

Of Pretense and Preservation of the Self: Theater, Trauma, and (Post)memory in *The Mother of the Dog* by Pavlos Matesis

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Abstract

This study discusses The Mother of the Dog, the first and now best-known novel of Pavlos Matesis, the celebrated Greek playwright. The 1990 popular novel, by its original Greek title of Η Μητέρα του σκύλου, was translated by Fred Reed as The Daughter, after its main character. The title switch is indicative of the reader's willingness to move from the first to the second generation of those compelled to process devastating experiences and subsequent memories. This study unearths the novel's themes of trauma and memory and speaks to issues framed by the theoretical concept of "postmemory." In particular, I show how an extensive personal testimony from "postmemory" may fruitfully be read, analyzed, and integrated into Greek novel-writing as Greek history-writing—may even constitute the novel as history. Equipped with the notions and tools of postmemory and postmodernism of the 1990s, Matesis ironically reworks themes that have traditionally centered the master narrative of Greek nationalism. He subverts grand, patriotic Greek history and takes it down to the level of its perennial humble victims. Matesis presents the life of the nation, as of the heroine, as a performance manqué. He undercuts the "post-" of "postmemory" for demonstrating how Greek history failed to place both time and space between the first generation and the second generation of its trauma survivors and of its female victims, especially. The author's deliberate inability to represent a romantic novel or even a few romantic characters, his preempting of any worthwhile performance, whether communal or individual, bestows on this Modern Greek novel a unique voice of cultural and sociopolitical criticism. This critique has transformed the oft-translated novel of 1990 into an early harbinger of a new and more challenging era of (internationally watched) crisis, whose harsh realities have curtailed patriotism and deflated appearances even further.

Keywords

Pavlos Matesis; *The Mother of the Dog*; *The Daughter*; novel; postmemory; narrative; performance.

Introduction: Trauma, Memory, and Postmemory

Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.¹

Postmemory in Greece takes on a particularly urgent dimension, covering for history and history-writing centered on individuals: in a 1989 move to seal a (temporary) pact of reconciliation between the Greek communists and the Right, both camps authorized the destruction of massive heaps of police and security files containing personal information that dated back to the 1940s.² Given this void, social histories and also works of fiction that utilize the methods and tools of multidisciplinary memory studies, such as Matesis’s novel of 1990, may shed light on the hidden folds of the 1940s war years and may assist in building a cognitive model applicable to the study of other conflicts and their long shadows as well. The term “postmemory,” based on the concept of a memory that reaches back in the past beyond one’s own birth or that implies distance between successive generations, was first theorized by Marianne Hirsch in the context of Holocaust Studies and media representations. It became established after appearing in the title of Hirsch’s 1997 book, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*.³ Hirsch denotes a second generation’s relationships to the traumas of its parents,⁴ and her apt wording may help the reader to better understand the experiences of the protagonist of Matesis’s novel. Against the backdrop of the vast literature on trauma and memory studies and the “capacious analytic term” of “memory,”⁵ Hirsch concentrates on the remembrance of the Holocaust and examines the role of the family as a space of transmission. She pays special attention to photography as a “primary medium of transgenerational transmission of trauma.”⁶ Other scholars

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1 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 106-107 (italics hers); see also Marianne Hirsch, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996): 662.

2 Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 197-198; David H. Close “The Road to Reconciliation? The Greek Civil War and the Politics of Memory in the 1980s,” in *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences*, ed. Philip Carabott and Thanasis D. Sfikas (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 272-274.

3 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

4 See Hirsch “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile”; Hirsch, *Family Frames*; Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory.”

5 Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” 105.

6 *Ibid.*, 103. Aware of some of the criticisms that Hirsch’s theory has attracted, Athanasios Anastasiadis applies her interpretive framework to the novel *Η Εβραία νύφη* [*The Jewish Bride*], published by Nikos Davvetas in 2009 and inspired by turbulent Modern Greek history. Athanasios Anastasiadis, “Transgenerational Communication of Traumatic Experiences:

working at the intersection of oral history theory and memory studies have used different terms to capture the validity and intensity of the intergenerational transmission of memory.⁷ Froma Zeitlin speaks of the postsurvivor as the “vicarious witness,” who delivers “acquired testimony.”⁸ Rather than impede identification with the first generation, the sense of belatedness actually intensifies the subject’s will to identify. Zeitlin observes the common belated witnesses’ involvement in mimetic reenactments of scripts over which they may only tenuously claim authorship, let alone authority.⁹ Thus the postsurvivors’ sense of identification, even over-identification, seeks expression in venues of reperformance or “modes of reenactment.”¹⁰

The following sections attempt to recover some of the ambivalent voices of memory and postmemory in Roubini aka Raraou, the female protagonist of Matesis’s novel, beyond the silences of Asimina, her traumatized mother. Raraou has continued to relive her mother’s war trauma as a deeply felt experience affecting place, belonging, and identity in complex ways. This memory has shaped her own identity, which, like her mother’s, has never found rehabilitation and has thus been suspended in a state that is indefinite, not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well. Does Raraou’s sharing of this trauma with her mother leave any room for a daughter’s reading of past events for the virtually safer distance of postmemory? Raraou is a mediocre actress who speaks with sarcasm about any Greek “sacred cow.” Is her pursuit of (ironizing) performance, in real life as well as on stage, enough of a creative distancing process? May we qualify this lifelong pursuit as a constitutive element of postmemory? For apparently self-aggrandizing and professed “artistic” reasons, which thinly veil vulnerabilities, Raraou has always wanted to “go live,” “perform,” or dramatize her life story. She thinks of herself as a lead actress but typically settles for the parts of extras. Hirsch’s work helps the reader comprehend where this personal but far from unusual mode of trauma processing comes

