

# Mikhail Mitsakis' Psychosis. Writing as a Symptomatic Solution. A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Approach.

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## THE CONFLICT WITH KOSTIS PALAMAS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE DESTABILISATION OF MIKHAIL MITSAKIS' PSYCHOSIS

**Key words:** psychosis destabilisation, Name-of-the-Father, forclusion, symbolic order, logotatria

## A FEW LINES ABOUT MITSAKIS' LIFE AND WORKS

Mikhail Mitsakis constitutes a peculiar figure of the Greek letters. Towards the end of the 19th century, one could hardly browse through a magazine or a newspaper of the time without coming across his name, or rather across one of his many pen-names. It could be a piece about a train-travel in Thessaly, or a reading note on Ernest Renan, or a short prose piece sculpted on the spot in the streets of Athens.

Born in Megara in 1865, he descended, on his mother's side of the family, from Panagiotis Giatrakos, one of the generals who had fought for the Greek independence in 1821. He spent his childhood in the town of Sparta, where even as a student he applied himself to broad historical studies and issued a handwritten newspaper titled Taygetos. From early on he was attracted to literature.

Fresh out of high-school, he hurriedly left Laconia for Athens, where he enrolled to Law School, from which

he dropped out two years later, in order to try to earn a living through his pen, namely through journalism<sup>2</sup>. He immediately joined the editorial group of the magazine named Asmodaios and was one of the co-founders of the Asty magazine. His first texts were already being published since 1880. Most of them were signed with a pen-name<sup>3</sup>. For sixteen years he would work with almost every newspaper, magazine and almanac that flourished in the capital at the time, aided in this by a vagabond instinct and an aversion to any kind of routine. Indeed, he would try twice to publish a newspaper himself (The first one was named Thoryvos [Noise] and the second Protevousa<sup>4</sup> [Capital City]) – an attempt that failed both times after the publication of few issues. In Dimitris Koromilas' newspaper Ephimeris [Journal], he would record with wit the Parliamentary proceedings.

What follows is an example of how he presented himself to his peers in 1890:

"He is, despite his young age, a significant figure. He has acquaintances everywhere, politicians fear his sharp pen and men of letters tremble in front of his scathing criticism.

He is able to express himself in fluent French, he is aware of everything published and he is able to follow all the movements of the intelligentsia of his time. His erudition is wide and deep. History and philosophy are equally familiar to him as are literature and poetry. Nothing escapes him; he is well aware of everything. He is an avid reader devouring the printed page. And what he reads, he digests, making it his forever. Equipped with an amazing memory, he is able to recite by heart thousands of verses in Greek and French. His conversation is a happy blend of unexpected words, harmonic sounds and his [verbal] findings cause delight. His spirit shines and charms, his ability to balance on tiptoe with words

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<sup>2</sup>Mitsakis, Mikhail, *Un checheur d'or*, trans. Gilles Ortlieb, Finitude, Bordeaux, 2012

<sup>3</sup>Mitsakis, Mikhail, *Narratives and Travelogues*, Costas and Helen Ouranis Foundation, Athens 2006, p. 16 [in Greek]

<sup>4</sup>Ibid p. 20

is astounding.<sup>5</sup>

Other portraits depict him as "always dressed in a suit of the same colour and a permanent felt hat slightly lowered over his eyes, his pointed beard clipped to his nose, his myopic and full of curiosity eyes investigating tirelessly, trying to discover everything, not to let anything that surrounds him escape."<sup>6</sup>

His works, besides the purely journalistic ones, scattered in all these magazines, calendars and newspapers, were mainly short-stories or, rather, poetic images bearing the title "Athenian Pages" and "Travel Notes." Mitsakis wanted to have them published in a book. The publication of this book was one of his literary dreams. However, he never managed to fulfil it. His works were only posthumously published in book form. Very few of them had already been published, during his life, in separate booklets, namely: "Kourtopassis. Adieu à un Diplomate" (1888), "An Athenian Gold-digger" (1890), "The Language Question in Greece. A Literary Page in Two Languages" (1892) and "The Kitten" (1893).

