

Loukis Akritas: His Small and Great World **[Λουκῆς Ακρίτας. Ο Μικρός και ο Μεγάλος του Κόσμος]**

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Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth

Nicosia, 2020 [pp. 379]

ISBN: 978-9963-0-0189-7

Takis Hadjidemetriou's *Loukis Akritas: His Small and Great World*, published by the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (YPPAN), Nicosia, 2020, is a book dedicated to the politician, writer, and journalist Loukis Akritas (1909-1965). This is the fourth edition of the Cultural Services for Loukis Akritas, the former three (in Greek) being: 1. *Short Stories* (*Διηγήματα*, 1986), 2. *Thirteen Texts* (*Δεκατρία Κείμενα*, 1995), 3. *Three Theatrical Plays* (*Τρία Θεατρικά*, 2001).

Loukis Akritas, an individual with great activity in political, journalistic, and educational matters in Greece, is not only uncle to the writer Takis Hadjidemetriou, but also the one who defined him intellectually. Hadjidemetriou sensed that Loukis Akritas was fading into oblivion, and, as the last of an entire generation, bore the burden of saying a final word about this man whose life became an example. Therefore, he felt the need to narrate what he saw and experienced before he faded into oblivion himself, 'before my own voice stops being heard', as he characteristically says (p. 15). The phrase of writer Ivi Meleagrou (Hadjidemetriou's sister and Akritas' niece): 'Now Louki, you will have to be confronted with oblivion and time' (p. 17) also shook Hadjidemetriou. The writer admits that he is not writing history; he is not writing the biography of Loukis Akritas, either. He is rather offering the reading audience a book that aims to preserve the memory of an entire family through the presentation of the significant personality of Loukis Akritas. Hadjidemetriou chooses to talk about the multifaceted personality of Akritas, the man who may have lived only few years –he died at the age of 56– but achieved many important things.

The book consists of 18 chapters, which cover the entire life of Loukis Akritas, as well as his family history. The writing of the book is based on the family archive, and particularly the vast amount of correspondence collected by the writer, which follows the entire course of Loukis Akritas' life, as well as the lives of people in his close family environment (Euripidis Akritas, Christos Akritas, Takis Hadjidemetriou, Ivi Meleagrou et al.). Indicative of what Takis Hadjidemetriou attempts to achieve is the first

chapter of the book, where the intentions of the writer and the methodology used are presented. This chapter is –allow me the phrase– the soul of Hadjidemetriou’s work. In this chapter he defines his authorial boundaries and explains his intentions. The author writes: ‘I have always thought that it would be very important to write about the life of Loukis Akritas. [...] I let my desire to write about Loukis Akritas sleep for many years, but he was never absent from my thoughts. In difficult times and in cases where I needed answers to questions and problems, I took refuge in Loukis and read his texts’ (p. 21). Regarding the writer’s choice to use the letters of Loukis Akritas and other family members, Hadjidemetriou explains: ‘I thought: what are you doing now? Do you find the evidence and make your own synthesis, or is it better to present the testimony alive as it was stated in the letters while life took its own course? I opted for the latter’ (p. 22). Therefore, Hadjidemetriou carves his own writing path to illuminate important moments of Loukis Akritas. Structuring the chapters of his book in a particular way, he passes the torch over to the reading audience, allowing them to form an opinion about Akritas’ life.

In the second chapter of the book, the secondary literature, as well as material from the press of the time, are used by the writer to unravel the thread of the family history of Loukis Akritas, dating back to the late 18th century / early 19th century. The narration of the life of Loukis Akritas actually begins with the third and fourth chapters, entitled ‘Loukis the Teacher’ and ‘Loukis in Athens’, respectively. Here, the writer discusses Akritas’ teaching career and his transition to Athens, where he hoped he would see himself progressing. ‘[...] I give you my word of honor, that I will progress’ (p. 61), he writes to his cousin Euripides Ioannidis. The fourth chapter includes references to the publication of Loukis Akritas’ first book, the novel *Young Man with Good Recommendations* (*Νέος με Καλές Συστάσεις*, 1935), as well as his second book *The Valley* (*Ο Κάμπος*, 1936) which is inspired by the Cypriot countryside life.

The fifth chapter concerns Loukis Akritas’ endeavors towards the literary and journalistic world, again making extensive use of letters received or sent by Akritas. Of particular interest is the letter dated 28 March 1939, in which, while talking about journalism, Akritas writes: ‘[...] so what is a journalist? A conventionally intelligent subject that intervenes everywhere without being frowned upon. Because the intervention is guaranteed: The salvation of the people [...]’ (p. 82).

The next three chapters, six, seven and eight, are concerned with how he perceived and experienced the events of World War II. As we are informed by the letter dated 23 August 1939, Loukis Akritas was serving his military duties and in Decem-

ber 1940 he found himself on the Albanian front, where he would remain for some time. There he became a war correspondent, and his writings were published in Athenian newspapers and reprinted in Cypriot ones. Characteristic, not only of the feeling experienced by Loukis Akritas, but of his entire personality as well, are the two phrases from a letter Akritas sent to Euripides while on the Albanian front: a) '[...] I am happy, Euripides, that I am fighting today as a soldier and as a journalist so that we can achieve together what free humanity desires and rest assured that we will win [...]' and b) '[...] it is the desire of all free people to win and to eliminate systems of violence once and for all. And we will win [...]' (p. 103).

