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## On Stammering, Barbarisms, and National Literature\*

Review essay of Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800-1850: Stammering the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018, 272 pp. – ISBN: 9780198788706, and Eadem, *Τραυλίζοντας το έθνος. Διεθνικός Πατριωτισμός στη Μεσόγειο, 1800-1850*. Tr. Menelaos Asteriou. Ed. Kostas Livieratos. Athens: Alexandria 2022, 344 pp. – ISBN: 9789602219607

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**K**onstantina Zanou’s book *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800-1850: Stammering the Nation* (2018), which was recently translated into Greek (2022), invites us to reconsider basic concepts that have shaped common understandings of social and political realities in Greece, Europe, the Mediterranean, and beyond, such as nation, (Greek) Enlightenment, liberalism, patriotism, homeland, and diaspora. By pairing some of these notions with uneasy conceptual bedfellows—“transnational patriotism”, “imperial nationalism”, “conservative liberalism”, and “Orthodox Enlightenment”—it opens up alternative ways of telling the history of this period and, ultimately, of the constitution of modern Greece. Her study takes us

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\* Another, shorter version of this review essay in Greek was published by *Χάρτης* magazine in May 2023. It was one of four contributions to a roundtable discussion in Piraeus organized in January 2023 by the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation on the occasion of the publication of the Greek translation of Zanou’s book. The four contributions by Karen Emmerich, Vassilis Lambropoulos, Konstantina Zanou, and myself were published in *Χάρτης* under the heading “Τι ήταν ο Συγγραφέας πριν γίνει Έλληνας και η Λογοτεχνία πριν γίνει Εθνική;” (What was the writer before they became Greek and what was literature before it became national?).

back to the first half of the 19th century and centers on the Adriatic coast (especially the Ionian Islands), and more broadly on the Eastern Mediterranean, in a time of crisis and transition from multi-ethnic imperial powers to emerging nation-states.

As it starts with the end of the Republic of Venice, the book, as the author writes, tells “a story of the ruins of the Serenissima” and its transformation “into a battlefield between old and new imperial powers and emerging nationalisms” (2018, 1). The macrohistorical narrative of this transition and the transformation of cultural and political geographies it entailed are conveyed primarily through the stories of individuals who lived, to use the author’s words, in the “borderland between the collapsing Venetian imperial world, the changing Ottoman world, and the ascendant, emerging national worlds of Italy and Greece”: the lives of these people, some famous and some lesser known, register the shifts in mobilities and in cultural, political, and national allegiances, as well as the reframing of identities and vocabularies that this period brought about (1). Delving into the written traces these people left behind in the form of books, letters, diaries, autobiographical writings, literary works, and other manuscripts, the book compellingly traces how these people turned from “former Venetian subjects” into “Ionian ‘citizens’”, Greek or Italian patriots, exiles, “transnational liberals” or “revolutionaries” (2). Although the book also includes overviews of historical developments, its main objective is to revisit large-scale historical changes through “microhistories”. In doing so, it offers a compelling account of this period through the details and intimacies of personal biographies, which often undercut conventional accounts of the formation of nation-states.

The prominent intellectuals and politicians the book turns to—Ugo Foscolo, Andreas Kalvos, Dionysios Solomos, Ioannis Kapodistrias, and Niccolò Tommaseo—all became key figures in either the Greek or Italian nations. These personalities take center stage in the book’s first and second parts: the first part focuses on the literary figures of Foscolo, Kalvos, and Solomos, while the second part turns mainly (though not exclusively) to Kapodistrias in order to lay out the ideology of “imperial nationalism” and the entwinement of religion and Enlightenment, as they took shape mainly in the context of the “Russian Adriatic”

(2018, 66–114). In the book’s third and fourth parts, we encounter a group of (mostly) lesser known men and a few women of the Ionian, Dalmatian, Greco-Italian, Greco-Russian, and other Adriatic diasporas, most of whom led lives that crossed religious, cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries in the Mediterranean and the Balkans: Isabella Teotochi-Albrizzi, Giorgio Mocenigo, Spiridione Naranzi, Andrea Mustoxidi, Bishop Ignatius, Alexandre and Roxandra Stourdza, Spyridon Destunis, Mario Pieri, Maria and Spiridione Petrettini, Constantine Polychroniades, Angelica Palli, Andrea Papadopoulo Vretto, Spiridione Vlandi, Giovanni and Spiridione Veludo, Bartolommeo Cutlumusiano, Antimo Masarachi, Pier-Alessandro Paravia, and Emilio Tipaldo.<sup>1</sup>

