

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN THE MARCH TOWARDS BIOPOLITICAL SANITY

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In her speech "Dimensions of Biopolitics", Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis introduced, for the first time in international literature, new vocabulary: bio-assessment, bio-legislators, bio-lawyers, bio-art^{1,2} etc.. This paper introduces the new term: "bio-literature". It is certainly additional proof that the vision of the Biopolitics International Organisation is all-embracing and relates to all areas of human endeavor.

I come before you, distinguished men of science, as "a man of letters". I do so with a little smugness (which the dictionary defines as "contentedly confident of one's own superiority or correctness") because I believe that literature may prove the most powerful weapon in the campaign to save the earth for the next millennium.

There have been many instances in history where the pen has been "mightier than the sword". There was, in recent history, a rather dramatic instance which relates to the work at hand, namely, the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson which ultimately led to the worldwide discontinuance of the use of DDT.

During Congressional hearings in Washington D.C., Representative, Jamie Whitten, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture and a pesticide enthusiast said: "The worst residue problem we have to face today is the residue of public opinion left by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*."³

Joel Primack and Frank Von Hippel, in their book, *Advice and Dissent: Scientists in the Political Arena*, had this to say in their chapter entitled: "The Battle Over Persistent Pesticides": "The story of the struggle over DDT has much to teach those contemplating involvement in efforts to bring about responsible federal policies for technology. Among these is the effectiveness of a well-written book. More than 10 years after its publication, *Silent Spring* remains a classic influential statement of the case for restraint and care in the use of pesticides and, by analogy, of technology in general."⁴

But despite her initial success, the world which Rachel Carson desperately tried to save - the earth, the air, the seas, the flora, the fauna, and not least of all, ourselves - has further been corrupted and poisoned and the biosphere is continuing to deteriorate.

Yet, though we might have expected continuing philosophical and literary pessimism as a result of this deterioration; a deepening of man's alienation from society and nature - the type we find in the philosophies of the existentialists in the first half of the 20th century from Nietzsche and Spengler to Sartre and Camus - there is now, instead, a zeitgeist of return, of synthesis, of evolution.

There are many illustrations to choose from. Erazim Kohak's *The Embers and the Stars* subtitled: *A Philosophical Inquiry Into The Moral Sense of Nature*, is a lyrical example. Acknowledging his debt to Teilhard de Chardin he writes: "To recover the moral sense of our humanity, we would need to recover first the moral sense of nature." And then he demonstrates his own recovery: "I sense my own place in the rhythm of the seasons, from seed time to harvest, the falling leaves and the stillness of winter. I can cherish the fragile beauty of the first trillium against the dark moss, and I can mourn its passing, I can know the truth of nature and serve its good, as a faithful steward. I can be still before the mystery of the holy, the vastness of the starry heavens and the grandeur of the moral law ..."⁵

These dimensions of return, more and more include the synthesis of East and West at last. Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration Of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* recalls a similar experience to that of Erazim Kohak. This, from the Preface to *The Tao of Physics*: "5 years ago, I had a beautiful experience which set me on a road that has led to the writing of this book. I was sitting by the ocean late one summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance. Being a physicist, I knew that the sand, rocks, water and air around me were made of vibrating molecules and atoms, and that these consisted of particles which interacted with one another by creating and destroying other particles. I knew also that the Earth's atmosphere was continually bombarded by showers of 'cosmic rays', particles of high energy undergoing multiple collisions as they penetrated the air. All this was familiar to me from my research in high-energy physics, but until that moment I had only experienced it through graphs, diagrams and mathematical theories. As I sat on that beach my former experiences came to life; I 'saw' cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I 'heard' its sound, and at that moment I knew that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers worshipped by Hindus."⁶

And so to the "Biosphere" of the physical world has been added the "Noosphere" of the world of thought. And the "Mega-Synthesis" and "pointOmega". In the philosophic works of Teilhard de Chardin, whose terms these are, we find an optimistic vision of man's evolution - of an "ultra-hominization" - a "future stage of evolution", as Huxley describes "in which man will have so far transcended himself as to demand some new appellation."⁷