Mitsakis was an Athenian flâneur. He wandered in the city and, with his myopic eyes, recorded images, outlined characters, customs and practices. He travelled, then, to Epirus, Thessaly, the Greek islands to record scenes of natural everyday life and its people. He was really happy when he was able to save enough money for his travelling expenses, as travel journalism was flourishing in the late 19th century. He enjoyed these escapes dearly, they renewed him and he longed for them. They bore him away from the city dust, which he so much detested, and brought him before a Greece he considered instinctive, authentic, true.

He maintained a newspaper column entitled "Our Literature" and felt it his duty to comment on even the slightest movement, criticising every manifestation of Greek and foreign intellectual creation of his time, aiming (as a scathing and sharp, but always honest critic) to advance the literary production towards the –according to him - right artistic paths.

His literary activity, however, would change radically after the triggering of his psychosis<sup>7</sup>.

At this point, special reference should be made to the way Mitsakis wrote. His verbal wealth is such that often impresses the reader. He used a highly sophisticated, mixed language, that traversed all eras, from Homer and Byzantium to the demotic vernacular of his

time. He had his own unique style based on purist Greek with demotic insertions. He strived to express in words what he saw around him. He has been characterized as the "alcoholic of description"<sup>8</sup> and his writings brim over with this agony. He seems unaware of the redundant and gives the impression that he didn't know how to handle punctuation correctly. He, wanted seemingly, to say everything, as if he had before him a canvas that had to be filled with words. For this reason, he used a variety of adjectives. Adjectives have a special value in Mitsakis' work; one can count up to 30 adjectives in seven rows of text<sup>9</sup>.

A realist to the bone, he remained enslaved to his surrounding reality; he needed to look in order to be inspired<sup>10</sup>.

He was also a master of irony and everyone trembled before him.

It could be argued that another feature of Mitsakis' writing is the lack of myth, of plot. Often, the myth appears indeed to be missing, even though Mitsakis himself held his own position on this: "in a street painting you can enclose the entire philosophy of Kant and Schopenhauer."<sup>11</sup>

So, this opposer of monotony with the broad erudition, peculiar writing style and satirical spirit, he who studied and read greedily and whom the young scholars called a "maître"<sup>12</sup>, the critic of every literary event, he who wanted to record everything, under his pen-names, who censured everything that failed to come up to his expectations and identified himself professionally as "simple cameras of momentary impressions,"<sup>13</sup> who did not succeed in publishing a book, something that hurt him and left a heavy mark on him, this rebel, the irascible, the arrogant, the uncompromising before mediocrities, with his witty phrases and his own personal style, the judge of society and the man scathing the imitation life of modern Greeks, the inventor, lastly, of a complex system of taps, pipes and upturned cones that sprayed him with hot and cold showers unfailingly every morning, was hospitalized, for the first time, for fifteen days in the mental hospital of Corfu on December 21, 1894.

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<sup>8</sup>Athanasiopoulos, Dimitris, "Mitsakis. The Alcoholic of Description." Greek Creation, 143, p.80 [in Greek]

<sup>9</sup>Ibid p.85

<sup>10</sup>Pratsikas, Giorgos, "An Unlucky Novelist" Greek Creation, 143, p. 77 [in Greek]

<sup>11</sup>Mitsakis, Mikhail, "A few words. The intellectual movement in Greece" newspaper Asty, 29.01.-02.02.1895 [in Greek]

<sup>12</sup>Faltaits, Constantinos, "The Life of Mitsakis", Greek Letters, 60, 10.08.1929

<sup>13</sup>Mitsakis, Mikhail, "Thomas" newspaper Asty 27.04.1886, p. 6-7 [in Greek]

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<sup>5</sup>Peranthis, Mikhail, Mikhail Mitsakis - His Work, Hestia, Athens 1956, p. 18-19 [in Greek]

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 15 [in Greek]

