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**Autofiction à la grecque
Greek autobiographical fiction (1971-1995)**

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Greek autobiographical fiction (1971-1995)

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Autofiction à la grecque: Greek autobiographical fiction
(1971-1995)

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Year: 2013

Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence and development of Greek ‘autofiction’ from 1971 until 1995, through the selected works of six writers: Kostas Tachtsis, Melpo Axioti, Vassilis Vassilikos, Vassilis Alexakis, Yiannis Kiourtsakis and Michel Fais.

I have chosen to employ the term ‘autofiction’ (first introduced in 1977 by the French novelist and critic, Serge Doubrovsky) in order to define a specific type of autobiographical fiction that also discusses the process of writing. In autofiction, the extratextual author is identified with the narrator and a main character, who is a writer that explores the act of writing the self and the act of writing in parallel.

My thesis is divided into two parts; the first covers the early period of Greek autofictional writing (1971-1975), while the latter focuses on the early nineties (1993-1995). During the first period of ‘autofiction’, which preceded the official coinage of the term, Tachtsis, Axioti and Vassilikos produced texts that do not simply employ autofictional techniques (such as the splitting of the subject) but also implicitly argue for the existence of Greek autofiction *avant la lettre*.

The 1990s saw a new generation of novelists (Alexakis, Kiourtsakis and Fais) that surveyed new possibilities in identity construction. A staple of their writing is the construction of ‘dual’ identities within a postmodern context. They resulted in producing texts that present the authoring consciousness oscillating between two distinct cultural or even religious and linguistic identities.

The ultimate aim of my dissertation is to put forward a term for the study of texts that have been vaguely labelled by Greek criticism as ‘autobiographical’ as I seek to prove that autofiction existed in Greece before the establishment of the actual term. By identifying its key characteristics and its divergences from its French

counterpart, I argue for the existence of a textual category that fuses autobiography and fiction through postmodern strategies of 'self-reflexivity'.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Roderick Beaton. It is difficult to overstate my gratitude to him for his constant support, guidance, attention to detail, sound advice and encouragement. Without him, this thesis would not have been possible.

I cannot thank enough my secondary supervisor, Dr Eleni Papargyriou for being an assiduous reader of my drafts. Her detailed feedback and our inspiring discussions have been very important in directing my research towards original perspectives. I am truly indebted to my assessor, Professor David Ricks for his invaluable insight and helpful comments that helped me further develop my arguments.

Many friends have offered their support along the way. My long-standing friend from Thessaloniki, Eleni Verikaki, was always able to clarify any questions I had on French texts. I would also like to thank my high school friends, Anastasia Pavlou and Katerina Nikolaou, as well as my flatmate Panayiotis Petousis for their good sense of humour and for offering much needed distraction. I am also thankful to Dionysia Kokkinou, for her friendship and the memorable summers we spent in Greece, Cyprus and abroad.

My best friend Nicholas Petousis, deserves special mention. He has provided a caring environment for me in London and has given me strength at my most scattered moments. I think of him as my family away from home.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my wonderful parents for all their unconditional love, everlasting patience and calm reassurance throughout my studies. I dedicate this work to them.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Table of Contents	5
Preface	7
CHAPTER I Autofiction <i>sans frontières</i>: autofictional trajectories in French and Greek	16
1.1. ‘Autofiction <i>à la manière de</i> Doubrovsky: its origin and parameters	17
1.2. Before and after ‘autofiction’ – theoretical frameworks and autobiographical fictions in postmodern context	28
1.3. Criticism on ‘autofiction’	35
1.4. ‘Autofiction’ <i>à la grecque</i> : Moving beyond the tradition of autobiographical fiction	42
PART A. THE EMERGENCE OF GREEK AUTOFICTION (1971-1975)	51
CHAPTER II ‘The Broken Mirror of Kostas Tachtsis’: Fragments of the self in <i>Τα ρέστα</i>	52
2.1. The structure of <i>Τα ρέστα</i> as a short story cycle	54
2.2. The autobiographical subject(s): challenging chronological and autobiographical coherence	63
2.3. Autofictional ‘rites of passage’: <i>Τα ρέστα</i> and the Bildungsroman	72
2.4. Mapping the ‘writerly queer identity’	79
CHAPTER III <i>Η Κάδμω</i> – The writing subject and the return to language	86
3.1. Kadmo’s monologue: Remembering fictional lives	88
3.2. ‘Writing the exile’s return’ – <i>Η Κάδμω</i> as an autofiction of ‘homecoming’	
3.2.1. Naming the subject	99
3.2.2. House and home	101
3.3. Kadmo and her other fictional creations – writing the ‘autobiography’ of books	107

CHAPTER IV <i>The Few things I know about Vassilis Vassilikos: at the crossroads of biography and autofiction</i>	118
4.1. <i>Γλαύκος Θρασάκης</i> as a transgressive text: moving beyond fictional (auto)biography	121
4.2. <i>Γλαύκος Θρασάκης</i> and its intertext	126
4.3. Alter egos and doubles in <i>Γλαύκος Θρασάκης</i>	132
4.4. Fictionalising the writer's exile in <i>Γλαύκος Θρασάκης</i>	140
PART B. GREEK AUTOFICTION IN THE NINETIES (1989-1995)	149
CHAPTER V Autofiction between languages and cultures: Vassilis Alexakis' <i>Παρίσι-Αθήνα</i>	150
5.1. Borderline spaces in <i>Παρίσι –Αθήνα</i> : The Canadian experience	153
5.2. 'Μισές γλώσσες': constructing the author's dual identity	161
5.3. Performing the dual identity: The author as actor	168
5.4. Writing the dual identity in <i>Παρίσι-Αθήνα</i>	175
CHAPTER VI 'Mon semblable, mon frère': Yiannis Kiourtsakis' autofictional 'dicôlon'	181
6.1. The other within the self: The fictional 'dicôlon'	183
6.2. Towards a generic definition of <i>Σαν μυθιστόρημα</i>	193
6.3. The autofiction of impossible 'nostos'	200
CHAPTER VII Pushing autofiction to its limits: The autofiction of a town in Michel Fais' <i>Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου</i>	207
7.1. Challenging the principles of autofiction – The city as the writer in the text	209
7.2. The narrating voices: The multiplication of the speaking subject(s)	218
7.3. 'Κατά το ήμισυ Εβραίος': The dual identity of the subject	230
7.4. Reading the title: Situating <i>Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου</i> at the limits of Greek autofictional writing of the 1990	238
Conclusions	243
Afterword Beyond 1995...Greek autofiction in the twenty-first century	250
Bibliography	256

Preface

I write fiction and I'm told it's autobiography, I write autobiography and I'm told it's fiction, so since I'm so dim and they're so smart, let *them* decide what it is or it isn't.

Philip Roth, *Deception* (1990)

This complaint uttered by Philip, Roth's fictional alias, encapsulates the troublesome relationship between autobiography and fiction. Philip, the writer-protagonist in *Deception* faces the dilemma of publishing his notebooks without making any changes or to revise the names chosen so that his text is not read as 'autobiography'. Philip's narrative is created at the nexus of two discrete writing modes; the autobiographical (factual) and the fictional. At the most obvious level, the title refers to the adultery committed by the protagonist. At a deeper level, it suggests that the writer in the text distorts autobiographical reality in his thinly-veiled fictional works. Ultimately, the reader is deceived if he reads the text through a single lens: as either autobiography or fiction.

This thesis focuses on a category of fictional texts in Greek that occupy the grey area between autobiography and the novel, and ultimately refuse to abide by the conventions of a single genre. More specifically, they feature a narrator/protagonist who is a writer by profession and preoccupied with the composition of the text at hand. The biographical data that are disclosed by the narrator/protagonist allow us to identify the fictional writer with the real-life author and therefore read the text as fiction that draws attention to the way it appropriates autobiographical reality.

Greek critics classify such texts under the label of ‘autobiographical fiction’, an umbrella term that I find over-simplifying and misleading. The writer of an autobiographical novel uses incidents from his/her lived reality as the subject matter for fiction and recreates them in a way that prevents the identification with his/her fictional self. There is a rich tradition of autobiographical fiction in Greece with a considerable number of novels that transcribe real-life events in fiction (including Theotokas’ *Λεωνής*, Axioti’s *Δύσκολες νύχτες*, Tachtsis’ *Το τρίτο στεφάνι*). Unfortunately, there is also lack of appropriate terminology adequate to distinguish subcategories of the vast domain of autobiographical fiction.

There is nevertheless a number of essays and articles that deal with Greek autobiographical fiction and examine individual cases of writers ranging from Vizyinos to Fais. Even though some of these studies are extremely insightful and up-to-date with the trends of literary criticism outside Greece, there is still a generalised tendency to describe fictional works that test the boundaries between fact and fiction as merely ‘autobiographical’. A significant step forward was the introduction of the term ‘fictional autobiography’ for the cases of texts in which the lives of the writer/protagonist and the narrator are intertwined with the use of fictional techniques, but even this term does not reflect the peculiarities of the category this thesis examines.¹

I believe that the tendency to oversimplify matters when it comes to this particular type of fiction is fostered by the lack of a special study that focuses on the relationship between autobiography and fiction in the case of Modern Greek and also the lack of a specific term and a theoretical framework to analyse relevant texts. The

¹ The term appears in the introduction of Dimitris Tziouvas’ study *The Other Self. Selfhood and Society in Modern Greek Fiction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003), p. 2.

only study that touches upon matters related to autobiography and fiction is Grigoris Paschalidis' 1993 book *Η ποιητική της αυτοβιογραφίας*.² Paschalidis aimed to introduce the Greek public to several theoretical models and views for the study of autobiography including those proposed by Spengemann, Pascal, Gusdorf, Lejeune, de Man and Olney. Paschalidis' study is impressive regarding the amount of theory it tackles, but it draws examples mainly from English and French autobiographical literature and only occasionally from Greek. He attributes the sporadic employment of Greek examples to a 'belated' development of the autobiographical genre in Greece. The scattered references to fictional works such as Tachtsis' *Το φοβερό βήμα* are not distinguished from autobiography proper, which points to the fact that autobiographical fiction is not discussed as a separate area of interest in Paschalidis' poetics of autobiography.

In order to analyse this specific category of texts that revolve around the fictionalisation of the real-life author, I had to resort to a term from the literary vocabulary that combines the practice of life-writing with fiction while drawing attention to its self-reflexive character. Given the lack of any corresponding Greek term and my reluctance to employ the term 'autobiographical' as a buzz word in Greek for all prose texts that relate partly or in their entirety to the real lives of their authors, I decided to turn to French theory and terminology. This is how I came across the term 'autofiction' that was proposed in 1977 by the French critic and novelist Serge Doubrovsky.

Autofiction is a term currently espoused by a significant number of novelists and academics when discussing fictional texts that cross the boundaries between

² Grigoris Paschalidis, *Η ποιητική της αυτοβιογραφίας* (Athens: Smili, 1993).

autobiography and the novel. In the early days of its existence however, this neologism was either downplayed or dismissed by established critics. During the thirty-six years of its life, autofiction has incited heated discussions among francophone literary circles. Its liminal situation between autobiography and the novel baffled critics to the point that academic readership was split into two warring camps: ardent supporters and fervent accusers. Lately, the situation has changed considerably; so far three colloquia focusing exclusively on autofiction have taken place in France (2008 and 2012 in Cerisy-La-Salle) and in the USA (2012 at New York University). The number of articles and studies employing autofiction as a framework for the study of German, Spanish, English, Indian and Japanese texts is constantly growing, while an up-to date website (www.autofiction.org) is dedicated to the promotion of autofictional studies worldwide.

The question however remains; why is the schema of autofiction most suitable for the purposes of this study? When adjusted beyond Doubrovsky's parameters, the framework of autofiction allows us to study texts in which the intratextual writers rewrite their own private and authorial lives in the form of a novel that openly challenges the staples of autobiographical fiction. Another important factor in my selection of autofiction as the reading framework for my thesis is the realisation that it is indeed the best theoretical lens to study identities articulated by the writers in the text, to which I shall refer extensively in the next few pages.

Before moving on to a description of the main questions this thesis addresses, I feel it is necessary to clarify how I intend to use the terms 'author in the text', 'authoring/autofictional consciousness' and 'intratextual writer'. All three terms are used here interchangeably and refer to the real-life author who enters his/her own fiction as a narrator and as the main protagonist, who is a writer. I wish to discourage

a possible interpretation of the above terms as synonyms to the widely known concept of ‘the implied author’ formulated by Wayne Booth in his influential study *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth understands the implied author in terms of a ‘second self’: an ‘implied image’ of the real-life author that emerges in his/her fiction.³ The concept of ‘the implied author’ bears an emotional and moral load as it acts as an intermediate agent between the narrator and the author.⁴ I, on the other hand, take the identification between the narrator, the real life author and the writer in the text for granted - something that is not that common in mainstream fiction. I am interested in the way that the author is represented in the text and not in the way he/she is contained in the ideas projected in the text or its individual style and aesthetics.⁵

Chapter One of my thesis stands on its own as it aims firstly to familiarise the reader with the theory of autofiction through an account of Serge Doubrovsky’s novels and articles, secondly, to relate autofiction to similar theoretical perspectives on fictional autobiography and thirdly, to give an overview of current critical perspectives on autofiction. The last part focuses exclusively on Greece and investigates the tradition of autobiographical fiction in order to situate the emergence of Greek autofiction in the early seventies and follow its development in the nineties.

The following six chapters are conveniently arranged in two parts that reflect the two periods of Greek autofictional writing. The first part of the thesis focuses on the emergence of autofiction in Greece and situates it in the postmodern context of the 1970s. In this sense my analysis presupposes Dimitris Papanikolaou’s (as well as Van Dyck’s) contention that the military regime and its censorship policies fostered

³ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), (first pub.1961), p.67-86.

⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

⁵ Wolf Schmid, ‘Implied Author’, paragraph 2. in Peter Hühn et al. (eds.), *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2009). Web. www.hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=ImpliedAuthor&oldid=1586 [accessed on 01/12/2012].

manifestations of Greek postmodernism in the early 1970s.⁶ As my readings of *Τα ρέστα* (chapter 2), *Η Κάδμω* (chapter 3) and *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* (chapter 4) will illustrate, Kostas Tachtsis, Melpo Axioti and Vassilis Vassilikos developed a mode of writing that obscured autobiographical reality through postmodern fictional strategies – most notably through the refraction of the authorial subject into fictional alter egos and the discussion of the process of creating the text.

An important aspect for my analysis is the treatment of the identities projected by the ‘author in the text’ and its fictional projections. The identities I shall identify could be described as ‘marginal’ when discussed in relation to the regime’s acceptable standards. The homosexual identity emerging from Tachtsis’ short stories in *Τα ρέστα* and the identity of the exiled author projected by both Axioti and Vassilikos would be marginalised in any environment controlled by regime’s ideology. The term ‘marginal’ seems however too narrow to encompass the breadth of those identities so I will be using the term ‘writerly identities’ instead. Laura Reeck put forward the term ‘writerly identities’ in her recent study on the autofiction of the francophone immigrants from North Africa.⁷ The term calls attention to the fact that these identities are valid in the context of the written text and that they are ultimately products of the act of writing.⁸ According to Reeck modern *autofictionneurs* that have emerged from the Beur culture in postcolonial France produce politically charged autofictions, in which the autofictional self usually articulates more than one ‘writerly’ identity that are in a symbiotic and/or antagonistic relationship. Therefore, I seek to contextualise the artificiality of those identities while at the same time I

⁶ Dimitris Papanikolaou, ‘Greece as a Postmodern Example: *Boundary 2* and its Special Issue on Greece’, *Kambos* 13 (2005), p. 127-145. Also Karen Van Dyck, *Kassandra and the Censors. Greek Poetry since 1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.12-27.

⁷ Laura Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), p. 16-17.

⁸ I believe that the adjective ‘writerly’ encompasses Barthes’ distinction between ‘lisible’ (readerly) and ‘scriptible’ (writerly) texts.

inscribe the emergence of Greek autofiction in the postmodern literary milieu of the dictatorship.

In the second part of the thesis I abandon the term ‘writerly’ identities in favour of ‘dual identities’. During the second period of Greek autofiction (first part of the nineties), the practitioners use as a central axis the writing subject’s position between two spaces and two different identities (national, linguistic, cultural and religious). My aim is to argue that Alexakis, Kiourtsakis and Fais resort to autofiction in order to articulate their dual identities (that could roughly be schematised as Greek/ French or Greek/Jewish).

I shall explore the ‘dual’ identities on the basis of a ‘self’/‘other self’ bipole, a theoretical construct that I have borrowed from Dimitris Tziovas and his 2003 study *The Other Self*. Tziovas focuses mainly on the exploration of the fictional construct of the self in novels of ‘formation’ that follow the characters’ development within society (focusing largely on ‘defiant’ characters that find themselves in contrast to the society’s norms and demands). Inspired also by Lyotard’s axiom that the self is an ever-changing construct that is reshaped according to how it relates with others,⁹ Tziovas highlights the dualism of the fictional self.¹⁰ He talks about the ‘liminal self that is on the boundaries of the self’ and the ‘self who stares into the eyes of the other or with the eyes of the other’.¹¹ Understanding the self as the ‘other’ and vice versa reflects the act of writing as such, as the text is in a state of continuous flux, being created while we are reading it.

⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.13.

¹⁰ Tziovas, op.cit .,p.5.

¹¹ Ibid., p.10.

I regularly make the case that the driving force behind the Greek autofictional texts of the nineties is exactly this ‘dualism’ on the level of the construction of the writer’s identities that is further projected on spatial bipoles like Alexakis’ Paris and Athens, Kiourtsakis’ Greece and Belgium (or France) and Fais’ multicultural hometown of Komotini in the past and present. I put forward the suggestion that the staple of Greek autofictional texts in the nineties is that they illustrate the tensions, the frictions as well as the ‘symbiosis’ or ‘antagonism’ between the distinct identities of the writer in the text. In *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*, Vassilis Alexakis subjectivises the linguistic split of the writing subject between French and Greek. In *Σαν μωθιστόρημα* Yiannis Kiourtsakis addresses the theme of ‘δίκωλον’ by fictionalising the relationship with his brother and literally becoming his brother’s double. Last is Michel Fais, whose Greco-Jewish identity is the focal point of the autofiction of the town of Komotini in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* as one follows the process in which the authoring consciousness is recreated through the revelation that the multiple protagonists are actually mere refractions of the same overarching subject, who struggles to reconcile his silenced Jewish heritage with his Greek self.

I close this introductory discussion by discussing one of my key reading choices for this study. Occasionally, I discuss certain metafictional elements separately as I do not believe that metafiction is simply a modality of autofiction. Hence, I follow Iovinelli’s approach, which treats autofiction and metafiction as two distinct forms of writing.¹² The process of fictionalising the author in the text will most probably entail a metafictional dimension but one should remember that while metafiction focuses on the process of creating the text, autofiction ultimately places the emphasis on the authorial consciousness and how it is articulated in the self-referential text.

¹² Alessandro Iovinelli, *L'autore e il personaggio. L'opera metabiografica nella narrativa italiana degli ultimi trent'anni* (n.p. Rubbettino, 2005), p. 247-254.

Finally, I would like to clarify that this thesis is by no means an exhaustive study on Greek autofiction. An informed reader could think of several Greek texts that could be read in the light of autofiction, but are not discussed here. Given however the limited space available, I decided to include the cases I deemed the most representative of the period covered in this thesis.

CHAPTER I

'Autofiction sans frontières': autofictional trajectories in French and Greek

Autobiographie, roman, pareil. Le même truc, le même trucage: ça a l'air d'imiter le cours d'une vie, de se déplier selon son fil.

Serge Doubrovsky, *Le livre brisé* (1989)

L'autofiction ça peut être un fragment de vie [...] une manière contemporaine pour l'écrivain d'écrire sur soi.

Serge Doubrovsky in an interview with Mélikah Abdelmoumen (Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2011)

1.1. 'Autofiction à la manière de Doubrovsky: its origin and parameters

Le Grand Robert defines autofiction as “a narrative that combines fiction and autobiographical reality”.¹³ According to *Le Grand Larousse* autofiction is “an autobiography that borrows the narrative forms of fiction”.¹⁴ The term was only included in the latest editions of both dictionaries, a fact that suggests that ‘autofiction’ was not taken up easily by scholarly criticism. ‘Autofiction’ remained a largely contested issue within life-writing scholarly circles in France until the mid nineties, and virtually unknown as a name and a practice to the wider public before 1989.

In 1977, Serge Doubrovsky, a professor of French literature at New York University, and also an essayist and novelist, published his third novel entitled *Fils* [*Son or Threads*] and devised the term in order to define his practice.¹⁵ *Fils* focuses on a single day in the life of the narrator, Julien Serge Doubrovsky, whom the readers follow as he wanders around the streets of New York, meets his psychoanalyst Akeret and delivers a university lecture on Racine’s *Phèdre*. On the back cover of his novel Doubrovsky offered reading instructions and officially introduced the term ‘autofiction’.¹⁶

Autobiographie? Non. C’est un privilege réservé aux importants de ce monde au soir de leur vie et dans un beau style. Fiction d’événements et de faits strictement réels; si l’on veut *autofiction*, d’avoir confié le

¹³ *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, directed by Alain Rey (Paris: Dictionnaires *Le Robert*, 2001).

¹⁴ *Le Grand Larousse illustré* (Paris: Larousse, 2005), p.204.

¹⁵ In 1997 Mark Weitzmann, a cousin of Doubrovsky, claimed that the credit for inventing the term ‘autofiction’ should not go to Doubrovsky but to Jerzy Kosinski and his book *The Painted Bird* (1965). Doubrovsky himself and other fellow critics argued that this novel could not be classified as autofiction, since there was no nominal identification between the author and the protagonist and moreover, the author was not narrating his own life, but he had fictionalised a certain experience of the war in Poland. Philippe Vilain provides a detailed but slightly biased account of Weitzmann’s allegations in his essay *Défense de Narcisse* (Paris: Grasset, 2005).

¹⁶ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Grasset, 2001)(first pub. 1977).

langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau.

This extract sheds light on the exact identity of a fictional subgenre that had already emerged by 1977. Doubrovsky distinguishes autofiction from autobiography by highlighting the retrospective nature of the traditional autobiographical narrative. He accentuates at the same time the preponderance of the fictional element and claims an innovative approach with regard to language and syntax, which as I shall explain later tries to reflect the unconscious. Doubrovsky challenges autobiography's pretensions to provide a definitive and all-embracing version of a person's life. Instead of a coherent account of the individual's past, he proposes fragmentation. He was in search of a *terminus technicus* that would clarify the vagueness of what up until that moment would have been labelled as an 'autobiographical novel'. That new subgenre that he was theorizing would also feature a radically new perspective on the syntax and the language of the novel, and promised to move beyond the experimentations of contemporary practitioners.

Recent research focusing on Doubrovsky's unpublished novel *Le monstre* shows that Doubrovsky had conceived the term in the early 1970s. The text is essentially the first version of *Fils* that became known when the author entrusted his manuscripts to a group of researchers headed by Isabelle Grell and Arnaud Genon in 2002. The researchers then came across the first form of the term – spelled as AUTO-FICTION (sic).¹⁷ Nevertheless, the term remained in obscurity for more than five years before appearing on the back cover of *Fils*. Both the novel and the term appeared in public when Doubrovsky thought the timing was right; in 1975 a

¹⁷ See Isabelle Grell, 'Pourquoi Serge Doubrovsky n'a pu éviter le terme d'autofiction?' in Jean-Louis Jeannelle, Catherine Viollet and Isabelle Grell (eds.), *Genèse et autofiction* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2007), p. 39-51.

pioneering study had transformed the field of life-writing criticism in France and this became a springboard for officially launching the term.

Philippe Lejeune's seminal work *Le pacte autobiographique* led Doubrovsky (according to his claims) to devise a term suitable for works that in Lejeune's analysis are described as 'blind cases' ('les cases aveugles').¹⁸ In order to construct his theoretical grid, Lejeune classified the texts on the basis of two pacts: the autobiographical and the fictional ('le pacte autobiographique' and 'le pacte romanesque' respectively). Furthermore, he claimed that there were two liminal cases: the case of a self-declared autobiography, in which the name of the protagonist is different from the name of the author and the case of a novel in which the hero has the same name as the extra-textual author.¹⁹ Lejeune asserts that as far as the second possibility is concerned, it is not impossible for the hero of a novel to have the same name as the author.²⁰ On the contrary, he speculated that such identification could bring about interesting effects but he did not specify those and furthermore, admitted that he could not name a novel that put that strategy into practice.²¹

Fils responds to the basic criterion prescribed by Lejeune for the 'blind case', as the name of the protagonist and the narrator is gradually revealed as Julien Serge Doubrovsky, the actual name of the author. In late 1977, Doubrovsky wrote a letter to Lejeune explaining the role of *Le pacte autobiographique* for the composition of *Fils*. He wrote: "J'ai voulu remplir très profondément cette "case" que votre analyse laissait vide, et c'est un véritable désir qui a soudainement lié votre texte critique et ce que j'étais en train d'écrire(...)". Thus, Doubrovsky appears to have consciously

¹⁸ Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1996) (first pub.1975).

¹⁹ Ibid., 1996, p.31-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 1996, p.31: "Le héros d'un roman déclaré tel peut-il avoir le même nom que l'auteur? Rien n'empêcherait la chose d'exister."

²¹ Lejeune was not aware of Luke Rhinehart's novel *The Dice Man* (1971), which is based mainly on Rhinehart's own experiences of psychoanalysis and introduces him as the protagonist and the narrator.

moulded *Fils* in order to fit the parameters of the blind case of Lejeune's poetics.²² Given that the first edition of *Fils* went by unnoticed according to Gasparini's information, this letter can be interpreted as an attempt to attribute particular traits to a fictional text by immediately linking it to a study that was greeted as ground-breaking in the domain of autobiography in France.²³ The letter also reveals how highly Doubrovsky as professional literary critic thought of theory and considered it as complementing the work of fiction. More importantly however, we can claim that his fiction follows theoretical premises as he writes with a certain theory in mind and aiming to provide an example of a seminal study such as Lejeune's for future publications.

The way towards the establishment of the term was not an easy one if we consider that the novel was bypassed by criticism. Doubrovsky engaged in 'auto-critique' from as early as 1979 and began promoting the term not only through his fiction but also through his articles.²⁴ In his 1979 article 'L'initiative aux maux: écrire sa psychanalyse', where he first established the rapport between psychoanalysis and autobiography, he repeated the term 'autofiction' and applied it to his individual case without however giving any further definitions.²⁵ There are a couple of interesting ideas in this article, which are nevertheless not developed into a concrete argument.

²² The letter (dated 17 October 1977) is cited by Lejeune in 'Autofictions & Cie. Pièce en cinq actes', *RITM: Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur les Textes Modernes* 6 (1993), p. 6. See also Philippe Lejeune, *Moi Aussi* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), p. 63. However, since the term was first conceived in the early 1970s Doubrovsky's allegations that the term is directly related to Lejeune's work could be dismissed as inaccurate.

²³ Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction. Un aventure du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p.32.

²⁴ For more information on *autocritique* and the case of Doubrovsky see Jean-Luc Pagès, 'Le jeu de l'autocritique littéraire à l'autofiction de Proust à Doubrovsky' (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997).

²⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, 'L'initiative aux maux: écrire sa psychanalyse' in *Cahiers Confrontation* 1, (February 1979) and in *Parcours critique* (Paris: Gallilée, 1980), p.165-201.

The article was included in the collection of essays *Parcours Critique*, and in the preface Doubrovsky writes that when he engages in a self-analysis of his own text, the critic within him collides with the writer.²⁶ Therefore, Doubrovsky introduces himself as both the writer and the first reader of his own autofiction. However, the two qualities he claims, are in an antagonistic relationship; the writing subject struggles in vain to reconcile the *autofictionneur* with the critic and has to resort to psychoanalysis in search of equilibrium.

In 1980 Doubrovsky wrote one of his most important essays, which contains key notions that he would repeat in later stages of his career.²⁷ In ‘Autobiographie, vérité, psychanalyse’, Doubrovsky begins by exalting self-analysis and suggesting that it is one of the supplementary forms of modern autobiography, paralleling it with the late seventeenth century or early eighteenth century essays that are classified as autobiographical texts. For the first time he analyses the term ‘autofiction’, three years after its appearance on the back cover of *Fils*. The analysis Doubrovsky offers seems to suggest that autofiction is a new name for the autobiographical novel and contends that autofiction brings together autobiographical writing and the poetic function of language. He states: “Ni autobiographie, ni roman, donc, au sens strict, il fonctionne dans l’entre-deux, en un renvoi incessant, eu un lieu impossible et insaisissable ailleurs que dans l’opération du texte.”²⁸

In this excerpt, Doubrovsky puts forward the issue of dualism in autofiction, the exploration of which is of pivotal importance for the present thesis. By placing autofiction at the crossroads between autobiography and the novel, he asserts the post-modern character of this new genre that blends so radically two modes of writing that

²⁶ Serge Doubrovsky, *Parcours critique*, op.cit., p. 11.

²⁷ Serge Doubrovsky, ‘Autobiographie, vérité, psychanalyse’ in *Autobiographiques, de Corneille à Sartre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), p. 61-79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

were traditionally considered to be mutually exclusive. Moreover, as suggested by the title of this essay, Doubrovsky introduces psychoanalysis as a principle upon which all his subsequent theoretical texts are based. He notes:

L'autofiction c'est la fiction que j'ai décidé, en tant qu' écrivain, de me donner de moi-même et par moi-même, en y incorporant, au sens plein du terme, l' expérience de l'analyse, non point seulement dans la thématique, mais dans la production du texte.²⁹

This particular article can be read as a programmatic text for the development of the genre, since Doubrovsky is called in defence of his own work and feels that he has to prove the validity of his neologism. He introduces the psychoanalytical framework for the study of his novels, as he believes that literary criticism had been transformed because of the introduction of psychoanalytical theories as reading frames. Psychoanalysis allows Doubrovsky to treat his fragmented self and at the same time, explain dualistic patterns that emerge from his text such as the coexistence of two linguistic identities (French, his mother tongue and English, the language of his environment) and furthermore, the dynamics between two sexual identities (public heterosexuality and latent homosexuality).³⁰

In 1982 Doubrovsky published his fourth novel, *Un amour de soi* in which he fictionalised his troubled love affair with Rachel, a relationship that mirrors the odd marriage between the elegant Charles Swann and Odette de Crecy in Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*.³¹ The term 'autofiction' appeared again on the back cover:

Étrange aventure, pour un universitaire qui enseigne confortablement Proust à New York, lorsqu' il découvre un jour que Swann, c'est soi. (...) Ce règlement de comptes exacerbé avec soi- même refusera donc

²⁹ Ibid., p.77.

³⁰ Many articles, by both Doubrovsky and others, have attempted psychoanalytical readings of Doubrovsky's fictions or have pinpointed the role of psychoanalytical theories in his work, so there is no need to reproduce any of the work done in this field.

³¹ The title *Un amour de soi* is obviously modeled after *Un amour de Swann*, the third person novella included in the first instalment of Proust's saga, entitled *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913).

les alibis du romanesque. Seule, en effet, une « autofiction » assume réellement dans le vif, le fardeau des vérités pénibles que l'on supporte uniquement dans l'abstrait ; ou sur le dos des autres.³²

In the excerpt quoted above we can see how Doubrovsky's thinking around autofiction has rapidly evolved. He takes one step further in his literary theory of autofiction by intensifying both the fictional and the autobiographical element in autofiction. Whereas in *Fils* he would declare that the right to autobiography should be reserved to important individuals near the end of their lives, in *Un amour de soi* he fictionalises his own self and identifies with Proust's Swann. The boundaries between the genres have been effectively transgressed and it seems impossible for the subject to distinguish between reality and fiction.

In his 1985 volume of seven short stories, *La vie, l' instant*, the word autofiction is absent. It appears again on the back cover of the 1989 novel *Le livre brisé*. This was the work that introduced Doubrovsky to the greater public and won him the Prix Médicis. In the text Serge accounts for his married life with Austrian-born spouse Ilse in New York and explores how they divide themselves between their maternal languages and English. Through the pages of his diary, Serge revisits Sartre and his autobiography *Les mots* as well as his iconic work *La nausée* (1938) in order to introduce the theme of solitude he experiences as a result of his problematic relationship with his wife. Ilse is exposed as an alcoholic and dies towards the end of the novel.³³ The blurb on the back cover states that Doubrovsky describes *Le livre brisé* as an autofiction because he uses his own life as subject-matter; the only difference between real life and the text is that the latter focuses on the transformations of the language.³⁴

³² Serge Doubrovsky, *Un amour de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) (first pub. 1982).

³³ Ironically the fictional death of Ilse in *Le livre brisé* coincided with the death of Doubrovsky's wife.

³⁴ Serge Doubrovsky, *Le livre brisé* (Paris: Grasset, 1989).

Critics consider *Le livre brisé* as Doubrovsky's most important novel since all the themes that he had used in the past resurface here with greater intensity and fully developed. The author is more straightforward than ever because he admits to have drawn its material exclusively from his own life. Furthermore, Doubrovsky is to this day praised for his verbal mastery in *Le livre brisé* and the way he uses language in order to transform experiences into written discourse.

Doubrovsky's sixth novel, entitled *L'après-vivre* (1994) picks up from where *Le livre brisé* ended. In this autofiction Serge splits his time between his academic post in New York and his life as a writer in Paris. He is trying to come to terms with the death of his second wife and sort out the troublesome relationship with his younger lover while he tries to control his guilt for Ilse's death as well as his own addiction to alcohol and prescribed medicine. On the back cover, Doubrovsky opted for the description *roman vrai* only to introduce autofiction directly in the narrative. He writes: "C'est vrai, je ne suis pas sûr pourquoi, j'ai pris l'habitude, depuis des années de mettre ma vie en récits. D'en faire par tranche, des sortes de romans. J'ai appelé ça, faute de mieux, mon autofiction."³⁵

Roman vrai could be interpreted as almost a contradiction in terms – the notion of reality clashes with that of fiction as an artifact. In a playful mood, Doubrovsky suggests that autofiction was the best term he could come up with in order to encapsulate the transformation of autobiographical material into fiction, without distorting the actual facts. He goes on to say that 'autofiction' became the medium to write down his life and put it in books, in order to be read as a novel about him as a fictional being.³⁶ Such an admission indicates that despite having developed his techniques and thoughts regarding autofiction, as time went by, he remained

³⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, *L'après-vivre* (Paris: Grasset, 1989), p.20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20.

faithful to the statement “Je suis un être fictif”, which will be readdressed in the following section where I discuss the case of Roland Barthes.

Following this presentation of Doubrovsky’s novels and articles, a key question needs to be addressed.³⁷ What is essentially new or even radical about autofiction according to Doubrovsky? Which are the original elements that differentiate his novelistic practice to what we normally define as autobiographical fiction? In his texts the narrator/protagonist is not simply identified with the real author Doubrovsky, but has the exact same name. The name of the author on the cover of the book reappears in the pages of the book (in the form of initials eg. J.S.D or in full, e.g Julien Serge Doubrovsky) while under the title one reads the generic specification: novel. Unlike many cases of autobiographical fiction, where despite the obvious parallels between the author’s real life and the hero’s fictionalised life, the protagonist is presented with a different name due to the intervention of the fictionalisation process, here no effort is made to conceal the identity of the hero. The ambition is to make it as explicit as possible that the author fictionalises himself and hence blurs the boundaries between the genres of autobiography and the novel.

An important trait of Doubrovskian autofiction is its dependence on psychoanalysis; it hosts long scenes of psychoanalytical sessions and long narrations of dreams.³⁸ In an interview with Doubrovsky in 1977 shortly after the publication of *Fils*, Bernard Pivot described *Fils* as a day of self-psychoanalysis, a description that

³⁷ I have omitted from my analysis Doubrovsky’s texts that were written before 1977 as well as the two autofictions *Laissé pour conte* (1998) and *Un homme de passage* (2011) as they do not fall into the time period this thesis covers.

³⁸ For a psychoanalytical approach to Doubrovsky’s works see Jean François Chiantaretto, ‘Écriture de son analyse et autofiction: le «cas» Serge Doubrovsky’, *RITM: Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur les Textes Modernes* 6 (1993), p.165-181. Also Anneleen Masschelein, ‘Psychoanalysts finding form: (auto)fictional experiments in contemporary psychoanalysis’, *Revue électronique de littérature française* 4, no.1 (2010), p.123-143.

the author readily accepted.³⁹ Psychoanalysis is a fundamental process in Doubrovsky's writing as the author is attracted to the idea that the self cannot be perceived as a single 'entity' but rather as fragments of a dis-unified consciousness. There is however a downside to this fascination with psychoanalysis in Doubrovsky's works; often the long scenes between the protagonist and Akeret, his analyst, tend to monopolize the writer's interest to the point that the text comes close to psychoanalytic fiction.

Another vital feature for Doubrovsky's autofiction is the emphasis on language and more specifically on what he calls "the adventure of language".⁴⁰ By inverting the order of words *langage* and *aventure* on the cover of *Fils*, he juxtaposed autofiction to conventional narratives that put language in the service of plot. For Doubrovsky, autofiction is essentially a matter of language: the 'adventurous' language he proposes is on the one hand made up by sequences of words (*films des mots*), in which alliterations (*allitérations*), assonances (*assonances*) and word puns (*calembours*) abound, and on the other hand is full of gaps that denote the silences and the fragmentary character of the narrative.⁴¹

In the manuscripts of *Fils*, Doubrovsky explains how he handles language in his autofiction, by applying controlled freedom in the use and choice of words. He writes: "Laisser les mots. Se retourner. En liberté. Surveillée. C'est la langue. Qui devient. Spontanément. L'anti-langue. Mon travail."⁴² This notion of controlled freedom (*liberté surveillée*) in terms of language is central in Doubrovsky's *Fils*. The

³⁹ Serge Doubrovsky, 'Ah vous écrivez?' Interview by Bernard Pivot (1979). Web [accessed on 13 Dec.2012]. Pivot asked Doubrovsky: "Et finalement, est-ce qu'on peut dire de ce livre que c'est une journée d'auto-psychanalyse?"

⁴⁰ See the back cover of *Fils*.

⁴¹ Elisabeth H. Jones, 'Autofiction: A Brief History of a Neologism' in Richard Bradford (ed.), *Life Writing. Essays on Autobiography, Biography and Literature*. (Basingstone: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.174- 184. See esp.p. 177. Also in Gasparini, *Autofiction*, op.cit., p. 23-27.

⁴² See 'Le monstre', folio 1301 as cited by Isabelle Grell on the Larousse website: <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/article/Laroussefr - Article/11000875> [accessed on 20 August 2012].

text displays bold experimentations on the level of language, which reflect the spontaneous process of evoking disjointed memories. Doubrovsky stressed the erotic relationship that the text develops with the maternal language. He even drew a parallel between the vestigial storyline of *Fils* (a son's written tribute to his deceased mother) and the relationship the protagonist/narrator maintains with his mother-tongue. French is after all the language that links him back to his origins and his past in France and this is why he chooses to employ it as a medium for his fiction.

Another important element of autofiction (that does not apply solely to the case of Doubrovsky) is dualism, which will be explored further in the second part of the thesis through my readings of Greek autofiction in the 1990s. Dualism exists at all levels in Doubrovskian autofiction: first, the dualistic nature of autofictional writing as suggested above (incorporating principles of autobiography and fiction). Secondly, the dualism experienced at a deeper level by the protagonist, who is split between inherent and imposed or even chosen identities and torn between two languages, cultures and eventually different selves.⁴³

Doubrovsky declared that the actual practice had been out there long before his novels were published and that important writers had already been producing works that could be classified as autofictions (and gave as an example Colette's 1928 text *La naissance du jour*).⁴⁴ The practice simply lacked a name and a definition and Doubrovsky was the one to offer that. By claiming that autofiction was not simply a personal manner or philosophy of writing but a tested subgenre, he championed the ubiquitous nature of autofiction while he emphasized his own critical intervention. In his own words: "Donc, je n'ai pas du tout inventé l'autofiction. J'ai inventé le nom, le

⁴³ For an analysis on how *Le livre brisé* puts the idea of dualism to practice by splitting the book into two; between Doubrovsky and Ilse, see Hélène Jaccopard, 'Qui brise *Le livre brisé* de Serge Doubrovsky?', *Littérature* 92 (1993), p.37-51.

⁴⁴ See Patrick Saveau, 'Autofiction n'est pas invention: le cas Doubrovsky', *Dalhousie French Studies* 48 (fall 1999), p. 147-153.

mot.”⁴⁵ However modest the above statement might sound, we have to credit Doubrovsky with proposing a term that would replace the generalised and slightly loose *mot-valise* of ‘autobiographical fiction’. Doubrovsky did not revolutionize autobiographical fiction overnight; it would be an exaggeration to suggest that. We may say that by reproducing the group of the aforementioned strategies and techniques in his fictional works and by commenting on those through his critical discourse, he offered critics a useful tool in order to tackle a specific phenomenon within postmodern fiction. Then it was up to the rest of the critics to reflect further on the use of the term and its applicability.

1.2. Before and after ‘autofiction’ - theoretical frameworks and autobiographical fictions in postmodern context

As we noted in the previous section Doubrovsky tried not to restrict the applicability of the term autofiction strictly to his own novels; on the contrary, he sought to establish the term as a reading frame for texts written even before 1977. His contribution in the field of literary criticism on autobiographical fiction could be understood as a follow-up to other critical frameworks, which will be examined in this section. I shall focus on certain theoretical discourses that could be inscribed in a postmodern context and whose authors approached more or less the path of Doubrovsky. My objective is to see whether other writers or critics engaged in an exploration similar to Doubrovsky’s autofiction before this was officially suggested as such. To this end, I will discuss cases of ‘autobiografiction’ as examined by Max

⁴⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, Interview by Alex Hughes (University of Birmingham, 1999). Web. <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/artsFrenchStudies/Sergedou/intervw.htm> [accessed on 27/04/2011].

Saunders, Raymond Federman's 'surfiction', Roland Barthes' *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, as well as novels and articles by Alain Robbe-Grillet.

In 2010 Max Saunders published a meticulous study on 'autobiografiction', a term that appears to enclose 'autofiction'.⁴⁶ Saunders introduced 'autobiografiction' as a type of fiction preoccupied with the genre of autobiography. Instead of offering a definition, Saunders states that "autobiografiction reflects the literary relationship between fiction and a self's autobiography, rather than that between fiction and a self".⁴⁷ He also revealed that the term 'autobiografiction' was not his own invention but dated back to 1906, when Stephen Reynolds wrote an essay under that title.⁴⁸ In his essay, Reynolds drew the distinction between autobiographical fiction and 'autobiografiction', saying that the first term was to be used for the cases of "fiction with a good deal of the writer's own life in it" while the second should be used to "connote shortly a minor literary form which stands between those two extremes; which is of late growth and of a nature at once very indefinite and very definite."⁴⁹ Reynolds went on to argue that 'autobiografiction' combined three threads: autobiography, fiction and essay. Up to a certain point, Reynold's use of the term 'autobiografiction' seems to anticipate Doubrovsky's case seventy years before the term's inception.

For the purposes of his analysis, Saunders examined an impressive array of modern and postmodern texts to offer insights into this process of marrying life-writing and fiction. However, he directly states that 'autobiografiction' is more appropriate for modernist experiments than postmodern, and claims that there are many terms available for the discussion of those liminal cases of postmodern texts,

⁴⁶ Max Saunders, *Self Impression. Life-Writing, Autobiografiction and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴⁸ Stephen Reynolds, 'Autobiografiction', *Speaker* 15 (new series), 366 (6 October 1906), p.28 -30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

including ‘autofiction’. He briefly mentions Doubrovsky in his introduction but his corpus of texts covers mainly the modernist period (1870-1930). We can therefore argue that Saunders’ interpretation of ‘autobiografiction’ can be treated as a forerunner of autofiction, with applicability mainly in a modernist context.

In 1973 Raymond Federman came up with the term ‘surfiction’ in order to define the process of fictionalising real-life experiences. Federman contended that this type of writing gives access to a certain truth projected by the writing I.⁵⁰ Often mistaken as a synonym for metafiction,⁵¹ ‘surfiction’ employs metafictional devices for exposing fictional conventions but does so in order to promote the “fictional aspect of reality” and also reveal “the playful irrationality of human beings”.⁵² In 1983, inspired by his readings of postmodern texts by William Burroughs and Samuel Beckett, he put forward the term *nouvelle fiction* (reminiscent of *nouveau roman*) in order to argue for the fragmentary nature of contemporary fiction.

It is clear that ‘surfiction’ only partly fulfils the criteria set out by Doubrovsky and it is a product of an avant-garde generalised movement that sought to renew the novel and fiction in general. Federman’s term was proposed rather hastily and was not further elaborated in the years that followed its inception. It is important to mention that Federman was aware of the term Doubrovsky coined but he associated ‘autofiction’ with an experimental type of writing that was directly linked to the post-holocaust experience. Federman’s understanding of ‘autofiction’ as a narrative

⁵⁰ The case of Raymond Federman has already been paralleled to Doubrovsky’s since both authors are Jews that escaped the Nazi manhunt in occupied France and emigrated to the United States. Both Federman and Doubrovsky produced fiction and criticism; nevertheless, Federman has produced creative work in both French and English, unlike Doubrovsky. Federman’s fiction is marked by his traumatic experience of the Second World War as this becomes apparent in his ‘realistic’ narrations but at the same time he maintains that he is above all a storyteller, who distorts the real facts just for the sake of telling a story.

⁵¹ See Irüdiger Imhof, ‘Contemporary Metafiction: The Phenomenon and the Efforts to Explain it’ in *REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 5 (1987), p. 271-329. See especially p. 292-293.

⁵² Raymond Federman, *Surfiction Fiction Now...and Tomorrow* (Ohio: Swallow Press, 1981) (first pub. 1975).

centered on the articulation of the writer's Jewish identity introduces important cultural dimensions to 'autofiction' that I will be discussing in the following sections.

"Tout ici doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman". This was the emblematic opening statement of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* that appeared in 1975 as a part of the popular series 'Écrivains de toujours' (1951-1981).⁵³ When the publishing house Seuil invited Barthes to contribute with a volume on himself, he appeared to conform (at least on the surface) to the style of the series and respect the format of previous instalments (where the text is accompanied with photos). A first divergence from the blueprint for the series is that Barthes chose to replace the standard subtitle '*par lui-même*' and use his full name twice. Erasing the inscription '*par lui-même*' would probably discourage readers from approaching the text as an authoritative self-portrait and a 'retrospective' autobiography. Barthes however creates certain expectations for his readers, which he then deconstructs. The doubling of his name initially suggests that he amplifies his presence in the work but when read in the light of the remark quoted above, we understand that it subverts the entire autobiographical enterprise by rendering the autobiographical 'I' into the textual persona of 'Roland Barthes'.

Hence, Roland Barthes becomes a fictional persona independent from the real-life author; a persona that does not exist beyond the text. By stating that the text should be read as fiction, Barthes establishes distance between himself as the writer and a fictional persona. Doubrovsky, too, tries to secure this distance between his autofictional 'I' and his fictional persona when he claims "Je suis un être fictive" in

⁵³ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 2010) (first pub.1975). The series featured slim volumes in which a critic undertook the task of introducing a famous author to the general public through the extracts from his/her texts and photos. Barthes' instalment was actually the first and only volume of the series written by the writer himself. For more details on the series see Vincent Debaene, 'Atelier de la théorie littéraire: La collection «Écrivains de toujours» (1951-1981)', <http://www.fabula.org/atelier.php> [accessed on 30 October 2012].

Le livre brisé. In the main body of the text, Barthes as a fictional protagonist presents his readers with fragments of his works, displayed as dictionary or encyclopedia entries and further obscures the distinction between reality and fiction. The fragmentation of the text suggests Barthes' opposition to a conventional and coherent autobiography and inscribes the text into the domain of autofiction.

Moreover, Barthes asserts that a 'true' autobiography is impossible and that the autobiographical subject is constructed in the text exclusively through language and thus paves the way for Doubrovsky's experiments. Barthes may occasionally use his own initials as Doubrovsky will later do, but he also uses the personal pronouns 'I', 'You', 'He' – a point of divergence from Doubrovsky's example. Nevertheless, the strategies followed by Barthes in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* anticipate (to a certain extent) Doubrovskian autofiction.⁵⁴

Apart from the autobiography written by one of the leading French thinkers of the late 1960s, 'autofiction' appears to have a strong affinity with the *nouvelle autobiographie*, an offspring of the *nouveau roman*. This movement dominated the French literary scene in 1950s France. Alain Robbe-Grillet, one of the leading figures of the *nouveau roman*, argued for the existence of a new type of autobiography in a 1986 seminar presentation.⁵⁵ He argued that if such a thing as the *nouveau roman* exists, a 'new autobiography' (*nouvelle autobiographie*) should exist as well. He added that this new autobiography would focus on the actual autobiographical enterprise and stressed its fragmentary nature.

The statement appears to be partly contradicting the official doctrines of the *nouveau roman*: Robbe-Grillet appears to admit that the subject matter for his

⁵⁴ Mounir Laouyen, 'L'autofiction: une réception problématique', www.fabula.org [accessed on 28 April 2011].

⁵⁵ The piece is characteristically entitled 'Je n'ai jamais parlé d' autre chose que moi' in Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Le voyageur* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), p.273-285.

fictional work is his own life (a practice that was common among other *nouveaux romanciers* like Natalie Sarraute or Marguerite Duras) and distances himself from the doctrine of objectivity, envisaged by the critic Jean Ricardou. How does Robbe-Grillet's admission vary from Doubrovsky's "Je suis un être fictive"? Both statements expose the exact same strategy of fictionalising the self and moreover both authors understand the self as a fragmented entity.

In 1994 Robbe-Grillet produced another theoretical text on autobiography, entitled 'Du nouveau roman à la nouvelle autobiographie'.⁵⁶ When discussing his first novel *Les gommes* (1953), he draws an analogy to the mythic snake known as ouroboros, that bites its own tail in order to illustrate his argument regarding the use of life-writing material in fiction. In the same text Robbe-Grillet referred to the reasons preventing him from adhering to Lejeune's autobiographical pact. He claimed that he could not subscribe to Lejeune's views since he found that he began writing his life in the form of novels because he had not acquired a definite image or perception of himself as a human being. He treated the very process of writing as a means of internal quest; he saw it as a way to discover the complexities of the fragmented self. Even though Robbe-Grillet clearly misunderstood Lejeune's argument, nevertheless the admission that one writes in order to make sense of all the pieces of one's existence is a stage before Doubrovsky's experimentations with multiple coexisting identities.

If we read Robbe-Grillet's comments as supplementary to his *Romanesques* (1984-1994), we can claim that in his autobiographical trilogy Robbe-Grillet combines autobiography with the Bildungsroman since alongside the first-person narrative of Robbe-Grillet, the reader follows the development of H. Corinthe's

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 287-298.

personality (an alter ego of Robbe-Grillet). This is an extreme experiment in fictional writing but still does not fully qualify as an autofiction because both the two personas (H. Corinthe and Robbe-Grillet) and their respective narratives are always distinct.⁵⁷

Robbe-Grillet's statements and the examples of texts that he drew from the circle of the *nouveaux romanciers* (like *Enfance* by Nathalie Sarraute or *L'amant* by Marguerite Duras) appear extremely convincing in order to argue that the group of the *nouveau roman* and Robbe-Grillet in particular, found themselves extremely close to the spirit of Doubrovsky's autofiction but not quite there and in any case not before 1977. Robbe-Grillet will use the term autofiction with caution with reference to *Les derniers jours de Corinthe*, the final volume of the *Romanesques* trilogy (1994) and he tends to draw an equation between autofiction and the *nouvelle autobiographie*.⁵⁸

So far I have treated four distinctive cases of terms or texts that could be introduced in postmodern or at least avant garde contexts but are not fully equivalent to autofiction as outlined in my first section. Those terms and practices focus on the liminal situation of 'autofiction' and the subgenre's precarious position between autobiography and biography. Reynolds, Federman and Barthes can be introduced as predecessors of Doubrovsky, and Robbe-Grillet as a contemporary who approaches the essence of autofiction, while stopping short of the notions of duality that are central to this study.

⁵⁷ As in Perec's *W ou souvenir d'enfance* (1975). In contrast to Robbe-Grillet and Perec, Vassilikos managed to combine the two in his novel *Γλάκος Θρασάκης*, which is discussed in chapter four.

⁵⁸ See the interview Robbe-Grillet granted to Philippe Vilain, which was published as addendum to the latter's essay *Défense de Narcisse*, op.cit., p.209.

1.3. Criticism on ‘autofiction’

As I have already mentioned, Doubrovsky’s term and practice triggered heated discussions amongst French literary critics, academics and writers of fiction. This section aims to provide a representative sampling of various critical stances since the inception of the term in 1977. Far from being exhaustive, this overview will help the reader understand why some have reservations and voice their objections against Doubrovsky’s autofiction while others embrace it. My discussion closes by focusing on a recent trend in autofictional criticism, which I partly follow in this thesis. I will illustrate the shift of the critics’ interest from autofictional narrative strategies towards issues of identity, with a specific reference to the issue of ‘exceptional’ and ‘dual’ identities.

I am particularly interested in examining Lejeune’s responses to the phenomenon, as Doubrovsky involved him in the discussion on autofiction and questioned the comprehensiveness of his model. Lejeune has on various occasions questioned autofiction’s distinctive status and suggested that it is merely an alternative term for the autobiographical novel and the fictionalised autobiography. He did not reply to Doubrovsky in 1977 upon receiving the letter that followed the publication of *Fils* but referred to the coinage of the term in his 1980 book *Je est un autre*.⁵⁹ Autofiction was introduced in the context of a reading of Victoria Thérames’ *Hosto-blues* (1974) but Lejeune did not adopt the term as he thought it was still too early for ‘autofiction’ to be incorporated into the vocabulary of French literary criticism.

⁵⁹ Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre. L'autobiographie de la littérature aux medias* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 217.

In his 1982 article entitled ‘Le pacte autobiographique (bis)’,⁶⁰ Lejeune revisited the autobiographical pact and consolidated his opinion on autofiction. He claimed that autofiction could hardly be distinguished from autobiography or the autobiographical novel - at least in the way in which Doubrovsky perceived and practised it. In another article entitled ‘Autobiographie, roman et nom propre’,⁶¹ he recommended that the definition ‘autofiction’ be applied in the case of texts in which the narrator (who can be identified with the author) is attributed imaginary features and characteristics or is presented in entirely imaginary settings, as in Dominique Rolins’ *Le gâteau des morts* (1982). In 1986, Lejeune was apparently still sceptical about this neologism as it distorted his schema of classification separating the autobiography from the autobiographical novel. This is why in this article he tried to show that there were many authors before Doubrovsky, who had done the same (e.g Jacques Lanzmann - *Le têtard* 1976). On these premises, he concluded once more that there was no point in further defining the autobiographical novel by introducing new terms such as autofiction.