The seismic shifts that took place in the first half of the 19th century were inscribed in the language, consciousness, and bodies of the subjects who lived through these changes. As basic concepts such as homeland, exile, nation, and national literature were being shaped or transformed, people’s experience of their place in the world was also shifting. Thus, when the book’s protagonists navigate between two or more linguistic, cultural, and other settings, which suddenly acquire a national character, and thus become more strictly demarcated, they inevitably start “stammering”. In her title, Zanou borrows the verb “stammer” (in Greek, “τραυλίζω”) from a letter written in 1795 by Ugo Foscolo, who was searching for his personal voice through his bilingualism (Italian and Greek). Many of the protagonists in the book mix languages or write in one language (Greek, French, Italian) but end up becoming members of a national community that speaks another language (3–4). This discrepancy between language and national affiliation gives rise to the experience and practice of stammering.

In a roundtable discussion organized in Piraeus in January 2023 by the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation on the occasion of the publication of the Greek translation of Zanou’s book, the panelists—including myself—were asked to reflect on the notion of national literature through the question “What was the writer before they became Greek?”. My (rather provocative) answer to that question was “barbarian”. This was, of course, not meant as an endorsement of the ultra-nationalist view that all

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<sup>1</sup> See Zanou 2018, 4.

non-Greeks are barbarians. Instead, in my contribution, which I expand in the present essay, I argued that the multivalent concept of barbarism can become a useful lens for addressing some of the ambiguities and complexities of the liminal period that Zanou's book skillfully sketches. In this essay, I look at the workings of this concept, which may only occasionally pop up in the book, yet is haunting the writing practices and processes of identity formation that the book broaches. In doing so, I assert this concept's relevance in critically rethinking the notion of national literature: a rethinking that is also central to Zanou's endeavor.

Concepts are never fixed or unambiguous, but shifting 'texts' in which dominant and peripheral discourses often meet or collide. According to Reinhart Koselleck and other historians of concepts, concepts do not simply reflect a social and historical reality, but inform and influence the practices through which we consolidate, maintain or transform our worlds.<sup>2</sup> In the following, I set out to show (i) how even the figure of the *barbarian*, which traditionally works to consolidate rigid hierarchical distinctions between nations or cultures, carries contradictory meanings and functions and becomes an arena for ideological conflicts in the period Zanou's book covers (1800–1850), and (ii) how the concept of *barbarism* can contribute to the articulation of transnational, hybrid subjectivities and alternative conceptions of national literature that can accommodate the fluid, conflicted identities that the book foregrounds.

My starting point in this exploration is the practice of stammering, which Zanou foregrounds by placing it in the book's title,<sup>3</sup> and its entwinement with the concept of barbarism. Stammering has accompanied the figure of the barbarian since Greek antiquity. In archaic Greece (ca. 800–500 BCE), where the word "barbarian" (*βάρβαρος*) originates, the barbarian was identified with linguistic difference.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Koselleck presented in Bevir 2000, 274. See also Koselleck 2004; Koselleck et al. 1972.

<sup>3</sup> In the English edition, "stammering" figures in the book's subtitle, while in the Greek translation it becomes part of the main title (*Τραυλίζοντας το έθνος*).

<sup>4</sup> Probably the first appearance of the word is in Homer's *Iliad*, where the word *barbarophōnoi* (*barbarophone*) is used to refer to the Carians who speak a language other than Greek, even though Homer never actually uses the word *Hellenes* (Munson 2005, 2; Boletsi 2013, 69).

According to its etymology, the word derives from the onomatopoeic repetition of the sequence bar bar bar that is supposed to mimic a foreigner's incomprehensible sounds. The barbarian, however, denoted not only foreign speech, but also someone who speaks with difficulty, inarticulately, with a bad pronunciation or someone who stammers and stutters.<sup>5</sup> Linguistic difference thus often went hand in hand with a degradation of other peoples, whose language was perceived as inarticulate, if not gibberish.<sup>6</sup> However, the rigid Greek/barbarian opposition—that became so prominent in Western history—is a product not of the archaic, but of the classical period (5th–4th centuries BCE) and of the conceptual shifts brought about by the Greco-Persian Wars (499–449 BCE).