<sup>7</sup>See also Ploumbidis, Dimitris, "The French Poetry of Mikhail Mitsakis", 24 letters, www.24grammata.com/?p=4907, [last accessed 13/12/2016] [in Greek]

We will see the conditions that led to this first hospitalization

## THE CHRONICLE OF THE CONFLICT WITH KOSTIS PALAMAS AND MITSAKIS'S FIRST HOSPITALIZATION IN CORFU

### *The arrival in Corfu - The letter to Moraitidis*

In April 1894, Mitsakis visited Corfu. A lengthy letter he writes on May 12, 1894 to his pen-pal friend and writer Alexandros Moraitidis<sup>14</sup> gives us an idea of the motives that led him to the island and of the life "mission" he felt he had undertaken. We quote his exact words:

Corfu provides you with the greatest pleasure [...] the pleasure to feel alone by myself, free from irksome acquaintances in the street, free of even more irksome home visitors, free from every kind of foolish social fetters, which due to some inexplicable love towards slavery the fool mortal imposes onto himself, free from blabbering people, from the prying, from the stupid; tranquil and free exactly as if one were in a great city [...] Since I - and my entire literary course up until now, I believe, bears witness to that, was never quite able to understand Lie, Self-interest, Injustice, regarding intellectual work, regarding intellectual struggles. In common Life the struggle is for bread, for the fulfilment of the relentless physical needs, for the enjoyment of individual, all in all, benefits, whose amount is by nature fixed and limited for each of the contestants. But in intellectual Life, but in intellectual movement, but in intellectual struggle, what is the purpose, what is the point of the struggle: The Common Good, the Common Enjoyment. And what is the prize for the contestants: the honour, the name. Nothing else exists, nothing else should exist.

### *The conflict with Kostis Palamas*

The opposition to Palamas had already been simmering since March 20, 1890, when Palamas, in a speech at the Philological Association of Parnassos, reading his poems announced in his introduction a first draft of the literary manifesto "How We Understand Poetry." Mitsakis is shaken by the speech and, using his until then inexhaustible sarcasm, sends him a letter and a poem written à la manière de Palamas.

However, the emergence of Palamas, in the following years, as a judge and bellwether exacerbates the conflict.

On April 22, 1894, the fraternal and most beloved friend of Mitsakis, the poet Kostas Krystallis, died of consumption in Arta. Fifteen days later, the literary memorial service of the poet took place in Parnassus with Palamas as the speaker. In the same month, Mitsakis read in Ephimeris the text "the work of Krystallis", in which Palamas divided poets into philosopher-poets and painter-poets. So, he was to read that Krystallis was "a painter poet" who just "illustrates", but "does not lift the spirit and does not supervise the ceaseless flow of time and place."

Palamas, however, did not stop there. He struck the reader of Ephimeris Mikhail Mitsakis at his very soul, by criticising the use of idiomatic or rare words in Krystallis' poetry. (As we are going to analyse later on, not only did Mitsakis himself make use of such words, but the choice and prominence of these rare words was also a key feature of his writing as a symptomatic solution.)

Palamas wrote:

But when the use of these unusual and rare [words] is dictated by the character of the poetic work itself, the poet who disfavors their use on the pretext that he would become inaccessible and therefore disagreeable to others is definitely committing an act against art.

And he continued:

Some time ago some scientist was dividing words into aesthetic ones, which generalize, idealize the by them signifieds and in rational ones, which explain and specify them. A great part of these rare for us words that Krystallis uses could be categorized under this second category. The more general the inspiration of the poet, the less imposing the need of these specific so to speak words.

The grenade of Mitsakis' mind had already been unpinned. In September 1894, Palamas published in Hestia a translation of the poem "Hypatia" by the French parnassian poet Leconte de Lisle. For Mitsakis, the translation was not up to par and that was something he had to denounce at any cost: In October a brief and anonymous criticism of the translation appeared in Asty. Palamas reacted strongly by publishing, in the same month, a lengthy response in Hestia.

