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Subversive literary representations of 1821 in the *Metapolitefsi* (1974–81)

ABSTRACT

*The article refers to the Greek War of independence's afterlife during the Transition period in Greece (1974-1981), focusing on literature. The military dictatorship (1967-1974) presented itself as the heir of this national revolution. Representations of the 1821 were popularized and mediatized through film, paintings and the public spectacles organized by the regime, culminating with the 150-year anniversary in 1971. This triggered an alternative use of these representations, by songwriters, playwrights and writers who aimed to subvert them through mimicry. Focusing on three novels by young writers of the period, Yoryis Yatromanolakis' *Leimonario* (The Spiritual Meadow) (1974), Nikos Platis', *Gkoutn mpai mister pap* ('Goodbye Mr. Pap') (1976) and Takis Theodoropoulos', *O vios stin politeia tou Thodori Kotronithodorikolou* ('Life in the city of Thodoris Kotronithodorikolos') (1977), the article examines how these young writers subverted the representations of heroism constructed by the dictatorship through the use of surrealist and avant-garde techniques to subvert national narrative. The use of pastiche, the corporeal and the fantastic, in the case of Yatromanolakis, creates an alternative discourse of heroism. In the case of Platis and Theodoropoulos surrealist techniques, the low and transgressive sexuality create a grotesque gallery of heroes, by emphasizing the hybridity and performativity of their identities. These writers also questioned and experimented with the ways in which history is represented in narrative, through*

reversal of temporality, the nightmarish, corporeality and the private. The article also examines the texts' reception, at a time when new grand narratives of national history were shaped

KEYWORDS

1967 dictatorship in Greece, *Metapolitefsi*, avant-garde literature, representations of 1821 in literature, sexuality in literature, parody in literature

INTRODUCTION

During the period of the *Metapolitefsi* ('transition') (1974–81), the reinstatement of democracy in Greece, the public memory of 1821 was revisited and renegotiated. The Greek military dictatorship (1967–74) had presented itself as the heir of this national revolution, systematically propagating representations of this event in the public sphere. During the final years of the dictatorship and especially after its fall, writers, theatre groups, musicians and artists drew on the legacy and the representations of 1821, aiming to subvert them through mimicry. Focusing on three novels of the period, Yoryis Yatromanolakis's *Leimonario* (*The Spiritual Meadow*) (1974), Nikos Platis's, *Gkout mpai mister pap* ('Goodbye Mr. Pap') (1976) and Takis Theodoropoulos's, *O vios stin politeia tou Thodori Kotronithodorikolou* ('Life in the times of Thodoris Kotronithodorikolos') (1977), this article examines how these young writers subverted the representations of heroism constructed by the dictatorship through the use of surrealist and avantgarde techniques. These writers also questioned and experimented with the ways in which history is represented in narrative, through reversal of temporality, the nightmarish, corporeality and the private.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE DURING THE DICTATORSHIP

The Greek War of Independence (1821–30) has consistently been presented as a national revolution against the Ottoman Empire, with patriotic aims, focusing on the onset rather than its outcome, which frustrated the Greeks' expectations (Beaton 2009: 2–4). Every anniversary allowed political and educational institutions to revisit the event so as to vindicate the present. This was very much the case during the dictatorship, which presented itself as the heir of this national revolution. The coup was termed 'nation-saving revolution' (*Ethnosotirios epanastasis*), so as to legitimate the lack of a democratic mandate. Contemporary propaganda songs, in folk song style, explicitly linked the dictators to 1821 in both words and music (Papaeti 2015: 57–59).

Representations of the 1821 during the dictatorship were an integral part of the historical narrative shaped at the time, based on the presumption of a continuum of Greek history from antiquity to the present, put forward by the historian Paparrigopoulos in the mid-nineteenth century (Gourgouris 1996; Liakos 2002: 29–37; Petmezas 2009: 129–32). According to the regime's narrative, the dictatorship was the culmination of a long series of Greek victories against dangerous enemies. These representations were popularized and mediatized in epic films on War of Independence figures, such as *I megalí stigmí tou 21: Papaflessas* ('The crucial moment in [18]21: Papaflessas') (Andreou 1971) or *Manto Mavrogenous* ('Manto Mavrogenous') (Karagiannis 1971), featuring popular film stars, such as Dimitris Papamichail and Jenny Karezi (see Papadimitriou 2015).

