

## EUROPA IN WONDERLAND: GOBLIN MARKET OR SAPPHO'S GYMNASIUM?

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“Alice [I mean Europa] was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank [I mean the seashore], and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book [I mean the papyrus] her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, ‘and what is the use of a book’, thought Alice [or Europa], ‘without pictures or conversation?’ So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit [I mean a White Bull] with pink eyes ran close by her” (Carroll 1946: 23). Rabbit or Bull serves the same role in texts divided chronologically by hundreds of years, as an initiator and guide for the young women, Alice and Europa, into unknown territories; the two animals signify the proximity to a threatening liminality related to an ‘awakening’. So Europa, I guess, would be a most appropriate hostess and instructor in the diachronic pedagogic journey over the European humanistic landscape that I wish to make in this presentation. “Let us go then, you and I” (Eliot 1954: 11) tracing Europa’s adventures in wonderland.

The myth of Europa, in the fullest version that has come down to us, by the ancient bucolic poet Moschus, begins with Europa, Phoenician princess and daughter of king Agenor, dreaming that “two continents contended for her, Asia and that which faces it, and they wore the shapes of women. One had a stranger’s form, but

the other was like a woman of her own country and clung the closest about her daughter and kept saying how she herself had borne her and nurtured her. But the other, laying strong hands upon her, drew her nothing loth away, for by the will of aegis-bearing Zeus, the figure said, Europa was destined to be hers” (Moschus 1953, 1972: 8-15). Terrified but also attracted by the unknown (in the form of a woman), Europa wonders upon waking, “Who was the stranger that I beheld in my sleep? How yearning for her seized my heart; and she, how fondly she welcomed me, and looked at me as though on her own child!” (24-26). Europa’s desire for the (uncanny) woman, her balancing between the ‘familiar’ and the ‘other’ mother, is to be mediated through the intervention of the male Zeus. Europa’s fearful ‘transference’, her sea-change, is marked by cries of agony as the bull-god carries her toward the unknown (mother) land: “Crete came into sight” (162).

Interpretations of the myth of Europa begin with attempted etymologies of her name; though the linguistic connections between the girl and the continent that was to become her nuptial home are considered ‘coincidental’ by some scholars, her name has been taken to mean the “western”, or “dark”, related to the “willow” (of vegetation cult) but also to the “moon” —“wide-eyed” or “broad-faced” (Barkan 1986: 15). Europa, earth-mother or moon-goddess, belongs to a mythical genealogy of women (Io, Telephassa, Pasiphaë, Phaedra, Ariadne, Aerope) most of whom have been victims of divine rape one way or another, instances of the Great Rape, the triumph of the Indo-European sun-bull/Zeus over the Mediterranean Great Goddess —with a deepening chasm separating ‘culture’ from ‘nature’. So Europa may be taken to be “the manifestation of the Great Goddess as the mother of an entire continent” (Gadon 1989: 106). Once in Crete, Zeus and Europa, the story goes, were united in the Juktan cave or under a plane tree, in *hierogamy*; subsequently, Zeus married her off to Asterion, king of Crete at the time. The passage of Europa from Phoenicia to the Cretan island indicates the transfer of the Great Goddess cult from Anatolia to the Mediterranean. In this respect, Europa becomes one aspect of the feminine divinity that reigned supreme in Bronze Age Crete, and beyond (Gimbutas 1989: 318).

Minoan civilization was not brought ready made from Asia or from Africa, but was an original native creation wherein foreign techniques and ideas were assimilated and blended to form a novel and essentially European tradition. The Bronze Age civilization of Crete, and its later Mycenaean development, permeated and shaped almost all of what was later to become Greece —and Europe. There is uncontestable proof, I think, that whether matriarchal, matrilineal, matrilineal, matrifocal, or matrilineal, Crete, the originating point of Europe, had established a female-dominant or at best an egalitarian society (Stone 1976: 46-49), where woman was as much a cultural subject as man, initiator of value and meaning in

personal, communal, and religious life —having an original ‘symbolizing’ power of which she was gradually deprived— and depraved (Castleden 1990: 9-29). A pervading characteristic of Cretan society, even at its zenith, is that it is a non-dominator society, showing no personal ambition, aggressiveness, or desire for control. In the absence of hierarchical ‘difference’, women (and men) seem to enjoy a social prehistoric freedom, equally participating in public activities, leading a way of life that is fearless, joyful, relaxed, exuberant, ‘aesthetic’ (Hawkes 1968: 110-17). Education in Crete was highly regarded, full of elevated religious feeling, showing concern for the development of the whole human being, for an ideal inner perfection. Writing was a sacred activity, of divine origin and inspiration, placed under the patronage of a god.

