line 'A solitary swallow /and Spring's great worth is found'. After drawing a parallel between the metaphorical use of swallows in Elytis' previous poems, in Sikelianos and in folk songs, he adds Romanos' *kontakion* 'On the Nativity' as 'an instance of a more metaphysical interpretation'. Thus, the dialogue between the two poets is dictated by the commentator's own intuitive choices and not by the text itself.

Lignadis' method of analysis is either dissipated in citing a list of possible sources or is reduced to mere parallelism, which narrows the power of the allusion. In several instances he evokes Romanos to justify the function of certain ways of expression while he neglects their Biblical use. Elytis, just like Romanos, adopts an expressive manner which is quite common in the Old and New Testaments for his own poetic purposes. Lignadis' hasty interpretation fails to disclose the function of Biblical tropes in the poem.

Earlier, we mentioned Lignadis' remark concerning certain expressive 'techniques' that the poet borrowed from the anonymous *kontakion*. Figures of assonance, indeed, hold a dominant position in *The Axion Esti* and in Romanos' hymns. As we have already seen, such figures were abundant in

ancient literature and in poetic homily. In a poem like *The Axion Esti*, whose language is drawn from millennia, it would be very restricting to suggest, as Lignadis does, that Byzantine literature is the only source of similar tropes. The brief examination of Lignadis' comments regarding the presence of Romanos in *The Axion Esti* reveals that despite the abundance of unproven connections,[42] there is no convincing evidence for a dialogue between the two poets. In his own commentary on the poem, Elytis admits that his original objective was to construct it on 'the tonal systems of Byzantine poetry', but he also confesses his final stance towards the liturgical texts: 'I was disappointed when I studied the texts.'[43] If we take this remark into account together with the fact that the metrical structure of the *kontakia* was not fully known to Elytis before 1963, we have serious reasons to doubt Romanos' shaping presence in the poem as Lignadis portrays it. Elytis' dialogue with the hymnographer, as we have already seen, was developed much later than the time *The Axion Esti* was written. The fruitful outcome of this dialogue is in fact embodied in *The Little Seafarer*.

3. Re-writing the precursor: *The Little Seafarer*

The Little Seafarer was written between 1970 and 1974. The poem has a retrospective character. We could see it as a conducted tour of the poet's workshop, a voyage in the realms of his imagination. As Bloom notes 'If the Imagination, in poetry, speaks of itself, then it speaks of origins, of the archaic, of the primal, and above all of self-preservation.'[44] *The Little Seafarer* is an attempt to establish the fixed limits of a poetic Paradise. It enacts Elytis' perception of the poet as a 'rival creator'[45] as he defined it in 1977: 'Poetry was made to correct God's mistakes, or, if not, then to point out how mistakenly we received his gift.'[46]

The poem shares many common features with *The Axion Esti*. We find the same juxtaposition between the strictly mathematical form and the intensity of language, elements that Elytis detects in Romanos. There is also a similar, only more overt, battle between poetry and history. The poet's audacity is enacted as a powerful drive towards self-portraiture against a society no longer unified by a generally accepted code of values.[47] His role in the poem is that of visionary and tormented outcast. The retrospective, self-defining character of the poet's imagination gives the poem a confessional tone which is articulated in religious terms. He appears as a recluse who studies ascetic prayers in order to acquire the gift of poetic creativity. The result of his austere devotion is reflected in the impeccable structure.

The poem opens with an 'entrance' and closes with an 'exit' which remind us of Elytis' metaphor of the poem as a church.[48] In these two sections the poet

evokes Solomos through a fragment from *The Free Besieged*: 'Helpless are the eyes that you summon golden wind of life'.[49] The rest of the poem is divided into fourteen sections. Four of them are entitled 'The Little Seafarer' and they are made up of seven scenes each. The images are all scenes of injustice that the poet's camera captures as it surveys the whole of the historical Greek world. Each of these catalogues of violence is followed by seven prose poems under the heading 'Μυρίσαι τὸ Ἄριστον'.[50] These four parts are the founding columns of Elytis' poetic structure and provide the base for the three sections headed by Kalvos' words 'With Light and Death'. The thematic, lexical and structural arrangement of the latter allow them to rise above the other four, just as an arch rises between two columns. Their heightened tone is a result of the poet's self-presentation, as an ephebe possessed by a divine *furor poeticus.* Through playful and versatile forms, coinage of words and bold, extravagant metaphors, he celebrates the gifts of poetic madness (*mania*) as Plato defines them in the *Phaedrus.*[51] Here Elytis appears as a hunter who chases 'bodies' of vowels and consonants in order to seduce them.[52] He employs the acrostic, a feature of Romanos' poetry, so as to manifest his own poetic imprint: A.L.G.R.E.U.S. The archaic form of the coined word alludes to 'ἄλγος' and 'ἀγρεύς' and we could interpret it as 'he who hunts/kills the pain'.[53]