Narrating the Past from a Postmemorial Position,” *Journal of Literary Theory* 6, no. 1 (2012): 8-9, 10, 11-12, 15-16, 17, 18-19, 20, 21-22. With Hirsch, Anastasiadis emphasizes that postmemory is not only an inherited but also an “investigated” form of memory (Ibid., 6). The 2013 collective volume edited by Demertzis, Paschaloudi, and Antoniou has brought the notion of “cultural trauma” to the forefront of the Greek debate. Demertzis names memory, emotion, and identity as the fundamental elements of cultural trauma theory. Nicolas [Nikos] Demertzis, “The Drama of the Greek Civil War Trauma,” in *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering*, ed. Ron Eyerman, Jeffrey C. Alexander, and Elizabeth Butler Breese (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 146. With co-author Lipovats, Demertzis has also defined the cultural trauma that is associated with life condemned to a closed, narrow-minded society (reputedly of the village). For a discussion focused on Greek writing from the 1950s through 1980s, see Nikos Demertzis and Thanos Lipovats, chap. 6 in *Φθόνος και μνησικακία. Τα πάθη της ψυχής και η κλειστή κοινωνία [Envy and Resentment: The Soul’s Passions and the Closed Society]* (Athens: Polis, 2006).

7 Loring M. Danforth and Riki Van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 220, 221, 224, have incisively deployed the broader categories of the politics of memory, war-related memory, and the memory war in the context of the Greek Civil War and its aftermath. They have stressed the complexities of the relationships between experience, memory, and narration. See also Riki Van Boeschoten et al., eds., *Μνήμες και λήθη του Ελληνικού Εμφυλίου Πολέμου [Memories and Oblivion of the Greek Civil War]* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2008).

8 Froma I. Zeitlin, “The Vicarious Witness: Belated Memory and Authorial Presence in Recent Holocaust Literature,” in *Shaping Losses: Cultural Memory and the Holocaust*, ed. Julia Epstein and Lori Hope Lefkowitz, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 128, 129.

9 Ibid., 130.

10 Ibid., 130.

from:

Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.¹¹

Postmemory suffers from an (understandable) misconception of its value as reliable testimony or proof. Some studies have even tried to scientifically capture the evidentiary contribution of postmemory, thus “quantifying” its presumed speculative nature.¹² I agree that empathic mimicry ensues from inherited wounds (whether spoken about or suppressed in silence or situated at any stage in between), but also that these wounds can be alleviated with the quasi-homeopathic treatment of remembering and reappropriating—indeed, of mimicking. The “limitations of verbal communication” can often be superseded by nonverbal, alternative forms of communication, such as self-expression through art.¹³ The iconoclast Raraou turns to the (low-brow) stage and also to a mode of obsessive confiding in the reader, who becomes listener and confidante before she knows it and even against her will,¹⁴ until she realizes, with some relief, that an observer-psychiatrist is standing by, to deal more patiently and more professionally with Raraou’s descent into insanity.

Remembering—or Not—for Survival

αλλά μιά ζωή έπρεπε να κολακεύω για να επιζήσω και επέζησα
but me, all my life I’ve been buttering up people to survive, and believe you me I’ve survived¹⁵

11 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.

12 See, for instance, Sarah Gangi, Alessandra Talamo, and Stefano Ferracuti, “The Long-Term Effects of Extreme War-Related Trauma on the Second Generation of Holocaust Survivors,” *Violence and Victims* 24, no. 5 (2009): 687-700.

13 Kostis Kornetis, “Public History and the Issue of Torture under the Colonels’ Regime in Greece,” *Ricerche Storiche* 44, no. 1 (2014): 88. The multifaceted relations between trauma and art have been the subject of a growing literature that, again, originated in Holocaust Studies. However, Sophia Richman’s recent book, entitled *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma* (2014), adds a Greek angle to the better researched long view on Jewish history, experience, and memory. A novella by Elias Maglinis entitled *Η Ανάκριση* (translated by Patricia Felisa Barbeito into English as *The Interrogation* in 2013) dramatizes how personal trauma and torture experienced by a father in the past of the Greek dictatorship impact upon his daughter’s life and art in ways that are far from superficial. The link between “transmittable trauma” in fiction and in reality has been accentuated by Kornetis (in “Public History, 88), who focuses on the torture inflicted on activists of the 1968 generation and their children’s patterns of anxieties. A recent crop of literature and art bespeaks the Greek side of a second-generation commitment to memorial literature/art, in which imaginative work meets emotional labor. The 2015 movie *Fils de Grèce: Τα Παιδιά του Εμφυλίου* [*Sons of Greece: The Children of the Civil War*], directed by Dionysis Grigoratos, presents the interwoven memories and histories of the first through third generations of Greeks who experienced the Civil War. The movie further acknowledges the role of archiving, interpreting, and (re) performing the kind of deep trauma that is stirred up again by the current Greek economic and social crisis.

14 Spyros Tsaknias, review of *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου. Μυθιστόρημα*, by Pavlos Matesis, in *Πρόσωπα και μάσκες* [*Characters and Masks*] (Athens: Nefeli, 2000), 137.

15 Pavlos Matesis, *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου: Μυθιστόρημα* [*The Mother of the Dog: A Novel*] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1990), 96-97; translated into English as *The Daughter* by Fred A. Reed (London: Arcadia Books, 2002), 79 (hereafter cited as *Mother of the Dog* and *The Daughter*, respectively).

The main events of Matesis's novel *The Mother of the Dog* (or *The Daughter*) are set in the Greek countryside of the 1940s, during and after the Axis Occupation. The narrative relies on memory, however, and quickly becomes episodic and associative. Some life-changing events and invocations of survival tactics pertain to later decades (the 1950s through 80s), during which the haunting past returns to the main characters by way of narrative flashbacks or remembrances. The harsh trials and tribulations endured by Raraou and her closest family do not elevate or aggrandize the characters. Rather, they systematically strip them of their defining human qualities, such as emotionality, femininity, the physical voice, patriotic sentiments, religious beliefs, higher hopes and aspirations. Mother and daughter suffer the cruelty of the—far from idyllic—Greek village (named Epalxeis, translated as “Rampartville”). After a harrowing crisis of Asimina being publicly disgraced, they move away to an aggressively expanding Athens. There they find anonymity, but also the ugly urban equivalent of the village, surrounded as they then are by the rapidly changing, merciless state that again tests the individual's pursuit of life and love. In the city as in the village, Greek “high-society” members vindictively pursue their victims and scapegoats from the lower classes, who have shown the naïve “audacity” to commit to the quest for happier endings for themselves, their children, and their loyal neighbors.

