

# Ο ΠΡΩΤΟΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΣ

ΤΡΑΓΩΔΙΑ

## MURDER AND SUICIDE IN MODERN GREEK THEATRE (1900-1940)

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**ABSTRACT.** The conscious taking of a human life has been and remains an extremely popular theme in global dramaturgy. In particular, during the period of pre-war Modern Greek theatre, specific socio-political as well as aesthetic conditions influenced both the motives of murderers and suicides in the plays of the time, and the issues that playwrights aimed to highlight by presenting such acts and such characters through their works. Focusing on gender relations, this study examines and analyzes the way the murderer and the suicidal person are portrayed in Modern Greek dramaturgy from 1900 to 1940.

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** Modern Greek Theatre, Dramaturgy, Murder, Suicide.



with the emergence of a generation of new

at the beginning of the 20th century, Modern Greek dramaturgy experienced an unprecedented flourishing

playwrights influenced by contemporary trends in European theatre. The dominant influences were from naturalism, realism, and Ibsenian dramaturgy,<sup>1</sup> though symbolism, neo-romanticism, and aestheticism<sup>2</sup> also had a strong impact. Social drama and ethnographic plays became the most popular theatrical genres, while the depiction of

<sup>1</sup> For the influence of Ibsenian dramaturgy in Greece, cf. Παπανδρέου 1983; Μπλέσιος 1998: 144–154; Χατζηπανταζής 2010: 629–639; Λαδογιάννη 2011: 164–240; Κασίνης 2015: 119–138; Μόσχος 2016; Σταυρακοπούλου 2023.

<sup>2</sup> For aestheticism in Greece, cf. Ξεφλούδας 1957; Σαχίνης 1981; Περάνης 2003a; Πετράκου 2004; Αραμπατζίδου 2012; Νταρακλίτσα 2016: 43–273.

behaviors and relationships was scrutinized through the lens of new social issues emerging during that period. The influence of the Greek feminist movement was significant, highlighting the position of women and drawing attention to issues such as murders and suicides committed for reasons of honor or crimes of passion linked to the control of female sexuality, whether within the family or the institution of marriage.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the rise of socialism, which brought social issues to the forefront, inspired writers to depict crimes with a class dimension, showcasing the moral decay of the upper bourgeois or aristocratic class.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, new aesthetic trends opened new pathways in the way even extreme behaviors, such as murder or suicide, were presented and interpreted.

### 1. MURDER AND SUICIDE THROUGH A GENDERED LENS: CRIME AND SUICIDE FOR REASONS OF HONOR.

Female sexuality and its control were, during that period, directly intertwined with the status and image a family — regardless of social class — projected within its community. Thus, when a young woman deviated from acceptable behavior, a male family member, usually the brother, was expected to punish her by death, restore the family's honor, and reestablish moral order within both the family and society. This is because the issue of «honor» and «shame» was not considered a personal or even a family matter, but one that concerned the entire community, both in Greece and throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup> Even in cases of rape, «the perceived immorality of a woman's feminized life was seen as an affront to public morals and was punished as such — not the act of violence itself — since the feminized life was believed, in any case, to provoke violence and to require violence to be brought under control».<sup>6</sup>

This practice had begun to be seriously questioned both by feminist circles of the time and by a new generation of bourgeois citizens who, having absorbed Western influences more than their predecessors, regarded such practices as barbaric and regressive. They approached these issues through a social, class-based, and gendered lens. In 1904, Markos Avgeris, in his drama *In Front of the People* (*Μπροστά στους ανθρώπους*), presents his protagonist Loukas refusing to kill his seventeen-year-old sister, Annetta, after her seduction by the son of the local Lord. Then, the entire village takes revenge.<sup>7</sup> The girl is whipped and publicly humiliated by the enraged crowd, while her brother, tied hand and foot, is forced to watch her torment. Eventually, he throws her into the river to deliver her from her suffering. In this way, both violators of the «code corresponding to their social gender»<sup>8</sup> were punished. The custom of public shaming is a centuries-old tradition and was typically applied «in cases of adultery, but also arson, astrology, pederasty, and defloration. [...] The penalty was imposed by local leaders and executed by community authorities with the massive participation of the crowd».<sup>9</sup>

Grigorios Xenopoulos addressed the issue of honor killings and the judicial system's tolerance of such crimes in two of his plays: *The Brother's Honor* (*Η τιμή του αδελφού*, 1916) and *Thanasis' Trial* (*Η δίκη του Θανάση*, 1924).<sup>10</sup> In these two dramas, the murderous brother is, in reality, the one who prostituted his own sister and killed her when she tried to break free from his control and change her life. In court, he claims to have killed her for reasons of honor and is acquitted. Critics recognized the social significance of the works<sup>11</sup> and noted that Xenopoulos was

3 For the feminist movement in Greece, cfr. Αβδέλα-Ψαρρά 1985; Βαρίκα 1996; Αβδέλα 2010: 89–118; Παχή 2013: 1–7.

4 For the advent of the socialist movement in Greece, cfr. Νούτσος 1990.

5 Αβδέλα 2006: 196–229.

6 Τζανάκη 2018: 99.

7 Ξενόπουλος 1904: 23–24.

8 Μαυρογένη 2011: 574.

9 Γεωργοπούλου 2011: 86–87.

10 Ξενόπουλος 1916a; 1925a; 1925b.

