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**A SYMBIOSIS OF ANTIQUITY AND MODERNITY IN *THE DOUBLE BOOK* BY DIMITRIS KHADZIS**

*The Double Book*<sup>1</sup> by Dimitris Khadzis is one of the works that caused heated arguments among Modern Greek literary critics of the last ten years of the past century.

The novel consists of nine chapters: four of them (1,3,5,7) describe the monotonous life of the central character (Kostas) in Germany; other four chapters (2,4,6,8) have their own protagonists (a friend or a relative of Kostas) that are set apart in different times.

In this article we would like to draw your attention to the image of Anastasia,<sup>2</sup> as we consider her to be the focal point for the concept of this novel.

In our opinion, the critics have not yet paid relevant attention to the function and symbolics of this character. They seem to have limited themselves to the description of how she is introduced in the novel, without trying to explain what Khadzis meant to say through this image. We shall try to present some opinions around this issue.

The writer presents Anastasia as a Greek woman carrying in her the secret of Eleusinian mysteries. Her features and abilities turn her into unordinary character that is surrounded with mystic soul. The writer does not only mention this in the novel, but also brings in the series of symbolic that connect Anastasia with the image of mantic woman. On the one hand she is an ordinary mortal, but at the same time she has some characteristics that are unusual for a typical mantic.

Let us focus your attention on how the writer manages to include all symbols characteristic to mantic women in the artistic structure. When describing

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<sup>1</sup> Δ.Χατζή, Το διπλό βιβλίο, δεύτερη έκδοση ξανακοιταγμένη, KEIMENA, Αθήνα 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Anastasia is Kostas' sister. She is a main character of chapter 8 of the novel.

irrational aspect of Anastasia's character, Khadzis highlights her fortune-telling skills that can be sorted into several hierarchies.

**Hair** – The writer emphasizes the magic power of Anastasia's hair. Her hair carries a mystic power, therefore "I never cut my hair. My birds and my mother are in it".<sup>3</sup> In this case Khadzis takes into account ancient symbolics. As we know, according to various traditions, hair is identified with life and is connected with an individual's soul.<sup>4</sup>

**Eyes** – Anastasia's eyes preserve the memories of Greek history.

"In these eyes I see... continuously suffering Greek generations... women in despair, deprived of honor... from Khios, Psara, Mesolongi, the Asia Minor Disaster... collective murders during the occupation, internal disturbances..."<sup>5</sup>

In this case, again, Khadzis repeats old symbols. As known, eyes are identified with light and the ability of spiritual vision.<sup>6</sup>

**Tree** – This mystic figure has a specific relation with outer environment and here again Khadzis uses typical symbols: ritual tree that has clearly mythopoetic receiving. Khadzis does not refer to the tree with its literally meaning. This is a distinctly mythological tree that has special significance. In order to reveal the irrational feature of Anastasia, it is important for this particular tree to exist. When Anastasia goes to Molaos she says: "I don't have a tree anymore."<sup>7</sup> Evidently this does not mean that there are no trees in Molaos. This is the indication that she does not possess her tree anymore. Here Khadzis, again, takes into the consideration ancient perceptions. As we know, in different cultures some trees were considered to be holy and magic. The tree represents three kingdoms: Chthonic, earthy and divine, which forms a cosmic structure.<sup>8</sup>

**Birds** – *The Double Book* repeatedly underlines the mystic connection between birds and the tree. Illusionary birds are organically connected with the ritual tree of Anastasia. "Birds are not your property to call them whenever you may wish. You belong to them. They choose you",<sup>9</sup> -Anastasia says.

As we know, the birds play a significant role in antique literature in terms of pointing to the signs of predictions. Already in the Homeric epos we see various passages confirming this perception. The most important thing is that

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<sup>3</sup> Δ.Χατζής, 169.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: J.C.Cooper, *Lexikon Alter Symbole*, VEB E.A. Seemann Verlag Leipzig, 1986. 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> Δ.Χατζής, 55-56.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see: J.C.Cooper, 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> Δ.Χατζής, 180

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see: J.C.Cooper, 18-23.

<sup>9</sup> Δ.Χατζής, 178.

this epos describes one group of mantics that is directly called "auspices".<sup>10</sup> Following the Homeric tradition birds carry a special importance in Greek mantics. As it was said, divine signals were sent to humans by means of birds. In addition to this, the birds were regarded to have organic connection with divine spheres. We may suppose that Aristophanes' *The Birds* partially, although humorously, shows the attitude of his contemporaries towards birds.<sup>11</sup>

**Archangel** – The bird is the symbol of soul. In this regard the angel is the product of the developing image of bird.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that Anastasia identifies mystic birds firstly with the archangel and then with her own soul. "These birds were I, my soul as you call it".<sup>13</sup> We should not conceive the usage of archangel to be an attempt of the writer to attach religious light to the novel. Astral, shining body of angels resembles the phenomenon referred to in other cultures as astral bodies. According to Asian and Indian traditions, every human being has such astral body, but only wizards and magicians are able to feel its strength.<sup>14</sup>

**Mystic knowledge** – As we see, the novel delineate two types of symbolics: symbols possessed by Anastasia in herself and those connecting her with surrounding environment, where she realizes the irrational abilities. These symbols are united by mystic knowledge. This is not the knowledge in its common meaning, but the knowledge that is provoked and revealed by particular situations.