Along with shifty politicians and other self-important “worthies,” scammers and profiteers populate Matesis's dark portrait of mid-twentieth-century Greece. Virtue, faith, and tradition are revived only to be questioned and debunked. Virginity, sexuality, and even prostitution are never quite what they seem. Not without some resentment, women are forced to assume male roles in the absence of reliable men, whether they are vanishing fathers, lost siblings, or unavailable male partners. Even then, poorer women remain marginalized, and Raraou's position is always that of an “off-center character.”¹⁶ Post-WWII liberation becomes a caricature of freedom for reinstating gender conventions and demarcating new, socially conditioned prisons.¹⁷ Loyalty and solidarity often prove to be as fickle as the Greek wartime collaborators themselves, who change names, colors, flags, and affiliations overnight and proclaim themselves long-time patriots and champions of Greek autonomy and territorial integrity.¹⁸ The instinct for survival has not purified Matesis's characters but merely discloses multiple layers of compromise and corruption. Hellenism and heroism themselves are exposed by the many voices clamoring for a more realistic notion of national selfhood. Greater Greece has been tainted by its selfish upper classes, which treat fellow human beings like pawns, with a fickleness akin to that of fortune herself. The modern novel's finale does not offer resolution, but it features a rediscovery of the profound relationship between the daughter and her haunted and long-silent mother. Matesis's anti-romance asserts itself as a representation not of true love, but of shared trauma through fiction. And this fiction is well geared toward the Greek predicament of recent crises.

16 Dimitris Tziouvas, *The Other Self: Selfhood and Society in Modern Greek Fiction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 48.

17 *The Daughter*, 128. Page references to Reed's text appear in parenthesis, for easier consultation by those who are unfamiliar with, or are still studying Modern Greek.

18 *Ibid.*, 128-129, 136.

“I’m Raraou, artiste, and my country is my two pensions”¹⁹

Raraou is a far from shrewd “social climber,” who manages to survive by blurring the distinctions between reality and artifice. Matesis captures the airs that she puts on exceedingly well. The cutting language for which the author is known exposes the petit-bourgeois mentality of his essentially harmless heroine, who tries to elevate her idiosyncratic popular idiom with remnants of a katharevousa that merely point up its incongruities.²⁰ Language and relentless attitude color the demarcation lines between provincial and urban, old-fashioned and trendy. “[Mrs Kanello] still talks like a provincial,” Raraou declares haughtily, whereas “[m]e, I always make a point of speaking like a real Athenian in all my social encounters.”²¹ This purportedly “real” Athenian has choices to make and alliances to espouse. Raraou, the self-made but still naïve opportunist, has no scruples about seeking her own petty self-interest: “being on the winning side is the best idea, the sidelines never did suit me.”²² Thus the processes of memory and postmemory engender a characterization that emerges from Raraou’s self-narration. Additionally, indirect references and incidents imply characteristics of the heroine through metaphor, tokenism, and strategic focalization. Occasionally, they destabilize the certainties that the insecure actress has tried to build up through self-characterization and burnished remembrance.

The main character’s self-interest, the core of her self-characterization, becomes a plot-driver in its own right. This self-interest, which centers Raraou’s world and the words to describe it, inspires some outrageous statements that flout the Greek nationalist tradition. Some of Raraou’s pronouncements go as far as to invert tradition, debunk patriotism, and deconstruct the homeland altogether. In the midst of national and military crises, with the survival of Greece as a country at stake, Raraou merely sees history interfere with, if not sabotage, the rise of the “artiste.” She makes multiple caustic references to what is commonly known as the “Greek epic of 28 October 1940,” the clarion call for the Greeks to bravely stave off Mussolini’s invading armies. Greece’s legendary “No” of resistance to the

19 *The Daughter*, 204. In the original Greek: «είμαι η Παραού, καλλιτέχνης, και πατρίδα μου είναι οι δύο μου συντάξεις». *Mother of the Dog*, 243.

20 See further Kyriaki Chrysomalli-Henrich, «Σάτιρα και ειρωνεία: Στοιχεία ανατροπής της τραγικότητας στο *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου* του Παύλου Μάτεσι» [“Satire and Irony: Elements Subverting Tragedy in *The Mother of the Dog* of Pavlos Matesis”], in *Cultura Neogriega: Tradición y modernidad. Actas del III Congreso de Neohelenistas de Iberoamérica (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2 de junio – 5 de junio de 2005)*, ed. Javier Alonso Aldama and Olga Omatos Sáenz (Spain: Sociedad Hispánica de Estudios Neogriegos, Universidad del País Vasco, 2007), 334; Dimosthenis Kourtovik, review of *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου: Μυθιστόρημα*, by Pavlos Matesis, in *Ημεδαπή εξορία. Κείμενα για την ελληνική λογοτεχνία 1986-1991 [Half-Exile: Essays on Greek Literature, 1986-1991]* (Athens: Opera, 1991), 122; and Tsaknias, review of *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου: Μυθιστόρημα*, 139-141. The latter two find this mixed language and also other ingredients of the novel rather contrived. In *The Daughter*, Reed translates «διότι», one of Raraou’s favorite turns of phrase, into “seeing as how,” and thus into a marker of the newcomer’s pseudo-sophistication. Page 128 of Reed’s translation offers an apt example of how this expression, which remains at odds with Raraou’s colloquial idiom, leads to clever-sounding but otherwise disjointed sentences like: “Seeing as how in the meantime reprisals against the collaborators had started.” The original Greek sentence reads: «Διότι στο μεταξύ άρχιζαν τα αντίποινα εναντίον των συνεργασθέντων». *Mother of the Dog*, 152.