The conflict was then out of control. On December 6, 1894 Mitsakis started writing one of the greatest critical "libels" in the history of Greek letters. That text, entitled "A few Words", was included in the feuilletons of Asty under the general designation "The intellectual movement in Greece." In every installment the lament from Mani: "If you're behind, come reach me / and if you're ahead, wait" was repeated as a motto.

The first thing to be challenged in that text was Pala-

<sup>14</sup>Mitsakis, Mikhail, Critical Texts Letters Poetry, Costas and Helen Ouranis Foundation, Athens 2007 p.712-716

mas' originality. He insisted that a large part of Palamas' non-poetic work was a loan, a result of an impudent compiling. This argument, however, was reversed immediately as Mitsakis used it to refute the value of Palamas' poetic works: better to compose texts with borrowed materials than lousy poems.

Afterwards Mitsakis referred again to the "beelike compiling", namely to Palamas' tendency to appropriate foreign texts.<sup>15</sup>

With the same sharpness he broadened his criticism to cover also the form field, arguing that Palamas dealt with technicalities ignoring the connection of the form to the vital content of the poem.<sup>16</sup>

The setting of the dispute included, however, even more severe criticism. For example, the questioning of Palamas' ability to assimilate philosophical ideas and turn them into poetic sense.<sup>17</sup>

As the text unfolded, criticism gave way to complete and utter rejection: "[Palamas] has no personal style, nor proper form, nor vocabulary, nor rule, nor actual principles, he only makes noise in vain... he simply doesn't know how to write."

The rejection was brought to completion at the end of the text, when Mitsakis connected the poet's work with the passion for power in the field of letters and with the constant anxiety to ensure his dominance in the stock-market of ideas.

Asty published it in four installments from January 29th to February 2nd 1895. At the time of the publication, Palamas announced in Hestia: "To all that, which in full knowledge of the incongruous Asty has started publishing, I declare that I won't give any answer. Costis Palamas."

On December 19th 1894 Mitsakis telegraphed the short-story "Panagia Megalomata" [Holy Mary with the Large Eyes] to the publishers of the newspaper "Imerologio tou Scip-Romiou", who had to pay, in order to receive it, five cents a word. When questioned about it, Mitsakis answered the newspaper that they had asked him to send his contribution "telegraphically" and that was what he did. The next day, on December 20th, he went through the gates of the Psychiatric Hospital of Corfu -- the same psychiatric hospital he had visited a few years ago to write one of his vignettes entitled "In the House of the Mad", in which he informed us that he ran away during that visit, because, listening to how calmly the mentally ill conversed among themselves, he

feared that madness could be contagious and fled.

He was hospitalized there for fifteen days. In the admission registry is mentioned the diagnosis of "manic crisis", together with the fact that he paid part of his medical expenses himself. He was released on January 5, 1895, following a visit by his brother, who was a physician of the palace, and returned to Athens.

But what led our author to this destabilization? Why did the triggering of his psychosis followed this –in every other way literary- confrontation, which for him took on a dimension of a life or death struggle? The blow inflicted by Palamas' "derogatory" commentary on his writing style and, by extension, on Mitsakis' fragile "body of words" was fatal. Let's see why.

## "LOGOLATRIA" – THE PECULIAR ATTRACTION OF THE PSYCHOTIC SUBJECT TOWARDS LANGUAGE

Jean-Claude Maleval argues in his book *The Foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father* that the singular attraction displayed by psychotic subjects towards language is made known in so obvious a way that it couldn't but have been identified a long time ago<sup>18</sup>. When, in the late 19th century, Tanzi underlined the "logolatria" of certain psychotics, their extra tendency to create neologisms was already well ascertained.

For this reason, these phenomena are our starting point for studying the clinical description of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the Father.<sup>19</sup> Besides, the importance of these phenomena to the field of psychosis was what led Lacan, in 1956, to –at least temporarily- demand the existence of language disorders as a prerequisite for discussing the diagnosis.

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<sup>18</sup>Maleval, Jean-Claude, *La forclusion du Nom-du-Père*, Seuil, Paris, 2000, p. 161.

