

ΕΤΕΡΩΝΥΜΑ

Γράφει ο Κώστας Καραμάρκος → <http://endeaneos.blogspot.com.au>

Enriching Greekness or... Talking about cultural wealth...

In Australia, it was the Greek community of Sydney yesterday and it will be the Greek community of Melbourne this Sunday that will turn out on masse to celebrate Greek Independence Day...

Ok, the Greek diaspora around the world, including Australia and the Greeks in Greece on March 25, celebrate the declaration and the start of the national liberation struggle in 1821, against the Ottomans, that led to the formation of the modern Greek state, however...

How complex, how "rich", how broad is the diaspora understanding and the Greek Australian understanding of the so called Greek historical-cultural aspect of our individual or of our collective identity?

«And yet we should consider how we go forward. / To feel is not enough, nor to think, nor to move / nor to put your body in danger in front of an old loophole / when scalding oil and molten lead furrow the walls. /

And yet we should consider towards what we go forward, / not as our pain would have it, and our hungry children/ and the chasm between us and the companions calling from the opposite shore; / nor as the bluish light whispers it in an improvised hospital, / the pharmaceutical glimmer on the pillow of the youth operated on at noon; / but it should be in some other way, I would say like/ the long river that emerges from the great lakes enclosed deep in Africa, / that was once a god and then became a road and a benefactor, a judge and a delta; / that is never the same, as the ancient wise men taught,/ and yet always remains the same body, the same bed, and the same Sign, / the same orientation.»

The above remarks are extracts from a poem written by Nobel Prize winner George Seferis. This poem, entitled 'An Old Man on the River Bank', was written in Cairo, in the middle of the Second World War, in June 1942.

I am using Seferis' words today as a metaphor - this is what poetry and art is in many ways, a great ontological metaphor - in order to again ask a question that is on my mind constantly in relation to the Greek part of our individual and collective cultural identity - which experienced or imagined Greece is predominant in the eyes, minds and in the hearts of Greek Australians or of diaspora Greeks?

How broad is the definition of modern Greek culture, let alone history, for most members of the community, not only here in Australia, but also in the entire Greek diaspora?

Apart from an accurate or distorted version of the achievements of the ancient Greeks, apart from the



cultural omnipresence of Orthodox Christianity, apart from the great battles in the fields of war - victorious or disastrous, apart from our family tales and experiences, what else do we know, as individuals or a community, about other cultural parameters that define the ever-evolving Greek side of our identity?

How dominant are the simplistic manifestations of Greekness?

How many of us have heard of Nikos Skalkotas, Manos Hadjidakis, Eleni Karaindrou, Nikos Xidakis and others, if we are only to speak of music?

How few of us (Greek Australians) attended last June at the Melbourne Town Hall an impressive concert by internationally acclaimed Greek singer Maria Farantouri together the legendary American saxophonist Charles Lloyd?

How extroverted is the Greek Australian community in 2015? How culturally rich and «adventurous» is the Greek Australian community

in this great metropolis of the south, or in other Greek diaspora centres around the world?

Does the accumulation of material wealth, for a sizable number in the community, go hand in hand, even partially, with the acquisition of cultural wealth? In terms of income, most Greek Australians can be described as being members of the middle class. In terms of cultural attributes though, how big is the gap between material wealth and cultural wealth in the community?

I conclude with George Seferis again. «And I lowered my eyes to look all around: / girls kneaded, but they didn't touch the dough / women spun, but the spindles didn't turn / lambs were drinking, but their tongues hung still / above green waters that seemed asleep / and the ploughman transfixed with his staff poised.»

P.S. A similar version of this article was published in Neos Kosmos English Edition in June 2014.