Public spectacles, such as the annual 'Festivals for the Military Virtue of the Greeks' and the celebrations for the 1821 War of Independence 150-year

anniversary in 1971 were based on representations of war heroes and battles, enacted by soldiers and students dressed in costumes. The aesthetic of these re-enactments has been harshly criticized and ridiculed as kitsch. They drew on the spectacles staged by the inter-war dictatorship of Metaxas and their celebration of militarism, bodily virility and cultural continuity. Folk music and dances played a prominent role, since the 1967 dictatorship promoted the genre as the quintessential patriotic music. The Greek-American film producer James Paris has been named as the director of these spectacles, although the extent of his contribution is not clear.¹ Schoolchildren were obliged to attend these celebrations as part of a patriotic education, in an attempt to prevent youth radicalization, an international phenomenon of the period. As a 16-year-old student at the time, the writer Theodoropoulos remembers:

It was an extravaganza, that aspired to be Hollywood, but, in reality, was miserable.² [...] It utterly degraded all the symbols associated in our minds, through education and readings, with 1821 – from *cariofli* guns and *foustanella* folk costumes to heroism. Including of course the narrative of national history, where 1821 was a part of a continuum from antiquity through Byzantium. The dictatorship turned Paparrigopoulos into the director of a kitsch *revue*.

(2020: n.pag.)

Research has shown that this bombastic propaganda, deploying spectacular representations of 1821 and folk tradition, triggered an alternative use of these elements by songwriters, singers and playwrights who aimed to subvert them through mimicry (Papanikolaou 2007; Kornetis 2013; Kallimopoulou and Kornetis 2017). The songwriter Dionysis Savvopoulos wrote 'Odi ston Georgio Karaiskaki' ('Ode to Georgios Karaiskakis') (1969), a War of Independence hero, cross-referenced with Che Guevara. The use of folk music by Mariza Koch and Savvopoulos in his album *Ballos* (1972) and in their live performances during the dictatorship is also a case in point. Folk singers, melodies and instruments were used alongside rock instruments in performances characterized by hybridity and the sensory experiences of a rock concert. Thus, folk music and the memory of 1821 were appropriated by the counterculture and politicized, in a hybrid that subverted the cultural hierarchies of popular vs. foreign. The artistic persona projected by Savvopoulos was a fluid identity, self-conscious, at odds with tradition and the audience's expectations, a 'subject on the move' (Papanikolaou 2007: 136).

In 1973, Iakovos Kambanellis's *To Megalo Mas Tsirko* ('Our Grand Circus') was staged by the theatre company of Jenny Karezi and Kostas Kazakos. As with the dictators' festivals, the play consists of a series of scenes that construct a narrative of Greek history, from antiquity to the present. According to Van Steen, it was an alternative historical narrative, which, in its shortened, censored version, narrated Greek history as a series of frustrated struggles of the people against the establishment and the Great Powers, drawing parallels with the present of the dictatorship (2015: 189–215). The play includes a scene, where the statue of Theodoros Kolokotronis on Stadiou street in Athens comes to life, addressing present-day Athenians and chastising them for commemorating 1821 and for their political inertia: 'Let our struggle be, focus on your struggle. Where is the 3rd of September? Where is your Constitution?'

1 For an extensive account of the dictatorship's public spectacles, their contributors, aesthetic, ideology and relation to the public festivals of the inter-war period see Van Steen (2015: 159–89). On the appropriation of folk music by the dictatorship see Papaeti (2015: 51–55, 2018: 139–42). On the aesthetics of these re-enactments see Raftopoulos (1984) and Koutsikou et al. (1984: 92–95). On the role of kitsch in the memory of the dictatorship see Antoniou et al. (2017: 284–85, 292–94) and Kourniakti (2017: 246–350).

Figure 1: Papagiannopoulos as Kolokotronis in the performance of *To Megalo Mas Tsirko* (1973),



c. Museum and Study Centre of Greek Theatre.

September is the child of March and you are our children. Let the dead lie and stay with the living' (Kambanellis 1975: 60–64).

In Kambanellis's play, the War of Independence acquires a contemporary, revolutionary meaning, as opposed to the dictatorship's nationalist and militarist commemoration. The narrative of *To Megalo Mas Tsirko* shows the impact of events on the underdogs of history, at a time when, according to Tziovas, the cultural hierarchies between high and low culture were reversed in favour of the latter (2017: 286). Although the staging of the play drew on the carnivalesque and subverted theatrical rules, Kambanellis offered a consistent alternative narrative of history. Despite the presence of undercover policemen, watching the play became an act of resistance, especially after the Polytechnic uprising, when the troupe's support of the students led to Karezi's arrest for a month. After the fall of the dictatorship, the play was staged again, creating a trend in the next few years for plays which 'referred to "dependence" on "foreign" powers', such as Michael Hourmouzis's *The Opportunist* (Papadogiannis 2015: 132).

THE TRANSITION PERIOD (METAPOLITEFSI, 1974–81)

During the transition period, the memory of the War of Independence became the focus of historiographic debates, attempting to shape narratives of the event from a left perspective, placing emphasis on the social, economic

and cultural aspects,³ and presenting it as a frustrated social movement (see for instance, Moskof 1974). In this framework, parallelisms between 1821 heroes and the 1940s resistance fighters were drawn, in terms of both heroism and frustration (see Kornetis forthcoming 2021).