For the Greeks, education, *παιδεία*, was based, essentially, on a profound relationship between two people, one young and the other mature, who was at once model, guide and initiator (Marrou 1956: 31). Throughout Greek history the contact between master and pupil was to be a matter of personal ‘care’: education remained in principle not so much a form of teaching, an instruction in techniques, as an investment of loving effort by an elder concerned to promote the growth of a younger person. The older type of an educational institution, the ‘gymnasium’, we find in Lesbos towards the end of the seventh century, where girls could be instructed. This higher education took place within a community life, in a school, “the abode of the disciples of the Muses”, comprising a religious fellowship, *θίασος*, dedicated to the goddesses of culture—a form that was later to be adopted by the schools of philosophy from the time of Pythagoras onwards. Here, under the direction of a mistress, whose typical representative was the poet Sappho, the personality of these young women was fashioned to conform to an ideal of beauty, aspiring to wisdom. From the technical point of view the school was the equivalent of an Academy of Music following the joyful rhythm of a series of festivals, religious ceremonies and banquets (Marrou 1956: 34). Sappho is quoted (by Maximus of Tyre) as saying, “For it is not right that there should be lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses. That would not be fitting for us” (Sappho 1982: 161).

This remarkable educational system brought out the pedagogic value of music, and the other arts, which was to remain fundamental throughout the whole classical period; indeed it seems to have been the object of theological reflection even in Sappho’s time—a fragment of hers dealing with these questions clearly expresses the doctrine so dear to Greek thought, that immortality could be gained by the cult of the Muses (Marrou 1956: 34). Sappho is also quoted (by Stobaeus) as having reproached an uneducated woman in the following way: “But when you die you will lie there, and afterwards there will never be any recollection of you or any longing for you since you have no share in the roses of Pieria [probably poetic skill];

unseen in the house of Hades also, flown from our midst, you will go to and fro among the shadowy corpses” (Sappho 1982: 99). Sappho expected her pupils, because they had known an aesthetic sublimation with her, to pursue the bright and the fine things in life, for her ultimate lesson was that true beauty inhabits any natural form. This is why the ancients compared her to Plato’s Diotima, Socrates’ instructor in making the ascent to the beautiful. In the Greek culture which is focused on aesthetics, beauty is the central topic of both Sapphic poetry and Platonic philosophy. Sappho’s sense of ‘beauty’ is apparently physical and concrete; Plato’s metaphysical and abstract. Yet both ancient instructors exhibit a similar pedagogical model, based on a shared quest after beauty and truth through erotic attention and devoted engagement.

If we follow the testimony of Maximus of Tyre, we see that, in his *Orations*, he openly compares Sapphic and Socratic educational tactics: “What else could one call the love of the Lesbian woman than the Socratic art of love? [...] For they said they loved many, and were captivated by all things beautiful” (Sappho 1982: 21). To put matters in the proper historical perspective, one wonders if we should call Socrates’ —or Plato’s— educational politics ‘Sapphic’, rather than vice versa, seeing as indebted to the feminine origination of *έρως*, *ποίησις* and, perhaps, philosophical *λόγος*. Maximus of Tyre (in *Orations* again) detects a parallelism in the conception and definition of eros given by the male ‘ventriloquist’ philosopher and the female poet: “Diotima says that Love flourishes when he has abundance but dies when he is in need: Sappho combined these ideas and called Love bitter-sweet (Sappho 1982: 147) and ‘pain-giver’” (Sappho 1982: 175). Similarly, “Socrates calls Love a sophist, Sappho ‘tale-weaver’” (Sappho 1982: 181).

In the opening of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates is called upon to pronounce on whether a youth should entrust his education and ethical formation to a teacher motivated by a deep devotion. Socrates seeks support for his position in ‘forefathers’ and certainly ‘foremothers’ —“the wise men and women who in past ages have spoken and written on this theme” of eros (235b). Socrates appropriates ancestral voices that are feminine —“from the fair Sappho maybe” (235c)— which instruct him in the mysteries of love as an educational method. The bond between teacher and pupil, as Socrates sees it, is the homologizing of both partners to a common god; they project upon their love-objects the image of divinity, their inner daemon, and “as they follow up the trace within themselves of the nature of their own god their task is made easier, inasmuch as they are constrained to fix their gaze upon him, and reaching out after him in memory they are possessed by him, and from him they take their ways and manners of life, in so far as a man can partake of a god” (252e-253a). So education is given the character of ‘mystery rite’ that initiates into a sublime transcendence of the human condition, making men ‘equal to the gods’. The Platonic Socrates realizes that only dedication to the young can be a deep

educational force because it sets up a communicative bridge between (wise) teacher and (ignorant) pupil; so the Socratic method can be defined as the transformation of erotic attraction into an instrument of instruction.