Is this not also the vision for mankind expressed throughout the works of the great modern Greek writer, Nikos Kazantzakis, especially in poetic form in *Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* and *The Saviors of God*? Indeed, it is in Kazantzakis that we find a fusion of man's Dionysian relationship to the Earth; of the East as a fountain of spirituality; of the ascent of mankind as an individual duty and obligation. "Good is the earth", he sings in the Prologue of *Odyssey*, "it suits us! Like the global grape it hangs, dear God, in the blue air and sways in the gale, nibbled by all the birds and spirits of the four winds. Come, let's start nibbling too and so refresh our minds!"⁸

Of Buddha, he writes, in *Report to Greco*: "Of all the people the earth has begotten, Buddha stands resplendently at the summit, an absolutely pure spirit. Without fear or sorrow, filled with mercy and good judgment, he extended his hand and, smiling gravely, opened the road to salvation. All beings follow impetuously behind him. Submitting freely to the ineluctable, they bound like kid goats going to suckle. Not only men, but all beings: men, beasts, trees."⁹

Of Assent, he writes, in *The Rock Garden*: "Your first duty, in completing your service to your race, is to feel within you all your ancestors. Your second duty is to throw light on their onrush and to continue their work. Your third duty is to pass on to your son the great mandate to surpass you."¹⁰

Side by side with these philosophic, scientific, and poetic expressions of return, synthesis, and evolution is a growing body of fiction in the form of popular novels and "best sellers". The zeitgeist has permeated all literary genres.

Again, there are many examples to choose from. *2150 A.D.* by Thea Alexander, first published in 1976, is perhaps the most astonishing of its genre. It is at once fiction and philosophy; utopian romance in the tradition of More and Bellamy; and evolutionary conjecture. It is the description of an evolved mankind and his society. It is as if the visions of a Chardin or a Kazantzakis were suddenly made concrete.

The story is told through the journal of its central character who, during a sleep in 1976 "micro-time", wakes up in 2150 A.D. and discovers an utopian world of the "macro" society. He then begins commuting between the everyday micro-world we live in and the macro-world of our dreams. The continuous contrast builds disgust for this micro-world of ours in the character (but more importantly in the reader). Listen to the disgust: "Now wait a minute, Karl," I replied. 'Let's be fair. Let's be pragmatic. Let's compare the results. Our micro society of 1976 is dedicated to selfish exploitation of others in the interest of short-term material pleasures. This selfish behavior is performed and perpetuated in the name of our freedom, our family, our city, our state, our nation, our religion, or in the name of communism, socialism, capitalism, or some other "damnism", and it has produced inconceivable amounts of human misery. The world of 1976 is a world of selfish divisions breeding suspicion, distrust, hatred, and endless conflict both internally and internationally. It's a world so divided and so unable to cooperate that it has polluted its land, its water, its animal life, and even the air we breathe, to such an extreme that our planetary survival is in question. As for our people, at least one out of three lives in poverty, disease, and semi-starvation. This, Karl, in spite of the fact that we have the resources and the technology to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and education to each and every person on this entire planet!"¹¹

In contrast, there is one paragraph among all the descriptions and adventures, in which macro society is most concisely characterized. And, if we read it carefully, we find - not to our surprise - return, synthesis and evolution. It reads: "The ultimate purpose of all souls in all of their experiences is to attain macrocosmic awareness of their oneness with all that is, all that was, and all that ever will be (what some would call "God")."¹²

At the conclusion of Dr. Andreja Miletic's paper, *Philosophical Aspects of the Bio-Environment*, which also appears in the *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Biopolitics*, succinctly states that which alone is necessary to save us for the next millennium: "Nothing essential can be changed in man's relationship with nature unless everything is changed in man-to-man relations both inside and among societies."¹³ Perhaps "a well-written book" will appear (or perhaps it will be the collective effect of the many) to move us, to affect us, to transform us "both inside and among societies."

If so, then that "smugness" I spoke of at the opening of this lecture will surely be justified. Listen to Walt Whitman, one of America's greatest poets, who sings with enormous smugness of the literary artist's role, oh, so eloquently:

*After the seas are all cross'd (as they seem already cross'd)
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,
After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,
Finally shall come the poet worthy of that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.*

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