In 1987 Lejeune participated in a colloquium that focused on autobiography and psychoanalysis with a paper entitled ‘Peut-on innover en autobiographie?’⁶² Lejeune introduced autofiction in his discussion of innovations in the autobiographical domain that concerned enunciation strategies and referred to *Fils* as an example of renewing the “writing of one’s self”. However, once more he did not appear convinced about officially adopting the term ‘autofiction’ in his studies and still today, when he refers to autofiction, he does so with a certain degree of caution

⁶⁰ Philippe Lejeune, ‘Le pacte autobiographique (bis)’ in *L’autobiographie en Espagne* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982), p.416-434.

⁶¹ Philippe Lejeune, *Moi aussi* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p.37-72.

⁶² Philippe Lejeune, ‘Peut on innover en autobiographie?’ in M. Neyraut, J.B. Pontalis et al. (eds). *L’autobiographie. VI^{es} Rencontres psychanalytiques d’ Aix en Provence*. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1987), p.67-100.

that does not allow us to include him in the group of critics that support autofiction. Accommodating autofiction in Lejeune's theoretical framework would call for a new type of tacit agreement to be established between the reader and the author of the text. A potential 'autofictional' pact would ultimately disrupt Lejeune's binary scheme of analysis, which is based on the distinction between the 'autobiographical' and the 'novelistic' pacts and call for a drastic reconsideration of his framework.

The case of Jacques Lecarme is the most important in the group of the adversaries. In 1982 Lecarme coedited the volume *La littérature en France depuis 1968* and wrote a chapter entitled 'Indécidables et autofictions'.⁶³ The title is a succinct comment on the slippery ground that autofiction stands on as it oscillates between the autobiography and the novel. Lecarme argued that there were other writers before Doubrovsky that wrote novels in which the protagonist was nominally identified with the author such as François-Régis Bastide (*La vie rêvée* 1962) and Antoine Blondin (*Monsieur Jadis* 1970). This as a matter of fact enhances Doubrovsky's argument that he should be credited simply with inventing the term, not the actual phenomenon. I believe that Lecarme's contribution as far as this particular article is concerned is that he acknowledges that Doubrovsky's novel covers the gap left in Lejeune's analysis. Lecarme situates autofiction closer to autobiography by claiming that 'autofiction no longer opposes autobiography but it becomes, if not a synonym, at least a variation of it or a stratagem' while at the same time, he draws attention to the fictionalisation of reality in the narrative context.'⁶⁴

In his 1993 article: 'L'autofiction: un mauvais genre?' Lecarme drew attention to the genre-bending nature of autofiction but introduced a new element of

⁶³ See Bruno Vercier & Jacques Lecarme, *La littérature en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Bordas, 1982), p.267-283.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.269.

negative judgement.⁶⁵ He claims that autofictions are ‘undecidable’ texts that represent the most awkward cases between the various textual categories that belong to the autobiographical genre, which in turn is a genre that has not gained great literary reputation.

Despite this negative evaluation, it was Lecarme who challenged the perception that autofiction is a marginalised genre, by drawing the example of Céline among others, who had used the identification of the author, the narrator and the protagonist by using his actual name. He ended his article by stating that Doubrovsky’s contribution to the field of autofiction was that he used a rather unfamiliar form of enunciation with *Fils* (including puns and allophones) in the process of writing on himself.

So far, I have referred to Lecarme’s disapproving viewpoint and Lejeune’s uncertain stance towards autofiction. As far as the group of supporters is concerned, it is essential to refer to two distinct tendencies. The first follows Doubrovsky’s theoretical guidelines and is represented mainly by Doubrovsky himself and the critics examining his novels, while the second seeks to widen the frame of autofiction so as to include works as different as Dante’s *Divine Comedy* or Borges’ *Aleph*. Vincent Colonna, who completed the first doctoral thesis on autofiction, mainly represents the latter tendency.⁶⁶ In Colonna’s analysis the key issue is the exploration of strategies of fictionalisation of the self, so he radically sets the terminus post quem for the first manifestations of autofictional writing to late second century AD. His first two chapters examine the case of Lucian while the rest of his corpus includes readings from the eighteenth century onwards.

⁶⁵ Jacques Lecarme, ‘L’autofiction: un mauvais genre?’ in *Autofiction & Cie*, op.cit., p.227-239. See especially p.230.

⁶⁶ Vincent Colonna, ‘L’autofiction (essai sur la fictionalisation de soi en littérature)’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1989).

Colonna defines autofiction as “a literary work in which an author invents his personality and existence in fiction but at the same time stays loyal to his real world personality”.⁶⁷ His study suggests that autofiction *à la manière de* Doubrovsky is merely a version of a distinct genre and as a consequence, ends up detaching autofiction from the narrow frame that Doubrovsky devised for it. Autofiction becomes a synonym for every text in which the author constructs a fictional self. It also detaches autofiction from its postmodern context and thus I believe weakens the ‘oscillating movement’ between autobiography and the novel that I have described above. Doubrovsky’s response to Colonna’s analysis was quite straightforward.⁶⁸ He might have repeated over time that he should not be credited with inventing anything but the term, but his reaction towards what he describes as ‘unacceptable’ misuse of ‘autofiction’ shows that he is authoritative when it comes to taking excessive freedom with the term and expanding the definition in order to accommodate as many texts as possible. I believe that such an expansion of the field of autofiction entails the danger of over-generalizing the term.

To sum up, we can positively infer that there is still no critical consensus towards autofiction. On the one hand, there are those who do not accept autofiction as a theoretical grid because they prefer that of Lejeune. Indeed, Lejeune’s schema is fundamental for reading texts of autobiographical character but it should be complemented by the incorporation of autofictional theory. The aim must be to find a balance between the different frameworks; if we adopt Colonna’s theory of autofabulation we risk reducing autofiction to a vague ‘mot-valise’ term that is applicable to every text that fictionalises the author. With the benefit of hindsight, we can safely say that it took almost three decades to establish the term ‘autofiction’ as a

⁶⁷ Vincent Colonna, *Autofiction & autres mythomanies littéraires* (Auch: Éditions Tristram, 2004).

⁶⁸ Serge Doubrovsky, ‘Ne pas assimiler autofiction et autofabulation’, *Le magazine littéraire* 440, (2005), p.28-30. See p.28.

valid and generally acceptable name for a specific subgenre, which its opponents insist on equating with the autobiographical novel.

In order to complete this section on criticism related to autofiction, I shall refer to current developments mainly in the francophone world. Recently, critics have shifted the focus of their readings; they are no longer strictly centred on the narrative strategies employed by the practitioners, or offer predominantly psychoanalytical readings of autofictions. Several recent studies examine autofiction through the lens of cultural, gender and post-colonial studies. Nowadays, researchers in the francophone world have the tendency to discuss those issues on a wider basis and are in the process of establishing the ‘politics’ of autofiction.

The main principle that brings together those various studies is that autofiction is a vehicle that lends itself to articulating the experience of different sorts of minorities. According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* many *autofictionneurs* are members of what could be described as ‘social minorities’ (the examples provided are those of Jewish and homosexual writers).⁶⁹ Even though I believe that the examples chosen are restrictive, I endorse the idea that autofiction “allows for the creative reconfiguration of minority identities” and I shall attempt to illustrate why in the following paragraphs.⁷⁰

According to Elisabeth Molkou there were two main conditions that led to the development of autofictional writing in the twentieth century: firstly, the great advancements on the field of psychoanalytical studies that totally transformed the

⁶⁹ David Herman, Jahn Manfred & Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), p.36-37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

notion of 'selfhood' as well as the Second World War.⁷¹ Starting with the case of Doubrovsky, autofiction was seen as a fictional frame, upon which a fictional discourse on Jewishness could be articulated. Autofiction could capture the splitting of the authorial subject between his innate Jewish identity and an atheistic identity adopted later. In the 1990s, researchers spread the net further by illustrating how autofiction has gained prominence among francophone writers in Canada, North Africa and the Caribbean. Thus, they introduced notions of postcolonialism, hybridity and diversity to the critical discourse around autofiction.

In the cases of writers from the Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana) and Haiti, autofiction became a vehicle to explore the internal conflict of their indigenous Creole identity and the imposed French one.⁷² We have also the numerous cases of 'Maghreb' autofictions written by Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian authors that explore the dualistic situation experienced by the native populations, who are split between Arab national sentiment and the French language. Furthermore, autofiction has become a type of writing favoured by certain homosexual authors (Mark Weitzman) and also women (Chloé Delaume, Régine Robin, Marie Darrieussecq). It appears that this genre captures the rift between their gender or sexual identities and the heterosexual or patriarchal society.

This short account of recent developments in criticism and research tendencies on autofiction aims to put forward the argument for a 'decentralisation' of autofiction that will be further examined in the following and final section. In this way autofiction extends beyond the area of the French or even the American metropolis, and reaches the peripheries. Practitioners seem to acknowledge the greater freedom

⁷¹ Elisabeth Molkou, 'L'autofiction, un genre nouveau?' in Henry G. Freeman (ed.), *Beginnings in French Literature* (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2002), p. 155-168.

⁷² See Renée Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the French Caribbean* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

that autofiction affords them in order to articulate their life experiences and tackle their fragmented national and linguistic identities as well as represent gender and sexually dissident voices.

1.4. ‘Autofiction’ à la grecque: Moving beyond the tradition of autobiographical fiction

So far, I have discussed autofiction exclusively within the context of francophone writing. Moving now in the Greek context, I begin by providing an overview of Greek autobiographical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by focusing on a couple of representative texts that could be considered as forerunners of autofictional writing. I will then focus on the period covered in this thesis in order to argue that certain texts that are read as fictional autobiographies should instead be understood as autofiction.⁷³

The existence of autobiographical writing in Greek need not be questioned; alongside some ‘autobiographical’ subgenres like memoirs (‘απομνημονεύματα’), private journals and correspondence, there has been a considerable production of autobiographies in the form of retrospective first person narratives,⁷⁴ especially after the establishment of the Greek State.⁷⁵ Some indicative titles of works that roughly follow the conventional pattern of autobiography ‘from cradle to the grave’ are: *Βίος*

⁷³ So far, I have been able to identify a single attempt to translate the term autofiction in Greek. In her article ‘Η τέχνη της απόστασης: ο Ταχτσής και η αυτοβιογραφία’, Sophia Iakovidou introduces autofiction in Greek as ‘αυτομυθοπλασία’ and briefly discusses Doubrovsky’s theory. See ‘Η τέχνη της απόστασης: Ο Ταχτσής και η αυτοβιογραφία’, *Nea Estia* 1742, (2002), p. 270-296. I believe that her choice to render autofiction as αυτομυθοπλασία is successful and justified if we consider that the term metafiction has been translated into Greek as ‘μεταμυθοπλασία’. See the Greek version of M. H. Abrams’ *Glossary of Literary Terms - Λεξικό λογοτεχνικών όρων* (transl. Yianna Delivoria and Sophia Xatzioannidou) (Athens: Patakis, 2007), p.295 and Dimitris Tziouvas, ‘Ο μυθιστοριογράφος και τα παιχνίδια με τον μεταμοντερνισμό’, *To Vima* (12 March 2000), p.28.

⁷⁴ This definition is given by Lejeune in *Le pacte*, op.cit., p.7.

⁷⁵ On the matter of the intersection of autobiography and memoirs in modern Greek literature see Lizzie Tsirimokou, ‘Το μέλλον της μνήμης: αυτοβιογραφία, απομνημόνευμα’ in *Εσωτερική ταχύτητα* (Athens: Agra, 2000), p.413-422.

by Adamantios Korais (1829), *Αυτοβιογραφία* by Elisavet Moutzan Martinegkou (written before 1832), *Αυτοβιογραφία* by Andreas Laskaratos (1873), *Η ζωή μου* by Dimitrios Vikelas (1908), *Η ζωή μου* by Napoleon Lapathiotis (1940), *Η ζωή μου σαν μυθιστόρημα* by Gregorios Xenopoulos (1958) and *Σελίδες Αυτοβιογραφίας* by Georgios Th. Vafopoulos (1970-1975). The common feature of all the texts mentioned above is that they are written in the first person by authors who are in the twilight of their lives and in most cases tend to follow a chronological timeline from their birth to the actual moment of writing. Moreover, the above works draw the reader's attention to the life-writing genre they belong to; apart from 'αυτοβιογραφία' other favoured terms like 'ζωή' and 'βίος' are employed.

Nevertheless, I have to clarify from the outset that some of these autobiographies occasionally digress towards the subgenre of 'memoirs'. Vafopoulos, for instance, occasionally deviates from the strictly chronological narrative that the autobiography dictates in order to focus on selected incidents of their lives and convey their emotional imprint. Finally, a common characteristic of all those literary autobiographies is the authors' tendency not only to account for their own private lives and writing careers but also for the cultural climate of their time, with particular interest in the literary establishment and their position within it. The writers opt for veracity and credibility in these texts and hardly employ any fictionalisation strategies in their work.

I will now focus on autobiographical fiction proper and start with Grigorios Vizyinos, who is also particularly attractive to postmodern successors (notably Michel Fais). Vizyinos' six short stories (published 1883-4 and 1895 in *Estia*) are based on autobiographical material that has been elaborately intermingled with mystery. Four of the stories are set in Vizyinos' native Thrace while two of them are set in Europe,

where Vizyinos studied philosophy and psychology. The stories are narrated in the first person and researchers have shown that the majority of the stories set in Thrace evoke Vizyinos' childhood. It has even been suggested that the stories can be read as a 'novel in progress',⁷⁶ where the young protagonist named Yiorgis finally grows into the adult G.M. Vizyinos. Vizyinos attempts a fictionalised account of his childhood by revisiting his native land of Thrace. Stories such as 'Ποιός ήτο ο φονεύς του αδελφού μου', 'Το αμάρτημα της μητρός μου' and 'Το μόνον της ζωής του ταξείδιον' recreate fragments of Vizyinos' early years and could be treated as a fragmentary 'autobiographical' novel.

In the aftermath of the Asia Minor Disaster in 1922 there was a tendency to write fiction that could serve as a testimony against the atrocities of the war. The most important example is Ilias Venezis' *To νούμερο 31328* (1931). The novel is based on purely autobiographical material: it begins with Venezis' arrest by the Turkish militia shortly after the collapse of the front and the retreat of the Greek army. The novel relates the near-death experience of the eighteen-year old Venezis on the way to the labour camp and focuses on his experiences as a prisoner of war. So far, one can tell, fictionalisation is kept to a minimum. Myrivilis in *Η ζωή εν τάφω* (1924,1930) treats his material in an entirely different way. If Venezis is not interested in disguising his horrific experiences, this is not certainly the case with Myrivilis, who in order to narrate his experiences from the First World War, invents a fictional device and a fictional persona. Thus, Myrivilis' first-hand account of the war reaches the reader in the form of letters written by the deceased sergeant Kostoulas. The employment of a persona by Myrivilis is a key strategy in autobiographical fiction.

⁷⁶ Michalis Chrysanthopoulos, *Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός: Μεταξύ φαντασίας και μνήμης* (Athens: Estia, 1994), p.14.

The final work that could be included in this brief account of autobiographical fiction in Greece is Nikos Kazantzakis' *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (written between 1955-57, published in 1961). This is one of Kazantzakis' most debated books as researchers have tried to decide its genre; whether it is an autobiography or a novel, as it is called on the title page. It could be argued that this is Kazantzakis' spiritual autobiography written in a literary manner since Kazantzakis accounts for the defining moments and incidents in his early life and youth and stops with the Odyssey episode and his decision to embark upon his ambitious poetic plan. Peter Bien has shown how Kazantzakis's *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* differs from the conventional autobiographies that we mentioned in the beginning of this overview.⁷⁷

It has been argued satisfactorily that Kazantzakis' model for writing *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* was Goethe's famous book *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*), but we should point out that he takes the freedom to rearrange certain episodes of his life in a way that distorts factual accuracy and does not conform to a strict timeline. I believe that the schema chosen by Kazantzakis serves a specific purpose; the author selects the most important incidents of his life as well as the most interesting encounters and experiences that shaped his authorial persona and helped him create and solidify his philosophical credo. Even though the events narrated in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* correspond to Kazantzakis' 'real' autobiography to a great extent, this work is not a mere autobiography but a novel that transgresses the fine line separating autobiography and fiction. It seems to me that *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* is the final preparatory stage before the emergence of autofiction in Greece a decade later. Kazantzakis' biggest contribution to this 'incubation' period was that he paired the two threads that are essential for autofictional writing: autobiography and fiction, with

⁷⁷ Peter Bien, *Kazantzakis: Politics of the Spirit*, vol.2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 524-546.

the *Künstlerroman* – the novel that follows the development of an artist (often a writer). The *Künstlerroman* anticipates certain aspects of autofiction as the latter calls for a hero, who is an author and who is preoccupied with his/her writing projects and expresses his/her worries to the readers of autofiction. Therefore, we can credit Kazantzakis with giving an extra dimension to the autobiographical novel and facilitating the advent of autofiction in Greek letters.

My next task is to provide the reader with an overview of the history of Greek autofiction in the time period covered here (1971-1995). The first part of the thesis sets out to demonstrate that autofiction appeared at a very specific time during the seven-year dictatorship. The works examined in the first part of the thesis were written after the lifting of pre-censorship (November 1969); an event that broke the writers' protest of "silence" and triggered the production and publication of many texts.⁷⁸ The collective volume *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα* (1970) is a milestone for the publication activity during the dictatorship since it abounded with indirect references to the regime and mocked its discourse.⁷⁹ The three texts that are discussed in the first part of my thesis were written or finalised after 1970; at a moment when writers appeared determined to write against the regime and resorted to cryptic, or indirect ways to undermine the regime through their writings.

⁷⁸ See also Karen van Dyck, *Kassandra and the Censors. Greek Poetry since 1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.12-56.

⁷⁹ 'Preventive censorship' as it was notoriously called, had an immediate effect on the majority of the established Greek authors; they resorted to silence in order to avoid the degrading for their status process of submitting their works to the censors for approval. In an attempt to present a more liberal aspect of their regime within Greece and beyond its boundaries, the Colonels lifted the pre-censorship laws in late 1969 and in 1970 the volume *Eighteen Texts* was published with texts that abounded in innuendos and metaphors. In 1971 there was a follow-up with *New Texts* that included more polemical texts with direct references against the regime. For an account of the writers' reaction to the censorship laws of the regime see Thomas Doulis, *The Iron Storm: The Impact on Greek Culture of the Military Junta, 1967-1974* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 95-130.

A preliminary question with regard to the selected texts from the early 1970s could be as follows: did the three writers produce texts that were at the crossroads of reality and fiction as a response to the ‘superficially’ relaxed censorship policy of the Junta in the 1970s? I do not believe that those three writers were merely experimenting with the (auto)biographical mode only because they were influenced by the developments in France and especially Robbe-Grillet’s writing. Even though Tachtsis, Axioti and Vassilikos were not consciously writing autofictions, I seek to make the case that they contributed to the emergence of autofiction *avant la lettre*, as a way to articulate identities that were marginalised or targeted by the regime.

More importantly, we should establish a link between the progressive writing (within which autofiction is inscribed here) during the Junta and the issue of ‘subjectivity’ in order to explore the role the writing or the performing ‘subject’ assumes in the cultural environment of the dictatorship. As Dimitris Papanikolaou argues, these progressive performances and writing should be examined in view of the development of critical thought in Greece from 1969 onwards, which was profoundly influenced by the international theories that dominated the 1960s (structuralism and psychoanalysis).⁸⁰ Papanikolaou suggests that at that specific moment the subject takes center-stage and that the writers, the artists and performers claim ‘responsibility’ over their work. This means that by producing a text, writers not only engage in political action but more crucially, emphasize on their presence by claiming responsibility for their writings. Papanikolaou further relates this to the emergence of new subjectivities and new identities that appeared as fragmented and dissident, and refers to the case of the ‘queer’ identity in Tachtsis’ *Τα Πέσσα*, and women’s poetry

⁸⁰ Dimitris Papanikolaou, ‘“Κάνοντας κάτι παράδοξες κινήσεις”- Ο πολιτισμός στα χρόνια της δικτατορίας’, in Vaggelis Karamanolakis (ed.), *Η στρατιωτική δικτατορία 1967-1974*, Athens: Lambrakis Publications, 2010, pp.175-196, esp. pp. 192-195.

that contested the ‘patriarchic staples of the Greek society’ such as Jenny Mastoraki and Rea Galanaki.⁸¹

The fifteen-year period (1974-1989) that separates the first ‘embryonic’ phase of Greek autofiction from the second was a period of ‘transition’ for Greek politics and society. After the fall of the Colonel’s regime, Greece entered the period commonly known as ‘metapolitefsi’ (change of Polity), which is marked by the restoration of democracy, the end of the monarchy and the country’s entry into the European Community as a member country (1981).⁸² According to Tziovas there was a remarkable turn towards fiction in the years after the end of the military dictatorship.⁸³ Despite the boom in fiction in the aforementioned period, there was no development as far as the autofictional trend is considered.

The fall of the Junta put an end to the practices of censorship and self-censorship. There was a tendency towards mythologizing the events of the uprising of the Polytechnic School in Athens.⁸⁴ As Giorgos Thalassis acutely remarks, there was a sense of ‘freedom’ among writers, who felt they were free to publish texts that drew their subject matter not only from the ‘recent’ experience of the dictatorship, but also from the civil war and the post-civil war period.⁸⁵ The 1980s heralded the renewed interest in the fictionalisation of less-known aspects of Greek history; there are works that fall into the category of ‘historiographic metafiction’ and investigate the

⁸¹ Papanikolaou, *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁸² There is no consensus as to the duration of the period of ‘metapolitefsis’ but in his study of the economical, social and political changes in Greece, Karampelias uses the time frame 1974-1988, which coincides with the time gap discussed here. See Giorgos Karampelias, *Κράτος και κοινωνία στη Μεταπολίτευση (1974-1988)* (Athens: Eksantas, 1989).

⁸³ Dimitris Tziovas, ‘Η ώρα της πεζογραφίας ή η εξάντληση της ποίησης’, *Porfyras* 47 (1988), p.68-71.

⁸⁴ Some examples are Alexandros Kotzias’ *Αντιποίησης αρχής* (1979), Maro Douka’s *Η αρχαία σκουριά* (1979), Nikos Kasdaglis’ *Η νευρή* (1985). For a compilation of texts, both prose and poetic that represent the events of November 17, see Elias Gkres, *Το μελάνι φωνάζει. Η 17^η Νοέμβρη 1973 στη λογοτεχνία* (Athens: Metaixmio, 2003).

⁸⁵ See Giorgos Thalassis, *Η άρνηση του λόγου στο ελληνικό μυθιστόρημα μετά το 1974* (Athens: Gnosis, 1992). Note the reference to “αίσθηση ελευθερίας” (p.17).

complicated relationship between the Greek past and present, such as Yiorgis Yiatromanolakis' *Ιστορία* (1982) and Eugenia Fakinou's *Το έβδομο ρούχο* (1983). There are also works like Rea Galanakis' *Ο βίος του Ισμαήλ Φερίκ Πασά* (1989) and Vassilis Gkourogiannis' *Το ασημόχορτο ανθίζει* (1992) that address the issue of hybrid national and religious identities (Greek Orthodox vs Muslim), and therefore correspond to the preoccupation of the second generation of autofiction practitioners with the so called 'dual' identities on a national, linguistic and religious basis.

During this fifteen-year period, autofictional writing seems to stay out of the limelight. There is nonetheless the case of Vassilis Vassilikos, who included texts with autofictional dimensions within his voluminous corpus. In the late seventies, Vassilikos wrote a series of texts, which are inspired by the death of his wife, Mimi; namely: a couple of the short stories that appeared in the collection *Το τελευταίο αντίο* (1978) and the novels *Ο φοβερός μήνας Αύγουστος*, and *Η φλόγα της αγάπης* (both published in 1979). The climate of loss is ubiquitous as all three works were published shortly after Vassilikos' bereavement. *Ο φοβερός μήνας Αύγουστος*, in particular, is structured as a journal (covering the period from July to September 1978), which records the period following the death of the intratextual writer's wife. It is interesting to point out that Vassilikos' text seems to anticipate a style of writing pursued by Doubrovsky in his 1989 autofiction *Le livre brisé*, which also treats the theme of loss and is dedicated to his late wife Ilse.

The autofictional dimension lies in the fact that the writer in the text is referred to as Vassilis, while at the same time there are sporadic references to other works by Vassilikos (notably *Z*). The journal form in combination with the correspondence of Vassilikos' biographical data to those of the intratextual writer Vassilis, encourages at first sight a reading of the text as Vassilikos' own intimate

journal. However, the existence of a couple of vignettes within the main body of the text, which fictionalise Mimi's and Vassilikos' life in exile and the night of her death in 1979, point towards a possible reading of the text as 'autofiction' and not as a mere memoir. Finally, in *H φλόγα της αγάπης*, Vassilikos introduces a fictional persona, Leonidas Phylactopoulos (his alter ego) and fictionalizes the experience of repatriation without Mimi. These texts, however, do not reach the level of experimentation that will be explored in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* nor do they promote the issue of writing the text at hand, hence they were excluded from my analysis.

The second part of the thesis covers the first part of the 1990s and texts by Alexakis, Kiourtsakis and Fais are examined in the light of autofiction. All three writers are informed readers of French literature and write after the coinage of the term by Doubrovsky in 1977. The common element that groups their texts together is their large-scale exploration of duality epitomised on the level of the writing subject. In individual chapters of the second part, I will be focusing on the articulation of the intratextual writer's identity against a bipolar frame (predominantly Greek and French, as well as Greek and Jewish), and explore the interaction of two distinct identities on the level of language, culture and religion. My readings will suggest that the 1990s is a period in which Greek autofiction flourishes in the sense that the three writers discussed here produced far-reaching texts that push the limits of autofictional writing beyond what Doubrovsky had imagined in 1977. My ultimate objective is to argue for the originality of Greek autofiction while suggesting the relationship of a peripheral literature (such as Greek) to more central ones (e.g. French).

PART A

The emergence of Greek autofiction (1971-1975)

CHAPTER II

The Broken Mirror of Kostas Tachtsis: Fragments of the self in *Τα ρέστα*

Εγώ νιώθω σαν να μην είμαι μόνο ένας,
αλλά πολλοί άνθρωποι συγχρόνως,
ή ένας άνθρωπος αλλά με άπειρες δυνατότητες.

Kostas Tachtsis, 'Μια συνέντευξη',
Diavazo 3-4 (May-October 1976)

To this day, Kostas Tachtsis' best-known work remains *To τρίτο στεφάνι*. It attracted little interest when it was first published in 1962 but it became popular in the early 1970s around the same time when *Ta réστα* came out.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the novel's commercial success backfired against the rest of Tachtsis' texts. As Menis Koumantareas remarked: “*Ta réστα* και *Η γιαγιά μου η Αθήνα*, πάντα υπέφεραν μένοντας κάπως στη σκιά της Νίνας και της Εκάβης. Άδικα κατά τη γνώμη μου.”⁸⁷

Koumantareas picks on a tendency demonstrated by many critics in newspapers and literary journals, who focused exclusively on *To τρίτο στεφάνι*, and considered *Ta réστα* as a ‘satellite’ text that supplements the novel.⁸⁸ On the contrary, Kay Cicellis' extensive review of *Ta réστα* (published in 1974) was a cornerstone for criticism related to the collection, because she first attributed to it a key role within Tachtsis' oeuvre. Cicellis set the tone for discussing Tachtsis' short stories by situating them in an overall autobiographical project, whose first stage was the novel. Dimitris Papanikolaou further developed Cicellis' arguments in his afterword to the latest edition of *Ta réστα*, where he introduced the work as a short story cycle and framed it against the cultural context of the 1960s.

⁸⁶ Dimitris Papanikolaou, ‘Κουτσομπολιό, νεύρωση και ιστορία.’ *Ta Nea* (14 Nov 2009) Web. <http://www.tanea.gr/news/culture/books/article/4546117/?iid=2> [accessed on 19 March 2010]. Papanikolaou mentions that: “Η πρώτη έκδοση του βιβλίου, το 1962, έμεινε απούλητη. Και ξαφνικά, μετά την επανέκδοσή του το 1970, *To τρίτο στεφάνι* έγινε το πλέον ευπώλητο ελληνικό βιβλίο του αιώνα.” As far as Tachtsis himself is concerned, in several of his 1980s accounts, he situates the success of the novel in the first half of the 1970s. Even though he is not consistent about the specific year, he maintains that the novel became known among political prisoners, thus claiming for *To τρίτο στεφάνι* the status of a potentially subversive work. See Kostas Tachtsis, ‘Δεν πιστεύω σε κοινά ιδανικά’ (p.190-1), ‘Η ομοφυλοφιλία είναι από τη φύση της αντιεξουσιαστική’ (p.215), and ‘Τον εμφύλιο τον έχουμε στο αίμα μας’ in *Από τη χαμηλή σκοπιά* (Athens: Eksantas, 1992). In a 1987 speech however, he claimed that political prisoners and police officers alike read the novel; a situation that he considers as highly ironic since he was repeatedly asked to report to the police for political and other reasons. See ‘Απλώς μου έπεσε ένα λαχείο’ in Kostas Tachtsis, *Ένας Έλληνας δράκος στο Λονδίνο* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2002), p. 87.

⁸⁷ Menis Koumantareas, ‘Κλέβοντας και σκοτώνοντας’, *I Lexi* 197 (July-September 2008), p. 350-352.

⁸⁸ Anastasis Vistonitis, ‘Η επιστροφή του Κώστα Ταχτσή’, *To Vima* (6 Sep 2009) Web. <http://www.tovima.gr/books-ideas/article/?aid=287018> [accessed on 20 March 2010]. Vistonitis claims that: “Τόσο *Ta réστα* όσο και το *Η γιαγιά μου η Αθήνα* δεν μπορούμε να τα θεωρήσουμε παρά ως ένα είδος ας πούμε ημερολογίων του *Τρίτου στεφανιού*.”

In this chapter I initially develop the case made by Dimitris Papanikolaou that *Τα ρέστα* should be read as a short story cycle; an approach that paves the way for the treatment of the text as autofiction. In the second section, I focus on the dispersion of the overarching writing consciousness into multiple narrative subjects across the stories. The focal point of my analysis in the last two sections is how *Τα ρέστα* appropriates elements from the Bildungsroman, and how it challenges the genre by articulating the identity of the homosexual writer in 1960s Greece.

2.1. The structure of *Τα ρέστα* as a short story cycle

An obvious objection which can be urged against my reading of *Τα ρέστα* in the light of autofiction, is the use of the term ‘διηγήματα’ (short stories) on the title page. One could argue that upon the coinage of the term in 1977, Serge Doubrovsky associated autofiction with the novel. By using the generic rubric ‘roman’ (novel) on the front cover of *Fils*, Doubrovsky pointed to the genre autofiction was closer to, but at the same time sought to challenge, through a new perspective on autobiographical fiction.⁸⁹

The vast majority of studies on autofiction focus on novels (including texts written before 1977), and few treat mainly short story collections.⁹⁰ I doubt that the lack of readings of short stories as autofictions should be attributed to the fact that literary critics have undervalued this specific textual category as they thought it was

⁸⁹ Doubrovsky has so far been consistent in the use of the term ‘roman’ on the title page of his works.

⁹⁰ French Caribbean Maryse Condé's slim volumes of short stories *Traversée de la Mangrove* (1995) and *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer - Souvenirs de mon enfance* (1999) are read as autofictions. In an article examining Condé's 1999 collection, Anne Malena introduces the study of short stories to the field of autofictional studies. See Anna Malena, ‘Playing with Genre in Condé's Autofiction’, *Journal of West Indian Literature* 12, no. 1/2 (November 2004), p. 154-169.

“paling in comparison to the novel”, as Anna Malena suggests.⁹¹ I believe that critics overinterpret Doubrovsky’s equation of autofiction with the novel, to such an extent that they disregard his autofictional short stories collected in the volume *La vie, l’Instant* (1985).⁹² Given that short story collections present the reader with the problem of deciding whether or not there is overall unity, critics avoided discussing them in as autofictions.

The principal idea that I will be examining in this section is that *Τα ρέστα* can be read as an autofiction, if we establish an overall sense of unity (which is normally found in a novel). In this sense, I argue that the volume constitutes a fine transfer from the novel - the genre that Tachtsis had tackled with success in *Το τρίτο στεφάνι* - to the short story.⁹³ Critics appear to be torn when comparing the properties of the novel and the short story. According to Susan Ferguson, the short story has more similarities than differences with the novel as far as formal characteristics or even techniques are concerned.⁹⁴ Other scholars have a totally different opinion; starting with Boris Eichenbaum, who insisted on a polarised perception of the two genres based on “big and small form” and ending with Charles May, who believes that the essential difference between the two is that in contrast to the novel, the short story calls upon “a subject matter and a set of artistic conventions” that are directly and not

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 154.

⁹² See Elisabeth Jones, *Spaces of Belonging. Home, Culture and Identity in 20th Century French Autobiography* (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2007). While Jones refers to *La vie l’ instant* as a work that has been sidelined by both Doubrovsky and other scholars, she does not discuss it in her analysis.

⁹³ Tachtsis came up with a plethora of excuses as to why he did not try his hand at another novel: unwillingness to produce literature on demand, impediments to his creative mood during the dictatorship due to more active preoccupation with political affairs and emotional distress at the mere thought of the difficulties he faced whilst writing the novel. See ‘Με το προσώπειο του δοκιμογράφου’ in *Από τη χαμηλή σκοπιά*, op.cit., p.185.

⁹⁴ See Susan Ferguson, ‘Defining the Short Story. Impressionism and Form’ in Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), p.218-230.

conceptually created.⁹⁵ Yet both sides agree that the difference between the two narrative genres is essentially quantitative; the keyword for story is brevity. The mastery of a short story writer lies in managing to articulate themes and events in a self-contained text that is considerably shorter than the novel. This presented Tachtsis with a unique challenge: testing his potential in ‘miniature’ narrative forms.

Before examining why *Τα ρέστα* can be read as a short story cycle, I shall provide an overview of the publication history of the individual stories that made up this collection. *Τα ρέστα* came out as a volume of twelve short stories in 1972 but seven stories had already appeared in various journals during the period 1964-1971. The first story ‘Τα ρέστα’ appeared in the first issue of *Pali* in 1964, a short-lived literary review directed by the avant-garde poet and novelist Nanos Valaoritis.⁹⁶ In 1965 Tachtsis published the stories ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’ and ‘Το άλλοθι’ in *Epoches* and *Pali* respectively.⁹⁷ The following year marked the publication of three stories ‘Το κόκκινο παλτό’ in *Kritirio*, ‘Μια επίσκεψη’ in *Epoches* and ‘Η πρώτη εικόνα’ in *Pali*. ‘Μια διπλωματική ιστορία’ featured in the issue that launched the Thessaloniki based literary journal *Tram* in 1971. In 1972 Tachtsis drew together in a volume his so far published stories and included five more, which were unknown until then; namely ‘Ζήτημα ιδιοσυγκρασίας’, ‘Ένα πλοίο στη στεριά’, ‘Η μουτζούρα’, ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’ and ‘Λίγες πένες για το Στρατό Σωτηρίας’.

⁹⁵ See B.M. Eichenbaum, ‘O. Henry and the Theory of Short Story’, p.81-88 and Charles May, ‘The Nature of knowledge in short fiction’, p. 131-143 (especially p.133) in Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories*, op.cit.

⁹⁶ On Tachtsis’ collaboration with *Pali* see his 1975 account entitled ‘Το «Πάλι» κι εγώ’ in *Η γιαγιά μου η Αθήνα κι άλλα κείμενα* (Athens: Patakis, 1995) (first pub.1979), p. 71-90.

⁹⁷ Getting a story published in *Epoches* was a breakthrough for a young writer, since some of the leading figures of the so-called 1930s Generation (Terzakis, Seferis, Theotokas and Dimaras) were members of the editorial board. This is an indication that, unlike what Tachtsis maintained, his work had the seal of approval from the older, well-established generation even before the belated success of *Το τρίτο στεφάνι* in the 1970s.

There is conflicting information regarding the time the stories were written. The dates 1964-1967 under the title on the cover of the first publication actually correspond to the period when the majority of the stories appeared in print. Yet, in his unfinished autobiography *Το φοβερό βήμα* Tachtsis maintains that ‘Λίγες πένες για το Στρατό Σωτηρίας’ was written immediately after the military coup,⁹⁸ while most of the hitherto unpublished stories were written just a couple of months before the first edition in 1972.⁹⁹ When the revised edition of the collection came out in 1974 after the restoration of democracy, Tachtsis added a thirteenth story entitled ‘Τα παπούτσια και εγώ’, which he allegedly wrote after the student uprising in 1973 and commented openly on the instability of Greek politics after the coup and the round-up of individuals that were identified as ‘opponents’ of the regime.¹⁰⁰

The fact that the stories had been published autonomously in platforms as different as *Pali* and *Epoches*, or first introduced in the 1972 edition does not support the treatment of *Τα ρέστα* as a unified text in the first place. One could argue that it is possible for a number of short stories to appear in a volume under a seemingly ‘umbrella heading’ merely for reasons of publication. In Tachtsis’ case however, the title far from alludes to ‘remnants’ or scattered pieces as Papanikolaou acutely remarks.¹⁰¹ My approach in this chapter follows closely the reading suggestions of Cicellis and Papanikolaou, who read the collection as a unified text.¹⁰² In 1974 Kay

⁹⁸ In a 1974 essay, Tachtsis claimed that this story was distributed in a clandestine manner. He paralleled the case of ‘Λίγες πένες για το Στρατό Σωτηρίας’ with Engonopoulos’ poem Bolivar, which was allegedly circulated in an underground way during the years of the Axis Occupation. See ‘Λίγη ζωή με τον Σεφέρη’ in *Η γιαγιά μου η Αθήνα*, op.cit., p. 108-109.

⁹⁹ *Το φοβερό βήμα* (Athens: Eksantas, 1989), p.375.

¹⁰⁰ For information on the first publication of the stories as well as the structure of the collection over the different editions of *Τα ρέστα* see Dimitris Papanikolaou, ‘Επίμετρο - Δέκα χρόνια κομμάτια. *Τα ρέστα*, ο Ταχτσής και η εποχή τους’ afterword to the new edition of the stories (Athens: Gavrielides, 2009), p.175-189. Additional information was provided by Dr. Papanikolaou, who kindly shared with me his knowledge on editorial matters.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁰² See Kay Cicellis, ‘Η καρδιά του κρεμμυδιού’, *Το Vima* (26 November 1974) and Dimitris Papanikolaou, ‘Επίμετρο’.

Cicellis claimed that the individual stories were the constituent parts of a longer text that had an implicit and more asymmetrical structure than a novel.¹⁰³ Papanikolaou approves the same reading strategy and states that *Τα ρέστα* should be read as a cycle of short stories linked together by a subsequently imposed structure.¹⁰⁴ To support his case, he argues that after the first printed version of the book, Tachtsis realised that the stories formed a closely-knit unit of stories subjectivizing the issue of the development and expression of homosexuality in Greek society.¹⁰⁵

In the first edition of *Τα ρέστα*, the reader encounters indicators confirming that each story should be read on its own account, such as the dedicatory notes to friends, a table of contents including dates of first publication in journals as well as the label ‘διηγήματα’ on the front cover.¹⁰⁶ Those elements were omitted in the revised edition in 1974 and this decision should not be underrated when opting for a unified reading of *Τα ρέστα*. In his last text *Το φοβερό βήμα* Tachtsis notes:

Έγραψα λοιπόν μερικά ακόμα διηγήματα-κρίκους αυτής της αλυσίδας, πέντε ή έξι, δε θυμάμαι ακριβώς, έγραψα ακόμα ένα λίγους μήνες μετά το πραξικόπημα των συνταγματαρχών, κι ύστερα – τίποτα. Ως το 72 που, με το ζόρι έγραψα ακόμα τρία ή τέσσερα.¹⁰⁷

The above statement illustrates – rather straightforwardly, I believe – that Tachtsis himself favoured a reading of the collection as a sequence of linked stories. Papanikolaou accounts for the changes Tachtsis made to the edition and stresses the use of Cicellis’ insightful piece of criticism ‘Η καρδιά του κρεμμυδιού’ as a prefatory note in the late 1970s editions, in which she pointed out the unity of *Τα ρέστα*.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, he draws attention to the fact that in the 1974 edition, the subheading ‘διηγήματα’ was abandoned as well as the individual dedicatory notes in the

¹⁰³ Cicellis, op.cit.

¹⁰⁴ Papanikolaou, ‘Επίμετρο’, op.cit, p.178.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 189 and p.178 (footnote 5).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 178 (footnote 5).

¹⁰⁷ *Το φοβερό βήμα*, op.cit., p. 375.

¹⁰⁸ Papanikolaou, ‘Επίμετρο’, op.cit., p.178.

beginning of each story,¹⁰⁹ - a move that I would add, must surely have been approved by the author.

Besides, the experience of reading certain stories in the volume builds upon the experience of having read the preceding one(s).¹¹⁰ This is certainly true in the case of a specific group of stories: the stories that evoke the atmosphere of *Το τρίτο στεφάνι*, which I discuss later on. Apart from the case of this distinct unit within the collection, where the names, characters (the uncle and the grandmother) and situations are reproduced from story to story, there are also a couple of meta-textual comments that exemplify the linkage between individual texts. The opening paragraphs in the story ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’, can be read as an introduction where Tachtsis raises the issue of autobiographical truth in view of the multiple personas of the short stories and refers to ‘Το άλλοθι’ as the story “you (the readers) have just finished reading”. In the short time that lapsed between the two publications of the volume, the author realised that he had to indicate to the reader (who, could have also read the pieces when they appeared in the journals) that the stories were not put together for mere publishing purposes. Apart from the meta-textual introduction of ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’ there is another meta-textual reference in the text that was added in the second edition - namely ‘Τα παπούτσια κι εγώ’. What strikes the reader at first glance is that the titles are almost identical in structure since they share the same noun and thus, Tachtsis generates the expectation that the newly added story relates to the existing one. The impression that the stories are directly linked is verified not simply by the reappearance of Paul, the British character, but also from

¹⁰⁹ The subheading ‘διηγήματα’ and the dedication to Seferis are reintroduced in the 2009 edition of *Τα ρέστα* by Gavrielidis publishing house.

¹¹⁰ See Forrest Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. (Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 13.

the narrator's reference to the text 'Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια' as the 'pre-history' of the current story.

In spite of the evidence for linking individual stories, the reader can attempt to evaluate the stories on an individual basis primarily because of the diversity of biographical subjects, which I shall discuss in detail in the following section. The idea of a text that lends itself to two readings - either in separate parts or as a whole, was no novelty for Greek letters. Giorgos Seferis, in particular, explored this possibility in 1935 with the poetic composition *Μυθιστόρημα*.¹¹¹ Tachtsis was familiar with Seferis' work and he had developed a friendly relationship with him.¹¹² At the time that he was writing some of the stories that are included in *Τα ρέστα*, he mentions that he was reading Seferis' poetry and specifically refers to *Ημερολόγια καταστροφώματος*.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the peculiar structure of *Μυθιστόρημα*, could not have escaped his attention and we should not exclude the possibility that Seferis' poetry influenced Tachtsis to include several texts that function as smaller interrelated units within the macro level of a longer prose text.

The principle of linking the stories in order to be read as story cycles is identified in several short story cycles of the twentieth century. According to a typology devised by Dunn and Morris in 1992, *Τα ρέστα* can be described as an 'arranged' cycle of stories because it was not conceived from the beginning as a unified text, but this happened after the first edition.¹¹⁴ Since these seemingly

¹¹¹ Criticism on the specific collection has followed a double trajectory – on the one hand, some critics treat *Μυθιστόρημα* as a sequence of twenty-four short poems, and, on the other hand, as a longer poem divided to twenty four sections. For the two representative readings of *Mythistorema* in light of the above see respectively: David Ricks, *The Shade of Homer: A Study in Modern Greek Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.135-146 and Roderick Beaton, *George Seferis* (Bristol: Bristol Classical, 1991), p.89-109.

¹¹² See 'Λίγη ζωή με τον Σεφέρη' and 'Οι δισταγμοί του Σεφέρη' in *Η γιαγιά μου η Αθήνα*, op.cit., p.91-126.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.100.

¹¹⁴ Maggie Dunn & Ann Morris, *The Composite Novel. The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (New York: Twayne, 1995), p.10. The other two types are: a) 'composed', in which the story cycle is planned

disjointed texts were arranged on the basis of a common theme within the frame of the 1974 collection, one can even introduce *Τα ρέστα* as a ‘composite novel’, a term used in the case of volumes with several individual texts that are at first sight treated autonomously but give the impression of whole text coherence when read as a sequence.¹¹⁵

The notion of the cycle suggests that the participating stories are linked together through various strategies including: a) a consistent spatial or temporal framework b) the existence of a linear time progression between the individual stories c) the existence of a single common hero or even a collective protagonist (for example: a community and its members or a town/village and its inhabitants) and d) common elements such as the treatment of a common theme or patterns.¹¹⁶ Academics who endorse the term ‘composite novel’, believe that cycles of stories that exemplify one or more the aforementioned linkage strategies cover the middle ground between a random compilation of stories and the novel.¹¹⁷

James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (published in 1914) is a well-known example of a short story cycle that can be read as a ‘composite novel’ on the basis of the common setting and theme the individual stories treat. The thirteen stories (written between 1904-1907) revolve around the axis of moral ‘paralysis’ and are all set in Dublin, Joyce’s native town.¹¹⁸ A Greek parallel to *Dubliners* is I believe Dimitris Hatzis’ collection of seven short stories entitled *Το τέλος της μικρής μας πόλης* (first published in 1953 and revised in the second edition in 1963). Hatzis’ stories follow Joyce’s pathway in the sense that they are all set in Hatzis’ hometown, Ioannina and illustrate

from the beginning as a whole text and b) ‘completed’, in which the overall plan of a unified collection came up when the author began composing the individual stories

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1-50.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.1. The term composite novel is no longer reserved for novels with more than one author.

¹¹⁸ See Ghiselin Brewster, ‘The Unity of *Dubliners*’ in Moris Beja (ed.), *James Joyce: Dubliners and a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.100-116.

through individual characters the decay of a provincial town during and after World War II. The protagonists function as archetypal figures, whose individual cases represent the fate of the victims of an unjust society.¹¹⁹

The two aforementioned cycles present their readers with leitmotifs that are repeated across the stories through the perspectives of various characters. I should also note that the thematical unity of those cycles is significantly enhanced by urban space. Space is an important cohesive factor in the cases of other storywriters such as Georgios Vizyinos and Yiorgos Ioannou. Ioannou's thematically loose cycles of autobiographical stories such as *Για ένα φιλότιμο* (1964) and *Η σαρκοφάγος* (1971) are tied together because they are all set in Thessaloniki, the author's hometown. As I have already mentioned in chapter One,¹²⁰ all Vizyinos' short stories have an autobiographical background and four of them are set in his native Thrace. Those were the two factors that encouraged Chrysanthopoulos to suggest a reading of the seemingly autonomous short stories as 'chapters of a novel in progress'.¹²¹

On the contrary, in the case of *Τα ρέστα*, we cannot argue for a unified space; the stories are in their great majority set in Athens, but we also encounter stories set in Thessaloniki (eg. 'Τα ρέστα'), London (e.g. 'Τα παπούτσια κι εγώ') or even Australia ('Λίγες πένες για τον Στρατό Σωτηρίας'). Tachtsis' thirteen texts may not share the same setting, as do Joyce's, Hatzis' and Ioannou's, but they revolve around the axes of a boy's coming of age as well as the awakening and development of (homo) sexuality. There may be readers who will read many male protagonists in *Τα ρέστα* yet we should emphasize that they all seem to be growing up at the same time in Greece. As I shall discuss in the following section, Tachtsis makes a significant

¹¹⁹ Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 247-248.

¹²⁰ See chapter I, p.43-44.

¹²¹ Michalis Chrysanthopoulos, *Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός: Μεταξύ φαντασίας και μνήμης* (Athens: Estia, 1994) p.14.

contribution to the field of short story cycles in Greek because it features as its ‘collective protagonist’ a latent authorial subject – a fictional Tachtsis, who is hidden behind the different protagonists of the individual stories (in a manner similar to that of Vizyinos in his short stories). The time frame (1930s-1970s) and the age progression of the seemingly different protagonists provide the strongest link between the dispersed overarching subject.

2.2. The autobiographical subject(s): challenging chronological and autobiographical coherence

Firstly, I shall briefly address the issue of chronological coherence of the stories when these are read as a sequence. I seek to make the case that there is an overall temporal framework in *Τα ρέστα*, even though the individual stories do not always adhere to a strictly linear chronological progression. This overarching framework replicates the progression from childhood to adulthood and furthermore, the setting of the stories responds to Tachtsis’ biographical data. Then I shall concentrate on the issue of the various autobiographical subjects in order to make the case for understanding the different personas as refractions of the overarching writing consciousness.

The first story ‘Τα ρέστα’ takes place thirty years before it was written in 1964. The young boy of the story attends elementary school in Thessaloniki, the city in which Tachtsis was born and spent his early years,¹²² In ‘Ζήτημα ιδιοσυγκρασίας’¹²³ and ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’ the hero is a high school student (note the use of the word ‘καθηγητής’ instead of ‘δάσκαλος’), living with his

¹²² Kostas Tachtsis, *Τα ρέστα* (Athens: Gavrielidis, 2009), p.16. Henceforth, all references to the literary texts examined and citations will be given in brackets in the main body of the text.

¹²³ The hero attends high school and the readers are informed that this is the third time that he fails his math exam so he is probably around twelve to fourteen years old.

grandmother and his uncle in Athens.(37) The reference to the famous singer Sophia Vembo situates the story in the interwar period at a time when Tachtsis moved to Athens into his grandmother's house.(36) In 'Ένα πλοίο στη στεριά' we are given an exact date: the story takes place in spring 1940 and the war was already unfolding in Europe.(49) In the following story, 'Η μουτζούρα' the protagonist has already entered the stage of puberty and is first exposed to sexual stimuli, but the reference to the Italian invasion of Albania in early April 1939 upsets the so-far smooth linear time progression.(63)

The next story, 'Το άλλοθι', in which the protagonist is a teenager, takes place in mid August 1940 when the Greek cruiser Elli was torpedoed by an Italian submarine while stationed in Tinos harbour.(86) The events of the following story, 'Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια' take place after 1946, at the same time that the final round of the civil war began and the protagonist is no longer an adolescent but a young adult.(98) In 'Το κόκκινο παλτό' the protagonist is a boy in his late teens and the date given is 1943.(107) 'Μια διπλωματική ιστορία' is narrated shortly before the coup'd'état in 1967, and it is the sole case in the volume in which the protagonist's age varies considerably from Tachtsis' actual age. The protagonist's university years coincide with Metaxas' dictatorship (1936-1941) and we follow him as an adult during the period 1940-1965 (158).¹²⁴ In 'Τα παπούτσια και εγώ', the adult protagonist is employed in London and the story takes place during the first couple days after the 1967 coup. The penultimate story 'Λίγες πένες για τον Στρατό Σωτηρίας' is inspired by Tachtsis' stay in Australia in the 1950s. The concluding story 'Η πρώτη εικόνα' is narrated in 1966, when Tachtsis published its original version 'Μικρό αυτοβιογραφικό δοκίμιο' in *Pali*. This final story is the intratextual

¹²⁴ See Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.323.

author's comment at the time the majority of the stories were written, and at the same time fictionalizes, or rather 'invents' one of the first memories of the writer's life in the late 20s. In this way the collection of the short stories draws a circle that begins with Tachtsis' birth in 1927 and ends in the late 60s when he wrote the majority of the stories included in *Τα ρέστα*.

From a point onwards in the cycle, the chronological progress of the stories becomes looser. More specifically, in the stories following 'Το άλλοθι' the 'linear' development of the volume is no longer that firmly anchored to specific dates or other historical events. The chronological coherence is essentially ensured by the arrangement of the stories against a more general historical background that spans from the late twenties or early thirties to the late sixties, thus ranging from the interwar years to the period of the military coup. As it will become evident later on, the chronological coherence is ensured with the different ages of the protagonists in the stories, which represent the various stages of the physical, emotional and sexual development of the overarching consciousness.

One would assume that as a cycle of stories treating the progression from childhood to adulthood, *Τα ρέστα* would demonstrate not only relative chronological coherence but also coherence on the level of the subject. My next objective is to identify the different personas that appear in the volume in order to analyse how the fragmented overarching subject articulates its narrative in each story. There is a stable narrative strategy in *Τα ρέστα*: the narrating voice is identified with the main hero in every single story. Despite the different grammatical persons that are employed in the case of individual narratives, the overarching consciousness remains the same throughout the collection and is in addition identified with the extra-textual author. Apart from those stories narrated in the first person where the identification of the

narrator and the protagonist cannot be easily disputed, Tachtsis also employs the third person singular and in the case of the first story only, the second person.¹²⁵ The choice of the latter could be interpreted as a strategy of ‘dédoublement’ – a technique widely used in autobiographical writing - since it enables Tachtsis to use two voices, that of the adult narrator and the child protagonist and introduce himself as the latent overarching subject of the volume. However, the choice of the third person should not be misinterpreted by the reader as proof of the existence of an extradiegetic narrator according to Genette’s typology.¹²⁶ The narrator is always homodiegetic; he takes part in the events of the story but he presents the events with the benefit of hindsight. The hero is none other than the narrator’s younger self and the use of the other grammatical persons in the discourse highlights the time distance between the young boys (as heroes of individual Bildung-stories) and the adult narrator, who is at the same time the author of the text.

In order to relate this choice of grammatical persons as vehicles of discourse with the overall shape of the collection, it is necessary to make the following observation. The stories in first person singular are found in the second half of the volume and the shift from third to first person narration is introduced in ‘Το άλλοθι’. The third person singular ensures temporal distance between the narrator and the hero but it also suggests an analogous psychological detachment of the mature narrating self from the younger experiencing self. This broad distinction between first person narratives and third (or in one case second person) narratives essentially splits the volume into two parts for which the story with the enigmatic title ‘Το άλλοθι’ serves

¹²⁵ First person narratives: ‘Το άλλοθι’, ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’, ‘Το κόκκινο παλτό’, ‘Μια διπλωματική ιστορία’, ‘Τα παπούτσια και εγώ’ and ‘Η πρώτη εικόνα’. Second person narrative: ‘Τα ρέστα’. Third person narratives: ‘Ζήτημα ιδιοσυγκρασίας’, ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’, ‘Μια επίσκεψη’, ‘Ένα πλοίο στη στεριά’, ‘Η μουτζούρα’ and ‘Λίγες πένες για το Στρατό Σωτηρίας’.

