FROM THE EDITORS

Why “World Hellenisms”? What were we thinking when we sent this issue to press with such a name? The phrase seems to invite disaster on multiple fronts.

First, there’s the opacity of “Hellenisms.” Why the plural? What precisely do these Hellenisms mean? Then, of course, there’s the breadth of its scope—“World”—one whose weight our issue can hardly hope to bear in any real sense. Nor indeed would we want to. There are very real political problems lurking within any encyclopedic claim to represent the whole world over. And yet, here we are with the word “world” in our title. At the risk of making empty promises to our readers, promises that this issue will lead them, like Lucian’s True Story, across vast, fantastical geographies, over seas of milk or, indeed, through the outer arc of space itself, where they might contemplate our planet as some seamless, unified entity, we’ve chosen the word “world” with quite a different aim in mind: to push (and prod) Hellenism beyond its geographic and cultural comfort zones, to set it tumbling off beyond the borders (and we mean both external and internal borders) of its stifling nation-state, in a wide-ranging but always site-specific and localized itinerary. At each stop along the way, we wanted this Greekness to find its plurals—hence the “Hellenisms” of our title. While they present no unified topography, tongue or even topic, these Hellenisms map out the contours of a shared conversation.

Surely today’s Hellenism isn’t limited to Hellas, nor to the Hellenic language. We looked for writings that explored Greece from the perspective of visitors, displaced persons, and marginalized people looking in, or, conversely, from the perspective of locals striving to break out. We looked for non-Greek texts set in non-Greek locales that traced the Hellenisms of their own place and history. We looked for representations of Greekness that productively unsettled us with their unfamiliarity.

Rather than attempting to settle on a singular definition, however broad, we hope that the selection of texts in this issue suggests a shifting, prismatic quality to the notion of the “Hellenic.” Speaking from multiple languages, through multiple translators, and across multiple forms—fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry—the texts that we’ve assembled here create a kind of din, like a motley group of travelers pausing at an inn for the night before they continue on their way(s) the
next day. Listen closely, however, and you’ll hear them interacting, debating, laughing at shared jokes or mourning lost friends. They engage creatively with the archetypes of Greek mythology (Boukova, Hooleh), reflect on the history and politics of the Greece of today and of a century ago, through the streets of Athens and across the Aegean (Chouliares, Shoshkes, Capossela), and even delve into the well-trodden libraries of the Modern Greek literary canon (Sotiropoulos, Emam, both tracking the liminal figure of Cavafy in France and Egypt, respectively). We were inspired by the idea of travel more generally, of movement across time and space, beginning with the stifling enclosure of Kastrisiou’s haunting story, following Polygeni’s lyrical orbits and explorations, and ending with Ioannou’s questioning of the future.

Only by traveling alongside them will you understand what these Hellenisms mean.

We also would like to thank the Absinthe team, Megan Berkobien, Elisabeth Fertig, Graham Liddell and Genta Nishku, for their invaluable contributions towards putting this issue together.

The editors would like to extend special thanks to Professor Vassilios Lambropoulos and Professor Artemis Leontis from the Modern Greek Studies Program at the University of Michigan, and to Dr. Etienne Charrière for their help with this issue.

This publication is made possible by the generous support of the Modern Greek Studies program and the Constantine Tsangadas Trust.

---

Ali Bolcakan
Will Stroebel
Peter Vorissis
The University of Michigan