Of pleasure and sorrow:

Two modern Greek Epicurean poems

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This paper aims to explore the topic of philosophical influences, and more specifically the one of Epicureanism, on Modern Greek poetry, taking as study cases two leading Modern Greek authors: Cavafy and Vizyinos. It also intends to outline the different pathways through which the doctrines and beliefs of Epicurus reached these particular poets (and many others along with them). Another aim of my paper is to discuss a possible influence of Vizyinos on Cavafy. The poems under consideration are Vizyinos’s ‘Επικούρειον’ and Cavafy’s early (and later on recanted) poem ‘Βακχικόν’. The paper includes a discussion of the reception of Epicureanism through the Phanariot tradition and a close reading of the two poems (especially of the less known ‘Επικούρειον’, which could be seen as a possible source for Cavafy’s poem) relying mainly on the teachings of Epicurus.

As far as the first, recanted poems of Cavafy are concerned, the eclectic affinities with exponents of the Phanariot tradition of the late 18th and the early 19th century have already been detected.¹ I believe, however, that what still has not been sufficiently highlighted is the possible relations between the early Cavafian work and a major author, who also began his poetic career from the area of Phanar (besides, he studied at the Theological School of Halki, where, in addition, Ilias Tantalidis was his professor),² who was later, in the 1880s, advertised as the new national poet of


² With regard to Vizyinos’s relation with Phanariotism see Yeoryios M. Vizyinos, Νεοελληνικά διηγήματα, ed. Panos Moullas (Athens: Estia, 1980), ξ’-α’. It is worth quoting the most characteristic phrase in this section, which is entitled ‘Η “φαναριώτικη μικρολογία του”: ’ο Βιζυινός δεν
Greece, and is nowadays known to every Modern Greek scholar and student (and almost to everyone in Greece), but not so much as a poet anymore, as he is as a short story writer. I mean, of course, Yeoryios Vizyinos.

Vizyinos’s poetry collection Ατθίδες Αύραι, which witnessed three publications (as a matter of fact, the first one was in London) from December 1883 to spring 1884, is composed of various poems; varied with regard to the content, the form, the date of writing and the group of poems in which they had been subsumed by the poet prior to their publication. Inter alia, this collection also contains the poem ‘Επικούρειον’, whose first form appears in Vizyinos’s manuscript Λυρικά, bearing the date July 17 1882. I quote it here for the needs of the examination that is to follow:

Σ’ αυτή την πρόσκαιρη ζωή μας, διστά
να μη χαρή το ζούντανό το σώμα;
Ως κ’ οι μωροί το λέν, πως είμεθα θνητοί,
πως θα μας βάλουν μια φορά στο χώμα.
Μα ούτ’ οι Δεσποτάδες μας οι κορδωτοί,
ούτε οι πλέον διαβασμέν’ ανθρώποι,
γνωρίζουν τι θα γεινούμε κατόπι
αυτού που θα να ’πάμε. –
Βάλτε να φάμε!
Βάλτε να πιούμε!
Γιατί αυτό κανείς δεν το αμφισβητεί:
Φαγεί’ και πιεί’ αλλού δεν θα τα ’βρούμε.

Ανέλπιστα γυρνά της Τύχης ο τροχός,
κι ο Χρόνος που περνά, δεν στρέφ’ οπίσω.
Της χρες ο Κροίσος είναι σήμερα φτωχός,
κ’ εγώ, ο νέος, αύριον θ’ ασπρίσω.
Αυτά τα ’ξεύρουν όλοι πλέον ευτυχός’
κι όμως πολλοί στερούνται και νηστεύουν!
Θα ελαφρύνουν τάχα, για ν’ αναίβουν

κατόρθωσε παρά σε ελάχιστες μόνο προνομιακές στιγμές να σπάσει τα δεσμά που τον έδεναν χειροπόδαρα με το φαναριωτισμ’ (Vizyinos, Διηγήματα, ξ’).
3 A prime role towards the projection of this image was played by the publisher of the newspaper Νέα Εφημερίς, Ioannis Kambouroglou. See Lambros Varelas, “Ο μεγαλοϊδεάτης Γ. Μ. Βιζυηνός,” Nea Estia 1830 (2010).
4 Marinos Ksireas, Άγνωστα βιογραφικά στοιχεία και κατάλοιπα του Βιζυηνού (Nicosia: n.p., 1949), 82 (No. 234, ‘Άσμα Επικούρειον’).
αυτού που θένα 'πάμε;
Βάλτε να φάμε!
Βάλτε να πιούμε!
Γιατί 'ως κ’ οι τρελοί το ξεύρουν δυστυχώς:
Φαγεί’ και πιεί’ αλλού δεν θα τα ’βρούμε.