21 *The Daughter*, 89. In the original Greek: «Δεν το ’κοψε το επαρχιώτικο . . . Εγώ πάντως, στις συναναστροφές μου μιλάω πάντα πολύ αθηναϊκά». *Mother of the Dog*, 107.

22 *The Daughter*, 205. In the original Greek: «σκόπιμο είναι να είσαι πάντα με τον νικητή, δεν μου πάει εμένα να βρίσκομαι στο περιθώριο». *Mother of the Dog*, 244.

fascist forces, which is celebrated on “Ochi Day” to this day, has Raraou sneer:

Είκοσι έξι κάνουμε πρεμιέρα, σημειώνω εγώ θρίαμβο ως κόρη ορφανής, είκοσι οχτώ ξεσπάει ο πόλεμος, λες και μου έκαναν σαμποτάζ παιδί μου. . . . πάνε οι παραστάσεις, αναστέλλεται η καριέρα μου. Βρήκαμε την ώρα, ως έθνος, να πούμε το σκασμένο το όχι, για να μου κόψουνε την τύχη εμένα. Τέλος πάντων, προηγείται η πατρίς, αν και αόρατη.

On the twenty-sixth [26 October 1940] was the premiere, my moment of glory as the motherless child, and on the twenty-eighth the war breaks out, you'd have sworn somebody was out to sabotage me, artistically speaking. . . . [T]hat was curtains, so to speak; end of career. And us, as a nation, we have to go and say that cursed ‘No’, just to spoil my future. Anyway, fatherland comes first, even if you can't see it.²³

Not even the much-lauded Greek heroism displayed in the Greek-Italian War (on the Albanian front) can placate Raraou's resentment. Even years later, Matesis's anti-heroine does not hesitate to state her personal beef and to knock Greek patriotism off its pedestal: “That's my main quarrel with the Axis and the Occupation, the main reason I condemn them is because I wanted to take off as an artist and they wouldn't let me.”²⁴ Distant Greek myth is not safe, either, from Raraou's proprietary, self-serving reading of “history.” In all seriousness, Matesis's protagonist routinely conflates ancient and modern name-giving, the communal and the individual, the public and the private. She does so obeying the only authoritative voice she trusts—that of her mother, who herself, in a wartime hour of need and fear, unstitched the family's Greek flag to turn it into underwear for her destitute children.²⁵ Kyriaki Chrysomalli-Henrich regards this “double blasphemy” as the kind of act that Matesis likes to credit to intrepid women.²⁶

Και τις Κυριακές έπαιρνε η μάνα μου το βιβλίο και καθόταν και διάβαζε, Ιστορία και Γεωγραφία κυρίως, της έκτης Δημοτικού. Για τους Τρωαδίτες, τον Πρίαμο, τους Δώδεκα Θεούς, τους Έλληνες. Τότε μάθαμε, κι εγώ και η μαμά μου πως και εμείς Έλληνες λεγόμεθα, εκτός από Μέσκαρη.

23 *Mother of the Dog*, 102; *The Daughter*, 84.

24 *The Daughter*, 147. In the original Greek: «Αυτό κυρίως καταλόγιζα στην Κατοχή και στον Άξονα, γι' αυτό κυρίως τους κατηγορώ· που πήγαν να βάλουνε φραγμό στην καλλιτεχνική μου πτήση». *Mother of the Dog*, 173.

25 Recalling this episode, Raraou speaks with admiration of her mother's courage for placing her children's needs before national and religious symbols. In the original Greek, the passage reads:

Τώρα, την ξηλώσαμε και η μητέρα μου την έκοψε κι έβγαλε τέσσερα ζεύγη φανελλάκια για όλα μας, και από δύο βρακιά του καθενός. Μάλιστα, θυμάμαι, στο δικό μου βρακί έλαχε η μέση, με το σταυρό, δε σήκωνε ξήλωμα, κι έτσι φόραγα βρακί κυανόλευκο και ο σταυρός μ' έκοβε στον καβάλλο αποκάτω ακριβώς.

Now, after we unstitched it [the family's Greek flag] Mother cut it into four shifts and two pairs of drawers each. In fact, I remember mine were cut from the middle of the flag, the part with the cross: we couldn't unstitch that part, so I ended up with drawers in our national colours with the cross right in the crotch.

Mother of the Dog, 17-18; *The Daughter*, 8-9.

26 Chrysomalli-Henrich, «Σάτιρα και ειρωνεία,» 331.

On Sundays Ma would sit down and read a book, mostly History and Geography it was, from the sixth grade. All about the Trojans, King Priam, the Twelve Gods, the Hellenes. That's when we found out, Mum and me, that we are also called Hellenes, in addition to Meskaris.²⁷

Matesis shuns any celebration of the glorious classical Greek past and does not resuscitate ancient myth. He marks such celebrations as typically male, and he lets Asimina enact a gendered deed of subverting, of (literally) disassembling the nationalist master narrative. Raraou ups the ante of gendered subversion by desacralizing the Greek homeland, as when she expounds: "Greece, she's like the Holy Virgin: nobody ever saw her" (see below).²⁸ Matesis foregrounds, rather, personal, even "banal" histories that have long been marginalized, such as those of the common Greek people, named and unnamed alike, during the war years. Names are important to the uneducated Raraou, and they become a means to an end. Her father has gone one step further, turning the Albanian War into his means to his end: he deserted, took a new name and false identity, began a new life, and established a new family.²⁹ Failing to return as a proper father to his first family, he, too, performed his act on the stage of waning Greek patriotism. He, too, chose a "stage name" (according to Reed's translation, whereas the original Greek uses «ψευδώνυμο» or merely "pseudonym").³⁰ Raraou's father went missing, only to reappear and disappear again.³¹ As Chrysomalli-Henrich notes, Matesis presents the father's abandonment of his family as far worse than his desertion from the Greek army.³² An un-sentimental, hardened Raraou barely denounces her father's irresponsibility, however, as long as her second pension, her pension for being a "fatherless orphan," remains secure (in the original Greek «ορφανή πατρός»).³³ In the absence of men fulfilling their patriotic and other duties—a predicament to which Raraou tells herself that she has grown accustomed—the women are simply compelled to take on traditionally male roles as well. Raraou lies about the last time she saw her brother Sotiris, then she corrects herself and modifies her account when she retells the story.³⁴ The men of the Meskaris family appear to dwell in a constant interplay between narrative "reality" and its malleable

27 *Mother of the Dog*, 170; *The Daughter*, 144.

