



# Images of the Balkans

The post- communist Balkans

Contemporary depictions of the Balkan states

A Word of 'division'

Eighth Lesson

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# The historical context

- **Collapse of Balkan socialism**
- **Disintegration of the multi-ethnic** Yugoslav state and the **civil war between Serbs and Croats**
- The **fragile political and social situation** in Albania, Bulgaria and Romania after the political change
- Attempts towards *normalization* and **Europeanization**

# The historical context

- The transition of the Balkans to a Western-style democracy proved to be difficult
- The European interest regarding the formed countries
- The **'shocking' brutality of the civil war and the relative constructions**
- **Post-communist images as literary motifs:** *nuclear power plants* and *'smoky communist factories'* as contemporary narrations in the Western imaginary
- The Modern Greek literary production regarding the post-communist Balkan
- A **widespread narrative framework** for Modern Greek fiction
- *Fiction, cinema, travel memories, testimonies*

# The Greek literary production regarding the post-communist Balkans- General Remarks

- Significant increase in literary texts
- Growing publishing of **documentary or testimonial texts**
- The '**journalistic language**' of these texts
- The Greek interest in a new landscape in the Balkans
- The thematic of the '**Balkan future**'
- **European integration** and the image of Greece as 'the only Western state in the Balkan Peninsula'

# Defining Greece as 'Western state': a growing idea

- The depictions of **Greece as a European country from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century** and the new, relative elements
- **Comparing the economic standards between Greece and the Balkans**
- The inevitable comparison between *Greek political and social normality* versus *Balkan instability*
- **Greece's European integration and the relationship between EU and the Balkan states**
- Imagining Europe through the notions of **progress** and **modernism**

# Re- defining old stereotypes

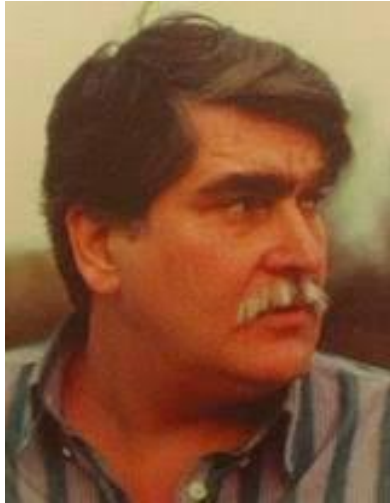
- Old stereotypical constructions reused in the modern era
- Connecting the Balkan Peninsula with the notions of *barbarism, primitivism and backwardness*
- Post-communist period and the image of the Balkans **as a region outside Europe**
- Greece as a Western state (Greek and Western thought)
- Imagining the Balkans as a **unified region**
- The **orientalist characteristics** of the Greek Word
- The image of the Other and the image of the Self (questions of identity)

# Sakis Totlis: 'The combination- Edessa to Zurich'

- Novel published in 1993
- A narration that resembles a 'travelogue'
- The transfer to the big screen: The road movie 'Βαλκανιζατέρ'
- The story of the novel
- Imagining Bulgaria: **corruption, arbitrariness and illegal activities**
- The image of Bulgaria as a state in which the illegality can turn a respectable citizen into a potential black marketeer
- The Greek '**superiority complex**' and the ironical approach of Totlis

# Sakis Totlis: 'The combination- Edessa to Zurich'

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# The image of Bulgaria in Totlis' novel

- Bulgaria as a '**strange eastern economy**'
- Forming the Greek '**superiority complex**'- A contemporary aspect for the Greek imagination
- The Greek **economic stability** versus the **declining and questionable Balkan economies**
- The *Balkan steps towards a European identity*
- The '**orient**' **pace- a diachronic literary motif**
- A state unable to react to illegality, not out of weakness, **but by choice**
- **The factor of technology** (The contrasting image of the car repair-shops in Switzerland and Bulgaria as a characteristic example)
- **Modernization, Westernization, Europeanization and the 'Eastern Balkans'**

# Depicting Tito's Yugoslavia

- Yugoslavia and its relationship with the Western civilization
- Yugoslavia as '*the last obstacle to Europe*' for Greece
- The Yugoslavian society as **deprived** and **cut off from the consumer goods of the West society**
- Yugoslavia as the main cause for Greece's isolation from Europe

# Greece's position between Europe and the Balkans: symbolic geography

- **The Balkans as a factor restricting Greece's integration to Europe**: a common idea in the Modern Greek thought
- Greece, Europe and the Balkans: Greece's position and the aspect of '**in-betweenness**'
- **Linking Europe with culture, technological development and modernization**
- **The dream to escape Balkan misery**
- Sakis Totlis' heroes proved to be trapped in their stereotypes
- The image of Switzerland. *An ideal state or a modern 'slave-market'?*

# The combination: Edessa to Zurich

"- There's a lot of black market in the dollar there, too. Anyone you find on the street... in the hotel... at the front desk...

-Everywhere...

-...the hotel employees... the housekeeper... the waitress... the waiters...

-Everyone.

-....They scream to you 'Dolar Dolar!'. That's all they have to say! All they care about...[...]