¹²⁶ See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, (trans. J. Lewin) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

as a bridge. In the second part of the volume the psychological distance between the narrator and the characters shrinks as the temporal gap between the time of events and the time of narration is reduced.

Having clarified the strategy behind the use of different grammatical persons in the individual narratives, it is time to tackle the key notion of this section: the numerous biographical subjects in *Τα ρέστα*. The varying biographical information provided in each story or group of stories demonstrates that the unity of the biographical subject is undermined in contradistinction to the unaltered narrating consciousness that could be identified with Tachtsis, the writer. I shall rephrase the principle that governs the text: there is more than one hero or biographical subjects in *Τα ρέστα* whereas there is a single narrating consciousness that identifies with them all. At first sight, this ‘unorthodox’ statement raises doubts over the applicability of the unified reading that I aim to offer.

I shall now focus on certain crucial differences regarding the biographical data of the subjects across the individual stories. With the exception of the protagonists in ‘Το άλλοθι’ and ‘Μια διπλωματική ιστορία’, the heroes of the stories represent mainly the lower middle class. In the two stories named above, the protagonists have educated fathers (in the first case a lawyer and in the second an accountant), who apparently are considered to be members of the upper middle class. On the contrary, in ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’, the hero admits that his father was a police officer, who was impoverished after retiring from service. In the case of the stories, ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’, ‘Ένα πλοίο στη στεριά’ and ‘Η μουτζούρα’, the main provider for the family is the hero’s uncle, who works for a newspaper.

Apart from the different professions exercised by the heroes’ parents or guardians, Tachtsis modifies the boys’ family condition from story to story. The main

condition that is susceptible to changes is the presence or the absence of one of the parents. In two stories, ‘Το άλλοθι’ and ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’ the protagonists have lost their mothers, a fact that is crucial for presenting them as extremely introvert teenagers.¹²⁷ In the rest of the stories, it is mainly the father who is absent not because he is dead but because the parents have separated. The boys are brought up in exclusively matriarchic settings without the presence of a paternal figure and those who try to assume the role of the father, fail. This condition of course, which is continuously explored through the progress of the collection gains even more importance as the absence of the male figure in the family. The total absence or the disempowerment of the male figures accentuates the gender conflict, which in turn leads to the dichotomy experienced by the subjects and the author.¹²⁸

Bearing the family condition in mind, I believe that there is a distinct group of stories within the collection that sets itself apart from all the other stories precisely because they are staged within a single family environment: namely ‘Ζήτημα ιδιοσυγκρασίας’, ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’, ‘Μια επίσκεψη’, ‘Ένα πλοίο στη στεριά’, ‘Η μουτζούρα’. It is within this group that we encounter for the first and last time the name of the boy protagonist. He is called Ntintis, a familiar form of Konstantinos, the first name of Kostas Tachtsis. In these five stories we recognize the familiar environment of *Το τρίτο στεφάνι*. The atmosphere of Ekavi’s household is reproduced here with accuracy and only the names have changed (Ekavi has now become the grandmother, Thodoros is uncle Mimis and Alkis is Ntintis). For any reader who was

¹²⁷ Tachtsis accounted for his decision to present the protagonist of ‘Το άλλοθι’ as a boy, who lost his mother in the next story in the sequence of the printed volume. He claimed that having lost his mother, the boy would be more susceptible to turning to same sex relationships. See the opening remarks in ‘Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια’ (p.92).

¹²⁸ For an account of the dynamics between the male and the female characters in Tachtsis’ novel see: Nikolas Kostis, ‘*The Third Wedding: Woman as the Vortex of Feeling*’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 9, no.1 (1991), p. 93-106.

introduced to Tachtsis' fiction through the novel, this group, is immediately recognisable as it revives the obsessions of the novel's heroine and her stance towards her family members. It provides a better insight into Ekavi's relationship with her eldest son and her grandson (the fictional self of Kostas Tachtsis) in comparison with the novel that focused on the quasi-erotic relationship with her youngest son Dimitris and her friendship with Nina. It is as if the narrator assumes the persona of the grandson in the novel in order to stimulate the reader's interest regarding the early adolescent years.

Apart from this distinct group of stories, the other stories in the volume do not share a common background regarding the family. Tachtsis commented on the variety of this sort of biographical information in a rather long introduction to one of the texts included in the volume, *'Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια'*.

Κάθε φορά που, για να γράψω κάτι, αντλώ από προσωπικές εμπειρίες, δε λέω ποτέ ολόκληρη την αλήθεια. Όχι, φυσικά, από έλλειψη ειλικρίνειας, αλλ' επειδή το υπαγορεύουν καθαρά ψυχολογικές κι αισθητικές ανάγκες...Είναι κάτι που καταλαβαίνουν πολύ καλά όσοι γράφουν, και που εξηγεί γιατί, όπου αναφέρεται κάποιος πατέρας στα γραφτά μου, στο' να είναι υπαλληλάκος κάποιας δημαρχίας, στ' άλλο λογιστής, και σ' ένα τρίτο, όπως στο διήγημα που μόλις τελειώσατε, δικηγόρος. (91)

In another excerpt from the same story, the narrator appears to be chastised by a reader of *'Το άλλοθι'* because he gives him different information on his schooling: *Κι όμως έβγαλα το 9^ο. Στο Πειραματικό πήγαινε ο νεαρός ήρωας της ιστορίας, και ο λόγος είν' απλός κι ευνόητος: έπρεπε να κάνω σαφή την κοινωνική διαφορά που υπήρχε ανάμεσα σ' αυτόν και τα παιδιά των καπνεργατών...(91-92)*

Tachtsis therefore challenges autobiographical coherence by destabilising the composition of the family and the social surroundings across the individual stories. He thus dispersed his own identity behind different personas from diverse

backgrounds, in a way that could be termed autofictional. In *Το φοβερό βήμα* he reveals the following:

Συνέλαβα την ιδέα να γράψω ένα μυθιστόρημα αλυσίδα. Μια σειρά από τέτοια διηγήματα, φαινομενικά αυτοτελή, με τον ίδιο όμως ήρωα, εμένα, πίσω από διαφορετικά προσωπεία, απ' τα βρεφικά μου χρόνια ως τη στιγμή που γίνομαι πια «συγγραφέας». Κάθε διήγημα θα ήταν κι ένας κρίκος της αλυσίδας.¹²⁹

Thus, in the case of *Τα ρέστα* the existence of a common motif and a 'collective protagonist' counterbalance the feeling of fragmentation. As far as the common motif is concerned, Kay Cicellis placed particular emphasis on the role of the family and she was the first to remark that the engagement with family was the common thread of the thirteen stories as early as 1974. In fact, she described the family as a 'hothouse' where the author's homosexuality is shaped and developed.¹³⁰ What the stories of the volume have in common is that in they point to the family as the determining cause for the narrator's homosexuality. The stories that comprise *Τα ρέστα* are based on a triptych that is reproduced in the individual stories of different biographical subjects: family, gender and sexuality. Through the proliferation of biographical subjects and different family circumstances introduced in the text, the stories as a whole imply that homosexual orientation stems from the uneven dynamics between the two sexes in the family. In every case represented in the volume (across a spectrum of different biographical conditions) the family is made to seem responsible for the appearance of homosexuality.

The roles assumed by the male and female in the family are disproportionate and influence the way the narrator perceives gender roles. In stories such as 'Τα ρέστα', 'Το άλλοθι', 'Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια', one of the parents is dead or

¹²⁹ *Το φοβερό βήμα*, op.cit., p.374-375

¹³⁰ Cicellis, op.cit.: "Το κύριο ερέθισμα σ' όλα τα διηγήματα είναι η οικογένεια · αυτό το θερμοκήπιο, κόλαση και παράδεισος μαζί, που κύρια χαρακτηριστικά έχει την παντοδυναμία της μητέρας και την απουσία του πατέρα, και που από μέσα της γεννιέται, εξελίσσεται και διαμορφώνεται η ομοφυλοφιλία του συγγραφέα".

absent and as a result, the dynamics are annihilated in favour of a single gender. In these cases the child does not have an accurate perception of the coexistence of the two parental models. Yet, in other stories such as ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’ or ‘Ένα πλοίο στη στεριά’ the two sexes coexist in the child’s environment; the grandmother and the uncle assume the parental roles but the relationship between them is far from being balanced.¹³¹

As far as the second cohesive factor is concerned, the term ‘collective protagonist’ refers to either a group acting as a central character or to an implied central character functioning as a metaphor.¹³² In the case of *Τα ρέστα*, the implied central character is the homosexual man, whose archetypal form assumes different masks in the context of the volume.¹³³ In other words, this implied central character is identified with the single narrating consciousness (the writer in the text), that for the purposes of fictionalisation changes grammatical persons across the volume. This fictionalisation process reaches its culminating point with the overarching consciousness being split into multiple personas. Behind the individual life stories of the different biographical subjects, we can trace Tachtsis’ intratextual persona – that of the gay adult writer, who refracts his own subjectivity through multiple fictional subjectivities. The reader restores the portrait of the writer in the text by putting together ‘the broken pieces of a mirror’ with the guidance of a steady narrating voice, that ensures a certain degree of narrative unity in this highly fragmented text.

¹³¹ This Manichean distinction between women that are in control and men that are controlled by them is a theme Tachtsis elaborated in *Το τρίτο στεφάνι* as criticism has argued. The model of the authoritative woman is reproduced in the group of stories of *Τα ρέστα* written in third person singular and in the psychoanalytical story ‘Η πρώτη εικόνα’.

¹³² Maggie Dunn & Ann Morris, op.cit., (footnote 112), p.59-73.

¹³³ In a 1983 interview, Tachtsis stated: “ό, τι έχω γράψει είναι ένα συνεχές παιχνίδι με μάσκες”. See *Από τη χαμηλή σκοπιά*, p.170-171. Also Dimitris Mitropoulos, ‘«Ένα παιχνίδι με μάσκες»: Μοντερνισμός, μεταμοντερνισμός και αδιέξοδα στο έργο του Κώστα Ταχτσής’ in Thanasis Niarchos, & Kostas Stamatias (eds.), *Συγνώμην, εσείς δεν είσθε ο κύριος Ταχτσής*; (Athens: Patakis, 1993), p.11-24.

2.3. Autofictional ‘rites of passage’: *Ta ρέστα* and the Bildungsroman

We can thus claim that when read as a sequence, *Ta ρέστα* reflect the progression towards maturity and the formation of sexual identity through fictionalised incidents featuring different protagonists in various family and social settings. Christopher Robinson first suggested a reading of *Ta ρέστα* as an unconventional Bildungsroman centred on how the central subject gains awareness of gender roles and at the same time manifests his sexual preferences.¹³⁴

It is reasonable to suggest that Tachtsis arranged his stories in a way that resembles the outline of a Bildungsroman. This claim is supported by his own admission to have read Thomas Mann’s novella *Tonio Kröger*,¹³⁵ a twentieth century Bildungsroman.¹³⁶ By the end of a traditional Bildungsroman, the protagonist gains self-consciousness, and not only does he comply with the society and its rules, which he had formerly rejected but also claims and eventually secures his rightful place within it.¹³⁷

It appears that individualism is an inherent characteristic of the Bildungsroman (at least in its pre-modern period) but like all literary genres, the Bildungsroman underwent significant transformations in the twentieth century.¹³⁸ Those texts demonstrated a deeply problematic continuity of individual biographies, and undermined the unity of the subject that is identified as the main hero. This of

¹³⁴ Christopher Robinson, ‘Gender, Sexuality and Narration in Kostas Tachtsis: A Reading of *Ta ρέστα*’, *Kambos* 5 (1997), p. 63-80.

¹³⁵ Kostas Tachtsis, ‘«Τόντιο Κρέγκερ»: Μικρή εισαγωγή’ in *Η γιαγιά μου η Αθήνα*, op.cit., p.59-66.

¹³⁶ The Bildungsroman (novel of development) originated in Germany in the eighteenth century and focuses on the coming of age of a young person, who after a series of mistakes, adventures and wrong decisions, grows into a mature adult. On the history of the genre in Germany see Todd Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman. History of a National Genre* (Columbia, NY: Camden House, 1993). For a concise account of key Bildungsromane see Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman. From Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹³⁷ On the definition and history of the Bildungsroman see Fricke, Grubmüller and Müller (eds.), *Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol.1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997) and Mathias Konzett (ed.) *Encyclopedia of German Literature*, vol.1 (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), p.109-110.

¹³⁸ *Reallexikon*, op.cit., p.231.

course applies to the case of *Τα ρέστα* where the individual personas challenge the idea of the inner continuity of the biographical subject.

I shall outline the progression from childhood to maturity as it takes place in *Τα ρέστα* prior to my main discussion. The opening and the last story take us back to the early childhood of the writing consciousness in interwar Greece (that coincides with Tachtsis' own childhood), whereas the rest of the stories in the first half of the book concentrate on the pre-puberty stage at the time of the war. As I shall demonstrate in the following pages, the individual stories could be understood as 'rites of passage': as events that designate the transition from childhood to adolescence and then maturity.

'Τα ρέστα' as the opening story of the volume sets the Bildung process into motion. The idea of becoming a proper 'man' is instilled early on in the protagonist by his mother. In a strict tone, the latter employs the word 'άντρας' as synonymous to the gender norm and the socially acceptable behaviour for Greek males that can be summarized in the following motto: 'Men don't cry'. When she disciplines the child, she exclaims:

«Η θα γίνεις άντρας και θα μάθεις να μην κλαις» σου' λεγε αφρίζοντας και χτυπώντας όπου έβρισκε, «ή θα σε σκοτώσω από τώρα μια και καλή, να σε κλάψω και να σε ξεχάσω, άναντρος σαν τον προκομμένο τον πατέρα σου δε χρειάζεται άλλους η κοινωνία – πες μου, θα γίνεις άντρας; Πες: «Θα γίνω άντρας»!». (15)

The mother's aversion to the father figure establishes a thread that runs through the entire volume; the boy protagonist shapes his own perception of 'masculinity' on the basis two poles defined by the terms 'άντρας' and 'άναντρος'. These specific terms 'άντρας' and 'άναντρος' do not merely point out to gender stereotypes and behaviour,¹³⁹ but more crucially set the agenda for the process of sexual Bildung that

¹³⁹ Robinson, op.cit., p.66.

will unfold in the following stories. ‘Άντρας’ is apparently used as a synonym for heterosexuality, whereas ‘άνανδρος’ hints at homosexuality, or as Robinson puts it to the concept of ‘non-masculine biological male’.¹⁴⁰ The mature writer addresses his mother in the final paragraph of the text by admitting: Ακόμα δεν έγινα άντρας... Κι αυτό είναι η μεγαλύτερη τιμωρία σου.(16) This final statement in the opening story of *Τα ρέστα* provides the reader with a hermeneutical key for the volume; the stories will build up to the articulation of a queer ‘writerly’ identity.

In the next story ‘Ζήτημα ιδιοσυγκρασίας’ the schoolboy appears to be curious about the other sex and briefly considers trespassing in the girls’ lavatories. He stops for fear of being punished by his teacher, Miss Mina – a female authoritative figure. He thinks: Φαντάσου, το καλύτερο παιδί της τάξης να μπαίνει στ’αποχωρητήρια των κοριτσιών!.(23-24) The protagonist suppresses his developing curiosity in order to conform to the boundaries set by the school’s administration and to comply with Greek society’s standards regarding social gender stereotypes. We read: Αυτός δε μπορούσε να κλάψει. *Ήθελε*, μα δε μπορούσε.(25) The word ‘ήθελε’ appears italicized in order to illustrate the conflict between the society’s norms and the boy’s instinctive reactions, which will culminate in the following stories.

In the story ‘Ένα σύγχρονο προϊόν’ we observe a reference to the physical appearance of the boy protagonist, which triggers the development of the plot. We read: Είχε *ατίθασα* μαλλιά. Την είχε ακούσει να λέει στο θείο Μίμη: «Αυτό το παιδί έχει πολύ *ατίθασα* μαλλιά, το πήρε *κι αυτό απ’* τη μάνα του, τον καιρό που’ ταν μικρή τα μαλλιά της πετούσανε σα διαβόλοι...»...(29-30) This is one of the stories that evoke the atmosphere of *Το τρίτο στεφάνι* and the reference to the mother’s unruly hair that has been passed down to the boy certainly echoes Ekavi’s complaints about

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

her eldest daughter Eleni and the latter's inappropriate (non 'ladylike') behaviour. When the protagonist in this story wears his hair in a manly style and grooms it with his uncle's hair-grease, he is told off by his grandmother. The boy's reaction is immediate – he cuts his hair, as a response to the oppression exerted by the female authoritative figure. This is the first time we see the child self-consciously disobeying the rules within the family and also actively protesting in order to provoke the adults around him.

An important rite of passage occurs in the story 'Η μουτζούρα', where the protagonist has just entered puberty. In the opening scene the boy explores his body in private, trying to make sense of the transformations taking place during puberty. Not only is his body changing and becoming more masculine, but also the grandmother's attitude towards him has changed as she avoids unnecessary physical contact and allows him significant freedom of movement outside the house.

Φαίνεται πως, τώρα που'χε μεγαλώσει, ήταν κακό να τον ακουμπάει η γιαγιά. Αλλά γιατί ήταν κακό; ...Κι ακόμα μεγαλύτερο μυστήριο: ενώ ως τότε δεν τον άφηνε ποτέ να πάει μόνος στον κινηματογράφο, τι τον έπιασε εκείνη την ημέρα και τον έστειλε ολομόναχο στο Άστυ να δει το έργο με τον Φρέντυ Μπαρθολόμιου; (62-63).

In this story the young protagonist has his first sexual experience with Ilias, a young adult who works at the newspaper. The boy remains entirely passive in sexual terms during his encounter with Ilias, but at the same time narrates the story line from a film about a young child. This first experience of sexual stimulation is accompanied by story-telling (the first step before writing), a fact that enhances Robinson's claim regarding the close relationship between sexuality and textuality in *Τα ρέστα*.¹⁴¹

The next story 'Το άλλοθι' is the centrepiece of the collection as it reflects the culminating stage of adolescence and the outbreak of the war is combined with more

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.63.

explicit manifestations of sexuality. In this story, the teenage boy experiences peer pressure as Miltos - an older boy - encourages the young narrator to have intercourse with one of the girls he met in the summer camp. This story is crucial in many aspects, as the protagonist has to pretend that he is the son of a tobacco-worker in order to fit in a large group of children from a working-class environment, and is also expected to sexually manifest his masculinity. In 'Το άλλοθι', Miltos imposes himself as a role-model for the narrator; he always assumes the role of the leader in play-groups and he is in a position to command others. The narrator is Miltos' chosen one and thus has to follow Miltos' exhortations. Following Miltos' instructions, the young narrator manages to enter the off-limits girls' tent and begins to caress Voula. The narrator's first heterosexual experience fails when the camp's supervisors discover the underage couple. I would describe this scene as a moment of 'epiphany' for the young boy because it explicitly illustrates the rupture point between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the volume. 'Το άλλοθι' is a key moment for the development of *Τα ρέστα* as it portrays a failed attempt by the protagonist to lead a heterosexual life. The title 'Το άλλοθι' suggests that the events narrated alibi the protagonist for turning to homosexuality after his failed heterosexual encounter.¹⁴²

In the stories following 'Το άλλοθι' the sexual Bildung of the teenage protagonist is explicitly centered around homosexuality. In 'Ο πατέρας μου και τα παπούτσια' the boy is first attracted to a young police officer as he admits that as a child: Τις συνέκρινα (τις γυναίκες) με το σώμα του Αντρέα, και το προτιμούσα. (96) During the civil war, the boy protagonist is in his late teens and meets twenty-seven year old Paul, a British soldier stationed in Greece. The young protagonist appears to meet regularly with Paul and keeps a diary of their meetings as well as a pair of shoes

¹⁴² Tachtsis referred to his experience with Voula during the summer camp and how this incident provided the subject matter for 'Το άλλοθι' in *Το φοβερό βήμα*, op.cit., p. 119-121.

that the latter gave him. When his father unlocks the drawer where he kept the diary and the shoes, he humiliates his son.

Άρχισε να χτυπάει όπου έβρισκε. Κι έβριζε. Έβριζε. Έλεγε ξανά και ξανά αυτό που δεν ήξερα ακόμα ότι ήμουν, αυτό που μπορεί ακόμα να μην ήμουν, που, Θε μου, χρειάστηκαν σχεδόν είκοσι χρόνια άγχους και αυτοκαταστροφής για ν' αρχίσω να καταλαβαίνω πως δεν είμαι, το' λεγε, το' λεγε με τα χυδαιότερα λόγια. Στο τέλος, όταν κουράστηκε, άρπαξε αισθμαίνοντας τα ποιήματά μου και το ημερολόγιο και τα'κανε όλα χίλια κομματάκια. (100-101)

The discovery of the boy's homosexuality is another important rite of passage because it is the first time that the protagonist's gay love-life is disclosed to his family, but it also sets the tone for the treatment of homosexuality in the following stories. The violent reaction of the father and the doubts expressed by the mature writer in this story of cruel family confrontation is indicative of the Greek postwar society's stance towards homosexuals and their marginalisation. The protagonist's notebook including his poems reflects the convergence between the *Künstlerroman* and the *Bildungsroman*. The destruction of the notebook is a symbolic move on behalf of the father, who as a symbol of authority tries to silence his son's homosexuality by showing that he disapproves of his literary production.

The final rite of passage is the journey to Australia in 'Λίγες πένες για τον Στρατό Σωτηρίας'.

Σήμερα το πρωί άρχιζε γι' αυτόν μια νέα ζωή, σε μια νέα χώρα, όμορφη, πλούσια, αδιάφθορη κι απαλλαγμένη απ' τους συνειρμούς ενός αμαρτωλού παρελθόντος που, στο δικό σου τόπο, σε κυνηγάει σα βεβαρυμένο ποινικό μητρώο και παρεμβάλλεται σε κάθε σου απόπειρα να μπει στο σωστό δρόμο. Οι άνθρωποι εδώ ήταν αθώοι και απονήρευτοι. (152)

This story is based on Tachtsis' stay in Australia for two years during the fifties. The protagonist is a young man, who emigrates to Australia in hope of a better life away

from Greece.¹⁴³ The references to a sinful past are not made explicit until the incident in the male lavatories, where an unknown man tries to initiate homosexual intercourse with the protagonist. The latter claims to have mixed feelings about that encounter: ...αυτός ο ξύλινος, ο βρόμικος, άψυχος τοίχος τον καλούσε τώρα να κάνουν έρωτα. Κοίταξε αναποφάσιστος, γεμάτος πόθο, μα και φόβο, κι αηδία. (159) At this point, the protagonist realises that he may have embarked upon a long journey in hope of renegotiating his past and starting a new heterosexual life, but Australia presents him with the same dilemmas regarding his sexual life as Greece. The journey is a common theme in the Bildungsroman genre and it usually leads to the protagonist gaining self-awareness. In this case, this is the story in which the homosexual identity emerges fully. The opportunity for intercourse generates feelings of lust to the homosexual writer but also intensifies his fear and disgust for the same-sex relations that are marginalised by the society.

To summarise the argument so far, *Τα ρέστα* uses a structure that is in many ways similar to the structure of the Bildungsroman, but it also subverts some staples of the genre. Whereas in the traditional Bildungsroman, the protagonist would finally conform to the norms of society and become one of its integral members, in *Τα ρέστα* the overarching consciousness ends up formulating an identity that in the context of the Greek sixties sets him apart from the rest of society. The many rites of passage that we have examined here are actually cornerstones for the emergence of a ‘marginal’ sexual identity. Even though these rites of passage are fictionalised through the employment of different personas and different settings, they all appear to be embedded within a discourse on masculinity that is crucial for the articulation of the writing subject’s queer identity.

¹⁴³ Yiannis Vasilakakos, *Κώστας Ταχτσής. Η ζωή του. Η αθέατη πλευρά της σελήνης* (Athens: Electra, 2009), p.57-73.

2.4. Mapping the ‘writerly queer identity’

In this final section, I shall be drawing on Dimitris Papanikolaou’s reading of Tachtsis’ short story cycle as a ‘queer’ text.¹⁴⁴ Papanikolaou argues that *Τα ρέστα* should be read as a text that explicitly refers to the experience of identifying oneself as a homosexual in Greece. Following his line of thought, I will argue that Tachtsis, articulates a distinct ‘writerly’ identity across the thirteen individual stories; that of the homosexual author in postwar Greece.

In my discussion of the queer identity in *Τα ρέστα*, the concept of the ‘protean’ self – as explored by Peter Mackridge – will prove extremely useful.¹⁴⁵ Mackridge introduces the term ‘protean’ in order to describe Tachtsis’ technique of assuming either the role of the opposite sex (as in the case of *Το τρίτο στεφάνι* and Nina, the narrator), or the role of a heterosexual man (as in ‘Μια διπλωματική ιστορία’).¹⁴⁶ One can expand this notion of the ‘protean self’ by employing the metaphor of the theatre which runs through the text. I should point out that the narrator in ‘Τα παπούτσια κι εγώ’ admits that: Κατά ένα τρόπο, είμαι άνθρωπος του θεάτρου. (145) This could be interpreted as a straightforward admission that the writer in the text transforms like Proteus and assumes different masks, which he then discards. The protagonist is therefore behaving as if he were on a stage, and the text becomes a stage where he can display different personas and perform distinct roles.

The performance staged in the thirteen stories of *Τα ρέστα* is fundamentally a performance of identity. The different masks that are assumed by this ‘protean’ overarching consciousness display the progress from childhood to adulthood and

¹⁴⁴ Papanikolaou introduced the definition ‘queer’ for the study of the text. See *Επίμετρο*, *ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Mackridge, ‘The Protean Self of Costas Tachtsis’, *European Gay Review* 6-7 (1991), p. 172-184.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.177-178.

more crucially demonstrate the two aspects of male sexuality. Therefore, *Τα ρέστα* presents the reader with a slippery ground upon which the writing subject's sexual identity is constructed. This is particularly evident in the stories that follow 'Το Άλλοθι' where the identity of the homosexual emerges straightforwardly, yet, it is still possible for a homosexual character to adopt the mask of a heterosexual in order to perform a social 'heterosexual' role (like the university tutor/diplomat in the aforementioned 'Μια διπλωματική ιστορία'). Finally, the concluding story 'Η πρώτη εικόνα' makes a compelling case for the homosexual identity. Tachtsis appropriates Freud's 'primal scene' and adjusts it by replacing the heterosexual couple (mother and father) with a same-sex couple (father and son). Thus, homosexuality emerges as the principal identity in *Τα ρέστα*.

Consequently, we can make the claim that by the end of the volume there is an affirmation of the queer identity in a groundbreaking way for a text in the early seventies that can therefore be read as an autofiction *avant la lettre*. A comparison of the treatment of sexual identities in *Τα ρέστα* and Doubrovsky's *Un amour de soi* (1982) strengthens further my argument regarding the pioneering nature of Tachtsis' text. As I have mentioned in the first chapter *Un amour de soi* tells the story of Serge's extra-marital affair with Rachel, a younger colleague. According to Alex Hughes, there are several indications of Serge's homosexuality which is suppressed in the novel.¹⁴⁷ Hughes suggests that in the context of certain dreams that are narrated in the text, Rachel assumes the role of the male in the heterosexual couple while Serge seems to take a more passive and 'feminine' stance. What she describes, brings us closer to Tachtsis' introduction in 'Η πρώτη εικόνα' and the dynamics developed between the male and the female within the family that I have discussed in previous

¹⁴⁷ Alex Hughes, 'Serge Doubrovsky's "Gender Trouble": Writing the (Homo)textual Self in *Un amour de soi*', *French Forum* 20, no.3 (September 1995), p.315-331.

sections. Nevertheless, in *Un amour de soi* the textual hints at homosexuality are not developed to such an extent that it becomes possible to argue for the existence of a ‘writerly’ queer identity. As Hughes concludes, male same-sex desire in Serge’s case remains a taboo subject and the “*non-dit*” of Doubrovsky’s text.¹⁴⁸ Far from being a *non-dit* in Tachtsis’ case, the queer writerly identity is clearly pronounced and articulated through its interplay with heterosexuality. On the basis of all the evidence so far, this book has to be read as a ‘queer’ autofiction *avant la lettre*.

I shall bring this discussion to an end by investigating the political repercussions of articulating the queer identity in *Τα ρέστα*. Once again, my point of departure is Dimitris Papanikolaou’s critical text in which he frames *Τα ρέστα* in the context of the late sixties and early seventies, and the international gay liberation movement.¹⁴⁹ I would add that by fictionalising the queer identity (even through thinly veiled personas) during the Junta, Tachtsis seeks to construct not merely a sexual, but more essentially a political identity. His main strategy is the fragmentation of the subject that Papanikolaou defines as a means of “resistance against the dictatorship”.¹⁵⁰

At this point, I should note that Tachtsis was among the first to sign the Writers’ declaration against the censorship in 1969. Throughout the 1980s he was claiming the identity of a ‘dissident’ writer.¹⁵¹ To this end, he maintained that he had been targeted by the police and excluded from any decision-making within literary circles during the Junta because of his homosexuality. He described himself as a

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 329-330.

¹⁴⁹ Papanikolaou, ‘Επίμετρο’, op.cit., 187-188.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.185-186.

¹⁵¹ Tachtsis, ‘Από τη χαμηλή προσωπική σκοπιά’, op.cit., p. 15.

writer who was on the margins of society by saying that “οι περιθωριακοί με θεωρούσαν κατεστημένο, οι κατεστημένοι περιθωριακό.”¹⁵²

In 1972 however, when *Ta Résta* first came out, the reader could not have easily detected Tachtsis’ ‘dissident’ identity in terms of politics. The volume did not include the story ‘Τα παπούτσια κι εγώ’, which refers to the days following the military coup. When the story was included in the second edition, the reader would pick up on some references to the dictatorship, others slightly cryptic and others more candid. For example, the narrator appears to be carrying around the streets of London a plaster bust of Homer which is a part of the décor for a film and insists on placing the bust on the office of a Gestapo officer. The ‘plaster’ could of course refer to Papadopoulos’ infamous statement about Greece as a patient in cast, but more essentially, Homer represents the regime’s fascination with ancient Greece.¹⁵³ Moreover, the narrator tries to reach one of his friends in Athens, Menis (possibly Menis from ‘Το Άλλοθι’), who is a member of Lambrakis’ Youth. Menis’ mother informs the narrator that Menis: *έχει πάει...εκδρομή* and *έχει πάει σ’ ένα ...νησί.*(142-143) This is Tachtsis’ metaphorical way of referring to the round-up of people that the regime targeted as its enemies instead of directly referring to exile. The reference to Menis comes as a parenthesis in the main story, but it could actually be understood as an example of bringing politics and homosexuality together. From the above we can infer that in the context of *Ta Résta*, sexual identity is potentially a political identity.

In order however to discuss homosexuality in the light of Greek politics in the 1960s, we need to refer to the political and social context of that period. Greek society in the 1960s did not embrace homosexuality; homosexual relationships were never in the public eye. The Colonel’s regime targeted homosexuality from its early days and

¹⁵² Ibid., p.35.

¹⁵³ The allusion to Nazi Germany could be understood as a metaphor for the Junta.

there were cases of attacks against homosexual men that were initiated by the regime, who viewed this different sexual identity as potentially dangerous for their national state.¹⁵⁴ After all, the Colonels' regime promoted a traditional view of Greek society by insisting on the motto 'Πατρίς-Θρησκεία-Οικογένεια', which did not allow any space to sexual identities that were not mainstream.¹⁵⁵ Thus, Tachtsis sought to situate homosexuality in the wider sociopolitical context of the sixties by assuming the responsibility for 'writing' the homosexual self in his text and subverting the last pillar of the Junta's motto: family.

By exposing the role of the family in the development of that marginal – at the time - identity, Tachtsis undermined a fundamental belief of the regime and at the same time challenged mainstream heterosexuality in Greek society. As I have illustrated, the discourse in *Τα ρέστα* focuses on family dynamics and as a matter of fact, the dynamics of a family in crisis. In this sense, *Τα ρέστα* develops the themes first presented in *Το τρίτο στεφάνι* because in their majority, the stories discuss family matters and are preoccupied with the role of the female (the mother and the grandmother) in the child's development. It is in this suppressing context, where the child is constantly supervised by a female figure (who has usurped the authority from the male in a traditional Greek family) that homosexuality emerges as Tachtsis explicitly shows in the final story.

¹⁵⁴ Dimitris Papanikolaou claims that the queer identity was understood as an αντεθνική ταυτότητα by the regime and makes specific references to Colonel Ioannis Ladas, the regime's Security chief, who organised an attack against a group of homosexual men in 1968. He also arrested and beat two employees (K. Psychas and T. Lambrias) at Eleni Vlachou's *Eikones*, who wrote an article that included references to homosexuality in ancient Greece. Ladas' homophobic statement: "έπρεπε να σας έχουν ρίξει στον Καιάδα" triggered Loukas Theodorakopoulos to name his chronicle of the persecution of homosexuals during the Junta *Ο Καιάδας* (written 1972, published 1976). See D. Papanikolaou 'Η απόφαση της λησμονιάς: Το ΑΚΟΕ, τα μεταδικτατορικά κινήματα και η αφαίραση της δημόσιας σφαίρας', *Arxaiotaxio* 15 (September 2013), p.84-87.

¹⁵⁵ Evidence of this rigidity came in 1972 with the prosecution of Elias Petropoulos for publishing *Καλιαρντά* – a 'dictionary' of gay slang (1971).

Tachtsis' autofictional project could therefore be read as a subversion of the social and cultural politics espoused by Junta. The dysfunctional or incomplete family (where usually one of the two parents is absent) that is featured in this story-cycle, exposes an institution, whose value was praised and safeguarded by the regime. The model patriarchal family collapses in Tachtsis' text when the heroes of the individual stories search for same-sex love affairs in order to escape from the 'tyranny' of females.¹⁵⁶ By dismissing family as a faulty institution, Tachtsis articulates a politically and socially charged discourse that essentially constructs a marginal 'writerly' identity. To sum up, *Τα ρέστα* should be read in terms of an autofictional 'coming-out' narrative¹⁵⁷ that creates a 'queer' autofictional identity in a more radical and straightforward way than Doubrovsky did ten years later in *Un amour de soi*.

In this chapter I opted for a reading of *Τα ρέστα* as an integral text instead of opting for an approach limited to reading the stories as individual, self-contained textual entities. By emphasizing the framework of the short story cycle, I have argued that as a postmodern text, *Τα ρέστα* addresses the issue of a fragmented writing ego, whose autobiographical discourse is articulated with the employment of different personas. I have also claimed that *Τα ρέστα* point to the structure of the Bildungsroman and at the same time challenge the norms of the genre. I placed emphasis on the fact that the story-cycle places emphasis on the sexualisation of the male protagonist and the process of Bildung results in the manifestation of homosexuality and the emergence of the writer. I demonstrated how Tachtsis made

¹⁵⁶ On the issue of female 'tyrants' in Tachtsis see Dimitris Tziovas, 'Tyrants and Prisoners: Narrative Fusion and the Hybrid Self in *The Third Wedding*' in *The Other Self*, op.cit., p.175-193.

¹⁵⁷ On the 'coming out narrative' and the creation of identity see Esther Saxey, *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

use of the conventions of a Bildungsroman in order to invent a way to speak about homosexuality as a marginal identity and further to relate the ‘coming of age’ narrative to a ‘coming out’ narrative.

I have shown how the multiple biographical subjects are merely masks that obscure the overarching consciousness that is identified with Tachtsis. *Τα ρέστα* is in this sense a highly innovative in text as it is preoccupied with the fragmentation of the writing subject and it sets the tone for the first generation of practitioners of autofiction, by projecting a writerly ‘marginal’ identity that undermines the political regime of that time. This is why I believe that Tachtsis’ dealings with the textual category of autofiction are not to be postponed until the period that he is writing *Το φοβερό βήμα* as Sophia Iakovidou implies.¹⁵⁸ It is not his autobiography that paves a new way between fact and fiction but *Τα ρέστα*, as a series of thirteen exercises on writing the queer life.

¹⁵⁸ Sophia Iakovidou, ‘Η τέχνη της απόστασης: Ο Ταχτσής και η αυτοβιογραφία’, *Nea Estia* 1742, (2002), p. 270-296.

CHAPTER III

Η Κάδμω – The writing subject and the return to language

Σου φέρνω τον εαυτό μου
τώρα
ξένο ταξιδιώτη
μέσα στο καράβι μου.

Melro Axioti,
Κοντραμπάντο
(1959-1960)

Melpo Axioti's final work, *H Κάδμω* was published in 1972 – just a year before the writer's death. Critics have called it a 'requiem'¹⁵⁹ and a 'swan song'.¹⁶⁰ Written in the twilight of her life, *H Κάδμω* has been read as the final writing gesture by the elderly author to the readers of *Δύσκολες νύχτες* and *Θέλετε να χορέψουμε Μαρία;*. The book attracted limited critical attention at the time of its publication, which under no circumstances could be paralleled to the responses that her first novel generated back in 1938. *Δύσκολες νύχτες* remains by far Axioti's most discussed work due to the introduction of pioneering narrative techniques, followed by *Θέλετε να χορέψουμε Μαρία;* and *Το σπίτι μου*.

Axioti was prompted to begin writing *H Κάδμω* in 1971 by her close friends Yiannis Ritsos and the publisher Nana Kalianesi. This is the only work she wrote in its entirety after her repatriation in 1967 and it follows the trajectory of *Το σπίτι μου* (1965) as far as the subject matter and the writing style are concerned. *Το σπίτι μου* and *H Κάδμω* mark the return to the technique used in her early works, prior to her departure abroad. After permanently returning to Greece, Axioti stopped submitting her works to the designated committee of the Greek Communist Party in order to have them evaluated according to the directives of socialist realism. As a result, in her last two fictional works she abandoned 'militant literature' and returned to her modernist vein, which she had 'recanted' while in exile.

In this study I read *H Κάδμω* as a key text that reconnects the writer with her authorial past - both recent and distant (and specifically her first two works). I will demonstrate that the text is an autofiction that fictionalises the trauma of exile and explores its impact on the linguistic medium of the protagonist. I shall explore how Axioti uses the monologue to convey Kadmo's narrative. I will also examine Kadmo

¹⁵⁹See Takis Karvelis, 'Μέλπω Αξιώτη (Παρουσίαση-ανθολόγηση)' in *Η μεσοπολεμική πεζογραφία*, vol.2 (Athens: Sokolis,1992), p. 271.

¹⁶⁰Mairi Mike, *Μέλπω Αξιώτη. Κριτικές περιπλανήσεις* (Athens: Kedros,1996), p. 79.

as a fictional persona of Axioti and emphasize how she regains control of her mother tongue upon homecoming. The final section concentrates on the variety of fictional personas from Axioti's previous works. I shall argue that the text draws attention to the creation of some of the author's earlier texts, and thus could be read as a groundbreaking 'autobiography of books' (almost two decades before Michel Fais published his autofiction *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*). The overall aim of the chapter is to propose a reading of the text as an autofiction evolving around two axes: repatriation and the act of writing.

3.1. Kadmo's monologue: Remembering fictional lives

Kadmo, an old woman, who has recently returned from exile, voices the narrative. Despite the fact that the protagonist's life mirrors that of Axioti (her homecoming experience in particular), the heroine has a different name. Kadmo is Axioti's fictional alter-ego, yet the fact that the protagonist and the extratextual author do not share the same name, would seem to rule out a reading of the text in the light of (Dobrovskian) autofiction. However, Tachtsis in *Τα ρέστα* used different personas as protagonists, in order to thinly veil his fictional persona and Axioti employs a similar strategy here.

In the following paragraphs, I will focus on the monologue that the narrator/protagonist articulates as the narrative unfolds. Monologue discourse is one of the main features of Melpo Axioti's prose works and this is the reason why she is often associated with the so-called 'school of Salonica' of the 1930s alongside other practitioners of interior monologue (e.g. Xefloudas, Pentzikis). She first used interior monologue in *Δύσκολες νύχτες* (1938), in which the reader follows the coming of age

of a young girl from Mykonos predominantly through her perspective that shifts as her age progresses. In her 1991 thesis, Maria Kakavoulia examines the techniques of interior monologue in Axioti's novel and provides a useful theoretical framework for research based on Dorritt Cohn's narratological schema.¹⁶¹ In her important study *Transparent Minds*, Cohn offers a wide array of possibilities for the analysis of the monologue and its techniques. Here, nevertheless, I will only be discussing certain aspects of her theory that are related to my reading.¹⁶² More importantly, I will highlight the points where *H Κάδμω* diverges from the principal features of the monologue discourse as those are presented in *Transparent Minds*.

In order to study *H Κάδμω* as an autofiction that employs the techniques of monologue, I will first challenge a reading of the text in terms of a typical monologue. My starting point is the fundamental division Cohn makes between interior monologue techniques and interior monologue texts. The main difference between a text in which interior monologue techniques are employed and a proper interior monologue text is that the latter is 'unmediated'; it is essentially a first person narrative which at the same time is presented in the form of a monologue voiced by the narrator.¹⁶³ As far as the interior monologue technique is concerned (which is of interest here), Cohn describes it as 'mediated' because a narrating voice is employed in order to convey the inner thoughts of the character.¹⁶⁴ This seems to reflect what happens in Axioti's text; the narrating voice conveys the thoughts of Kadmo (and Axioti). According to Cohn's claims, the narrating voice employs third person

¹⁶¹ See Maria Kakavoulia, *Interior Monologue and its Discursive Formation in Melpo Axioti's Δύσκολες νύχτες* (Munich: Institut für Byzantinistik und Neugriechische Philologie der Universität München, 1992). Also in Maria Kakavoulia, *Μελέτες για τον αφηγηματικό λόγο* (Athens: Psychogios Publications, 2000).

¹⁶² Dorritt Cohn, *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13-16.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15.

discourse or first person discourse, in the case of autobiographical narratives. Axioti's text however is for its greatest part conveyed in second person, a feature that in Cohn's analysis is merely reduced to the use of second person pronouns or perceived as a variation of first person discourse.

Furthermore, Cohn traces the difference between first person narratives in fiction and interior monologue texts in the existence of a listener; as she notes, the narrative circumstances in fictional narratives imply the existence of a listener, who records the thoughts of the monologuing consciousness. On the contrary, there are no implied listeners to Kadmo's monologue. The text is written at the very moment that the narrator recalls past incidents. If we take these observations into consideration, then we can argue that *Η Κάδμω* demonstrates features of the interior monologue primarily because the temporal distance between the act of writing and the act of speaking (or in this particular case the act of remembering) is obliterated. Nevertheless, Axioti's text is closer to what Cohn defines as a memory monologue because the memory monologue registers a process of remembering that does not follow a clear-cut time line.¹⁶⁵ At the same time however, *Η Κάδμω* is different from the mainstream memory monologue, and the different grammatical persons used to convey the narrative serve to that end.

The discourse is primarily carried out in the second person with occasional switches to the first or third. The choice of the second person dramatically highlights the absence of an actual listener – a condition that leads the narrator to address her fictional alter-ego Kadmo. The minute she enters her new house, Kadmo stresses to herself: Για πρώτη φορά άνοιξες τα μάτια σου μέσα σε σπίτι όπου θα κατοικήσεις

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 247-255.

μόνη σου. Εσύ πάντως το θέλησες.(7)¹⁶⁶ Kadmo has nobody to communicate with – even her two friends, a woman that seems unaware of Kadmo’s move into a new house (7) and a man, whom the researcher might identify as the poet Yiannis Ritsos (10-11) do not appear to be particularly interested in her current act of writing.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, Kadmo experiences complete solitude and as ‘a means of defence’ she turns to herself and selects the monologue form in order to expose her agonies with regards to getting back to writing.

Besides the second person that dominates the discourse, Axioti uses other grammatical persons. Notably, every time that the narrator introduces the name Kadmo in the narrative, the discourse switches to third person. A typical example is: Τώρα όμως είναι νύχτα, σκοτεινά και η Κάδμω πλαγιασμένη στο κρεβάτι, περιμένει σαν κάθε νύχτα τον ύπνο, και ξαφνικά βλέπει μπροστά της την καμινάδα του φούρνου.(34) In this manner, Axioti distinguishes her narrating voice from the dominant fictional persona. By distancing Melpo from Kadmo, she gives the reader the opportunity to view Kadmo as a heroine of a conventional third person narrative. These smaller narrative units within the wider narrative frame attest the disruption which is latent in the equation of the protagonist and the narrator/extratextual author and subsequently, illustrate the degree of fictionalisation that the author’s persona is subject to.

In a couple of instances, the grammatical person changes from second person to first person (and in even fewer, to first plural). This shift becomes apparent in the layout of the text as the first person discourse is usually (though not always) carried

¹⁶⁶ Melpo Axioti, *Η Κάδμω* (Athens: Kedros, 1972). Henceforth all references to the text will be given in brackets.

¹⁶⁷ Although the male friend is not named in the text, the possibility of its being Ritsos should not be excluded due to the textual references to the letters Kadmo used to exchange with the poet. Ritsos was corresponding with Axioti on a frequent basis from 1957 onwards and helped her with editing her books. A corpus of those letters was published by Mairi Mike, *Κριτικές περιπλανήσεις*, op.cit., p.154-168.

out in a separate paragraph without any other warning indicators such as punctuation. Those first person pieces are scattered within the main body of the text and help the reader obtain more direct access to the thought process of the monologuing subject. Such an example of the shift between the two grammatical persons emerges from the following excerpt:

Άνοιξε τώρα τα πακέτα όπου έχεις κρατήσει κάποιες σημειώσεις. Μα τί να τά κάνεις τώρα πιά. Πόσος καιρός πέρασε από τότε! Πόσα αποκόμματα βρέθηκαν. Από που τάχα; Δεν ξέρω. Έτσι όπως είναι ανακατωμένα θα τ' αραδιάσω τώρα πάνω στο χαρτί.(54)

Those parts written in the first person pertain to the autobiographical core of the narrative and at the same time bring the text closer to the conventions of the (narrative) monologue. The entire second section under the heading 'Επιστράτευση' is articulated in first person but it is a distinct piece within the text because the speaking I is not Kadmo but a clock; a non-human narrator.¹⁶⁸ It is possible that this section was placed here in order to separate the two scenes where Kadmo accounts for her encounter with Anna - the fictional character from the 1940 novel *Θέλετε να χορέψομε Μαρία;*. Furthermore, by embedding a narrative that echoes the atmosphere and the theme of her novel *Εικοστός αιώνας* (1946) or that of her collection of short stories *Σύντροφοι καλημέρα!* (1953), Axioti offers a specimen of a particular type of writing she was engaging with while in exile, as I shall argue in greater detail in the final section of the chapter, and draws the distinction between the present and the past of the writing.

Moreover, there are a few circumstances where the first person plural is employed instead of the first person singular as in the opening paragraphs of the section entitled 'Πολιτείες': Έχετε μάνα; Μας ρωτούσε συχνά ένας δημοσιογράφος.

¹⁶⁸ On non-human narration see Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices. Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p.1-16.

«Όχι, δεν έχομε τώρα πια μάνα.» «Ε τότε, δε θα σας θυμάται κανείς!» Κι όμως έμεναν όλα μέσα στο μυαλό μου, για ένα χρόνο απροσδιόριστο...(62-3)

On the one hand, the use of the plural polite in Greek occurs in a formal context and it enables the speakers to keep a distance. On the other, I believe that this could be treated as the only instance throughout the text that Kadmo reveals two aspects of her personality. One corresponds to the private sphere and reflects the thoughts and distress of the authoring mind whereas the use of plural is associated to her public image. Kadmo perceived herself both as an isolated individual as well as a member within a group of people that share the same experiences with her. This realisation does not contradict the state of solitude experienced by the narrator that uses first person singular; the fact that in the past she could identify herself with a group intensifies the feeling of loneliness in the present.

It is exactly this sort of variety of grammatical persons used in the narrative of *Η Κάδμω* that disrupts the uniformity of the dominant second person singular employed by the narrating voice. It is important to note however, that *Η Κάδμω* is not the first case of a Greek text that employs different persons in the narrative. By the time *Η Κάδμω* was written, Stratis Tsirkas had already set a successful example with his trilogy *Ακοβέρνητες πολιτείες* (1961-5). In the first novel *Η λέσχη* and the last *Η νυχτερίδα*, Tsirkas uses three different narrators and all three grammatical persons in his text.¹⁶⁹ The use of different grammatical persons in the trilogy adds to the ‘polyphonic’ effect created by the employment of several narrators that provide different points of view to the reader.

¹⁶⁹ See Takis Sinopoulos’ criticism on the use of second person discourse in *Νυχτολόγιο* (Athens: Kedros, 1978), p.99-100. Sinopoulos detects the influence of James Joyce and the monologue related techniques on Tsirkas. He describes it as the effect in which: την εσωτερική ομιλία προς το «εγώ» που ακούγεται σαν «εσύ».

However, the case of *H Κάδμω* is not identical with Tsirkas' large-scale composition. Axioti is not creating a polyphonic universe in her narrative by allowing different characters with different perspectives to assume the role of the narrator. The use of different grammatical persons and pronouns in *H Κάδμω* serves exclusively the purpose of destabilising the identity of a single protagonist and narrator. The overarching consciousness is dispersed and the fragmentation is traceable mainly at the level of the grammatical persons used in order to convey different aspects of Kadmo's personality (e.g. public vs private). This is slightly reminiscent of the narrative strategy that Tachtsis used in *Τα ρέστα* where the fragmentation of the authoring subject was conveyed through the existence of all three grammatical persons in the discourse along with the varying biographical subjects. Here, there are multiple fictional personas that surround the subject that we refer to as Kadmo but Kadmo herself is hard to pin down since there is no stable grammatical person that Axioti uses when referring to the main character.

It is time to focus on the monologue form *per se* and see why *H Κάδμω* does not fall into Cohn's schema of monologue texts. The first question that springs to mind is if apart from Tsirkas' narrators in *Ακυβέρνητες πολιτείες*, Axioti had other recent examples of 'monologue' texts to follow. The possibility that Ritsos influenced her in choosing monologue as a vehicle for the narrative should not be excluded. Ritsos had revived the genre of the dramatic monologue in his large poetic compositions found in the collection *Τέταρτη διάσταση* (1956-1972). Indeed there are many similarities as far as context is concerned with one of the most celebrated compositions of the collection, namely 'Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος' (1956). In Ritsos' poem, the voice belongs to an isolated aging woman writer, who has published a couple of poetic collections.

However, ‘Η σονάτα του Σεληνόφωτος’ lends itself easily to a stage adaptation as the stage directions in the beginning and the end of the poem indicate, but more importantly there is indeed a listener, a young man who remains silent throughout the poem. *Η Κάδμω* on the other hand subverts the conventions of a typical monologue by making references to the potential readers of Axioti’s work but those are continuously challenged in the preceding or the following paragraphs. For example, Kadmo says: Βάλε σε μια γωνιά τα χαρτάκια που μάζευες με τόση προσοχή. Μείνε εσύ μαζί μ’εμένα. Πρέπει τώρα πια να τα πεις. Μα ποιος θα σ’ ακούσει and in the next paragraph she comments: Γιατί ο άλλος, ο πλησίον, ο αναγνώστης σου ας πούμε, πως να σε καταλάβει. (67) Therefore, Axioti is challenging if not subverting a fundamental aspect of the monologue genre - the existence of a listener or a reader in the case of a highly self-referential text. Kadmo hopes that there will eventually be readership for her marginalised works but she does not necessarily anticipate them. This realisation enhances the feeling of isolation experienced by the elderly writer and leads us beyond conventional monologue discourses.

This means that even though the monologue is based on Axioti’s autobiography, *Η Κάδμω* does not qualify as a typical autobiographical monologue. Cohn used the term ‘autobiographical monologue’ in cases where “a lone speaker recalls his own past, and tells it to himself - in chronological order.”¹⁷⁰ However, the past in Axioti’s text is recalled in a random way without following a conventional timeline from birth until present. Amidst the scattered memories from the various places of exile, she recalls incidents from her childhood in Mykonos and then she returns to memories from the years she spent in exile.

¹⁷⁰ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, op.cit., p.181.

This brings us closer to memory monologues that are often highly fragmented texts that resist unified reading along the lines of chronology. In *Η Κάδμω* Axioti uses autobiographical material without adhering to a well defined time line that could have set as a starting point her childhood in Mykonos and led to the final days of exile. Instead, incidents from different stages of the author's life are combined together in an unsystematic manner and create the impression that a clearly outlined chronology of events followed in other forms of autobiographical writing is not an issue here.

I shall complete this section by focusing exclusively on memory and its functions, since memory is a pivotal aspect of the text both in terms of discourse and as a theme. The very act of writing depends on the power of the mind to remember; memory is the force that triggers the writing process. This impression is enhanced by the frequency of verbs like 'θυμάσαι' that are used in the opening lines of several paragraphs and introduce the author's fragmented memories and images from her past life. However, human memory is treated as something that cannot possibly last for long and therefore should be recorded on paper as soon as it springs to mind. Η μνήμη έρχεται, και φεύγει. Ο άνθρωπος είναι μικρός (63) realises Kadmo and she is trying to write down as much as she can.

It is also important to stress here that the potential of memory is not the same from the beginning of the text until the end. On the contrary, memory develops in stages as a result of the writer's effort to remember. Kadmo's memory has not weakened simply because she is growing old. As we can understand, her long-term experience in exile resulted in further deterioration of her memory but she appears to develop her memory skills by continuously engaging in this strenuous mental activity and as a result she is able to retrieve her memories and fill in the pieces of the mosaic of her life.

The memory of the narrator is selective; she insists on specific events while she appears unwilling to remember others. The trip to Italy is a good example; she employs it as a recurrent motif in the narrative. This reference corresponds to a tour Axioti undertook in late 1947 following the instructions of KKE leadership. The trip proved to be very successful according to the Party records and this is probably the reason why the author insists on it.¹⁷¹ On the contrary, other painful memories from the long term exile are suppressed such as the violent deportation from Paris, but this could be a conscious choice since those memories formed the distinct pieces that narrate Kadmo's odyssey around Europe in *Το σπίτι μου* as I shall discuss in the following pages.