11 Σταθ. Τιμ. 1916.

among the first playwrights to exploit a theme that was particularly popular in newspaper headlines of the time.<sup>12</sup>

Konstantinos Rodokanakis, in *Ampara* (Η αμπάρα, 1917), also criticizes honor crimes by having the betrayed husband defend his unfaithful wife, who was murdered by her brother. The brother «representing the prevailing and especially in villages long-standing limited views, considered the offense as a stain upon the entire family».<sup>13</sup> The husband, in turn, attacks and kills his wife's murderer. As Greece moved closer to the Interwar period, the murder of a woman for the «honor of the family» began to seem outdated and a relic of a provincial, conservative mindset.

It is not only the brother who commits honor crimes, but also the husband when confronted with an unfaithful wife, though his sense of honor more often directs him against his wife's lover. The practice of dueling—using firearms in more urban settings and knives in working-class contexts—was also a common phenomenon in Greek society at the time, not always motivated by infidelity. In *The Revelry* (*Το ξεφάντωμα*, 1906) by Ilias Koulouvatos, *The Red Shirt* (*Το κόκκινο πουκάμισο*, 1908) by Spyros Melas, and *While He Was at War* (*Ενώ πολεμούσε*, 1915) by K. Ladopoulos, the husbands kill their wives' lovers. However, in Koulouvatos' play, the husband himself is corrupt and unfaithful,<sup>14</sup> while Stavros, the protagonist in Melas' work, is a more complex character. He does not punish his wife but tells her he is going «to stain his own shirt red so she'll like it».<sup>15</sup> He kills her lover but is himself fatally wounded and dies in her arms while she weeps and expresses her love. Xenopoulos praised the play, concluding that Melas was superior to all the writers of his generation for masterfully developing the

soul of the common people, describing it as a «gloomy popular tragedy».<sup>16</sup>

In Ladopoulos' play, written during wartime, the hero learns of his wife's infidelity upon returning from the front and, with the help of his soldiers, ambushes and kills her lover.<sup>17</sup> In *Roussa* by G. Kazantzakis (*Ρούσσα*, 1917), an old and ailing man is married to a young woman who has a young lover. She has no moral qualms and enjoys the benefits of both relationships. Her husband kills the lover and pressures her to claim she was raped, but she refuses and spreads the word that her husband is the murderer.<sup>18</sup> In *A Night in the Moonlight* by I. Polemis (*Μια νύχτα με φεγγάρι*, 1918), the elderly betrayed husband kills both his wife and her lover.<sup>19</sup>

In the drama *Dalmanopoula* (*Νταλμανοπούλα*) by P. Horn, the family name defines the characters. Billyo Dalmani, granddaughter of the fire-ship captain Dalmanis, feels proud of her name and heritage, and this very name makes her aloof, creating obstacles in her love affair with a young officer, Falkos, who loves her but does not come from a prominent family. Billyo ultimately marries, out of sheer stubbornness, Sokratis Dosidolaropoulos, the nouveau riche son of a tavern owner who, according to the author, represents «the conceited parvenus who formed the aristocracy of wealth as opposed to the aristocracy of blood».<sup>20</sup> Horn's choice to have Billyo's husband die in a duel at the hands of Falkos makes Sokratis a somewhat sympathetic figure: though ridiculous, he gains some of the audience's sympathy through his completely unjust — and theatrically unredeemed — death.<sup>21</sup>

Brothers also take the law into their own hands to defend their sister's tarnished honor by killing the perpetrator. When Kitsos kills the man who raped and drove

12 Νηβάνας 1916.

13 Κ. 1917α: 115.

14 Ξενόπουλος 1906: 158-159.

15 Μελάς 1909: 72.

16 Ξενόπουλος 1908: 312-313.

17 *Θεατρική ζωή* 1915: 68.

18 Γεωργοπούλου 2011: 81.

19 *Τα Αθηναϊκά θέατρα. Θέατρον Κυβέλης* 1918: 41.

20 Χορν 1923.

21 Βαφειάδη 1994: 242.

his fifteen-year-old sister, Panoria, to suicide in *Our Man* by P. Horn (*Ο άνθρωπός μας*, 1910), he is murdered by his fellow villagers, who believe he has deprived their town of a great benefactor «who builds churches, marries off girls, and is the father of the sorrowful».<sup>22</sup> In *Panagia the Katiforitissa* (*Παναγιά η Κατηφόρισσα*, 1915) by the same playwright, Lambros kills his cousin Ernesto for seducing his sister Maria and is forced to confess the crime when an innocent man is accused of the murder.<sup>23</sup> Captain Nikolas, the hero of N. Rozan's drama *The Blood Screams Out* (*Το αίμα σκούζει*, 1916), kills his sister's fiancé in a duel after the latter refuses to marry her.