<sup>19</sup>Name-the-Father (Fr.: Nom-du-Père). "When the expression "the name of the father" first appears in Lacan's work, in the early 1950s, it is without capital letters and refers generally to the prohibitive role of the FATHER as the one who lays down the incest taboo in the Oedipus complex (i.e. to the symbolic father); 'It is in the name of the father that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function, which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law' (E, 67). From the beginning Lacan plays on the homophony of le nom du père (the name of the father) and le 'non' du père (the 'no' of the father), to emphasise the legislative and prohibitive function of the symbolic father. A few years later, in the seminar on the psychoses (Lacan, 1955-6), the expression becomes capitalised and hyphenated and takes on a more precise meaning; the Name-of-Father is now the fundamental signifier which permits signification to proceed normally. This fundamental signifier both confers identity on the subject (it names him, positi-

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<sup>15</sup>Dimiroulis, Dimitris, "A Forgotten Critical 'Libel'", *H Kyriakatiki Avgi*, June 5, 2005

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

So, if it is accurate that neither linguistic nor cognitive studies are in a position to allow the conception of this –however undeniable– clinical phenomenon that is composed by the disorders of the psychotic's language, it seems necessary to consider what is beyond these approaches, namely the subject of the unconscious.<sup>20</sup>

Psychiatry was led to produce a large number of concepts for every disorder of the psychotic's language, the enumeration and explanation of which is the subject of many voluminous treatises. Freud and Lacan intervened in this diversity. They could only do so by deducing, through elaborate study, the mechanisms that would allow them to conceive the essential in subjective function. They produced a remarkable conceptual economy by restoring the variety of descriptions, which open up to infinity, to a really small number of procedures. In the 1950s, Lacan suggested the dichotomy: full intuition – empty formulation/stereotyped phrase; in 1915 Freud distinguished the major event in the psychotics' tendency<sup>21</sup> to be satisfied with words in place of things ("but then find themselves obliged to be content with words instead of things"<sup>22</sup>). This often cited and of great soundness formulation deserves to be seriously considered in the case of our author.

### THE WORD IN PLACE OF THE THING – THE PRIMACY OF THE LETTER – THE PROPER- RARE WORD

Maleval indicates that J.-P. Falret had noticed since 1854 the prominence of the letter in the thought and speech of the psychotics: "An impression, a memory, a simple consonance phenomenon," he wrote, "are sufficient to change the direction of their thoughts [...] it should be noted that the connection of thoughts is mediated more by secondary relationships between words and sounds than by logical relationships ..." Psychiatry

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ons him within the symbolic order), and signifies the Oedipal prohibition, the 'no' of the incest taboo. If this signifier is foreclosed (not included in the symbolic order), the result is PSYCHOSIS. In another work on psychosis (Lacan, 1957-8b), Lacan represents the Oedipus complex as a metaphor (the PATERNAL METAPHOR), in which one signifier (the Name-the-Father) substitutes another (the desire of the mother)." [Evans, Dylan, *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 122].

<sup>20</sup>Maleval, Jean-Claude, *La forclusion du Nom-du-Père*, Seuil, Paris, 2000, p. 175.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>22</sup>Freud, Sigmund, *The Unconscious*, Elliniki Paideia, Athens 2016, p.62 [in Greek]

has long ago described such a process of word over-investment using the terms "logolatria" or "verbal fetishism". It is considered as one of the major characteristics of the psychotic language. This phenomenon, according to Freud, should be preceding a withdrawal of the pulsion investment from "the points which represent the unconscious presentation of the object", so that delirium, as a treatment effort, would tend to "recover the lost objects" in an attempt "to rediscover the path that leads to the object via the word element of the object." As a consequence, a tendency of the psychotic towards empty, cut-off from representation abstractions would arise. The explanatory schema of the primacy of the relationship of the word, "the primacy of the relationship of the word over the relationship of the thing," complemented with the notion according to which words are subjected to the primary mental process, proves to be so sufficient for the understanding of all (relevant) phenomena that Freud, in an article which after all wasn't focused on the theory of psychosis, did not attempt to investigate them further.