The other dialogue where Plato 'steals' a woman's voice to talk about an eros-based education is of course the *Symposium*. Diotima, the prophetess of love, like the poetess of love, Sappho, locates the origin of wisdom in "frenzy" or "divine rage". Sappho of Lesbos and Diotima of Mantinea are actually the female figures that Socrates recognizes as 'instructors'. The well-known position advocated by Diotima, and transmitted by Socrates to his pupils, is that eros is a daemon, a mediator between humans and divinities, the only channel through which "man can have any intercourse, whether waking or sleeping, with the gods" (203a). Diotima defines the essential attribute of eros as a longing of mortals for the condition of immortality, and Socrates concludes his report of Diotima's revelation by avowing full allegiance to this 'womanspeak', and admitting that if we are to achieve the transcendence of human limits, "Love will help our mortal nature more than all the world" (212b). The master metaphor of Diotima's metaphysics of eros as an ascent from the bodily to the spiritual domain in search of "the beautiful", *το καλόν*—which is not to be sought for itself but "for the conception and generation that the beautiful effects" (206e)—is the female generative process: "To love is to bring forth upon the beautiful [*τόκος εν καλω*], both in body and in soul" (206b). Conception, pregnancy, labour, parturition, and midwifery are the dominant images of the Platonic dialogues—female biology becoming the subtext of the philosophical process. Philosophy proclaims itself to be 'woman'—the maternal body being used as a relational entity between the *bio* and the *socio*. Once again, 'culture' mirrors 'nature'. Also, in the *Theaetetus*, comparing the pedagogue to a midwife, Socrates avows: "My art of midwifery is in general like theirs; the only difference is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth. And the highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom or instinct with life and truth. [...] The many admirable truths they bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within. But the delivery is heaven's work and mine" (150b-d).

In the *Republic*, Plato, describing the education of the "good old days", tells us that it was two-sided, comprising "gymnastics" for the body and "music" for the soul—"for the harmonious adjustment of these two principles by the proper degree of tension and relaxation of each" (411e-412a). From the beginning, Greek culture and hence Greek education included an element that was at once spiritual, intellectual and artistic (Marrou 1956: 41). For Plato, music, *μουσική*, signifies the domain of the Muses in the widest sense; in the *Laws*, he confirms what seems

to be common knowledge: “May we assume that our earliest education comes through the Muses and Apollo, or not?” (654a). The expression “ancient education”, *αρχαία παιδεία*, also denoted the type of schooling current in Athens in the first half of the fifth century, before the great changes that were made towards the end of the period by the Sophists, initiating the pedagogical revolution which introduced ‘Sophistry’ as a new model of instruction. The Sophists were the great forerunners, the first, so to speak, instructors of higher education, professional men for whom teaching was an occupation whose practical application proved its social utility (Marrou 1956: 48). The aim of their teaching was to educate the ambitious young men of Athens (women were restricted to domestic occupations only), to prepare them with the necessary skills for a successful political career. The Sophists were pioneers who discovered and applied a whole series of new educational methods, all of which followed an extreme utilitarianism and commercialism, ‘selling’ the knowledge that would enable the future politician to impose his will on the city. In Plato’s words, the Sophist can “impose upon the young who are still far removed from the reality of things, by means of words that cheat the ear, exhibiting images of all things in a shadow play of discourse, so as to make them believe that they are hearing the truth and that the speaker is in all matters the wisest of men” (*Sophist* 234c); he appears in many guises “as the hired hunter of rich young men [...] as a sort of merchant of learning [...] as a retail dealer [...] as selling the products of his own manufacture” (*Sophist* 231d). So the antinomy between professionalism and humanism was already present in ancient Athens, distinguishing between education as private interest and as public good. This problem, which was also to become a crucial issue in the higher education of the third millennium, was certainly not settled in the fifth century BC—in fact it was aggravated, when against the type of instruction offered by the Sophists there arose the severe criticism of Socrates. When he charges the Sophists with being too exclusively concerned with political manoeuvring, with effective action, and thus in danger of adopting an attitude of cynical amorality, he takes his stand on spiritual values, first among which, in education, was ethics, ‘virtue’, *αρετή*. Socrates’ great annunciation is that “virtue *is* teachable” (*Protagoras* 361b). Let us not forget, though, that Socrates suffered ‘capital punishment’ for his educational views—being accused, arrested, imprisoned, convicted and executed in the year 399 BC.