As I lay out elsewhere, between the 8th and 5th centuries BCE language was the main criterion for defining the barbarian; ethnicity or political ideology did not yet play a defining role, because a sense of a common ethnicity had not yet been formed in the Greek world.<sup>7</sup> This was a transitional period in which identities were chiefly shaped “around city-states, with considerable differences in laws, political systems, lifestyle, and even language”.<sup>8</sup> In this period of heightened migration, mobility, and exchanges, distinctions between different peoples and cultures were still rather fluid and in gestation. The idea of a single Greek language is also questionable in this period—even in the classical period, as Greek was a “collection of myriad regional dialects”, making communication among Greeks from different regions almost as challenging as between Greeks and non-Greeks.<sup>9</sup>

In the classical period, the Persian wars gave rise to the political need for Greeks to define themselves as a unified group against a common enemy, the Persians. Against this backdrop, the *barbarian* acquires a political and ethnic basis, and is enriched with unmistakably negative

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<sup>5</sup> Long 1986, 130–131; Hartog 2001, 80. These sources are discussed in Boletsi 2013, 69.

<sup>6</sup> Long 1986, 131; Boletsi 2013, 69.

<sup>7</sup> Boletsi 2013, 69. My exposition of aspects of the history of the “barbarian” in this essay is based on my previous work on this concept, mainly in Boletsi 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Boletsi 2013, 69–70.

<sup>9</sup> J. Hall 2002, 116–117; Boletsi 2013, 254, n12.

connotations. In this new context, the *barbarian* finds its prototypical incarnation in the figure of the Persian and comes to denote the political and cultural antipode of the Greek or, more precisely, the *Athenian* ‘free’ democratic subject trying to ward off Eastern despotism.<sup>10</sup> The Greek/barbarian antithesis, which Western thought inherited and consolidated, is a key product of the transition from archaic to classical Greece and the dividing lines it imposed. Although comparisons between very different eras are always risky and inevitably selective, we could to some extent relate the passage from the archaic to the classical era, and the conceptual shifts that accompanied the formation of the ethnic and political identity of ancient Greeks around the Athenian hegemony, to the transitional period (1800–1850) in Zanou’s book: a period during which multi-ethnic empires gave way to modern nation states, and “a common regional space” with “its centuries-old cultural continuum” was shattered; and a period in which allegiances shifted from cultural and local communities to a national entity with Athens as its axis, and language turned “from an index of social mobility into an attribute of national identity” (Zanou 2018, 2). If the transition from the archaic to the classical era in Greek antiquity brought about a hardening of conceptual boundaries between the Greek self and its ‘barbarians,’ the period Zanou sketches generated a radical redrawing of boundaries too, which gave rise to “mutually exclusive nationalisms” and transformed the Adriatic Sea ““from a bridge into a border”” (2).

The perception of a ‘barbarian’ language as noise or stuttering survives in later times through the second meaning of *barbarism*, as “an offensive word or action, especially a mistake in the use of language” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 2003), or, in a more extended definition, “the intermixture of foreign terms in writing or speaking a standard, orig. a classical, language; a foreignism so used; also, the use of any of various types of expression not accepted as part of the current standard, such as neologisms, hybrid derivatives, obsolete or provincial expressions, and technical terms, or any such expression used in discourse (*Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 1913).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Munson 2005, 2; Long 1986, 130–131; E. Hall 1989, 3–5; Boletsi 2013, 70, 73, 81.

<sup>11</sup> Both definitions quoted in Boletsi 2013, 5.

This meaning is rooted in the rhetorical tradition, in which, as Markus Winkler writes, “*barbarismós/barbarismus* ... reflects the association of the use of foreign language with inappropriate and amiss language”.<sup>12</sup> In Quintilian specifically, Winkler continues, “the term refers to aesthetically and morally offensive incorrectness of speech”, such as “the insertion of foreign words into Latin speech (Quintilian mentions here among others African, Spanish, and Gaulish, Inst. 1.5.8)” but, interestingly, Quintilian also traces a potential attractive quality to such barbarisms, conceding that “the bad qualities of linguistic barbarism may exceptionally turn out to be excellent qualities (*virtutes*) when consciously used by poets as figures of speech (Inst. 1.5.1. and 1.5.57)”.<sup>13</sup>