During the same period, literature drew on representations of 1821, but in a hybrid and irreverent manner. The three novels examined here emphasize the grotesque or nightmarish element of these representations and place the 1821 heroes in the context of contemporary consumerist practices. These texts share many characteristics of the underground and avant-garde literature of the period, which appeared in texts by young writers published in the underground periodicals during the dictatorship, such as *Kouros*, *Panderma* and *Tram* (Nikolopoulou 2015: 270–71). They draw on the tradition of the historical avant-gardes, subverting the dichotomies between high and low culture, the collective and the personal, the historical and the contemporary, reality and fantasy. Mass culture, kitsch and consumerism are used to question and subvert the hierarchies of high culture and state propaganda, all the while criticizing the petit-bourgeois attraction to consumer goods. All three writers had lived or were living abroad, in London and Paris, and were aware of the international avant-garde strategies, but each employed them in a different way.

YATROMANOLAKIS, *LEIMONARIO* (1974)

Yatromanolakis wrote his first novel, *Leimonario*, during the dictatorship, while working as a teacher on the island of Kythira. It was reworked in London, during his postgraduate studies (Yatromanolakis 1983a: 62–65). The novel's protagonist, Thodoris, travels to the (fictional) island Porfyri, to take up his first teaching post. The novel is set during his first 24 hours there and consists of monologues he addresses to his sister, his lover and his first love. He soon realizes that he is expected to behave according to the linguistic, ideological and moral standards set by religion, education and the police and the strict hierarchy that defines every social practice.

A dominant discursive framework for the novel, which is indicated in the title, is the *Leimonarion* (in Latin *Pratum Spirituale*, *Spiritual Meadow*), an early Byzantine text by John Moschus, comprising a collection of edifying narratives of monastic life (Chadwick 1974). These include miracles, visions, temptations and trials. A recurrent theme is the passage from secular to monastic life (Moschus 2006: 16–19). Thodoris parallels his passage to Porfyri and the limitations imposed on a public servant to the ascetic life. His hotel room is termed a cell, alluding both to monastery and prison. This framework also enables the fantastic to invade the text, in the form of visions and miracles. Temporality is also subverted, since at certain points the narrator is transported to the past or to his future as a teacher in the island. In other instances, historical figures invade the present. This happens especially during school celebrations, which commemorate the past through a patriotic discourse that glosses over the events it celebrates.

A central chapter of the novel refers to the celebration of the 1821 anniversary. The narrator explains that national celebrations are very important: 'We have unchanging ideals. History has satisfied us. All other things are unpatriotic' (Yatromanolakis 2000: 119). The text criticizes the ahistorical hero-worship of the dictatorship, which was based on a dualistic world-view. The narrator describes the ceremony in bureaucratic language, adding idealizing adjectives. Yet the ceremony is stained by blood that inexplicably

3. See, for instance, the Special Issue of *Anti* on 1821 (46, 29 May 1976) and the references to Kordatos's view of the revolution as a social and class struggle that dates back to 1933 (*Anti*, 43, 17 April 1976; 44, 1 May 1976), articles in the historical journal *Mnimon* (first published in 1971), the books by Vassilis Kremidas and Kostis Moskoff, and the series on the Greek Enlightenment in Ermis editions, edited by Philippos Iliou.

flows everywhere. Suddenly, a group of dirty soldiers appears with Athanasios Diakos, a 1821 hero, who was arrested by the Turks in a battle and impaled: 'On a glorious day in a golden atmosphere Athanassios Diakos had come. He was changed through. Almost a stranger from the person we knew. In this unsuspected celebration he brought himself looking unrecognizable. In a mess' (Yatromanolakis 2000: 121).

The arrival of Diakos and the Turkish soldiers is not a vision, but a miraculous presence from the past, as would happen in Moschos's *Spiritual Meadow*. The hero celebrated in the commemoration invades the present and his excruciating torture and death happens during the anniversary speech (Yatromanolakis 1994: 132–38). This creates a contrast between the abstract commemorative discourse and the experience of the events it commemorates. Described in gruesome detail, the corporeality of the Diakos narrative creates a dramatic intensity which challenges the didactic discourse of heroism. His martyrdom can be associated with the anniversary of 1821 and the narratives about religious martyrs in Moschos's *Spiritual Meadow*, but it also refers to torture inflicted to political prisoners by the dictatorship. When the torture ends with Diakos's death and his body is exposed to the public, the narrator, along with the rest of the audience, realizes the power and beauty of the sight of the tortured hero:

The people in authority put barriers round the post so we couldn't approach. We had our eyes stuck on him [Diakos] though. Because every time our eyes met his we felt a strange jerk backwards. It was, you know, as if they gave him a kick right in his face. You retreated feeling dizzy. Deep in your skull you could hear the wooden sound of the hammer. 'Tok'. The peaceful, unhesitating look of the young man was tearing your head and neck. It was coming down like a knife inside the chest and belly, splitting you in two. The torture drove us mad.

(Yatromanolakis 2000: 128)

Diakos is presented as a different type of hero from the dictatorship's commemorations, since the experience of torture has a more pervasive impact than discourse. This is a hierarchy of values (body vs. discourse, experience vs. historiography) that can be associated with the emphasis placed on suffering by testimony, as opposed to official and institutional discourses. Although the narrator at the end of the chapter returns to the institutional celebrations and the instrumental use of history, the torture remains a reminder of a different type of heroism, presented as authentic.