The writer emphasizes a special importance of woman (mother) in the Greek family. According to Khadzis, Greek women possessed mystic knowledge that was carried from generation to generation similarly to Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>15</sup> "Every Greek woman knew this ancient art... their Eleusinian mysteries that they used to learn from one another and pass on".<sup>16</sup>

Anastasia can feel this mystic knowledge, but she cannot use it in practice. "I could not read or write. I could not even think. I could only feel. I

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<sup>10</sup> οἰωνοπόλος, οἰωνιστέες in ancient Greek language.

<sup>11</sup> About the auspices and their role in ancient mantics see:

P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechische Religion* 1, München 1967<sup>2</sup>, 166- and so forth.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see: J.C.Cooper, 205-206.

<sup>13</sup> Δ.Χατζή, 171.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see:

В.Бауер, И. Дюмотц, С. Головин, *Энциклопедия Символов*, Москва 1998, 191-195.

<sup>15</sup> About the Eleusinian Mysteries see:

M.Giebel, *Das Geheimnis Der Mysterien, Antike Kulte in Griechenland, Rom und Agypten*, München 1993. 17-and so forth

W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Kölln, Mainz 1977, 426- and so forth

P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechische Religion* 1, München 1967<sup>2</sup>, 663- and so forth

<sup>16</sup> Δ.Χατζή, 32.

would touch subjects with fingers and see them like blind people do. I could hear like deaf people do. This is how I felt my life, our lives, and our fortune."<sup>17</sup>

**Holy marriage** – It is interesting whether this mystery of Anastasia is a closed system, or it is something that can be transferred to others. As we see in the novel, Anastasia is not able to share her knowledge with her brother, she is afraid of blood mixing as the knowledge can be transferred only via sexual act. We regard this to be the analogy of the "holy marriage".<sup>18</sup>

In ancient cultures the "holy marriage" used to be the symbol of unity of the earth and the sky, female and male origins, God and Goddess. Often the "holy marriage" would be executed through the sexual act between a priestess and the supreme governor. Priestess would be the image of Goddess i.e. the image of the universal female origin. In the perceptions of ancient people, this was the only way to maintain fertility and cosmic order the following year. Distinctly emphasized sexual aspect would transfer into spiritual and be regarded as a mystic reunion of God and man.<sup>19</sup>

**On the verge of real and unreal** – Such is the "double life of Anastasia: dream and reality at the same time".<sup>20</sup> The character is not able to couple, to consolidate the two.

Anastasia's marriage brings an end to her mysticism, spiritual life. The birds do not appear to her anymore. Archangel becomes a stranger. Even her own self becomes distant to her.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, through the sexual act with the writer the ritual of conveying the mystic knowledge is executed. This is confirmed by the handing of Anastasia's cut hair to the writer. "I know you came here for the final word. I do not even know how to tell you. That is why I surrendered. Because I wanted to show you, I wanted to let you see beyond my mother's mother. Where our roots begin. Where the graves of my murdered birds rest. I have nothing else."<sup>22</sup>

All the aforementioned allow us to conclude that Anastasia is a quite thoroughly described mantic woman, who, owing to her symbolics, is entirely

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<sup>17</sup> Δ.Χαρζή, 165.

<sup>18</sup> About the so called "Holly marriage" see:

W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz 1977, 176 and so forth

P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion 1*, München 1967<sup>2</sup>, 121 and so forth

<sup>19</sup> See: Ганс Бидерманн, *Энциклопедия Символов*, Издательство "Республика", Москва 1996, 236.

<sup>20</sup> Δ.Χαρζή, 171.

<sup>21</sup> Δ.Χαρζή, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Δ.Χαρζή, 180.

connected with antique perceptions. The writer retracts the characteristics of ancient mantic with almost classic order: Anastasia has *mystic knowledge* that is embodied in her *hair* together with her power of life; her *eyes* give the picture of Greek history; nearby one particular *tree* the *birds* appear to her and she never tells anyone about them; at night she walks in the sky, exchanges places with stars and this way changes the destiny of human beings; she transfers her *mystic knowledge* to the writer through a special "*ritual*".