Barbarism’s intimate connection with (foreign, improper or incorrect) language, as laid out above, invests it with a transgressive quality.<sup>14</sup> The above definitions link “barbarisms” with the crossing of linguistic, cultural (and other) boundaries, and with processes of hybridization and syncretism that are hardly ever harmonious. Barbarisms mark “encounters between heterogeneous spatial or temporal frames, linguistic registers, and discursive orders” and “bring the familiar in contact with the foreign” and “the new with the old”.<sup>15</sup> In that sense, they coalesce with the transitional landscape that Zanou’s book sketches and the liminal, hybrid identities of its protagonists. With this in mind, I will zoom in on a few writing samples by people who parade through Zanou’s book, in order to trace how the “barbarian”, as laid out above, comes into play in the conceptually confounded terrain in which these people operate and permeates their ideological conflicts:

1. First and foremost, we have the “stammering” metaphor, which, Zanou tells us, was used by several characters in the book, and most prominently by Ugo Foscolo as he was “making his first faltering steps into Italian letters” (Zanou 2018, 3). In a letter to his teacher, Cesarotti,

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<sup>12</sup> Winkler in Winkler et al. 2018, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Winkler’s source for Quintilian’s views on barbarismus is Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*.

<sup>14</sup> Boletsi 2013, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Foscolo writes: “I shall hear from you the precepts of a language that I studied with great difficulty, and for the moment I only stammer”.<sup>16</sup> In the original, Zanou explains, the phrase is “written in a hybrid Italo-Greek”, with the verb “τραυλίζω” in Greek and the rest in Italian (38). This central figure of the Italian letters essentially presents himself as a ‘barbarian’ (i.e., one who stammers), seeking his voice through the barbarisms of a hybrid language. Foscolo’s phrase thereby exemplifies and performs the linguistic/rhetorical meaning of *barbarism*, which here denotes a purportedly improper admixture of linguistic codes that yields the experience of stammering. Many of the intellectuals and politicians Zanou presents in her book use the ‘stammering’ metaphor to express “their difficulties in carving out a space for themselves in between patrias, and in living bilingualism and multi-patriotism”. As familiar codes and vocabularies are shifting, they experience themselves (or others) as barbarians, as it were, in their “awkward attempts ... to articulate the vocabulary of the nation” (3–4).

2. In a letter to Foscolo in 1809, Niccolò Delviniotti, a jurist who “wrote both Greek and Italian patriotic poems (all in Italian verse)” (Zanou 2018, 35), writes: “In *barbarous* Greece one cannot study anything else but Greek”.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, the poems that accompanied his letter included an ode “to the Greek language and to the need to restore it,” written in Italian (36). If mixed languages and multilingualism are commonly taken to be a sign of barbarism, what makes Greece “barbarous” in the experience of this scholar is its *monolingualism*: the limitation of only being able to study the Greek language in Greece. Multilingualism is thereby indirectly projected as a marker of civilization and intellectual cultivation.

3. As Greek nationalism was gaining ground in the Ionian Islands, Niccolò Tommaseo, reacting to the efforts of Ionian intellectuals and politicians such as Andrea Mustoxidi (and others) from 1830 onwards to eliminate the Italian language from public life, writes to them: “The

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Zanou 2019, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Delviniotti quoted in Zanou 2018, 35; emphasis added.

casting away of the Italian language and memories as if the body of a shipwrecked person, would be a double barbarism if you were to do it, O Ionians, it truly would”.<sup>18</sup> The governmental decrees of the Ionians (in Greek), Tommaseo also writes, “sound like those discordant and strident attempts an orchestra makes when tuning up its instruments: but they remain dissonant”.<sup>19</sup> His indignation at what he perceived as a “war against the Italian language” grounded in xenophobia, leads him to attribute double barbarism, cacophony, and dissonance to the attempt to tune a society’s language to the major tonality of a monolithic conception of national memory and to monolingualism as the basis of a “national patriotism in linguistic terms”, as Adamantios Koraes (1748–1833) saw it (166). Cacophony and dissonance, which belong to the semantic field of barbarism, do not project here the ideal of a homogeneous language, but quite the reverse: they are attributed to the (for Tommaseo) artificial expunging of Italian from Ionian public life in the attempt to make monolingualism a pillar of the new nation. Let us not forget that the “monolingual paradigm,” as Yasemin Yildiz has shown, is a modern European construction of the end of the 18th century that served the establishment of nation-states.<sup>20</sup>

4. On the opposite side of this conflict, Andrea Mustoxidi, an eminent politician of the Ionian state, complains in 1839 about the fact that Italian is the only language of the Ionian administration: “And for thirty who stammer Italian, we sacrifice national honour, and the interests of almost two hundred thousand men”.<sup>21</sup> Mobilizing the ‘stammering’ metaphor again, he attributes the barbarism of stammering to what he sees as an artificial imposition of a foreign language (Italian) on the majority of the Ionian population.