Each of the above three groups of poems is followed by a section headed by Sappho's words 'What One Loves', which consists of lists of the poet's most precious 'belongings': random lines from his favourite poets, paintings, musical movements, words drawn from the island idiom, snapshots from life on Greek islands or images of girls. In the first of these lists we find two lines from Romanos that Elytis selects for their euphonic effect and their metaphorical audacity (p. 442).

Romanos is a powerful presence in the poem since the supporting sections bear his words as their title. The phrase 'μυρίσαι τὸ ἄριστον' is taken from the *kontakion* 'On the sinful woman'.[54] The words can be found in standard Modern Greek vocabulary but not in the same forms and definitely not with the same meaning. Thus their interpretation can be quite misleading. The aorist infinitive of the verb (μυρίσαι) is no longer in use and the meaning of the verb has been limited over the years. In the sixth century it meant 'to anoint' and it is found in that sense and in the same form in Mark xiv.8 in Christ's words: 'she was the first to anoint my body.'[55] The neuter noun 'τὸ ἄριστον' was employed for 'the meal' and it has the same sense in the *kontakion*, as the use of the verb 'συναριστῶ' (to dine with) in the second strophe reveals. Thus, the meaning of the phrase in its context is 'to anoint the repast'.

Elytis' re-writing of Romanos begins with his interpretation of the phrase. He employs 'τὸ ἄριστον' in its modern sense, namely, as a neuter adjective which means 'that which is excellent'. Although he keeps the archaic form of the verb, the meaning he ascribes to it is that of the verb 'μυρίζομαι' (I smell). On this substitution of meaning Elytis bases a whole poetic construction, characterized by a pre-Christian perception of the world and of artistic creativity.

Before proceeding to Elytis' revisionary tropes I will first examine the figurative use of the verb 'μυρίζω' in Romanos. In the *kontakion* under examination, the verb and the related noun 'μύρον' (myrrh) have the central role in a complex network of references. First of all, the act of anointing someone's body has sensual implications. Eroticism indeed is not at all absent from Romanos' presentation of the Biblical incident. The words (ῥήματα) of Christ are poured (ῥαινόμενα) everywhere like perfumes (ἀρώματα). The smell of his words gives breath of life to the faithful. The harlot's deeds smell bad and she is attracted by the divine smell of Christ's speeches. The smell of his table excited the sinful woman and generated in her the desire for him. In order to show her devotion she decides to anoint and flatter him, but in tears and penitence. She gives up her sins by the symbolic act of exhalation.[56] Her enthusiasm for anointing Christ's body and her plea for forgiveness is so intense that the sinful woman imagines that Simon the Pharisee may think she is intoxicated.

Romanos, drawing on Luke,[57] presents in a passionate manner the woman's renunciation of carnal desires for the sake of the spiritual love that Christ offers as a lover of human souls. Tomadakis noted Romanos' daring language and metaphors by saying that some parts of the *kontakion* would scandalize the congregation even today.[58]

In his interview Elytis had clearly stated: 'There is a search for Paradise in my poetry. When I say "paradise", I do not conceive of it in the Christian sense. It is another world, which is incorporated into our own, and it is our fault that we are unable to grasp it.'[59] In *The Little Seafarer* he creates his Paradise with elements from an archaic thought.

The Garden and the sense of smelling/breathing with which we relish its fragrances are metaphors for the act of writing. The poet as an outcast feels like 'a plant satisfied in its poison' (p. 433), but he is also 'Piper of plants' (p. 435) who expects that a 'mercy-giving orchard' (p. 436) will purify the world. His thought is like a 'novice rosebush' (p. 439) and he is capable of planting 'grapevine-words' (p. 479) and writing with trees: 'the Greek of grief/ With trees for capitals where shall I write it' (p. 488). What we detect here is

a primitive equation of Self with nature. The poet's Paradise is closer to Aphrodite's Holy Grove as we find it in Sappho than to the Christian Eden.[60] It reflects an almost hermeticist faith in the thaumaturgic virtues of the Word and it is inextricably fused with sensual pleasure.