Honor killings and rape are still justified for the authors and the audience of the time, even when the perpetrator is a woman. Rape is a stigma that heroines in war dramas of the period try to escape, even through suicide or murder, as seen in *The Great Idea* by G. Vokos (*Η μεγάλη ιδέα*, 1909) and *Boycott* by P. Dimitrakopoulos (*Το μποϊκοτάζ*, 1910). When a child is born from the rape, it too bears the burden of the past. In *The Innocent Sinner* by Prince Nikolaos (*Αθώα Αμαρτωλή*, 1914), Irene has a daughter, Nelli, whom she treats coldly because she is the result of her rape by a Bulgarian officer. When the truth is revealed, the daughter commits suicide.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, a common belief, from the French Revolution to the 19th and 20th centuries, was that a man could not truly rape a woman who was determined to resist him.<sup>25</sup>

In *Old Athens* (*Η παλιά Αθήνα*, 1917) by G. Aspreas and *The Comrade* (*Ο σύντροφος*, 1922) by N. Chatzipostolou, the heroines kill the men who seduced them with the promise of marriage and then refuse to marry them. In Aspreas' drama, the girl

«although she is forgiven by people, does not find grace before divine justice and commits suicide»,<sup>26</sup> while the heroine's lover in Chatzipostolou's work is of leftist ideology and refuses to marry due to his political views.<sup>27</sup> In *Easy Victims* (*Εύκολα θύματα*, 1933) by Lili Iakovidou, the heroine enters a relationship with her superior, becomes pregnant, and he, refusing to take responsibility for the child, encourages her to have an abortion. She chooses suicide. Critics mocked the passive stance of Iakovidou's heroine, as well as the particularly bold scene of her seduction in her superior's bachelor pad.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. MURDER AND SUICIDE THROUGH A GENDERED LENS: CRIME OF PASSION AND SUICIDE OF LOVE.

Crimes of passion are equally popular among Greek playwrights of the period, showcasing a variety of causes, motives, and circumstances. Jealousy is undoubtedly a prominent cause for a crime of passion. In *Maria Pentayiotissa* (*Μαρία Πενταγιώτισσα*, 1908) by P. Nirvanas, a drama based on a popular folk myth about a fatal woman, her lover, Pothitos, kills a rival suitor and is then killed by another man who also desires Maria. The village wants to kill her, but she commits suicide by drinking poison.<sup>29</sup> Critics describe the heroine as «unforgivably vain», «shameless»,<sup>30</sup> and «a rural courtesan».<sup>31</sup>

A fatal woman becomes the subject of scandal in the play *In the sweltering heat of summer* (*Στην κάψα του καλοκαιριού*, 1944) by Th. Sinadinou and *The Evil Demon* (*Ο κακός δαίμων*, 1929) by Ad. Papadiamantis, arousing the desire of a man who, in a fit of anger and jealousy, attempts to kill her, only for an innocent third party trying to prevent the crime to be killed instead.

22 N. 1910.

23 Βαφειάδη 1994: 182.

24 Θεατρική επιθεώρησης 1914: 268.

25 Vigarello 2001: 167-179.

26 K. 1917b: 68.

27 Βασιλείου 2005: 232.

28 Θρύλος 1977: 258; Κουκούλας 1937.

29 Παναγιωτοπούλου 2014: 210-211.

30 Ψηλορείτης 1909: 51-54.

31 M. 1908.

In the first play, a servant,<sup>32</sup> and in the second, the perpetrator's brother,<sup>33</sup> die. Blind jealousy leads to crime in the hero of *The Blind Leading the Blind* (*Ο τυφλοσούρτης*, 1906) by I. Delikaterinis, who, in his frenzy, accidentally kills his wife's sister and her fiancé.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in *When We Love* (*Όταν αγαπούμε*, 1911) by H. Voutieridis, the hero, Panos, wounds and abandons his lover, Varvara, and ultimately, in his jealousy, kills a wealthy lawyer who loves her. Varvara takes the blame for the crime to save her lover.<sup>35</sup>

In *Eternal Story* (*Αιώνια Ιστορία*, 1916) by Ioannis Paksinos, the son tries to kill his mother's lover, only for her to intervene and take the bullet herself.<sup>36</sup> In *Broken Wings* (*Σπασμένα φτερά*, 1931) by D. Bogris, the lover kills the husband who tries to convince his wife to return to him. The central character of the drama is the lover, Georgios Lampiris, who draws criticism for being «a creation of sick imagination without any moral basis»<sup>37</sup> and lacking ideology and ethos.<sup>38</sup>

However, jealousy also leads women to murder in the dramas *Zouana* (*Ζουάνα*, 1914) by H. Voutieridis and *Flandro* (*Φλαντρά*, 1925) by P. Horn. In the first, the heroine poisons her husband because he is unfaithful.<sup>39</sup> In the latter, Flandro, viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, desires Notis Serdaris, who is in love with her daughter. Drunk on desire, she makes a sexual advance on Notis, and when he rejects her, she delivers him to his pursuers to die.<sup>40</sup> Criticism is divided: some con-

sider her passion «brutal lasciviousness of a repulsive woman»,<sup>41</sup> and the author's heroes «pathologically abnormal»,<sup>42</sup> while others perceive a tragic dimension in the portrayal of the heroine<sup>43</sup> and recognize the innovative elements Horn introduces to modern Greek drama with this work.<sup>44</sup>

Passion drives the female hand to violence in *Rinoula* (*Ρηνούλα*, 1918) by Aimilios Veaikis and *Maikina* (*Μαικίνας*, 1926) by Th. Synadinos. In the former, which takes place in a working-class environment, Rinoula kills her serial rapist and murderer lover with scissors.<sup>45</sup> In the latter, a typist who has a relationship with her corrupt and ambitious boss murders him when he refuses to let her end their relationship.<sup>46</sup> In both cases, critics approve and justify the actions of the heroines, describing the victim in the first work as «a drunkard, unemployed, corruptor of women»,<sup>47</sup> and in the second as «a swindler, lecherous, corruptor of girls».<sup>48</sup>

Maro is an orphaned girl from Athens who now lives with relatives in the countryside, in the drama *The Awakening* (*Το ζύπνημα*, 1940) by A. Lidorikis. A city man comes to the village looking for pure love, and he finds it in her. A villager who was once her lover claims her and blackmails her, threatening to reveal her past. She kills him. The relatives claim she killed him to protect her honor, but the young Athenian already knew who she was; he had learned about her past through gossip and didn't care.<sup>49</sup> Critics see in Maro the attempt of a person to turn a new page,

32 Σταματογιαννάκη 2018: 344.