In chapter nine the writer deals with the period after the Liberation, when Loukis Akritas was appointed head of the Directorate of the Ministry of Press and Information. An important part of this chapter is the history of *Καθημερινά Νέα* (*Daily News*), the problems of the publication, and how it was finally led to closure. The troubled era following the end of WWII is sufficiently understood, as are the political positions of Loukis Akritas which are expressed in *Καθημερινά Νέα*. His differentiation from George Papandreou and his ideological orientation can be identified in his article in *Καθημερινά Νέα* on 31 August 1945 (p. 283). Chapter nine is one of the longest in the book and we consider it to be of particular interest because it essentially describes an entire transitional period for post-war and civil war Greek society.

The tenth chapter is entitled 'Toward a New Journey: 1947-1950' and concerns Loukis Akritas' life in the USA and London, as well as the micro-history of Loukis Akritas publications, and the journalistic adventures brought about by the closure of *Καθημερινά Νέα* and the publication of the *Ελληνικά Χρονικά* (*Hellenic Chronicles*), released on 19 May 1950. The information provided by Hadjidemetriou is also important regarding Akritas' book *Armed* (*Αρματωμένοι*), published in 1947, and for the tragedy of *Hostages* (*Όμηροι*), which was to be staged by the Greek National Theater in the same year; the play, however, was never staged and, as Hadjidemetriou informs, *Όμηροι* were finally staged in a production by Cyprus Theatre Organisation (THOC) in 1964, directed by Vladimiros Kafkaridis. Particularly important for the portrayal of Akritas' temperament is the letter he addresses to his niece Ivi, on 6 June 1950: 'If the world falls apart, I will always be standing among the ruins, always ready for new struggles' (p. 201). Another similar chapter, is the fifteenth, which concerns Akritas' editorial/publishing efforts, focused to *Επιστήμη και Ζωή* (*Science and Life*), containing letters that Loukis or his brother Christos sent to Takis and Ivi, asking them to spread the word about the journal.

In the eleventh chapter, Takis Hadjidemetriou proceeds with Loukis Akritas' transition from journalism to politics, with his participation in Nikolaos Plastiras' *Εθνική Προοδευτική Ένωση Κέντρου* (EPEN, National Progressive Center Union) with which he was elected as a member of parliament in the elections of 9 September 1951, as well as with his exclusion from the EPEN-Liberals ballot in the elections of 16 November 1952. Both chapters twelve and fourteen are about his political career. In these chapters Hadjidemetriou briefly presents the Progressive Union founded by Akritas, his activity in the Cypriot movement, his selection as Ethnarchy Councilor by the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus in 1957, and the elections of 11 May 1958. In chapter fourteen the writer also narrates his own journey from Athens to Zeli of Locris, a small village in Central Greece, and from there back to Cyprus in 1959, at the prompting of Loukis Akritas. In the same chapter we read also Akritas' last text on the Cyprus issue (14 February 1959), where he states: 'The Agreement on the Cyprus conflict puts Hellenism in front of one of the most delicate and risky challenges its historical path' (p. 258), referring to the Zurich Agreements.

Chapter sixteen is also political, and the writer presents the period during which Loukis Akritas gets elected as a member of parliament in the elections of 3 November 1963, the issue of the Cyprus conflict, and, of course, the relationship of Loukis Akritas with the educational reform in Greece while George Papandreou was in office.

Three chapters of Hadjidemetriou's book depict the individual Loukis Akritas, these are chapter thirteen, which concerns the creation of a family by Loukis Akritas (he marries Sylva Giavasoglou in 1954), chapter seventeen which explores the last period of his life and the book's last chapter, the eighteenth, with letters relating to his death.

The extensive use of the letters in Hadjidemetriou's book is of a wider interest. Many of the letters used are not Loukis', but his relatives' and friends', which allows us to observe things from a different angle; one could call it a second reading of Loukis Akritas' real intentions or state of mind. Apart from the wider issues that the book tackles, the reader can also extract interesting information on small fun-facts or trivia. An example is with regard to the town of Morphou and its inhabitants –we can see that the micro-history of Morphou is interwoven with the great history of Loukis Akritas. In addition, other small details are provided regarding the interwar period in Athens, such as the rent rates during the period, the tram ticket prices, as well as the prices of the fabrics in Cyprus and Athens, a culmination of detailed information that makes up the universe which gave rise to Loukis Akritas.

In conclusion, faithful to what he declared in the first chapter of his book, Takis Hadjidemetriou presents in a succinct way the world of Loukis Akritas, from his biggest to his smallest moments, from Morphou and his teaching career to the publishing houses and newspapers, and the consequent struggle for survival, on the mountains of 'Arvanitia' at the Albanian front, the publishing successes and electoral triumphs, and his by no means insignificant contribution to the educational reform. Introducing Loukis Akritas by talking about him and his relatives, Hadjidemetriou paves the path towards preserving the memory of an important Cypriot personality who left his village, and his country, in his attempt to escape from the margins. Loukis Akritas writes (28/3/1939): '[...] the world is wide -so wide. And every person has the right to position themselves wherever they want; As long as he can. I feel that I can; a motivation pushes me everywhere there is action, movement, creation, eternity perhaps in the broader sense of the word. And I face the situation with the irony of the brave and the laughter of the cunning [...]' (p. 82).

The book also includes an index of names, a list of family names, bibliography, and a list of publications by Loukis Akritas Publishing House (Akritas Publishing House, Kosmos Publications 1961-1962).

I cannot but notice, though, that the book by Takis Hadjidemetriou *Loukis Akritas: His Small and Great World* lacks both typographical and editorial care by the publisher, the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, an oversight that I consider rather unfair to the content of the book.

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