This dichotomy between the discourse of heroism shaped to serve the state ideology and the authentic 1821 heroism and its legacy is much more evident in the final chapter of the novel. Drawing once more on the miraculous and fantastic elements of Moschos's text, the narrator dreams that he is transposed onto a higher level of existence, a sublime world of sunshine and freedom inhabited by the shadows of martyrs, fighters and heroes from different generations, including those 'exiles and executed, tortured and imprisoned', in a reference to the persecutions of the Left (Yatromanolakis 2000: 174). As in Kambanellis's *To Megalo Mas Tsirko*, the text creates an alternative narrative of history as a series of battles and traumas, to be vindicated in this ethereal world. The protagonist meets Makriyannis, a fighter of the War of Independence, who appears covered in blood, as he was when he was shot during the siege of the Acropolis. Makriyannis and the old monk invite the

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protagonist to remain in this utopia. Nevertheless, he declines, out of solidarity to his fellow countrymen, who are trapped in the submerged island. This choice equals a fall from grace and death:

These things up here are distant and false. Only Porfyri below is true.
Death and looting, siege and handcuff, the law of the prisoner, of the
blind and the outlawed. The truth is locked up inside us. Well, I say yes
to death. I go back since it's not possible for all of them to come up here.
I am no good like this.

(Yatromanolakis 2000: 176)

By accepting death, the protagonist becomes an anti-hero of sorts. As he lies dying, light and darkness become one, the dualities that have determined the text's universe and time collapses.

Yatromanolakis does not reject the previous generations' view of resistance literature, or the emphasis on literal discourse. Nevertheless, this yearning for the identification of words and actions coexists with the fantastic, the subversion of temporality and the pastiche of a work of monastic literature, subverting realism and cultural continuity. In the final chapter, the utopian alternative gallery of heroes is rejected. Since the novel could not criticize the reality of the dictatorship, it focuses on its ideological reading of history and especially 1821. Unlike writers from previous generations, Yatromanolakis does not aim to construct an alternative grand narrative. He uses a combination of literal discourse, parody and the fantastic, so as to subvert the discourse of politics, religion and historiography. At the same time, the text also questions the alternative narrative, through the paralogical, the reversal of logic, as was the case with other writers of the Generation of the 1970s (Van Dyck 1998: 30–33).

NIKOS PLATIS, *GKOUNT MPAI MISTER PAP* (1976)

Nikos Platis belongs to the generation of writers who appeared during the dictatorship in underground periodicals such as *Kouros* and *Panderma*, publishing poetry, prose fiction and comics. He periodically lived in Paris from 1972 to 1977 and was the editor of the magazine *Harakiri* (1974), which drew on its French namesake. Platis's *Gkount mpai mister pap* is an avant-garde crime novel, where a serial killer, 'the paranoid boxer' according to the police, murders respectable members of the society. In reality the victims are corrupt representatives of institutions such as the Church, education, the justice system and the police, with connections with a National Socialist organization. The police officer who investigates the murders is an inept petit-bourgeois who identifies with the 'national-minded ideology'. The murderer's motives are connected to political violence and the silenced trauma of the civil war. The crimes are not presented as the result of a criminal personality, but as the symptom of a corrupt society. This links the text with the 'néo-polar', a type of crime novel which appeared in France by writers of the Left, who were disenchanted by the aftermath of May 1968.⁴

The novel consists of two narratives, focalized through the police officer and the murderer. The police officer's narrative is a third-person realistic narrative, following the crime novel tradition, while the murderer's perspective is given through a fragmented first-person narrative. Realism and logic are discredited, since they are associated with the corrupt institutions the police officer defends. The murderer's mnemonic monologue renders his

4. For a more detailed presentation of the text's avant-garde techniques see Nikolopoulou 2021. In 'néo-polar', social and financial institutions are presented as criminal and crime appears as the result of capitalist economy. Moreover, the crimes unveil the silenced past of society and its respectable members, such as colonialism in the French 'néo-polar' or Fascism in the Italian *giallo* (Mandel 1986: 170; Collovald and Neveu 2001).

motives and the repressed social and individual trauma that lead to the murders, through nightmarish and comics imagery. The narrative is dominated by advertising slogans, bureaucratic language, newspaper clichés and political formulaic language, highlighting how the institutional and discursive frameworks define and manipulate the individual (Hamalidi et al. 2012: 249).