28 *The Daughter*, 206.

29 *Ibid.*, 199.

30 *The Daughter*, 205; *Mother of the Dog*, 244.

31 *The Daughter*, 198-200. [Page references to Reed's text appear in parenthesis, for easier consultation by those who are unfamiliar with, or are still studying Modern Greek.]

32 Chrysomalli-Henrich, «Σάτιρα και ειρωνεία,» 332.

33 *The Daughter*, 200; *Mother of the Dog*, 237.

34 Other scholars and critics have pointed out additional inconsistencies in Raraou's narration, which is a deadpan but also a fragile account given by an equally fragile person. See, for instance, Athanasios Anastasiadis, "Trauma—Memory—Narration: Greek Civil War Novels of the 1980s and 1990s," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 35, no. 1 (2011): 103; and Dimitris Tsatsoulis, «Οι Εκδοχές της αλήθειας: Για τις αφηγηματικές τεχνικές και τις γλωσσικές ανατροπές στη Μητέρα του σκύλου του Παύλου Μάτεσι» ["Versions of the Truth: About the Narratological Techniques and the Linguistic Subversions in *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου* of Pavlos Matesis"], in *Η Περιπέτεια της αφήγησης: Δοκίμια Αφηγηματολογίας για την Ελληνική και Ξένη Πεζογραφία* [The Adventure of the Narrative: Essays on Narratology and Greek and Foreign Prose Writing] (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 1997), 200-201. I concur with these scholars that listing such discrepancies is, therefore, not a fruitful undertaking.

reconstruction. In the end, however, the teenage Raraou alone is ready to assume the role of head of a household of two. She becomes a close and loyal caretaker to Asimina, in a complete role reversal of the mother-daughter relationship. Absent men simply remain absent and, if one believes Raraou, perhaps for the better. Equally absent and unreliable are the male politicians, and one doctor and Member of Parliament in particular. Doc Manolaras may have been helpful by sending a few odd favors Raraou's way, but he is merely building up clientelist relations of crude patronage. Corruption, voting fraud, and tampering with ration cards are not alien to Doc Manolaras,³⁵ but Raraou accepts the favors and pushes any scruples aside. She also never doubts whether Manolaras really took care of her brother Fanis, who somewhat mysteriously disappears from view.³⁶

The double pension that Raraou pursues and protects at all costs is the topic of much discussion throughout the novel: at stake are her actor's pension in addition to her orphan's pension. Like a red flag, Raraou's obsession with her double pension signals her dwindling patriotism and civic spirit. She commits nothing short of pension fraud, but she feels perfectly entitled to do so: "I'm Raraou, artiste, and my country is my two pensions."³⁷ Committing little "white" fraudulent acts comes easy to Raraou; in fact, it is her mode of survival, it is the measure of her success, it is her cue to take further advantage when the opportunity presents itself. Thus Raraou takes every bit of advantage of a special pass to receive free access to the theater. Proud to be an actress with nine lives, Raraou hardly cares when people make insinuating comments, drawing on the famous maxim that "Greece never dies"—and, Matesis implies, Greece never sees resurrection, either:

Παραού, μου κάνουν οι κομπάρσοι, εσύ είσαι σαν την Ελλάδα, ποτέ δεν πεθαίνεις.

Πολύ που χέστηκα εγώ αν πεθαίνει η Ελλάς, μη σώσει και πεθάνει, την είδα εγώ την Ελλάδα ποτέ μου . . . ; Η Ελλάδα είναι σαν την Παναγία· δεν τη βλέπει κανείς μας ποτέ... Ενώ τ' αυγά μου στο ψυγείο μου τα βλέπω. Τη σύνταξη τη βλέπω. Είμαι επιτυχημένη εγώ.

Raraou, the extras all tell me, you're just like Greece, you never die.

Frankly I couldn't care less if Greece lives or dies, one way or the other. What did Greece ever do for me? . . . Greece, she's like the Holy Virgin: nobody ever saw her... Me, I can see my eggs in the fridge. My pension, I can see that. I'm a success.³⁸

Pension fraud and stealing from the state are the two sides of every coin that Raraou may well pocket. Fleecing the fatherland may well be a long-lasting and even fulfilling *modus operandi*, "validated" by the fact that the nation owes her for making her mother suffer:

Η σύνταξη είναι πιο σταθερή από όποιον σύζυγο. Και πιο θερμή. Και ούτε έχω τύψεις που εξαπατώ το έθνος. Αυτό, γιατί κούρεψε τη μαμά μου; Δέχομαι τη σύνταξη κυρίως ως έκφραση συγγνώμης εκ μέρους του έθνους απέναντι στη μαμά, για την απρέπεια που της έκαναν τότε.

35 *The Daughter*, 151-152.

36 *Ibid.*, 151, 200, and *passim*.

37 *Ibid.*, 204.

38 *Mother of the Dog*, 245; *The Daughter*, 206.