We know that most psychoanalytic works devoted to psychosis are inspired by one text, that of Schreber. We have often established that many psychotics devote their existence to writing. The remarkable abundance of production in certain cases leads us to talk about graphomania. It is not uncommon for the psychotics to display an early interest in etymological inquiries or in word games like crosswords, puzzles, anagrams, palindromes, etc. Taking these factors, along with some others, into serious account, we must add a second clarification to the Freudian approach: the words with which the psychotic finds himself satisfied consist, more precisely, in letters.

These are the same letters that Freud brought out in the formations of the unconscious. Maleval pointed out that we know that Freud easily compares dream mechanisms to puzzles or hieroglyphics, to emphasize the fact that images should be regarded as phonetic elements. Lacan stressed, since 1957, "the instance of the letter in the unconscious": the signifier is a symbolic element that has nothing but differential value, it is not perceivable except when paired with another; on the contrary, the letter is a real object that can be isolated, something proved by the typographer's type case, so that it is identified as the "essentially localized structure of the signifier."<sup>23</sup> It constitutes "that material support that concrete (not abstract) discourse borrows from lan-

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<sup>23</sup>Lacan, Jacques, « L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud », στο *Écrits*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 501.

guage”<sup>24</sup> and which contains no meaning before the idea to pair with other bodies as inane as itself crosses its mind. To take the word literally means to isolate it from the chain. Psychoanalysis reveals that the enjoyment of the subject is hooked on the “non-thinking” literal rendering of elements involved in the various formations of the unconscious. The function of the letter is to be the littoral zone between enjoyment and knowledge. It constitutes the body of the symptom, whose enjoyment it defines without an Other. So if psychosis produces “a rejection of the unconscious,” we realize that in psychosis, better so than anywhere else, “the symptom, if we are able to read it, is articulated most clearly in the structure itself.”<sup>25</sup> The insufficiency of the repression function contributes to the emergence within the manifest content of the symptom of what remains latent in the neurotic. The enjoyment that is literally bound on the thing constitutes the start of the clinic of psychosis.

A deeper understanding of the course of Mitsakis, the author and man, is, then, reflected on his singular relationship with the word, with the signifying material as such, with the Lacanian letter itself. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the real of the signifier, the materiality of the signifying material, the letter as such constituted Mitsakis’ existence. In fact, it was an existence grounded on the belief, on the unshakeable belief in the existence of the appropriate words. The appropriate word, the right, the rare word, the word that identifies body and mind, that can speak the essence of things, this word, for Mitsakis, does exist. This is what is indicated by his persistence on the coveted identification of content and form: “Language and Idea, Concept and Expression, Form and Content, no matter how they call them, for me they are usually interrelated, ... inseparable, ... integral”<sup>26</sup>

This faith in the word that includes the object  $\alpha$ <sup>27</sup> explains the course of his life. Let’s see, indicatively, some

features of this course:

1. This belief in the word is what renders the student newspaper Taygetos into his teenage existence, since through its handwritten columns, from the first to the last word, he practices calligraphy, composes articles, writes about history and philosophy. It is the newspaper in which he personally chose each word separately. He parted with it only when he was about to come to Athens.

2. In Athens, though, the conformism of legal language won’t hold him for more than two years. Mitsakis wants to choose the words himself, to be the creator, the artisan of the signifying material. What suits him is a profession that offers him freedom in the choice of words, so he chooses that of the journalist, the journalist who writes what he wants, as he wants it, and when he wants. The restrictions in his writing emanate only from him; he is the editor of the newspaper, the magazine, the publication. Whenever he feels that he can not shape things, writing, in his own personal way, he shifts to another publication. He does not accept any instructions from any editor, any colleague, any employer. His formalism is above all. The word combining idea and form is above all. He never gives an inch to anything and anyone.

3. But, isn’t this belief in the existence of the appropriate word also the reason that makes him participate in every street squabble? This is, after all, a favourite pastime of his. His belief in the appropriate word leads him to whisper different things to each of the two participants, so as to bring peace, the end of conflict.