As these few examples already suggest, in this transitional period the semantic field of *barbarism* is contested and fraught with contradictory

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<sup>18</sup> Tommaseo quoted in Zanou 2018, 210.

<sup>19</sup> Tommaseo quoted in Zanou 2018, 212.

<sup>20</sup> Yildiz 2012; See also Emmerich 2023, n.pag.

<sup>21</sup> Mustoxidi quoted in Zanou 2018, 55.

connotations, references, and experiences: it occupies an arena of clashing discourses fighting for dominance. We are, let us not forget, in the broader period that Reinhart Koselleck called *Sattelzeit* (1750–1850): the threshold leading to modernity through intense socio-political changes in Europe. It is a period in which key concepts shift and become “politicized” “with the dissolution of the old order giving rise to competing classes and movements that used them as weapons”.<sup>22</sup> In this context, what constitutes *barbarism* is far from settled: barbarism can, on occasion, be ascribed to monolingualism, multilingualism, foreign influences, and either a monolithic or a plural historical memory.

Despite systematic attempts to construct a monolithic conception of the nation through language and a homogenized, organic history of Greek literature—as conceived by K.Th. Dimaras, with whom Zanou’s book critically converses—this history is full of ‘barbarisms’ that stem, among other things, from the multilingualism and biculturalism of several writers. Dionysios Solomos—who was actually born, as we are reminded, as “Dionisio Salamon”—is perhaps the most striking example of such “a life in translation” (Zanou 2018, 54–55). As Zanou explains, the very few letters he wrote in Greek are misspelled and “follow a phonetic and colloquial writing” (55). In his writing, he mixed Italian and Greek even within the same sentence or word and often creates neologisms or hybrid words by combining the two languages (60). His Greek verses were replete with Italianisms and in them Italian and Greek become almost inseparably merged: the “‘promiscuous interpenetration’ of the two languages often ended up producing a third, hybrid language composed of elements from both idioms, which were used in the same sentence or phrase”, Zanou writes, in a description that evokes almost all elements of linguistic barbarism (60). That most of Solomos’ works are fragmentary and incomplete is also a sign of ‘stammering’: that is, of his poetry’s stubborn shunning of a homogenous, organic, integrated scheme that would fit the centripetal forces of national history. The fact that Greece’s national poet gave us a writing of barbarisms from the Greek periphery invites us to rethink the concept of national literature.

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<sup>22</sup> Koselleck presented in Bevir 2000, 275; Cf. Koselleck et al. 1972–1997.

Solomos is of course not the only great poet whose language is shaped by barbarisms. C.P. Cavafy (1863-1833) is another well-known example. Cavafy's poetic language sounded "barbarian" to many of his contemporaries. In an interview from 1924, Timos Malanos said about Cavafy: "I don't like his barbaric rhyme ... He will have no imitators. He who imitates him will create parody. Mr. Cavafy is limping in his style. And the one who will imitate him will limp too".<sup>23</sup> The word "limp" ("κουτσαίνει") is perhaps the equivalent of "stammering" in the body's movement. Cavafy's idiosyncratic language—with its mixing of demotic and *katharevousa*, its antilyricism, its hybridity—puzzled Greek literary circles in his time. The perception of his poetry (or that of other writers) as 'barbarian' tells us little about the poetry itself and much more about the norm that determines the literary canon of each period and the homogenizing tendencies that eliminate divergent and barbarian elements (in the linguistic sense of *barbarism*) that threaten the norm.

Just like the concept of barbarism, national literature is defined by exclusions. Any work that is considered deviant, dissonant or barbaric invites us to read the canon that every literary history constructs critically: not as a collection of works of unquestionable and eternal value but as a product of clashing ideological forces and discourses. This is also the task of genealogical criticism, as Vassilis Lambropoulos has proposed and developed it (1985). Barbarisms are thus silenced, suppressed, rejected or, in some cases, normalized and 'nationalized' by critics—as part of Cavafy's reception also shows—so that they can acquire a logical, organic place in the dominant narrative of national literature.