A final yet crucial point focuses on the relationship between memory and language. In the text, memory is primarily associated with the use of the mother tongue. Exile is a condition impairing the use of mother tongue in the sense that the exiled individual does not have the opportunity to keep experiencing the language in its natural surroundings. The exiled person (in cases other than internal exile), finds himself or herself in a different cultural and linguistic environment. In Axioti's case the exile lasted for eighteen years before she was allowed to return to Greece. Within this time period she had to move from Paris to East Berlin and from there to Warsaw, Germany again and later on to Sofia. Kadmo concludes that the worst implication of exile is that it cuts you off from your own mother tongue:

Αλλά το πιο σημαντικό ήταν ότι ξεχνούσες τις λέξεις, εκεί στο εξωτερικό...Λησμόνησες τις λέξεις, τις έχασες. Έχασες τα βιβλία σου, τα λησμόνησες κι αυτά. Έγινες ένα αρχαίο πιθάρι. Αλλά σε τι θα μπορεί να σου χρησιμεύει, αφού του έλειψε τώρα ο καρπός: το εσωτερικό του.(63)

¹⁷¹ See Anna Mathaiou & Popi Polemi, *Διαδρομές της Μέλπως Αζιώτη 1947-1955. Μαρτυρίες και κείμενα από τα αρχεία σύγχρονης κοινωνικής ιστορίας* (Athens: Themelio, 1999), p. 30.

Exile therefore taints the memory of the language because it condemns the mother tongue to uselessness. However, Axioti is not completely pessimistic. In the process of regaining her lost memories, she retrieves the sounds and the words of the language in a rather magical way. Γυμνή κάθε τόσο από λέξεις, όλο πιο περιορισμένες, κι εκεί που νομίζεις ότι στέρεψαν, ξαναφυτρώνουν κι έρχονται... Σαν να τον πλάνεψε νεράιδα... Έμαθες τώρα ότι με λίγες λέξεις ζεις και πεθαίνεις. Και γράφεις she claims (63-64). The sense of being back in her homeland enables her to recapture the memories and the language and finally makes it possible for her to get back to writing again.

So far, I have discussed *H Κάδμω* against the background of Cohn's narratological framework for the study of monologue techniques and texts. I have outlined the diversity of grammatical persons used in the discourse and then tried to justify the choice of different pronouns in a text that at first glance appears to belong to the category of memory monologue. I illustrated how Axioti broadened the horizons of monologue texts in Greek by subverting the unity of the narrating persona through the grammatical variations. Nevertheless, I have argued that the text rejects a definitive classification along the lines of Cohn's model given that the multiplicity of personas and the indeterminacy of the narrating subject do not justify a treatment of the text as a conventional monologue. Unlike Mairi Mike, who has classified the narrative as a memory monologue,¹⁷² I propose instead a reading of the text as an autofiction that uses memory monologue techniques. I believe that the 'spontaneous' way in which Kadmo's mind functions supports a reading of the text as an autofiction that appropriates the techniques of the memory monologue.

¹⁷² Mairi Mike, *Κριτικές περιπλανήσεις*, op.cit., p.142.

3.2. ‘Writing the exile’s return’ – *H Kádμω* as an autofiction of ‘homecoming’

3.2.1. Naming the subject

The current section is devoted to the protagonist and narrator of *H Kádμω*. I will first refer to the name’s mythological background and the process of ‘fictionalising’ the name as well as the life story of the ‘repatriated’ author. The issue of Kadmo’s ‘linguistic’ adventure as well as her strenuous effort to regain command of her mother tongue will become a main focal point. I will finally read Kadmo’s endeavour to recover language in terms of a fictionalised ‘nostos’ that follows the traumatic experience of exile.

Kadmo is a name that Axioti clearly devised from mythology. Guy Saunier suggests that the fact that the author devised a ‘feminised’ version of the name Cadmus indicates that the several myths regarding the mythical founder of Thebes provide a key for reading the text.¹⁷³ The affinity between the fictional persona Kadmo and Cadmus can be put down to the fact that Cadmus wandered for years in search of his sister, Europa, when the latter was abducted by Zeus. Cadmus stands out as a symbol of people that went abroad and settled in various parts as William Holwell claimed in his 1793 mythological dictionary.¹⁷⁴ In the context of the myth, Cadmus does not remain passive - he follows the abducted Europa, who is driven away from her home – even ‘exiled’ by Zeus. Ironically, in the case of Axioti, Europe becomes the place of exile for Kadmo. We read: Να οδοιπορείς διωγμένη, ανάμεσα στις ξιφολόγχες, μ’ ένα σακούλι στο χέρι, να παραπλέεις ένα σημαντικό κομμάτι της

¹⁷³ Guy Saunier, *Οι μεταμορφώσεις της Κάδμωσ. Έρευνα στο έργο της Μέλπως Αζιώτη* (Athens: Agra, 2005) p.168.

¹⁷⁴ William Holwell, *A Mythical, Etymological and Historical Dictionary, Extracted from the Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (London: C.Dilly, 1793). Also Pierre Grimal, *A Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

Ευρώπης μέσα σ' ένα τροχοφόρο της αστυνομίας, και να κρατάς βιβλία!.(67) In this way the myth of the abducted Europa undergoes a contemporary transformation and Kadmo experiences the violence of the mythical abduction in the shape of modern weapons used by the local authorities.

Nevertheless, there is another version of the Cadmus myth that is relevant to Axioti's text. According to the Phoenician traditions, Cadmus invented the alphabet and thus, endowed people with the power of writing. Kadmo herself is preoccupied with the power of writing - in a feminine way. Like her mythological archetype, who devised the alphabet in order to record human civilization, Kadmo has to devise the words of her own language so that she can write once more. This is actually what she aptly describes as “ο αγώνας με τη λέξη.” Therefore, despite the incongruity with regards to the adaptation of the myth, it is no coincidence that a ‘feminised’ version of the male mythical name is formulated here. This (possibly) original transgressive adaptation of the ‘masculine’ myth of Cadmus calls for an equally transgressive fictional persona. Kadmo is therefore projected as a female, modern equivalent of the mythical Cadmus but she has stripped herself of the glory such a discovery entails. She has no other option but to retrieve the means of her profession in order to be able to survive the daunting experience of repatriation.

Apart from its mythological resonances, Mike made another interesting association of the fictional name ‘Κάδμω’ with the name ‘Μέλπω’.¹⁷⁵ She demonstrated that the relation between the signifiers implied a relation between Melpo and Kadmo at a deeper level. Both are five lettered names that not only have the same ending but also the same stress pattern. A linguistic analysis of the names reveals a few other similarities: both are spelled with two syllables (the first including

¹⁷⁵ Mike, op.cit., p. 51.

three letters and the second two letters). Moreover, if a comparison of the two is carried out with regards to phonetics, then we can identify a common pattern in the two names. The first syllable is made up from a vowel between two consonants while the latter is a consonant followed by the same written form of the sound. This analogy between the real first name of the author and the ‘feminised’ as well as ‘fictionalised’ name of the protagonist can be used to introduce the argument I will be raising in the next pages with regards to the degree of fictionalisation of autobiographical material in the context of the last and the second last work of Axioti.

In addition to the aforesaid, Kadmo is Axioti’s fictional projection as far as the main themes of the narration are concerned. Like Melpo, Kadmo must come to terms with aging, which is one of the main themes in her narrative. The reference to the human species in general (and Axioti) is followed by a particular reference to Kadmo: Ο άνθρωπος, έρχεται ώρα που γίνεται αντικείμενο. Μαδά το κεφάλι του όπως στις κούκλες[...]Και η Κάδμω επίσης μαδά, σαν τις κούκλες. Της πέφτουν τα μαλλιά, τα δόντια, τα χέρια δεν είναι πια σταθερά. Ούτε το κεφάλι της. Γερνά. (41)

But it is not only the body that is subject to the deteriorating power of time; more importantly, in the case of a writer like Kadmo old age heralds the deterioration of the verbal ability and the weakening of her skills in language. She remarks: όταν ξεχνάς τις λέξεις, είναι το γήρας: ένα ένα τα όργανά σου σε αποχαιρετούν. Πέφτουν σε αποσύνθεση. Λησμόνησες τις λέξεις, τις έχασες. (63)

3.2.2. House and home

As the end is slowly approaching, Kadmo makes two important decisions that Axioti herself made in real life: firstly, to move into a new house and secondly, to

start writing again despite suffering from a type of amnesia. As I aim to show these two decisions are interrelated. Moving into a new house leads Kadmo back to writing and this is why the house should be treated as an important element of Axioti's personal mythology.

My starting point is Axioti's penultimate work entitled *Το σπίτι μου* (1965) in order to introduce the idea that the house might as well serve as a metaphor for language. Moreover, the narrative in *Το σπίτι μου* appears to be constructed in two levels: on the first level, the main body of the text focuses on the history of Axioti's native island of Mykonos, which is represented through an impressive range of sources as diverse as letters, chronicles, plenum decisions or narrations by unnamed inhabitants of the island. On the second level there are eight passages that focus on Kadmo and respond to the main signposts of the author's period in exile.¹⁷⁶

Thus, *Το σπίτι μου* is essentially comprised of two texts embedded in one longer narrative. The individual story of Kadmo is intertwined with the multiple stories that compose the meta-historical narrative of Mykonos while the scattered passages that take place mostly in the places of exile, elucidate the portrait of the mysterious Kadmo. If we further reflect upon the title of the work, we can say that Axioti composed a lively portrait of her homeland by incorporating purely autobiographical material in a 'pastiche' of texts from mainly non-fictional categories. The theme of long-term absence is introduced here against a background that extols the value of locality and the sense of belonging to a place. Reading *Το σπίτι μου* is therefore, a requirement for understanding *Η Κάδμω* because the first informs the reader of the prehistory of the final text, which is centred on Kadmo's homecoming after years in exile.

¹⁷⁶ The passages appear on the following pages of *Το σπίτι μου* (Athens: Kedros, 1986) I (53), II (82), III (105-6), IV (141-2), V (159-160), VI (183-5), VII (189-190) and VIII (198-9).

Hence, *Η Κάδμω* should also be read as the continuation of the narrative *Το σπίτι μου*, which had been written while Axioti was still abroad. In the earlier book a distinction is made between the main body of the text, which is set on the island of Mykonos and the smaller extracts that describe Kadmo's wanderings around Europe. The employment of different letter fonts further enhances the geographical distance between Mykonos and Europe as well as underlines the juxtaposition between life in homeland and life in exile.

Most of the passages that refer to Kadmo in *Το σπίτι μου* tell in fact of Melpo Axioti's forced itinerary across Europe in chronological order. Notably, the third passage accounts for the deportation of the author and other political refugees from France to Eastern Germany in 1949.¹⁷⁷ The fourth passage refers to the two year period she spent in Warsaw during the years 1952-4, the fifth and sixth to her second stay in Berlin after 1954 while the penultimate takes us back to her childhood. The final passage records the experience of 'nostos' and follows Kadmo / Axioti as she packs her few belongings and heads back to her homeland after eighteen years of absence. *Η Κάδμω* begins exactly at the point that *Το σπίτι μου* ends. The latter ends with the termination of a period of violence and deprivation whereas the first begins with the attempt to restore life to its pre-exile state so that the psychological trauma of the aging writer is healed.

Generally, the passages indicated above abound with references to military violence across the cities within the Iron Curtain, where Kadmo spent a significant part of her life and engaged in the production of literary works that drew inspiration from that tumultuous time. The final passage links *Το σπίτι μου* directly to *Η Κάδμω*. As she makes her way back to Greece, Kadmo realises that the only ones awaiting for

¹⁷⁷ All information regarding Axioti's years in exile and her literary works during that period have been based on the findings of Popi Polemi and Anna Mathaiou. Polemi & Mathaiou. op.cit.

her return will be her dead relatives, friends and comrades. She says: Θα κατεβαίνουν οι άνεμοι και θα έρχονται με τους νεκρούς να την προϋπαντήσουν. Οι πρώτοι άνθρωποι που θά' ρχονται να την προϋπαντήσουν θα είναι οι νεκροί, της τελευταίας 25ετίας νεκροί, τόσοι πολλοί θα είναι...(199)

One can suggest that Kadmo's repatriation and her long awaited nostos are paralleled to Odysseus' descent to the Underworld, where he encounters the souls of the dead in a process of finding the way home.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the reader is prepared to encounter Kadmo in the next and final book in an atmosphere of bereavement and isolation while she is undergoing a process of regaining self-awareness as an author.

The experience of exile affects the language and 'deprives' the exiled person of his/her medium of communication and artistic expression. Caren Kaplan notes that one of the main constructions of exile is the "nostalgia for the past; for home; for a 'mother-tongue'."¹⁷⁹ Moreover, in the case of Axioti, we can say that language in the condition of exile is stripped down to the absolutely essential words, while it thrived before she left her homeland. This theme is also apparent in *To σπίτι μου*, where the language of the passages that are set in Mykonos is vibrant and embellished with words from the dialect of the island as well as older words. In contrast to that rich and colourful 'ντοπιολαλιά' of the main body of the text, the passages that refer to Kadmo in exile are written in a strict language, which responds to the feeling of deprivation experienced abroad.

Furthermore, the very title *To σπίτι μου* signifies the author's return to her linguistic medium, which she had lost during the years of her absence. The house is not only a physical refuge that the exiled person seeks but more importantly, it is a metaphor for returning to the mother tongue and ultimately to the act of writing.

¹⁷⁸ *Odyssey*, book.11.

¹⁷⁹ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p.33.

Axioti might be in dialogue with Seferis' *Κίχλη* (1947) with regards to the use of the 'house' as a symbol. Seferis writes:

Τα σπίτια που είχα μου τα πήραν. Έτυχε
να είναι τα χρόνια δίσεκτα πόλεμοι, χαλασμοί, ξενιτεμοί [...]
Καινούργια στην αρχή, σαν τα μωρά [...]
Ξέρεις τα σπίτια πεισματώνουν εύκολα, σαν τα γυμνώσεις.¹⁸⁰

Seferis personifies the house and he perceives it as a living entity. The image of the destroyed houses during times of war is gloomy and the experience of exile and displacement is expressed through the symbol of the hotel that offers a temporary solution to the displaced individuals. Seferis' houses in *Κίχλη* are plundered and they are no longer the safe havens of pre-war time. The war disrupts any sense of normality or permanence as exile and emmigration become tangible realities for the individuals. It is interesting to note that in his study on the poetics of space, Gaston Bachelard expresses a similar viewpoint to Seferis in order to argue for the key role of the house in literature. Bachelard claims that: "In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being."¹⁸¹

The opening scene in *Η Κάδμω* corresponds to Axioti's life since at the time that she started writing the book she decided to move into a house after years of renting hotel rooms. Kadmo enters the new house as a dispersed being; she is 'ολόγυμνη', without any notes and drafts of her texts and that intensifies the imagery of the empty house, which was articulated by Seferis in the line "σαν τα γυμνώσεις". Kadmo exclaims: Το χώρο σου τον είχε πνίξει ο χώρος ο αδειανός. The choice of words related to 'nudity' is not a coincidence. Seferis describes the houses as 'nude' entities, lifeless and old. Axioti uses the adjective nude to refer to her persona, who is

¹⁸⁰ Giorgos Seferis, *Ποιήματα* (Athens: Ikaros, 1981), p.219-220.

¹⁸¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (transl.M. Jolas) (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 7.

stripped from her language and literary work. Moreover, when she refers to her paternal house on the island she uses images reminiscent of Seferis. She writes: Αφού είναι ένα σπίτι που παρέδωσε τον εαυτό του σε μια εποχή με γέρους τώρα πια ανθρώπους, με γυναίκες τσακισμένες απ' την πολυκαιρία, απ' τους θανάτους, απ' την πείνα...(53)

Even the house she grew up in has succumbed to the destructive impetus of the time. People grow old, and houses too. Therefore, the act of moving under a permanent, new roof in *Η Κάδμω* relates to the attempt to redefine her own personality and moreover to restore the link with the maternal language. The feeling of having once again a room of her own, gives her the necessary space to accommodate her memories from the past and as a consequence, host the personas from her books in an ultimate bid to regain the ability to master her own medium after the bitter experience of exile.¹⁸²

Η Κάδμω is a text that tells the story of moving into a new house, an act which is clearly not fictional in itself. Kadmo is the modern female Cadmus, who has previously lost the link to her homeland because of her displacement and she struggles to take refuge to writing in order to reconnect with her past. However, the autobiographical story of Melpo Axioti as she moves into her last dwelling becomes metaphorical in relation to language since the repatriated individual attempts to rebuild her life not only by finding a new home but also by finding refuge in her mother tongue if we are to remember Elytis' equation between the language and home from his famous verse from *Το Άξιον εστί*:

Τη γλώσσα μου έδωσαν ελληνική,
το σπίτι φτωχικό στις ακρογιαλιές του Ομήρου.¹⁸³

¹⁸² This reflects another idea expressed by Bachelard; that the house functions as a stabilising agent for an individual's memories, which are by nature motionless. *Ibid.*, p 9.

¹⁸³ Odysseus Elytis, *Το Άξιον εστί* (Athens: Ikaros, 1974) (first pub.1959), p. 23.

Therefore, Kadmo becomes a fictional figure that personifies the identity of the exile and consolidates her 'writerly' identity by mythologizing an ancient name that becomes a metaphor for the exiled individual. Axioti, filters her own exilic experiences through her fictional avatar, Kadmo at a time when any former 'exile' would be marginalised and 'silenced' by the Junta. I would like to point out here that the text does not refer directly to the state of Greek politics at the time it was written; all the references to politics are foregrounded in the past and the former experience of exile. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with language and the way the individual becomes alienated from it during turbulent times could be read as a response to the regime and a late reaction to the politics of censorship. The condition of exile is ultimately read as a metaphor for the writer's banishment from language and literary creation under an oppressive regime.

To sum up, in *H Kádμω* Axioti writes the identity of the writer whose literary medium has been tainted as a result of exile due to political reasons. The possibility of restoring that medium depends upon the writer's ability to reconnect with her past writing self and articulate her traumatic experience of exile. These are the factors that drive her towards inventing a kind of autofiction *avant la lettre*. At the same time, the writer realises that during politically charged periods, writing a pioneering fictional 'autobiography', is a way to react to the 'silencing' of her voice by the censors.

3.3. Kadmo and her other fictional creations – writing the 'autobiography' of books

Kadmo may be deprived of any sort of human presence while re-establishing connection with her mother tongue as argued above - however; the absence of a listener is soon counterbalanced. The narrator's lonely room will be crowded with

several fictional personas that will accompany Kadmo to her journey towards regaining her lost memories. I shall argue that the inclusion of fictional characters from earlier works enables her to transform her autobiographical narrative into autofiction. Moreover, I will also argue that alongside her endeavour to regain control over her language and her authoring medium, Axioti in fact manages to produce an autobiography of her own books in which she tries to rescue from oblivion her most important works according to her own judgement and keep them for generations to come.

The first task is to present the other personas that surround Kadmo in the narrative environment. There are references to Ismini and Alexandros from *Δύσκολες νύχτες*, Anna from *Θέλετε να χορέψουμε Μαρία*; and Michelina from *Κοντραμπάντο*. What is striking is that the works that are evoked in *Η Κάδμω* are representative of Axioti's first and later period writings whereas her more militant works during the years 1941-1959 are not mentioned. It is noteworthy that she does not recall either the volume of short stories under the heading *Σύντροφοι καλημέρα!*, or her widely translated novel *Εικοστός αιώνας*; a fact that could be attributed to their topical character.

This realisation appears to contradict Axioti's dismissal back in 1955 of those of her works in which she adopted surrealist strategies. In her essay 'Μια καταγραφή στην περιοχή της λογοτεχνίας' Axioti, apparently adhering to the doctrine of socialist realism, seems to value exclusively her realist works and to undervalue her early works.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, during the period 1945-1959, alongside her essays on literature and her journalism, Axioti published several short stories that accounted for the resistance movement from the perspective of the Left, as well as for the persecutions of the

¹⁸⁴ Axioti refers to *Δύσκολες νύχτες* and *Θέλετε να χορέψουμε Μαρία*; as her surrealist works. She notes: Εδώ πρέπει να πω και τη δικιά μου παλιά αμαρτία. Ήταν ένας καιρός που με επηρέασε κι εμένα ο σουρρεαλισμός στη φραστική του διάρθρωση και μπήκε δίχως ίσως και να το πάρω είδηση σ' ορισμένα γραφτά μου. See Μελρο Αξιоти, *Απαντα Στ': Μια καταγραφή στην περιοχή της λογοτεχνίας και άλλα κείμενα* (Athens: Kedros, 1983), p.152.

leftists in the aftermath of the Greek civil war. I find striking the fact that in her above mentioned essay she does not refer to her widely translated *roman à thèse* *Εικοστός αιώνας*, which was praised by Louis Aragon after its publication in French in 1949.¹⁸⁵ This lack of reference becomes even more impressive since it has been suggested that Polyxeni, the protagonist of the novel is another fictional persona of Melpo Axioti.¹⁸⁶

In 1959 Melpo Axioti reverts to her early writing style. Her long poem *Κοντραμπάντο* and *Το σπίτι μου* mark the third and final period in her career, during which she returns to techniques applied in *Δύσκολες νύχτες*. Therefore, near the end of her life, Axioti seems to understand that the works of the second period were written in order to serve a specific purpose within a particular time period. The author eventually opts to refer to fictional personas she created at times when the political struggle was not her top priority and her work was not exclusively subject to historical circumstances.

Hence, Kadmo appears to be rather selective as to the personas that she recalls in her final work. Kadmo provides a link to the immediate past (as does Michellina) while Anna, Ismini and Alexandros are the personas that offer a gateway to the author's remote past and the opportunity to restore her authoring memory. She notes: Σήμερα όμως ήρθε το παρελθόν σου, για να σε συναντήσει. Η Άννα, η Μαρία, η Ισμήνη, η Κάδμω, όλα τα ονόματα που έπλασες, οι καταστάσεις που φαντάστηκες, οι Μιχελίνες που συντρόφιασες. Εκεί, μέσα σ' αυτές τις σελίδες έζησες και μεγάλωσες...Εκεί είναι το παρελθόν σου. (28-9)

Here, I will introduce the personas listed above within the context of the texts in which they first appeared. I shall present the fictional characters based on the

¹⁸⁵ Mathaiou and Polemi, op. cit., p.33.

¹⁸⁶ Mike, op. cit., p. 23.

chronology of the publication of the original works and not according to the order Axioti uses in the text.

Firstly, there is Ismini from *Δύσκολες νύχτες*. In the second part of the 1938 novel, a great part of the text focuses on the character of Ismini, whom the narrator meets as a young girl at the Catholic school of Tinos. Ismini is a quite impulsive person who befriends the anonymous narrator at a time that she finds it hard to make any friends. Ismini's voice takes up a significant part of the narration in part two of the book in order to narrate her own life story, which has a striking similarity with that of the principal narrator's (as well as Axioti's). Like the main anonymous narrator of *Δύσκολες νύχτες*, Ismini is the offspring of a failed marriage since her father has abandoned his wife in order to marry another woman. Axioti herself was left to the exclusive care of her father in Mykonos after her parents divorced and her mother settled in Athens, where she remarried. The two girls are united because of their common experience and develop a strong bond while at school. However, towards the end of the second part they both fall ill but while the main narrator recovered, Ismini passed away. The second part thus ends with Ismini's death, which is a hallmark for the author's formative years in the school. This is her first experience of the death of a person her age that leads up to the third part, in which she returns as a seventeen year old to Mykonos in order to experience two significant losses in the following part.

Alexandros Smyrlis is a character that we encounter throughout the third part of *Δύσκολες νύχτες*. Alexandros plays a particular role towards the development of the narrator as a young female because he is the first man to demonstrate erotic feelings towards her before she begins her love life in the final part of the novel.¹⁸⁷ However, the courtship between the two will not last for long as Alexandros is sent off to the

¹⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that Alexandros was also the name of Ismini's first boyfriend back in Egypt.

war front without being given the chance to say goodbye. Alexandros is the second character in *Δύσκολες νύχτες* that dies at a young age and whose death prepares the ground for the death of the narrator's father at the final page of the third part. I should also note here that Alexandros is the only male fictional character that Kadmo refers to by identifying the work that he is first introduced. However she writes:

Εκεί θα είναι τότε παρών και ο Αλέξανδρος, από τις «Δύσκολες Νύχτες», το πρώτο σου βιβλίο. Αλλά θα είναι τώρα ο Κωσταντίνος, με το σωστό του όνομα. Μπροστά στο θάνατο δέ θάχεις πια ανάγκη να τους μεταμορφώσεις, μεταποιώντας τα ονόματά τους τα πραγματικά.(56)

It is exactly this comment that draws attention explicitly to the fictionalisation process that the majority of the personas are subject to in the context of *Η Κάδμω*. I shall return to this remark later towards the end of the chapter.

Next is Anna, one of the main characters in *Θέλετε να χορέψομε Μαρία;* a work that Axioti herself defined as a novel though it is closer to the novella in length. Anna is an introvert university student that has low self-confidence and self-esteem. However, towards the end of the novella Anna meets Yiannis, who falls in love with her and her life is transformed into a fairytale. Maria is not an actual character in the novella. Eleni Yannakakis suggested that the 'absent' character under the name Maria is the object of a quest in the novella and a void symbol that welcomes several interpretations.¹⁸⁸ Maria is also a name that bears religious connotations and this impression is further enhanced by the fact that Anna acquires the name of the Holy Mother towards the end of the book.

Furthermore, Maria is the name of the ideal woman that Yiannis was expecting in his life and, more importantly, a personification of 'writing' and 'creation' in general. The name Maria appears in block capital letters on the penultimate page of the book.

¹⁸⁸ Eleni Yannakakis, 'Narcissus in the novel. A study of self-referentiality in the Greek novel 1930-1945' (unpublished PhD thesis, London: University of London, 1990), p.215-256 (esp. p.236 -244).

Maria represents a more generalized idea: it is a common name that nevertheless, within the particular context signifies the perfect other half that people seek and functions as a name for the personal dream of each reader. Kadmo makes a special reference to Maria in the part entitled ‘Συνάντηση’. There she begins with an excerpt from *Θέλετε να χορέψουμε Μαρία;* where Anna’s name is mentioned but shortly after she announces Maria’s entrance in the sphere of narrative. Απόψε όμως ήρθε και σε βρήκε εκείνη η Μαρία σου....Τί θαύμα!Εδώ είναι η Μαρία σου! she exclaims. She starts writing again and this is probably a result of the miracle that the narrative of Maria entails for Axioti.

In contrast to the other personas recalled by Kadmo, Michellina from *Κοντραμπάντο* is not only dead but also represented as an old maid. Within a wider context that alludes to a modern version of the ‘νέκυσια’, the displaced narrator encounters Michellina and describes her as an aging and ‘de-sexualised’ female, who is no longer desired by men. It is important to stress here that especially in her later period texts, Axioti reflects her own reality in her fictional personas, Kadmo and Michellina. Those personas are refractions of the author’s aging self and in fact Michellina is said to be literally ‘στο σκαλοπάτι του δικού της τάφου’.

Ismini, Alexandros, Mikellina, and Maria are recognised by the dying Kadmo herself, as they gather in her room. Kadmo has situated herself in a liminal space, where the boundaries separating reality and fantasy as more crucially, life and death, are fluid. She appears to be calling the names of her fictional creations in a way that is reminiscent of the ‘νέκυσια’ scene in the *Odyssey*, where the souls of the dead gather around Odysseus. We read: Όλα τα πρόσωπα των βιβλίων μου ζωντανεύουν τώρα και με τριγυρίζουν...Γυναίκες, γριές, άντρες, ηλικιωμένοι, παιδιά μεγάλα ή μικρότερα...Με τους θανάτους ωστόσο και με τους νεκρούς, είχα αρχίσει κι εγώ να

γράφω. (101) The appearance of those fictional characters encourage Kadmo to start writing again in order to rescue them in the future. Through the evocation of their names and the metaphor of the ‘transformation of the chrysalis’ (58) Kadmo is united with her fictional personas.

The significance of all this is that the reunion of Kadmo with the other fictional personas is mediated through the act of (re)reading. Kadmo reads the books she wrote many years ago and the text itself regenerates the memories she has lost after many years of aphasic behaviour. Before embarking on the project of re-reading her own books, not only can she not recall any of her fictional personas, but she also feels abandoned by her own creations.

Όχι, κανείς δεν ερχόταν από τα πρόσωπά σου για να σ’ επισκεφθεί. Και μήπως δεν τους έδωσες αρκετή διορία; Πως! Πολλά χρόνια τους άφησες στην καλή τους τη διάθεση-κάπου καμιά εικοσαριά. Ήταν ένα αρκετό περιθώριο χρόνου.(16)
Τώρα διαβάζεις σιγά-σιγά. Αρχίζεις να θυμάσαι λίγο-λίγο. Θυμάσαι κάτι από τότε, όταν τα έγγραφες ... Σε κάθε κομματάκι αντιστοιχεί μια ανάμνηση. Όσα χρόνια που είχες αποκοπεί απ’τα βιβλία σου! Απ’ τη ζωή. (27)

Life for the intratextual writer cannot be separated from the act of writing since her literary as well as life memories are attached to the memories of writing. Kadmo remarks: Μέσα σ’ εκείνες τις σελίδες έζησες, μεγάλωσες, εγέρασες...Εκεί είναι το παρελθόν σου.(68) Hence, the ability to remember her past life relies on her ability to remember her literary texts .

For Melpo Axioti, the act of writing *Η Κάδμω* assumes the act of (re)reading her previous works and to a certain extent re-writing them. Already in the beginning of the chapter, I used the definition ‘an autobiography of books’ for this text as I wanted hint to a link between Melpo Axioti and Michel Fais, the final case of *autofictionneur* examined in this thesis and as a consequence, a link between the first and the second generation of Greek practitioners. Both texts explore through different pathways the

issue of memory and writing and both feature a protagonist, with language-related difficulties that are addressed only through writing the book in hand. Kadmo has lost command of her linguistic medium and the overarching persona in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* has a speech defect; the remedy for both of them is found only through writing. Kadmo's (and Axioti's) 'autobiography of books' is a narrative incorporating references to the 'individual' narratives of her earlier books, which are represented in the text with the evoking of their respective fictional protagonists.

In the beginning of the text, Kadmo refers to a characteristic anecdotal episode from Tolstoy's life. She explains: Πήγανε, λέει, στον Τολστόι όλα του τα βιβλία και τον κοίταζαν, εκείνη την ώρα που ήταν πια νεκρός. Εσύ όμως δεν είσαι τώρα ούτε νεκρή, ούτε ζωντανή. Είσαι κάτι ακαθόριστο.(20) This reflects the liminal situation of Kadmo – she is at the threshold separating life from death. She is neither active as she used to be as a young person nor passive as the dead Tolstoy. However, she is aware that her works have a life of their own and she is preoccupied with their posthumous fate. She is also between a textual and extratextual existence. Her fictional creations stand the test of time through her revisiting them as a reader of her own fiction and also through re-writing them. This double process of rereading and rewriting has special importance in the final section entitled 'Γυρισμός' (Homecoming), where Kadmo says: Εγύρισες λοιπόν στα βιβλία σου - κάπου κατόρθωσες ν'ανακαλύψεις κανένα - κι ένιωθες σα να είχες ξαναγεννηθεί.(106) The overall pessimistic tone that runs through the book is overshadowed in the final pages by an unexpected realisation that the process of regaining lost memories and therefore retrieving her writing skills by creating the book in hand has been successfully completed.

On the penultimate page Kadmo is explicitly identified with the author/narrator. We read: ήρθαν κάποιες φωνές να σε χαιρετήσουν εσένα, την Κάδμω, την ώρα που

κοιμόσουν (108). The narrator just this once uses the second singular pronoun instead of the third in order to address Kadmo. This shows that the text is self-addressed although it does not fall into one of the strictly defined categories of the monologue text as argued in the first section of the chapter. The three subjects – the protagonist, the narrator and the extra-textual author - come together at the end of the book through the identification of Kadmo with the second person and manifest clearly the autobiographical nature of *Η Κάδμω*. The union formed between the protagonist, the narrator and the real author expose the intense fictionalisation process that takes place in the text and support my reading as a pioneering autofiction.

Kadmo eloquently sums up a fundamental principle of autobiographical writing and autofiction in particular: Διπλή διεργασία: η ζωή φτιάχνει τα βιβλία, κι εκείνα ξαναφτιάχνουν τις συνέχειες της ζωής.(87) Autobiographical and biographical snapshots are consequently rescued through the process of fictionalisation just as Melpo Axioti's life story reaches the readers through her fictional aging alter ego, Kadmo. Beginning to write again heralds not only a renewal in Axioti's writing career. Her life is near the end but her 'fictional' and 'linguistic' nostos is accomplished. The book in hand renews the previous works of the author by evoking the characters she devised and by recalling through reading the memories of writing and language. This renewal makes it possible to write this final farewell text as the afterword of the 'nostos'. Life is denied in the case of Axioti, 'nostos' however is achieved and the fruit of the author's labour is this incipient autobiography of her books.

In the course of this chapter, I have tried to offer a new reading of Melpo Axioti's final prose work in the light of autofiction. I believe that a reading of *H Κάδμω* as a typical example of a memory monologue in Greek is inadequate if we take into account what Axioti actually achieves. In the end of her writing career, she creates a text that surpasses the constraints of the monologue genre and uses elements of monologue discourse in a manner that leads her towards autofiction. I have demonstrated the autofictional character of the text by arguing that Axioti's experience of exile and the recreation of her fictional personas in the narrative are fictionalised to a great extent, and more crucially that the narrator, the protagonist and the extratextual author are different sides of a single 'writing' consciousness.

H Κάδμω is essentially a work that demonstrates Axioti's pioneering nature as a novelist. Instead of composing a monologue by adhering to familiar modernist techniques, Melpo Axioti moves on to postmodern experimentations. The core of the text is autobiographical since the main themes that are developed in the narrative reflect Axioti's isolation during her late years and her struggle to regain control of her writing medium after almost two decades in exile. However, as I have explained in detail, the incidents and Kadmo, the autobiographical subject is fictionalised to the extent that the text could be read as an autofiction that challenges the staples of the monologue. My argument could be summarised as follows: *H Κάδμω* is one of the very first examples of autofictional writing in Greek and in fact it could be defined as a woman's autofiction of 'nostos' and repatriation.

Melpo Axioti's *H Κάδμω* is a text that bridges Tachtsis' *Τα ρέστα* and Vassilikos' *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*, the last representative case of the first period of autofictional writing in Greek. In *H Κάδμω* the author assumes the mask of Kadmo in order to embark upon an autobiographical narration focusing on her writing career.

Axioti does not obscure herself in the text by employing different biographical subjects as Tachtsis does, but instead uses a single fictional *alter ego* as the protagonist at the same time that she employs a variety of grammatical persons in the discourse. This brings us closer to the technique Vassilikos employs in his text *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*, where he takes this triple relationship among the author, the narrator and the protagonist a step further by disguising his own autobiography as the biography of Thrasakis, an invented author.

CHAPTER IV

The Few things I know about Vassilis Vassilikos: at the crossroads of biography and autofiction

Κι αν εγώ δεν ήμουν εσύ
Μήπως εσύ θάσουν εγώ;

Αίμα σου το ψέμα μου

Vassilis Vassilikos,
Γλαύκος Θρασάκης
(1973-1975)

The first part of this thesis closes with a text in which the autofictional strategy of splitting the persona of the writer in the text crucially develops into a bipole formed by his intratextual ‘self’ and his ‘other self’. In *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* (written between 1973 and 1974) Vassilis Vassilikos experiments with the limits between biography and what today can be called autofiction and tests how the writer in the text writes about himself through the lens of ‘otherness’.

My first objective is to illustrate the complexities and challenges of labelling the text, as we can observe features from different genres (e.g. biography, detective story). I will subsequently draw a parallel between *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* and its literary sources (primarily Vladimir Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*) and discuss how these have had an impact on Vassilikos’ text. I shall then present Thrasakis’ fictional alter egos in order to illustrate the splitting of the authorial subject. A central question in my analysis is how the dipole between Glafkos Thrasakis and his biographer is created and how the identity of the exiled writer is articulated in the text. The examination of the double as a literary device, which will be a dominant issue in this chapter, will lead to a discussion of the novel as an autofiction that transgresses the boundaries between ‘factual’ biography and autobiography. Autobiography in this case turns out to be a mirror image of biography and the self is reflected through the text as ‘the other’. Therefore, the ‘few things’ the readers discover about Vassilis Vassilikos are those that they come to know through his fictional self, the émigré writer Glafkos Thrasakis.

Vassilis Vassilikos was preoccupied with the composition of *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* throughout the 1970s. The work was initially presented as a sequence of three novels under the titles *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* (1974), *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης, Η επιστροφή* (1975)

and *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης, Μπερλίνερ ανσάμπλ* (1975).¹⁸⁹ In 1975 again and with only minor changes to the original text, the first omnibus edition of *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* came out and by that time the greater part of the novel (as we know it today in its finalised version) was written. Apart from the three main novels, the introduction is an excerpt from a short story entitled ‘Δίπτυχο’ included in the collection of short stories *20:20*¹⁹⁰ while the first part entitled ‘Έρευνα πάνω στη ζωή και το έργο (το νεανικό να εξηγούμαστε) του Γλαύκου Θρασάκη’ is derived from the collection *Η Κάθοδος*.¹⁹¹ The versions of the book that followed its initial publication incorporated additional narrative parts from the collection *Το λιμάνι της αγωνίας και άλλα διηγήματα*¹⁹² whilst the final volume *Τα Απόκρυφα του Γλαύκου Θρασάκη* was added in 1979, two years after the first one-volume edition of the novel in 1977.

According to Vassilikos’ note on the back cover of the 2008 edition, *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* is his favourite and most ambitious as well as large scale work. The fact that there were two one-volume publications during the 1990s (1990 and 1996) as well as a definitive edition in 2008, argues for its key-role in Vassilikos’ oeuvre. Here, however, I will not consider the revised editions of the text even though those reworkings raise interesting questions regarding the changes in structure and the enrichment of the work as well as the process of selecting which parts to keep and which parts to discard. For the purposes of this thesis I will examine the novel as it first appeared in the mid 1970s before Vassilikos began remodelling it because it gives us insights into the original authorial plan, while it further strengthens the

¹⁸⁹ All the above were published in Athens by Pleias and were written a year before their publication—that is 1973 and 1974 respectively. As far as the dates of publication are concerned, I have verified them against Giannaris’ record. See Giorgos Yiannaris, *Βιβλιογραφία Βασίλη Βασιλικού 1949-1982* (Athens: Dorikos, 1984). Here all citations are given in brackets and follow the Pleias edition.

¹⁹⁰ Vassilis Vassilikos, *20:20’ Αφηγήματα* (Paris: 8 ½, 1971), p. 27-35.

¹⁹¹ Vassilis Vassilikos, *Η κάθοδος* (Athens: Pleias, 1974) (written in 1973).

¹⁹² See ‘Τρεις ανέκδοτες ιστορίες του Γλαύκου Θρασάκη’ in *Το λιμάνι της αγωνίας* (Athens: Nea Sinora, 1978).

argument for the existence of autofictional works in Greek in the early 1970s. Even in its original form and before the three slim volumes gave way to the bulky publication, Vassilikos is exploring the new possibilities that arise for the novel when the latter is teamed up with life-writing.

4.1. *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as a transgressive text: moving beyond fictional (auto)biography

Given the lack of critical consensus with regard to the terminology employed for works that bring together fiction and life-writing, defining *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* proves to be a particularly challenging task. On the front cover of the first edition, Vassilikos labels the work as a ‘novel’, in a way that echoes Doubrovsky’s use of the term ‘roman’ on the title page of his autofictions. On the back cover of the revised editions of 1990 and 1996 as well as on that of the definitive version that appeared in 2008, Vassilikos makes the claim that the text could be equally described as “βιομυθιστόρημα, αυτομυθιστόρημα ή και αντιβιογραφία.” All three terms proposed by Vassilikos in his description highlight the fictionalisation of ‘controversial’ genres such as the biography and of course the autobiography, whose documentary/factual nature was traditionally considered to be at odds with fiction. The aforementioned terms do not appear as such in Greek life-writing criticism and have apparently been appropriated from French or English. Vassilikos, however, does not define the terms used and seems to suggest that all three are merely different names for his text that subscribes to fictional life-writing.

Therefore, my point of departure is the realisation that a suitable term and reading framework for Vassilikos’ text should point out the (auto)biographical viewpoint of the book and at the same time emphasise its fictional character. Georgia

Farinou's article on Greek fictional biography, in which she examines Vassilikos' case, will be used as a springboard for my analysis. Farinou initially discusses the impact of the 'New Biography' trend in Greece and at the same time introduces other related terms like 'vie/biographie romancée'.¹⁹³ In the same article she informs us that works representative of the 'New Biography' trend were translated into Greek during the years 1935-1955.¹⁹⁴ She associates the translation activity with the development of Greek fictional biography during the same period and refers to novelistic biographies in Greek including the groundbreaking biography of Baudelaire by Yiannis Beratis.¹⁹⁵ More importantly, Farinou extends her analysis to postmodern texts and uses as an example *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* in order to suggest that in a postmodern context, biography readdresses its relationship with the novel. She also states that postmodern fictional biography promotes the narrative of a disjointed selfhood, articulates "liminal identities" and brings both the biographee and the biographer into focus,¹⁹⁶ issues that I will also be discussing here.

In *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*, the unnamed writer embarks upon an ambitious project that entails more than composing the biography of another author. He is at the same time presenting and commenting on the biographee's manuscripts, which are kept in the archives of an American university. Given that the deceased author Glafkos Thrasakis is a fictional creation, the text appears to be a fictional literary biography. The biographer is a fictional persona himself, who narrates Glafkos Thrasakis' life story from his own point of view; as a result, the reader is given direct access to the biographer's thoughts and his method of composition.

¹⁹³ Georgia Farinou-Malamatari, 'Aspects of Modern and Postmodern Greek Fictional Biography in the 20th Century', *Kampos* 17 (2009), p. 27-47. Farinou claims that 'vie/biographie romancée' was used in a pejorative manner in the case of Maurois.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.32.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 37-38.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 40-41.

Even though the biographer does not present the reader with a biography from cradle to deathbed, he tries to respect roughly Thrasakis' lifeline. It is important that the Berlin episode takes up most of the narration in the third book because it ends with Thrasakis' murder somewhere near the 'no man's land' that divides the western and eastern part of the city. With the exception of occasional digressions to Thrasakis' childhood and teenage years that are prompted by his early writings, the biographer accompanies his subject to the consecutive places of exile. The works of Thrasakis are incorporated in the main body of the narrative and they serve as testimonies for putting the finishing touch to the portrait of the author Thrasakis.

In addition, *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* moves beyond the constraints of a literary (auto)biography and combines elements of different genres and types of novelistic or non-fictional writing (including detective fiction). The storyline is plotted on the basis of Thrasakis' unsolved murder. The biographer assumes amongst his other tasks the role of a detective in search of the truth behind the biographee's mysterious murder.¹⁹⁷ Possible scenarios are tested (e.g. murder by cannibals in New Guinea or murder by Yugoslavian agents) and dismissed, thus exposing the veracity of the information revealed by the biographer. The blending of genres that takes place in Vassilikos' text is typical of postmodern novels: marrying (auto)biographical fiction with detective fiction turns the search for clues regarding the elusive personality of Glafkos Thrasakis into a search for elucidating the relationship between the biographer and biographee.¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, the text can be read as a piece of criticism against 'old-fashioned' interpretations of a novelist's work based on an exhaustive analysis of his

¹⁹⁷ This echoes M. Karagatsis' novel *Ο κίτρινος φάκελος* (1956), in which the narrator is called to resolve the mysterious suicide of the lawyer and author, Manos Tasakos.

¹⁹⁸ Stuart Sim (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 2005). See Barry Lewis' contribution on literature and the special section on pastiche, where he makes the claim that detective fiction is particularly popular with postmodern novelists. p. 114-115.

biography. The process of writing the biography of Thrasakis puts to the test a critical contention that Marcel Proust dismissed in his important essay *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.¹⁹⁹ The assertion that in order to understand a work of art, the reader should be aware of the artist's biography, is rejected in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* by exposing the biographical narrative as an inadequate tool for supporting exclusively a reading of Thrasakis' texts.²⁰⁰ The impression that we get from the biographer in the beginning of the text is that he adheres to the old dogma of literary criticism and thinks that the life of Thrasakis provides the hermeneutical key to interpret his work. Exhaustive quotations from the work of Thrasakis are scrutinised by the critic in order to bring to surface 'catchy' subjects, such as homosexuality and eventually associate them with the author's personal life. Yet, as Proust did in his famous essay, Vassilikos puts to the test and ultimately parodies the practice of using the artist's biography as the primary hermeneutic key for interpreting a work of art. He seems to suggest, instead, that the true artistic self of the author is revealed in the actual works he produces, which in turn should not be approached on the sole basis of linking them to his own life.

Therefore, the text not only challenges the traditional methods of discussing works of literature in relation to the lives of their authors, but more crucially questions a method that used to be popular among practitioners of literary biography. The biography *ipso facto* is a literary genre that alongside the private life of the biographee is interested in constructing his/her public figure. Of course in the case of literary biographies, the reader anticipates that the public profile of the biographee will be derived from his work. In the case of Glafkos Thrasakis, we get the impression that in those specific parts where the biographer engages with the biographee's work,

¹⁹⁹ Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) (first pub.1954).

²⁰⁰ Elaine Marks, 'The Relevance of Literary Biography', *The Massachusetts Review* 7, no.4 (Autumn, 1966), p. 815-823.

he does not let Thrasakis' texts speak for themselves but forces 'arbitrary' interpretations that render him less trustworthy.

In my view Vassilikos has identified a trap into which those who engage in writing the lives of authors are liable to fall, and he mocks the anonymous biographer, who uses to the point of exhaustion Thrasakis' literary texts in order to derive factual information about the man himself. The novel is structured in a way that puts in doubt the biographer's entire venture. If the texts on which the avid reader's entire analysis depends are fictions within a fiction (*mise en abyme*), then to what extent is it possible to extract a 'real-life' image of his subject? The only possible way to approach his subject is through fiction and more specifically through fiction that interlocks biography and autobiography.

However, as it became evident in the previous sections, certain features of Vassilikos' novel demonstrate new complexities in this generic type of writing that combines fiction and life-writing. Thus, the framework of fictional biography is exposed as insufficient in the case of Vassilikos' work since it cannot encompass the novelties that are introduced in the novel. Fictional biography is not a sufficient framework for articulating Glafkos Thrasakis' story, nor that of the anonymous biographer. 'Fictional biography' belongs to the literary tradition of past generations and therefore another framework should be sought, one which will prove resilient to the merging of the biographical and the autobiographical endeavour undertaken by the anonymous biographer in a smaller level and by Vassilis Vassilikos in the extra-textual level.

To sum up, *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* will be read here as a text that experiments on the framework of fictional (auto)biography by opening up to other types of writing that do not belong to the genre of life-writing. As I have already suggested a crucial

identification takes place in the text; that between the narrator/biographer and the biographee. Over the next pages, I shall explore this identification in detail and argue that this is what essentially makes this novel an autofiction.

4.2. *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* and its intertext

Vassilis Vassilikos had no qualms about revealing the works that provided inspiration while writing *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*. He borrowed the idea of questioning the credibility of the author/biographer from two novels by Vladimir Nabokov: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) and *Pale Fire* (1962). A third work that triggered further Vassilikos' interest in literary biography against a postmodern background was Jean Paul Sartre's account of the life of Gustave Flaubert, entitled *L'idiot de la famille* (1971-2). A fourth source – albeit not straightforwardly acknowledged by the author – was Dostoevsky's novella *The Double* (1846). In this section, I discuss how Vassilikos responds to these works in terms of the elements that he appropriates as well as investigate to what extent he diverges from the originals.

Nabokov's novels are the most important intertexts of *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as Vassilikos admits in a recent interview where he considers *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* as his primary source of inspiration.²⁰¹ In Nabokov's 1941 novel, we follow the narrator's quest to find out about his half-brother and compose a 'truthful' biography. The biographee is Sebastian Knight, a Russian émigré, who wrote novels in English and died at the age of thirty-six. The lines separating fiction and reality are blurred for the biographer with the cryptic name V, since he encounters people and situations that seem to have sprung up from Knight's novels. Furthermore, as the

²⁰¹ See Vassilis Vassilikos' interview 'Το έναυσμα για τη συγγραφή ενός βιβλίου, μου το δίνει ένα άλλο βιβλίο που διάβασα, άλλου συγγραφέα', *Neoi Agones Epirou* (12/06/2010). Web <http://www.neoiagones.gr/> [accessed on 12 Dec 2010].

novel progresses, V identifies to such extent with his late half-brother that the reader is left in doubt whether the two are separate personalities or if Knight is the fictional projection of V. In Vassilikos' novel this confusing identification issue is resolved after the revelation that Thrasakis is a character that exists only in the context of the novel.

The biographer in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* experiences the same process of identification with the biographee as V does with Sebastian. In both novels, the reader is presented with an ambiguous situation, in which the personalities of the biographer and the biographee are merged into a single self. It seems that the biographer's quest towards the 'real' lives of their fictional subjects is identified with their proper endeavour to accomplish self-discovery through writing the novel at hand.

In *Pale Fire*, Charles Kinbote annotates the poem 'Pale Fire', composed by his deceased friend John Shade. Vassilikos uses the same basic principle - he presents the biographer as a commentator of the work of a fellow author, who is dead at the time the book is being written. A striking difference between *Pale Fire* and *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* is that unlike Nabokov, Vassilikos does not distinguish the 'original' works the biographer examines from his own text and he integrates Thrasakis' poems and short stories as well as excerpts from his novel and miscellaneous works into the main narrative. Criticism on *Pale Fire* has highlighted the arrogant character of the biographer-narrator.²⁰² In his foreword to 'Pale Fire' Kinbote states: "For better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word."²⁰³ He gives instructions to the reader (e.g. to first read the notes and then the poem) in an authoritative manner. On the contrary, Vassilikos does not present the biographer as a confident scholar, who believes that he possesses the key to 'unlocking' Thrasakis' work.

²⁰² See Couturier Maurice, 'The Near-Tyranny of the Author: *Pale Fire*' in Julian Connolly, *Nabokov and his Fiction: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.55.

²⁰³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (London: Penguin, 2000) (first pub.1962), p. 25.

One further thing both novels have in common is that they illustrate the two intratextual authors as distinct individuals with regard to their physical appearance, their sexuality and family status.²⁰⁴ In Vassilikos' text the biographer is married with a daughter and a grandson whereas Thrasakis has no children. In *Pale Fire* it remains unclear if John Shade and Charles Kinbote are actually 'mirror images' of the same character and the novel is thus open to many different interpretations.

Moreover, I believe that the employment of parody in Vassilikos' text owes a lot to Nabokov.²⁰⁵ It is beyond the scope of my analysis to engage with the multiple and elaborate manifestations of parody in Nabokov's novels here; nevertheless, I will briefly illustrate how Nabokov puts language to the service of parody in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and then relate it to the parodist language in Vassilikos' text. In Nabokov's novel the entire literary enterprise is parodied through the metaphors of chess, a game Nabokov was passionate about.²⁰⁶ The biographer's quest for information regarding Sebastian, is carried out in terms of a chess game. The language reflects this parodist condition with many references to black and white individuals (like the pawns that move across the chessboard) and names inspired by chess (e.g. Knight, Bishop).

In Vassilikos' case the parody is direct and carried out predominantly on the level of names. The language in the novel parodies primarily the Greek literary establishment and also Greek politics in the seventies (to which I will be referring in the last section). In *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* recognisable names appear slightly distorted: the authoritative figure of Greek criticism, Dimaras appears as Midaras, and Mario

²⁰⁴ For a complete list with the differences between the two principal characters in *Pale Fire* see Couturier, op.cit., p.63.

²⁰⁵ Stuart Dabney, *Nabokov. The Dimensions of Parody* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

²⁰⁶ On Nabokov's literary appropriation of chess games see Janet K. Gezari and W.K. Wimsatt, 'Vladimir Nabokov: More Chess Problems and the Novel', *Yale French Studies* 58 (1979), p. 102-115.

Vitti - the Italian academic - is introduced as Vario Mitti. Finally, we have the ‘vulgarisation’ of the name of one of the most important literary journals in Greece, *Nea Estia*. Thrasakis’ texts and articles that are of interest to the biographer are published in the literary review *Nea Somba*.²⁰⁷

Vassilis Vassilikos is also in dialogue with Jean Paul Sartre, who was particularly drawn to biography as a genre and chose French writers as his subjects. Sartre’s involvement with biography spans a period of twenty-five years during which he wrote on Charles Baudelaire in *Baudelaire* (1947), Jean Genet in *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr* (1952) and Gustave Flaubert in *L’idiot de la famille* (1971-1972). The publication of the three volumes of Sartre’s incomplete work on Flaubert coincided with Vassilikos’ stay in Paris. Therefore, the author was definitely aware of the publication and possibly of the first critical responses the work generated. This particular work has been insufficiently studied in comparison to the rest of Sartre’s writings, but it actually echoes his autobiography *Les mots* (1964).²⁰⁸ One of the main arguments that Sartre made in *L’idiot de la famille* was that in contrast to what common belief dictates, creative writing (such as fiction) and documentary writing (such as biography) are actually compatible as genres.²⁰⁹ Sartre’s biographical enterprise reconciles biography and fiction by opting for third person narrative; a device that goes back to Julius Caesar and the employment of third person for real autobiography. Hence, biography is masked as a novel written in the third person

²⁰⁷ In this case Vassilikos uses the synonym of the word ‘εστία’ in demotic Greek and his pun targets both the use of katharevousa promoted by *Nea Estia*’s editorial committee, as well the journal’s austere and conservative viewpoint on literature in the seventies that did not encourage experimentations in language or form.

²⁰⁸ Douglas Collins, *Sartre as Biographer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 184-194.

²⁰⁹ See Julie Anselmini & Julie Aucagne, ‘Présentation’ – «L’idiot de la famille» de Jean Paul Sartre’, *Recherches et Travaux* 71 (2007), p. 5-27.

where the biographee is treated as a fictional character.²¹⁰ Vassilikos admits that he used Sartre's method in composing *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*. He says: Όχι αυτοβιογραφία, όχι βιογραφία, το εσύ, αλλά το αυτός – ή το τρίτο πρόσωπο, μέθοδος Σαρτρ με τον *Ηλίθιο της οικογένειας*, ή Φλωμπέρ, που είχε πει το κλασικό: « Η μαντάμ Μποβαρύ είμαι εγώ ».²¹¹

Sartre's contention that it is possible to combine biography and fiction is tested extensively in Vassilikos' text. The biographer holds on firmly to the following assumption until the last pages of the book: he is convinced that he cannot be an author and a biographer at the same time. This is why he appears throughout the novel as a mere biographer, who is entirely dependent on Thrasakis' original work due to his own lack of talent. Once he has finished scrutinizing Thrasakis' prose and poetry, he feels lost and he is terrified at the thought that there is no original work left to sustain his biographical project. However, as I shall show in the next section, the argument that biography and creative fiction are two discordant types of writing falls apart in the long episode in which the biographer discusses his anxieties with his daughter.