Faced with the extreme utilitarianism of the Sophists’ educational policy, which sees every branch of study as a means to increased political power and social promotion, Socrates asserted the transcendent existence of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty as guiding principles for the wise instructor: “But we must look for those craftsmen who by the happy gift of nature are capable of following the trail of true beauty and grace, that our young men, dwelling as it were in a salubrious region, may

receive benefit from all things about them [...] and so from earliest childhood insensibly guide them to likeness, to friendship, to harmony with beautiful reason" (*Republic* 401c-d). Here Socrates comes forward as heir to the great pre-Socratic philosophers, to that mighty effort of thought directed with such high seriousness towards the unravelling of the mystery of things, the quest after Being (Marrou 1956: 58). It is by dedication to the idea of the Good and not by any persuasion-technique that he will lead his pupils to spiritual perfection, to "virtue": "This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of the good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known" (*Republic* 508d-e). The ultimate aim of education is achieved by reaching the state of "wisdom", when the pupil "passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless [...]. And this condition of the soul we call wisdom" (*Phaedo* 79d). The appropriate attitude of the 'knowledgeable' teacher is to admit that 'he knows nothing', standing before the world 'unknowing' —always questioning: "It isn't that, knowing the answers myself, I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself", Socrates confesses (*Meno* 80c).

Many Platonic *Dialogues*, such as the *Sophist*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Greater Hippias* and *Lesser Hippias*, explore the pedagogical role of the Sophists, as "one producing belief without knowledge" (*Gorgias* 454e). In the *Sophist*, Plato undertakes to study the character of the Sophist and "bring his nature to light in a clear formula" (218c), proposing that "his art may be traced as a branch of the appropriative, acquisitive family" which "hunts man, privately, for hire, taking money in exchange, having the semblance of education —and this is termed Sophistry, and is a hunt after young men of wealth and rank" (223b). Comparing the Sophist to the merchant who travels around selling goods, Plato suggests, "And would you not call by the same name him who buys up knowledge and goes about from city to city exchanging his wares for money?" He continues: "And so this trader in virtue again turns out to be our friend the Sophist, whose art may now be traced from the art of acquisition through exchange, trade, merchandise, to a merchandise of the soul" (224b-d).

Morning and evening  
Maids heard the goblins cry:  
'Come buy our orchard fruits,  
Come buy, come buy:  
Apples and quinces,  
Lemons and oranges,  
Plump unpecked cherries,  
Melons and raspberries,

Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,  
Swart-headed mulberries,  
Wild free-born cranberries,  
Crab-apples, dewberries,  
Pine-apples, blackberries,  
Apricots, strawberries;—  
All ripe together  
In summer weather,—  
Morns that pass by,  
Fair eves that fly;  
Come buy, come buy: (1-19)

Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (written in 1862, that is twenty-four centuries after the Platonic *Dialogues*), a fairy-tale and nonsense poem (something like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) can be read as a socio-economic allegory reflecting the industrial society that 'produced' it. The goblins' goods represent, among other things, economic power and imperial capitalism, and the poem argues (imaginatively) that everything can be 'marketed' in unprecedented 'exchanges'. The poem's ultimate target is to show how the woman's world, the innocent and protected 'home', is contaminated like everything else by the market principles of selling and buying (Helsing 1995: 189-91). The goblin merchants tempt the two sisters of the story —Laura and Lizzie— with fruits that promise to satisfy their desires, to fulfil the women's longings. The sisters enact a drama which displays what moral defences have to be exerted in order to learn how to face and handle the tempting world of market forces. *Goblin Market*, read in terms of the economic exchange incorporated in it, turning things and people into commodities, becomes a parable about power relations. Although it attempts to imagine a *topos* for women outside a capitalized society, it totally surrenders to an 'economic' language and metaphors, contaminating everything by the laws of exchange. *Goblin Market* is the place of fantasy and marketing, playing by the rules of magic and money. It thus uncannily echoes the growing commodity morality of nineteenth-century culture. As the poem moves toward its conclusion, however, communal solidarity erases commercial corruption, with Lizzie and Laura triumphant. At the end of the poem, Laura turns from 'sufferer' to 'narrator', confirming her ultimate control. In her re-remembering and retelling of the story she must repeat the goblins' fruit-cry "come buy", thus appropriating their merchantile play. Incorporating their text into her own 'tale', Laura seems to bring the entire system of exchange —the goblin market and its rules— with all its disquieting iterations, under her power. In her assumption of the goblins' role —yet giving her 'goods' to her listeners-customers 'for free— she leaves the world not purged of goblin marketing, but 'embraced' into a wider system of 'home' economics and feminine values. The question left