Κι όποιος μια κόρη, μιαν οραίαν αγαπά,
ας της χαρή τα πρώτα πρώτα κάλλη.
Λύπαις κι αρρώστιαις θα της πάρουν τα λουπά,
και θα του μείνη μόν’ η παραξάλη.
Αυτό στ’ αυτί καλά βεβαιώς δεν χτυπά.
Μα πλην αυτού, 'ξάφνιον προβάλλ.' ο Χάρος
κ’ ειδοποιεί: «Αφέντη, μη προς βάρος –
Κοπιάστενε να ’πάμε!!»
Βάλτε να φάμε!
Βάλτε να πιούμε!
Γιατί φαγεί’ και πιεί’ και κάλλη χαρωπά
στου Χάρου το κελλί δεν θα τα ’βρούμε!5

A few years later, in early 1886, Constantine Cavafy published his first poem, ‘Βακχικόν’, which was later on tacitly recanted, in the Greek periodical of Leipzig Έσπερος (issue 5/118, 15/27.3.1886):

Από του κόσμου κεκιμηκός την πλάνον αστασίαν
εντός του ποτηρίου μου εύρον την ησυχίαν
ζωήν κ’ ελπίδα εν αυτώ και πόθους εσωκλείω
δότε να πίω.

Μακράν εδώ των συμφορών, των θυελλών του βίου,
αισθάνομ’ ως διασωθείς ναύτης εκ ναυαγίου
κ’ εν ασφαλεί ευρισκόμενος εντός λιμένος πλοίω.
Δός μοι να πίω.

Ω! υγιής του οίνου μου ζέσις, απομακρύνεις
πάσαν ψυχράν επιρροήν. Φθόνου ή καταισχύνης,

5 Yeoryios Vizyinos, Τα ποιήματα, ed. Elena Koutrianou (Athens: Idryma Kosta kai Elenis Ourani, 2003), 1:500-501. Both poems are transcribed according to the monotonic orthography, but all other orthographic aspects of the texts are kept the same as in the prototype.
The chronological proximity of the two poems, in other words the sequence of the Cavafian poem at a time not very remote from Vizyinos’s poem, as well as Vizyinos’s reputation as a poet and some obvious (albeit superficial) analogies between the two poems would probably suggest the existence of a case of latent imitation of Vizyinos’s poem by Cavafy. But things are perhaps more complex.

Taking into consideration that both Vizyinos and Cavafy were ‘systematic readers’, one could first of all seek after the causes of whichever similarity and analogy among their common readings; especially seeing that both poems seem to be part of a poetic category systematically cultivated within the frames of Classicism: the anacreontea (ανακρεόντεια). This would take us back firstly to the Phanariot versification around the late 18th century, next principally to Christopoulos (but also to Vilaras), and thereafter it would navigate us towards some other literary figures that act during the so-called ‘romantic’ (in reality ‘classic-romantic’) 50-year period (1830-1880) mostly in Athens. It is quite known that nostalgists of Neoclassicism

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8 About the coexistence of elements stemming from both the movements of Neoclassicism and Romanticism in the cultural centre of Greece, Athens, see Yiorgos Veloudis, “Ο επτανησιακός, ο αθηναϊκός και ο ευρωπαϊκός Ρομαντισμός,” Μονά-Ζυγά: Δέκα νεοελληνικά μελετήματα (Athens: Gnozi, 1992), especially p. 106 where he eloquently describes the phenomenon as a ‘cultural Athenian dualism’ (‘πολιτισμικός [...] αθηναϊκός δυαδισμός’); see also the chapter about the same period in Georg Veloudis, Germanograecia: Deutsche Einflüsse auf die neugriechische Literatur (1750-1944)
and of Enlightenment values, but also many members of the Athenian romantic school, largely descending from Phanariot families, have included such poems, completely compatible with the graceful and playful Phanariot spirit, in their oeuvre.