33 Σιδέρης 2000: 260.

34 Ξενοπούλος 1907a: 300.

35 K. 1911: 142.

36 Ξενοπούλος 1916b.

37 Red 1931.

38 Χάρης 1931a.

39 Πεφάνης 2003b: 338.

40 Βαφειάδη 1994: 278.

41 Πολίτης 1925a.

42 Καλογερίκος 1925a.

43 Μπαστιάς 1925a.

44 Γεωργουσόπουλος 1984: 264.

45 *Τα αθηναϊκά θέατρα. Θέατρον Κυβέλης* 1918: 57.

46 Σταματογιαννάκη 2018: 144-145.

47 Βασιλείου 2005: 96.

48 Πολίτης 1926a.

49 Κουκούλας 1940.

only for the environment<sup>50</sup> and her own self to ultimately prevent it.<sup>51</sup>

Love is a common cause of suicide, especially among young and vulnerable men who experience rejection, like Mar- ios in *Hidden Love* (*Κρυφή αγάπη* 1911) by Ar. Sakellariou,<sup>52</sup> or Pavlos in *Rising* (*Αναδυομένη*, 1926) by Gr. Xenopoulos.<sup>53</sup> It also affects young men who fall in love with married women, only to experience rejection, abandonment, and a return to the marital home, like Zak Komér in *The Pit* (*Το βάραθρον*, 1916) by Ioannis Paksinos, or a young poet in *Past Wakes Up* (*Τα περασμένα ζυπνούν*, 1914) by Anastasios Markellos, who commits suicide by falling onto the train tracks, like Anna Karenina.<sup>54</sup>

In his play *Above This World* (*Υπεράνω του κόσμου τούτου*, 1910), G. Vokos por- trays his hero, Charilaos, as accepting and forgiving his wife, Zoí's love affair with his best friend, Giannis, while keeping both of them in his life. Zoí, unable to resist anymore, commits suicide, followed by Giannis. Critics find the stance of the betrayed husband «unorthodox», calling him a «Platonist and socialist admirer»<sup>55</sup> with a «weak character»,<sup>56</sup> and deem the foundation of the play «antisocial».<sup>57</sup> In D. Bogris' *Engagements* (*Αρραβονιάσματα*, 1925), a young fisherman commits suicide by blowing himself up with dynamite when he finds out he is in love with his half-sister and has accidentally killed his half-brother, who was mentally chal- lenged. The play, which was unanimously praised by critics,<sup>58</sup> is the first Greek play to openly address the sexual abuse of serv- ants by their masters, although Bogris sets the action in a rural island setting, where the «shadow of the master» prevails, rather than in an urban household.

Romantic disappointment can also be a cause of suicide, particularly for young girls, as seen in *Foteini Sandri* (*Φωτεινή Σάντρη*, 1908) by Gr. Xenopoulos. Foteini, a young girl who falls in love with her first cousin, commits suicide by jumping from a cliff when she receives the invitation to his wedding. The play made a significant impact and became one of the greatest successes of the pre-war theatrical scene, with the critics noting that «Foteini Sandri lives and dies in an atmosphere of beauty, reaching the limits of symbolism».<sup>59</sup>

In *Wedding March* (*Γαμήλιο εμβατήριο*, 1937) by Angelos Terzakis, a drama heavily influenced by Chekhov's *Three Sisters*,<sup>60</sup> the life of a woman in rural Greece is ex- plored through the story of a family. Ma- rina, a twenty-five-year-old, begins a love affair with a mechanic who has come to the town to build a road, hoping that he will help her move to Athens. However, he abandons her, and Marina commits suicide.<sup>61</sup> Rosa, from *Hail, Bride* (*Χαίρε νύμφη*, 1930) by Xenopoulos, already lives a life of sin as she is prostituted by her own family. She eventually commits su- icide after being abandoned by a young man who promised to save her from her life and marry her. The play shocked both the audience and critics with its rawness and provocative nature.<sup>62</sup>

In Nikos Kazantzakis' work *Dawn* (*Ξημερώνει*), the heroine, Lalo, is a lady of the upper bourgeois class, married to a man who adores her, Alekos, with whom she has a daughter. However, Lalo does not love Alekos and is deeply in love with his brother, Philippos, who has been liv- ing abroad. When Philippos returns and shows that he, too, is in love with her, the torment begins for Lalo. She is afraid to

50 Θρύλος 1977: 517.

51 Στογ. 1940; Πράτσικας 1940: 281.

52 Ο κριτικός του *Νουμά* 1911: 399.

53 Πολίτης 1926b.

54 Ο Αριθμός 13 1914: 112.

55 Ξενοπούλου 1910a.

56 *Θέατρα* 1910: 145.

57 *Ibid*

58 Πολίτης 1925b; Μπαστιάς 1925b; Καλογερίκος 1925b.

59 Μιχαηλίδης 1908: 268.

60 Σιδέρης 1960: 372; Μακρής 1980: 98; Χατζηιωαννίδης 2005: 70–72.

61 Χατζηιωαννίδης 2005: 67.