Finally, Vassilikos is in dialogue with another important writer – Dostoevsky and his novella *The Double*. Although, he has not mentioned Dostoevsky in his interviews, he does refer to Dostoevsky in the epilogue of the novel, when the biographer realises that Thrasakis has been nothing more than his alter ego in fiction. He recalls a visit to a psychoanalyst, who explains the case of a split personality by giving a synopsis of Dostoevsky's novella. *The Double* portrays a schizoid individual

²¹⁰ This echoes Roland Barthes opening statement in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* “Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman”. See chapter one, p.31-32.

²¹¹ Dimitris Gkionis, *Καλύτερα στον τυπογράφο παρά στον ψυχίατρο (18 συνομιλίες σε 30 χρόνια με τον Βασίλη Βασιλικό)* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1996), p. 31.

with hallucinatory behaviour and hence the double in the novella is actually a reflection of the main character. This is similar to the situation described in the epilogue of Vassilikos' novel. The biographer claims to have sought psychological treatment in order to cope with the disturbing realisation that Thrasakis was nothing more than his own alter ego (an issue that I will be discussing in detail in the next section). However, Vassilikos' novel does not share the horrifying atmosphere of Dostoevsky's novella and the realisation of the void behind Glafkos Thrasakis' mask conveys simply a feeling of temporary disillusionment.²¹²

Therefore, I make the case that Vassilikos carefully selects elements from his sources and incorporates them in his own fiction. Although he does not reproduce the complexity of the multiple levels of narration found in Nabokov's works, he manages to identify a couple of key aspects regarding life-writing and fiction and treat them in his novel; namely, the dualism of the protagonist and his tendency to represent himself in fiction as a split subject, both inside and 'outside' the text. I believe that the most important contribution Vassilikos made to Greek postmodern writing with this book was illustrating that there is indeed a way to combine fiction with biography through the practice of viewing one's self from a certain distance. In this way, through a broader exploration of the limit between life-writing and fiction, Vassilikos introduces autofictional practices in Greece before the coinage of the term and should be credited with extending the previous experiments in autobiographical fiction to their absolute limit.

²¹² The void that is ultimately exposed behind Glafkos Thrasakis' persona echoes Seferis verses from the poem 'Ο βασιλιάς της Ασίνης': Ο βασιλιάς της Ασίνης, ένα κενό κάτω από την προσωπίδα/ παντού μαζί μας, παντού μαζί μας ένα κενό. Giorgos Seferis, *Τα ποιήματα* (Athens: Ikaros, 1981), p. 185-187.

4.3. Alter egos and doubles in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*

In the two preceding chapters on Tachtsis and Axioti, I placed particular emphasis on the presence and function of the narrators' alter egos in the text. As I have tried to demonstrate so far, it is the strategy of employing different masks and personas to obscure the intratextual narrator/writer that defines these early Greek experiments in autofiction. Vassilikos' novel is a rich territory in terms of the alter egos that are present in the narrative. Moreover, we can claim that through the existence of 'doubles' in the narrative, Vassilikos introduces the notion of duality and finds himself extremely close to expressing the concept of the 'other self' as explored by Tziovas in his 2003 study.²¹³

In a general overview of Vassilikos' work, Alexis Ziras remarks that the multiple consecutive portraits/personas present us, in an ironic and humorous manner, with the metamorphoses and disguises of the author, who in turn transforms his relationship with the external world.²¹⁴ The above statement is ambiguous since Ziras does not clarify whether he is referring to Thrasakis or to the biographer (or to both) when he refers to the 'author'. My objective is to demonstrate that both Thrasakis and the biographer as professional writers can be identified with the extra-textual author.

It is crucial at this point to clarify who is Glafkos Thrasakis, the subject of the biography. Thrasakis is a pen name for the biographee, who moreover has a couple of different 'legitimate' names. In the second instalment entitled *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης, Η επιστροφή*, his real name appears to be Pavlos Pavlogiannis, whereas in the greater part of the novel, Thrasakis is the pseudonym that Lazaros (or Lazos) Lazarides uses.

²¹³ Dimitris Tziovas, *The Other Self: Selfhood and Society in Modern Greek Fiction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003).

²¹⁴ Alexis Zeras, 'Βασίλης Βασιλικός. Παρουσίαση - ανθολόγηση' in *Η μεταπολεμική πεζογραφία. Από τον πόλεμο του 40 ως τη δικτατορία του 67*, vol. 2. (Athens: Sokolis, 1992), p.348.

Thrasakis is a recurring figure in Vassilikos' oeuvre: he also appears in *Λούνικ II* (1969), *Η Ωραία του Βοσπόρου* (1973) and *Τα Φρύγανα του έρωτα* (1997), where his name is again identified as Lazaros Lazarides' pen name.²¹⁵ Lazaros is a fictional character that appears in the series of autobiographical short stories under the heading *Φωτογραφίες* (1964). Three years earlier Lazos Lazaridis was introduced as the protagonist of Vasilikos' text *Το φύλλο*, the first part of the trilogy *Το φύλλο, Το πηγάδι, Το αγγέλιασμα* (1961-1964). Lazos is a young man, who develops an absurd and metaphysical love relationship with a plant.²¹⁶

We should not disregard the religious connotations the name Lazaros bears. In the Christian tradition Lazarus rose from the dead and his resurrection is often paralleled to Adonis' rebirth. In the context of *Το αγγέλιασμα* (and also *Το φύλλο*), the choice of the name Lazaros draws attention to that intermediate and irrational state between death and resurrection. In my opinion, the persona of Lazos as it appears in this early work, is a primordial fictional projection of the future author – it represents a sensitive young man, who has declared his personal war against the over-industrialised society because he champions the power of dream and poetry and dares to embrace the 'illogical' elements of nature.

It is striking that both names (Pavlos Pavlogiannis and Lazaros Lazaridis) manifest a duplication of the first name.²¹⁷ A parallel can be drawn with Vassilis Vassilikos, whose own name presents the same double structure outlined above. Saunier successfully argued in his analysis of the novel that the double name is a

²¹⁵ On the first page of *Τα φρύγανα του έρωτα* (Athens: Livanis, 1997) we read: Το ανέκδοτο αυτό χειρόγραφο του Λάζαρου Λαζαρίδη (πιο γνωστού με το ψευδώνυμο Γλαύκος Θρασάκης) μου το έστειλε ανώνυμα κάποιος (συγγενής ή φίλος του;) από τη Θάσο.

²¹⁶ Koula Chrysomalli-Henrich, 'Η τριλογία (1961) και ο *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* (1974-1975) του Β. Βασιλικού. Μια προσπάθεια σύγκρισης και ερμηνείας' in *Αφιέρωμα στον καθηγητή Λίνο Πολίτη* (Thessaloniki, 1979), p. 345-387.

²¹⁷ Unlike the name Lazaros (Lazos) Lazaridis that is repeated across Vassilikos' novels, the name Pavlos Pavlogiannis does not appear elsewhere.

common situation in everyday life which Vassilikos employs here as a linguistic device that enhances the notion of the fictional characters' double personality.²¹⁸

Turning now to the name 'Glafkos Thrasakis',²¹⁹ Glafkos alludes to Athena's owl ('γλαύκα') and the blue colour described by Elytis in *To Άξιον εστί* ('και τα σπίτια πιο λευκά, στου γλαυκού το γειτόνεμα').²²⁰ The first name also refers to the sea-daemon Glaucus, who according to the myth was a mortal fisherman who once noticed that one of the fish he had caught, was plunged into the sea after touching some herb. Glaucus tasted the herb and was transformed into a sea divinity;²²¹ according to ancient popular beliefs he had a dual nature and he was depicted as a man with a fish tail from below the torso. He was also thought to possess a protean nature, as he was able to change shapes and adopt different faces.²²² Therefore, the name Glafkos can be interpreted here through the lens of myth. The reader could imagine Glafkos as an author, who will be immortalised posthumously in view of the biography that is being written and also in view of the preservation and annotation of his unpublished manuscripts. Moreover, the 'protean' nature of the mythical Glaucus is reflected in Thrasakis' different identities (Lazos and Pavlos), while the dual nature of the sea daemon encapsulates the two principal refractions of the auto(bio)fictional consciousness in Vassilikos' text: the biographer and the biographee.

²¹⁸ Guy Saunier, 'Ο συμβολισμός των αριθμών στο *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* του Βασίλη Βασιλικού', *Themata Logotechnias* (Sep-Oct 2007), p. 118 -130 (esp. p.122-8).

²¹⁹ The name Glafkos appears to have a unique place in Vassilikos' work. It appeared for the first time in Vassilikos' work *Καφενείον Εμγκρέκ (Ο Άγιος Κλαύδιος)*, (Athens: Pleias, 1975). In *Καφενείον Εμγκρέκ* (written in 1967-1968) we read the conversations between several exiled Greeks, who gather at a coffee shop in Paris. The exiled men refer to Glafkos as a person being searched for by the Greek police as a dangerous instigator. The elusive Glafkos manages to avoid arrest and the police arrest another man with the same name.

²²⁰ Glafkos is also the name of the main character in Terzakis' Bildungsroman *Ταξίδι με τον Έσπερο* (1946).

²²¹ Pierre Grimal, *A Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

²²² In *Τα απόκρυφα του Γλαύκου Θρασάκη* (1979) Vassilikos cites an excerpt from Philostratus. See Philostratus the elder, *Imagines*, 2.15 and 173.26. See also Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 898-968.

As far as the surname is concerned, an exegesis of how the name Thrasakis came about is provided in the epilogue. The narrator's admiration for the work of the 1930s generation novelist, Thrasos Kastanakis resulted in him borrowing the name of the real-life author and transforming it into a surname with the addition of a typical patronymic suffix for Modern Greek names (-άκης).²²³ Moreover, the name Thrasos approximates phonetically the name Thasos, Vassilikos' native island. One could claim that the consonant -r is cleverly added in order to create the Greek word for audacity, rudeness or bravery (θράσος in Greek). However, as it will become evident in the following pages, the biographer is not brave or audacious since he chose to obscure himself behind a non-existent 'established' author. The name Thrasakis parodies his lack of boldness and reluctance to expose himself as an unknown author to the public.

I shall now discuss the biographer's choice of using Thrasos Kastanakis as a model figure for creating Thrasakis. This choice, is not arbitrary; both Kastanakis and Thrasakis were writers of the diaspora. Kastanakis spent the greatest part of his life in Paris, where he taught in the School of Oriental Languages like the fictional Thrasakis (and of course the fictional Lazaridis). Moreover, according to the narrator's claims, Thrasakis used to live in the same block of flats with Kastanakis during his stay in Paris.²²⁴ In the context of Vassilikos' text, Thrasos Kastanakis is treated as the proper subject of the narrator's project of biography. The narrator quotes excerpts from biographical accounts of Kastanakis' life (by Lili Iakovidou) and draws a parallel between the biographical project that takes place within the text and the already published biography in a special issue of *Nea Estia*, devoted to Kastanakis.

²²³ The ending -άκης is typical for Cretan surnames. The name Θρασάκης could also be related to Thrasaki, Kapetan Michalis' son in Kazantzakis' novel *Ελευθερία ή Θάνατος*.

²²⁴ See 'Δίπτυχο', op.cit., p.119.

Finally, I would like to explore the relationship between Vassilis Vassilikos and Glafkos Thrasakis. Vassilikos' relationship with Thrasakis mirrors the relationship between Sebastian Knight and Nabokov. As I have already mentioned, in the case of Nabokov and Knight we have a real and a fictional Russian émigré, who wrote novels in English. In the case of Vassilikos and Thrasakis we have two professional writers born in 1934, who share a leftist political background that makes them oppose to their fathers in their adolescence and early adulthood. Moreover, the trauma of exile links Vassilikos to Thrasakis and we shall take into account that Vassilikos travelled as much as Thrasakis travels in the text and lived in the same cities as his fictional creation: Rome, Paris, Berlin.²²⁵ It is thus safe to claim that Thrasakis is the fictional projection of Vassilikos in this text.

I shall now focus on how Vasilikos treats the 'double' in the novel so as to prepare the ground for the issues of autofictional writing that will be discussed in the final section. To this end, I will examine Thrasakis as the biographer's double as well as discuss the duplicated relationship between the two intratextual authors and their wives.

In the epilogue, the biographer exclaims: Από τότε που έχασα το Θρασάκη, χάθηκα λίγο κ'εγώ. [...] Εγώ χωρίς τον Θρασάκη είμαι εγώ χωρίς τον εαυτό μου... Γιατί αυτοολοκληρώθηκα στο δόσιμο: ήμουν ο Γλαύκος στο βαθμό που εκείνος, ακόμα κι αν μπορούσε, δεν θα το πίστευε ποτέ...(*Μπερλίνερ ανσάμπλ*, 145-146). The biographer understands that this remarkable degree of identification with Thrasakis, has resulted into a dispersion of his own personality. He has led himself into believing that he cannot possibly exist beyond and after Thrasakis and once he has finished writing Thrasakis' biography, he feels there is no other purpose in life. He poignantly

²²⁵ On Vassilikos' stay in Rome and his relationship to Italy see Gerasimos Zoras, *Η Ιταλία του Βασίλη Βασιλικού* (Athens: Bartzoulianos, 2009).

remarks: ...τόρα, χωρίς άλλα διηγήματα για να στίψω, θ' αρχίσω να τρώω απ' τις σάρκες μου, γράφοντας αναγκαστικά δικά μου, σαν νάμουν αυτός. (*Μπερλίνερ ανσόμπλ*, 147). The biographer is afraid of the transition from the state of being a mere observer to that of actively producing fiction. The excerpt quoted above shows that Thrasakis casts a shadow over the biographer's own existence and that in case the biographer decides to go ahead with creative writing, he will not easily get over the feeling that he is a mere continuator of Thrasakis' legacy or even worse an impostor.

Therefore, if we are to assume that Thrasakis is the 'original' character (or the 'prototype') in Vassilikos' text, then the biographer is his double. However, this relationship between Thrasakis and the biographer is reciprocal. Given that at the end of the novel we discover that Thrasakis never actually existed and that he is a character invented by the narrator/biographer, then we can assert that Thrasakis is the persona of the unnamed biographer. This realisation obscures the limits between the narrator and Thrasakis and the reader cannot be certain as to who the 'original' character is and who its double. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that both figures are fictional beings and that the double is, first and foremost, a textual construct. Essentially, the narrator has come up with the idea of viewing himself from the outside and the double is a device that he uses in order to accomplish the desirable degree of distancing from himself.²²⁶ Hence, the impression that Thrasakis' biographer gives to his readers echoes the realisation made by V, the biographer of Sebastian Knight in Nabokov's novel: "I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows."²²⁷

²²⁶ The idea of 'the self as the other' is explored in Farinou's article: 'Β.Βασιλικού. Γλαύκος Θρασάκης: Ο εαυτός ως άλλος στη βιογραφία', *Porfiras* 104 (Jul-Sep 2002), p.211-217.

²²⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, op.cit., p.205.

Towards the end of Vassilikos' novel, the daughter of the biographer, who has studied literature at university, resolves the mystery around the figure of Thrasakis. I am quoting part of the dialogue between the biographer and his daughter:

- Και στο Βερολίνο; ρώτησα σβησμένα.
- Ήρθες για να με δεις. Κι αρρώστησες εκεί.
- Ποιός αρρώστησε;
- Εσύ, εσύ, ΕΣΥ. (*Μπερλίνερ ανσάμπλ*, 161)

She confronts him with the fact that Thrasakis never existed, because his name does not appear in accounts of modern Greek literature. She explains that Thrasakis was nothing but a literary device that served in order to tell a story in the way that letters are used as devices in epistolary novels. The biographer finally admits that he created Thrasakis as his double, because he wanted to present his own original work under another name that would add credibility to his 'fictional biography' project. He emphatically states:

Δεν υπήρχε άλλος τρόπος παρά να συνεχίσω την υποκρισία: άπαιχτα δικά μου έργα, διηγήματα, βάραιναν σαν αυγοτάραχο που μπαγιάτεψε στην κοιλιά του γραφείου μου. Θα τα τύπωνα λοιπόν σαν **νάταν** τα έργα του Θρασάκη, κι' επάνω θά βαζα και τη βιογραφία του καμωμένη από μένα τον ίδιο, μια που η νέα γενιά φαίνεται νά χει καθαρή προτίμηση για τα ντοκουμέντα. Οι μυθιστορίες δεν την ενδιαφέρουν παρά μόνο αν ξεκινούν από ένα πραγματικό περιστατικό...(*Μπερλίνερ ανσάμπλ*, 159)

The strategy of duplication is further applied in the novel with the existence of Glafka, Glafkos' wife. Glafka or Mrs.Lazaridou as the unnamed biographer calls her, should be perceived as the female alter ego of the intratextual author. What is more interesting is that Vasilikos creates another fictional couple – the biographer and his wife in order to complement the first couple. The biographer's wife is engaged with a 'biographical' project herself – she is Glafka's biographer and her work compliments that of her husband. The narrator describes the identification first as far as he is concerned and links it to the identification experienced by the couple:

Τότε φυσικά τρελαίνεσαι. Προπαντός όταν κι ο πιο κοντινός σου άνθρωπος, η γυναίκα μου στην περίπτωση αυτή, ασχολιούνται με τη γυναίκα του, κι έτσι υπήρχε μια πρωτοφανής ταύτιση ζευγαριών: εγώ ήμουν αυτός κ'η γυναίκα μου εκείνη... Κι αλήθεια, ποιά ήταν τα σύνορα των Θρασάκηδων; Ποιά τα δικά μας; Που σταματούσαμε εμείς; Που άρχιζαν εκείνοι; (*Γλάυκος Θρασάκης*, 40-41)

As stated above, the main problem that arises from the double identification between the writers and their wives is the blurring of lines that separate fiction and reality on the level of narration. It is extremely difficult for the narrator to disengage from his subject because his wife acts as a double of Thrasakis' wife. Despite the fact that the couples do not share the exact same life patterns, as the Thrasakis couple happens to be childless, it is still impossible to define clear-cut boundaries between them. On the whole, the existence of a 'double' couple adds to the confusion created by the cases of single 'doubles' and creates a complex net of relationships between the characters of the novel.

In spite of his negative criticism, Apostolos Sachinis was the first to point out that the novel belongs to a peculiar narrative genre ('ιδιότυπο αφηγηματικό είδος') and moreover that the author uses the practice of 'double voicing'.²²⁸ Sachinis mistakenly employs the Bakhtinian term since here we do not have two entirely distinct voices and two different meanings. However, if we consider the parts where the narrator uses first person singular discourse and the parts with third singular, we can affirm that there is indeed a balance between the two grammatical persons. In his narration, the biographer uses the first person singular to record the stages of his project as well as his anxieties, doubts and worries. In the parts where Thrasakis' life is the point of interest and Glafkos is treated more like the hero of a picaresque novel, the biographer uses the third person singular. However, in the epilogue the use of the

²²⁸ Apostolos Sachinis, 'Βασίλης Βασιλικός' in *Μεσοπολεμικοί και μεταπολεμικοί πεζογράφοι* (Thessaloniki: Konstantinidis, 1979), p. 95-120 (esp. p. 115-117).

second person pronoun ‘εσύ’ condenses the two voices and annihilates the distance between the biographer and the biographee.

The fact that the identification or rapprochement between Thrasakis and the biographer takes place in *Μπερλίνερ ανσάμπλ*, provides an extra hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the relationship between the different aspects of the ‘overarching consciousness’ that has been split. Thrasakis’ vagabond life comes to an end in the middle of the divided Berlin and likewise, the fragments of his persona are brought together on the occasion of his death. Ultimately, the two aspects of the self – the actual self and its double - can meet in the intermediate zone between the self and the other verbally depicted by the second person.

4.4. Fictionalising the writer’s exile in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*

Having illustrated that Thrasakis is the fictional projection of both the biographer and Vassilis Vassilikos, I will now move on to a discussion of the theme of exile in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*. My main objective is to link Vassilikos’ experience of exile during the period of the dictatorship with its literary representations in the text and argue that *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* should be read as an autofiction exploring the very notion of exile in turbulent times.

Contrary to what Vassilikos stated in a 1980s interview, I disagree with this particular text being considered as a novel that is fully “disengaged from the immediate reality of its author” (at least in its original version).²²⁹ I believe that Vassilikos distorts certain ‘real-life’ events (a strategy that becomes more evident in

²²⁹ ‘To be a Writer in Greece: A Discussion with Vasilis Vasilikos’ (an interview with Dan Georgakas and Peter Papas), *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* (1980), p. 7- 26, esp. p. 9.

the latest versions of the text) just to avoid an oversimplifying reading of *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as an autobiographical novel.

Nevertheless, in the pages that follow, I will be making the case that the text is firmly anchored to the political context of the time it was first written and that exile becomes a common denominator between the biographer, Thrasakis and Vassilikos; the three refractions of the autofictional consciousness. The notion of exile is introduced subtly in the foreword, when the biographer refers to Thrasakis as a writer ‘in residence’. I believe that the definition ‘in residence’ can be interpreted in a highly ironical manner; Thrasakis is actually a writer ‘without residence’ and ‘in search of residence’. From the foreword already, the reader is informed that Thrasakis is led to exile due to an outbreak of plague (‘επιδημία χολέρας’).²³⁰ This specific reference targets the Colonels’ regime since it could be understood as a parody of the medical vocabulary employed by Junta’s front man, George Papadopoulos, who notoriously described Greece as ‘a patient in cast’.²³¹

I should point out that the attack against the military regime is carried out through parody; the biographer discusses openly his resentment at the anticommunist declaration of political beliefs and ridicules the notorious ‘δήλωση φρονημάτων’ that the Tigers’ club obliges him to sign in order to be eligible for USA funding.²³² Moreover, the biographer rebukes the fascist perception of ‘Greekness’ championed by the likes of Pericles Giannopoulos; a stance that if interpreted in the light of the accusation for dealing in plundered antiquities (‘αρχαιοκαπηλία’) draws attention to

²³⁰ I should note that Vassilikos uses the adverb ‘μεταχολερικά’ instead of ‘μεταδικτατορικά’.

²³¹ Thanassis Valtinos parodies this use of medical vocabulary in his text ‘Ο γύψος’, which was included in the collection *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα*. Vassilikos in his work *Καφενείον Εμιγκρέκ - Ο Άγιος Κλαύδιος* (written between December 1967 and May 1968 and first published in Paris) one of the exiled Greeks – a writer by profession, highlights the distortion of language by the dictators. He exclaims: Προσπαθώ ν’ανακαλύψω την τεχνική του γραψίματος. Να βρω απ’ την αρχή τις λέξεις που τις εξευτέλισε μια χούντα. See *Καφενείον Εμιγκρέκ - Ο Άγιος Κλαύδιος*, (Athens: Pleias, 1975), p. 18.

²³² The reference to ‘The Tigers Club’ (modelled on the international organisation ‘The Lions Club’) points to the involvement of the USA in Greek politics.

the regime's propagandist use of the Greek past. Moreover, the references to the politics of the period include a discussion of one of the short stories written by Thrasakis after 1973 that refers to the uprising of the Polytechnic School of Athens in November and to Karamanlis' return from Paris to lead the country to a new era of parliamentarism. Finally, it is interesting to note that the biographer draws a parallel between the Colonels' regime and similar regimes in South America. Thus, he appears to be in step with some of the writers involved in the publication of the politically subverting volume *18 κείμενα* (notably Th. D. Fragkopoulos with his short-story 'Ελ Προκουραδόρ').

Given the above details that anchor the novel in the period of the Junta, I believe that it is quite evident that Thrasakis' experience of exile mirrors Vassilikos' self-exile in Europe during the 1960s and the 1970s. When the 1967 coup took place, Vassilikos was *en route* to Greece after visiting Sweden. His active involvement with politics and his 1966 novel *Z* rendered him a politically dissident writer, who would be targeted by the regime. He preferred to settle in Rome and Paris as a self-exile throughout the dictatorship.²³³

Thrasakis' exile is presented by the unnamed biographer as a blessing in disguise:

Ο Θρασάκης ζώντας αναγκαστικά μακριά απ' την πατρίδα του πλούτισε τη λογοτεχνία μας με το θέμα της εξορίας. Νοσταλγώντας, έγραψε σελίδες γεμάτες λυρισμό για μονοπάτια άλλοτε αγαπημένα, για σταυροδρόμια και γωνιές πυκνώνοντας με νέο υλικό το τόσο γνωστό σε μας πια θέμα: του νόστου...(Γλαύκος Θρασάκης, 103)

One can claim that the biographer stops short of introducing Thrasakis as a key figure of *Exilliteratur à la grecque*. The use of 'αναγκαστικά' on the one hand suggests that Thrasakis' exile was inevitable and forced, and on the other, that it triggered the

²³³ This is certainly reflected in the choice of Rome as a setting for many of Thrasakis' stories that are embedded in the text. See Vassilikos' autobiography *Η μνήμη επιστρέφει με λαστιχένια πέδιλα* (Athens: Livanis, 1999), p.328-329 and also Gerasimos Zoras, *Η Ιταλία του Βασίλη Βασιλικού* (Athens: Bartzoulianos, 2009).

production of texts exploring the writer's nostos. We can thus claim that by circumscribing Thrasakis' work into the domain of nostos narratives, the biographer defines *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as a text primarily addressing the issue of homecoming.

According to Caren Kaplan forced displacement is often interpreted as a creative, contemplative life away from a hostile home environment (especially in a modernist context).²³⁴ Indeed, Thrasakis comes across as a nomad writer, who wanders from one place to another and ultimately benefits as an artist by distancing himself from Greece. In this sense he adopts a popular stance of modernist writers, who welcomed exile as an opportunity to detach themselves from their homeland's reality,²³⁵ and more importantly as a means to free themselves from confining literary traditions (e.g James Joyce, Gertrude Stein).²³⁶ The biographer explains Thrasakis' decision to become an expatriate in Thrasakis' own words: «Η σχέση μου με την πατρίδα», γράφει, «είναι η ίδια με της γης και του μικρότερου πλανήτη: ό,τι εκεί, στον πλανήτη ζυγίζει 0,04 του κιλού σε μένα φτάνει στα 2,5 κιλά, γιατί έχω άλλη στρατοσφαιρική δομή, αλλιώς βαραίνει σε μένα η ατμόσφαιρα.» (*Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*, 103). The above excerpt points out that exile becomes a condition for producing literary work in the case of Thrasakis (as for many other twentieth century writers).

Moreover, the writer in the text makes the following claim with regards to the alienating position he has put himself into: ζω λυτρωμένος από την ελληνική καθημερινότητα που αποπροσανατολίζει από την ουσία του προβλήματος που είναι: μια γλώσσα, ναι, αλλά που ανταποκρίνεται σε ποια γηγενή προϊόντα; (*Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*, 79). The writer in the text claims that by distancing himself from Greece,

²³⁴ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 38.

²³⁵ For an account of writers' voluntary and involuntary exile in a modernist context see Anders Olsson, 'Exile and Literary Modernism' in Eysteinnsson Astradur & Vivian Liska (eds.), *Modernism*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2007), p. 735-754, esp. p.735-6.

²³⁶ Michael Guzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 36-39.

he overlooks the problem of literary language. This echoes to a certain extent Kadmo's troubled relationship with language: the exiled writer risks losing his linguistic medium as he is no longer exposed to the environment that the language is being spoken on a daily basis and develops. The reference to 'γγγενή προϊόντα' could be understood as a cryptic comment on the language, the literature and the 'native'/ 'nationalist' culture in general that was promoted by the Colonels' regime.²³⁷ The intratextual writer implicitly points out that language mirrors the cultural scene. The official language of the regime was katharevousa, which the dictators wished to revive by fostering the pride of a glorified past to the masses. Therefore, the regime's cultural capital - its 'γγγενή προϊόντα' - was articulated in an artificial language, which the writer deems as equally alienating as the condition of exile.

For the purposes of my analysis I shall adjust one of the main arguments of Kaplan, who claims that an individual in exile due to political infringement "can be viewed as doubly estranged."²³⁸ She maintains that whether exiled people stay at home or resettle abroad, they experience alienation on a double basis. In this sense, the intratextual writer in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* is 'doubly estranged' since he experiences the feeling of alienation within Greece, is led to self-exile – the condition that perpetuates this sentiment abroad - and more importantly, finds himself exiled from both his homeland and his mother tongue. This double exile is a key concept for the anonymous biographer, as the latter experiences the agony of being exiled from Greece and Greek, through a double lens: his personal viewpoint and that of his fictional persona.

²³⁷ On the issue of culture during the dictatorship see Dimitris Papanikolaou, 'Ο πολιτισμός στη χούντα – «Άνθη» μέσα από τον «γύψο», *Ta Nea* (17.04.10), p. 24-25.

²³⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 38

Yet, the text invites another interpretation of the phenomenon of exile. The experience of exile allows the extratextual writer to disengage from his own viewpoint and to view himself from the perspective of the intratextual writer and his persona – in other words to view himself as the ‘other’. Therefore, exile becomes a powerful metaphor that accounts for the different refractions of the autofictional subject, that are alienated from each other. Exile provides us with a viable analogy to describe the splintering of the writer’s ego between the ‘self’ and the ‘other self’ – that is between Thrasakis and the biographer, between Vassilikos and the biographer, and finally between Vassilikos and Thrasakis. In such a text, where the subject is disjointed and dislocated, autofiction seems to provide the ideal narrative vehicle for articulating the identity of the writer in exile.

I believe that Thrasakis, the biographer and of course Vassilikos exemplify a crucial shift from exile, along the modernist paradigm, to postmodern émigré literature.²³⁹ The autofictional subject shifts its status from exiled to émigré, and readdresses its ‘writerly’ identity as well as ‘normalises’ the experience of exile. By treating emigration as a contemporary aspect of exile, the autofictional subject emphasises the movement between different spaces. I believe that the émigré writer is the final stage in the development of the identity of the exiled writer in Vassilikos’ text, and furthermore, it links Vassilikos to Thrasakis and Nabokov, two diaspora authors that play a certain role in the novel.

In his preface to the French translation, Jacques Lacarrière described *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as Vassilikos’ testimony for the contemporary Greek diaspora, the émigrés.²⁴⁰ The experience of exile is not fictionalised in order to talk about Greek

²³⁹ Carine Mardrossian, ‘From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature’, *Modern Language Studies* 32, no.2 (2009), p. 15-33.

²⁴⁰ Jacques Lacarrière, Préface ‘L’ Europe des Lotophages’ in Vassilis Vassilikos, *Un poète est mort* (transl. Gisèle Jeanperin) (Paris: Julliard, 1974), p.ix-xv.

politics in the period of the dictatorship solely, but it is ultimately elevated to a key element for the production of Vassilikos' autofiction. The emergence of the émigré writer in Vassilikos' text shows how the nostos concept is renewed in *Γλαύκος Θρασόκης*. As in the case of *Η Κάδμω*, nostos remains physically unattainable and is realised only through the return to the maternal language. Nevertheless, the émigré identity does not simply point to a trauma, but also to a complex process of shaping the identity as a reaction to imposed exile.

According to Lacarrière, Vassilikos is writing his own *Vassilikée*, which is similar to the *Odyssey* as this is “the incessant and difficult return to the island of Thasos over the time period of thirty years”.²⁴¹ I would be hesitant to pinpoint the *locus* of return to Thasos but I would claim that Vassilikos fictionalises his return to writing, to his own methods that are modified under the condition of exile. Thrasakis' and his biographer's wanderings stand metaphorically for the experimentations in fiction that demand to be understood as, in today's terms, autofiction. The detachment from homeland in the context of exile ultimately leads to a detachment from ourselves that facilitates a way of perceiving ourselves as others. The act of writing in the text is central as it reconciles the two projections of the writing self and moreover, it offers the sole possibility of homecoming to the émigré writer. Thrasakis becomes an emblematic figure of the émigré (or *émigréc* as in *Καφενείον Εμυγκρέκ*) writer ‘in search of residence’,²⁴² who can realise ‘nostos’ exclusively in the context of autofiction.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁴² Evidently, Vassilikos devised the term *émigréc* by combing the words *émigré* and *Grec* in order to create a political and linguistic identity for all those Greeks in exile that frequented the Café Saint-Claude in Paris during the Junta. See *Καφενείον Εμυγκρέκ*, op.cit.

In this final chapter of Part I, I have examined *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as a text that brings us closer to the period of culmination of Greek autofiction in the 1990s. Here, I have explored an issue that I dealt with in the cases of Tachtsis and Axioti: that is the splitting of the authorial subject and the existence of alter egos (or doubles in the context of this novel). My objective has been to show how the current novel, like the works by Tachtsis and Axioti, exemplifies the transgression of the boundaries between fiction and reality at the same time that it transgresses the boundaries between biography and autobiography.

Reading *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* as an autofiction provides a broader frame for the novel. Vassilikos admitted that *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* is his favourite book because he managed to portray the self through the perspective of the other. In that sense, he echoes Rimbaud's statement 'Je est un autre'. Vassilikos entered the sphere of fiction and created a fictional writer (as Tachtsis and Axioti did) in order to explore the possibilities or rather the impossibilities of traditional fictional biography. By treating the self as the hero of a novel, he questioned the authenticity of conventional life-writing and wondered whether it is possible to ever capture 'real' life in these postmodern times. As the title of the current chapter indicates, *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* is a novel that reveals a 'few things' about Vassilikos, once it is read as an autofiction that treats the hero as a fictional creation and puts in doubt the notion of 'definitive' (auto)biography.

'The diptych' of the fictional author, Glafkos Thrasakis and his so called biographer (who is none other than Vassilikos) brings us closer to the notion of 'δίκωλον' as it will emerge later in Yiannis Kiourtsakis' *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*. Therefore, the novel holds a strategic place in the context of the present study since it bridges the two designated periods of Greek autofictional writing and presents a shift

from the early autofictional preoccupation of subject-fragmentation and fictionalisation to the more specific process of dividing the subject and presenting two different aspects of the self. Vassilikos' novel is a successful example of a smooth transition from the conventional 'biography-based' fiction to cutting-edge autofiction.

PART B

GREEK AUTOFICTION IN THE NINETIES (1989-1995)

CHAPTER V

Autofiction between languages and cultures: Vassilis Alexakis’ *Παρίσι - Αθήνα*

Είχα αποφασίσει να ζήσω και με τις δυο
μου ταυτότητες, να χρησιμοποιώ
εναλλάξ και τις δύο γλώσσες, να
μοιράζομαι τη ζωή μου ανάμεσα στο
Παρίσι και την Αθήνα.

Vassilis Alexakis, *Παρίσι - Αθήνα* (1993)

In the years that separate the two periods of Greek autofictional writing, important events took place which determined the fate of autofiction in the francophone world. As I have shown in chapter one, Doubrovsky - following *Fils* and the coinage of the term - sought to consolidate autofiction through his novels and criticism. When he came to prominence with *Le Livre brisé* (1989), scholarly criticism took note of autofiction, and many francophone writers followed in his footsteps and produced works that are classified as autofictions. The first text examined in Part II of my thesis was created during this period of autofictional explosion in the francophone world and was first written in French - the language that autofiction was associated to in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The fact that *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* was first written in a language other than Greek does not exclude it from the repertoire of Greek autofiction. I should stress that Alexakis is a writer that began his writing career in 1974 with a novel in French, *Le sandwich* and continued to write exclusively in French until 1983, when he wrote *Τάλγκο* his first novel in Greek, followed by *Η μητρική γλώσσα* in 1995 and *Η καρδιά της Μαργαρίτας* in 1999.²⁴³ His case however is special because he undertakes the project of translating his works from one language into the other and essentially offers two different versions of the same text destined for two different readerships. These two texts (the Greek and the French) should be perceived as the two aspects of a unified text. Moreover, it should be stressed from the beginning that the one complements the other in a unique way because Alexakis adjusts accordingly several cultural references in order to be understood by both French and Greek readers. Therefore, one can argue that *Paris-Athènes* was not merely translated from the French original but was reintroduced in Greek under the title *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*; it then

²⁴³ From 2000 onwards Alexakis writes his novels in French and then translates them himself into Greek.

became a turning point in Greek autofictional writing as it carried the subgenre forward after the fifteen-year long period of stagnation that followed the publication of *Γλαύκος Θρασόκης*.

So far in this study, I have shown how the first Greek *autofictioneers* employed fictional alter egos in order to fragment the overarching authoring consciousness. However, my preoccupation in the second part of the thesis is the examination of the dual identity of the writer in the text. In this chapter, I discuss *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* as a text that puts into practice the notion of dualism in autofiction by presenting the author/narrator split between two cities (Paris and Athens), two languages and two cultures (French and Greek). The notion of dualism as it is projected in the second period of Greek autofictional writing focuses mainly on two decidedly different identities and not on mere alter egos or doublings of the author's intratextual projection. These identities are linguistic, national, religious and cultural, as I will demonstrate in this and subsequent chapters. One of my main aims from this point onwards will be to explore how the author's distinct identities are articulated and further explore their relationship (symbiotic, antagonistic or both) in the texts.

The text has already been discussed in the light of autofiction by researchers who have highlighted the osmosis of autobiographical and fictional elements.²⁴⁴ My reading of Alexakis' *Παρίσι - Αθήνα* is based on the argument that Greek and French are two literary media that negotiate the author's dual identity. For the purposes of my reading I shall discuss geographical space and more specifically what I call 'borderline' spaces in order to explore the position of mainly the French language in relation to other languages, outside France. Moreover, I am interested in examining how this is reflected in the text itself and the ways in which the minority language

²⁴⁴ See Marianne Bessy, *Vassilis Alexakis. Exorciser l'exil* (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2011) and also Efstratia Oktapoda-Lu & Vassiliki Lalayianni, 'Le véritable exil est toujours intérieur imaginaire et métissage chez les écrivains francophones grecs', *French Forum* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2005), p. 111-139.

infiltrates the main body of the text, which is written in a language that is spoken by larger populations. My analysis also focuses on the procedure through which the author's dual identity is constructed in the text as a result of family and religious dynamics as well as the development of the bilingual identity in response to the existing tradition of literary bilingualism in Greece before Alexakis. I also examine the metaphor of the writer as an actor in the text as well as the text as a stage for performing dual identities and finally connect this practice of identity performance with the possibilities inherent in autofictional writing.

5.1. Borderline spaces in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*: The Canadian experience

The title of the text, *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* encourages the reader to place particular emphasis on the geographical space circumscribed by the two capital cities. Paris and Athens represent the two axes around which two separate linguistic and cultural identities are articulated. The writer in the text explains the difficulty of using both languages interchangeably across both spaces:

Δεν μου είναι εύκολο να γράφω γαλλικά στην Τήνο, να σημειώνω γαλλικές λέξεις μπροστά σ' αυτό το τοπίο... Τα γαλλικά μεταφέρουν άλλη ατμόσφαιρα, έχουν διαφορετικό άρωμα. Είναι περαστικά από τούτο το μέρος. Εδώ τα πράγματα μιλάνε άλλη γλώσσα, που συνεχώς κερδίζει έδαφος. (87)²⁴⁵

The rhetorics of space and language are introduced already in the first paragraphs, where the writer explains that he selects in which language to write each text by taking into account its specific setting and cultural references.

Αισθανόμουν την ανάγκη να μιλήσω γι' αυτά που ζούσα στη Γαλλία. Θα μου ήταν δύσκολο να διηγηθώ στα ελληνικά τη ζωή της δημοτικής πολυκατοικίας όπου πέρασα δώδεκα χρόνια, το μετρό ή το γωνιακό

²⁴⁵Vassilis Alexakis, *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* (Athens: Eksantas, 1993) (first pub. *Paris-Athènes*, 1989). All references to the text will be given in brackets.

μπιστρό. Όλα αυτά τα γαλλικά αντηχούσαν μέσα μου. Εξίσου δύσκολο θα μου ήταν να περιγράψω στα γαλλικά ένα γεύμα σε ελληνική ταβέρνα: οι παρευρισκόμενοι θα έχαναν κάθε αληθοφάνεια για μενα τον ίδιο αν μιλούσαν γαλλικά, θα έμοιαζαν με υπάλληλους της ΕΟΚ.
(15)

The passage above highlights the untranslatability of certain experiences because of their particular cultural connotations. The fact that there are certain situations in which one of the two languages falls short of conveying specific meanings could be interpreted as a sign of antagonism between French and Greek.

It is interesting to illustrate that this linguistic antagonism emerges mainly from a spatial dilemma that the intratextual writer faced when he had to decide if he would settle in France after his studies or return to Greece. According to the writer in the text the decision to settle in France was taken quite easily because of the dire situation of Greek politics at the time: Από μια άποψη, δεν ήταν δύσκολο να διαλέξει κανείς ανάμεσα στη Γαλλία του 68 και την Ελλάδα του 67, ανάμεσα στο γαλλικό Μάη και τον ελληνικό Απρίλη, ανάμεσα στη μια άνοιξη και την άλλη. (14)

The military dictatorship played a certain role in Alexakis' decision to settle in France and in this respect he became a 'self-exile' – an émigré like Vassilis Vassilikos.²⁴⁶ Yet, unlike Vassilikos, Alexakis' 'self-exile' generates negative feelings as he claims: Από τη μια άποψη μόνο, γιατί αργότερα αισθάνθηκα ένοχος που απομακρύνθηκα από την Ελλάδα, που την ξέχασα ακριβώς τη στιγμή που είχε τόση ανάγκη να τη θυμούνται.(14) The writer in the text does not return to Greece permanently after the return of the democracy, begins his professional life and his writing career in France, and realises that he is losing control of Greek as a linguistic medium while French is taking over. As a response to the feelings of guilt, he splits his time between two countries, two languages, and finally between his two families.

²⁴⁶ For an analysis of Alexakis' novels that focuses on the notions of 'exile' and 'displacement' see Marianne Bessy, *Exorciser*, op.cit.

Family is the institution that provides the writer in the text with a strong link to both Greece and France. His statement: *Ανήκουμε μοιραία στο χώρο που μεγαλώσαμε* (54) points to the role of the family when discussing questions of space. Despite the fact that France gave the writer in the text the opportunity to study journalism and work, he describes the country as an orphanage, where nobody spoke his language. (97) Therefore, he married a French woman in order to feel less alienated, and moreover created his own family in an attempt to establish his own permanent links with the country. He claims that at a certain point he believed that nobody would remember him in France as they would be unfamiliar with his Greek past.

In light of the above, the birth of his children in France could be understood as an act of creating strong bonds with the country and the language. As he admits: *Οι μόνοι Γάλλοι που γνωρίζω από την ημέρα που γεννήθηκαν είναι τα παιδιά μου.* (15) I believe that fatherhood is a notion that comes across as central in multiple levels. I should highlight that ‘πατρίδα’, the Greek word for homeland can also be interpreted as the land of the ‘father’. *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* is a text dedicated to the writer’s father, and it is moreover a text that explores the writer’s journey from the country of his father, Greece (Tinos) to France - the country where he fathers children. In this sense, *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* should be read as a text that charts a life journey between two spaces and two languages that become organically linked through the process of becoming a father; and therefore by establishing bonds with the country of reception while trying to preserve the link with the country of origin.

However, the text’s geographical space is not restricted between the poles of the French and the Greek capitals, and to the writer’s back and forth journeys from one to the other. The textual space stretches beyond the radius of Paris and Athens to

reach on the one hand, Canada and on the other hand, some islands in the Cyclades with an important Catholic minority. In this section, I will discuss the importance of borderline spaces in the overall performance of linguistic identity in the text and explain how these particular spaces push the issue of dual identities to the absolute limits.

‘Η αυτοβιογραφία ως πειρασμός’ is the title of the second section of this narrative and the title of an international conference that the author in the text is attending. This section merits detailed discussion not only because the narrator reflects upon the uses of autobiography in fiction and its possibilities but also because it takes place in Quebec, the French speaking territory of Canada. I will be asking why Alexakis chooses Canada as a setting for this unit and how his choice reflects the spirit and practices of bilingualism and biculturalism.²⁴⁷

It should be emphasized from the outset that Canada is a state that constitutionally protects and promotes bilingualism. In general, English as first language is spoken by the great majority of the population whereas French is the mother tongue of approximately one fourth of the population. Native French speakers are mainly concentrated in Quebec, where the English language is considered by the inhabitants as a ‘minority’ language, which could nevertheless threaten the dominance of French.²⁴⁸ Even though Canada is a state that implements bilingual policies in all aspects of public life and administration, the majority of its population is monolingual and Quebec could be described as ‘a state within a state’. This is the only province where the official Canadian pro-bilingualism policy is not applied and where

²⁴⁷ See Maria Orphanidou-Fr ris, ‘L’identit  “apatride” de Vassilis Alexakis’, *Francofonia* 9 (2000), p.171-185. Orphanidou-Fr ris emphasizes on the textual representation of both France and Greece in Alexakis’ work and examines the Quebec episode in order to argue that the experience in Canada enables the writer in the text to find the right balance between the two languages. (p. 178-180).

²⁴⁸ See John Edwards, ‘Monolingualism, Bilingualism, Multiculturalism and Identity: Lessons and Insights from Recent Canadian Experience’ in Sue Wright (ed.), *Monolingualism and Bilingualism. Lessons from Canada and Spain* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 1996), p.5-37.

bilingualism is a highly contested issue that causes reactions from the French speakers. The slogan in Quebec as the author/narrator remarks is: ‘Je me souviens’, which serves as a daily reminder to French Canadians that it is their task to preserve the dominance of French and protect it as much as possible from the intrusion and incorporation of elements from English.²⁴⁹ However, this is not always possible given that one encounters expressions such as ‘prendre un marche’, which is only found in Canada and not in mainland France because it is a loan from English (e.g ‘to take a walk’).

I believe that Quebec is chosen here as a setting for the writers’ conference on the grounds of being a boundary separating the French language from English that is spoken in the rest of North America. Canada and Quebec in particular are liminal spaces that allow the author to have a double view of his linguistic identity by presenting French as a dominant language in the context of a minority.²⁵⁰ In this way, the author/narrator parallels French to Greek, which in turn is a minority language when compared to French. The realisation that French is a dominant language within the area of Quebec but this is not the case in the neighbouring provinces puts things into another perspective for the author/narrator and suggests that the choice of language is not to be decided on the basis of numbers of speakers. It seems that Alexakis uses the Quebec episode as a background for the broader theme of language selection that is fictionalised in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*. The fact that Alexakis first wrote it in

²⁴⁹See Monica Boehringer, ‘Entre errance et appartenance: Dyane Léger’s Coming to Writing’. *The French Review* 78, no.6 ‘Le Quebec et le Canada Francophone’ (2005), p. 1148-1159. In her article Boehringer looks into how Canadian writers from the Acadia region position themselves between their francité and their américanité by adopting a militant stance that favours French in both public and private settings in their effort to preserve French as their dominant language.

²⁵⁰On the use of English and French in autobiographical fiction in Canada see Rosemary Chapman, ‘French and English in Gabrielle Roy’s Autobiographical Work’, *The French Review* 78, no.6 (2005), p. 1127-1137. In this article Chapman discusses how Gabrielle Roy articulates the dynamics between the two languages, English and French in her autobiographical project and how she decides to write in French (the *langue dominée*) instead of English (the *langue dominante* in academia and public life).

the language with the most speakers means that he had a particular readership in mind. Nevertheless, the passages concerning his life in Greece trouble the writer as those are the passages that will be interpreted in a different manner by the Greek readership. I believe that the Greek version argues effectively for the liminal character of the text; while it was first written in a dominant language it was reworked into a minority language in a way that lays bare the implications between the two languages of writing.

The linguistic contamination that is put forward with regard to the Quebec incident is further explored by the intratextual writer in order to introduce the issue of linguistic identity. This is why the author in the text includes a special encounter in Canada with Greek immigrants, whose linguistic identity is also on a borderline.

Συνάντησα επίσης μερικούς μετανάστες απ' την Ελλάδα... Προέρχονταν από πολύ φτωχές οικογένειες. Είχαν εν μέρει ξεχάσει τα ελληνικά που σίγουρα δεν τα είχαν μάθει ποτέ πολύ καλά. Ούτε τα γαλλικά τα ήξεραν καλά, παρ' όλο που ανακάτωναν διαρκώς γαλλικές λέξεις στην κουβέντα τους. Δυσκολεύτηκα να καταλάβω ποιά ήταν η οδός Ντελέπη για την οποίαμίλαγαν, ήταν η οδός de l' Erée, του ξίφους, στο Μόντρεαλ. Μιλούσαν κατά κάποιον τρόπο, δύο μισές γλώσσες. Είχαν εγκαταλείψει τις όχθες της μια κουλτούρας χωρίς να φτάσουν ποτέ στις όχθες της άλλης. (46)

This is a poignant description of Greek not simply as a minor linguistic identity but also in the context of immigration and diaspora. I believe here that the emphasis should be placed again on the importance of space for each individual's linguistic identity; the narrator has come across people of Greek origin, who nevertheless did not have the opportunity to experience either Greek or French in their dominant environment and thus, they have been led to devise a distinct linguistic identity that mixes words from Greek and French. This small population on the outskirts of the big city is actually speaking an idiolect that could loosely be described as 'macaronic'.

Therefore, this small population of diaspora Greeks speaks a quasi ‘macaronic’ language, yet this practice is reflected throughout *Παρίσι- Αθήνα*. The text could also be defined as ‘quasi *macaronic*’ both in the French original and in the Greek translation.²⁵¹ This is because the author/narrator mixes two different languages by introducing several Greek words in the French text, which he marks in the text with the use of an asterisk. This is actually a learned procedure, through which the author introduces words of his maternal language to the French readers, thus creating a multidimensional text in each language that creates a meta-text in the other language. For example, the first Greek word that the French reader encounters in the text is ‘εικονίτσα’, which appears in italics in order to distinguish it from the rest of the text and draw the reader’s attention to its sound image and its meaning that could not be easily rendered in French, because a corresponding word in cultural terms is not available. The exact same strategy is applied in the Greek translation, where he introduces French words in the main body of the text such as ‘pipistrelle’ but in this case he indicates the pronunciation with brackets. Moreover macaronic puns occasionally appear in the Greek text,²⁵² with a phrase taken from a foreign language, such as ‘qu’est-ce qu’il y a?’, that phonetically resembles to the Greek phrase ‘και τα σκυλιά’ (46). Those puns aim towards blurring the boundaries of the two languages by illustrating that a standard phrase in one language could be interpreted in a humorous way in the other.

The above can be described as strategies of defamiliarisation, since words and terms are taken from their original context, which is in Greek, and they are placed in a

²⁵¹ See Boehringer op. cit. She discusses the example of Chiac, a variety of Acadian French that mixes English p. 1150-1151.

²⁵² This sort of macaronic language has allegedly been observed in the communities of the diaspora, such as the Russian-American speech of the first wave of Russian émigrés (immediately after the Russian Revolution in 1917). See David Andrews, *Sociocultural Perspectives on Language Change in Diaspora* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999), p. 57.

French context. However, the defamiliarisation process that takes place in the Greek text of *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* is twofold. In the Greek text, the author/narrator refers to the original French version of the book and explains that he will designate with an asterisk all the words that appeared in Greek in the French original version. In the case of the French text, these words are perceived as foreign but in the Greek text the words are singled out for purposes of reference to the text's dual linguistic background. What is important here is that the author in the text invites the Greek reader to imagine himself/herself as a French reader who comes across these 'foreign' words marked with asterisks and therefore perceives them as an implied paratext. Hence, he essentially involves the reader in a dualistic situation, where on the one hand he continues to read the text in Greek yet on the other hand, he is encouraged to begin thinking like a French reader. This double defamiliarisation on the linguistic level could be aptly described as the implementation of the notion of two 'half' languages in the text.

The instability of geographical space in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* and especially the daring leaps that are attempted beyond these two urban centres illustrate the fluidity of linguistic identities. The reference to 'δύο μισές γλώσσες' does not simply refer to a hybrid idiolect spoken by an isolated population of immigrants living on the boundaries of two languages. These two 'half' languages are actually the pillars that support the entire dualistic construct of the text that is symbolically staged in both Paris and Athens. There is a French side as well as a Greek one in both versions of the text that are put together by means of the strategies highlighted above. These two aspects of the intratextual author's literary discourse are in effect the two parts that shape his dual identity as I will argue next.

5.2. ‘Μισές γλώσσες’: constructing the author’s dual identity

In this section I examine the process of constructing a dual identity for the author in the text. In order to do so, I will first need to present this special category of bilinguals – that of bilingual authors - and ask how Alexakis positions himself towards bilingualism.²⁵³ I shall then explore the impact of the family environment and religious identity in the formation of the dual linguistic identity of the author in the text.

What renders Vassilis Alexakis’ case particularly interesting is the fact that he addresses issues of dualism in autofiction from the point of view of a bilingual author. Bilingualism is a very widespread phenomenon: many individuals are born into an environment or a society in which two or more languages are spoken at the same time.²⁵⁴ It is also very common for individuals to obtain extremely good command in languages other than their mother tongue at different stages of their lives and under varying circumstances (education, migration, exile etc.).

I use the term bilingualism to specifically describe the competence of authors like Vassilis Alexakis to produce literary work in a language other than their mother-tongue. I am interested in exploring a very special type of bilingual identity: that of the bilingual literary author. Bilingual authors make up a significant group in world literary history.²⁵⁵ To mention but a few examples of writers who became known for their works in languages other than their first: Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco. There is of course a great number of authors who were considered to

²⁵³ On the issue of Alexakis’ dual identity and bilingualism see Olympia Antoniadou & Vassiliki Lalagianni, ‘Problématique identitaire et bilinguisme dans les romans de Vassilis Alexakis’, *Les Cahiers du GRELCEF*, no 1. (Mai 2010), p. 129-140.

²⁵⁴ See Suzanne Romaine, *Bilingualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)(first pub.1989).