'The fumes/ of a certain courageous lavender' (p. 436) are capable of propitiating the universe and the smell of flowers has magic effects: 'this blend/ of jasmine verbena and lemon geranium/ that holds the sky at a distance' (p. 487). The state of being before existence is also defined by smell: 'when the violets were fragrant when I didn't know' (p. 488).

The function of Romanos' words 'μυρίσαι τὸ ἄριστον' signals Elytis' beliefs. In the sense Elytis gives to it, the phrase suggests a bold exaggeration, a hyperbole, since it is impossible for the human senses (smell) to perceive something that has no material substance (the excellent).

Elytis' evocation of the air/wind in the introductory lines is equivalent to the evocation of the Muse in the Homeric poems. The poet's need to breathe alludes to the Greek word for inspiration 'ἔμπνευση' (breathing in) and the ancient belief that poetic composition is a divine gift. Elytis, through the use of analogy, which is also the great tool of the hermeticist poetic discourse, presents his poems as gardens with fruits that 'smelled of Heraclitus and Archilochus'[61] (p. 424). Through smell he perceives the existence of a 'second' Paradisal world on earth: 'fragrant herbs, hunting dogs of our holiness' (p. 427). In the realm of his imagination the wind is identified with the divine: 'The wind rises. The divine triumphs' (p. 454). The sea also has a central role in the poem. It is the 'School' where the poet learned his 'mathematics' according to which primitive sensualism and Christianity are fused into one: 'The product of fragrant herbs times innocence always gives the shape of a certain Jesus Christ' (p. 457).

Elytis confesses that he consumed a lot of wind to grow up and that endowed him with the gift of perceiving with precision the mysteries that lie under the surface of the Greek language (p. 477). He presents strong psychic impulses as the wind that blows into a man's soul (p. 478) and he imparts to us that man can become wind in the same way that he can demolish the boundaries of Ethics established by a powerful 'ancient stupidity' (p. 482). Elytis here overtly expresses his opposition to the Christian perception of the Fall as a human weakness that derives from sensual pleasure. As a true devotee of the Heraclitean doctrine of the unity of the opposites, Elytis dispenses with the Christian distinction between good and evil, he discovers justice in a fragrance, and so he chooses to express himself like 'a bergamot in the morning air' (p. 483). For Elytis the Greek landscape (especially the Aegean)

and the Greek language are the custodians of an archaic unity to which Christianity and Marxism are equally hostile (p. 501).

Elytis' dialogue with Romanos becomes more evident at the point where he contemplates the notion of humility (ταπεινοσύνη) (p.506). Romanos used to include his name in the acrostic accompanied by the adjective 'ταπεινοῦ' in order to show his religious submission. In the closing paragraph of his essay Elytis stressed this feature as the hymnographer's implicit demonstration of pride in his consistent dedication to his religious virtue and poetic ideas. Here Elytis contends that humility is not the opposite of pride. Such dualistic distinctions do not exist in nature; the smell of wild herbs proves it: 'I broke it off and raised it to my upper lip. Right away I understood that man is innocent. I read this so intensely in its scent acrid with truth.' Thus, Elytis reads in the book of Nature that all religions are false and that Paradise is a right and not, as we find it in Romanos, a reward.

In *Open Book* there is only one reference to Romanos, in a text published in 1973: 'I felt like an aristocrat who had – the only one who had – the privilege to call the sky 'οὐρανός' and the sea 'θάλασσα', just like Sappho, just like Romanos, for thousands of years.'[62] In the last poem of 'Μυρίσαι τὸ ἄριστον', Elytis confirms his dialogue with Romanos with the same words: 'WE WALK FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. We call the sky "sky" and the sea "sea".' His quest for lost innocence and justice ends successfully by locating these two notions in the continuity of the Greek landscape and the Greek language. In poem 12 he depicts the holiness of such a natural continuity as we witness it in the sensual names with which ordinary people call the Virgin Mary, transforming the idea of a distant, austere divinity into an earthly deity. Therefore our 'humble Paradise' lies within our grasp.