62 *Θέατρο* 1931: 205; Χάρης 1931b; Μπαστιάς 1931: 187–188.

oppose the morals she was taught by her family, and unable to cope with the rebellion of her body, she commits suicide by poisoning herself. Kazantzakis accurately describes the symptoms of neurasthenia due to suppressed emotions in her behavior.<sup>63</sup> He also foreshadows the crises that will eventually break down «proper» households and «harmonious» marriages, as in the new era of psychoanalysis and the enhanced status of women, the sexual factor acquires a different weight.<sup>64</sup>

Most critics attacked the play, mainly for the morality it invoked.<sup>65</sup> However, G. Xenopoulos saw nothing immoral in the plot and believed that the author's solution seemed even more moral than divorce, as the heroine's death purifies her in the eyes of the audience.<sup>66</sup> K. Petrakou observes that while Kazantzakis wants his heroine to be «superior to the masses», this superiority is hard to discern. Kazantzakis relies on her principles that prevent her from being unfaithful like other women of her class, but: «She suffers psychosomatically from the beginning to the end, and unable to endure either her internal conflict and unfulfilled libido or the social reproach if she abandons her family, she commits suicide».<sup>67</sup>

Equally sensitive as Lalo is Lina in Spiros Melas' play *Lina* (*Λίνα*, 1917) a married woman who has already attempted suicide. She falls in love with a young man who disappoints her, and she eventually commits suicide.<sup>68</sup> In an article before the play's performance, Melas mentions that in the behavior of his heroine, there are «causes of social and individual psychology, intellectual construction, and upbringing»<sup>69</sup> implying, according to K. Karra, that his aim is to critique a system that leaves no room for the heroine to live without her life being defined by a partner,

although later, in another article, he would state that he was more interested in the psychological portrayal of the heroine.<sup>70</sup>

### 3. MURDER AND SUICIDE THROUGH A SOCIAL/CLASS LENS

Socialism, which made its appearance in Greece at the end of the 19th century, quickly gained many admirers across the entire spectrum of the Greek political scene and intellectual circles. Leading figures of the movement included Platon Drakoulis and Stavros Kallergis. Drakoulis, in his work *Light from Within* (*Φως εκ των ένδον*, 1894), connected socialism with theosophy and Christianity,<sup>71</sup> while Kallergis, a more militant socialist, organized the first celebration of Labor Day in 1894. The concerns raised by socialist philosophy became particularly appealing to young writers. Even bourgeois authors wrote works criticizing the corruption of their own class, though without questioning its very existence. Rather, they sought a purification of their class, showing little concern for the oppression of the lower classes and without pursuing revolution, but rather aiming for social change—a change that would emerge from within the bourgeoisie itself.<sup>72</sup>

A common feature shared by both the bourgeois with such concerns and the socialist writers is that their works portray characters corrupted by money and power, who commit crimes to secure their personal interests. These are usually people in positions of power, such as Tharsis, the inhumane factory director in M. Lidorikis's *Estias* (*Εστίας*, 1917), who murders his wife when she goes to meet her former lover;<sup>73</sup> the corrupt director of a mining and financial joint-stock company, Alekos Karras, who is murdered by his mistress in *The*

63 Πούχγερ 2006: 559.

64 Πετράκου 2005: 100.

65 Διαβάτης 1907; Μώμος 1909; Δάφνης 1907: 102–103; Σταθ. Τιμ. 1907.

66 Ξενοπούλος 1907b: 222–223.

67 Πετράκου 2022: 226.

68 Καρρά 2010: 186.

69 Φορτούνιο 1917.

70 Καρρά 2010: 187.

71 Νούτσος 1990: 60.

72 Γραμματάς 1987: 121–122.

73 Κ. Ο. 1917.

*Maecenas* (*Ο Μαικήνας*, 1926) by Th. Synadinos; and Nikos, a man who hides a dark and corrupt life behind a pleasant façade, ultimately causing the suicide of his disfigured but honest brother in *Karagiozis* (*Ο Καραγκιόζης*, 1924) by Th. Synadinos.<sup>74</sup>

However, there are also corrupt politicians or state officials, such as Prosecutor Markatis, who, through his work, ensures that adulterers are convicted, while he himself maintains a relationship with a married woman and is murdered by her husband, Vrettos, for betraying both his office and his principles, in *We the Animals* by Th. Synadinos (*Εμείς τα ζώα*, 1931). Critics expressed their concerns about the philosophy underpinning the play and the reasoning the author puts in the mouth of the murderer.<sup>75</sup> Petros Haris, with an ironic tone, comments on the philosophical reflections of the betrayed husband, who would have been ready to forgive his wife's lover—if only he weren't a prosecutor punishing adultery!<sup>76</sup>

In *The Politics that Kills* by Ilias Voutieridis (*Η πολιτική που σκοτώνει*, 1914), the daughter of a wealthy businessman is pressured to marry a corrupt politician who kills her idealistic lover. However, she exposes his involvement in the crime, and after a conversation with her — where she tells him he lacks the essential political virtue, morality — he commits suicide.<sup>77</sup> In *The Pharisees* by N. Potamianos (*Οι Φαρισαίοι*, 1912), a young member of the Hellenic Parliament on an island becomes responsible for a bequest and decides to build a lighthouse instead of a church. Standing in the way of his plan is the island's former parliamentarian. Ultimately, the lighthouse is built, but the people, incited by the elderly politician, prevent it from being lit, and the hero, in an attempt to save a ship, douses himself in oil and burns alive.<sup>78</sup>

Beyond the rapidly rising bourgeois class, which was forming a «moneyed ar-

istocracy» in late 19th-century Greece—where wealthy merchants, industrialists, and shipowners controlled the palace, the governments, and, by extension, the country—there also existed an «aristocracy of blood», which had, however, fallen into decline. This referred to the aristocracy of the Phanariots, who retained their titles from the Byzantine Empire era, and the Ionian islanders, who, having been under Venetian rule for centuries, had adopted the titles of the Venetian aristocracy. There was also the aristocracy of the heroes of the 1821 Greek Revolution, as King Otto, the first monarch of Greece, had integrated revolutionary leaders and their families into his circle, such as those of Kitsos Tzavelas, Dimitrios Mavromichalis, and Kostas Botsaris.