²⁵⁵ See Stephen G. Kellman, *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003)

be functionally bilingual or multilingual in professional or other surroundings but produced literary work only in their mother tongue (e.g. Alexandros Rangavis, Dimitrios Vikelas). Therefore there is an essential difference in being an author who is functionally bilingual and an author who is ‘creatively’ bilingual. The latter case is the focal point of this section.²⁵⁶

Vassilis Alexakis is aware of at least part of the tradition of Greek bilingualism and he has occasionally referred to Greek authors who were bilingual. In *Η μητρική γλώσσα*, the author Pavlos exclaims: Αρκετά νομίζω έχουν προσφέρει στην ελληνική γλώσσα οι Έλληνες της διασποράς. Σκέφτομαι τον Κοραή και τον Ψυχάρη, που έζησαν στο Παρίσι. Εγώ μάλλον την ξέχασα τη γλώσσα στα χρόνια της απουσίας μου.²⁵⁷

Alexakis’ fictional projection is presented as a contrast to the figures of Koraes and Psycharis, who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the study of Greek language despite spending the greatest part of their lives in a foreign language environment.²⁵⁸ Both Koraes and Psycharis were bilingual, but Psycharis was the one who produced literary work in both French and Greek. Here however, no distinction is made between ‘functional’ and ‘literary’ bilingualism, while the emphasis is placed on the individual’s struggle to preserve his first language in a foreign environment. Alexakis draws attention to ‘diaspora’ as a condition that encourages bilingual behaviour, but in his case the immersion experience is detrimental for the use of Greek as a literary medium. On the other hand, being away from Greece and the natural surroundings of the Greek language encouraged Psycharis to attempt to bridge

²⁵⁶ See Bessy, *Exorciser*, op.cit., p. 87-99.

²⁵⁷ Vassilis Alexakis, *Η μητρική γλώσσα* (Athens: Eksantas, 1995), p. 48.

²⁵⁸ Interestingly, Koraes and Psycharis represent the two different views on the language ‘question’ that torn the Greek society in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

the gap by offering what he considers to be a ‘new and more objective’ linguistic method.

Nevertheless, Alexakis is not referring exclusively to Greek authors who were bilingual, but also to bilingual francophone authors, whom he greatly admired. He seems to suggest that it was exactly the condition of bilingualism that encouraged him to write in French. It is important that he refers to *La cantatrice chauve* (1950), the first play by the bilingual playwright Eugène Ionesco as the first text that he read in its entirety in French having previously failed to read beyond the first couple of pages of Gide’s *Les faux-monnayeurs*. Alexakis makes the following statement regarding Ionesco: Ήταν ο πρώτος συγγραφέας που μου έδωσε τη διάθεση να γράψω Γαλλικά. (135) Moreover, the author that he appears to prefer in French is Samuel Beckett as he can clearly identify himself with Beckett’s effort to master a foreign language. He says: Μου έδωσε κατ’ αρχάς τη βεβαιότητα ότι μπορεί κανείς να γράψει σ’ άλλη γλώσσα απ’ τη δική του. (146) Alexakis had thus a couple of examples of writers that managed to become ‘literary’ bilingual from both the Greek but also the French literary scene.

Alexakis was aware, at least to a certain degree, of two other factors that play key roles in constructing the author’s dual identity. The author in the text explores the role of the family and especially that of parental archetypes in determining the individual’s linguistic behaviour. In this text, we have a contrasting pair of parents: while the mother is a linguistically active person, the father appears to be almost aphasic. The mother in the text is responsible for the children’s upbringing and this is why she is the one who teaches them how to read. Thus, she plays the greater role in the author’s linguistic development. The representation of the mother in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* corresponds to Psycharis’ remarks in *Το ταξίδι μου*, where he states that: χωρίς

τη γυναίκα, δε γίνεται καλή γλώσσα· η μάνα τη μαθαίνει του παιδιού της ...²⁵⁹

Psycharis grew up without the presence of his mother, so he did not have the opportunity to speak Greek with his mother. This is not the case with the author in the text. Here, the mother closely monitors her children's development not only by reading aloud stories to him but also by checking his spelling as a young student. She will remain an active force in her son's adult life as an author and it is indicative that she translates his novel *La tête du chat* into Greek in an effort to facilitate her son's way into the Greek language as an author.

The most important step she takes in order to protect her son's language skills is undertaking frequent correspondence with him immediately after he moves to France. The correspondence that the author maintains with his mother in Greek is vital for him as a natural speaker of Greek during the traumatising years he spends in Lille because it prevents him from abandoning the Greek language at a time that he has to put all his efforts into learning French. Furthermore, the mother of the author is the character that before his departure from Greece used to read his texts first before anyone else did. More importantly, she is the individual that translates her son's novel into Greek before he even attempted to write directly in Greek. Δεν είχα τολμήσει ακόμη να γράψω στη γλώσσα μου, admits the author/narrator. Η μετάφραση της μητέρας μου, που έγινε με κάποια δική μου βοήθεια, μ' ενθάρρυνε να το τολμήσω. (117) It is therefore, thanks to his mother, the intratextual author re-establishes his connection with the Greek language and subsequently is encouraged to start writing and translating in Greek.

On the other hand, the mother and the father of the author/narrator do not interact verbally. As the narrator remarks: Δε νομίζω ότι μίλησαν πολύ μεταξύ τους

²⁵⁹ Psycharis, *Το ταξίδι μου* (Athens: Estia, 1983) (first pub. 1888), p.125.

στα πενήντα σχεδόν χρόνια που ζουν μαζί. Να μίλησαν έστω μερικές φορές; Τη δική της τη μοναξιά δεν την επέλεξε εκείνη. (116) Therefore the author/narrator was brought up in an environment that presented him with the two sides of a coin; he experienced intense linguistic activity with his mother whereas his father would limit himself to the occasional and absolutely necessary verbal communication with his son. The narrator remarks:

Ο πατέρας μου είναι ένας κλειστός χώρος. Ζει μέσα στο άτομό του. Αυτά που συμβαίνουν παραέξω ελάχιστα τον απασχολούν αν όχι και καθόλου...Πόσα βιβλία να έχει διαβάσει; Είμαι σχεδόν σίγουρος ότι κανένα απ τα δικά μου δεν το διάβασε μέχρι τέλους... Δε μου ζήτησε ποτέ να του μιλήσω πιο προσωπικά.(106)

The father therefore appears to be reserved and distant and does not have any significant contribution in his son's linguistic development. Interestingly enough, the father is a professional actor, which means that the greatest part of his day is spent performing speech acts. The author/narrator as a young boy rarely has the opportunity to interact verbally with his father: the rare instances that his father appears to him as a speaking individual are predominantly during theatrical performances. Hence, the image of the father appears to be split in the author's consciousness: on the one hand, the silent human being in the private sphere of the house that barely speaks and intervenes verbally only in moments of crisis (such as the son's announcement that he wanted to get married at a young age) and on the other hand, an amusing actor, who is transformed into a talking individual on the stage behind the mask of a theatrical part. Moreover, as we find out later, the 'silent' father wrote several theatrical plays that the son enjoys reading even as an accomplished writer and believes that it is a pity that his father's authorial talent never became known.

Furthermore, there is another factor immediately related to the narrator's upbringing that contributes to the construction of the intratextual author's dual

identity. It is important to highlight here that the parents have different religious identities; while the mother is Orthodox, the father is Catholic. In this context, we can attribute the mother's crucial influence in terms of language to her sense of belonging to the Greek religious majority. The 'aphasic' behaviour of the narrator's father could be attributed to his sense of belonging to a religious minority in Greece that as a matter of fact practises religion in a language other than their mother-tongue. There is certainly an element of uncertainty in this distinct minority identity of the father as represented in the text that leads him to a dual mode of behaviour. His Catholic upbringing in a small island like Santorini, where there used to be a sizeable Catholic community led to him being secluded in his personal inner space and interfere in family affairs only in extreme cases.²⁶⁰ It is possible that the acknowledgment of belonging to a community that had a strong presence in the Cyclades within a predominantly Orthodox country makes the father think that he is not allowed to voice his opinion and thus he settles for a non-verbal behaviour in his private space. The only space that the father is free to engage in verbal action is the stage of the theatre that has a liberating effect on him.

As far as the mother is concerned, she appears to be suspicious of the Catholic minority at first because she considers them as 'ψευτοέλληνες'. Interestingly enough, even though as we have so far discussed the mother is responsible for her children's education, she gives her consent to having one of her sons christened as Catholic and attending a catholic school run by monks. The author, who did not enjoy attending a Catholic school, describes the majority of his teachers at the French school in a

²⁶⁰ For a concise account of the history of the Catholic community in Greece see Charles Frazee's contribution in Richard Clogg (ed). *Minorities in Greece. Aspects of a Plural Society* (London: Hurst, 2002), p. 24-47. According to Frazee, the numbers of Catholics in Santorini fell significantly around 1600 while Syros and Tinos remained strongholds of Greek Catholicism throughout the twentieth century.

negative manner.²⁶¹ Through the system of education and indirectly through religious indoctrination, he was introduced to the French language, which he felt he had to learn again from the beginning when he arrived in France. Nevertheless, what I find extremely important in understanding the process of constructing a linguistic identity in the case of the author narrator is the dichotomy that he experiences in his immediate environment when it comes to religious practices and subsequent linguistic choices and how he represents this dichotomy in the text.

When recalling his experiences in Lille, the narrator states that his religious identity had an impact on the linguistic identity he chose to adopt. Even though he appears to resent the priests for imposing the sacrament of confession on young people, he recalls that he wrote poems in French exploring the theme of God as a means of rebelling against the mentality of the Jesuit High school in Lille. He says:

Μερικές φορές τα έγγραφα στα γαλλικά, ίσως για να μπορέσω να τα δείξω στους δυο-τρεις φίλους μου, ίσως γιατί ο Θεός που ονειρευόμουν ήταν πιο κοντά στους καθολικούς παρά στους ορθόδοξους και ήξερε κατά συνέπεια καλύτερα γαλλικά παρά ελληνικά. (71)

Thus, this striking difference in the way his parents behave towards language becomes a determining factor in him developing two alternating stances towards writing and verbal expression. The author in the text appears sceptical when he is faced with the dilemma in which language to write and express himself.²⁶² Greek is the language he identifies with his mother but he hesitates when he actively engages with writing and prefers to express himself in a language other than the mother-tongue while in certain instances he finds it more convenient to imitate his father's

²⁶¹ It is interesting to note here that Nikos Kazantzakis and Melpo Axioti attended schools run by French speaking Catholic monks or nuns. Kazantzakis was sent to Naxos in 1897-8 amidst the Cretan uprising against the Ottomans and Melpo Axioti graduated from the boarding school of Ursulines on Tinos in the early 1920s.

²⁶² See Susan Stuart, 'Linguistic Profit, Loss and Betrayal in *Paris-Athènes*' in Kamel Salhi (ed.), *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures. Critical Essays* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003), p.284-295.

behaviour and resort to silence before deciding to engage in a performance of identities like actors do. His personal strategy is a combination of the two practices (silence instead of writing in Greek or writing in French), which nevertheless does not provide a resolution to his dilemma as an author.

I have argued that there are certain factors that enable the construction of the author's dual linguistic and cultural identity in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*: firstly, the acknowledgement of a long tradition of literary bilingualism in Greek letters that the narrator seeks to assimilate and secondly, the contrasting stimuli he receives from the representatives of the two genders in his immediate environment. These stimuli range from the dominance of Greek as a mother tongue to the 'aphasic' behaviour of his father, whose profession demands performing extensive acts of discourse and the appropriation of different identities.

5.3. Performing the dual identity: The author as actor

In this section, I explore an instrumental metaphor that runs through the entire text from beginning to end: the metaphor of the actor, which is further supported by the extensive use of vocabulary alluding to theatre and performance.²⁶³ My argument is that the double linguistic and cultural identity, whose construction procedure I have presented above can be negotiated and manifested in the text through the establishment of an analogy between the authoring subject and an actor, who is in a position to switch from one identity to another and perform all sorts of different identities for the requirements of his theatrical part.

²⁶³ In her article Ioanna Chatzidimitriou simply suggests that the writer resembles to an actor, yet, she does not elaborate her arguments. See Ioanna Chatzidimitriou, 'Language(s) of Dispossession: Silent Geographies in Vassilis Alexakis's *Paris-Athènes*', *Dalhousie French Studies* 76 (2006), p.113-119.

The theme of the actor is mainly explored via the father figure. As I have mentioned in the previous section, the introvert father appears to be fascinated by his profession that entails the assumption of ‘fictional’ identities and his ability to ‘dress’ and ‘undress’ himself on stage. When he goes on stage, the ‘aphasic’ father is ‘transformed’ into a completely different being. The narrator says:

Κι όμως του συμβαίνει να μιλάει ασταμάτητα, να εκφράζει συναισθήματα, να γελάει μέχρι δακρύων, να κλαίει, να μεταδίδει στους άλλους κάθε απόχρωση της ψυχικής του διάθεσης: αυτά συμβαίνουν όταν παίζει θέατρο. Τη στιγμή που περνά απ’ τα παρασκήνια στη σκηνή μεταμορφώνεται. Το πρόσωπό του γίνεται πιο εκφραστικό, η φωνή του πιο δυνατή, οι κινήσεις του πιο κοφτές, ο βηματισμός του πιο σταθερός. [...] Φαίνεται ευτυχισμένος όταν βρίσκεται στη σκηνή. Φαίνεται επίσης πολύ πιο νέος. Μόλις τελειώσει η παράσταση, μεταμορφώνεται ξανά για να ερμηνεύσει το πιο μυστηριώδες πρόσωπο που ενσάρκωσε ποτέ: τον εαυτό του.(109)

As suggested above, the stage has a liberating effect on the actor since he feels that he is in touch with his truest ‘self’ and thus he can express all his emotions without inhibitions. Emphasis is placed in this extract on the fact that the author’s father is happy and youthful when he enters the world of theatre and, consequently the world of ‘fictionalised’ characters. On stage, the father discards his everyday persona, which is that of an individual whose affiliation with a particular religious minority has imposed on him constraints regarding expression. The theatrical performance appears to be a remedy for the author’s father as he provides him with a ‘verbal’ outlet for his suppressed feelings. The end of the theatrical act heralds his return to a predominantly ‘non verbal’ state. In a way resonant of Cavafy’s verses, the end of the show is identified with an exit, which in this particular case is the exit from oral speech and his disappearance behind a mask of silence.

Κάμνοντας όμοια σαν ηθοποιός
Που όταν η παράστασις τελειώσει
Αλλάζει φορεσιά και απέρχεται.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ C.P. Cavafy, ‘Ο βασιλεύς Δημήτριος’, *Τα ποιήματα*, vol.1 (Athens: Ikaros, 1985), p.33.

As a result of the father's occupation, the author/narrator is exposed to the world of theatre and initiated into the process of performing 'stage identities' from a young age. A reference to an instance of the author/narrator performing in a language other than the mother tongue as a child is worth discussing in detail here. Αρχίσα να πηγαίνω στο Γαλλικό Ινστιτούτο Αθηνών, όταν ήμουν δέκα, δώδεκα χρονών. Σε μια γιορτή στο τέλος του έτους είχα απαγγείλει ένα ποιηματάκι μεταμφιεσμένος σε παπαγάλο. Με είχαν συγχαρεί για την προφορά μου.(20)

The fact that the child is disguised as a speaking parrot is also significant here, as parrots are the birds that assimilate human voice and are capable of extensively reproducing human vocabulary. Being disguised as a parrot could be also interpreted as a humorous comment on behalf of the mature author, who criticizes the way a child learns a foreign language.²⁶⁵ Here however, the narrator's performance in the second language is praised by people that are in a position of authority as far as language and education is concerned. This successful performance of a literary text in a language other than Greek is appraised, a fact that I believe facilitates and encourages the construction of a premature francophone alter ego in the narrator's mind long before his authorial debut in French.

The writer's experience in Lille is also described in terms of a stage performance. We read:

Η Λιλ με είχε αναγκάσει να μεταμφιεστώ: για πρώτη φορά στη ζωή μου φορούσα παλτό και κασκόλ. Για πρώτη φορά στη ζωή μου επίσης κρατούσα ομπρέλα, μια τεράστια μαύρη ομπρέλα που μου είχαν προμηθεύσει οι γονείς μου. Δεν έλεγα πια παρά μόνο γαλλικές λέξεις. Είχα αφήσει ένα μουσάκι καθαρά γαλλικού τύπου: ήθελα να κρύψω το πρόσωπό μου, να ολοκληρώσω το μασκάρεμά μου, να μην μπορούν να με αγγίξουν τα βλέμματα των άλλων. (147)

²⁶⁵ There are words in Greek like 'παπαγαλίζω' (Engl: to parrot) or 'παπαγαλία' that refer to this sort of memorization of language or information and its mechanical reproduction. The expression 'comme un perroquet' is used in French to convey the same meaning.

Lille is the stage in which the intratextual writer makes his official debut in a purely francophone environment. The writer assimilates the dressing and disguising of actors in order to perform a certain role, with his own ‘μασκάρεμα’ in order to perform the French identity. He switches exclusively to Greek but in order to look the part, he has to be attired in winter clothes, carry an umbrella and grow a beard *à la française*. The intratextual writer masks his Greek self among the French, by permanently appropriating the French style and consequently, the French way of living in an entirely francophone context.

Theatrical-like performances of identities take place throughout the text by characters other than the young narrator and his father. There is also another important case of identity performance, which is practised by the monks at the school. As the author remarks about the so called ‘φρέρηδες’ (appropriation in Greek of frères - the French word for monks): ‘Ήταν Έλληνες οι περισσότεροι, κι ελληνικά μιλούσαμε μαζί τους, αλλά δεν τους ξέραμε παρά μόνο με το όνομα που είχαν πάρει ως μοναχοί, που ήταν γαλλικό: Εντουάρ, Ντανιέλ, Ζακ...(52)

The case of the monks is extremely interesting in a discussion focusing on performing dual identities. Here the monks appear to have both a Greek and a French identity. Being Greek Catholics means that their mother tongue is Greek, yet they chose to adopt a different cultural identity as an affirmation of their distinct religious identity in Greece. Therefore, those ‘φρέρηδες’ perform the identity of proper French Catholic monks in a French-Greek school. Similarly, the author refers to the tendency of the Catholics on the island of Tinos to slightly change their first names in order to sound more Italian (eg. Τζάνης instead of Yiannis, Φραντζέσκος instead of Φραγκίσκος) and thus project their distinct dual identity as Catholic Greeks whose cultural choices are directly associated with Catholicism and not the dominant

Orthodoxy. After all, this is a public performance of a minority identity that the author's mother criticized as 'ψευτοέλληνες'.²⁶⁶ Those 'fake Greeks' are actually people with a dual identity that in one way or another perform their identity (Greek – Catholic/Western) in a borderline space (Tinos) where unlike other parts of Greece, the Catholic element is particularly strong.

Finally there is another instance of identity performance undertaken this time by Greeks who live abroad, but complementary to that of Greek Catholics. For example, when the author visits the Greek minority living in the outskirts of Montreal he is informed that there is a couple of Cretans that dress up as Indians in order to make a living by selling shoes. So, there are Greeks, who assume the attire of an indigenous tribe in the context of their profession. More importantly though, there is a reference to a tendency among Greeks to adopt a westernised persona in the context of diaspora. The author in the text mentions that during the period that he stayed in Lille for his journalism studies, his name on his passport appeared as Basile and not Vassilis because the Greek authorities adopted the trend of translating the name into the foreign language instead of merely transliterating it. So the author/narrator notes:

Οι Έλληνες ταξίδευαν στο εξωτερικό με πλαστό γαλλικό όνομα, ο Γιάννης ως Ζαν, ο Γιώργος ως Ζορζ κ.ο.κ. Αν θυμάμαι καλά, ο Ρίτσος ονομαζόταν Ζαν στις πρώτες εκδόσεις των έργων του. Ο Σεφέρης εξακολούθει να ονομάζεται Ζορζ. Έζησα λοιπόν στη Λιλ με το όνομα Μπαζίλ. (139)

This is a point that echoes Psycharis' experience in the diaspora given that he was named 'Βάνιας' in Russian, 'Ζαν' in French but he rarely used his Greek name, Yiannis or Ioannis. Psycharis signed all his French books with both name and

²⁶⁶ According to the incidents described by Frazee in his aforementioned account at the time the Greek version of Alexakis' book was published, there was a negative atmosphere against the Catholic community in Greece because of the stance of the Vatican towards Orthodox Serbs in former Yugoslavia, which culminated in acts of vandalism against Catholic churches in 1994. At the same time, the Catholics were protesting against an official proposal stating that the candidates for the police force were obliged to state their religion, which according to Frazee was a "good example of subtle discrimination". See Richard Clogg (ed.), *Minorities*, op.cit.,p.41.

surname in French but in the case of *Το ταξίδι μου*, he prefers simply being called Psycharis as he did not ever experience being called with his first name in Greek. Even though Psycharis' case is different to the one in the text, the essence here lies that in both instances the practice of name changing is not fully endorsed by the author in the text.

The adult writer in the text admits that: *Κι εγώ παίζω θέατρο φυσικά, παραδοξολογώ, ευφρολογώ, ό,τι μπορώ τέλος πάντων (166)*, when he refers to the fact that he pretends to be French because the public in Greece treats him as a French author. The identity of the French author is an identity that he has painstakingly devised over the years by writing novels in French and thus he believes that he needs to defend it by constantly performing as a French and not as a Greek author. A couple of pages later, he adds: *Στη Γαλλία προσέχω τα λόγια μου, τις κινήσεις μου. Ζω προσεκτικά. Είχα σαφώς την αίσθηση ότι έπαιζα θέατρο όταν πήγαινα στη Μοντ. (169)*

Towards the end of the book, however, the author/narrator refers to the particular feeling of discomfort he experiences when performing his French identity in front of his parents every time he returns to Greece.

Στο Παρίσι είχα τόσο πολύ ταυτιστεί με το ρόλο μου που σε γενικές γραμμές δεν είχα καθόλου την αίσθηση ότι έπαιζα θέατρο. Διατηρούσα επιμελώς το γαλλικό μου μουςάκι που είχα από την εποχή της Λιλ. Όμως κάθε φορά που οι γονείς μου μας έκαναν επίσκεψη, συμπεριφερόμουν αδέξια. Η παρουσία τους ξυπνούσε τον άλλο μου εαυτό. Δεν ήξερα πως να κινηθώ, τι να πω. Ήμουν ικανός να παίζω ένα ρόλο, όχι όμως δυο ταυτοχρόνως. (198)

A single actor cannot perform the two sides of this dual identity at the same time, claims the author in the text. Like his father, who was able to perform his part in the presence of his family, the author succeeds in doing so even though he claims unable to perform his French identity because he feels that he betrays a part of

himself, his Greek identity. We can also say that the performance of both identities at the same time would probably result in him performing like one of the popular characters of the shadow theatre in Greece. In the opening section of the book, as he leaves Greece in order to settle in France he describes his shadow as ‘καραγκιόζης’, which is a common reference in Greek for trickster individuals. The author in a sense feels like a trickster himself when he cannot combine two identities in a single performance and has to choose only one when he verbally interacts with others or engages in an act of writing. On the other hand, ‘καραγκιόζης’ alludes not only to mischievousness but also to a good-natured character, so it is possible to say that it is a character that has a dual identity, or a dual nature according to the circumstances. However, ‘καραγκιόζης’ is always an empty puppet, with no substance beyond the stage of the ‘shadow theatre’ and to this extent he is closer to the notion of the actor as described in both Cavafy’s poem and Alexakis’ text.

This analogy of autofiction and the theatre presents the reader with fluid identities that are all about performance. Each individual can possess two or more identities and chose which one to ‘perform’ in a given moment just as Alexakis chooses his literary idiom between French to Greek. *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* could be described as a textual stage where linguistic, religious and cultural identities are performed by the author/narrator, his father and a chorus of minor characters. If the stage for the author’s father is that of a theatre, the stage for the author in the text is the newly constructed one of ‘autofiction’. Like a proper actor, the writer in the text is free to experiment with identities that are verbally constructed. The author in the text seems to suggest that one’s truest self is the self that is expressed in contexts other than those of everyday reality. As a consequence, one’s truest self might be stylised, even

‘fictionalised’ but more importantly should be seen as a combination of ‘performed’ identities.

5.4. Writing the dual identity in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*

Παρίσι-Αθήνα is an autofiction about Alexakis’ personal adventure as an author who settles outside the Greek state and seeks to express himself in a language that is not his mother tongue. Most references regarding the life of the author in the text reproduce in great detail Alexakis’ life, but there is also a great deal of fictionalisation in episodes like the writer’s conference in Quebec to the extent that the reader is not expected to try to distinguish where fiction ends and reality begins. A propos of writing this particular narrative the author in the text claims: Θέλω να πω ότι έχω συχνά ασχοληθεί με τον εαυτό μου, αλλά ότι πάντα φορούσα κάποιο προσωπίο. Αισθάνομαι αμηχανία έτσι όπως κοιτάζω τώρα το πρόσωπό μου γυμνό. (27)

I believe this is not actually the case in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* since as I have argued, the text is all about performing dual identities. I have so far focused on describing the text as a stage for the interaction of identities that are verbally performed. Despite the author’s claims with regards to exposing himself uncensored, postmodern literary genres, autofiction included, are not about revealing an undisputed ‘naked’ truth but rather about how the different masks, identities and in this case languages and cultures interact in textual contexts.²⁶⁷

I believe that *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* is a highly self-reflexive text that lays bare the struggles of the author, who aptly enough mentions that he owns two typewriters, one with Greek and one with French keyboard and wonders which one to use. *Παρίσι-*

²⁶⁷ See Georges Fréris, ‘Le Dialogue interculturel de Vassilis Alexakis dans *Paris-Athènes*’, *Cahiers francophones d’Europe Centre-Orientale*, N° 5-6, *Y a-t-il un dialogue interculturel dans les pays francophones* (1995), p. 387-398.

Αθήνα is an autofiction that puts forward the question of linguistic choice in the case of a bilingual author and as a consequence explores the issue of dual identity in bicultural context. The author in the text reflects upon the suitability of the autobiographical genre to give an answer to his question regarding which linguistic medium to choose in order to write this text. He confesses: Σκεφτόμουν ότι ένα αυτοβιογραφικό κείμενο μπορεί να μη μου έδινε απαντήσεις αλλά θα μου δημιουργούσε τουλάχιστον κάποιες καινούργιες ερωτήσεις. (42) When Alexakis refers to autobiography as a ‘temptation’ in the heading of the second part of the book, he points out to his readers that the autobiographical character of the text should not be disregarded. However, standard autobiography is not the ideal vehicle here since there is not a single identity that the author projects: he is actually writing about the game and the delicate balance act between different identities. Therefore, Alexakis has to resort to other forms of writing that enable him to situate his narrative halfway between autobiography and fiction and this is how he resorts to autofiction, which is a new genre that enables writers to articulate dual identities and reflect upon dualistic situations.²⁶⁸

Παρίσι-Αθήνα is therefore a text that is conceived and created on the basis of the dynamics between the two identities that the writer possesses. Several dualistic situations or authorial dilemmas are explored in the text; fundamentally the split between two cities, two languages and two cultures. Abandoning one of the two languages and making either Greek or French his exclusive medium, is an option that appeals to the author/narrator. He confesses about French: Την είχα τόσο χρησιμοποιήσει αυτή τη γλώσσα που μοιραία, αφήνοντάς την, θα εγκατέλειπα κι ένα

²⁶⁸ For example, in the case of Doubrovsky, criticism has pointed out that the fundamental dualistic situation explored in his novels is the male and the female aspect of the author/narrator. It has been suggested that autofiction was the medium that enabled Doubrovsky to also articulate the heterosexual/homosexual behaviour of the author/narrator. See Jean-Pierre Boulé, ‘Gender Melancholy in Doubrovsky’s autofictions’, *L’Esprit Créateur* 49, no.3 (fall 2009), p. 64-78.

μέρος του εαυτού μου (20). The dual identity is defined by the author in the text as an identity of the diaspora. By arguing that the notion of travel is inherent in Greek culture, the author in the text includes himself in the group of Greek authors that used languages other than Greek as means of literary expression and anchors his own dual linguistic identity as an author on a long tradition of literary bilingualism, which nevertheless does not give him a definite answer to the question: which language to use in which context.

Therefore, an initial reaction to bilingualism and the construction of a double identity in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*, is resolving to silence – a tactic used by the father of the author in order to avoid performing his dual identity in all aspects of his life. However, this is a text that resists the silence and promotes instead the fusion of the identities. As I have argued above, in the original French version, Alexakis creates a Greek subtext that exists in parallel with the main text. Unlike Psycharis, who had made a clear distinction as to which language to write each of his texts, Alexakis resorts to creating two “twin” texts according to Marianne Bessy’s description,²⁶⁹ one in French and the other in Greek and at the same time, he playfully incorporates the second language in both the original and the translated version through a variety of macaronic strategies.

The ability to express himself stylistically in two languages, presents the author/narrator with a dilemma, which generates doubts about his authorial ‘self’. Nevertheless, there is a solution in self-translation as this is proposed by his mother, who is responsible for re-establishing her son’s relationship with his mother tongue.²⁷⁰ Self-translation is process that allows the author in the text to decrease the

²⁶⁹ Bessy, *Exorciser*, op.cit., p.88 and her reference to “oeuvre jumelle”.

²⁷⁰ On self-translation in Alexakis see Eleftheria Tassiopoulos, ‘Literary Self-translation, Exile and Dialogism: the Multilingual Works of Vassilis Alexakis’ in Anthony Pym (ed.), *Translation Research Projects 3* (Tarragona: 2011), p.43-52.

tension he experiences every time he is faced with the dilemma of which language to write each text in.²⁷¹ His personal authorial space or his ‘μικρή ιδιωτική πατρίδα’ (16) as he calls it, is in both languages and the possibility of self-translation allows him to duplicate his work and not to restrict himself in just one language. In connection with the issue of translating a text, the author/narrator mentions an author who married his French translator, he remarks: Εγώ έχω παντρευτεί τον ίδιο μου τον εαυτό. Self translation is thus put forward as a unifying step that joins the author’s two authorial selves, the one who prefers French as his literary medium and the other who insists on making the effort to write in Greek.

In other words, self-translation is the bridge connecting the two linguistic and cultural identities in the context of Alexakis’ autofiction. In this way Alexakis’ policy to self-translate echoes that of Mimika Kranaki, who in her volume *Ετερογραφία* explains the reason behind her enterprise to self-translate her works. Kranaki claims: Αποφάσισα λοιπόν κι εγώ να γίνω άνθρωπος ολόκληρος κι όχι ημι-άνθρωπος, να μεταφράσω ελληνικά τα γαλλικά μου κείμενα...Γιατί η μετάφραση δεν καταργεί τη διγλωσσία, την ενισχύει μάλλον....²⁷² Bilingualism is therefore fostered through the process of self-translation because self-translation functions as a reconciling force between the two ‘antagonising’ selves - the Greek and the French, and the two linguistic and cultural identities.

Self-translation from one language to the other mirrors the actual journeys between Paris and Athens and charts a creative linguistic journey between the French and the Greek text. As the intratextual writer points out the title of the text could not

²⁷¹ Psycharis practised self-translation as well. He translated his novels *T’ Ονειρο του Γιαννίρη* and *Ζωή κι αγάπη στη μοναξιά. Ιστορικά ενός καινούργιου Ρομπινσώνα* into French in 1897 and 1922 respectively. For a list of his Greek and French novels see Georgia Pateridou, ‘Ο Ψυχάρης και η συγγραφική του αυτοσυνειδησία’ in Georgia Farinou-Malamatari (ed.), *Ο Ψυχάρης και η εποχή του*. (Thessaloniki: Institute for Modern Greek Studies, 2005), p. 249-250.

²⁷² Mimika Kranaki, *Ετερογραφία. Ελληνογαλλικά κείμενα (1947-2000)* (Athens: Ikaros, 2005), p. 11.

have been *Αθήνα-Παρίσι*, since *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* indicates the preferred destination. In conclusion, we can argue that the textual journey of translating from one language to the other indicates French as the language of departure and Greek as a language of homecoming. Therefore, it seems that Alexakis prefers to write his texts in French first in order to then engage in self-translation and thus prepare their return into Greek.

In conclusion, Vassilis Alexakis embarks upon his own personal ‘voyage’ of self-discovery and understanding his dual identity in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*. Both spaces have left an indelible mark on his fictional persona and they could be paralleled to the two poles of his fictional universe and his world beyond fiction. The two cities in the title are metonymies of his cultural and linguistic identities and the back and forth movement represents his unwillingness to reach a final decision as to which one of the two languages finally prevails. Despite his above quoted statement regarding the direction in which the trip between the two cities is more pleasant, Alexakis ultimately refuses to decide between Greek and French. He writes: *Είχα αποφασίσει να ζήσω και με τις δυο μου ταυτότητες, να χρησιμοποιώ εναλλάξ και τις δυο μου γλώσσες, να μοιράζομαι τη ζωή μου ανάμεσα στο Παρίσι και την Αθήνα.* (217) Therefore, he has accepted both of his selves as he has come to terms with living in either Athens or Paris and his text insists on maintaining the freedom to choose the language that he finds more suitable according to the subject matter of each individual book.

This is the reason why autofiction appears as an ideal narrative vehicle for Alexakis since this liminal subgenre not only champions a daring osmosis of fiction

and autobiography but it accommodates dual identities that cannot be negotiated in absolute terms. The stage of the text keeps changing from Paris to Athens and vice versa, between the author's French and Greek identities. The ongoing movement from one language to another and from French texts to Greek texts through self-translation is, I believe, the most interesting aspect of Vassilis Alexakis' oeuvre. Alexakis' autofictional quest for a language that encompasses his dual self, results in rejecting the possibility of choosing a definitive and linguistic medium. There is not a single language that can fully express Alexakis' coexisting identities – there is simply autofiction that encourages the performance of dual identities and self-translation as a textual procedure to bridge the gap between the two identities.

CHAPTER SIX

‘Mon semblable, mon frère’: Yiannis Kiourtsakis’ autofictional ‘dicôlon’

ο Χάρης ήταν, ήμουν τώρα εγώ,
... εγώ δεν ήμουν παρά μία
ενσάρκωση του παμπάλαιου
Δίκωλου- του καρναβαλικού
ήρωα που η καμπούρα του δεν
είναι παρά το σώμα του νεκρού
αδελφού του

Yiannis Kiourtsakis, *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* (1995)

Yiannis Kiourtsakis' first novel *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* came out in 1995.²⁷³ It is the first part of a trilogy with the overarching title *Το ίδιο και το άλλο*. The second instalment of the trilogy, entitled *Εμείς οι άλλοι* was published in 2000 while the final volume was published in 2007 under the title *Το βιβλίο του έργου και του χρόνου*. For the purpose of my analysis however, I will examine only the first volume of the trilogy since I propose to approach the text as it was first read, before the other two volumes were completed. *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* is a product of the nineties, which as I seek to prove, is a decade of innovation for Greek autofictional writing.

Criticism on *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* drew attention to its autobiographical kernel.²⁷⁴ Indeed, the narrative reproduces biographical data with evident accuracy; Yiannakis, the narrator is explicitly identified as a younger fictional 'ego' of the author Yiannis Kiourtsakis. The author in the text reinforces the treatment of the book as autobiographical since he occasionally makes self-referential comments to his critical texts, especially to his study on Karagkiozis and the Carnival that will also be discussed in the context of this chapter.

In the sections that follow, I first explore Kiourtsakis' fictional 'δίκωλον', the 'dual' male figure that carries his dead brother on his shoulders, which the author borrows from the Greek folk tradition and adjusts to the text. I shall then examine the generic complexities Kiourtsakis' novel presents us with and argue why a reading of the novel in the light of autofiction adds to its interpretation as a groundbreaking text. I will also discuss issues of self-reflexivity in order to argue for the great deal of metafictional elements in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*. Finally, I will read the text as an autofiction that fictionalises Dikolon's unaccomplished nostos.

²⁷³ Yiannis Kiourtsakis, *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* (Athens: Kedros, 1995). Henceforth, all references to the novel will be given in brackets.

²⁷⁴ See Lamprini Kouzeli, 'Γιάννης Κιουρτσάκης: «Ο εκπατρισμός είναι η μοίρα του Έλληνα»', *Το Vima* (16 July 2011), Web [accessed on 01 September 2011], <http://www.tovima.gr/culture>.

6.1. The other within the self: The fictional Dikolon

I start by examining in detail the most significant aspect of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*: the dual subject which becomes the quintessence of dualism in this text. The main two characters of the text, the deceased Charis and Yiannis form a fictional entity which is named ‘δίκωλον’. The importance of Dikolon for the purposes of my analysis is further supported by the change of title in the recent French translation, *Le dicôlon*.²⁷⁵ The choice of not keeping the original title is not only the result of editorial politics in order to avoid using an already used title. *Comme un roman* is an autobiographical essay by Daniel Pennac that explores the latter’s relationship with reading.²⁷⁶ It is also a conscious decision on behalf of both the translator and the writer to opt for the neologism *dicôlon*, which would on the one hand, point out the subject matter of the book and on the other hand, provoke the French readers, who would not be able to understand its meaning without the help of the paratext and the text itself.

The first section of the text is entitled ‘Δίκωλον’ and it can be read as the preface to the novel or a programmatic statement about the text that we are about to read. For the author in the text, the writing of this novel begins with a ‘νέκυια’ on the hills of Ekali. The mature Yiannis senses the presence of the souls of his dead parents and his brother around him at a critical time for his career. The book that he wants to write as a tribute to his brother Charis, who committed suicide, has been too long in

²⁷⁵ The concept of Dikolon is of pivotal importance in Lakis Progidis’ essay on *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*. Progidis’ vocabulary is centered on the concept of ‘dualism’ and he uses terms such as: ‘διφυσείς ενότητες’ (p.1009), ‘ιδιόμορφη διττότητα’ (p.1013), ‘δικοιλότητα’ (p.1014) and ‘δίκωλη μορφή’ (p.1017). See Lakis Progidis, ‘Τα μυστήρια του μυθιστορήματος. (Σκέψεις με αφορμή το *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* του Γιάννη Κιουρτσάκη)’, *Nea Estia* 1705 (1998), p. 1008-1020.

²⁷⁶ Daniel Pennac, *Comme un roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). In this autobiographical text Pennac reflects on his relationship with reading. His aim is to criticise the various reading practices applied by institutions such as the school and the family and at the same time to argue for the pleasures of reading.

gestation. He suddenly experiences a defining moment that will eventually trigger the narrative.

Άκουσα το αίμα τους στις φλέβες μου και αγόριστα, το αίμα του Χάρη – του αδερφού μου που χάθηκε στα εικοσιέξι του χρόνια. Ναι, ένιωσα αυτόν τον άλλο σφυγμό να χτυπάει στον σφυγμό μου και τον νεκρό μου αδερφό να ανασταίνεται στο αίμα μου, όμοια όπως ένιωθα το φως το ουρανού να εισρέει μέσα στη σκοτεινάδα του κορμιού μου και να το πλημμυρίζει. (14)

The climate in the paragraph quoted above is ideal for the emergence of Dikolon from the inner consciousness of the author in the text. This mini ‘νέκυια’ episode brings together two worlds; the world of the living and the world of the dead.²⁷⁷ This dual fictional being comes to life through the osmosis of death and life, as the references to ‘σκοτεινάδα’ and ‘φως’ indicate.²⁷⁸ The process of bringing Charis back to life within the author in the text is described in terms of a blood transfusion, thus, drawing attention to the ‘bodily’ discourse that is a key element for the treatment of the issues of the ‘double body’ that I will be examining.

Dikolon has its origins in the Greek folk tradition and more specifically in the Pontic theatre.²⁷⁹ In his specialized study on the Pontic theatre of the period known as ‘Δωδεκαήμερον’, Christos Samouelides claims that ‘ο Δίκωλον’ is an innovative figure of the Pontic theatre and more specifically, of the traditional play of the carnival known under the generic title ‘Μωμόγερο’.²⁸⁰ Dikolon is principally the

²⁷⁷ The opening scene in Kiourtsakis’ novel is similar to the closing scene of Seferis’ *Έξι νύχτες στην Ακρόπολη*. The author in the text, Stratis (an alter ego of Seferis) watches Lala as she evaporates in the daylight and while another human figure appears among the marbles (the spectre of Salomi). See Giorgos Seferis, *Έξι νύχτες στην Ακρόπολη* (Athens: Ermis, 1974), p. 250-252.

²⁷⁸ This echoes Seferis’ verse in ‘Κίχλη’: *αγγελικό και μαύρο φως*. See Giorgos Seferis, *Ποιήματα* (Athens: Ikaros, 1981), p.228.

²⁷⁹ To this day, the etymology of Dikolon has not been discussed and verified. A possible explanation is that δίκωλον is made up of the prefix *δι* (twice/ having two of) and the noun *κῶλον* (part of the body). One should also note the dialect peculiarity in the case of Δίκωλον; in pontic Greek the ending –ον is a regular ending for masculine nouns. I shall also note that in the context of the Pontic theatre, Dikolon is a male proper noun whereas in the context of the novel it appears as a noun of neutral gender. Dikolon is ‘defamiliarised’ in Kiourtsakis’ text and acquires a new significance – that of “δίκωλον μυθιστόρημα” as I shall argue towards the end of the chapter.

²⁸⁰ Kiourtsakis cites Samouelides in his study on the carnival. See Yiannis Kiourtsakis, *Καρναβάλι και Καραγκιόζης. Οι ρίζες και οι μεταμορφώσεις του λαϊκού γέλιου* (Athens: Kedros, 1985), p. 70.

male character that carries his dead brother (named Κιζίρης or Γαμπρόν) on his shoulders and in almost every dramatization, he demands from the village-judge to punish Αλογάς, his brother's murderer. In later stages of the development of the Pontic folk theatre, Dikolon even appears to be carrying two dead brothers on his shoulders or a doll, with which the audience can play.²⁸¹ Dikolon as Samuelides notes has four buttocks – two of them belong to the living brother while the other two belong to the dead brother.²⁸² Moreover, he claims that this dual figure that encompasses both the living and the dead brother is often related to the ancient belief regarding the dialectic relationship between life and death. However, as he remarks the dead brother of Dikolon remains a dead body on the living brother's shoulders.²⁸³ The living brother never dies on the stage of the Pontic theatre, as he has to spend his life protesting against the unfair murder of his brother and symbolically condemning injustice.²⁸⁴

The figure of Dikolon is assessed by Kiourtsakis in his study on the carnival and the Greek shadow theatre and reinterpreted in the light of his reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's influential study on Rabelais.²⁸⁵ In his study *Καρναβάλι και Καραγκιόζης*, Kiourtsakis follows the pattern of Bakhtin's thought and after an examination of the medieval culture of laughter in Europe and in Greece, he moves on to discuss the notions of 'grotesque' and the 'double body' in order to eventually transplant them to the context of Greek folk culture and parallel the 'dual' grotesque body to Dikolon.

²⁸¹ Christos Samouelides, *Το λαϊκό παραδοσιακό θέατρο του Πόντου* (Athens: published PhD thesis at the University of Ioannina, 1980), p.165-166.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 41.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 156-157.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

²⁸⁵ While Kiourtsakis' interest in the carnival dates back to 1971-2, he did not read Bakhtin's study on Rabelais until 1973. The fact that he did not come across the study during his stay in France (that coincided with the period that Todorov and Kristeva introduced Bakhtin's work to the French readership), illustrates that Kiourtsakis was primarily interested in the study of Greek folk culture and subsequently theorized it by applying Bakhtin's theory. See Yiannis Kiourtsakis, *Εμείς οι άλλοι* (Athens: Kedros, 2000), p. 347.

Our understanding of Kiourtsakis' fictional construction of Dikolon depends on understanding his scholarly appropriation of the carnival and Karagkiozis. The understanding of these, in turn, depends on Bakhtin's theory. In his study *Rabelais and his world*, Bakhtin defined the medieval aesthetics of 'grotesque' through the example of Rabelais' novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1552).²⁸⁶ A crucial point in his analysis of the grotesque culture and literary production was the exploration of the 'grotesque body'. For Bakhtin 'grotesque' was more than a term to describe something that was at the same time comic and frightening; 'grotesque' implied feelings of estrangement from the surrounding world and also the uncompromising conflict between two elements, personality traits and characteristics. As Kiourtsakis points out, the literary mode defined as 'grotesque realism' is principally manifested through the body and an exaggeration of bodily functions. Bakhtin describes the grotesque body as "a body in the act of becoming" and he stresses its ability to endlessly transform but more importantly its ability to create another body or recreate a specific part of the existing body.²⁸⁷ What we might call a double body in his own words is a body that retains and projects the parts that can actually regenerate themselves.²⁸⁸ Moreover, a double body is the body that is born from the death of another body – a remark that is worth keeping in mind as the discussion unfolds.²⁸⁹

Bakhtin draws particular attention to those parts of the body that are instrumental in its exaggerating growth within the grotesque atmosphere and facilitate the transgression of the single-body boundaries (e.g. the bowels or the phallus that

²⁸⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (transl. by H. Iswolsky) (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984) (1st Russian edition 1963).

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

belong to the so called lower bodily stratum).²⁹⁰ Those are parts of the body that he also considers as detachable, which is worth remembering when referring to the detachable doll that Dikolon appears to be carrying on his back in the later stages of the Pontic theatre. Furthermore, Bakhtin introduces the term ‘convexities’ alongside ‘orifices’ for those parts of the body that he considers to be on the confines with the ‘outer world’ and this clearly points out another bodily feature that is typical for both Dikolon and of course Karagkiozis – the hump.

Finally, Bakhtin explicitly refers to the body projected in classical works of art as a body where all signs of ‘duality’ are eliminated and, therefore, all bodily events such as birth, ageing and death are interpreted in a single way.²⁹¹ What is essentially different about the grotesque body is that because of its open-endedness and its ability to grow, regrow and outgrow on those parts that we consider as intersections, death is followed by rebirth. Kiourtsakis also puts forward the idea regarding the circular movement from life to death; by choosing however the Pontic Dikolon he differentiates the dual entity created in *Σαν μωθιστόρημα* from Bakhtin’s grotesque body. As I said above, Dikolon does not present any regenerating qualities in the Pontic tradition in contrast to other figures of the Pontic theatre like Γέρων, who can be resurrected from the dead.

In *Καρναβάλι και Καραγκιόζης* Kiourtsakis uses the terms: ‘σώμα διπλό’ and ‘δισωματικό’ to render the Bakhtinian ‘corps bicorporel’.²⁹² The description of ‘δισωματικό σώμα’ by Kiourtsakis follows the exact same lines of Bakhtin’s analysis. What is however essentially new in Kiourtsakis’ analysis of this grotesque body is the way he links it to Greek folklore tradition and the concept of Dikolon in particular. In

²⁹⁰ The single body as Bakhtin notes was the ideal body for the aesthetics of the Renaissance. Ibid., p.320 – 322.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 320-1.

²⁹² Kiourtsakis. *Καρναβάλι και Καραγκιόζης*, op.cit., p. 74.

Kiourtsakis' theoretical analysis of the carnival, Dikolon is promoted as the ideal Greek example that responds to Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque and 'double body'. In *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, Kiourtsakis attempts to fictionalize this theoretical discourse and tests the applicability of a figure from the folk tradition in the context of the autobiographical text.

At one point in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, Yiannis realizes: Πόσο σωστά αισθάνθηκα τότε, όταν σημείωνα ότι ο Χάρης ήταν, ήμουν τώρα εγώ, ότι εγώ δεν ήμουν παρά μία ενσάρκωση του παμπάλαιου Δίκωλου- του καρναβαλικού ήρωα που η καμπούρα του δεν είναι παρά το σώμα του νεκρού αδελφού του.(261) The hump is a sign of excrescence, a part of the body that grows out of control and transgresses the limits of the initial body. The hump is also the most typical body feature of Karagkiozis, the main figure of the Greek shadow theatre.²⁹³ As Kiourtsakis explains, the hump can be seen as a 'reversed' image of a woman's impregnated belly, a 'dysmorphic' body part that carries another body within it. In the novel it is symbolically substituted by Dikolon and Yiannis who carries within him his dead brother.²⁹⁴ This is a metaphorical manifestation of the dual body or Bakhtin's 'double body'. In the novel, Yiannis bears the burden of Charis' suicide on his shoulders. As I have explained in the case of Dikolon there is not a possibility of Charis being physically resurrected in the text. His coming back to life is possible only through a type of fiction that embraces the dual body of Dikolon and the dual subject.

Therefore, for the author in the text there is always another self within the self – Charis within Yiannis. The intratextual writer depicts the relationship between the self and the other self through the image of Dikolon as this is interpreted through his

²⁹³ Karagkiozis, the hunchback, became a symbol of Greek pop culture in the 1970s through the lyrics of Dionysis Savvopoulos: φίλους και εχθρούς στις φριχτές μου πλάτες, όμορφα ανασήκωνα σαν να'ταν επιβάτες.

²⁹⁴ Kiourtsakis, *Καρναβάλι*, op.cit., p. 196-198.

readings of Bakhtin on grotesque aesthetics. The author in the text explicitly refers to the other self that inhabits and transgresses his own self: Άντλησε μέσα σου (άραγε από που; άραγε από ποιόν; σίγουρα από τον Άλλον που έχει τη ρίζα του και μέσα σου κι όμως σε υπερβαίνει, τον Άλλον που δεν ξέρεις να ονομάσεις κι όμως είναι μέσα σου, ε ί σ α ι εσύ ο ίδιος όταν γράφεις). (553)

The authorial subject here possesses a dual body, a dual self and a dual voice.

Ναι τώρα που ακούω πιά τόσο καλά μέσα μου τη φωνή του αδερφού μου, τώρα που βλέπω νοερά το πρόσωπό του όπως ποτέ άλλοτε δεν το είχα δει, τώρα μονάχα μπορώ να εξακριβώσω πόσο ετούτη η φωνή μοιάζει πραγματικά με τη δική μου, πόσο αυτό το πρόσωπο μοιάζει πραγματικά με μένα. (261)

Yiannis and Charis merge together in a transgressive fictional body, the body of Dikolon, whose one part is alive whereas the other is dead.

In his theoretical text, Kiourtsakis suggests that the significance of Bakhtin's concept of the bicorporal body is exactly the dialectic rapport it establishes between the 'individual' and the 'communal' or in different terms between 'the self' and the 'other'.²⁹⁵ To that end Kiourtsakis uses two voices in the text: that of the autobiographical authoring subject and that of his dead brother Charis, through his extensive correspondence with his parents during the time that he studies in Belgium. The dual subject of the text, the Dikolon shaped by Yiannakis and Charis, is also articulated through an elaborate interweaving of the narrator's and Charis voices, as can be seen in the following passage.

Προπαντός όμως μας ζητούσε να του γράφουμε καταλεπτώς τα πιο ασήμαντα καθημερινά μας νέα- ήθελε απολύτως να ξέρει τι κάνουμε και τι επρόκειτο να κάνουμε, ώστε να ζει κι εκείνος στο Gembloux όλα όσα ζούσαμε εμείς στην Αθήνα, κι αν ήταν δυνατό τη στιγμή ακριβώς που τα ζούσαμε: «Χθες Σάββατο», γράφει π.χ στις 17 Φεβρουαρίου, «πήγα στο χορό του Athénée (γυμνασίου) του Gembloux που έγινε εδώ στο Δημαρχείο. Το ίδιο βράδυ ήσαστε κι εσείς σε χορό. Τι σύμπτωσης! Εσείς τι ώρα γυρίσατε; Εγώ στις 4:30.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

Στον χορό πέρασα ωραία. Εσείς πως τα περάσατε; Διασκεδάσατε; Ας μου γράψει η μαμά λεπτομερείας.» Αυτό ήταν τώρα το κλίμα της αλληλογραφίας μας. Χόρευε και έβλεπε τους γονείς του να χορεύουν (κι εγώ χόρευα με όλους στη φαντασία μου). (227-278)

This passage illustrates how Charis and Yiannis interact at the level of discourse even though one is in Belgium and the other in Athens. Yiannis' retrospective narrative is invaded by the voice of Charis, who reaches the readers from the underworld via his letters that were preserved by his brother. The repetition of actions by the two constituent parts of *Dikolon* shows that Charis and Yiannis live in effect parallel lives within the fiction even though one is in Greece and the other in Europe. There is also a switch between the narrative techniques used here; Charis' letter is introduced in free indirect style that enhances the fusion of the brothers' voices whilst the actual text of the letter is embedded in the main body of the text with the use of quotation marks.

On this 'metadiegetic' level of the embedded letter, Charis' speech is framed as 'alien' in Bakhtin's terms, through the use of elements of *katharevousa*.²⁹⁶ *Katharevousa* in Kiourtsakis' trilogy is associated with bureaucracy and is discarded as an ossified idiom, which is alienated from everyday discourse. The split between the maternal language and *katharevousa* that is imposed through education and institutions highlight the feeling of estrangement or even exile experienced here by Charis. Kiourtsakis allows *Dikolon* to dissolve momentarily between the 'hometown' and the space of exile through the techniques of letter writing and the employment of heteroglossia and at the same time reunifies it via the one-to-one correspondence between Charis and Yiannis.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Tziouvas examines similar cases of the use of *katharevousa* in Greek texts in the light of Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' in his study *Το παλίμψηστον της ελληνικής αφήγησης. Από την αφηγηματολογία στη διαλογικότητα* (Athens: Odysseus, 2002) (first pub.1993), p. 206-211.

²⁹⁷ Dimitris Tziouvas. *The Other Self. Selfhood and Society in Modern Greek Fiction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003). Tziouvas' perception of the self follows Bakhtin's 'dialogic' principles as he

In *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, Yiannis articulates his identity through the prism of the self as the ‘other’ and vice versa through the process of writing the text. Yiannis admits to himself that the text provides a frame for accommodating the overarching consciousness, which is ambiguously perceived as absent and present, dead and alive. He says: Αυτή η βασανιστική απουσία-παρουσία δεν μ’ άφηνε να ηρεμήσω....Ναι εγώ ήμουν ο Χάρης, ή πιο σωστά, ο Χάρης ήταν, ήμουν τώρα εγώ, αφού μόνο εγώ μπορούσα τώρα να δώσω ένα σχήμα στα όνειρά του, ένα σώμα στην ψυχή του που δεν είχε άλλο τρόπο να ξαναζήσει. (16)

The text thus proposes a superimposition of Charis’ self on the authorial self in a way reminiscent of the way Salome’s face was superimposed on that of Lala during the scene of transfiguration in the marble quarry in *Έξι νύχτες στην Ακρόπολη*. The reference to ‘σχήμα’ also brings to mind Pentzikis’ text *Ο πεθαμένος και η ανάσταση* (written in 1938), where the quest for a form becomes the central point of the narrative. The narrator in Pentzikis’ text is a writer who is in search of a ‘form’ for his narrative that resists the techniques and typologies of the traditional novel as well as for its protagonist - a young man that killed himself out of unrequited love.²⁹⁸ The narrator then undertakes the task of resurrecting the young man in fiction but he realises that it is impossible to come up with a ‘form’ for both the text and the disjointed protagonist.