You can count on your pension better than on any husband. It's warmer, too. So maybe I'm cheating the nation but I don't regret it for a minute. How come they sheared off my mum's hair, just tell me that? I accept this pension mainly as if it was the nation begging for pardon from Mother, for the disgrace they made her suffer back then.³⁹

Begging is another of Raraou's performance and cheating acts. From a debutante beggar, this survivor works herself up to the level of a "professional," capable of exploiting the patriotic and philanthropic ethos of others.⁴⁰ Thus the beggars' parade of three (Raraou, Asimina, and the mutilated stranger with whom they team up) must exorcise the earlier parade of the public humiliation, before the mudslinging (literally!) crowds. Raraou does not at all seek to forget this humble phase in her earlier life, which plays out in a non-descript time period that may or may not have occurred.⁴¹ Inverting the very meaning of restorative forgetting, Raraou lets this memory, rather, become an intrinsic part of her repertoire of survival strategies. In a picaresque or carnivalesque fashion (complete with a cart), Raraou has managed to perfect her begging routine as a stage gig, and she has (virtually) succeeded for never feeling shame, not even amid hyperbolic pretense:

φόραγε τα ψηλοτάκουνα και υποδεχόταν τους πελάτες, άρχιζε το νούμερο της ζητιανιάς.
Έτσι το έβλεπε αυτή, ως νούμερο από ρεβύ, ως εισόδια στον κόσμο της θεατρικής τέχνης.

Η ίδια έλεγε στη μητέρα της, αργότερα, . . . πως αυτή η περίοδος της ζητιανιάς με τον ανάπηρο της χάρισε τα εφόδια ν' αντιμετωπίζει τους θεατές. Επιπλέον, έμαθε να μη θίγεται, ούτε να νιώθει ντροπή, η ντροπή είναι για τους επαρχιώτες, έλεγε στη μαμά της.

She would . . . slip on her pumps and wait for the customers to arrive, then launch into her begging number. That's how she imagined it, as a number in a review, as her theatrical debut.

Later, . . . she told her mother that the time they'd spent begging with the cripple had given her the inner strength she needed to face an audience. More important, she learned not to let people hurt her, not to feel shame, shame is for provincials, she told her mum.⁴²

39 *Mother of the Dog*, 242; *The Daughter*, 204.

40 See Evgenia Marinakou, «Επαίτες—πρόσωπα της ιστορίας στο μυθιστόρημα *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου*, του Παύλου Μάτεσι» ["Beggar Characters of History in the Novel *Η Μητέρα του σκύλου* of Pavlos Matesis"], *Themata Logotechnias* 52 (Sept.–Dec. 2013): 151, who, building on her doctoral research, has contributed more recent studies as well. See also Eugenia Marinakou, "Talion social et plaidoyer littéraire dans *La Mère du Chien* de Pavlos Matessis" ["Social Revenge and Literary Defense in Pavlos Matesis' *Mother of the Dog*"], *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Philologica 2 / Graecolatina Pragensia* (2016): 43-56.

41 *The Daughter*, 187-188.

42 *Mother of the Dog*, 189, 198; *The Daughter*, 160-161, 168.

“Get that Dog out of here, get that Dog away from me”

«Διώχτε το, Διώχτε το Σκυλί . . . τί γυρεύει ο Σκύλος, δεν είμαι η Μητέρα του»

“what’s that Dog doing here, I’m not its mother”⁴³

Raraou, who does not let shame stop her, is, however, deeply traumatized by the ritual of public shaming that the villagers made her mother undergo after the war was over. Asimina had taken first one, then another Italian soldier lover to be able to survive and feed her children. She was one of the humble, desperate, and powerless women whom the villagers branded as collaborating “whores” and from whom they exacted a cruel revenge: identifying female hair as a source of seduction, they shaved the heads of such “unpatriotic” women and subjected them to extreme humiliations and sometimes even to summary trials. But many powerful, upper-class Greek collaborators, male and female alike (the “big whores”; in the original Greek «μεγαλοπουτάνες»),⁴⁴ came out of the frenzied days of the Liberation unscathed. Some wealthy turncoats and high-placed traitors got off entirely scot-free. This discrimination at the expense of her mother is the only issue that strikes Raraou as a blatant social injustice, and, unlike any other wrong, it has a profound impact on her. As much as she tries to dispel this grievous (post)memory by way of irony and sarcasm, it simply conditions the rest of her life. Recalling the critical scene of her mother’s debasement amid cruel village action, Raraou’s stance of postmemory reverts back to traumatic memory. The entanglement of memory and postmemory in her person, identifying as she does with her mother, proves to be inexorable. Matesis conveys the need to revisit the past, even to reenact it, in order to better understand the sociopolitical present but also the private psyche.

Only Mrs. Kanello, the outspoken tomboy and partisan, stuck her neck out for Asimina and called for a stop to the public shaming, boldly accusing even the “people’s courts,” the purported new organs of popular justice, of replicating and therefore deepening the socio-economic divides.⁴⁵ Without having the rhetoric, let alone the education, Mrs. Kanello bravely argued for solidarity among women, for a female support network amid the ever-present fear of first starvation and then retaliation.⁴⁶ Raraou’s mother received some support and sympathy from female neighbors, who grasped the daunting responsibility of her being a sole provider, at the time of the public humiliation and also thereafter, when she withdrew and refused to leave the house. The lack of proper rehabilitation that the chastised “mistress” faced marked a state of continued violence, against lower-class women in particular, which made a farce of the freedom promised after the Liberation.⁴⁷ Raraou only occasionally acknowledges the crucial female backing. While this memory holds a certain healing or redemptive value, it hardly tempers the heroine’s critical outlook on the village, its inhabitants, and its resistance fighters and avengers. Raraou and Asimina try hard to maintain and, after the war, to

43 *Mother of the Dog*, 164; *The Daughter*, 138-139.

44 *The Daughter*, 129; *Mother of the Dog*, 153

45 *The Daughter*, 129. [Page references to Reed’s text appear in parenthesis, for easier consultation by those who are unfamiliar with, or are still studying Modern Greek].

46 *Ibid.*, 118, 129, 139-140.