This narrative arrangement is reversed in the central chapter of the novel, where the police officer adopts the first-person mnemonic narrative and describes a feast in the 'Countryside tavern 1821'. There he sees Germanos, the Bishop of Patras, who, according to the popular narrative, proclaimed the revolution in 25 March 1821 and blessed the arms of the fighters in the monastery of Agia Lavra, although historical research has concluded that this event never happened (Daskalakis 1961: 9–30; Kremmydas 1996). The police officer sees something very different:

Germanos, Bishop of Patras, a spitting image of Salome, belly-danced under a tulle veil. Foxy. An houri from paradise. Disgusting. Even his beard had blond highlights. A bloody faggot. At the tables all around everybody is singing. Clapping to the rhythm. 'Tonight you're killing it/Even the trams stop/ when they see you'. Kolokotronis. Diakos. Papaflessas. Tzavelas. Laskarina with no reservations. With her tits sticking out, barefoot, swinging like a whore from the Place Pigalle. Everyone was there. The revolution in quorum.

(Platis 1976: 49–50)

The solemn gathering of fighters in Agia Lavra is parodically presented as a private contemporary celebration which contravenes the police officer's concepts of sexuality, nation and heroism. The use of the new popular song 'Apopse kaneis mpam' ('Tonight you are killing it') (Tsitsanis 1952) instead of the folk songs that have been traditionally associated with the 1821 heroes, connects the participants to the culture of nightlife and entertainment, distancing them from the heroic discourses typically used to present them. *Rebetiko* and its evolution, *laiko* (new popular, according to Papanikolaou), had been elevated to high popular by composers such as Hadjidakis and Theodorakis in the 1960s, was accepted by the Left, but was still rejected as low music by the dictatorship (Papanikolaou 2007: 63–81; Papaeti 2018: 142–44; Kallimopoulou and Poulos 2017: 451).

Transgressive sexuality is the focus of the gathering, since Bishop Germanos remains the main figure, but he is heretically presented as gay, dressed and behaving in an effeminate manner. His comparison to the *houris* is subversive in terms of gender, religion and patriotism, since it refers to a beautiful virgin woman, who is the reward of Muslim fighters in Paradise, according to the Qur'an. The rest of the 1821 heroes seem to accept this transgressive sexuality and the reversal of cultural taxonomies. Laskarina Bouboulina, one of the few female fighters of the revolution, is here presented transgressing these limits in terms of her sexuality. The use of the term *poustis* ('faggot') and 'whore' places Germanos and Bouboulina within the framework of a traditional concept of sexuality, as the opposite of a masculine model (Yannakopoulos 2016: 174), which has traditionally been associated with the discourse of heroism. This description is made from the perspective of the police officer, who adopts petit-bourgeois moral standards and nationalist-minded ideology, which is subverted by the text. At a time when the personal was political internationally, in 1970s Greece sexuality

was gradually connected to political identities. While during the dictatorship political youth organizations adopted more masculine cultural practices, after the *Metapolitefsi* sexuality and gender were gradually redefined, and space was created for the emergence of new collective subjects, such as feminists and the gay movement (see Kornetis 2013, 2015; Papadogiannis 2015; Papanikolaou 2018; Yannakopoulos 2016). Nevertheless, these social subjects were reluctantly accepted, even among organizations of the Left. There was strong prejudice against homosexuality in particular (Papadogiannis 2015: 267–70). Therefore, the representation of Germanos as an effeminate man is very ambivalent, since it attacks national cultural politics of masculinity and all the components of the dictatorship's slogan 'Country, Religion, Family'. His presence is a part of a countercultural strategy but it is not clear if homosexuality is accepted.

The police officer also sees Kanaris, another 1821 hero, drunk and smoking a Cuban cigar. In his monologue Kanaris concludes that the revolution and the death of the Turks was unnecessary, since the present is very similar to the Ottoman rule, in terms of state violence and lack of freedom. Rigas Velestinlis (Feraios), the Enlightenment political activist and revolutionary, who published the *Charta tis Ellados* ('Map of Greece') (1797) as a representation of national space and consciousness, is presented designing the *Charta tis Ellados* for the National Tourism Organization. The aspirations of the War of Independence are thus subverted by consumerism and political oppression in the present. The text constructs continuities not with ancient Greece or the War of Independence, but with the Ottoman Period. Thus it presents 1821 as a frustrated social struggle and adopts the historiographic narrative that was being shaped at the time.

In the final scene, the police officer wakes up and finds all the heroes maimed but snoring, under the sign 'Do not disturb [in English]. We are relaxing as of today. The [18]21 is resting. Forever. [in Greek]' (Platis 1976: 53), followed by the soundscape of a funeral. Similar to Kolokotronis in *To Megalo Mas Tsirko*, who urges contemporary Greeks to stop idealizing the War of Independence, here the gallery of heroes is destroyed. Unlike *To Megalo Mas Tsirko*, which offers the alternative of focusing on the present by drawing on the 1821 legacy, *Gkoutn mpai mister pap* does not offer an alternative, since the past is presented as corrupt as the present. The use of English in the title and in the text is a signpost of avant-garde literature of the period, subverting the cultural politics of Greekness and emphasizing the cultural (and political) dominance of the United States.