Be that as it may, what Frantzi mentions with regard to the Phanariot verse anthologies, that ‘ανταποκρίνονται σε μια ηθική καινούργια, που εισηγείται αξίες κοσμικές και υπερβαίνει τη θεολογική αρετή’, could be applied to some extent to the poems under consideration here. It is fairly clear that neither poem corresponds to the Christian ethics. Forbearance and moral behaviour that call for the denial of any form of worldly indulgence and for adherence to the uttermost goal of posthumous bliss, are components alien to these poems’ spirit. Besides, the message they convey, which is incompatible to Christianity, is not presented as the author’s personal position, but an effort is made for it to be integrated into an acceptable frame; indeed, a frame relevant to pre-Christian worldviews.

Mimesis is most certainly a classicist principle, and poems of this kind (as mentioned above) pertain to the broader Classicist movement. Someone could wonder how the classicist element survived and reached these litterateurs, that grew up in a period when Romanticism had erst predominated, and they wrote during another period, when the latter was already outmoded and, even in Greece, had started being cast aside by new trends and movements (laographism, ethnography, naturalism etc). In fact, in Vizyinos’s case one can see that Romanticism is surpassed in terms of language, since the katharevousa, which constituted the bastion of the romantic school of Athens, is not used.10

However, should one observe the characteristics of the Romantic Movement in other countries, for instance in Germany, they will realise that what prevails is nostalgia for the Middle Ages; the medieval element is thus rendered an aspect of Romanticism and contrasts with the ancient one, which is identified with Classicism.

(Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1983), 122-237, bearing the title ‘Romantik und Neoklassizismus (1830-1880)’ and most specifically the section ‘Athener Romantik und Neoklassizismus’ (ibid., 201-237).


10 Perhaps the most formal component of the poem is its title with the use of the puristic type ‘Επικούρειον’ instead of the demotic one ‘Επικούρειο’ (without –ν). Composing peritexts in an archaistic language and using the demotic (at times interlarded even with dialectal words) for the text itself constitutes one of Vizyinos’s frequent tactics, something that becomes more easily discernible in poems with lengthier titles, e.g. in ‘Ελεγείον εἰς τὴν μικρὰν Ξάνθην’ (Vizyinos, Ποιήματα, 450-451); this particular poem is not just in demotic, but it also echoes Solomos’s poetry, especially his early poem (of the so-called ‘Zakynthian period’) ‘Η ψυχόλα’. 

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Besides, Romanticism is related to the emergence and formation of national identity and nationalism, and the ancient Greek and Latin element are not national for the Germans. For the Modern Greek state, however, which begins its history having in essence recanted the Greek Middle Ages\(^{11}\) and striving to prove real the ideologeme of direct descent from the Ancient Greeks, the classic element eventually survives, indeed it asserts itself, as an aspect of Romanticism.\(^{12}\) And more specifically, as far as Anacreontism is concerned, it continues to influence Greek poetry for several years even after the entrenchment of Romanticism,\(^{13}\) while bacchic and sympotic poems have been written by the majority of the literary figures of the period 1830-1880.\(^{14}\)

Apart from that, in Greek areas outside the Greek state (especially in Constantinople and Smyrna), where the needs satisfied within the Greek borders by Romanticism either do not exist or cannot be expressed, classicist echoes live on without necessarily passing through the channel of Romanticism. In these cases the classic element remains classicist.\(^{15}\) Moreover, in the 1870s, when Greek

\(^{11}\) The first Greek scholars who started giving prominence to Byzantium, along with the tripartite schema of the uninterrupted continuity of Hellenism (Ancient Greece, Byzantine Empire, Modern Greece), are Spyridon Zambelios and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, from the 1850s onward.

\(^{12}\) See Roderick Beaton, *An introduction to modern Greek literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48. I quote the most characteristic passage: ‘Paradoxically, in a Greek context “neoclassicism” should be understood as the local manifestation of the Romantic impulse which in other parts of Europe gave rise to the gothic revival’. Frantzi (*Μισμαγιά*, 42) observes phenomena of cultural syncretism with some analogies to that in antecedent times.


\(^{14}\) This group is composed so much of poets that stay true to the spirit of Enlightenment, such as Iakovos Rizos Rangavis and Iakovakis Rizos Neroulos, as by romantic poets, like Panayotis Soutsos, Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, Dimitrios Paparrigopoulos, Achilleas Paraschos et al. Even Emmanouil Roidis has written a poem of similar content (see Yeorganta, *Οίνος στην ποίηση*, 111). As a matter of fact, according to Yeorganta ( *Οίνος στην ποίηση*, 111, 149) this poem constitutes a possible source of the Cavafic poem under examination here.