Dikolon is portrayed as the other self and in his search for a certain ‘σχήμα’ it merges with the writing self in such a degree that it becomes extremely difficult to draw the separating lines. In contrast to Vassilikos’ novel *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* where the self was presented as the ‘other’, here the actual ‘other’ is appropriated as a ‘self’.

subscribes to an understanding of the self as a bipole, the constituent parts of which are the self and the other (self).

²⁹⁸ Nikos Gavriil Pentzikis, *Ο πεθαμένος και η ανάσταση* (Athens: Agra, 1987), p. 7: Επιθυμούσε ένα σχήμα.

The ‘other’ is Charis, the dead brother, whose identity is adopted by the author in the text. In an interview published on a blog of *Le Monde*, Kiourtsakis admitted: Je suis Harris, le frère mort, et de toute évidence, je suis aussi un autre. Le narrateur écrit ce livre avec son frère. La dette envers le mort, la dette de la vie envers la mort, devient une sorte de don de la mort à la vie!²⁹⁹

In *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, the author in the text reflects the exact same attitude as Kiourtsakis did in his interview. He confesses:

Κι ακόμα, συλλογίσου: αν άρχισες αυτή τη γραφή δεν ήταν για να κάνεις κι εσύ το χρέος σου προς τους δικούς σου; Χρέος δικό σου και χρέος του αδερφού σου, που θέλεις δε θέλεις, τό έχεις αναλάβει τώρα εσύ – έτσι ή αλλιώς γυρεύεις να ξοφλήσεις ένα χρέος προς νεκρού: αυτόν που σου κληροδότησε μαζί με το θάνατό του την ανολοκλήρωτη ζωή του κι εκείνους που σας δώσανε μια μέρα τη ζωή. Παράξενο, αλήθεια, πως ο θάνατος δένεται και πάλι με τη ζωή! (358)

The text in this case is the triumph of Dikolon over the destructive forces of time and death. The dual subject (Charis/Yiannis), as this is incarnated within the fiction in the transgressive form of the Bakhtinian ‘double body’, is manifested in the Greek fictional context through the figure of Dikolon. This symbiosis of the dual subject (alive and dead) in the dual spaces circumscribed by the confines of Greece and Europe against a dual intertext (Greek folk tradition/Bakhtin) results in a postmodern text that resists absolute definitions. The fictional Dikolon is suspended between provincial Greece, the once ‘idyllic’ birthplace that cannot provide for its children, and northern Europe, the alienating space that educates and appears to accommodate first Charis and later Yiannakis. Nevertheless, it turns out that Dikolon cannot be fully integrated neither in Greece nor in Europe.

This is why the text is ‘like a novel’, and not a novel in the traditional sense. This Dikolon subject transcends the notion of a ‘single’ selfhood and thus the

²⁹⁹ Yianis Kiourtsakis, “Toute notre modernité a un problème” – interview for *Le Monde* (22 March 2011). Web. www.horstemps.blog.lemonde.fr. [accessed on 10 February 2012].

traditional novel would fall short in representing Dikolon. The hero of a typical narrative of apprenticeship is called to make a decision between two situations and two different ways of life, which is not the case with Kiourtsakis' Dikolon. This fictional Dikolon resists the acceptance of either the Franco-European way of life or the compromise with Greece. This was the same dilemma we encountered in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* where the intratextual writer claimed his right not to make a decision as to which language to use in fiction and which of his two selves to promote over the other. Dikolon as we shall see next, calls for another type of writing, which is self-referential and combines traits from different texts and different genres.

6.2. Towards a generic definition of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*

This particular type of writing that Dikolon calls for could account for the generic 'hybridity' of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*; a trait that was immediately spotted in reviews published chiefly in newspapers. In scholarly criticism, too, *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* appears as a text that does not belong to a single genre, but to a certain 'είδος μεικτό και νόμμο' as Dimitris Daskalopoulos suggests with a famous quote from Solomos.³⁰⁰ According to Stavrakopoulou, the text is representative of a hybrid genre that combines a large-scale historical narrative articulated in the form of the chronicle of a family, with biography, autobiography and the epistolary novel.³⁰¹ Tziovas was the first to clearly discern the two modes of writing that are combined in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* - fiction and autobiography and he listed the text among the fictional autobiographies that appeared during the nineties and early 2000s.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Dimitris Daskalopoulos, Review of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, *Ta Nea* (16 May 1995).

³⁰¹ Anna Stavrakopoulou, '«Return from Greece»: Journey and Homecoming in two Contemporary Greek Novels' in Gregory Nagy & Anna Stavrakopoulou (eds.), *Modern Greek Literature. Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 158-170. See p. 162.

³⁰² Dimitris Tziovas, *The Other Self*, op.cit., p.53.

Tziovas' definition brings us a step closer to defining the text as autofiction. However, the discussion regarding the suitability of the term 'autofiction' in the case of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* began in France in 2011. On the occasion of the publication of the French translation of the book under the title *Le dicôlon*,³⁰³ the French review *L'Atelier du roman* (directed by the Greek essayist and a friend of the author, Lakis Progidis), devoted a special issue to Kiourtsakis' text.³⁰⁴ The majority of the featured articles not only celebrate the publication of the novel in French, but revolve around the same thematic: the examination of the figure of the humped *dicôlon* and the osmosis of autobiographical reality and fiction. Nevertheless, one can easily note the cautiousness with which the critics tackle *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* when it comes to giving a definition for it; the term 'autofiction' appears only twice and in one case the reference to autofiction is not further elaborated.³⁰⁵

Jean-Yves Masson in his contribution categorically states that Kiourtsakis' writing has nothing to do with autofiction ("L'écriture de Yannis Kiourtsakis est à mille lieues du narcissisme des formes dévoyées de l'autofiction qu'on a pu voir fleurir en France récemment").³⁰⁶ Masson reduces autofiction to merely a current trend without acknowledging the literary debate that has taken place since the coinage of the term in 1977. He associates autofiction with primarily 'self-confessional' literature ('littérature intime') and denounces it as a 'derailed' form of narcissistic narrative.

Nevertheless, just days after the publication of Masson's article, *Le Monde* published the aforementioned interview with Yiannis Kiourtsakis, in which the author

³⁰³ Yannis Kiourtsakis. *Le dicôlon* (transl. René Bouchet) (Paris: Verdier, 2011).

³⁰⁴ 'La Grèce et l'Europe ou Le Dicôlon de Yannis Kiourtsakis', *L'Atelier du roman* 65 (March 2011).

³⁰⁵ Olivier Maillart, 'Portrait de l'exégète en romancier', *ibid.*, p. 30-37 (esp.p.36).

³⁰⁶ Jean-Yves Masson, 'Le résidu poétique de l'expérience', *ibid.*, p. 38-45 (esp.p. 45-47).

himself appeared less strict than Masson towards autofiction.³⁰⁷ When Kiourtsakis is asked if he has written an autobiography devoid of narcissism, he replies:

Sans doute parce qu' au départ, j'étais rétif à l'idée d'autobiographie, dont je redoutais le sens mièvre. Et plus encore à l'idée d'autofiction, si à la mode chez vous depuis Serge Doubrovsky. Qui étais-je pour raconter ma vie? Mais ma résistance était aussi d'ordre littéraire. Le terme même de fiction me paraît trop étroit pour rendre compte de la richesse de l'univers d'un vrai livre. Montaigne ne disait-il pas: «je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre»? On pourrait dire qu'il s'agit d'autofiction ou d'autobiographie, mais cela va bien au-delà!”

Thus Kiourtsakis neither fully embraces the term ‘autofiction’ nor rejects it altogether. The fact that he names Doubrovsky and paraphrases the latter’s remark on autobiography and its prestigious state as it appeared on the back cover of *Fils*, shows that he is up to date with the developments in the French literary scene and he is aware of the related criticism. We should not exclude the possibility that he had come across Doubrovsky’s works already by the nineties. Nevertheless, he consents to a description of the novel as autofiction by stressing that it is not just autofiction but it goes beyond that (and of course beyond the limits of conventional autobiography). He chooses not to stress the autofictional dimension because he seeks to link his work with the literary tradition of narratives of homecoming like the *Odyssey* and on the other hand, wishes to connect it to the tradition of the European Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman (two subgenres that he hints at under the term ‘apprentissage’).

Given that Kiourtsakis’ novel is a text combining the essay, the autobiography, the diary novel and the Bildungsroman as well as the Künstlerroman, I believe that a reading of it in the light of autofiction will certainly bring out its generic complexities. I do not seek to impose autofiction as the single appropriate definition for the novel; on the contrary by applying the term for my reading I wish to point out

³⁰⁷ Yianis Kiourtsakis, ‘Toute notre modernité a un problème’, op.cit.[accessed on 10 February 2012].

how original Kiourtsakis' attitude is towards established forms and how he experiments with different genres through the osmosis of established autobiographical modes and pioneering fictional strategies. To this end, I shall now emphasise the metafictional dimension in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, which attests to its groundbreaking character.

Kiourtsakis' novel is highly self-conscious and self-reflexive text that lays bare its artificiality through the use of language related to the writing process and its tendency towards self-criticism.³⁰⁸ Certain passages can be read as metafictional commentaries on the production of the current text and are indicative of the osmosis of two genres that are considered as representative of postmodern writing: 'autofiction' and 'metafiction'. In this sense, Kiourtsakis picks up the thread from *Η Κάδμω*, a text in which Axioti resorted to self-reflexive strategies in order to regain her linguistic medium.

The intratextual writer in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* engages intensely in self-observation and self-criticism. He expresses his worries with regard to the generic identity of the text in progress by questioning its status as an autobiography or a novel. Memoirs, autobiographical fiction and fictionalised essays are considered one after the other in order to be discarded. The writer in the text finds the novel more appealing because of its long tradition and because it allows more flexibility while offering a broad set of techniques in order to represent Dikolon.

Όμως, τι γυρεύω να κάνω; Το βιβλίο μου για τον Χάρη, το βιβλίο που εγώ μπορούσα να γράψω για τον Χάρη, δεν βρίσκεται άραγε πίσω μου, δεν είναι άραγε ακριβώς το Καρναβάλι..., το αφιερωμένο – όχι βέβαια τυχαία – στη δική του πρώτα μνήμη; ... Και το βιβλίο που λαχταράω να γράψω, που άρχισα ίσως να το γράφω μ' αυτή την ήδη

³⁰⁸ See Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative - The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Routledge, 1985), p.2.

παλιά εγγραφή του Δεκεμβρίου – πέρασαν από τότε σχεδόν τέσσερα χρόνια- για να το αφήσω πάλι, άραγε τι θα είναι; Απομνημόνευμα; Αυτοβιογραφικό αφήγημα; Ή μήπως μυθιστορηματικό δοκίμιο; Κάτι σαν μυθιστόρημα – ή πάλι ένα είδος μελέτης; Και άραγε θα γραφτεί ποτέ; (18-9)

However, this undecidability is not considered as an obstacle in the context of postmodern writing. A fusion of genres is endorsed and by the end of the text, the intratextual writer has realised that this mixture of genres is actually ideal for his text. The text claims its right to a hybrid ‘generic’ identity and resists clear-cut distinctions that would moreover restrict the possible interpretations and transformations of Dikolon.

In the sections that follow the intratextual writer draws attention to the artificial character of his writing. He is preoccupied with the way the reality of the past is transformed through writing. In the following he contemplates on how memories are fictionalised in the context of his narrative.

Αρχίζεις να φαντάζεσαι, να «σκηνοθετείς»: ανασύρεις κάποια άλλα γεγονότα που συνόδεψαν εκείνο που αναζητάς...προπάντων γυρεύεις εκείνο το χαμένο αίσθημα, εκείνο το κλίμα της ψυχής – ψάχνεις μεθοδικά τις λέξεις, τον τόνο και τον φωτισμό που θα το ανακαλέσουν.[...] Γιατί μονάχα ένα έργο όπως η γραφή έχει τη δύναμη όχι να διασώσει όσα έζησες, αλλά να ξαναγεννήσει την εντύπωση που άφησαν μέσα σου περνώντας την εσωτερική τους για σένα σημασία να φανερώσει έτσι στο χαρτί τον μονιμότερο εκείνο εαυτό σου που κλώθει το νήμα της ζωής σου, απ’ την αρχή ως το τέλος και το υφαίνει σ’ ένα κείμενο - πες το, αν θες, αυτο-βιογραφία. (78-79)

Through the act of writing, Kiourtsakis pieces together the various fragments of his past. This narrative of past experiences is perceived as a ‘tale’, it is a fictionalized narrative in which the reality is blended with the forces of dream and imagination. This technique of staging the past owes a lot to Proust and his technique of recreating the atmosphere of the memories through techniques like synesthesia. The reference to ‘staging’ implies that the author in the text frames the scattered past events that are recalled on a particular environment in which the human senses

cooperate in order to create a mental image.

The act of writing is identified with the ‘remembrance of things past’. As it is impossible to physically relive the past experiences, the only option available is to regain the impression of those memories through the act of writing. In the context of this text, as it proves impossible for the author in the text to relive the happy days of his childhood, he only has one option available: to try and regain the impression or the emotional ‘imprint’ of those memories through the act of writing. This is why the term *αυτο-βιογραφία* is hesitantly introduced with the use of a hyphen. By accounting for one’s own life not in the ‘prestigious’ and ‘official’ style of a ‘high-profile’ autobiography for which Kiourtsakis, like Doubrovsky, considers himself an improbable candidate, but through this text in progress, it becomes possible for the author in the text to recreate his experiences in fiction and transgress the barrier separating the ‘lived’ past from the ‘fictional’ present of the act of writing. Moreover, the visual image of the term ‘*αυτο-βιογραφία*’ draws attention to the two poles of the text and links them to the essence of Dikolon. Whilst the suffix ‘*αυτο*’ points towards the self, the term ‘*βιογραφία*’ points towards the ‘others’. Since Dikolon incorporates the self and the other self in a fictional entity, we can argue that the text represents as a type of writing that brings together two complementary perspectives: that of the writing self and the ‘other’ self – thus, autofiction.

In yet another metafictional comment, the writer in the text wonders:

Και τι παράξενο! Έχεις την αίσθηση πως μήτε ο αδερφός σου μήτε εσύ ο ίδιος υπήρξατε ποτέ· πως δεν υπήρξατε πουθενά αλλού έξω απ’ αυτό το μυθιστόρημα – ή μήπως εκείνο που αισθάνεσαι και δεν τολμάς να πεις είναι ότι υπήρξατε μονάχα για να ξαναζήσετε και να συναντηθείτε σ’ αυτό το μυθιστόρημα; (361)

Here, the limits between extra-textual reality (that correspond to the actual biographical data) and intra-textual imagination are effectively transgressed. The thin

lines that separate life events and real people that undergo a fictionalisation process in the novel become obscure and the text poses itself as the meeting point between the two worlds (the real and the fictional). Any attempt to define what is extratextual reality and juxtapose it to fiction is purposeless as metafiction champions the osmosis of fiction and reality. It is apparent that Charis and Yiannis, who are attached to each other through the shape of Dikolon, are also identified with the text in progress. As this ‘novel’ develops its metafictional dimension within the autofictional environment, the two siblings could become ‘the others’, the protagonists of their attempted nostos – their ‘other selves’ that are revealed with the help of the devices of fiction.

A final point I would like to address, is the title of the text because it draws attention to the genre the text resists subscribing to. In this light, it could be interpreted as a metafictional comment proper. I make the case that Kiourtsakis has elevated the discussion regarding the genre of the text into the title with this striking indication of textual theorization. Kiourtsakis at a first level uses the paratext (in this case the title on the cover of book) so as to enhance the self–reflexive character of the text. If we read the preposition as ‘in the manner of’, we can argue that he advocates for the inclusion of this text in the category of novels since it matches two criteria of a conventional novel, such as the considerable length of narration and the storyline. However, ‘σαν’ can also be understood in terms of a preposition that indicates substitution (‘instead of’) or also as a hypothetical conjunction, (‘as if’). Either way the use of ‘σαν’ suggests that the text is not a novel proper and thus the title can be interpreted as an indication of the text’s generic instability and uncertainty.

Therefore, the text can be read as if it was a novel or in the place of a traditional novel. The title should not be deciphered as a gesture of rupture between

traditional and more avant-garde texts that are classified under the umbrella-term ‘novel’. This title in particular sets the tone for the ongoing discussion within the text regarding the literary genres with which Kiourtsakis experiments in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*. Finally, we can argue that by implication of its title, we shall opt for a transgressive reading of the text instead of treating it vaguely as a pioneering text that is halfway between the novel and life-writing. *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* should be read as a metafictional autofiction – a text that opens the way for future explorations on the margins of two distinct postmodern genres.

6.3. The autofiction of impossible ‘nostos’

Prior to discussing *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* in terms of an autofiction that explores the theme of ‘nostos’, I would like to link the concept of ‘nostos’ to that of ‘apprenticeship’ - a notion that Yiannis Kiourtsakis pointed out in 2012. I have already suggested that the novel unfolds on the basis of a ‘dual’ apprenticeship; both parts of *Dikolon* go through a similar process that could be described in terms of ‘Bildung’. Firstly, the text illustrates Charis’ Bildung experience as a student abroad. Secondly, it illustrates Yiannis’ apprenticeship in the domain of literature during adolescence and early adulthood and to some extent the author/narrator’s unsuccessful efforts to become a ‘poet’ at a young age. These efforts are represented in the text with the embedding of Yiannakis’ texts in the main narrative. The long apprenticeship of the writer in the text terminates when the intratextual author reaches the point of writing the current text after the publication of his non-fiction studies and essays. As far as the plot is concerned, the coming-of-age process for the two members of *Dikolon* culminates with their journey and long-term stay in Belgium/France respectively and their immersion in European society and culture.

Both Charis and Yiannis find themselves occasionally at odds with the Francophone mentality, which creates a rift between the two worlds and within the respective identities.

We can thus infer that the journey, which is considered as a staple of the conventional Bildungsroman, is an essential component of Kiourtsakis' apprenticeship narrative.³⁰⁹ In this context, we can draw another comparison between the text's title and Seferis' *Μυθιστόρημα*. The twenty-four poems that comprised Seferis' volume were linked together under the rubric 'novel', which suggested a unified reading of the collection as twenty-four 'poetic chapters' of a larger composition exploring a collective voyage of self-discovery.³¹⁰ Seferis offered his interpretation of the title by explaining the role of myth and history as its main components.³¹¹ It is in a similar light that we should read the title *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*. The 'mythology' that Kiourtsakis reverts to, is that of his own family history (which provides the novelistic plot), while the 'story' featured here, is that of the journey for self-discovery or 'Bildung' (formation) that is epitomized in the act of writing the current text.

I believe however, that in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* the concept of 'nostos' overshadows that of the journey. The process of Bildung initiates the wanderings of Dikolon abroad and this results not only in obtaining new experiences, but more crucially leads to feelings of alienation and exile. These feelings of alienation trigger the Dikolon's longing for 'nostos'. On a first level, the text narrates the story of Charis' unsuccessful 'nostos' as this is marked by his fruitless search for employment

³⁰⁹ I have already discussed the theme of the journey in the Bildungsroman in chapter II, p.76-77.

³¹⁰ Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.159-60.

³¹¹ Seferis notes: "Μύθος, γιατί χρησιμοποίησα αρκετά φανερά μια συγκεκριμένη μυθολογία. Ιστορία, γιατί προσπάθησα να εκφράσω με κάποιον ειρμό, μια κατάσταση τόσο ανεξάρτητη από μένα όσο και τα πρόσωπα ενός μυθιστορήματος" in *Ποιήματα*, op.cit., p.314.

and his failure to adapt to the society he was born in. In Charis' case 'nostos' is denied as a result of his failure to acclimatize in 1960s Greece, then leads to a climax of the sentiment of alienation after his return to Belgium and his suicide. In the case of Yiannis, 'nostos' is partially completed when he writes the book in hand, yet, an all-encompassing 'nostos' is never entirely accomplished.

I should stress that the axis shaped by 'Bildung' and 'nostos' differentiates Kiourtsakis' 'apprenticeship' text from the tradition of the European Bildungsroman. The fact that the text is saturated by the 'nostos' theme is an indication of how Kiourtsakis transcribes European cultural products by using the Greek cultural idiom (in a similar way that he appropriated the European 'grotesque'/dual body by identifying it with the Pontic Dikolon). 'Nostos' is the textual construct that enables the writer in the text to write the 'apprenticeship' narrative through a Greek perspective. After all, the writer in the text admits that his story of the 'impossible nostos' is a story which is a universal narrative and at the same time μια ιστορία ελληνική. (23)³¹²

However, my aim here is to clarify how Dikolon attempts nostos through the actual writing process. I have already stressed that the other self of the writer in the text is created through the writing process. The following extract uses the image of the mirror in order to demonstrate how writing becomes the means of self-discovery:

Κι αυτό ακριβώς ζητούσες απ' το «παραμύθι» σου: όχι τα περιστατικά, ούτε καν τις πιο πολύτιμες στιγμές που σου δόθηκε να ζήσεις, αλλά εκείνο που ήσουν ενώ τις ζούσες. Ναι, αυτό που αλήθεια ξαναβρίσκεις δεν είναι το σβησμένο παρελθόν σου, αλλά ο άνθρωπος που το έζησε ...Κι έτσι, αυτό το γράψιμο, ετούτο το χαρτί, που σε υποχρεώνει, καθώς μαυρίζει αργά κάτω απ'

³¹² If we situate the current 'apprenticeship' story against the frame of contemporary history (1950s and early 1960s), we realise that it takes place during the period of post war massive emigration – a period during which the theme of 'nostos' came to prominence especially in pop culture (e.g. songs about 'ξενιτιά').

το χέρι σου, να προσηλωθείς όχι στα πράγματα αλλά στον εαυτό σου, γίνεται λίγο λίγο ο καθρέφτης όπου αντικρίζεις εκείνο που ήσουν. (78-79)³¹³

The mirror imagery recalls the third from Seferis' *Τρία κρυφά ποιήματα*

Το άσπρο χαρτί σκληρός καθρέφτης,
Επιστρέφει μόνο εκείνο που ήσουν.
Το άσπρο χαρτί μιλά με τη φωνή σου,
Τη δική σου φωνή
Όχι εκείνη που σ' αρέσει.³¹⁴

The poet here suggests that one's self only exists in what he/she writes.³¹⁵ It is in the act of writing that the writer in the text creates himself/himself. In Kiourtsakis' text, the white sheet of paper is not seen as a 'judging' mirror but as a new canvas that anticipates the act of writing. As an empty tableau it calls for the contribution of the writer in the text, who will create the text by constructing his nostos and articulate it through Dikolon. Moreover, both Seferis and the writer in Kiourtsakis' text present living and writing as two functions that happen simultaneously. In an opening statement the writer in *Σαν Μυθιστόρημα* emphatically links the state of being and the act of writing by saying "από τότε που γράφεις, από τότε που υπάρχεις". (9) In this way, the effect of the fusion between reality and fiction is enhanced further, which brings to mind the identification of the 'impossible' homecoming in real life and the only possible nostos, which occurs in writing.

In Kiourtsakis' text nostos is presented as a shared 'impossible' experience that brings together the two 'participants' in the act of reading; the writer in the text and the readers. This text offers an alternative viewpoint on nostos narrative since it

³¹³ The phrase 'που σου δόθηκε να ζήσεις' echoes Seferis' verse: "Τη ζωή που μας έδωσαν να ζήσουμε, τη ζήσαμε" from *Μυθιστόρημα ΙΕ*'. See *Ποιήματα*, op. cit., p.60. The idea of living the life that we are given instead of trying to change it, also emerges in the first volume of Seferis' diaries. See *Μέρες Α'*, especially the entry on Thursday, December 17th: "πρέπει να πάψω να σκέφτομαι την απίστευτη σπατάλη της ζωής μου τα τελευταία τέσσερα χρόνια". According to Seferis, the 'other' life or the 'real life' -as he calls it- is complementary to the life given and the sentiment of nostalgia of this other life that the writer experiences is a driving force for artistic creation. See *Μέρες Α'* (*Ποιήματα*: Athens, Ikaros, 1981), p. 25.

³¹⁴ Giorgos Seferis, *ποιήματα* (Athens: Ikaros, 1981), p.300.

³¹⁵ See Roderick Beaton, 'From Mythos to Logos. The Poetics of George Seferis', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 5, no.2 (1987), p.135-152. (esp.p.135-136).

suggests that the perspective of homecoming is only possible in the context of the act of writing.

Μήπως λοιπόν πατρίδα σου είναι ακριβώς ο αδύνατος νόστος: το ταξίδι χωρίς άλλο τέλος από το τέρμα της ζωής σου ο χρόνος που περνάει δίχως γυρισμό, ο εαυτός σου που δεν μπορείς να τότε βρεις γιατί αλλάζει ακατάπαυστα- ένας τόπος που υπάρχει μόνο μέσα στη μνήμη ή μες τη φαντασία σου κι όπου δεν γίνεται να γυρίσεις;(361)³¹⁶

Dikolon's inability to fully realise 'nostos' resonates Seferis' *Μυθιστόρημα* where the poetic ego (but also the nameless shadows of the companions) set out on a quest for their identity towards the north (of Europe) only to realise that the voyage of self discovery bears a certain price and that it is impossible to retrieve an idealised form of the past.

The difficulty in the physical realization of the nostos as far as the two halves of the fictional Dikolon are concerned, could be attributed to their shared liminal identity; they are neither proper Greeks nor proper Europeans. Charis killed himself as a result of the impossible nostos that he experienced as an outcome of acquiring this dual identity of the Greek émigré. On the other hand though, this 'partial' realization of nostos by the writer in the text points out an asymmetry between the two members of Dikolon. There is indeed an asymmetry between love and death as experienced by the two brothers. The writer in the text partly realizes a 'different' nostos in terms of love and establishing a relationship with Giselle, his own non - Greek wife.

According to Kiourtsakis' admission this nostos narrative should be read as his most representative text: Συλλογίστηκα πόσο αληθινός είναι ο λόγος, ότι κατά βάθος, δεν γράφουμε σε όλη τη ζωή μας παρά ένα μοναδικό βιβλίο. (18)The reason why the text is to be read like a novel is actually this original and unique treatment of

³¹⁶ The impossibility of 'homecoming' or 'γυρισμός' in times past is the theme of Seferis' poem 'Ο γυρισμός του ξενιτεμένου' in *Ημερολόγιο καταστρώματος Α'*. See Seferis, *Τα ποιήματα*, op.cit., p. 163-165.

the impossible nostos. Unlike the hero of a traditional novel, the fictional Dikolon in *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* does not enjoy a fully successful nostos. A conventional novel would have narrated the events of the accomplished nostos only, just like *The Odyssey*. Nevertheless, this ‘αυτο –βιογραφία’ that resists clear-cut generic labels provides the writer in the text with new possibilities in nostos narrative. In the context of this new writing that is a fusion between genres, it is possible to provide a ‘fragmented’ viewpoint that explores both the partially accomplished nostos as well as the unsuccessful instead of a single narrative that would deal only with the successful or unsuccessful homecoming.

The use of self-reflexive techniques that are made available through the framework of metafiction and their combination with the autofictional background enable the writer in the text to fictionalize the process of writing about the (im)possible nostos. On the autofictional level of the text, the key fictional hero is Dikolon while on the metafictional level, the key fictional hero is the nostos narrative – the text ‘under construction’ that narrates the (im)possible ‘nostos’ of Dikolon. The combination of the metafictional and the autofictional strata of the text create a multidimensional nostos narrative that offers more than one possibilities, which respond to the different experience of nostos by the two members of Dikolon. Moreover, the degree of self-reflexivity of the text stresses that the main hero the narrative is not simply the writer in the text but also the act of writing the current text. Thus through the use of self-reflexive strategies this alternative nostos narrative draws attention to its status as an artifact and shows that the only possibility in accomplishing nostos lies with the act of creating the text.

My reading illustrates that *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* encourages us to approach it from the joint angle of autofiction and metafiction. The writer in the text borrows the figure of Dikolon from the folk tradition and elevates it via Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory to a fictional dipole that embraces his dual identity as the writing self and the 'other' – his dead brother. Yiannis Kiourtsakis invites his readers to embark upon his private adventure as he writes his 'dikolon' text in honour of another 'implied' reader – his brother and the other half of Dikolon, Charis.

'Autofiction' offers an ideal field for Dikolon to demonstrate its possible manifestations on the basis of space (Greece or francophone Europe) as well as identity (the self/the other). Through a range of self-referential strategies we realize that it is not simply the fictional Dikolon (Yiannis/Charis), who is the subject matter of the book. The subject matter of the book is the act of writing itself and its protagonist is actually this transgressive text that resists definitive and exclusive generic rubrics. It is also possible to say that in this sense *Σαν Μυθιστόρημα* is a Dikolon text encompassing both the Western tradition of the Bildungsroman and the concept of nostos, whose roots and multiple manifestations are traced across the spectre of Greek tradition. Moreover, it is a Dikolon text in terms of looking towards both autofiction and metafiction; it is essentially a text that introduces a new subcategory – the 'metafictional' autofiction.

To sum up, the many aspects of the ever-developing and ever-transforming fictional Dikolon can be summarised in the following image: that in which the one side of Dikolon faces its past experience and its other side faces the present act of writing. The self-reflexive 'autofiction' that is being written as we – the 'hypocrite readers' read it, lends itself as the ideal vehicle to accommodate a successful version of the fictional nostos of Dikolon.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Pushing autofiction to its limits: The autofiction of a town in Michel Fais' *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*

«Τελικώς αναρωτιόσουν, υπάρχει
τίποτα πιο ανεπανόρθωτα ξένο
απ' το μύχιο;»

Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου (193)

Michel Fais' *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* came out in 1994 and set the tone for Fais' engagement with autobiographical fiction throughout the nineties and beyond. It was followed by a volume of short stories entitled *Από το ίδιο ποτήρι και άλλες ιστορίες* (1999), where the writer in the text devised different personas and masks in order to conceal his autobiographical project and a short narrative entitled *Aegyptious monachus* (2001) that situates the writing self at the heart of the act of writing. Elias Yiouris grouped the three works together on the premise of their engagement with the practice of autobiography. Moreover, he suggests that these are read as three parts of an 'informal autobiographical trilogy' or as three textual representations of the autobiographical subject through the perspective of 'the self as other'.³¹⁷

The first issue that I address in this chapter is why I consider *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* as an autofiction given that the text does not revolve exclusively around an intratextual writer, who can be identified with Michel Fais (unlike the cases of Axioti, Alexakis and Kiourtsakis). My aim in the first section is to read *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* as the autofiction of the town of Komotini as it is represented through the fictional archive, which takes up the first part of the text. Therefore, I will explore the notion of the 'city-text' - a text in which the city features as the protagonist - by drawing examples from English, French and Greek. In the second section, I discuss the voicing of the text through an exploration of the different narrative personas and argue for the existence of an overarching authoring subject that constructs itself on the central axis of the city through the voices of its inhabitants. I then explore the construction and articulation of the dual identities (Greek and Jewish) of that subject and situate these on the basis of the dipole 'self' and 'other'. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss the metafictional implications of the book's

³¹⁷ See Elias Yiouris, 'Οι αυτοβιογραφίες του Μισέλ Φάις (α)', *Nea Estia* 1799 (April 2007), p. 674-710. On page 676 he introduces the term 'ετερογραφίες του εαυτού'.

title in order to propose that *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* can be read as the autofiction of the text itself in its making. In these ways I hope to demonstrate that this text pushes Greek autofictional writing to its absolute limits by negotiating multiple and shifting writing identities against the background of a fictional ‘chronicle’ of the city.

7.1. Challenging the principles of autofiction – The city as the writer in the text

A plausible question could be why *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* is included in the first place in a thesis on Greek autofiction. In this sense I am readdressing a question raised by Panayiotis Moullas in a 1995 review.³¹⁸ Moullas writes:

Υπάρχουν αυτοβιογραφίες και αυτοβιογραφίες και αυτοβιογραφίες: πραγματικές και φανταστικές, άμεσες και έμμεσες, ενδιαφέρουσες και αδιάφορες, ανθρώπινες πάντως, ή τουλάχιστον, ανθρωπομορφικές. Τώρα αποκτούμε και την αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου. Περί τίνος πρόκειται;³¹⁹

The critic spots the originality of Fais’ text amidst the corpus of autobiographical texts. The text, as its title suggests, does not revolve around a human or at least, a human-like figure. On the contrary, the subject of the ‘autobiography’ is the ‘book’.

The reader first encounters a fictionalised archive of the town of Komotini followed by four introductory drafts of an incomplete novel and finally, a long discontinuous narrative voiced by different subjects, which is occasionally interrupted by several death notices. *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* is a key-text for Greek postmodern literature due to the extensive employment of metafictional strategies and more importantly due to the mixing of different textual sources, both real and imaginary, in order to create the archive within the text. However, as far as the

³¹⁸ See Panayiotis Moullas, ‘Αυτοβιογραφία και αυτοαναφορικότητα’, *ANTI* 593 (8 December 1995), p. 63-64.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.63.

autofictional element is concerned, the answer to whether the text is an autofiction or not, is not that evident as I shall explain.

Unlike the texts examined so far in this thesis, Fais' text does not directly situate the intratextual writer in the epicentre of the narrative. Moreover, the obscurity of the biographical data provided regarding the figures of Edmond/Efthimis and Makis does not allow us to argue beyond doubt that the writer in the text is to be identified with the extratextual author, Michel Fais. In the five texts I have previously discussed, the presence of the writer in the text was too prominent from the beginning to be disputed. More specifically, in the cases of Axioti and Vassilikos the intratextual writers, Kadmo and Glafkos Thrasakis respectively, are mere masks through which the extratextual authors invade the narrative. Moreover, in the cases of Alexakis and Kiourtsakis the writers in the text are unambiguously identified as the extratextual authors through the extensive employment of self-reflexive strategies and the accurate reproduction of biographical data in the narrative. Even in Tachtsis' case, in spite of the existence of several personas or different masks there is an overarching writer in the text; the homosexual writer, who is the fictional projection of Kostas Tachtsis.

Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου however, puts to the test a new practice for writing the self by shifting the focus from the writer in the text to the space in the text. As I have illustrated, space is a key factor in the Greek autofictional texts of the nineties; in the texts of Alexakis and Kiourtsakis the bipolar construction of fictional space (France/Greece – Europe/Greece) is essential for the articulation of the dual linguistic and cultural identities. In Fais' text the space in the text is more than an indispensable background; the space in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* is actually elevated to the level of the protagonist. The city of Komotini is the textual space where the individual comes to terms with its other 'social' self – it is the space where

the private meets the public self. Therefore, through the poetics of space emerges the dual identity of the writing subject; an individual and a social one. Hence, I build upon the following remark by Yiouris:

“Ίσως το σημαντικότερο από αυτά είναι εκείνο που αναφέρεται στη σχέση του εαυτού με τον εξωτερικό κόσμο. Το βιβλίο του Φάις δεν είναι μόνο η (αυτο)βιογραφία μιας ατομικής συνείδησης, αλλά και η (αυτο)βιογραφία της συλλογικότητας μιας πόλης.”³²⁰

Fais’ text presents us with a city that has a dual textual function. On the one hand, Komotini is rendered as a literary city and at the same time it appears to be the main autobiographical subject in the text that should be understood as a ‘city-text’. The human writer in the text is the collector who puts together the fragments of the town’s history. This obscure consciousness is masked behind the voices of Edmond – Efthimis (and also Rachel and the undertaker) and becomes the medium through which the city (the town in this particular case) speaks in the text. The town becomes essentially a metaphor for the writer in the text, an entity that dominates the narrative and articulates its fragmented identities through fiction. I believe that Michel Fais is informed by both a foreign and an indigenous literary tradition of writing the city (or the town) as a protagonist. I shall first explore some possible sources of inspiration in English and French, before moving on to an examination of Fais’ predecessors in Greek.

The use of the city as the protagonist of the text is a common literary practice in twentieth century modernist literature.³²¹ Two significant examples in English are James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), a work that I have briefly discussed in chapter 2, and *Ulysses* (1922). In *Dubliners* Joyce treated the city as the ‘center of modern

³²⁰ Yiouris ,op.cit., p. 677.

³²¹ For an account on the function of the city in early modern and modernist literature see Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

consciousness', a technique that he applied in *Ulysses* as well.³²² In her essay 'Imaginary Cities: America', Joyce Carol Oates makes a remark on the role Dublin plays in *Ulysses* by arguing that Joyce's 'great subject' is 'Dublin on June 16, 1904' and not its inhabitants.³²³ She argues that Joyce's achievement is the portrayal of Dublin in the most 'precise language possible', of the city of Dublin: "that city where everyone knows everyone else".³²⁴ Joyce's Dublin is multidimensional and thus it reflects the confused characters of his novel. In a similar manner, Fais' Komotini projects a multicultural historical background in order to accommodate the fluid identities of the fictional characters, as I shall discuss in greater detail in the second section.

Two other works in English that are worth mentioning in this discussion of the city (or town) as a text are Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* and Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*. Wilder's play was written in 1937 and is set in a fictional community of Grover's Corners in New Hampshire in May 7, 1901.³²⁵ The plot is vestigial and the most important aspect of the text is the interaction among the different voices. Dylan Thomas' work appeared in 1954 as a radio drama and was later reworked as a stage play.³²⁶ There is an omniscient narrator that switches between first and second person discourse, who invites the audience to 'hear the dreams' of the inhabitants of the imaginary Welsh town of Llareggub. Thomas creates a textual universe where the voices of the inhabitants interact as they dream and think in the context of a single spring day. Once again the different voices evaporate while

³²² See Desmond Harding, *Writing the City. Urban Visions & Literary Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.57.

³²³ Joyce Carol Oates, 'Imaginary Cities: America' in Michael C. Jaye & Ann Chalmers-Watts (eds.) *Literature and the American Urban Experience. Essays on the City and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.11-33.

³²⁴ *Ibid.* p.19.

³²⁵ See Thornton Wilder, *Three Plays – Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Matchmaker* (London: Longman's, 1958), p.5-103.

³²⁶ See Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood. A Play for Voices* (London: Dent, 1954).

the town emerges as the real protagonist of both texts since it embraces the inhabitants' individual characters.³²⁷

In French postmodern literature, the city appears to be a metaphor for human consciousness but is also further elaborated in order to encompass the notion of the city as text. The notion of the city as a visual and also textual universe full of signs that the traveller/reader is called to decipher is prominent in Roland Barthes' *L'Empire des signes* (1970) as well as in Georges Perec's *Espèces d'espaces* (1974). Michel Butor further elaborates the notion of the 'city-text' in his short essay 'La ville comme texte'.³²⁸ Butor understands the city as an accumulation of different kinds of texts, without restricting his view to its function in literature. As city-related text, he identifies the inscriptions that the visitor-reader is challenged to decipher in order to navigate his/her way around the city. Moreover, he relates the city-text to the detective novel in order to make a stronger case for his 1956 novel *L'emploi du temps*. In this particular novel the city of Manchester is the subject matter. The hero, Jacques Revel is a figure that tries to decode and discover the mysteries of the Manchester, which in the context of the novel is called Bleston.³²⁹ In his treatment of the novel, Albérès uses terms such as 'puzzle' and 'labyrinth' and suggests that Butor's novel follows a 'detective' form ('une forme policière') that is common in texts of the Nouveau Roman circle. I shall return to the concept of the 'detective' role that the reader undertakes when discussing the complex web created on the level of the characters' voices and their interaction in Fais' text in the second section of the chapter.

³²⁷ In this context it is worth mentioning that *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* was adapted as a stage play in 1995.

³²⁸ See Michel Butor, *Répertoire V* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), p. 31-42.

³²⁹ See R.M. Albérès, *Metamorphoses du roman* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1972) (first pub.1966), p.153-164.

Semi-fictional representations of cities are an established tradition in Modern Greek literature. The city plays a prominent role in texts that appear as early as the second half of the nineteenth century. In the fifty-year period from 1870-1920, the capital city, Athens features as a space for literary texts since it showcases the shaping of a Modern Greek urban identity through the illustration of the dynamics that govern interpersonal relationships in the urban space as well as the representation of the life in the city.³³⁰ Athens features in a number of works including the anonymously published *Η στρατιωτική ζωή εν Ελλάδι* (1870-1),³³¹ Mitsakis' *Αθηναϊκαί σελίδες*, Papadiamantis' Athenian short stories, Kondylakis' *Οι άθλιοι των Αθηνών* (1894), Christomanos' *Η κερένια κούκλα* (1911), to such an extent that Tsirimokou describes Athens as the Greek city-text.³³²

The dominance of Athens as a unique Greek literary city is challenged in the twentieth century as other provincial towns come to prominence – most notably Thessaloniki.³³³ Pentzikis' *Μητέρα Θεσσαλονίκη* (1970) is a slim volume that includes texts written during the period 1935-1962, which focus on the Byzantine heritage and religious aspect of Thessaloniki and illustrate the writer's organic relationship with the city. In Ioannou's collections of short stories *Για ένα φιλότιμο* (1964), *Η σαρκοφάγος* (1971) and *Η πρωτεύουσα των προσφύγων* (1984), Salonica emerges as

³³⁰ See Lizzie Tsirimokou, Lizzie. *Γραμματολογία της πόλης/Λογοτεχνία της πόλης/Πόλεις της λογοτεχνίας* (Athens: Lotos, 1988). This trend that Tsirimokou describes as 'αστική ηθογραφία' is the second principal trend in Greek prose of the late nineteenth century. 'Urban-centered fiction' initially develops on the margins of 'folkloric realism', the trend that under the aegis of the review *Estia* dominates Greek letters in the two last decades of the nineteenth century (p.18). For more information or on the term 'folkloric realism' see Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.73-74. See also Georgia Gkotsi, *Η ζωή εν τη πρωτεύουση: Θέματα αστικής πεζογραφίας από τα τέλη του 19^{ου} αιώνα* (Athens: Nefeli, 2004).

³³¹ The author has been identified as Charilaos Dimopoulos. See Panayiotis Moullas, "Ενας γνωστός άγνωστος. Ο συγγραφέας της *Στρατιωτικής Ζωής εν Ελλάδι*" in Nasos Vayenas (ed), *Από τον Λεάνδρο στον Λουκή Λάρα: μελέτες για την πεζογραφία της περιόδου (1830-1880)* (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1977), p. 269-277 (especially p. 266-267).

³³² *Ibid.*, p.15.

³³³ See Venetia Apostolidou, 'Ο ρόλος της πεζογραφίας στη μυθοποίηση της πόλης – Το παράδειγμα της Θεσσαλονίκης', *Entefktirio* 45 (1998/99), p.29-40.

the city of refugees against the background of the mid thirties, the Axis Occupation, the civil war and the post-war period. In Ioannou's stories the reader experiences the organic link that the city of Thessaloniki develops with the writers. It is possible to say that both authors discuss the city in terms of a body that accommodates the authoring consciousness and that both maintain a quasi-erotic relationship with the city.

Prevelakis' *Το χρονικό μιας πολιτείας* (1938) is a fictionalized account of his hometown, Rethimno, covering the period from the end of the Cretan Insurgence until after the arrival of the refugees after the Asia Minor Disaster.³³⁴ The anonymous narrator weaves together several individual stories of the city's Greek and Turkish inhabitants, conveying a sentiment of nostalgia for the past and bitterness for the city's current decline. Prevelakis' characters (perhaps with the exception of Madame Hortense) remain mere sketches as their individual stories are treated as textual vignettes that comprise a fictional 'chronicle' of the city.

This is not the case however with Dimitris Hatzis' collection of stories *Το τέλος της μικρής μας πόλης*, first published in 1953. In this volume Hatzis explores the changing urban landscape of another provincial town, Yiannena through the examples of the suffering group of tobacco workers in 'Ο Σιούλας ο ταμπάκος', the liquidated Jewish community in 'Σαμπεθαί Καμπιλής' or the demise of the a great family in 'Μαργαρίτα Περδικάρη'. Hatzis' characters are well developed in contrast to those of Prevelakis; however, alongside the multitude of the individual protagonists in every story, the town of Ioannina – that is not once named - remains the principal character of the collection since it provides the unifying link for reading the stories as a sequence that explores the changing environment of the provincial town.

³³⁴ Pantelis Prevelakis, *Το χρονικό μιας πολιτείας* (Athens: Galaxias, 1961) (first pub. 1938).

All this demonstrates that Michel Fais had a rich tradition of fictional and semi-fictional treatments of cities at his disposal from both Greek and foreign literatures. In the first part of the text he inserts these traditions of the textual renderings of the city in his semi-fictional construction of the archive of Komotini.

I shall now focus on Fais' experiment with the boundaries of autofiction and the emergence of the city as the writer in the text. The means through which Komotini takes over the place of the writer in the autofictional text is the archive that will provide the basis for the book that is referred to in the title and the final part of the text. The archive draws attention to the urban character of Komotini and highlights its historical presence. The existence of the archive is linked to multiple acts of treasuring written material as well as recording oral history.

This fictional archive is a collection of 'pseudo-historical' records, transcripts of interviews with Komotini's inhabitants or even radio broadcasts, transcripts of court cases, lists of business directories, newspaper articles, announcements and advertisements, postcards and photos that are not visually reproduced but are nevertheless verbally described.³³⁵ The intratextual collector's identity is revealed towards the end of the section: he is Edmond Bahar or Efthimis, who claims that this scattered and diverse material might become a scrapbook in the future. Ίσως, στο μέλλον αυτό το υλικό να πάρει τη μορφή ενός λευκώματος- βιβλίου admits Edmond, suggesting that the act of classifying the archive leads to the act of writing the book in hand. (77)

³³⁵ Thanassis Valtinos employed similar material in *Στοιχεία για τη δεκαετία του 60* (Athens: Stigma, 1989). In his fictional representation of the decade of the 1960s, Valtinos included material from different sources such as fictional letters, newspaper articles, and advertisements in order to construct a tableau of the transforming postwar Greek society and account for the phenomenon of emigration. For an interesting analysis of the archive in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* see Bart Soethaert, 'Πέρα από τον καθρέφτη. Η διαμόρφωση του υποκειμένου στην πεζογραφία (1994-2004) του Μισέλ Φάις' (unpublished MPhil dissertation, Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2008), p. 11-20.

The first part of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* is an attempt to familiarize the reader with previous forms of the city. The newspaper extracts frame the textual past of the city during the years 1927 until 1967, however the transcripts of the interviews are dated as late as 1987, while there are also references to the early history of the city (from the 14th century onwards after the establishment of Ottoman rule). The dates provided in the text can be read as the biographical data of the town in the text. The period covered by the end of the 1920s until the end of the 1980s is apparently a period of transformation for Komotini, similar to the transformation of Athens at the end of the nineteenth century or at the beginning of the twentieth century in the case of Thessaloniki. It is the period that Komotini becomes a part of the Greek state and is in search of its new, urban identity. In contrast to Athens, it is a city with a diverse ethnic background. Apart from the growing numbers of Greeks due to the influx of refugees, Komotini is also home to Muslims (Pomaks), Jews, Armenians and Gypsies. This linguistic and religious diversity of Komotini does not encourage a single, unified narrative but it privileges discontinuity and fragmentation. In order for the city to write its own autobiography, it is essential to deconstruct the great narratives of the past and lay bare its fragmented identities. In the second section I will discuss the issue of the various speaking voices in greater detail so as to make the case for the existence of an overarching human consciousness. The latter can be identified as the writer in the text, who employs the voices of others (and the different identities) in order to narrate the self-reflexive text.

I have illustrated how the town of Komotini functions not merely as a ‘topos’ in Fais’ text but as a dispersed human being that embarks upon an autobiographical

project.³³⁶ The city in the current text is ‘human-like’ or ‘anthropoid’ since through its archive it creates its own narrative. In this text, the writer is organically identified with Komotini to the extent that the writing consciousness is absorbed by the presence of the city in the text. Fais stretches the limits of autofictional writing to an extreme by employing the metaphor of the city as the writer of the text and based on the tradition of the literature of the city. In this way he detaches autofiction from its purely individualistic basis and suggests an original perspective on autofiction that explores the identity of the writing consciousness on the dual perspective of social versus individual identity. As I shall show in the following sections, this dual perspective is reproduced in the coexistence of Greek and Jewish identities and articulated through the intersection of different voices in the text.

7.2. The narrating voices: The multiplication of the speaking subject(s)

The voicing of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* is a key point of my analysis since my main objective is to explore the way in which Fais creates a ‘polyphonic’ text by bringing together many different voices. My first task is to provide an overview of the narrating voices in the order that they are introduced in the opening section of the text. I will then undertake ‘detective’ work in order to clarify the complicated relationships between the principal albeit sketchy characters and their respective voices in parts two and three.

Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου is a text that rejects the notion of a single ‘unified’ textual consciousness by presenting the reader with a multitude of narratives, voiced

³³⁶ See Jane Augustine, ‘From Topos to Anthropoid: The city as a character in twentieth century texts’ in Mary Ann Caws (ed.), *City Images. Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy and Film* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1993), p. 73- 85 (esp. p.73-4).

by different subjects.³³⁷ The subheading of the first part of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*, ‘ένα αρχείο ή τα χνώτα της πόλης’ is I believe highly evocative since the word ‘χνώτα’ draws attention to the act of breathing but is also associated to voice and hence, to the act of speaking.

The textual strategy of multi-voiced narration is particularly evident in the first part of the text, where the archive of the city is constructed through the recorded oral testimonies of its inhabitants. The voices belong to: the local history connoisseur and archive holder Agisilaos Kouloglou, the town’s photographer Xenophon Papazekos, the tobacco worker Athanasios Avramides, the tanner that is simply named as Alekos’ grandfather, the old lady Thodoroula, the cyclist, barber and World War II veteran Odysseas Kerasidis, the EAM partisan Panayiotis, the cinema owner Kostas Poallas, the two seamstress Koula and Litsa Ntountoukmanidou, the prostitutes Evangelia and Georgia, the mute Manolakis, the imaginary girl called Melaniasmeni, the brothel client Kostas Raftopoulos and the former municipal library employee and also local history connoisseur, Yiannis Ahtalis.

The voices which are heard in the first part of the text, are orchestrated in a very specific way. It is important that the first part opens and closes with the voices of Agisilaos Kouloglou and Yiannis Ahtalis, two experts on the local history of Komotini. Kouloglou’s narration provides an overview of Komotini’s history in the style of a chronicle that goes back to the fourteenth century, with occasional projections into the narrator’s family history. The opening narration reproduces a ‘nationalist’ discourse that emphasizes Greek Komotini and overlooks the town’s

³³⁷ There is an established tradition in multivoiced texts in the twentieth century. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and Faulkner’s novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930) are two indicative cases of twentieth century texts, in which more than a single voice are heard from beginning to end illustrating the fragmentary nature of literary modernism on the narrative level. In a list of Greek ‘multi-voiced’ texts, I would include Nikos Mprakolas’ *Ο Κήπος των περιγρήπων* (1966) and Thanassis Valtinos’ *Ορθοκωστά* (1994).

multinational and multicultural history.³³⁸ The final narration is disguised as an imaginary interview in which the voices of Ahtalis and the ‘collector’ Edmond Bahar are brought together. The former librarian Yiannis Ahtalis offers information regarding the town’s minority history, an aspect that is omitted in the opening narration. The latter’s narration puts forward a counter discourse when read in parallel with the first since Ahtalis focuses on the Jewish and the Armenian communities as well as on the Gypsies and the Pomaks. Ahtalis’ account of the town’s history could also be read as a ‘*historia arcana*’ given the abundance of references to prostitution, minorities, venereal diseases and criminality that are absent in the first narration that limits its subject matter strictly to what it could be considered as ‘official history’.

Between these two narratives, we encounter a large group of individual narratives from various inhabitants of Komotini who do not share a similar educational background with Kouloglou and Ahtalis. This encapsulates the notion of ‘history from below’ as important events like the influx of the refugees after the Asia Minor Disaster, the Bulgarian Occupation, the deportation of the town’s Jews, the civil war and postwar migration current are presented through the perspectives of common people that do not have any authority in the city and are occasionally marginalised.³³⁹ The multiple voices in the first part of the text serve specifically to underline the distinction between the ‘oral’ testimony as this is offered by the ordinary citizens of Komotini and the ‘learned’ or ‘written’ history as this is communicated through the narrations of the archivist and the librarian. This

³³⁸ In his review of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* Mazower considered the novel as a “literary response” to the “‘nationally-minded’ school of Greek history, fixated with the theme of Hellenic continuity”. See Mark Mazower, ‘The Jews of Northern Greece: a Review Essay’, *Bulletin of Judaeo-Greek Studies* 17 (1995), p. 40-44.

³³⁹ In the third part of the text Makis ironically refers to the collector Edmond/Efthimis as ο Μπροντέλ της Κομοτηνής. The reference to the French historiographer, who was an influential figure of the so-called ‘Annales’ school reinforces my argument that the archive is employed here as a fictional device that draws attention to a communal identity.

distinction will emerge more fully later in my analysis on the level of identity construction, where the ‘oral’ and ‘written’ discourse will be explored as the two poles governing the overarching writing consciousness.

Alongside the fictional testimonies of Komotini’s inhabitants, the city’s press comes across as another narrating voice. Despite not being a spoken human voice, the press plays a significant part in the text, as it provides a panoramic view of the city that spans over four decades. The use of the newspaper as one of the main narrating voices is not an actual novelty introduced by Fais; five years before *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* came out, Thanassis Valtinos used the newspaper medium as one of the main props in his transgressive *Στοιχεία για τη δεκαετία του 60*. In order to argue for the particular effect created by the employment of print media in the narrative propose, I propose a parallel reading with the Aeolus episode in Joyce’s *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses* we encounter tabloid-style headlines of newspapers that interrupt the flow of the narrative. The episode in which Leopold Bloom visits the offices of the newspaper *The Freeman’s Journal* in Dublin is read in the light of the episode of the Odyssey that takes place on the island of Aeolus, the god of the winds. The newspaper is a medium that transmits the political upheaval in 1904 Dublin. Furthermore, by implication of the Homeric myth according to which Ulysses’ companions set the winds loose and their act resulted in a shipwreck, one can also stress the power of the press to mislead and disorientate its readers.