The Little Seafarer is an enactment of powerful substitutions with which the poet challenges his precursor's tropes. In Romanos the phrase 'μυρίσαι τὸ ἄριστον' constitutes a metonymy in terms of which the specific act of anointing Christ's body is replaced by its symbolic effect of 'perfuming the meal'. This replacement aims at foregrounding the sinful woman's rejection of carnal desires and her eagerness for redemption from her sins and reward in the afterlife. Elytis overcomes this 'limitation' by substituting for the metonymy a hyperbole, which aims at gratifying instinctive demands that society and religion find unacceptable.[63] Thus he responds to the harlot's religious intoxication with a divine *furor poeticus* that reverses the 'low estimation put upon earthly life by Christian doctrine.'[64]

In Romanos' *kontakion* a complex network of metaphors evolves around the notion of 'smell'. Sinful deeds smell bad whereas delivery from sins has

the smell of precious unguents. This dualistic distinction of good and evil as good and bad smell aims at 'Sublimation', namely at a diversion of psychic energy derived from sexual impulses into non-sexual socially acceptable activity.[65] Elytis overcomes the limitations that religious dualism imposes on him, by usurping Romanos' completed figure (the metaphorical use of smell) and re-writing it in a new manner. For Elytis socio-political and religious conventions are the source of a suffocating, evil-smelling odour to which he responds with a sensual celebration of Greek nature and language. His primitive perception of nature and artistic creativity can be traced to Archaic Greek thought: consider the root meaning of the words 'νοῦς' and 'νοεῖν' which is 'to sniff' or 'to smell'.[66] Let us remember here two other pre-Socratics, namely Sappho and Archilochus, who broke with traditional ideologies and centered their poems on their personal experiences. Their lyric achievements celebrate the 'day' and the 'ephemeral', eschewing the epic concerns for divine and heroic deeds.[67]

The results of our re-evaluation of Romanos' presence in *The Axion Esti*, together with the examination of his presence in *The Little Seafarer*, allow us to infer that the hymnographer does not become a central figure in Elytis' poems and essays earlier than the period 1970–76. To this period belong *The Little Seafarer* and his essay on Romanos. By way of conclusion I shall review the basis and the purposes of Elytis' dialogue with Romanos by drawing together the threads of my analyses.

Both *The Little Seafarer* and the essay on Romanos belong to a very productive period in Elytis' career. The poet, who was travelling continuously at the time, found himself in the middle of decisive political events both in Europe generally (May 1968) and specifically in Greece (dictatorship 1967–74). While in France radical intellectuals were celebrating freedom of the imagination from political commitment and sexual liberation from both Christian and Marxist oppressions, in Greece political engagement gained more and more devotees in the realm of poetry and the examples of Cavafy and Seferis were considered as ideal ways of expressing this attitude.

Elytis, as we saw, was going through a creative crisis regarding the direction of his work. He was working on poems that heralded a new period in his career while at the same time gathering the fruits of his accomplished work in syntheses such as *The Little Seafarer*. By refusing to comply with a political approach of historic events, Elytis established an idiosyncratic stance towards the relation to poetry and history.[68] But this stance needed to be validated in order to withstand the test of time. The poet's dialogue with Romanos provided him with the retrospective validation that he was seeking.

Through powerful substitutions, Elytis 'opens' his precursor's work to his own concerns and values.[69] In his essay, this 'opening' overlooks the hymnographer's 'otherness', the relation of his work to his culture.[70] Like every strong 'misreading' the poet's interpretation modernizes and distorts his precursor's image by projecting onto him the achievements of his own poetry: strict use of form, transference of words, purification of language and a naturalistic view of life. In *The Little Seafarer* the modernization of Romanos' words and the 'revisionary replacements' of his tropes constitute a creative reading that discloses the 'semantic treasures' that lie concealed within the language of the *kontakia*.[71] Romanos could not have foreseen all these potential treasures when he was writing. Elytis, by awakening the semantic possibilities in the work of his precursor enriched and expanded the limits of his own achievements, enabling us to gain deeper insights into the nature of his poetics.