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open might be: Can women actually handle a market so dominated by goblins? (Holt 1996: 141). Or, to put it in educational terms: Can women find an instructive voice in a goblin market society? That its closing lines portray a woman as an effective 'teacher' is a positive gesture, delivering a prophetic message to the future: the need for an alternative symbolic order which 'uses' (without being 'ab-used' by) market practices.

Days, weeks, months, years  
Afterwards, when both were wives  
With children of their own;  
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,  
Their lives bound up in tender lives;  
Laura would call the little ones  
And tell them of her early prime,  
Those pleasant days long gone  
Of not-returning time:  
Would talk about the haunted glen,  
The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,  
Their fruits like honey to the throat  
But poison in the blood;  
(Men sell not such fruit in any town;) (543-56)

Do they not?

Taking the 19th century 'home' as a paradigm and bridge to bring us to the 20th, or rather 21st century academic 'home', the university, which is my ultimate goal in all this 'wandering' in the literary wonderland—with Europa as our guide—I would like to make a stop on September 18th, 1988, in Bologna, where the Rectors of European universities signed the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, making the following declaration: "The undersigned Rectors of European universities, gathered in Bologna for the ninth centenary of the oldest university in Europe [...]; looking forward to a far-reaching co-operation between all European nations and believing that peoples and States should become more than ever aware of the part that universities will be called upon to play in a changing and increasingly international society, Consider—that at the approaching end of this millenium the future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific and technical development; and that this is built up in centres of culture, knowledge and research as represented by true universities". The fundamental principles which must, "now and always", support the vocation of universities, "as proclaimed to all States and to the conscience of all nations" are the following: "The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage [...]. To meet the needs of the world around us, its research and

teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power”.

Eleven years later, on the 19th of June 1999, the European Ministers of Education convened, in Bologna again, issuing the Joint Declaration which was to chart the *European Higher Education Area*. The Bologna Declaration was initially politically driven. We must not forget that the premises of the whole Bologna issue are to be found in an earlier paper, the Declaration of Sorbonne on “Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System”, signed in Paris, in May 1998, by the education ministers of four States: France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. The key words underlying the Paris Declaration were “mobility” (of students and teachers), “transparency” (of degrees), and “integration” (of graduates into the common European labour market). Embodying the Paris principles of the ‘four’ into the Bologna agenda of the ‘twenty nine’ States, the Ministers declared: “A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship”. To conclude with the following commitment that establishes the single European (goblin?) market of education: “We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries” —with the unprecedented terms ‘competitiveness’ and ‘measurement’ revealing a fresh concept of ‘brave new education’ as a marketable good, a commodity.

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The next step was to move *Towards the European Higher Education Area*, taken in Prague on May 19th, 2001, resulting in the Protocol which proposed further actions for the implementation of the objectives of what is by now known as the ‘Bologna Process’: “As the Bologna Declaration sets out, Ministers asserted that building the European Higher Education Area is a condition for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of higher education institutions in Europe”. They supported the idea that “higher education should be considered a public good” but “agreed on the importance of enhancing attractiveness of European higher education to students from Europe and other parts of the world”: students-‘customers’, that is, “come buy”.

The third stage for *Realising the European Higher Education Area* took place in Berlin on 19th September 2003, issuing a new Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers, which attempts a reconciliation of opposites, with the paradoxical cohabitation of ‘competition’ and ‘cooperation’: “Ministers reaffirm the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process. The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social

characteristics of the European Higher Education Area [...]. In that context, Ministers reaffirm their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility”.