The police officer realizes some pages later that this visit to the 'Taverna 1821' did not really happen, but is something he experienced under the influence of LSD, trapped by the murderer. The narrative of national history becomes a nightmarish hallucination and the gallery of heroes is transformed to caricatures who adopt contemporary, individualistic values. If *Leimonario* constructed an alternative national history to problematize it, Platis, who belongs to the young underground writers of the *Metapolitefsi*, does not construct any narrative. He attacks discursive and ideological frameworks associated with 1821 through countercultural practices, such as the use of low culture, the adoption of post-surrealistic techniques, the presence of advertisements in the text, the typographical layout (Hamalidi et al. 2012: 249; Nikolopoulou 2015: 270–71). Following the underground editorial policies of Leonidas Christakis, the text was self-published, so as to avoid dependency on publishing houses (Kalamaras 2019: 156–57). Although the text was successful

immediately after its publication (Skouz 2009) and was reprinted in 1979, it remains obscure today.

O vios stin politeia tou Thodori Kotronithodorikolou (1977)

If in the case of Yatromanolakis and Platis the representation of 1821 heroes was not the main focus of the text, in the case of Theodoropoulos' *O vios stin politeia tou Thodori Kotronithodorikolou* (text: Theodoropoulos, paintings: Kyriakos Katzourakis, 1944–2021), a thinly disguised Kolokotronis is one of the protagonists. Most of Katzourakis' paintings include the figure of Kolokotronis or his helmet and sword. Apart from Kolokotronis' presence, the text and the paintings are characterized by strong intertextuality and historical trauma and erotic fantasy treated in an associative manner.

The book was published in February 1977, at the time when the paintings by Katzourakis were exhibited in the Ora Gallery (Katzourakis 1994: n.pag.). Some of the paintings had been exhibited in the Serpentine Gallery in London in 1976, in a collective exhibition, where Katzourakis was chosen from an open commission by Eduardo Paolozzi (Serpentine Gallery). As Katzourakis informed me in a personal communication:

Figure 2: Kyriakos Katzourakis, To Kafeneio tou Vermeer II (Vermeer's coffee house II), 1976.



Acrylic on canvas. 122cm × 202cm. c. Kyriakos Katzourakis. Kolokotronis is inside the coffee house, wearing his helmet. His sword is leaning on the table outside.

Theodoropoulos saw my painting *Theophilos-Velásquez* and made some perceptive points. We agreed that he would write the text of the catalogue for the exhibition in the Ora gallery. Theodoropoulos' book was in theory the exhibition catalogue.

(Katzourakis 2020)

The book, then, is an example of an intermedial dialogue between a painter and a writer, since Theodoropoulos's text does not comment on the paintings, but is a work of fiction, drawing on similar subjects and, to a certain extent, on similar poetics. As Katzourakis has noted, during his stay in London he incorporated certain paintings of the Renaissance and Baroque in his work, subverting representation and creating an a-historic and associative narrative that includes references to 1821, the 1940s, his personal fantasies and traumas. In 1972 Katzourakis participated in the exhibition of *New Greek Realists* in the Athens Goethe Institute, which created a model for political art, adopting representation not to promote verisimilitude, but to criticize consumerism and the mechanisms which construct reality, through the low and the ready-made (Stefanidis 2013: 22; Katzourakis 1994: n.pag.). During his London period (1973–85) he went beyond realism, combining the perspective of Renaissance painting, which creates the sense of order and distance, with the coexistence of figures from different periods, which creates a 'vortex of time' (cf. Angelatos 2017: 55–56, 463–66). The references to European painting masters and heroes, such as Kolokotronis, are not to create a new, celebratory narrative, but to shape an ironic mixture of traditional form with contemporary political identities. For instance, in *The vow* the painter takes a vow on Velasquez's *Las Meninas* while Kolokotronis' helmet is next to him. In the background there are some resistance fighters from the 1940s. The dilemma between art and engagement, self-referential art or social function of art remains unresolved. At the same time, Katzourakis wanted to 'vindicate Kolokotronis, who was wronged by the Greek state' (1994: n.pag.).

The text by Theodoropoulos creates a similar 'vortex of time': its protagonist is a person very similar to Kolokotronis in terms of costume and biography, but his name reshuffles that of his historic counterpart (literally translated as 'stone arse'), creating a parodic version, which emphasizes 'arse' even more. This parodic name coexists with a wordplay on the phrase typically used in biographies of eminent persons, 'Life and times'. In Greek the phrase 'Bios kai politeia', on which the wordplay is based, originates from the religious biographies of saints. The title parodies both the national and the religious element.

Thodoris lives in an underworld and sometime emerges in the present, creating this achronic presentness through post-surrealistic and avant-garde techniques. In a first-person narrative, the anonymous narrator constantly alternates between his erotic fantasies, an alternative biography of Thodoris, emphasizing the private rather than the public element, and scenes of violence by the army or the police, with reference to the 1940s or the dictatorship.