We do not know why the poet kept *The Little Seafarer* and his essay on Romanos unpublished until the 1980s. His severe judgement in the essay, of two of the strongest modern poets (Cavafy and Seferis) might be a good reason for postponing his polemic until the reception of his work would vindicate his views. Four years after these texts were written, in 1979, Elytis won the Nobel Prize; thus his aspiration to become a vindicated revolutionary was fulfilled. The poet of *The Little Seafarer* who appears as a recluse with primitive beliefs is not in harmony with the image of the national poet. Elytis chose first to publish works that reinforced his stature as a classic representative of Surrealism, fearing perhaps that the reversal of Christian beliefs which he realizes both in the poem and in his essay on Romanos might have impaired his image had they been published earlier. Their publication in the mid 1980s, together with his re-writing of Sappho's poems (1984) and his rendering of the *Apocalypse* into Modern Greek (1985), completed the poet's self-presentation. If the liturgical tone of *The Axion Esti* overshadowed the pagan underpinnings of the poem, *The Little Seafarer* makes it evident: Elytis' work as a whole and in its parts is an attempt to apply the Christian notion of holiness to a pre-Christian, perhaps even anti-Christian, perception of life and artistic creativity. In *The Axion Esti* Hellenism appears inextricably fused with Christianity just as *The Akathistos Hymn,* despite its esoteric quality, was identified with the glory and the fall of the Byzantine Empire. In *The Little Seafarer* Elytis abandons the role of the poet as the voice of his nation (let us not forget the Hellenic-Christian ideals of the military junta) and focuses on the idea of Hellenism as an adventure of the soul, a voyage to a Cavafian Ithaca. In *The Axion Esti* he exalted the heroic deeds of his countrymen whereas in *The Little*

Seafarer he highlights the disgraceful moments of Greek history and declares that his own Hellas may not even exist at all. It is a poetic creation, made up with elements from Greek nature and tradition where Christian belief coexists with a naturalistic view of life. His obsession with Paradise is an obsession with a pure poetic space where all concepts become new, undistorted by historical usage. Taking his lead from Solomos, who wanted the poem to have a 'bodiless soul' and grow as naturally as a tree,[72] Elytis refuses to comply with the restrictions of historicity. He rejects the dualism characteristic of western thought and the frustration it entails for modern man, in order to reintegrate man with nature[73] and reinvent faith and ideals which had been ruined by socio-political and religious convention.

NOTES

1 H. Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford 1975) 4.
2 M. Bakhtin, 'Response to a question from the Novy Mir editorial staff' in C. Emerson and M. Holquist (eds) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin 1986) 1–9.
3 O. Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis on his poetry. From an interview with Ivar Ivask', *Books Abroad* 4 (1975) 639.
4 O. Elytis, *'Εν Λευκῷ* (Athens 1992) 38. Page numbers in the text of this section refer to this edition of the essay. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
5 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 642.
6 Bakhtin, 'Response', 4.
7 H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (repr. Oxford 1997) 19.
8 P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford 1963) xiii–xxiii.
9 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 638.
10 D. N. Maronitis, *Ὅροι τοῦ Λυρισμοῦ στὸν 'Οδυσσέα 'Ελύτη* (Athens 1980) 23.
11 J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris 1977) 16.
12 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 640.
13 Maas and Trypanis, *Sancti Romani,* xxiii.
14 Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode,* 248.
15 Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode,* 133.
16 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 639.
17 Heraclitus fr. 84a DK; cf. T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus, Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Toronto 1987) 50–1.
18 L. Politis, *Διονυσίου Σολωμοῦ Ἅπαντα* (Athens 1961) I 208.
19 A remark first made by G. Seferis, *Δοκιμές* (Athens 1974) 63: 'Our three great dead poets who did not know Greek'.
20 In its first publication (*'Εκηβόλος* 15, 1986) the list included the word κατακαμουτόρενον, which is omitted in later publications for obvious reasons of euphony.
21 For example: ἀποτηγανίζομαι, δροσινά, λαλητός, τρανολάλοι, μονιός μοτώσω etc.
22 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 638.
23 Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode,* 247.
24 Maas and Trypanis, *Sancti Romani,* xviii.
25 Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode,* 303.