\(^{15}\) Στην Πόλη, ός το θάνατο του Τανταλίδη πάντως, έμεινε ακμαία η παράδοση του ελαφρού λυρισμού, η οποία συνδέει τα γράμματά μας με τον δέκατο όγδοο δυτικόν αιώνα’ [Konstantinos Th. Dimaras, “Περί Φαναριώτων,” in *Ο ελληνικός ρομαντισμός* (Athens: Ermis, 1982), 232]. That is to say, that some Phanariots living outside the borders of the Greek state continued being near Classicism and the milieu of Enlightenment.
Romanticism goes through its last days, a so-to-say ‘antiromantic’ stance emerges among the new prospective poets and a landing to the earthly reality is attempted, away from the reveries and whimpers of the Romantics. In this context a short-lived revival of Anacreontism is observed in the cultural life of the Greek state, mainly within the frames of the poetic contests, which, besides, constitute a constant pole of attraction, mostly for the new generation of authors.\footnote{This revival manifests itself mostly in the Voutsinaios poetry contest of 1873. See Moullas, \textit{Concours poétiques}, 307-321.}

I have already mentioned that the eclectic affinities, both thematic and formal, of the two poems create reasonable suspicion that Cavafy had possibly read and been influenced by Vizyinos’s poem. However, the fate of Cavafy’s library does not allow this thought to be treated as anything more than a speculation, since there is no palpable evidence that the Alexandrian poet had this particular poetry collection in his possession.\footnote{See Michaila Karambini-Iatrou, ed., \textit{Η βιβλιοθήκη Κ. Π. Καβάφη} (Athens: Archeio Kavafi & Ermis, 2003), where no extant books of Vizyinos’s are recorded apart from \textit{Το αμάρτημα της μητρός μου} (ibid., 16-17).} Nonetheless, even if a library has not been kept intact, the contingent absence of a book does not constitute proof that its owner had not read it (the same could be said with regard to exactly the opposite: tracing a book as part of a library does not mean that its owner had read it, let alone that he had been influenced by it); especially in this particular case, it is rather a common knowledge in the area of Modern Greek Studies that Cavafy had a passion for reading and had made a habit of visiting public libraries and borrowing books.

Moving now to the analysis and comparison of the poems, one can see first of all that their differences are quite a few, despite their similarity that is imposed mostly through the imperative which functions as a chorus\footnote{In ‘Επικούρειον’ the phrases ‘Βάλτε να φάμε / Βάλτε να πιούμε!’ are repeated in the 9th and 10th verse of each stanza. In ‘Βακχικόν’ the last verse of every stanza is an order of similar nature: ‘δότε να πίω’, ‘Δος μοι να πίω’, ‘δότε να πίω’, ‘δός, δος να πίω!’, ‘δότε να πίω!’ .} and in spite of their spirit, which is alien to Christianity. First, the lyrical subject’s resort to drinking proceeds from causes that are different in each poem. Secondly, these causes indicate a different stance of the subject towards itself, the world, and libation. Thirdly, the fact that the epicurean philosophy is really at a short distance from the content of Vizyinos’s poem, whereas the bacchic spirit seems to be at a rather notable distance from the melancholic emotions contained in and triggered by Cavafy’s poem, demonstrates a different degree of appropriation of the sources, a different degree of fidelity during the mimetic process.
On the basis of this third observation, one can speak of a superficial poetry, since neither one of these authors had such an attitude to life as the one they propose here, and the same applies to the bacchic poems of Christopoulos and Tantalis for instance. Nevertheless, as far as Cavafy is concerned, Stratis Tsirkas’s analysis could prompt the following slant: the spirit expressed by the poem not only is not contrived, but emanates from real experiences. Nonetheless, the same studier’s account of Cavafy’s resort to drinking during the period of the second edit of the poem (November 1892) proves, I think, that in the first writing, apart from some experiences which functioned as triggering events for a few individual verses, the adoption of the bacchic Weltanschauung from Cavafy’s part was fairly surface.