Anastasia's identification with a mantic woman makes it clear why the writer refers to her as to a Diotima.<sup>23</sup> "Here, in a mystic Thessaly Socrat found his Diotima. In the same place I look for mine in Anastasia".<sup>24</sup>

Diotima is one of the main figures in Plato's *Symposium*. The image of Diotima is rather obscure in Plato's work. We can regard it as a clear fiction and observe her purely symbolic nature. However, we should not exclude the possibility of Diotima's real existence.<sup>25</sup>

It must be noted that the image of Diotima is rarely used in contemporary literature. Besides Khadzis, the only case of using this image known to us belongs to a German writer Friedrich Holderlin.<sup>26</sup> The main character of his work is inspired by Plato's Diotima, however, as we know, Holderlin's Diotima had a real prototype – Susana Contard, the greatest love of the writer. Holderlin called his beloved lady Diotima, since according to the writer, "she shared with the writer the greatest cosmological secret of Eros, like Mantenean priestess shared it with Socrates".<sup>27</sup> (The writer in *The Double Book* tells Anastasia, "You inspired the real meaning of my art".<sup>28</sup>)

Helderlin's Diotima, like Khadzis' Anastasia, „is not born for this universe. Her image combines the great history of Greece and its future".<sup>29</sup>

Anastasia – Diotima – mantic woman... this is how Anastasia's image is generalized from a concrete human being to a common Greek phenomenon. It is noteworthy that in Anastasia we see different elements of a priestess and a mantic: Anastasia must preserve her virginity. The same was true about Pythia, but Pythia could not share the divine secret with others (Anastasia shared this secret with the writer). Only a priestess like Diotima is able to do this.

<sup>23</sup> See: NP 3. 677.

<sup>24</sup> Δ.Χατζή, 57.

<sup>25</sup> See: NP 3. 677.

<sup>26</sup> Fridrich Holderlin, *Hyperion and selected poems*, German Library, Vol. 22

<sup>27</sup> Παναγιώτης Κανελλοπούλος, Fridrich Holderlin, *Η ζωή και το έργο του* (στο βιβλίο Φρίντριχ Χαίλντερλιν, *Υπεριων*, s.a. 242-243.

<sup>28</sup> Δ.Χατζή, 190

<sup>29</sup> Παναγιώτης Κανελλοπούλος, 242-243.

Besides, neither Pythia nor Diotima could tell fortune with the help of birds, although it is widely known that other mantic women had this skill.

Anastasia, as an individual human being – is present (Kostas' contemporary), as Diotima – she represents past, as a mantic woman – she predicts and therefore is connected with future. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that Anastasia equally unites in herself past, present and future. She oversteps time bounds and acquires the feature of eternity.

There is one more very important aspect of *The Double Book* concept connected with this character: correlation of antiquity and modernity.

As known, the problem of "inheritance" acquired special importance after the release of Greece from Turkish conquerors. The problem was in the following: "What should be the attitude of Greek civilization toward the epoch that was universally regarded as one of the most significant stages in human culture, which left contemporary Greeks in a shadow. For Europe the importance of Greek culture was limited to antique civilization. The spiritual life of contemporary Greece, of course, looked rather colorless with such background. The Greeks had to face the problem of defining the way to overcome the complex of past superiority."<sup>30</sup>

Khadzis conveys an interesting interpretation of this problem in *The Double Book*. He draws parallels between the meeting of the writer with Anastasia and the meeting of Helen with Faust: "Here, in this very place, the second Faust of Goethe, young, strong and brave man found Helen for the wondrous merge of times".<sup>31</sup>

We believe that in this case, judging by the main concept of the work, it would not be right to compare Helen with Anastasia. In Goethe's drama the merge of antique culture (Helen) with modernity (Faust) ends with collapse (Helen disappears, Evphorion dies). Despite of the fact that Anastasia is also destined to die (in the last scene she walks among the graves) Khadzis maintains the hope of her rising.<sup>32</sup>

Evidently, Anastasia is a quite complex character combining various aspects of *The Double Book* concept.

The fact that Khadzis uses an antique image already draws attention to his work. The critics of *The Double Book* say nothing about writer's attitude toward the antiquity. And this is understandable, as the focal pathos of the novel is the problem of alienation of the main character, caused by the de-

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<sup>30</sup> S. Shamanidi, *The Classical Tradition in the Modern Greek Literature and George Seferis*, Tbilisi 1999, 68 (in Georgian).

<sup>31</sup> Δ.Χατζής, 200.

<sup>32</sup> Δ.Χατζής, 201.

struction of the time connection. In-depth analysis of *The Double Book* brings us to the conclusion that the problem of alienation is deeply connected to the antiquity – the main concept of the novel is the problem of national identity, which in this particular case, conveys the attitude of modern Greece toward the antiquity.

In our opinion, Khadzis tries to accord antiquity with modernity (Christian culture) through the image of Anastasia:

a) He gives a purely Christian name to the woman, who represents a reincarnated image of priestess, Diotima (reincarnation is indicated in the semantics of name itself: *Αναστασία* – rising from death. Deeper semantics of this name takes us to androgynous roots of human beings. Anastasia herself notes this moment of reincarnation: "I can be re-born".<sup>33</sup>

b) In the work, one of the main attributes of a mantic woman – illusionary birds are identified with an archangel.

c) Anastasia transfers her mystic knowledge to the writer via a special ritual. In the end, a Modern Greek Kostas obtains this knowledge in the shape of a book.

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<sup>33</sup> Δ.Χατζή, 201.