A representative of the «blood» aristocracy is Old Petrocharis, a financially and socially ruined descendant of 1821 revolution heroes, in P. Horn's drama *The Petrocharis Family* (*Πετροχάρηδες*, 1908). Over the course of one night, the old man learns that his son, Manthos, is having an affair with his cousin Myrtoula — who is also pregnant — and has robbed the moneylender Alexonidis, who, we know, has taken possession of their family fortune. Disappointed that his son not only failed to restore the family's former glory, as he had dreamed, but has also brought dishonor upon it, Petrocharis at first saves his son from the gendarmes but ultimately kills him himself, in the name of ancestral honor. Old Petrocharis, masterfully portrayed by the author, does not realize that his own admonitions drove Manthos to a dead end; instead, he remains rigidly committed to a distorted moral code and a notion of honor with shaky foundations. Interestingly, much of the contemporary criticism viewed Petrocharis's decision to kill his son positively, as «ideals are preserved. Falsehood collapses»,<sup>79</sup> while «the atrocious crime is so justified that instead

74 Σταματογιαννάκη 2018: 109–111.

75 Πολίτης 1931; Θ.Ν.Τ. 1931.

76 Χάρης 1931c.

77 Πεφάνης 2004: 50–51.

78 Δαράλεξης 1912: 169.

79 Δικ. 1908.

of being outraged, the audience felt a kind of relief, the relief of justice—sometimes savage but natural».<sup>80</sup>

Countess Valairena, from Gr. Xenopoulos's drama *The Secret of Countess Valairena* (*Το μυστικό της κοντέσσας Βαλαίρενας*, 1904), belongs to the now-declining Ionian aristocracy. A noblewoman from Zakynthos, she guards a secret recipe for eye medicine that has been passed down through generations in her family. Her son and daughter-in-law pressure her to sell the recipe to save the family from poverty. She eventually reveals it and commits suicide, only for it to be revealed at the end that the prospective buyer was a fraud. The reviews of the time were quite favorable. Michailidis spoke of «a life and an inner tragedy unfolding in a naturally cheerful environment. A masterful portrayal of Countess Valairena — so much so that I will hardly forget this noble figure of Zakynthos».<sup>81</sup> Georgia Ladogianni, examining the play through the lens of women's roles, noted that Valairena completely reproduces the patriarchal model: «The heroine remains “Countess Valairena” to the very end, within the patriarchal gender hierarchy, never once gaining female consciousness, despite the great upheavals».<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. MURDER AND SUICIDE THROUGH NEW AESTHETIC, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND ARTISTIC TRENDS.

Modern Greek dramaturgy at the beginning of the 20th century is mainly oriented toward realism and ethnography, with a clear inclination toward social criticism of institutions and traditions, particularly regarding family relations, marriage, and the status of women. Nevertheless, the influence of other aesthetic trends that emerged in Europe during the same period is not absent. As early as the late 19th century, prose writers and poets such as N. Episkopopoulos and C.P. Cavafy had

published prose and poems influenced by the Aesthetic movement,<sup>83</sup> which gradually gained more admirers within Greek intellectual circles. According to Stelios Xefloudas, Aestheticism appeared as a reaction against the dominance of ethnography,<sup>84</sup> while Lena Arampatzidou argues that Greek aesthetes innovated by combining English and French Aestheticism with Nietzschean philosophy.<sup>85</sup>

The elements of Aestheticism identified by scholars in Greek literature of the early 20th century include, first and foremost, morbidity on both a mental and emotional level,<sup>86</sup> with characters developing obsessions and neuroses that ultimately lead them to perversion, murder, or suicide. Dora, in *Three Kisses* (*Τα τρία φιλήματα*, 1907) by K. Christomanos, falls in love with Faïdis and essentially «steals» him from her friend Liana, whom she torments throughout the play—especially when she discovers that Faïdis is, deep down, in love with Liana. In the end, she commits suicide, separating the couple forever. Throughout the play, Dora seems to manipulate Faïdis and Liana like «puppets»,<sup>87</sup> and it is unclear whether her actions are driven by spontaneity or by jealousy and malice. It remains an open question whether her «sacrifice» is meant to separate them or to bring them together.

In *The Architect Marthas* (*Αρχιτέκτων Μάρθας*, 1907) by P. Nirvanas, the central character, Marthas, is an architect who wants to bring happiness to his loved ones. He seduces Mina, his lover, just before her family's financial collapse, takes her to his island, and keeps her in a world of illusions, speaking of his future professional success and an inheritance that will make them rich. When he can no longer hide the truth from her, he gets her drunk, lures her out to sea with the promise that they are going to their new yacht, and they drown together because, according to Nirvanas, «love that

80 Τσοκόπουλος 1908.