I have already touched upon the relation of Anacreontism to the earthly reality and, of course, a comparative analysis of the two poems could not but take into account that Epicureanism is a materialistic philosophy being in many ways on the other extreme of the idealistic perceptions that nourished and conserved the romanticists. Besides, Epicurus dealt also with subjects that nowadays fall within the scope of the so-called natural sciences and drew mostly on Democritus’ atomic theory (someone could argue that in many cases he simply repeated it). Apart from that, the fact that Materialism functions as a general basis of his philosophy becomes quite clear even if someone only bears in mind the epicurean, so-to-say, ‘credo’, the Tetrapharmakos: Ἄφοβον ὁ θεός, ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος καὶ τἀγαθὸν μὲν εὔκτητον, τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐκαρτέρητον. Hereunder I am going to proceed to a close reading of the two poems starting with Ἐπικούρειον and I am going to focus mostly on that, since it is less known than Cavafy’s poem. In its first stanza the Epicurean belief about the finitude of existence is projected, not with much lucidity though. Nothing exists post mortem, while the quality of ‘real’ can only be attributed to something ‘corporal’, material. Naturally, this does not beget only utter abandonment of every faith in and hope for the rewards of posthumous life, but also confrontation of the fear caused by death itself, since, as soon as death befalls, consciousness, and hence existence, comes to an end and one

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19 Stratis Tsirkas, O Καβάφης και η εποχή του (Athens: Kedros, 1973), 152.
20 Ibid., 222.
cannot feel anything.22 This ostensibly contradicts line 8 (‘αυτοῦ που θε νὰ ‘πάμε’), since, for the Epicureans, after death we simply are not to go anywhere at all – except, of course, for the particles we are made of; these atoms will not perish, but, according to the principle of matter conservation (an epicurean principle very similar to the law of conservation of mass and energy of modern-day physics) will be once more combined in order to form another physical object or entity. In the middle of verse 5, however, that is at the beginning of the sentence which ends with verse 8, there is the word ‘Δεσποτάδες’; this indicates that at this point it is the Christian Weltansicht that is being presented (and nullified) and not the subject’s own view (and this is why the contradiction is only ostensible).23

The whole poem is permeated with the feeling that the Christian expectation of a posthumous life does not function after all liberatingly or as a focalisation point for faith, but as an additional cause of guilt. Yet this is how the teachings of Jesus ended up being presented and, of course, the lyrical subject does not inveigh against him or his apostles, but against (and again only indirectly) the ‘Δεσποτάδες’: they, as spokespeople of the church (and to the minds of many people, as representatives of Christianity or even God himself), impose guiltiness as an attitude to life and inject people with the fear of death – which, this way, amounts in essence with the fear of life.24 It could be claimed that ‘Επικούρειον’ in general expresses an attachment to

22 2nd principal doctrine: ‘ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ, τὸ δ’ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς’.

23 At this point it should be noted that ‘Επικούρειον’ could be linked with another poem of Vizyinos’s, called ‘Μεταμέλεια’. The poem, which demonstrates a mild anticlericalism combined with the subject’s desire to enjoy the pleasures of life without inhibitions, and seems in fact to be based on autobiographical data, can be considered a precursor of the concept that will condense (there are various untitled ‘άσματα’ that seem to revolve around the axis of ‘Μεταμέλεια’) and will be ‘theoretically’ advocated later, with the help of the Epicurean philosophy, in the poem under consideration. Moreover, the title functions ironically, being thus parallel to some elements of ‘Επικούρειον’: repentance has religious connotations and perhaps one would expect in the text a statement of repentance on behalf of the lyrical subject for some ‘sin’ of his (even in the ancient meaning of the word ‘αμαρτία’). Here happens the opposite: the speaker complains, because he considers it wrong that he was oppressed and was not given the chance to sin.

24 See Anthony Kenny, A new history of Western Philosophy, vol. 1, Ancient Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 94: ‘It is religion that causes us to fear death, by holding out the prospect of suffering after death. But this is an illusion. The terrors held out by religion are fairy tales, which we must give up in favour of a scientific account of the world’, and George Sidney Brett, The philosophy of Gassendi (London: Macmillan, 1908), 195: ‘it was Church that had divorced virtue and the best life’.
earthly things and no less than an uninterested stance as far as the hereafter is concerned.25

By the word ‘κανείς’ in verse 11 someone could infer some more specific groups of people: (1) the Epicureans, of course, that did not believe in afterlife; (2) the Christians, who view the hereafter as unrelated to material needs; (3) perhaps even the exponents of idealistic philosophies.