4. The same phenomenon seems to occur at this anecdotal scene: sitting with friends, eating and drinking in one of their numerous pasta-eating events, Romos Philyras gets up to recite his poem “The Charmer.” Mitsakis, however, because he feels that one word is not appropriate, is not crafted properly, is not up to the challenge, gets up and leaves, leaving everyone speechless. Precisely for this reason: When a word is not in place, his whole world falls apart. His word-made existence collapses. And it is not far from the truth to say that his word-made “body” collapses. And the scene of the collapse is something that may not be witnessed by others.

5. This belief in the existence of the appropriate word is, so to speak, also the reason for the perpetual, laborious, Sisyphean, agonizing search which will secure him the designation “alcoholic of description.” Object  $\alpha$  is not lost, and Mitsakis perpetually, constantly attempts to find it. In this way, he keeps on moving metonymically, his seven rows have thirty adjectives and the scene described seems to enclose/encompass the entire weight of the signifying material. The belief in the existence of the appropriate word tends to leave nothing hidden. It

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid p.495

<sup>25</sup>Lacan, Jacques, « D’une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose », in *Écrits*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 537.

<sup>26</sup>Mitsakis, Mikhail, *Narratives and travelogues*, Costas and Helen Ouranis Foundation, Athens, 2006, p. 126 [in Greek]

<sup>27</sup>Object  $\alpha$  is one of Lacan’s major theoretical constructions. He evolves it through the different periods of his teaching, considering it originally as the object of desire, then as a residue that remains after the introduction of the symbolic into the real, to position it, in 1974, at the heart of the Borromean knot, at the point where all three classes (real, symbolic and imaginary) are interconnected. [Evans, Dylan, *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1996]

is one more of his attempts to reach the essence of the object.

6. But, ultimately, this is the reason he was so devastated by Palamas' speech during Krystallis' literary memorial service. For there existed a radical difference of opinions on the position of writing as such, a difference, finally, between, on the one hand, the form, the choice of words, the signifying material, that according to Palamas characterise painter-creators (namely Mitsakis and his alter ego, Krystallis) and, on the other hand, lo and behold, content, that characterises philosopher-poets (namely Palamas himself). Palamas struck a devastating blow on Mitsakis' body of words. It was as if Palamas, the "persecutor", was telling him precisely this: "You, who are not a philosopher-poet, you who do not have access to content, namely to the essence of things, you will never succeed. And your words are worthless; they will never manage to tell the essence of things."

## THE STRUCTURAL FAILURE OF THE SYMBOLIC

The appropriate word does not exist. It does not exist structurally. Therefore, since it does not exist, our author cannot, of course, find it. And for this reason he resorts to endless series of words, adjectives and adjuncts.

We would say, in particular, that if repression had worked, if it had accomplished its task, the subject would have been able to content itself with approximations, it would have been able to trust in the fact that, despite the somewhat inappropriate word, the message will be send and the other will read, will understand it. But this is not the case here, Mitsakis can not tolerate this uncertainty. He does not accept this convention, namely that there is a part of the word that can not be said: the unspeakable, what by definition can not be said by the word. He wants to find the right word no matter what, to find the word, namely, that will speak the essence of things. And, what's more, the essence without any residue.

The word is the thing, in the sense that we have seen it above, according to the Freudian perspective. Therefore, here, in Mitsakis' case, we come across a large flaw of the symbolic system, which does not stay in place. Metonymy happens because his delirium is based specifically on this: namely on the delusional belief that words say everything; that words can potentially say everything.

Since the word and the thing are one and the same, there is knowledge in the real.<sup>28</sup> There is no gap be-

tween knowledge and the real.