As far as Fais’ text is concerned, the choice of the newspaper as a narrating voice intensifies the effect of the multiple voices since it is not a single newspaper that is used but eight. The names of the newspapers, anchor the text to a specific time period (1926-1968) and to Komotini (or the wider region of Rhodope and Evros)

since there is no reference to any of the mainstream newspapers.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, the employment of the newspaper as a fictional prop enhances the distinction between the ‘oral’ and the ‘written’. The newspapers are narrating voices that are ironically articulated mainly in katharevousa (with only occasional switches to demotic) so as to comment on the petty bourgeois character of interwar and postwar Komotini. This linguistic selection also reflects the rift between the purist discourse that was par-excellence used in written context and the demotic that dominated oral discourse and moreover, sets the tone for a discussion of the ‘oral’ versus the ‘written’ element that I discuss in the final section.

I turn now to an examination of the principal characters as those are delineated by the narrating voices. Although these characters never emerge fully, they gain prominence as they can be read as refractions of human consciousness in this autofiction, where the city features as the dominant ‘autobiographical’ subject. The first character in order of appearance is Anthropaki (little man),³⁴¹ who is introduced through a series of letters that allegedly appear in the weekly review entitled *Επίκαιρα*. Anthropaki establishes communication with Melinda, the magazine columnist that offers advice to readers.³⁴² The series of Melinda’s responses help us sketch the persona of Anthropaki. He is a fifteen-year-old boy from Komotini, who has no friends and feels suicidal. The date of the letters (1972) and the reference to his

³⁴⁰ See the names of the newspapers (both actual and fictional newspapers): *Πρωία, Η Φωνή της Ροδόπης, Ο Προοδευτικός, Θρακικά Νέα, Η Πρόοδος, Ο Χρόνος, Η Κομοτινή, Η Ελευθέρα Σκέψις*.

³⁴¹ In his latest novel entitled *Κτερίσματα*, Fais claims to have originally modeled Anthropaki on one of the characters of an illustrated version of Victor Hugo’s novel *L’homme qui rit* (1869). He also mentions Tsirkas’ fictional Anthropaki (the infamous propagandist part instructor in *Ακυβέρνητες πολιτείες*). See Michel Fais, *Κτερίσματα* (Athens: Patakis, 2012), p.107. Note that in Greek the term ‘anthropaki’ is often used in a derogatory manner, meaning ‘petty man’. In his diaries Tsirkas recounts the sources of inspiration for the character of Anthropaki. See *Τα ημερολόγια της τριλογίας* (Athens: Kedros, 1973), p.86.

³⁴² This is reminiscent again of Valtinos’ text *Στοιχεία για τη δεκαετία του 1960*, where we come across letters to a radio broadcaster named Mina.

birthday in April suggests that the age of Anthropaki is identified with the age of the extratextual author Michel Fais, who was born on April 1st 1957 in Komotini.³⁴³

Anthropaki appears to be also identifiable with the young characters of Pentzikis' works that commit suicide in *Ανδρέας Δημακούδης* (1934) and *Ο πεθαμένος και η ανάσταση* (1938).³⁴⁴ The most fundamental question that Anthropaki puts forward is of an existentialist nature but also draws attention to the issues of identity: Ποιός είμαι; Γιατί υπάρχω; (85). Anthropaki finally discards his persona and his pen name in order to introduce himself as Makis Efthimiou. His parents are both doctors but he confesses that he is unhappy due to the constant quarrelling of his parents. He also admits that he has a speech defect; he has a stammer. He remarks: Το μεγαλύτερο μαρτύριό μου είναι η βραδυγλωσσία μου. Άρχισα να τραυλίζω από τα τέσσερά μου. Εξαιτίας αυτού του γεγονότος κλείστηκα ερμητικά στον εαυτό μου. (106)

Anthropaki/Makis is an introvert and tries to overcome the speech defect through writing. His inability to socialize in real life because of his speech disability leads him to the act of writing in the form of correspondence as a means of healing his trauma of isolation. However, the correspondence between Anthropaki and Melinda is terminated abruptly in 1973 at the aftermath of the uprising of the Athens Polytechnic School. We are told that it was the latter's initiative since Anthropaki remained self-absorbed by his own distress amidst the political upheaval and the social turmoil.

The second character that is introduced is Edmond, who in the first part of the text is presented as the collector that puts together the intratextual archive. It is

³⁴³ See Fais' autobiographical note on the collaborative volume of short stories *Ξένος, ο άλλος μου εαυτός*. Instead of a conventional note in third person, Fais uses the second person: Γεννήθηκες στην Κομοτηνή, από Εβραίο πατέρα και Πατρινά μητέρα, την Πρωταπριλιά του 1957. Michel Fais (ed.). *Ξένος, ο άλλος μου εαυτός* (Athens: Patakis, 1999).

³⁴⁴ There is a reference to a student named Anastasios Meintanis who committed suicide in 1957 according to the three fictional notes that are incorporated in the text. (p.62)

important that the text itself draws attention to Edmond's double name; in a note placed in brackets Edmond is identified as Efthimis (a main narrating persona that appears in the third part). Edmond Bahar is not a Greek name; the first name can be identified as French-Jewish whilst the surname is oriental sounding.³⁴⁵ According to his sister Rachel (the main narrating voice of the first draft of the incomplete novel in part two), Edmond suffers from a speech disorder (like Anthropaki/Makis). Rachel remarks: Ο Έντμοντ άρχισε να κομπιάζει. Άλλο πάλι κι αυτό! Ξαφνικά εκεί που καθόμασταν στην κουζίνα. Μασάει τις λέξεις. Μήπως πονάει στο στόμα; (115)

According to the biographical data provided, Edmond was born prematurely (he is referred to as 'εφταμηνήτικο') and he is welcomed by his father as a lucky omen since at the time of his birth, the comforts of modern living such as water supply in the household were made available. The reference however to the sudden stuttering, which Rachel later describes as 'ανυπόφορο' gives us a hint regarding the true nature of this speech defect that I will be discussing in the following paragraphs. Just as in the case of Anthropaki/Makis, Edmond's parents are both doctors, who quarrel and finally separate.

So far I have concentrated on the characters of Anthropaki and Edmond/Efthimis. There is another speaking subject that is referred to as Michel in the text. Michel is a young Jew (158), the eldest son of the rabbi Fais, who according to a rumor reproduced by the librarian might have survived the Shoah. (85) Michel's voice enters the text in the fourth draft of the incomplete novel, in which the main theme is the transfer of the members of the Jewish community of Komotini to Salonica in May 1943 before their deportation to Europe's death camps. The teenage boy called Michel is an avatar of the extratextual author since he bears his name and

³⁴⁵ Bahar in Turkish is a male and female name meaning 'spring' or figuratively 'youth'. See H.C. Hony & Fahir Iz, *The Oxford Turkish-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 52.

he shares the Greek/Jewish identity. The identification of names appears towards the end of the narration as a climax to the name game that is delicately established throughout the text. We read: Και μου' λεγε ο ραββίνος: Το θέμα δεν είναι να κάνεις καλές πράξεις. Το θέμα μας, Μισέλ, είναι να μην σκέφτεσαι ποτέ το κακό για τον άλλο. (162)

As far as the surname Fais is concerned, this reappears in the third part of the text. In the third part Makis reveals that he gave his estranged best friend Edmond/Efthimis a diary belonging to the rabbi. Τι μου' ρθε και μένα να του δώσω εκείνο το κωλοημερολόγιο – Μάις, Ράις - πως τον έλεγαν εκείνο τον τρομπά τον Εβραίο. Γιατί από τότε του λάσκαρε η βίδα για το μυθιστόρημα.(230) The name is not simply changed in the text but it is also parodied. The family name Fais is thinly veiled and its bearer is presented as a foolish Jew. In this way the narrating voices gain autonomy and seem to expose the extratextual author who concealed his Jewish identity under the names of Efthimis and Makis.

Another character is M. - an aspiring writer that cannot write: Ο Μ. θέλει να γράψει, μα δεν μπορεί.(162)³⁴⁶ The excerpts that focus on M. are printed in different characters so as to be distinguished typographically from the main body of the narrative. M. is introduced in the context of a failed affair with Magda, the dominant female narrating voice along with Rachel. Magda voices the final narration of part three and she appears to have had a love affair with both Edmond/Efthimis and Makis/Anthropaki, which resulted in a breakdown of their relationships and the failure of their childhood friendship. M. also suffers from a speech impediment like Edmond/Efthimis and Makis/Anthropaki. We read: [...] ένα ανέμελο πένθος τότε σε διαπερνούσε. Και τραύλιζες παντού, ακατάπαυστα. Τραύλιζες τόσο που δεν είχες πια

³⁴⁶ Note that M. was the first component of the pen name M. Karagatsis, used by Dimitris Rodopoulos.

μάτια να αντικρίσεις κανέναν στον κόσμο. (191) M.'s inability to control his speech impediment identifies him closely with Anthropaki/ Makis as his verbal trauma results in his isolation and his agonising efforts to write.

Fais explores to the limits the possibilities of representing the speaking subject as disjointed fragments, resisting the possibility of a unified textual entity. He thus offers four 'versions' of an incomplete novel that are closely linked to the disjointed narrative of the third part, where again different voices assume the role of the narrator. I believe that the original split of the narrating voice into two personas as this is illustrated with the double naming in the individual cases of Edmond and Anthropaki (as Efthimis and Makis respectively) is further expanded in a more crucial split. I am referring to a split on the level of the overarching human consciousness in the text; a split that results in the 'duplicated' dipole Edmond/Efthimis vs Anthropaki/Makis. As I have shown above, although Edmond/Efthimis and Anthropaki/Makis appear as two men from a different social background, they share the same speech impediment that is rooted in their miserable family life and they also share a past love affair with Magda. An initial indication regarding the identification between Makis and Edmond is the fact that Makis' family name is Efthimiou. As I have mentioned earlier, Edmond is identified as Efthimis already in the first part of the text. Hence, given this additional nominal detail (identification of family name and first name in the case of the two characters) one can suggest that Edmond and Makis are fundamentally versions of the same subject.

The third part of the text addresses this relationship between the two by staging a meeting in Komotini that results in a confrontation that leaves Anthropaki/Makis embittered towards his old friend as he realizes that Edmond/Efthimis is writing a novel, whose hero is modeled on Makis.

Anthropaki/Makis reacts to the appropriation of his life by Edmond/Efthimis for the purpose of writing a novel and he feels that: Αυτός με έβλεπε σαν ήρωα του Κάφκα.

(229) In their final conversation, Efthimis/Edmond in turn admits to Makis: ότι βασικά μιμούμαι τον εαυτό μου να σε αντιγράφει. (233)

The final narrating voice that belongs to Magda provides a key to decoding the obscure relationship between Edmond/Efthimis and Makis/Anthropaki. Magda presents Efthimis and Makis as the two sides of a coin; as two complementary aspects of the same character. Magda says: Η συνηθισμένη ιστορία. Ο ένας παίρνει τα χούγια του άλλου. Ο ένας αντιγράφει τον άλλο. [...] Όποτε ο Μάκης χαλαρώνει και γίνεται διαλλακτικός ή εξομολογητικός, ο Ευθύμης χάνει το χρώμα του. Μεταμορφώνεται. Στο ίδιο λεπτό. [...] Και το αντίστροφο φυσικά. (239-240)

This admission sheds light on the seemingly complicated relationship between the two characters. The term that emerges here is ‘transformation’: Efthimis/Edmond transforms himself into Makis/Anthropaki and appropriates his speech impediment in order to employ it as a fictional prop whilst Makis as a ‘little man’ tries to live the bourgeois life of Efthimis and appropriate his dual linguistic identity by teaching himself French. (231)³⁴⁷

According to Magda the relationship between Efthimis and Makis is best described as the relationship between the author and the hero. Magda says:

Όλα αυτά όμως, που ακούγονται λιγάκι εξωπραγματικά, ξέρετε που αποκτούν τις πραγματικές τους διαστάσεις; [...] Στο βιβλίο. Στο βιβλίο που γράφει. [...] Εκεί η σχέση του συγγραφέα και του ήρωα- του Ευθύμη και του Μάκη; να μην παραφρονήσουμε κιόλας- είναι στην κυριολεξία, ανοιχτό βιβλίο. (244)

There is therefore a doubling of the intratextual author and the hero, as one would anticipate in an overall ‘autofictional’ project. As Magda puts it, the author

³⁴⁷ It is possible that Makis is just a short form for Efthimis’ name, which supports the overall argument of Makis’ belittled behaviour as ‘ανθρωπάκι’.

Efthimis doubles himself in fiction by creating a fictional persona for Makis and by appropriating Makis' characteristics like the speech impediment and by projecting his own characteristics onto Makis. However, I believe that the hero/author relationship is further projected on a wider level by connecting M. and Michel with Efthimis and Makis. Efthimis, Makis, M., Magda, Edmond and Michel all are names that either begin with or include the letter 'M'. On the level of the intratextual 'novel', M. features as an intratextual author like Edmond/Efthimis whereas the name Michel Fais that appears split is a textual reference to the extratextual writer of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*, in a manner that echoes the appearance Doubrovsky's name in his autofictions. The dispersion of the narrating subject is initiated in the first part of the text and climaxed in the second part where we read the four drafts of an incomplete novel with a truncated narrative articulated through a plethora of voices. The third part of the text centers the climax of the conflict between the self and the 'other' self on the basis of the confrontation of Efthimis and Makis and finally provides a key to the solution of the reading puzzle of the multiple narrative personas.

As Yiouris suggests, the identity of the subjects in Fais' text resists a holistic approach. As I have shown, the speaking subject's identity is constructed by employing 'fluctuating' biographical data that changes according to which voice narrates each time and finally dissolves in the overall act of writing.³⁴⁸ In the first section, I argued that this is predominantly an autofiction in which the protagonist is the city, Komotini. Nevertheless, in the light of the above, the existence of an overarching human consciousness cannot be disputed. Despite the fragmentation on all levels of the narrative, there is indeed an overarching human consciousness that bears two main characteristics: the speech defect and the engagement with the act of

³⁴⁸ Yiouris op.cit., p. 675.

writing. Fais' treatment of the speaking subject suggests that the self is best understood through an exploration of its 'otherness' and this is realized in the text on the level of narrative with the extremely delicate role play but also on the level of typographical representation.³⁴⁹

The speaking subject's identity (and consequently the writing consciousness' identity) is articulated on the basis of a dichotomy between the 'oral' and the 'written' as well the 'self' and the 'other'. The overarching consciousness emerges through the act of writing that unifies the dispersed 'oral' fragments. The writing act is a not only the single unifying process in the text but it is also healing since it provides the only textual solution to the issue of 'oral' disability. The speaking subject assembles the voices of others because he can't speak for himself. In other words, the overarching consciousness is hiding behind the speaking masks of his fellow-citizens in an effort to 'write' the autofiction of Komotini but also the 'autofiction' of the writer's 'other' communal or even 'oral' self.

To sum up, this section has explored the perplexed voicing of the text and argued for the existence of an overarching consciousness that is veiled behind the multitude of narrating voices. The existence of this interesting array of voices makes the case that there is an overarching consciousness in the text that assumes different masks just like the consciousness in Tachtsis' *Τα ρέστα*. The narrating voices help articulate the subject's dual identity as Greek/Jewish and along the lines of 'self' and 'the other'. However, further analysis of the dual identity will be pursued through the overall autofictional project and the process of writing the book in hand.

³⁴⁹ As far as the typographical representation is concerned, the different types of layout suggest that *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* presents us with different versions of 'otherness' that co-create the textual self of Komotini.

7.3. “Κατά το ήμισυ Εβραίος”: The dual identity of the subject

In this section I employ once again the dipole “self/other self” that has appeared in my reading of Alexakis’ and Kiourtsakis’ texts. I do so in order to make the case that *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* exemplifies the splitting of the overarching subject between the Greek and the Jewish ethnic, cultural and to a lesser degree, religious identities.

In an article exploring the impact of Jewish heritage on Fais’ writing, Rika Benveniste argues that both direct and indirect references to Jewish culture can be traced in Fais’ corpus, which suggest the return to what she defines as ‘Jewishness’ (“μια επιστροφή σε κάποια εβραϊκότητα”).³⁵⁰ Benveniste goes on to determine Fais’ ‘Jewishness’ in terms of an alternative identity, which is primarily a textual construct. In order to support her argument, she draws a parallel between the textual manifestations of Jewish identity in Fais’ texts and the case of the Marranos, the Iberian Jews that were forced to convert to Christianity but ‘silently’ preserved their faith and returned to it, if the right occasion arose. Edmond’s return to Komotini and the construction of the archive in the current text are interpreted as the intratextual writer’s gestures to reconnect with his latent Jewish identity and *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* is considered to be the initial stage in Fais’ ‘marranic’ project.

The Jewish identity is perceived in the text as a manifestation of ‘otherness’; an attribute that designates its bearers as members of a specific minority within Greek society. In the first part of the book, Achthalis discusses with Edmond the ‘neutral’ stance of the town’s Jews in the 1919 referendum concerning the incorporation of Thrace to the Greek state. On the one hand, the Jews are described in their majority as

³⁵⁰ Rika Benveniste, ‘Η μαρρανική γραφή του Μισέλ Φάις’, *Nea Estia* 1783 (November 2005), p.760-768 (esp. p.760).

well-educated merchants, members of the middle-class or the upper middle class and proper ‘cosmopolitans’ (80,82) – yet, on the other, they appear as a secluded community. The reference to their poorer neighbourhood (the road known as οδός Μακκαβαίων which is ‘hellenicised’ as οδός Καραολή in the post EOKA years) is expressed with the slightly derogatory term ‘εβραϊγιά’ and is associated with a ‘ghetto’ (81). The references to the Jewish community are also framed by the term ‘taboo’, which is used in order to comment on the Jewish mentality of discouraging marriages between Jews and non-Jews (Η αφομοίωση ήταν ταμπού p.82).

Moreover, in the second part of the book and more specifically in the extracts narrated by Rachel, we can find more explicit references that convey the feeling of ‘otherness’ and even alienation experienced by the Jewish subject in the text. Rachel’s exclamation: Είμαι μια άσχημη, άσχημη Εβραία evokes a literary stereotype, according to which the Jew as someone who is identified as the ‘other’, is dismissed as ‘ugly’.³⁵¹ There is also a single reference to customary behavior during Easter week (throwing stones against the windows of Jewish houses) that exemplifies the deeply rooted prejudice against the Jew as the ‘other’ in Greek society. These few, nonetheless emphatic references to the stereotypes regarding Jews frame my discussion of the dual identity in the text and solidify the distinction between the two identities (Greek/Jewish) on the basis of the ‘self’ versus ‘other’ archetype.

The issue of the dual identity in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* could be epitomized in the identification of Edmond and Efthimis. The name Edmond Bahar is exposed as the Jewish alias for Efthimis/Makis already in the first part of the text. As noted earlier, Edmond strikes the reader as a ‘non-Greek’ name and the fact that the writer in the text carries a name of foreign origin alongside his Greek name(s)

³⁵¹ See Fragkiski Ampatzopoulou, *Ο άλλος εν διωγμό. Η εικόνα του Εβραίου στη λογοτεχνία. Ζητήματα ιστορίας και μυθοπλασίας* (Athens: Themelio, 1998), p.167-238.

establishes the distinction between the ‘Jewish’ and the ‘Greek’ selves. Furthermore, the name Edmond raises the issue of ‘westernization’ since its presumed French origin manifests the preference of Komotini’s Jews towards French culture. According to the information provided by Achtalis, the Jewish community of Komotini frequented schools that offered instruction in French.³⁵² It is therefore possible to attach a supplementary French identity to Jewishness. The realisation that the Jewish ethnic and religious identity is combined with a complementary French cultural and linguistic identity connects Fais’ text to those of Alexakis and Kiourtsakis, making a strong case for the emergence of common dual identities (Greek/French) during the second period of Greek autofiction.

Edmond (like Fais) is half Jew; his father is a secular Jew from Drama. Although the religious component is suppressed in Edmond’s case, it is still a component of his identity. The fact that his parents separate and Edmond moves to Athens with his mother and is hence distanced from his father, contributes to the disempowerment of his Jewish self. The image of Jesus on his writing book at school illustrates that the Christian identity is promoted as the sole religious identity through formal education (152). There is a difference between the writer in the text in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* and Edmond as far as the religious identity is concerned. Unlike Alexakis’ protagonist, who includes himself in the religious minority of Catholics, Edmond does not adopt his father’s religious identity. Furthermore, he is not exposed to derogatory remarks regarding the ‘other’ non Christian identity made by non Jewish members of his family, in the way Alexakis’ intratextual persona was exposed to his mother’s comments on ‘ψευτοέλληνες’.

³⁵² This becomes particularly evident in the case of Makis, who is envious of Edmond’s French education and tries to assimilate this identity trait.

Έτσι κι αλλιώς τα εβραϊκά ανακλαστικά του ήταν μειωμένα. Κι όχι μόνο διότι ήταν κατά το ήμισυ Εβραίος. Αφού κι ο πατέρας του, που προερχόταν από εξαιρετικά θρησκόληπτη οικογένεια, περιοριζόταν στο να τηλεφωνεί στους συγγενείς του στη Δράμα και στην Αθήνα μόνο τις ημέρες της Ροζ Ασανά και του Πεσάχ. (164-5)

The impression that Jewishness is not understood here exclusively on the basis of religious faith is further enhanced: Τελειώνοντας το δημοτικό, αν και δεν τηρούσαμε ποτέ στο σπίτι μας τα εβραϊκά έθιμα, ο πατέρας μου πρέπει να στεναχωρέθηκε, περισσότερο σε επίπεδο κοινωνικού εγωισμού, που δεν έκανα το Μπαρ Μιτσβά στα δώδεκά μου. (200)

The Jewish identity in Fais' text is not articulated in terms of religious practice; the latter is only supplementary to a broader ethnic or cultural identity. Moreover, Edmond/Efthimis appears reluctant to give a definitive answer to Achtales regarding his Jewish ancestry. He vaguely replies: Ξέρετε, τα σόγια με τους Εβραίους είναι μια μπερδεμένη υπόθεση. (86) This stance could be interpreted as unwillingness to be identified as an exclusively Jewish citizen. It also allows him to transgress his Jewish identity in order to mingle smoothly with a non-Jewish group of peers.

Τί συνέβαινε τότε; Απλώς πάνω απ' όλα έβαζε τη συνοχή του παιχνιδιού και τη φαντασίωση της ομάδας. Με την ίδια λογική πήγαινε κανονικά στο κατηχητικό και εκκλησιαζόταν κάθε Σάββατο με το σχολείο- χώρια τα κάλαντα των Χριστουγέννων, της Πρωτοχρονιάς, των Φώτων και της Ανάστασης, που τον έβρισκαν να ξελαρυγγίζεται μαζί με τους φίλους του. (164-5)

This excerpt further reinforces Benveniste's remarks on Jewish identity in this text as 'undisclosed' or 'latent'. The public image of the overarching consciousness in the text is superficially constructed upon Greek Orthodox identity, since young Edmond participates in all the activities that his classmates and friends engage with. In order for him to acquire a sense of belonging to that group of peers, he has to develop a dual identity and consequently conceal his Jewish self by projecting the

Greek self (and carrying out Christian practices). The Greek self overshadows the ‘other’ Jewish self, which tends to remain ‘unspoken’ and silenced.

Nevertheless, the silenced Jewish self is actively voiced through other Jewish voices that are heard in the text. The Jewish identity emerges mainly from Rachel’s narrative and the testimony belonging to the fifteen-year-old boy that we have identified as Michel. We can thus suggest that the overarching writing consciousness articulates fully its dual identity through the use of different personas that in turn assume the role of the speaking subject. For example, the fact that there is an unidentified voice in part two that informs us about the language split in Jewish households, attests the complex way in which the dual identity is constructed in the text. We read: Σπίτι μιλάγαμε Σεφαραδίτικα, μιλούσαμε όμως και ελληνικά. (122-3)

In the fourth draft of the incomplete novel, the overlying theme is the liquidation of the Jewish community of Komotini; a theme that will be addressed at this point in order to have a fuller view of the Jewish identity as it is presented in the text. Michel, a teenager at the time of the war and the son of Rabbi Fais, voices this disjointed ‘Shoah’ narrative. This narrative can be read as a ‘counter-narrative’ in relation to the first part of the text. As I have suggested in the first section, the text draws attention to the fact that official, ethnically ‘purist’ historiography has silenced the town’s Jewishness in favor of its ‘Greekness’. Through the narrative of Holocaust, the Jewish identity is articulated as a predominantly ‘other’ identity, which is downplayed in official history. The discussion of dual identity can now be conducted on the level of ‘spoken’ and ‘unspoken’.

Edmond's stammer can be seen as his effort to articulate this silenced identity that is suppressed in an oral context.³⁵³ The speech impediment results from this imbalance between the human subject's dual identities and his inability to express his Jewishness in a strictly Greek-orthodox environment (such as the school). It is no longer a case of refusing the choice between one of the two identities like Alexakis' case (where both identities are spoken and written) but rather of being unable to articulate both identities in the text. As noted earlier, the Jewish identity is silenced because it is the identity of the 'other'. Through the confrontation of Makis and Edmond/ Efthimis in part three, the two identities of the author (Jewish and Greek) are brought together. Edmond/Efthimis' appropriation of the speech defect of the 'other' illustrates the effort to suffocate the Jewish identity in favour of his Greek identity that he understands to be mainstream.³⁵⁴

Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου challenges traditional autobiographical modes in its treatment of identities. There are different ways in which the text resists revealing the identity of the speaking subject. The fact that the name of the student that in two instances appears to be writing an essay is never revealed, testifies to the overall effort to obscure an identity (e.g. *Εν Κομοτινή* 1964. *Έκθεση του μαθητού ...*).³⁵⁵ The speaking subject that can loosely be defined as the overarching consciousness in parts two and three repeats on several occasions a statement, in which he refuses to provide his name. He says: *Με λένε όπως με λένε* (149) claiming a right to switch names, personas and voices. The resistance towards revealing a name also hints at the

³⁵³ There is also a reference to Edmond/Efthimis 'silencing' his father's Holocaust narratives as he feels that this is an ossified memory, which he cannot entirely share given that he appears to be only half-Jew raised by a non-Jew mother and an estranged Jew father.

³⁵⁴ This is also apparent in the renaming of the streets in the Jewish quarter and the use of names like Karaolis, a contemporary hero of the Cypriot struggle for independence.

³⁵⁵ In this transgressive text the choice of punctuation and ellipsis in particular are a traditional means of blurring the lines between fact and fiction.

inability of fully compromising with the idea of the self as both the self and the ‘other self’.

I propose that writing and autobiographical writing in particular is projected by the writing consciousness as the sole way to articulate this interplay between the self and the ‘other’ self. In Edmond’s monologue we read: [...]καθώς διόρθωνες τα ποιήματα σου, αναλογιζόσουν: μόνο λίγο νερό θα πίνω και θα γράφω νυχθημερόν [...] Τελικώς αναρωτιόσουν, υπάρχει τίποτα πιο ανεπανόρθωτα ξένο απ’ το μύχιο; (193)

This statement echoes Kiourtsakis’ stance towards dual identities that he placed against the framework of ‘ίδιο’ and ‘άλλο’. Kiourtsakis understood his fictional persona as a ‘dicolon’, a fictional self that carried the ‘other self’, its dead brother. This could be paralleled to Edmond’s return to his place of birth, where he rediscovers his Jewish identity that he perceives as an alienating inner space. Given that Edmond has great difficulties in orally articulating this very own ‘other self’ orally, he turns to writing as the only possible solution.

Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου is therefore tested as a textual shape that is called to embrace the overarching dipole: self/‘other self’ through the case study of the representation of the dual Greek/Jewish identity. Fais’ text is actually a hybrid text that subverts the staples of traditional autobiography since it does not offer a ‘full’ and not ‘partial’ and fragmented version of oneself in a manner similar to Doubrovsky’s autofictions. The Jewish identity is an object of literary representation in Doubrovsky’s texts, most notably *Fils* (1977) and *Le livre brisé*.³⁵⁶ In both texts, ‘Jewishness’ is projected through Doubrovsky’s own memories of surviving the Holocaust in France, which are articulated on many occasions in the style of an

³⁵⁶ See Elisabeth Jones, *Spaces of Belonging. Home, Culture and Identity in 20th Century French Autobiography* (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2007).

‘interior monologue’.³⁵⁷ The experience of the Holocaust and the trauma of going into ‘hiding’ in order to avoid deportation left an indelible mark on Doubrovsky’s fictional persona, which he tries to heal through the process of psychoanalysis and consequently through writing. Moreover, the fact that Doubrovsky’s intratextual writer admits to being an atheist Jew, and, more importantly, the fact that he was forced to ‘silence’ his identity in order to survive the war, bring him closer to Edmond as a secular Jew, whose speech impediment turns into a real impediment and inability to express his ‘Jewishness’.

Furthermore, the death of Edmond’s mother and the liquidation of the entire Jewish community of Komotini form a powerful link to Doubrovsky’s *Fils* that treats the trauma of the mother’s loss, which is also overshadowed by the experience of surviving the Shoah. Fais’ text articulates this similar trauma by subjectivising the loss of ordinary language and proposes writing an unconventional autobiography that employs novelistic techniques and narrates the story of one ‘dual book’ in its making.

To sum up, the dual identity in the text emerges on the level of the overarching consciousness (Edmond/Efthimis) as well as on the level of the history of Komotini as it is reconstructed through the archive and the testimonies of its Jewish inhabitants. The text is broadly divided between the isolation experienced in the capital and the effort to become part of a group of peers back in Komotini. It is further divided between reality and fiction, between autobiographical discourse (memoirs, testimonies) and fiction. The dynamics between the two identities are negotiated through the interplay between fact and fiction that is characteristic of autofiction.

³⁵⁷ See Patrick Saveau, *Serge Doubrovsky ou l'écriture d'une survie* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2011).

7.4. Reading the title: Situating *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* at the limits of Greek autofictional writing of the 1990s

So far, I have argued that the text lends itself to two simultaneous readings: in the first, the main autobiographical subject is the town of Komotini while according to the second, there is an overarching writing consciousness that can be traced behind the delicate interplay of the personas of Makis and Efthimis that is further split between a Greek and a Jewish identity. In this final section I shall briefly point out the metafictional aspect of the text and discuss the way the title of the book places the text itself in the heart of the autofictional project.

The employment of the term ‘autobiography’ in the title of the text can be read as a metafictional comment since it draws attention to the genre the text allegedly subscribes to. This leads us back to Moullas’ comment I quoted earlier on; the title of Fais’ text is striking because the autobiography does not refer to a human being but to a book. The employment of the term ‘βιβλίο’ as the subject of the ‘autobiography’ highlights the status of the text as a ‘human-like’ entity and an artefact. Here, Fais essentially states that this is an autobiography of a literary artefact and that the text, whose process of writing we observe as readers, is the protagonist. If we take into account the subheading ‘novel’ we can argue that the text makes a powerful statement as to its treatment as autofiction. The coexistence of the terms ‘autobiography’ (a genre of predominantly factual nature) and ‘novel’ (fictional work) on the title page challenges the stereotypical notion that those are two different genres with little or no common ground. If we also take into account one of the definitions of autofiction available, that is a text that is half way between the genres of autobiography and the novel, then we can claim that the title of Fais’ text and its subheading exemplifies the

osmosis between the autobiography and the novel in the form of an autofiction about the book in hand.³⁵⁸

Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου is a novelistic rendition of the process of making the text. The ‘autobiography’ here is a metonymy for the writing process and the production of this current text is an issue that is discussed throughout the book but especially in the final part. In a similar way that an individual or a fictional character gives an account of his/her life in retrospect, the text (the ‘book’ that is identified as the subject of the ‘autobiography’) presents the different stages of the writing procedure. The ‘book’ is the accomplished entity that is further identified as a work of fiction due to the appearance of the generic term ‘novel’. This ‘book’s’ autobiography is comprised by the multilayered archive that is reconstructed in the first part of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*, the four drafts of the incomplete novel of part two and the thirty pages of Edmond’s (Makis’) monologue in part three.

The metatextual character of the text is manifested for the first time in the concluding interview of the first part (the interview between Edmond and the librarian). It is the first time the reader is told that the scattered, archival pages he/she has just gone through, are actually the subject matter for what will become a book; a scrapbook on Komotini’s history. The metafictional element becomes more prominent in the second part of the text where the reader is presented with the four drafts of the incomplete novel. Those drafts highlight the artificial nature of the book since they provide an insight to the writer’s composing method. Their fragmentary nature as well as the instability of narrating voices lays bare the problem of this text’s narrative regarding the organization of the dispersed voices. In the third part of the text, the metafictional element reaches a culminating point with Magda addressing the

³⁵⁸ See Daniel Deltel, ‘Colette: l’ autobiographie perspective’ in *Autofictions & Cie. RITM Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur les Textes Modernes* 6 (1993), p. 123-134. Deltel provides a wide definition of autofiction as a text that is ‘a mi-chemin de l’autobiographie et de la fiction’.

readers and discussing with them the development of the text as well. Magda reveals that Edmond/Efthimis is writing a book, whose thirty page-long extract we can also read. This is a widely used strategy of metafictional writing; the fictional character draws attention to a ‘mis-en-abyme’ text that the writer in the text composes.

I would like to suggest that this metafictional aspect of *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* and the preoccupation with the act of writing (in terms of preserving the oral within the written) encourages a third autofictional reading of the book. Hence, the protagonist of the text is not only the town of Komotini and the writing consciousness that is disguised under names and biographical data that constantly change, but also the text that is being written. This text is I believe a dual text, another ‘dicolon’: it is the book that Edmond aims to compose based on the archival material he painstakingly collects but it is also the incomplete and chaotic (auto)biographical novel that Efthimis writes through a close observation of Makis/Anthropaki’s life that turns out to be a mere reflection of his own life. The text is moreover a ‘dicolon’ in terms of being a text that accommodates oral narratives in a written context but manages to maintain its ‘oral’ character through the use of various narrating voices while continuously reminding us of the book’s writing procedure.

In *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*, Fais presents us with his alternative to autobiographical writing echoing Doubrovsky’s refusal to engage in autobiography proper in the back cover of *Fils*. Autofiction, a text that makes use of autobiographical data and fictional techniques, provides the means to accommodate a narrative treating dual identities in both Doubrovsky’s and Fais’ cases. A conventional autobiography aims to offer a unified perception of the autobiographical subject, which is not possible in the cases of the aforementioned writers due to the existence of those dual identities. Autobiography does not allow for a treatment of the

self as ‘the self’ and the ‘other self’ at the same time; which is exactly what autofiction does.

Edmond’s/Efthimis’ fictional project is explained in the text: *Να χαράξεις, εν ολίγοις, γύρω από τα πόδια σου έναν κύκλο. Εκεί μέσα θα έκανες, αν έκανες την αυτοπροσωπογραφία σου...* (217) However, the realization that the self of what can be defined as the text’s ‘overarching writing consciousness’ is not a single self but on the contrary is a textual construct that embraces dual identities, makes him change his scope and appears to be writing a novel, whose subject matter is Makis – hence, a biographical novel. Yet, in a way similar to Vassilikos’ fictional device of masking autofiction as fictional biography in *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης*, the biographer Edmond/Efthimis is exposed. We read Martha’s admission:

Να μην τα περιπλέκω όμως κι άλλο τα πράγματα. Έχουμε ένα αυτόκλητο βιογράφο.[...] Στην πορεία αυτός ο βιογράφος γίνεται αυτοβιογράφος. Κι εδώ για μένα, βρίσκεται το κλειδί του βιβλίου. Μην είσαστε αφελείς. Ο Ευθύμης ουσιαστικά τη ζωή του αφηγείται. Δανείζεται το περίγραμμα από τον Μάκη για να μιλήσει για τα δικά του παιδικά χρόνια, για τις δικές του διαψεύσεις, για τις δικές του ενοχές και μικρότητες. (219)

This is a final example of articulating the identity on the basis of self and other in the text. The coexistence of biographical and autobiographical modes is another means through which the overall duality of the text is negotiated.

In *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* Michel Fais stretches autofiction to its limits by constructing a text that is at the same time the autofiction of a town, the autofiction of an overarching human consciousness and the autofiction of the current text in its making. I believe that the text can be read through a triple lens since the subjects are Komotini, the intratextual author that appropriates different masks and the autofictional text itself.

Fais' *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* combines key features of all the texts discussed in this thesis: namely, the fragmentation of the intratextual writer's ego projected in the texts of Tachtsis and Axioti; the idea that biography and autobiography are essentially the opposite sides of the same coin as Vassilikos illustrated; and the representation of dual ethnic and cultural identities (Greek versus Francophone) that we encountered in Alexakis and Kiourtsakis. In this sense, Fais' text is not only highly transgressive but it is also all-encompassing as it covers all aspects of Greek autofictional writing discussed in this study. Finally, *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* and the treatment of the 'Jewish' identity leads us back to Doubrovsky, who first crystallised the concept of autofiction. Nevertheless, Fais has taken the concept of autofiction further than Doubrovsky imagined in 1977. *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*, as a 'triple' autofiction, is the most far-reaching text in the repertoire of Greek autofiction and carries the autofictional project to new levels that were not envisaged by the originator of the term and not realized by contemporary autofiction practitioners in the francophone literary scene.

Conclusions

This study has aspired not only to offer a fresh reading of individual texts, but more importantly to identify and examine a special category in the field of Greek ‘autobiographical’ fiction. My objective has been to make the case that during the period between 1971 and 1995, a particular trend emerged and developed in the Greek literary system when the established tradition of Greek autobiographical fiction intersected with French postmodern experimentations in fictionalised life-writing, and fictional autobiography in particular.

The point of departure for my thesis was the realisation that the theoretical vocabulary applied to Greek texts lacked a *terminus technicus* to describe fictional works in which the ‘extratextual’ writer (that can be identified as the ‘real-life’ author) not only draws the subject matter for fiction from his/her own life, but also enters the narrative as a writer in the text. In turn, the ‘intratextual’ writer assumes the roles of the narrator as well as that of the protagonist (or other main characters). By employing a variety of fictional techniques, the extratextual writer constructs his/her own self in the text while at the same time he/she reveals the process of writing the text we are reading. My aim has been to take a step further from the generic term ‘fictional autobiography’ introduced by Dimitris Tziouvas in *The Other Self* (2003), which could broadly be applied to all types of fictional life-writing that are articulated in the first person mode(s). Therefore, I set out to delineate a particular territory in Greek fiction – *autofiction* – where fictional autobiography is not restricted to first-person narratives only, but also extends to second and third-person narratives as well.

My theoretical analysis (chapter 1) started with Serge Doubrovsky and the coinage of the term ‘autofiction’ in 1977. Nevertheless, I have deliberately moved

beyond his parameters and adopted a freer understanding of autofiction in order to keep up with current French criticism. As I have explained in the introductory chapter, an essential distinction between autofiction in the style of Doubrovsky and its Greek counterpart is that the former relies heavily on the element of psychoanalysis and linguistic devices. In the rest of the thesis, I formulated my approach to the Greek version of autofiction by placing emphasis on the writing subject's textual representation through the employment of an array of fictional strategies, namely: the splintering of the autobiographical ego, the modification of biographical data and the articulation of 'writerly' as well as 'dual' identities.

In the writings of the first period of autofiction, my discussion highlighted the fragmentation of the authorial ego and its dissolution into multiple fictional personas. I have shown how the overarching consciousness (the intratextual writer) is fractured into different fictional personas, either through the use of diverse biographical data (chapter 2) and the employment of diverse fictional masks (chapters 3 and 4) or through a framework of autobiography/biography that raises the issue of the double representation of the self as 'other' (chapter 4). The writing subject in this first formative period of Greek autofiction appears to be disjointed; however, what I defined as 'writerly' identities connected the various versions of the narrated self. Tachtsis' short story cycle acquired a unifying link primarily through the 'queer' identity that surfaces across the individual stories of the volume. In the texts of Axioti and Vassilikos, the identities projected were those of the repatriated and the exiled writers respectively. In both cases the writers in the text tried to achieve the impossible nostos and articulated the notion of homecoming through the act of writing.

My readings of Tachtsis, Axioti and Vassilikos drew attention to the fact that the initial period of Greek autofiction coincided with the period of the military dictatorship. This realisation led to an important question: could these writers be declaring that there was a way to do politics through fiction by experimenting with thinly veiled fictional autobiography? As I argued, the three Greek *autofictionneurs* were targeted by the regime due to their political views (Axioti and Vassilikos) or at least marginalised because of their ‘taboo’ sexual identity (Tachtsis). In my analysis the ‘writerly’ identities of the homosexual writer and the exiled writer were discussed as marginal and dissident, in relation to the Greek sociopolitical background of the period. Therefore, I suggest that the emergence of autofiction in Greece before the term was introduced in francophone literature in 1977 should be perceived as a shift towards the domain of autobiographical fiction at times of censorship since the practitioners focused on the persona of the writer in the text, instead of directly discussing the oppression exerted by the Junta. In the context of my analysis, I claimed that the experience of the dictatorship (and of course, exile) became a catalyst for the precocious emergence of autofictional writing. Finally, I argued that the writers examined here created a Greek version of autofiction as they were in search of a narrative platform through which they could articulate identities that would challenge and subvert the Junta’s political as well as social agenda.

The works of the second period of Greek autofiction appeared more than a decade after the introduction of the term by Doubrovsky and at a time when autofiction had begun to attract the interest of literary scholars in the French-speaking world. I have described the first part of the 1990s as the period during which Greek autofiction culminates, in the sense that it does not only correspond to the developments that occur in the French ‘autofictional’ scene, but it also presents us

with far-reaching texts that push the limits of autofictional writing beyond what Doubrovsky had imagined in 1977.

The common feature in all three texts examined in the second part of the thesis is the articulation of the dual linguistic, cultural and to a lesser extent religious identities through the use of metafictional strategies. The texts point to their status as literary artefacts while the intratextual writers expose the problems they face in their effort to accommodate their distinct dual identities in their overall ‘autobiographical’ project. All three texts engage in a discourse related to autobiography as a literary form and as a matter of fact the titles of two texts (*Σαν μυθιστόρημα* and *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*) subvert the clear-cut boundaries of two distinct genres: the novel and autobiography. The texts analyzed put to the test the osmosis of two distinct genres and result in effectively blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality.

In my account, I have accented the theme of dualism, primarily on the level of identity construction and secondarily, on the level of spatial division. I argued that the writers of the second generation of Greek autofiction situate their authorial ego at the crossroads of Greek and French cultural spaces. The fact that Alexakis, Kiourtsakis and Fais have immersed themselves deeply in the French cultural space by engaging in the practice of translation (or self-translation in the case of Alexakis) alongside their original work, supported my research hypothesis regarding a dual literary and cultural identity that is showcased in their texts. Alexakis is fully immersed in French culture since he has produced the greater part of his work in French, whereas Kiourtsakis has been educated in France and is up to date with developments in French-speaking fiction and criticism. The degree of competence in French required to undertake a translation project is indicative of all three writers’ strong rapport with

French literature and it has boosted my argument regarding the exchanges between the Greek and French literary systems.

In the case of Alexakis (chapter 5), the intratextual writer was split between Paris and Athens and constructed its fictional persona on the premise of this spatial and linguistic division claiming his right to write in both Greek and French. Likewise, Kiourtsakis (chapter 6) relied on the same spatial division between Greece and Belgium/France in order to articulate his fictional ‘dicôlon’; an entity that embraced both Kiourtsakis’ intratextual projection and his late brother Charis. Fais, on the other hand, fictionalised the identity dipole by rendering the French linguistic and cultural identity as supplementary to the Jewish identity and tested its symbiosis with the Greek identity (chapter 7). He experimented with the spatial division through the construction of a fictional archive of the town of Komotini that subjectivised the split between its multicultural past and its homogenous Greek present.

My principal aim has been to argue for the existence of a highly innovative branch of Greek fiction that was crystallised during the years 1971-1995. I argued that the first period of Greek autofiction anticipated the issues raised by Doubrovsky in both his novels and criticism since Greek writers produced narratives blending autobiographical reality and fiction well before 1977 - the year that ‘autofiction’ made its official debut. Furthermore, in my discussion of the second period of Greek autofictional writing, I suggested that the Greek writers were not merely aligned with Doubrovsky’s and his contemporaries’ experimentations in French; they actually extended the possibilities of the definition as envisaged by its originators and explored in depth the principle of dualism on the basis of space and identity construction. The last chapter, in particular, aimed towards a triple reading of Fais’ far-reaching text as an autofiction of the town of Komotini, of the writer in the text

and of the text in the making. *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* pushes autofiction to extreme limits and demonstrated how privileging and all-encompassing the narrative vehicle of autofiction can become for the treatment of dual identities in fiction.

Consequently, by trying on the one hand to consolidate the links connecting the Greek writers of the seventies and the nineties with French postmodern autobiographical fiction, and on the other hand by pointing out the peculiarities and the originality of Greek autofiction, I have sought to attribute to Greek writing a central role upon the European literary stage. I argued that the genesis of Greek autofiction *avant la lettre*, should be understood as a follow up to a rich indigenous tradition of autobiographical novels and short stories, which was imbued with the legacies of the European *Künstlerroman* and informed by the developments in the French literary scene from the sixties onwards. In light of the above, I made the case for the existence of an autofiction *à la grecque*, which came into being in the early seventies (before Doubrovsky's seminal *Fils*) and reached a culminating point in the first half of the nineties.

This study lays the ground for more Greek texts to be read in the light of autofiction in the future. More crucially, I hope that my thesis contributes to the reappraisal of the place of Greek literature in relation to other major literary systems. The emergence of autofictional writing in Greece in the 1970s and the state-of-the-art experimentations in the 1990s evidence Greece's significant position in the field of autofiction. In this context, it can be argued that Greek literature is indeed more central and *avant-garde* than is traditionally considered. I hope to have not merely elucidated a neglected territory in Greek fiction, but more significantly, to have demonstrated the highly innovative preoccupations of the selected texts. In this way, I

have tried to make the case that Greek fiction should escape the fate of a 'peripheral' and 'minor' literature and be embodied in a wider European context.

Afterword

Beyond 1995... Greek autofiction in the twenty-first century

I conclude this study by surveying the Greek literary scene in the second half of the nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century in order to offer an update on the second generation of *autofictioneers* I have presented in part II.

Yiannis Kiourtsakis' *Εμείς οι άλλοι*, came out in 2000 and was introduced as the second instalment of his trilogy under the umbrella heading *Το ίδιο και το άλλο*. In terms of plot, it is a sequel of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*, since it follows the narrator Yiannis during a twenty-five year period (1960 to 1985), covering thus the university years in Paris and his early career as a lawyer. In 2007 the trilogy was completed with *Το βιβλίο του έργου και του χρόνου*, which is presented in the form of a writer's diary recording the construction and progress of the trilogy. These two instalments did not offer anything new to the autofictional breakthrough of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα*. Yiannis Kiourtsakis did not further elaborate the theme of the dual identity and the concept *dikolon*. He preserved however the metafictional character of *Σαν μυθιστόρημα* in the following books and centered his trilogy around the actual process of writing.

Vassilis Alexakis' novel *Οι ξένες λέξεις* [*Les mots étrangers*], came out in 2003 and it is an interesting case of autofiction as it adds a new dimension to the issue of dualism that has been the key point of the second period of Greek autofiction. In this text, Alexakis readdresses the issue of dual identities and explores a possible way to overcome the writer's dilemma as to which language to use. *Οι ξένες λέξεις* is a fictionalization of Alexakis' apprenticeship in Sango, a Central African language. However, Vassilis Alexakis is not overtly exposed as the text's real protagonist. The narrator and principal character in *Οι ξένες λέξεις* is a Greek writer in Paris, M.

Nicolaides, who decides to learn an African language (that is used solely in oral circumstances and has not developed as a literary medium) because he wants to use it in the context of a new book he is writing in honour of his dead father, who was allegedly allured by Africa.

In this text, Alexakis again draws attention to the geographical split between Athens and Paris and revisits the relationship with his father that was a key theme in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα*. More importantly, *Οι ξένες λέξεις* redirects the question of choosing between the two languages - French and Greek - in view of an irreparable loss. While in *Παρίσι-Αθήνα* Alexakis claimed his right to use both French and Greek as his literary media, in *Οι ξένες λέξεις* he comes up with a solution; learning a third language and using certain words and phrases of it in the context of a text originally written in French and self-translated into Greek. We can claim that with *Οι ξένες λέξεις*, Alexakis transgresses the dualistic barrier that has been the common basis of the second generation of Greek autofiction practitioners and introduces the notion of a ‘third’ space and a ‘third’ language. However, I believe that it is still possible to view Sango and Africa in the light of dualism according to how we situate the intratextual writer. French and Greek could in this sense form together one part of the identity and linguistic bipole, whereas Sango could form the other part. This could be projected upon a spatial bipole, the ‘homely’ Europe (that is further divided into Paris and Athens) and the ‘exotic’ Africa. To conclude, *Οι ξένες λέξεις* gives the reader the freedom to proceed to two different readings of the text. It is ultimately a question of positioning the current reading in favour of an extension of dualism as explored so far or a rejection of it, or even to promote the ambiguity between the two readings.

Fais’ volume of short stories *Από το ίδιο ποτήρι και άλλες ιστορίες* (1999) has elements in common with Tachtsis’ autofictional project in *Τα ρέστα*. The thirteen

stories of the volume (thirteen stories were included in *Τα ρέστα*) feature different personas and voices from varying backgrounds (both male and female, young and old) as well as animals and dead people, and like Tachtsis' collection, they can be read as a fragmented novel. The unity of the collection emerges through the delicate treatment of 'unconventional' behaviors (like hyper-sexuality, fascination with death, or madness) that were evident already in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*. With *Aegyrius monachus*, Fais' autofictional project seems to come full circle, as the writer's persona comes centre-stage, addresses the issue of his Jewishness and attempts to finalize Fais' dealings with fictional autobiography. The reason why these two works were not included in this thesis has to do with the fact that they do not effectively contribute to the development of autofiction in the radical way that *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* did, but merely tend to shed more light on the phenomena discussed in chapter seven.

Following a thirteen-year gap in which he engaged mainly with fictional biography, Fais renewed the autofictional scene with his latest novel *Κτερίσματα* (2012). *Κτερίσματα* is described as 'παραβατική μυθιστορία' on the blurb and it carries forward the autofictional project initiated with *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*. The first part is narrated in the second person as the writer in the text addresses his younger self, the boy who at the age of six leaves his hometown Komotini to live with his divorced mother in Athens. The narrator is unambiguously identified as Michel, and he is the son of the Jewish dermatologist Fais from Drama and a Greek doctor from Patras. The narrative focuses on the writer's coming of age through his account of sexual maturation and the relationship with his parents. The issue of the dual identity and the rapport between the Jewish/Greek selves resurfaces here in a different way than in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*. The dual identity is articulated on the basis of a

family conflict between the imposing figure of the Greek mother and the alienated Jew father. Fais revisits his childhood and adolescence in order to reflect upon the ‘silencing’ of his Jewishness and the thorny relationship with his mother.

The second part could be read as a multi-voiced narrative exploring the themes of sexual desire and despair, loss, death and mourning, which is constructed in a way that resembles the structure of an archive - similar to the one constructed in *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου*. Here too, this part culminates in a dialogue of key importance to the understanding of the text. In this case, the reader comes across a fragmented dialogue between the intratextual author and his dead mother, where their failed mother-son relationship is exposed as the determining factor for his unfulfilling love life. In the third section the intratextual writer fictionalizes ‘snapshots’ from his love life as an adult; the narrating voice is further destabilized as the writer’s narration embeds smaller narratives voiced by the writer’s numerous partners. The final part is a pastiche of diary-style entries, excerpts from the transcripts of the trial for a criminal case that shook Komotini in the 1970s and a disjointed Shoah narrative leading up to nightmarish final encounter with the dead parents before they finally return to the place where all began, Komotini.

All these factors suggest that *Κτερίσματα* can be read as a continuation of Fais’ first novel. This book includes a dense web of references to Fais’ previous works, among which *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* stands out as the kernel of his autofictional project. In *Αυτοβιογραφία ενός βιβλίου* the authoring consciousness appeared dispersed between different versions of the writing self under the names of Edmond, Efthimis, Makis, Anthropaki. Here, the authoring subject appears more concrete, as the employment of the name Michel implies and focuses more intensely on the family dynamics that govern his dual identity. *Κτερίσματα*, not only sums up Fais’

autofictional imprint so far, but also brings new elements into Greek autofictional writing (such as the selective use of photographs in a way that brings to mind Barthes' *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* that I have discussed in chapter one).

Moreover, echoes of autofictional writing can be traced in a series of texts published by Patakis under the title *Η κουζίνα του συγγραφέα*. As the title suggests, the texts offer insights into the writers' workshop through the display of the subject matter for their fiction and their method of writing. Fais, the director of the series notes – in a tone highly reminiscent of Doubrovsky - that “the ‘author’s kitchen’ is the space where the adventure of writing and the writing of an adventure intersect”. The fact that Fais, the most pioneering figure in Greek autofiction is the director of the series suggests that his project on the ‘writers’ kitchen’ should be seen as a way of promulgating autofiction beyond the nineties.

So far the series numbers seven texts: Alexis Panselinos' *Μια Λέξη Χίλιες Εικόνες* (2004), Yiannis Xanthoulis' *Το μενού των φαντασμάτων* (2004), Maro Douka's *Τα μαύρα λουστρίνια* (2005), Petros Markaris' *Κατ' εξακολούθησιν* (2006), Mitsora Maria's *Με λένε λέξη* (2008), Soti Triantafyllou's *Ο χρόνος πάλι* (2009) and Athina Kakouri's *Με τα χέρια σταυρωμένα* (2010). Fais' editorial concept seems to be based on the format presented in *Roland Barthes by Roland Bathes*, with photography being an element central to the text. All the above texts reproduce more or less the same pattern that is a combination of ‘memoirs’ with the autobiographical novel and the Bildungsroman. Nevertheless, texts like Triantafyllou's *Ο χρόνος πάλι* are encouraging signs for the adoption of the ‘autofictional’ trend by novelists. Triantafyllou escapes the writing mode of ‘memoirs’ and demonstrates a great degree of fictionalisation to the point that the lines between reality and imagination are blurred.

To sum up, I believe that Fais' *Κτερίσματα* makes a compelling case for the continuation of Greek autofiction in the twenty-first century. It remains to see whether any upcoming instalments of the series *Η κουζίνα του συγγραφέα* will carry autofiction forward and disseminate its practice to a wider group of writers, or whether the three writers Kiourtsakis, Alexakis and Fais will remain the most prominent *autofictioneers* in Greek. Nevertheless, as I have stated in the preface, this study is by no means an exhaustive account of Greek autofictional writing; it covers the six most representative cases of Greek autofiction in the period between 1971-1995. It is still possible to read other texts of the same period in the light of autofiction and identify in the future more texts as as autofictions.

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