Parallel to the Ministers' conferences and communiqués, the Commission of the European Communities, “seeking to start a debate on the role of Universities”, publicized, in the same year 2003, the following Communication entitled *The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge*, asserting that: “Given that they are situated at the crossroads of research, education and innovation, universities in many respects hold the key to the knowledge economy and society. [...] European universities have for long modelled themselves along the lines of some major models, particularly the ideal model of university envisaged nearly two centuries ago by Wilhelm von Humboldt [...]. Today the trend is away from these models, and towards greater differentiation”. Focusing especially on the new challenges facing European universities, the Communication from the Commission asks “the fundamental question: can the European universities, as they are organised now, hope in the future to retain their place in society and in the world? [...] If it is to achieve its ambition of becoming the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy and society, Europe simply must have a first-class university system”.

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What do universities say responding to these challenges inviting them to perform this new educational role of promoting Europe as a knowledge-based society and economy? Let us listen to some familiar voices, expressed by members of ESSE and recorded, where else? in the *European English Messenger*. ESSE's ‘Socratic’ criticisms of the ‘Sophistic’ turnings of modern higher education originate in the address of its first President, Piero Boitani, Università di Roma, at the Bordeaux Conference in September, 1993. An excerpt from the address appeared in volume III of the *Messenger* in Spring 1994, entitled “The ECU”. Setting the question, “What is an ECU worth to members of ESSE?” Boitani proposes unthought of readings of the acronym, asserting: “We badly need an ECU, a European Common *Universitas*, which is to say, the cultural unity of European intellectuals, of European humanists and critics, acting in all spheres of life. In short, we need a true ECU, a European Currency Unit to be not an abstract entity but the daily basis of our ‘negotiations’ —and I mean this both literally and allegorically, both politically and culturally”. Having set the goals and hopes for Europe's future, he concludes: “The first Chairman of ESSE will leave you by ideally toasting to the ECU —a European Common Utopia” (55-59).

From “The President's Column”, in volume VII, Autumn 1998, we hear the voice of Helmut Bonheim, University of Cologne, as President of ESSE, exposing the vagaries of “The Information Society”: “Agreed, *information society* is not a term

without charm. We do live, if we contrast our age with earlier ones, in a media (or misinformation) society”. And he concludes, “These are only some of the reasons why the narrow view of modern life as an information society threatens to warp secondary and tertiary education. [...] For higher education is not first of all about facts and dates. It is about developing a sense of what questions are worth putting” (4-5).

The presence of Seamus Heany in volume X of Autumn 2001 introduces another dimension to this academic debate over the (precarious) present and (bleak) future of education. In “Time and Again: Poetry and The Millenium”, Heany, seeking shelter from the dazzling and dangerous glitter of information technology, turns to poetry and the cultural heritage because “poetry is an art which reaches after those hovering meanings and tries to connect them with the ground of our immediate experience”. Asserting his firm belief that “new life can only stream from the old sources if the lines to those sources are kept open”, he declares that “the university has still a vital humanist role to play”, adding that if “the cultural heritage is not maintained, if the ongoing work of retention and reinterpretation is not kept up by the academy, then in a short enough time a shared idiom may be no longer possible”. And he prophesies: “At the beginning of the new millenium, in other words, on the verge of the new technological era, when the galactic glare of new technologies seems capable of burning off the ozone layer of our cultural memory, it looks as if the work of the humanities departments is more necessary than ever” (19-23).

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Adolfé Haberer, President of ESSE today, gives a penetrating ‘internal’ view from “The President’s Column” in volume XI of Spring 2002, on “The Bologna-Prague Process and English Studies”. Starting from the decisive ‘beginning’, the Paris meeting of the four Ministers in 1998, he asserts that “The ultimate general objective was the development of a European Higher Education Area (or ‘Space’) that would match, and operate in relation with, the economic, commercial and financial markets set up by the European Union since the Treaty of Rome”. Critically tracing the whole development of the European educational policy, he notes that “a ‘single European area of higher education’” is “a formula which seems to be copied from that of the ‘single European currency’”. The President of ESSE places his hopes on human academic resources to refute the intentions of politicians: “The challenge for the present and future generations of teachers will be to maintain their moral and intellectual independence in a world increasingly concerned with economic competitiveness, market forces and productivity” (2-6).