Zanou's proposal for a transnational patriotism as an alternative axis for conceptualizing Modern Greek literature yields a centrifugal concept of Hellenism that leads us from Athens to the diaspora, from the mainland to the Mediterranean Sea, but also from the (European) North to the South. Cavafy's work exemplified such a centrifugal

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<sup>23</sup> My translation. In Greek: "Δεν μου αρέσει η βάρβαρος ρίμα του ... Δεν θα έχει κανένα μιμητήν. Εκείνος που θα τον μιμηθεί, θα κάμει παραδίαν. Ο κ. Καβάφης κουτσαίνει εις την τεχνοτροπιάν του. Και εκείνος που θα τον μιμηθεί θα κουτσαίνει" (Daskalopoulos & Stasinopoulou 2013, 106).

Hellenism. His poem “Going back Home from Greece” (“Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα”, 1914),<sup>24</sup> which does not belong to the 154 poems of the Cavafian canon, perhaps expresses this centrifugal Hellenism more than any other; and it does so by thematizing *barbarisms*. In the poem, two philosophers who identify as Greeks are sailing away from Greece. The title suggests that their home is not on Greek soil, just as Cavafy’s home was in Alexandria, Egypt. The speaker describes “the waters of Cyprus, Syria, and Egypt” as “the beloved waters of our home countries”. He does not feel that the Greece they are sailing away from captures their Greekness.

we are Greeks also—what else are we? —  
but with Asiatic affections and feelings,  
affections and feelings  
sometimes alien to Hellenism.<sup>25</sup>

The speaker’s Greekness escapes a geographically and nationally demarcated Greece and renounces an ethnocentric ideology premised on the elimination of diasporic, foreign, multicultural, Eastern elements. The speaker even mocks those who try to affirm their Greekness by suppressing these elements for fear of betraying their ‘barbaric’ origins:

It isn’t right, Hermippos, for us philosophers  
to be like some of our petty kings  
(remember how we laughed at them  
when they used to come to our lectures?)  
who through their showy Hellenified exteriors,  
Macedonian exteriors (naturally),  
let a bit of Arabia peep out now and then,  
a bit of Media they can’t keep back.  
And to what laughable lengths the fools went  
trying to cover it up!

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<sup>24</sup> For the original, see Onassis Foundation Cavafy C.P. Fonds, File F01, Sub-file SF0001, Item 0047; GR-OF CA CA-SF01-S01-F01-SF001-0047 (116), DOI: 10.26256/ca-sf01-s01-f01-sf001-0047.

<sup>25</sup> I use Keeley & Sherrard’s translation, in Cavafy 1992, 199.

The “Media” and “Arabia” that inadvertently “peep out now and then” are the barbarisms that the “petty kings” desperately try to suppress in an agonizing effort that strikes the speaker as ridiculous. The comic character of these barbarisms suggests, of course, the power of normative, notions of Hellenicity: this power makes the “petty kings” feel that they must expunge every foreign element in order to belong to the Greek space. The very figure of the barbarian is, after all, a product of such normative forces.

Literature is perhaps the experimental space par excellence where stammering and barbarisms can capture alternative experiences of homeland and Greekness. To place barbarisms and stammering at the center of national history and literature, then, as Zanou does by placing the stammering in her book’s title, is a challenge to homogenous conceptions of the nation and of national literature. It becomes a starting point for other narratives of modern Greek literature, in the plural, that could take us away from the barbarian/civilized dichotomy (based on a monolithic conception of the national self) towards an embracing of *barbarisms*. The book may even be read as an ode to barbarisms, as elements that testify to the multiplicity and multivalence of experiences, identities, and languages that a singular conception of the national tries to suppress. The emphasis on stammering and barbarisms invites us to see multilingualism and multiculturalism as well as hybrid means of expression not as exceptions but as constitutive elements of all literatures and of the experience of subjects in every era. Transitional epochs tend to bring such barbarisms into sharper focus. In periods perceived as more ‘normal’ or stable, barbarisms are naturalized, eclipsed or banished, but they never fully disappear if we know where and how to look for them and are willing to see them. Zanou offers a valuable, plural lens that invites us to reconsider the starting point, conditions of emergence, and dominant narratives of the modern Greek nation and its literature. It is a model for future research that is bound to open new horizons for researchers and readers alike.

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