-No difficulty at all! Leave everything to me and you'll see. I'll change the money for you in no time! It couldn't be easier! Not to mention, even from our hotel, from the reception desk...What am I saying? Even from our room, with just a call. The one easy thing to do in Bulgaria, is to exchange dollars for leva in Bulgaria. You can't imagine... In this place, even my aunt, who comes from a very small Greek village and she is a priest's wife, was black-marketing.

# The combination: Edessa to Zurich

*'With my own eyes I saw for the first time a **reason for Greece's isolation from Europe**. Yugoslavia for Greece is a huge stopper in the bottle of Europe'*

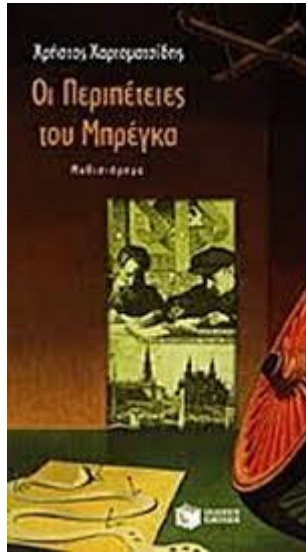
# Christos Chartomatsidis

- His family were political refugees in Sofia
- Chartomatsidis wrote a series of novels and short stories, in which he deals with **Bulgarian socialism**
- Novels providing an **authentic record of various aspects of the life of the Greek political refugee community in Bulgaria**
- The heyday of the Bulgarian socialist regime as **narrative framework**
- The transitional stage from the fall of the regime and beyond
- His main novels and short stories



# Bregkas' Adventures

- The **rise and fall of the socialist Bulgarian** regime is examined alongside the main phases of the novel's central character, Bregas.
- The main character: family of Greek political refugees in Sofia, born in the 1950s
- The name of the main character reflecting the **parents' loyalty** to the Party
- A family environment **extremely oriented and disciplined to party admonitions**
- Narration and **light irony: exaggeration or absurdity** that characterises certain aspects of the system.
- The incident in which the young Bregas visits the state camp for the first time: **dramatizing the fear for possible spies through humor and irony**



# Bregkas' Adventures

Stop! Hands up! The bewildered mother and her son saw a policeman in front of them threatening them with a pistol. Beside him the wolfhound showed his sharp teeth. 'In the name of the people, I arrest you!' bellowed the organ of order. Comrade Voula tried to give some explanation, but the policeman did not understand anything. 'Do you know how long I have been watching you?' he said to her.

As soon as he had come down to the little station, Comrade Voula **had aroused his curiosity**. Not only with her **elegant dress and breezy** bearing... There was something **suspicious** about this woman... And when he heard her asking, in a **foreign accent**, about the Central Committee nursery, he was now sure.

**Ostensibly fixing her lipstick, the stranger had looked in the mirror to see if someone was watching her. Then, instead of heading for the gate, she hid in the bushes. There was no longer any doubt that she was a foreign agent, who had come with some evil purpose to the Central Committee camp.** Perhaps to **organize sabotage!** The fact that she had her child there (if it was indeed hers) that wild thing, always growling and trying to pull the dog's tail, only showed how inventive the enemy can be when he wants to achieve his purpose.'



# Bregkas' Adventures

- Narration and irony
- **Distrust and suspicion** that characterized the regimes
- The **constant fear of the external enemy**
- **Dramatizing practices of surveillance**
- The *absurd fear and everyday life in the regimes*
- Brega's family and the willing to return to their homeland
- Depicting the Bulgarian socialist regime- **a system under erosion**, the people's growing **anxiety not to be seen as political enemies**, and the **comic behaviors**

## The need for people to be seen, beyond any doubt, as supporters of the Party

"Just before Bregas left to serve as a soldier, one of Brega's uncles had advised him:

“Brega, my boy, **be careful what you** say. Too many people will pretend to be your friend, so they can snitch on you! But **you must always answer them with the best words** about the army!

‘My uncle was right,’ thought our hero. ‘I’d better be careful!’

And he began to explain to the **trumpet boy how much fun they were having in the army, with their luxury rooms, great food and spotless, clean toilets.**

‘What’s he talking about, man,’ thought Mursel in turn. ‘Maybe he is someone in charge of Komsomol?’

So he decided to be careful when speaking and avoid traps.’

# Komsomol in Soviet Union



# Bregkas' Adventures

- The narration gradually reveals a **moral and ideological decline** within the Party
- Central Committee's **constant interference** in the personal lives of its members reveals the heard face of the regime
- Bregas' family decides in the mid-1970s to repatriate
- **1970- the Greek historical context** (the fall of Junta and the legitimacy of the KKE)
- The collapse of the Bulgarian socialistic regime
- **Chartomatsidis' characters:** between the difficulties of repatriation, the cultural shock of the differences between Greece and Bulgaria, and the emotional confusion regarding socialist Bulgaria.
- **Defying 'Post-communist nostalgia'.**
- A **tendency to express nostalgia mainly through anecdotes**



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