In volume XII of Autumn 2003, Robert Clark, Founding Secretary of ESSE, in an article bearing the title “English Studies and the Current Crisis. Or; The Condition of the Subject and the War in Iraq”, invites us to look again at the

British educational system as a forerunner, or even a paradigm of what came to be known later as the “Bologna Process”, with a postmodern concept of education transforming “the solitary searcher intellectual or seer” to “the cunning producer of commodities, the salesman of celebrity”, an education that “has to provide skills to the economy and ensure political control”. Going even deeper and setting the academic problem in a globalized political and ethical context, he asserts: “But of course the State does not want 50% of the population thinking independently so the quality of education has to change [...] because, at base, the ruling elites of the Western world are aware that not only is the oil running out, but the water, and even the air”. What more can be said, after such disheartening knowledge, but to agree with Clark that “the function of the university has to be to ask those questions the State does not want asked, and when this is forgotten a university education is not worth its name” (46-49).

Most appropriately, I conclude this presentation of ESSE anticommunist voices with Jina Politi, Emeritus Professor, University of Thessaloniki, who, in this same issue, inscribes her “Requiem for a Clerk”, her lament for the “death” of the scholar as we knew him/her. She begins: “No one is ignorant of the fact that there had always been a very small market for Aristotle, Petrarch or Chaucer. Yet, until recently societies showed a respect and endeavoured at all costs to preserve ‘the best that had been thought and said in the world’. The Global Market, however, reckoned that as these luxurious products were non profit-making they had better be withdrawn from circulation”. Moving beyond literature to the largest issue of academic politics, she asserts: “The University was also assailed. [...] The new World Order decided that ‘education’ was there to serve the pressing economic needs of society” (67-70).

Now it is time, I think, to open up the vistas of our concern and attend ‘care-fully’ to thoughts that “lie too deep for tears”, setting the whole problem of the academic situation today into a larger philosophical and humanistic context. Martin Heidegger reminds us that “man is the *animal rationale*, the living creature that demands and gives an account”: “According to this definition, man is the calculating creature, calculating understood in the broad sense, which Cicero already attributed to the word *ratio*, originally a word of Roman merchants, in a time when Greek thinking was transposed into Roman thought”. So, based on the ancient definition that “Man is the living creature that calculates”, Heidegger asks: “Does the definition of man as the rational animal exhaust the essence of man? [...] May we, if this should be the case, abandon what is worthy of thought in favour of the madness of exclusively calculative thinking and its immense success?” For Heidegger, “This is the question. It is the world-question of thinking. Our reply to it will decide what will become of the earth and what will become of the existence of man upon the earth” (1975: 222). The answer to the “question of

thinking”, according to Heidegger, is the “thinking of the question”; the questioning attitude which bears witness to being in a crisis: “The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought” (1977: 35). And he goes on to explain: “Questioning is then no longer a preliminary step, to give way to the answer and thus to knowledge, but questioning becomes itself the highest form of knowing. [...] Questioning then forces our vision into the most simple focus on the inescapable”, which is “the spiritual world” (1985: 474).

Hans-Georg Gadamer also supports the hermeneutical priority of the question: “It is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience. We cannot have experiences without asking questions”. So, “to question means to lay open, to place in the open”. He also reminds us of the importance of questioning for the Greeks, beginning with Socrates: “Among the greatest insights given to us by Plato’s account of Socrates is that, contrary to the general opinion, it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them. [...] In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know”. Gadamer supports the Platonic view that the enemy of questioning is the power of popular opinion, *doxa*. Hence, “as against the solidity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person who possesses the ‘art’ of questioning is a person who is able to prevent the suppression of questions by the dominant opinion”. Hence, “The art of questioning is that of being able to go on asking questions, i.e. the art of thinking” (1975: 325-30).

Jacques Derrida, in his work *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, engages with the “question of the question” in Heidegger, “the essentially questioning form, essence and dignity of thought or the path of thought”; “freedom” is the common ground correlating the “questioning” with the “spiritual” (1989: 9). With an impressive gesture, putting his theory into practice, and turning to the current issue of the role of the university in our times, Jacques Derrida asks: “Today, how can we not speak of the university?” In a ‘timely’ article, though published in 1983, entitled “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils”, he poses the ‘overwhelming’ question: “Does the university, today, have what is called a *raison d’être*?” Defining the University as “the place where people know how to learn and learn how to know”, he declares that he is “resolutely in favor of a new university Enlightenment” (thinking of Schelling and Kant), and unfolds a new series of questions: “What *is* the essence of the university?” and “Where does the university stand in relation to the principle of reason?” In an attempt to enlighten the postmodern condition and to predict the university’s trajectory, Derrida notes that the university is “built both on the principle of reason and on what remains hidden in that principle”, what “remains unthought”, “elaborated above an abyss”.