47 *Ibid.*, 117, 128.

restore bourgeois respectability and feminine, “lady-like,” or motherly qualities. The actress’ purchase of an apartment in the city must signal that she “has arrived.”⁴⁸ Mother and daughter have proven able to look upon the Italian occupiers as people, but they will never forgive the Nazi Germans—or the self-serving hypocrites from the village, for that matter. The language of Raraou’s dislikes is visceral and definitive.

Under the guidance of the people’s courts and the so-called upstanding citizens, the villagers subjected Asimina to a violent chastisement. Their “patriotism” was shallow and opportunistic, but it spurred a social aggression that victimized women, especially. The memory of this (heavily gendered) chastisement, even when diluted by cynicism and denial, leaves Raraou despising that kind of self-righteous patriotism and makes her, in the end, descend into madness. The injustice has fractured any sense of love, care, or safety that she has ever felt. Raraou associates such “sentimental” feelings (the kind that she is good at repressing) with the little pullet she looked after during the worst famine of the war years—until it suddenly died from starvation: “She was the only friend I ever had. Turned and looked me in the eye before she fell over and died.”⁴⁹ Opposed to the fragile chick stands the aggressive dog about which Raraou’s mother hallucinated during the worst of her debasement.⁵⁰ This merciless dog scene has given the novel its title.⁵¹ It is also what caused Raraou, who had been howling “like a beaten dog” to go into a seizure (in the original Greek «σαν σκύλος . . . αδικημένος», emphasizing injustice).⁵² Raraou has since repressed the memory of this delirious episode that left her, at the moment of “rejection” by her distraught mother, incapable of producing human sounds. She claims not to recall much more than the nightmarish scene in which her mother and other “mistresses” were placed on a truck and paraded through the streets before abusive crowds, which threw even animal guts at the victims.⁵³ Raraou’s denial of this paroxysm, her “banishing the traumatic memory from awareness,”⁵⁴ is immediately followed by an outsider’s refutation: “Of course she remembers but she won’t talk about it.”⁵⁵ The insensitive interlocutor questions Raraou’s memory loss and writes it off as another performance. The more Raraou emphasizes that she has started to forget, the more she invokes amnesia’s therapeutic power, the less credible she sounds: “that’s all I remember, nothing else. . . . And I said to myself, I’ll always remember this day. And now look, I went and forgot the half of it . . .”⁵⁶ Raraou’s disturbance of memory, her supposed “forgetting” of an essentially

48 Ibid., 115, 168, 187, and *passim*.

49 *The Daughter*, 213. In the original Greek: «αυτή ήταν η μόνη συντροφιά που απόχτησα στο ζην μου. Γύρισε, και κοίταξε εμένα πριν γείρει και πεθάνει» (*Mother of the Dog*, 253-254).

50 *The Daughter*, 135-139.

51 Ibid., 204.

52 Ibid., 138; *Mother of the Dog*, 164.

53 *The Daughter*, 137.

54 Anastasiadis, “Trauma—Memory—Narration,” 104.

55 *The Daughter*, 137. In the original Greek: «Θυμάται αλλά δεν τα λέει» (*Mother of the Dog*, 162). Mimesis lets this astute observation in the third-person be made by one of the women who was exposed to the repulsive parade along with Asimina.

56 *The Daughter*, 139. In the original Greek: «...μόνο αυτά θυμάμαι, άλλα δεν θυμάμαι. . . . Και έλεγα θα τη θυμάμαι εγώ αυτή τη μέρα. Είδες τώρα που τη μισή την ελησμόνησα;» (*Mother of the Dog*, 164).

unspeakable experience, is forever embedded in her remembrances; she cannot deny the interplay between the two, and neither can she clearly separate traumatic memory from second-generation memory. In later life, Raraou even mistakes her repressing of memories for an act of forgetting. The trauma and also the mnemonic dysfunction that has marked Raraou after devastating Asimina is forever associated with the Greek village and with the village mentality,⁵⁷ both haughtily rejected by a heroine who, nonetheless, keeps replicating them. The humiliating ordeal muted Asimina, who never spoke again except in her final moments. She then admits: “I never lost my voice. I just didn’t want it no more. From back then. Don’t cry.”⁵⁸ With her final breath, Asimina insists that her daughter should not bury her back in the village, should not even take her bones back there.⁵⁹

“[I] Played the role of drowned woman number two”⁶⁰

The trial of the mother’s mortification constituted the only moment of her daughter’s utter defenselessness, of her complete lack of pretense, of the malfunctioning of any survival mechanism. For her subsequent self-preservation, Raraou engages the powers of illusion and performance. Eleni Papargyriou has posited that theatrical performance thus “absorbs the devastating effect of humiliation on the level of mimicry”.⁶¹ Matesis’s dramatization (literally and metaphorically) of this performativity functions as a representational strategy that broadens the scope and tactics of the narrative.⁶² Raraou stresses that various prior acting gigs had long honed her survival instinct, but not that this instinct failed in the face of the most painful ordeal of all. Reportedly, Raraou made her stage debut as punching bag, as a kick-ball, and moved “up” to further low-grade roles among motley crews, who have seen their acts upstaged by national and world events.⁶³ Very often, Raraou merely settled for what she could get:

Λέω «τουρνέ μου» λες και ήμουνα η πρωταγωνίστρια. Είχα όμως και λόγια σ’ αυτή την τουρνέ, μισή σελίδα διάλογο. . . . με μισθό κομπάρσας με πήραν, για οικονομία, αλλά ευκαιρία, τρελή ήμουνα να τους κάνω και κόνξες;

When I say “on tour” you might get the idea I was the star. But at least I got some lines of my own, a whole half page of dialogue, in fact. . . . of course I did it on the

57 *The Daughter*, 209.

58 *Ibid.*, 208. In the original Greek: «Ποτέ μου δεν την είχα χαμένη τη φωνή μου. Δεν τη θέλησα πλέον. Από τότε. Μην κλαις και σώπα» (*Mother of the Dog*, 248).