In other words, the symbolic bears this flaw. The system itself, if one can see it from this point of view, gives this dimension, the assumption that everything can be said. (But the real too, viewed from its side, has this same flaw, namely that it can, potentially, be utterly reduced to the symbolic). When the symbolic cannot find the right word, then the author finds himself faced with the hole in the symbolic and this he cannot stand! And Mitsakis leaves! He stands before a symbolic which, from this side of things, does not function, if the right word, which according to him always exists, slips by, eludes him, deceives him. He admits: "I love beautiful phrases in exactly the same fashion as beautiful women, with the same passion, the same love, the same infatuation. And again, exactly like these, alas! Those too cheat on me, cheat on me..."<sup>29</sup>

His system is, so to speak, neutralized. The belief that there is nothing that cannot be said, that the word can say the unspeakable, makes him unable to withstand the hole in the symbolic.

Since repression does not work, things and words are not open to interpretation and a residue should be remaining. This is not acceptable in our case.

Let us analyze it further: Once we speak, the symbolic cuts a hole in the real. The fact that we are talking, the event of our speech as such, creates a hole in the code and every time we talk, the code is rendered insufficient. Because every time we speak, we say things that are open to interpretations. At this point we have the hole in the code, which our author, the subject Mikhail Mitsakis, does not want to admit. Because there are people who do try to keep this code complete, intact, so that subjectivity, which is already problematic for them, does not to enter the game.

So, the search for the appropriate word, which can be reduced to the author's attempt to tell the essence of things, is rendered, by structure, futile. And it is exactly this blow that he feels he suffers from his opponent by the confirmation of the fact that he will never be able to find the right word, because he is simply not capable. Failing to be protected from the real through language, he surrenders more than any other to the power of a deregulated enjoyment.

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says, and it is beyond meaning, but feeds thought with reasons. In science, it is what belongs beyond structured knowledge. In psychoanalysis, it defines "the impossible", because it is impossible to imagine and impossible to integrate into the symbolic order. [Evans, Dylan, Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Routledge, London, 1996]

<sup>28</sup>Karakalos, Angelos, "Looking for Mikhail Mitsakis", i lexi, 90, p. 995

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<sup>29</sup>The real (*réel*): is the one "always in its place" as Lacan

And he, like many other psychotics, perceives his being in the sense of a fallen object. In the absence of the phallic signifier that supports the image of the body, the body becomes for Schreber a "leper corpse", for Artaud, "a raw burger" for Volfson a "living corpse". When the phallic representation of enjoyment shows a deficit, the subject is at risk to conceive itself as the Other's object of enjoyment, coincident with the object  $\alpha$ , a language litter.

And this is exactly what happened with our author. From this point onwards, he embodied this "litter" of language.

From January 2nd to January 13th, 1895, seven of his travel notes (the largest number in such a short period) were published in the newspaper Acropolis. He intended to publish these works and he was already raising donations for this purpose. On January 5 he was released from the mental hospital. On January 29 "A few Words" was published in four installments.

Over the next fifteen months his literary production and his surviving correspondence are reduced to a minimum.

On April 17, 1896 Mitsakis is hospitalized for the second time in the psychiatric clinic in Dromokaitio Hospital at the request of his brother Panagiotis, because a few days earlier, while reading one of his works to G. Kaklamanos, a literature professor living in the upstairs apartment (as Stephanos Stephanou informs us), when Mitsakis felt that Kaklamanos didn't agree with his views, he attempted to choke him and then went out in the street shouting and asking why he was being persecuted and what it was they wanted from him.

A woman was used as bait for his confinement, while the admission registry states: "Medical history: intelligent but unhinged. He went mad three years ago in Corfu. He was cured. Present condition: suffering from the mental illness of the degenerates [Magnan's degeneration psychoses] manifested by impulses, fear and vague persecution ideas. Diagnosis: Schizophrenia of the paranoid form." He was released after five months, once again at the request of his brother.

Mitsakis continued to walk the same Athenian streets and to frequent the same offices, but he was no longer the same: he was branded with the stigma of the mad. He gradually became cut off from the professional, social and family circle. He no longer worked as a journalist, nor did he have any income. A third hospitalization followed in 1911 and a fourth and final one in 1912. He died in the psychiatric clinic on June 6, 1916.

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