26 E. Garantoudis, *Πολύτροπος 'Αρμονία: μετρικὴ καὶ ποιητικὴ τοῦ Κάλβου* (Herakleion 1995) x.
27 Constantine A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry: An Anthology* (Oxford 1951) xv
28 Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode,* 293.
29 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 638.
30 D. N. Maronitis, ' 'Η ποιητικὴ αἰσιοδοξία' in *Πίσω–Μπρος* (Athens 1986) 109–29.
31 R. Beaton, 'The sign of the dolphin', *Times Literary Supplement* 23 May (1980) 580.
32 E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge 1965) 80.
33 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 643.
34 P. Murray, *Plato on Poetry: Ion, Republic 376e–398b, Republic 595–608b* (Cambridge 1996) 10: 'In the early Greek poets the divine origin of poetry is used to guarantee its truth and quality.'
35 Beaton, 'The sign', 580.
36 Bloom, *The Anxiety,* 14.
37 G. Kehagioglou, 'Ενα ανέκοτο νόμνημα του Ελύτη για *Το 'Άξιον Έστί'*, *Ποίηση* 5 (1995) 27–65.
38 Quoted by Bloom, *A Map,* 108.
39 In *The Axion Esti,* the allusions to Romanos come from some of the most popular *kontakia.* Elytis, as we saw, must have known Romanos from collections and anthologies that disappointed him since they did not give him a clear picture of the metrical variety.
40 Tasos Lignadis, *Τό Ἄξιον Ἐστί τοῦ Ἐλύτη: Εἰσαγωγή, Σχολιασμός, Ἀνάλυση* (Athens 1971) 19. Page numbers in the text of this section refer to this edition.
41 Maas and Trypanis, *Sancti Romani,* 513.
42 Lignadis however detects two strong allusions to Romanos. The first in Psalm VIII: 'But with your word you lit the lantern of the star in our hand' and the second in Ode 5: 'With the star-lantern I * went out into the skies'. The theme of the 'star-lantern' is taken from the popular *kontakion* 'On the Nativity I', ιδ΄. 9: 'Seeking after the star-lantern'.
43 Kehagioglou, 'Ανέκδοτο υπόμνημα', 36.
44 Bloom, *A Map,* 67.
45 Bloom, *A Map,* 37.
46 Elytis, *Ἐν Λευκῷ*, 116.
47 Michael A. Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton 1980) 3–25.
48 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 640.
49 Solomos, *Ἅπαντα*, 246.
50 I purposely avoid translating this phrase at this point since a translation would restrict its multiple meanings, which I shall examine separately below.
51 244a–245a, 265a–b.
52 *The Collected Poems of Odysseus Elytis,* trans. J. Carson and N. Sarris (Baltimore and London 1997) 434. The pages in the text of this section refer to this translation.
53 I disagree with the way Carson and Sarris interpret the word as composed by ἅλς salt and ἄγρα chase/hunt. The combination of these two senses does not suggest any new meaning for the coined word.
54 Maas and Trypanis, *Sancti Romani,* 78.
55 In this section Mark describes a similar incident: the anointing of Christ's body by a woman in the house of Simon the leper.
56 This is a baptismal ritual that survives to the present day.
57 Luke 7. 36–50. A similar incident is described by Matthew xxvi. 6–16, Mark xiv. 3–9 and John xii. 1–8.
58 N. B. Tomadakis, *Εἰσαγωγὴ εἰς τὴν Βυζαντινὴν Φιλολογίαν* (Athens 1952) 158.
59 Elytis, 'Odysseus Elytis', 641.
60 Sappho fr. 2 (Lobel-Page); for discussion see D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus: An Introduction to*

the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry (Oxford 1965) 34.
61 In Plato's *Phaedrus*, a dialogue on love and poetry, Socrates presents a man's wise words as seeds that he plants in human souls and his writings as 'gardens of letters' (276d).
62 O. Elytis, *'Ανοιχτὰ Χαρτιά* (Athens 1974) 352.
63 Bloom, *A Map,* 4.
64 Cited in Dodds, *Pagan and Christian,* 5.
65 A Freudian concept deployed by Bloom, *A Map,* 73.
66 K. von Fritz, '*Nous, noein* and their derivatives in pre-Socratic philosophy' in A. P. D. Mourelatos (ed.), *The Pre-Socratics: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Princeton 1993) 23–85.
67 H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy: A History of Greek Epic, Lyric and Prose to the Middle of the Fifth Century,* tr. M. Hadas and J. Willis (Oxford 1975) 133.
68 M. Vitti, *'Οδυσσέας 'Ελύτης: Κριτική Μελέτη* (Athens 1984) 321.
69 Bloom, *A Map,* 3–4.
70 Bakhtin, 'Response', 7.
71 Bakhtin, 'Response', 6.
72 Solomos, *Ἅπαντα,* 207.
73 Elytis, *'Ανοιχτὰ Χαρτιά,* 383–400.