The second stanza begins with an implicit recognition of the impingement of Phanariot poetry on the poem. Apart from the recurring motifs of the wheel of fortune and the passing time,26 the usage of capital letters is an indication of the classicist resonance; ‘Τύχη’ and ‘Χρόνος’ are personified abstract notions. In verses 19-20 there is another rebuttal of the Christian credendum concerning posthumous life and paradise. The diction this time is rather mocking.

In the third stanza it is worth focusing on the 29th verse, where the poetic subject refers in principle to social conventions, in order to demonstrate right after that – as well as with what precedes– that they are de facto refuted. It should be noted at this point that the Epicureans, along with other philosophers of the Hellenistic Era, were in a way nonconformists, something logical at a historical period when the time-honoured values seemed hollow and unable to cover the fundamental human needs.

In general terms, the poem is in line with the Epicurean teachings, since the things proposed conduce to the conquest of pleasure. Even though the epicurean position that pleasure can be attained through the abatement of desires, the exhortations of the

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26 About the recurring motifs of Phanariot poetry see Frantzis, Μισμαγιά, 13. In parallel with verses 13-16 see for instance the following poems in Frantzis’s book: ‘[Κάθε καιρό του τραχόλη]’ (ibid., 130-131), ‘[Στην ακατάστατη της τύχης]’ (ibid., 138-139), ‘[Την ακατάστατη της τύχης]’ (ibid., 143-144), ‘[Ο κύκλος των πραγμάτων]’ (ibid., 148-149), ‘[Εις το άστατον της τύχης]’ (ibid., 155) et al.
poetic subject are only associated with natural and necessary desires.\textsuperscript{27} To my mind, a great part of the epicurean philosophy, as well as of the message that ‘Επικούρειον’ attempts to convey, is summarised in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Principal Doctrine (21\textsuperscript{η} Κύρια Δόξα): ‘Ο τά πέρατα τοῦ βίου κατειδόως οἴδεν, ώς εὐπόριστόν ἐστι τὸ <τὸ> ἄλγον κατ’ ἐνδειαν ἐξιμροῦν καὶ τὸ τὸν ὀλὸν βίον παντελῇ καθιστάν· ὡστε οὐδέν προσδεῖται πραγμάτων ἄγονας κεκτημένων’.

It should nonetheless be stressed that for Epicureans the desires that must not be fulfilled are the ones leading to bad results.\textsuperscript{28} However, no negative consequences ensue from eating, drinking or sexual intercourse (as long as everything is done in moderation, of course), for these are natural needs, and whatever is according to the natural law (φύσι) cannot be bad. Besides, in the opinion of Epicurus, pleasure is sua natura bonum.\textsuperscript{29} Other than that, given that there is no life after death, even if pleasure was a bad thing, this would have no posthumous repercussions.

It is thus rather unambiguous that this philosophical trend of the Hellenistic Epoch suggests an ‘anti-ascetic’ attitude to life, but without the excesses of the Hedonists.\textsuperscript{30} What is aspired to is ‘the body’s being free from disturbance’.\textsuperscript{31} Every ‘anti-ascetic’ worldview is not automatically amoralistic. Quite the contrary, it can propose its own

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\item \textsuperscript{27} Sharples, Hellenistic philosophy, 86-87.
\item \textsuperscript{28} ‘We need to be discriminating to ensure our course of action will not bring us more pain in the long run’ (Sharples, Hellenistic philosophy, 86), and ‘The reason why a pleasure is rejected is generally some anticipated evil consequence’ (Brett, Gassendi, 189).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Brett, Gassendi, 188.
\item \textsuperscript{30} In other respects, however, Epicureanism is rather closer to Hedonism than other philosophical trends of its time. See for example José Ferrater Mora, Diccionario de Filosofía, s.v. “Epicuro,” (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1964), 537: ‘Epicuro —que se opuso a las concepciones fundamentales de los estoicos, platónicos y peripatéticos, acercándose, en cambio, a las de los cirenaicos— partió de una doble necesidad: la de eliminar el temor a los dioses (que había engendrado el tipo del δεισιδαίμων, o individuo excesivamente piadoso — casi el supersticioso) y la de desprendérsel del temor a la muerte’. Others, rather overemphasising the importance of the differentiation between the two schools on the issue of the nature of pleasure, attempt to demonstrate the contrast between the two schools. For instance, Brett argues that ‘Plutarch points out this difference between Epicurus and Aristippus: the pleasure which Epicurus means is of the mind, that which Aristippus praises is of the body. Laertius points out other differences. Aristippus confines the term to pleasure in motu, Epicurus lays more stress on pleasure in statu or tranquility’ (Brett, Gassendi, 185). Cf. Sharples, Hellenistic philosophy, 92, where, dealing with the same matter, the author speaks of ‘the rival Cyrenaic hedonist school’ (emphasis added).
\item \textsuperscript{31} Sharples, Hellenistic philosophy, 87.
\end{itemize}
morality, seemingly somewhat peculiar for the Christian world, at times though more honest, more solid and less prone to deviations from the ‘rules’.