The narrator self-referentially presents his attempt to describe the life in the hero's city. The text's introduction is a surrealistic narrative, where descriptions of sexual feelings and fantasies are unexpectedly connected to Thodoris and to images of state violence. According to the narrative, the hero is alive and present in contemporary 1821 celebrations but remains silent. He lives in tunnels under the castle where he was imprisoned after the War of Independence. The castle is controlled by a group of soldiers who, as with the police officer of *Gkouti mpai mister pap*, have petit-bourgeois values and

Figure 3: Kyriakos Katzourakis, *Orkos (The vow)*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas. 190cm × 190cm. c.



Kyriakos Katzourakis.

rigidly adopt nationalist narrative. Thodoris and his fellow soldiers sometimes manage to escape and emerge into the present. He has a lover who is a ship owner's widow and he adopts a socialite lifestyle, plays cards and dresses up as a real or fictional hero of wars of independence, such as Bolivar, Lafayette, Captain Nemo or Pirate Lafitte. This already creates a carnivalesque alternative narrative of history, where connection with the French or the American revolution is suggested through disguise.

In the second chapter of the text, an alternative genealogy of the hero is created, presenting his ancestry from the Byzantine period. Drawing on a biography by Spyros Melas which gives a heroic version of the origin of Kolokotronis's *nom de guerre* (Melas 1957: 22–23), Thodoris is presented as suffering from a serious skin condition on his backside, which leads him to

wear the *foustanella* and to become a *kleft*. In the present, the hero's fellow fighters continue to steal rather than work, disguised as bikers or old women, who mourn the fish caught by the fishermen. Thus, the heroic discourses regarding the War of Independence and the Klefts are subverted by disguise or disease. According to Tziovas (1993: 246–47), in modern Greek culture the private element is connected to low culture, whereas the public is connected to high and national culture. Here, the corporeality and the private practices of the hero subvert his idealized representation by public history.

During the civil war the hero disappears, the state attempts to politically exploit this and declares him dead. In the first chapter, Thodoris' funeral is described. Similar to Diakos in *Leimonario*, who disrupts the celebration with his presence and the repetition of his death, the hero here appears with his fellow fighters, disrupting the ceremony through sexuality. He chooses a beautiful high school student who attends the funeral in her school uniform and abducts her, undresses her in the central square and fondles her, leading her to successive orgasms. This unleashes a wave of sexual violence by *agents provocateurs*, who are later executed and the hero's name is silenced forever (Theodoropoulos 1977: 20–25).

The scene is also an allusion to surrealist Andreas Embiricos's short prose 'Excelsior i to rodo tou Ispahan' ('*Excelsior* or the Rose of Ispahan') (Embiricos [1960] 2004: 133–42). In Embiricos' text the arrival of a young naked girl in an open carriage creates a miraculous, celebratory atmosphere which typically combines the heroic, sexual and religious element (Kechagioglou 1987: 19). The mixture of erotic element and death in the funeral scene also can be associated with his prose poem 'Eis tin odon ton Filellinon' ('On Filellinon Street') (Embiricos 1963: 7), where the young students in their school uniform attract the passers-by erotic attention. In Embiricos' work, eroticism constitutes a liberating and unifying cosmic force (Yatromanolakis 1983b: 142–43), although presented firmly from the male perspective. In Theodoropoulos's text sexuality, also from the male perspective, triggers impulses and practices which subvert political power. The young student's molestation by the hero subverts the representation of the emergent nation as a maiden liberated by the freedom fighters. Unlike the celebratory tone in Embiricos' poems, in Theodoropoulos's text erotic ecstasy does not overshadow violence and death.

These events from the hero's life are associatively connected to fragmented descriptions of sexual scenes between the narrator and certain women, narrated from his perspective and focusing on his sensations. These scenes include oral and anal sex, voyeurism and urolagnia, types of sexual practices that had not to that point appeared in modern Greek prose fiction, although many foreign works of erotic fiction were translated in the 1970s. The emphasis on the anus and anal sex creates an interplay with the text's title and Kolokotronis' name. Erotic ecstasy coexists with the mundane reality and the repulsive descriptions of bodily functions and of decomposing flesh. The sexual scenes constitute a large part of the narrative and the narrator's perspective. This type of eroticism draws on Georges Bataille's erotic fiction and theoretical texts, but Theodoropoulos's text is written in a more fragmented and associative manner. As Bataille notes, eroticism subverts an ordered system of individual rationality and social life. Transgression overcomes the limits of the law and the taboos, but it does not eliminate them, it rather highlights and questions them, leading to a sense of liberation. Eroticism is connected to violence and ugliness, to 'excreta, decay and sexuality' (Bataille 1962: 58). It leads to an awareness of social order, while it enables the individual to

shortly escape from it. In Theodoropoulos's text, the narrator emphasizes the erotic completeness he experiences, repeating his obsessions with recurring phrases. This sense of oblivion and wholeness accentuates the social order, with emphasis on a genealogy of state violence, from the imprisonment of Thodoris, to the civil war and to police suppression. A recurrent image in the text is a group of young people. In some cases, they are presented sunbathing or participating in a sexual orgy, while in others they are executed, their bodies are in decay and the eyes are plucked out, with the eyeballs hanging, a direct allusion to Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. Nevertheless, in Theodoropoulos's text the eyes are torn by state violence, rather than in sexual climax.