81 Μιχαηλίδης 1904: 244–246.

82 Λαδογιάννη 2007: 652–653.

83 Αραμπατζίδου 2012: 415.

84 Ξεφλούδας 1957: 8.

85 Αραμπατζίδου 2012: 11.

86 Symons 1979: 24.

87 Πούχνερ 1997: 253.

kills in this way is the ultimate love».<sup>88</sup>

Marthas is static and obsessive,<sup>89</sup> while his wife and later victim is described as «a human wreck, weak and sickly».<sup>90</sup> K. Chatzopoulos observes that Marthas represents a socially and morally decayed class.<sup>91</sup> Xenopoulos describes Marthas as «an aesthete» and fake, fabricated as the author imagined him rather than as someone true to life, giving the impression of madness, and says that his death, «both as a decision and as an act, is unjustified».<sup>92</sup> Photos Politis finds that «he loses heart like a woman,” believing that “truth appears as paradox».<sup>93</sup>

In *Ione* (Ιόνη, 1910) by Chr. Daralexis, Philippos, an admirer of the violet (ίον) and of a girl, Ione, who in his mind personifies the flower, urges his beloved to accept a marriage proposal because he himself is unable to marry her. Ione marries, but two years later returns spiritually and emotionally dead, unable to cope with the separation from Philippos. Then he, seeing the misery he has caused his beloved, commits suicide.<sup>94</sup> Daralexis’s play presents a hero whose obsession with the violet verges on fetishism and psychosis, a «hysterical violet-mania»<sup>95</sup> as the criticism of the time notes.

Equally peculiar in his worldview is Alkis, the hero of the drama *Alkis the Young* (Άλκης ο νέος, 1915) by Gr. Xenopoulos, a work based on the personality and life of Pericles Giannopoulos, a philosopher and writer whom Xenopoulos admired immensely.<sup>96</sup> He clarifies that it is not Giannopoulos himself: «The only thing I perhaps retained from my model is a captivating masculine beauty, combined with a subconscious genius and an inner

conviction of a great destiny».<sup>97</sup>

His hero is an idealistic young man and philosopher who captivates with his ideas and unique lifestyle but is also harshly criticized, ultimately committing suicide because he cannot bear the world he lives in: «Alkis is an extraordinary man. [...] The audience likes to see people on stage with their own ideas and feelings. The extraordinary man appears to them as foolish or mad. And the madman interests no one».<sup>98</sup> Criticism focused mainly on Xenopoulos’s choice to use Giannopoulos as a model, rather than on the play itself.<sup>99</sup>

The hero of Sp. Melas’s neo-romantic and symbolic drama *The Son of the Shadow* (Ο γιος του Ίσκιου, 1907), Vangos, is also a particularly striking figure. Living on an island, he becomes isolated from the community due to his eccentricity and the rumor that his mother conceived him after an encounter with a Shadow. There is strong rivalry between him and his brother Petros, while his only support is his mother. He falls in love with Avgi, the daughter of a shipowner, Captain Lefteris. After she rejects him, he sets out to conquer her by destroying everything stable in her life: first, he sinks her father’s ship, then burns down her house with her father inside, all the while presenting himself as a hero. Avgi indeed falls in love with him, but when he reveals the truth, she screams it to the whole island. Vangos commits suicide by throwing himself off a cliff. The central hero, a «superman» who commits the gravest crimes in the name of love,<sup>100</sup> was enthusiastically received by part of the critics,<sup>101</sup> and the character was described as a symbol who «stands outside ordinary life and cannot be measured by

88 Νιρβάνας 1908.

89 Παναγιωτοπούλου 2014: 150.

90 Παρρέν 1907.

91 Χατζόπουλος 1996: 296-297.

92 Ξενοπούλου 1907c: 267-269.

93 Πολίτης 1915.

94 Ξενοπούλου 1910b.

95 Θεατρικά. Ιόνη. Δράμα εις πράξεις τρεις του κ. Χ. Δαραλέξη 1910: 1054.

96 Ξενοπούλου 2009: 458.

97 Ξενοπούλου 1915a.

98 Ξενοπούλου 1915b.

99 Θεατής 1915; Άλκης ο νέος 1915; Πολυντάρ 1915.

100 Καρρά 2010: 1907.

101 Νιρβάνας 1907; Τσοκόπουλος 1907; Ξενοπούλου 1907d: 330-331; Άουερ 1907.

the common yardstick used for others».<sup>102</sup>

Equally distinctive is the heroine of the poetic drama by Greece's leading poet, Kostas Palamas, *Trisevgeni* (*Τρισεύγενη*, 1903). *Trisevgeni*, an independent and dynamic young woman in a seaside town whom people believe to be a fairy, marries her beloved despite her father's objections. When her husband fails to understand her free, independent, and often contradictory nature and decides to leave her, she commits suicide.<sup>103</sup> When the work was published in August 1903, the initial critical responses were positive. Konemenos, examining the heroine from a moral perspective, noted that she is not the model of a «good wife and good housekeeper», and thus her marriage becomes a field of conflict rather than harmony.<sup>104</sup> Psycharis described her as the future Greek woman: «freed, liberated from every prejudice that shackles, from every falsehood that stains, free and honest because she knows and sees, a woman, not a slave, a true and worthy partner to her husband».<sup>105</sup>

