Summary

Greece on the eve of the dictatorship of Metaxas
A psychoanalytical approach to three views of Greek society;
Yorgos Theotokas, Lilika Nakou, Thanasis Petsalis

For many European states the Interwar years were a period of social-economic crises and political instability. This also holds true for Greece, especially after the events of 1923, when the Greek government had to accommodate one-and-a-half million Greek refugees from Turkey, and as a result of the Great Crash in 1929, which severely affected the Greek economy.

This book is intended as a contribution to the historiography of Greece during the Interwar period, especially the years which preceded the dictatorship brought in by Ioannis Metaxas in 1936. The period is described on the basis of a psychoanalytical approach of three social-political novels, written at the beginning of the 1930s by three widely read authors. Each of these novels illustrates a different political orientation: one liberal, one socialist and one fascist.

The collapse of the Greek economy in the 1930s had a massive impact on the political landscape. The Liberal Party, which had governed the country almost continuously since 1910, lost the elections in 1933. Many of its former supporters, especially small farmers and industrial entrepreneurs, dissatisfied with the poor economic situation, had given their vote to the conservative People’s Party. The years 1933 to 1936 were politically very unstable, a fact evinced by, among other things, the frequent rows in the polarised parliament, two attempted coups d’etat under the leadership of General Plastiras and the death sentence passed on the liberal leader Venizelos. Besides that, the members of parliament seemed to put more effort in fighting each other’s points of view on the electoral system than in finding a solution to the serious social-economic crisis.

As a result of the elections of January 1936 the Communist Party acquired 15 out of 300 seats in parliament, the highest number it had ever had.
Although remaining a relatively small party, it now had a decisive vote. After another six months of social disturbances and deadlock in parliament, the former Minister of War, who just had been promoted to the office of Prime Minister *ad interim*, Ioannis Metaxas, was given permission by the King to proclaim a state of emergency and dissolve parliament. A date for new elections was not fixed. After this Metaxas installed the *Regime of August 4th*, which was to provide him with unlimited political power until his death in 1941, just before the occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers.

At first sight the Greek situation seems to correspond to a general pattern in Europe at the time, with a parliamentary system giving way to dictatorship. In this book an attempt will be made to indicate the reasons behind the collapse of Greek parliamentary democracy in the 1930s.

Under these circumstances of economic and political crisis a number of Greek novelists seem to have become either concerned or fascinated to such a degree that they chose the social-economic circumstances of their time as the subject-matter for their novels. A separate genre of novel, the so-called urban novel, flourished in Greek literature from approximately 1930 till 1936. Some of these novels also illustrate a political orientation. This especially applies to the novels that have been selected for this study, which are by Yorgos Theotokas, Lilika Nakou and Thanasis Petsalis. These authors seem to have consciously tried to document the social and political circumstances of their time. Their novels can be viewed as ‘time documents’ that comment on these circumstances and what it is like to live through them.

Besides genre, the novels have been selected on the basis of the similar backgrounds and age of the three authors. They were born in either 1904 or 1905 and all three of them came from an upper middle class social environment. When they wrote and published their novels, at the beginning of the 1930s, they were living in Athens, which also serves as the setting for their novels.

The most general question considered in this book is the way Greek society was represented in these novels. Another question is in which way the description of psychological conflict is related to conflicts within Greek society, as represented in the novels. Also considered is the extent to which the novels resemble (or differ from) each other regarding the way the Greek society was being portrayed. Focus is alternately placed onto the texts of the novels and the social context to which they are referring. The subject-matter of this book is both the political and social-economic circumstances of that time and the way these circumstances were experienced as represented in the novels.
The approach the book takes is not deductive in the sense that the historical context is the first thing to be examined. The procedure has been reverse: the novels are first approached with an ‘open mind’, i.e. from a psychoanalytical perspective, and then, on the basis of the social conflicts as represented in the texts, the historical context in which the authors have created their novels has been explored. For this reason the historical analysis of the political and social-economic conditions of that time will be the penultimate chapter of this book.

Psychoanalytical theory appears to offer elaborate views and methods for a prolific approach of culture and literature. A vital part of this approach is based on the observation that a literary text is always, amongst other things, an expression of inner conflict and of a – conscious or unconscious – need or desire of the author to control or order this conflict. This need or desire plays an equal part in the reception of literature; the reader can feel involved because – consciously or unconsciously – he or she recognizes the conflict. The second chapter of this book, which precedes an analysis of the texts, is dedicated to modern psychoanalytical theory and its connection to the study of literature.

The last chapter contains a psychoanalytical interpretation of the social views and political ideology in the three novels and the way they are related to the developments in Greek society at the time.