Theodoropoulos does not create an alternative national narrative, but in a surrealist manner he brings together place, time and history, rearranging them and creating a new presentness, similar to Embiricos (Yatromanolakis 1983b: 122–23). Thodoris is at the centre of this vortex of time, an antihero who both challenges power and takes advantage of the people, who is a socialite and a hermit. This ambivalent figure highlights and questions cultural practices, the present social condition and its historical roots.

Figure 4: Kyriakos Katzourakis, *Ai Giorgis (St. George)*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas. 120cm ×



120cm. c. Kyriakos Katzourakis.

Theodoropoulos's approach to Katzourakis' paintings, with which the text was intended to interact, is equally subversive. The text does not explicitly refer to the paintings and Theodoropoulos develops new narratives out of them. The most characteristic example is the reference to the painting *Ai Giorgis (St George)* (Theodoropoulos 1977: 28–30), which according to the painter, depicts a beautiful rider and a little girl, who is confident that she will be saved (Katzourakis 2013b: 239–40). Theodoropoulos' text plays with the second meaning of the word dragon in Greek, as sexual predator. St George in the narrative is George, a crippled kiosk owner, who is at the same time an old fighter who attacks the sexual predator and a molester himself. In his narrative the little girl smiles ironically because she knows his ambivalent character and she enjoys sexual activities with George. Thus, Theodoropoulos' text creates much more ambivalent and transgressive narratives out of Katzourakis' paintings. As Katzourakis noted in a personal communication, 'I felt that the myths he created, although they stemmed from certain paintings, were distant from my myths' (Katzourakis 2020). Therefore, the book was not presented as the exhibition catalogue and the few reviews do not refer to the paintings at all (Hatzidaki 1977; Petros 1977).

The reviewers are positive towards the surrealistic writing of the text. Petros believes that the text constructs an authentic national narrative, as opposed to the constructed ones, in an attempt to facilitate the text's reception

Figure 5: Kyriakos Katzourakis, *Thodoris geron ('Thodoris, old age')*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas. 110cm × 160 cm. c. Kyriakos Katzourakis.



by toning down its ambivalence. Hatzidaki, writing from a feminist standpoint, criticizes the fact that women are objectified in the sexual scenes, echoing the criticism addressed to Bataille for the same reason (Suleiman 1990: 79–87). Although she agrees with the subversion of the national narrative, she believes that masculinity and the discourse of heroism are not undermined, since Kolokotronis embodies them.

Critics associated Katzourakis's paintings with postmodernism, although he does not accept this, because at the time he was not aware of the movement (Katzourakis 2013b: 182–83, 1994: n.pag.). Theodoropoulos's text is more connected to avant-garde practices and especially surrealism. The text has been repudiated by the author (as well as the painter), probably because he considers it a *juvenilium* (Theodosopoulou 1999), or because he does not identify with the text's polemical politics and poetics anymore. As he implied in a recent article, the dictatorship had shaped this ironic and polemical attitude towards 1821 for his generation, which he now considers wrong (Theodoropoulos 2020).

CONCLUSION

The young writers of the *Metapolitefsi* period revisited and revised the representations of 1821 which had been shaped during the dictatorship through media, cinema and the public spectacles organized by the regime. Their texts undermined the realistic element which is traditionally used in literary texts with historical subject matter and employed surrealistic and avant-garde techniques to subvert the national narrative. At a time when an alternative grand narrative of national history was shaped by historians of the Left, these writers question grand narratives altogether. Yatromanolakis constructs a new discourse about heroism through the use of the corporeal and the fantastic.

In the case of more avant-garde writers, such as Platis and Theodoropoulos, the emphasis on the low, the corporeal, the private and transgressive sexuality creates grotesque figures which subvert both the public and private aspects of the 1821 heroes. Drawing on the theatricality of the dictatorship spectacles, these representations undermine the discourse of heroism by emphasizing the hybridity and performativity of the heroes' identities in a carnivalesque manner, bringing the private into the public. Gender and sexuality become the main means of parody. This was a political choice, at the time when new sexual identities were reluctantly renegotiated and redefined in Greece. The texts' avant-garde aesthetics, the merging of high and low culture, their fragmentariness and the transgressive sexual and gender roles defined their reception. *Gkount mpai mister pap* and *O vios stin politeia tou Thodori Kotronithodorikolou* fell into oblivion or were repudiated. The heretical representations of national history were not acceptable to a wider public. This illustrates the inability of the public sphere in the 1970s to include the counterpublic (Papanikolaou 2018: 247–54), which existed in underground and avant-garde circles, but their cultural and artistic practices and identities were not accepted.

These three texts experimented with discourses, techniques and cultural practices, creating dissenting narratives on the founding fathers of the nation and questioning the ways in which history is represented in narrative. Being the first novels for all three writers, they highlight the rebellious climate of the Early transition period, on both the aesthetic and the political level.

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