P. Nirvanas interpreted *Trisevgeni* as a clinical study of hysteria, a neurasthenic liar, a sad and repulsive psychopathological portrait of the lower strata of the rural population,<sup>106</sup> approaching the work through the lens of realism and adopting a Zola-inspired «scientific» perspective. Scholars and critics have connected *Trisevgeni* with the feminist movement of Kallirhoe Parren in the early 20th century. Palamas had personal ties with Parren and never hid his admiration for her and her work.<sup>107</sup> However, the feminist interpretation is contradicted by his preface, where he emphasizes that his work is not the mouthpiece of any ideology.<sup>108</sup>

Both in *Trisevgeni* and *The Son of the Shadow*, we find elements of folk tradition and Greek popular culture, which served as a rich source of inspiration for the playwrights of the period. Significant dramas are theatrical adaptations of well-known folk poems. The most popular is *The Bridge of Arta*, which, within a span of five years, inspired both P. Horn's drama *The Invaluable* (1906) and *The Master Builder* by Nikos Kazantzakis (*Ο Πρωτομάστορας*, 1909). In *The Bridge of Arta*,<sup>109</sup> the master builder is forced to entomb his own wife alive within the bridge's foundations so that it will stop collapsing. In *The Invaluable*, the master builder, Andreas, confronts a beautiful woman — the spirit of the river — who seduces him and convinces him to sacrifice/murder his wife. The erotic provocation of the river spirit sparked critical backlash<sup>110</sup> and led Horn to face a naval court, although it seems that what mostly offended was the language used by the author rather than the content itself.<sup>111</sup>

In Kazantzakis's *The Master Builder*, the master builder is not married but is romantically involved with Smaragdo, the daughter of a local lord. Smaragdo steps forward, openly confesses her love, and reveals that the master builder had enjoyed her body all night. She then walks consciously and with dignity toward her own sacrifice.<sup>112</sup> K. Petrakou sees in her behavior the classic model of the ideal woman in a patriarchal society, who willingly accepts to sacrifice herself for male ambition, since «she recognizes no other value for herself except through the eyes of the man.»<sup>113</sup> Ant. Glytzouris identifies in her character the duality of Decadence, «the femme fatale, to the extent that she

102 Ψ. 1907.

103 Πούχγερ 1995: 224-358.

104 Παλαμάς 1916: 90-93.

105 *Ένα γράμμα του κ. Ψυχάρη* 1903: 1.

106 Νιρβάνας 1903: 633.

107 Πούχγερ 1995: 362.

108 Παλαμάς 2018: 185-187.

109 Περάνης 1998-2000: 273-323.

110 Δ.Τ. 1906: 7.

111 Παπαζαφειρόπουλος 1908: 878.

112 Πετράκου 2005: 187-196.

113 *Ινί*: 205-206.

is responsible for seducing the man, but also her idealization». <sup>114</sup> According to G. Ladogianni, her public exposure recalls the shaming of the sinful woman. <sup>115</sup>

The folk poem *Lord Mavrianos and His Sister* is the source of inspiration for N. Poriotis's drama *Rodopi* (*Ροδόπη*, 1914). Rodopi, a beautiful and proud princess, refuses to surrender herself sexually and sends her servant, the simple, pure, and kind Krino, <sup>116</sup> in her place to the lord's bed. However, she cannot bear the idea that Krino, through love, might gain the power that Rodopi herself desires. Thus, she kills her by strangling her. According to V. Puchner, Krino acts as a bright alter ego of Rodopi, and so by murdering her, Rodopi feels a sense of deprivation of the love that she herself experienced, even if only through her substitute. <sup>117</sup> For Kyriaki Petrakou, Rodopi's defeat serves as a warning: in the patriarchal world, the woman who does not seek power through love but instead relies on her personal worth or political skills in behind-the-scenes maneuvers is doomed to fail. <sup>118</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we could say that in early 20th-century Greek dramaturgy, authors, critics, and audiences tended to view honor-related crimes with suspicion when the victim was a woman — especially when the sexual relationship was coercive — while showing more sympathy toward both male and female perpetrators when their actions targeted a male seducer. Conversely, perpetrators of crimes of passion driven by jealousy are portrayed negatively regardless of gender, whereas suicides prompted by love are met with sympathy and understanding. It is interesting that while terms of psychopathology are applied to perpetrators of crimes of passion regardless of gender, in cases of suicide these terms are sometimes used for female suicides but never for male ones.

The most negatively depicted, both

in terms of portrayal and reception, are those who commit crimes to serve their own economic or political interests. It is also particularly noteworthy that in plays which move beyond realism and ethnography, although the authors present their heroes in a positive light — even when they kill vulnerable women or consciously pursue personal goals — they are met with skepticism by critics, who continue to judge them through the lens of realism and psychological analysis.

What seems to be missing from most of the aforementioned plays is a conscious effort to study and analyze the psychological and social causes that lead a person to choose to take the life of another — or their own — and, above all, the consequences this choice has on their psyche. The heroes act either on personal impulse or societal imperative, which in only a few works is processed or questioned by the perpetrator before the act, and in no play do we see the psychological repercussions this choice has on the perpetrator (in the case of murder) or their environment (in the case of suicide or murder). Authors use these acts as the grand finale of their dramas, whereas such an act is usually the beginning of another equally compelling drama.

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<sup>114</sup> Γλυτζουρής 2009: 267-268.

<sup>115</sup> Λαδογιάννη 2011: 176.

<sup>116</sup> Πεφάνης 1998: 262.

<sup>117</sup> Πούχνερ 2002: 213.

<sup>118</sup> Πετράκου 2022: 238.

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