At this point, he introduces his much quoted proposition or annunciation that might save the university from its fatal dead end: “Those who venture forth along this path [...] need not set themselves up in opposition to the principle of reason, nor indeed give way to ‘irrationalism’. They may continue to assume *within* the university, along with its memory and tradition, the imperative of professional rigour and competence. There is a double gesture here, a double postulate: to ensure professional competence and the most serious tradition of the university even while going as far as possible, theoretically and practically, in the most directly underground thinking about the abyss beneath the university, “to think at one and the same time the entire [...] landscape [...] and the abyss itself”. Following in the wake of Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, he defines the university as “a place where truth has to be spoken without controls and without concern for ‘utility’”. For Derrida, “‘thought’ requires *both* the principle of reason *and* what is beyond the principle of reason, the *arkhe* and an-archy”. Conclusively, he reminds us that in a period of crisis, “provocation to think brings together in the *same* instant the desire for memory and exposure to the future”: “Keep the memory and keep the chance —is this possible?”, he wonders, transmitting his confidence that “that double guard will be assigned, as its responsibility, to the strange destiny of the university” (1983: 2-20).

But what ‘memory’ are we speaking about? Memory —from the Latin *memor*, mindful? Shall we follow the verbal game over a memory that ‘speaks’ (in Latin) its own signification of ‘mindfulness’? Or, the Greek Titaness, *Μνημοσύνη*, Mother of the Muses? Memory, in this maternal or primordial sense, attains to the status of Platonic *ανάμνησις*, as in Plato’s theory of recollection, where the philosopher-poet comprehends all things and re-members them, that is re-constellates them, in the creative act of *ποιειν*. Plato’s use of a language full of erotic overtones to describe the manner of approach to the vision of essential Being through recollection, is probably justified (among other things) by the etymological aura around the anamnestic process: *ανά-μνησις*, as a ‘calling to mind’ is a derivation from *μνάομαι* —to be mindful of, to turn one’s mind to, to woo for one’s bride, to court. ‘Remembering’ as ‘courtship’ is seeking the favour of the ‘beloved’, endeavouring to ‘please’ by constant ‘attentions’; not allowing the mind to become forgetful (of itself), *ανάμνησις* keeps it grounded and collected and becomes itself an intensifying force in the pursuit of Being, *η του όντος θήρα*. Erotic attention and devoted engagement is for Plato the motivating power in the quest after knowledge, a knowledge that comes suddenly, illuminating the mind: “Hardly after practicing detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts its powers to the limit of human

capacity, is flooded with light” (*Seventh Letter* 344b). *Ανάμνησις* means infinite care for learning what reality is, the ‘loving mind’, *νοῦς ἐρῶν* that cultivates a devoted and wondering attitude; it becomes the energy itself that solves the riddle of Being.

*Μνημοσύνη*, Mother of the Muses, mother of music, and poetry and all the arts (and sciences) perhaps inhabits the ‘wonderland’ nominated, among other definitions, as *chora* by Julia Kristeva, “enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written”, which is “rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment” (Kristeva 1984: 29). Seeking the Mother of the Muses, let us return with the Greek-American poet Olga Broumas to “Sappho’s Gymnasium” (Broumas 1999: 334-37), in a backward journey from the postmodern to the archaic, taking us to the primal educational scene that might give forgotten ‘signs’ to guide us through the schizoid split tormenting today’s academy:

Outside memory worship never dies  
That wish to embrace the great poplar  
I woke and my head was gleaming  
Trees fill my heart  
[...]  
Preumbilical eros preclassical brain  
Her face could still last tone of swaying habit  
as if by accident the sea  
exactly  
[...]  
Bird is drunk inside me  
remembering the smell  
at your door  
You are the guest  
heart traces  
[...]  
Laurel to air I speak your lips  
lantern in the abyss



## Europa in wonderland: Goblin market or Sappho's gymnasium?

I am what astonishment can bear  
tongue I owe you

Pupil only to you

[...]

Simone de Beauvoir announces the arrival of a feminine creature, the new woman (or old goddess) who may teach us 'to think and not to think': "She comes from the remoteness of ages, from Thebes, from Crete [...] she is a helicopter and she is a bird; and there is this, the greatest wonder of all: under her tinted hair the forest murmur becomes a thought" (de Beauvoir 1960: 729).

Will she?

### Additional Note

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