

By Evangelia Makridi



*Dionysios Solomos*

Dionysios Solomos was born on April 8, 1798 in Zakynthos. He was the illegitimate child of a wealthy count, Nikolaos Solomos, and his housekeeper, Angeliki Nikli. His father married his mother just a day before his death to make Dionysios and his brother Dimitrios his legitimate children. The poet spent his childhood years on Zakynthos until 1808, under the supervision of his Italian tutor, Abbot Santo Rossi. In 1808, young Solomos was sent to Italy to study. He finished High School in Cremona and in 1817 he graduated from the Faculty of Law of Pavia University.

Solomos started writing poetry in Italian, as he was a fluent speaker of the language and had great knowledge of Italian literature. Soon he was welcome in Italian literary circles as a brilliant poet of the Italian language.

After 10 years of studies Solomos returned to Zakynthos in 1818 with a solid background in literature. In Zakynthos, which at that time was well known for its flourishing literary culture, the poet acquainted himself with people interested in literature. Antonios Matesis, Georgios Tertsetis, Dionysios Tagiapieras and Nikolaos Lountzis were some of Solomos' most well-known friends. They used to gather in each other's homes and entertained themselves by making up poems. They frequently satirized a Zakynthian doctor, Roidis. They also liked to improvise poems on a given rhyme and topic. His improvised Italian poems during that period of time were published in 1822, under the title *Rime Improvisate*.

Along with the Italian poems, Solomos made his first attempts to write in Greek. This was a difficult task for the young poet, since his education was classical and Italian, but also because there were no poetic works written in the vernacular that could have served as models. However, he didn't want to write in the purist language, highly influenced by Ancient Greek. He wanted to write in the language and idiom of the common people of Zakynthos. He systematically began to study traditional songs

and Cretan literature that were the best representations of the vernacular of Modern Greek literature.

The Greek Revolution of 1821 and the Exodus of Mesolugi were great inspirations for Solomos to write one of his best poems, the Hymn to Liberty. This poem was the flag bearer of the entire literary output of Solomos and established him as a master of his native idiom.

A financial dispute with his relatives forced Solomos to move to Corfu, where he found an atmosphere congenial to his poetic and lonesome nature. There he became a center of attraction for his admirers and noblemen. During his final years, Solomos began to write again poetry in Italian. He was also alienated from some of his friends and started drinking too much. He died of stroke in February 1857. His body was transferred to Zakynthos, his beloved island, in 1865.