In any case, it could be said about the Epicureans that their teachings intended to function as a kind of ‘antidepressant’. The interesting thing is that ‘Βακχικόν’ seems not to be afar from the epicurean philosophy (without this signifying that it is directly influenced by Epicurus). The request for peace of mind and tranquillity is the most fixed one for Epicureans, it may indeed represent the most constant and persisting part of their teachings. This request is suggested in the first two verses of the Cavafian poem, whilst the ‘πλάνος αστασία’ of the ordinary way of life (which the Epicureans were attempting to surpass by reaching ‘tranquilitas animi’) is stressed, as it is enunciated in a more specific manner in the second stanza.

From the third stanza on one notices an escalating deviation between the two poems. The subject’s escapism is intensified and the poem’s spirit intersects more and more the Athenian Romanticism. While the epicurean philosophy may be in

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32 Although I use the term somewhat catachrestically, it is not, however, inappropriate to link the Epicurean philosophy with modern psychology and psychotherapy. It is no coincidence, moreover, that the title of the book Staring at the sun [Irvin D. Yalom, Staring at the sun: Overcoming the terror of death (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008)], by the renowned professor of psychiatry and novelist Irvin Yalom, has been rendered into Greek as Στον κήπο του Επίκουρου [Irvin D. Yalom, Στον κήπο του Επίκουρου: Αφήνοντας πίσω τον τρόμο του θανάτου, trans. Evangelia Andritsanou, Yiannis Zervas (Athens: Agra, 2008)]. This very significant exponent of existential psychiatry has utilised philosophical theories, such as those of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, in other books of his as well, but always with an aim related to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Perhaps the appropriation of Epicurean ethics for the composition of a literary piece of writing by Vizyinos could be associated with his interest and studies in psychology. In the final analysis, the ‘Επικούρειον’ suggests a lifestyle free from psychological problems emanating from repressed instincts and desires and without an undeserved sense of guilt caused by the satisfaction of those instincts.

33 See Yeorganta, Οίνος στην ποίηση, 149, where the author refers to the ‘αδιαμφισβήτο πρότυπο του Δ. Παπαρρηγόπουλού’ and the ‘αστική παράδοση της παλαιάς αθηναϊκής σχολής’, which ‘αποτύπωσε στη φάση της εξάντλησης της τα αδιέξοδα που καταγράφει και η βακχική εξομολόγησή του Καβάφη’. In Paparrigopoulos’s poem ‘Ματαιότητης ματαιοτήτων’ from the collection Ποιήσεις of 1867 that is quoted piecemeal by Yeorganta (Οίνος στην ποίηση, 116) there are several loci communes that can be traced in both poems under consideration here. The most characteristic stanzas are, to my mind, the second («Τις του έαρος δεν δρέπει τα ευώδη άνθη μόνον / επειδή μακρόθεν έρπει προσεγγίζων ο χειμών; / Τι το πεπρωμένων ψύχος προσλαμβάνοντες των χρόνων / να μη δρέψωμεν το ύπο των ολίγων μας στιγμών;») and the fourth one («Ματαιότης ο αφρίζων εν τω ποτηρίω οίνος / ματαιότης και τα χείλη τα διυόντα ασπασμών; / Αν πραγματικότης είναι εις την γην αυτήν ο θρήνος, / ας κενώσω την φιάλην, την απάτην προτιμών»).
accordance with a tendency of retreating from the public sphere and with the emergence of individualism, it is not, however, identified with the negation of reality and the pursuit of fictional recourses. In ‘Επικούρειον’ the resort to drinking does not constitute but a part of an alternative attitude to life capable of ceasing the sorrow which is inherent in human life and leading to elation. In ‘Βακχικόν’ on the other hand, the resort to drinking seems as an end in itself; wine functions as refuge, as narcotic, as panacea.

**Bibliography**