59 *The Daughter*, 209.

60 *Ibid.*, 89. In the original Greek: «έκανα τη δεύτερη πνιγμένη» (*Mother of the Dog*, 107).

61 Eleni Papargyriou, *Reading Games in the Greek Novel* (London: Legenda, 2011), 119, n. 31.

62 In the winter season of 2014-2015, Matesis’s novel was staged by the Contemporary Theatre in Athens, under the directorship of Stavros Tsakiris. It was also translated in several European languages and was temporarily considered for a movie treatment. For further discussion of the cross-fertilization between Matesis’s work as a dramatist and that as a novelist, see: Marinakou, “Talio social et plaidoyer littéraire,” 45; Walter Puchner, *Ο Μαγικός κόσμος του υπερλογικού στα θεατρικά έργα του Π. Μάτεσι: Ερμηνευτικό δοκίμιο* [*The Magical World of the Hyperlogic in the Theatrical Works of Pavlos Matesis: Interpretive Essay*] (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2003), 23-24.

63 *The Daughter*, 116.

cheap, extra's pay, but when opportunity knocks, who's going to spoil it by haggling?⁶⁴

“Stardom,” “triumph,” or “glory” are all relative notions, of course. Raraou does not lack ambition. Ambition and vanity, however, keep disguising the actress' true vulnerability. Reality seeps through the cracks of some of Raraou's outrageous boasts, as when she recalls her role in a production called *The Orphan's Daughter*.⁶⁵ The heroine has learned to comprehend the world as a world of the stage. She has long coped with it by cynically deconstructing illusion and disillusion, success and shame. She has even managed to eke out a sense of self-esteem:

της το χρωστάω αυτό της δεσποινίδος Σαλώμης, πρώτη αυτή ανακάλυψε τη ροπή μου. Δεν με διάλεξαν ως κόρη του κρεσπώλη τους, με μέσον, κάτι σπίθα είδαν αυτοί μέσα μου, κι έτσι μου άνοιξε ο δρόμος για τη μετέπειτα σταδιοδρομία μου.

[I] have to thank Mlle Salome, she was the first one to unearth my natural talents. They didn't pick me just because I happened to be the tripe merchant's daughter, no, they saw that inner spark of mine and that's the story of how I got started on my future career.⁶⁶

In search of validation, nonetheless, Raraou keeps up a web of delusions about her stage career, and she feeds on this delusion as much as on performance. Only by the end of the novel does Matesis disclose what really happened to his heroine's stage trajectory:

Βέβαια, η αλήθεια, καλλιτεχνικά δεν έχω καταξιωθεί ούτε αναγνωρισθεί ακόμη, ούτε τώρα που πλησιάζω πια να πάρω και τη σύνταξη ηθοποιού. Ρόλους μεγάλους δεν έχω δει ακόμη· συνήθως ρόλους βωβού προσώπου μου πρόσφεραν, ή νεκρήs.

Of course I haven't really reached my peak as an artiste yet, haven't really got the recognition I deserved, not even now when I'm about to start drawing my actor's pension. Never really got to play any of the great roles; usually what I got was the non-speaking parts or the dead people.⁶⁷

64 *Mother of the Dog*, 96; *The Daughter*, 79.

65 In the original Greek:

Στην πρεμιέρα . . . εθριάμβευσα. Το κοινό, όλο καλή κοινωνία, ανακουφίστηκε όταν είδε πως το παιδάκι έτρωγε χαστούκια και όλο το πετούσαν σαν τσουβάλι, αυτόs ήταν ο ρόλος μου. . . έσκαγα στο πάτωμα σαν καρπούζι, τσιμεντένιο δε το πάτωμα. Και μ' όλα ταύτα εγώ ούτε φώναξα ούτε έκλαψα, διότι από τότε μου άρεσε η δόξα. . . και έτσι μπήκα στον κόσμο του Θεάτρου.

The premiere . . . was my triumph. The audience, all high-society people, was relieved when they saw the kid getting slapped around and tossed to and fro like an old rag doll; that's what my part was. . . I fell plop on to the floor like a ripe watermelon, and a cement floor it was too. But even then I didn't let out a peep, not a tear; from that moment on, I was in it for the glory. . . and that was how I entered the world of the Theatre.

Mother of the Dog, 101-102; *The Daughter*, 84.

66 *Mother of the Dog*, 101; *The Daughter*, 83.

67 *Mother of the Dog*, 225; *The Daughter*, 190.

The “truth” about Raraou first appears in the form of a reality check on her career, followed by a report of a psychiatric evaluation. The latter “Certificate of Psychiatric Examination” refers to Raraou as a “Member, National Federation of Stage Extras,” and delivers the diagnosis of “compulsive confession” syndrome,⁶⁸ thereby confirming the reader’s preliminary conclusions.⁶⁹ Here the reader receives proof that Raraou has been talking to her psychiatrist (“That’s right, doctor”; «Μάλιστα, γιατρέ μου»)⁷⁰ and that these conversations have had a therapeutic effect, bringing her closer to acknowledging at least some of the facts. The psychiatrist’s examination reinforces that “investigation” and even “forensics” into memory, as part of the patient’s sustained treatment, shape our understanding of postmemory (see above, n. 1). Raraou’s account of her life story, her digressive but selective remembering make up the novel. While they do, the author appears to distance himself from the narration and the fictional speaker, who takes over.⁷¹

In addition, the psychiatric examination leaves Raraou “certified to be a virgin” («ευρέθη παρθένος»)⁷². Throughout the novel, however, Raraou has presented herself as sexually very experienced, to the point of being promiscuous. It, too, was all an act and a boast. It, too, drove a stream of her delusions. Raraou’s feigned sex life was again presented as a performance, albeit the kind of performance whose disdain for men undercut gender expectations (in Judith Butler’s sense of the words):⁷³ “It was all an act, I was only playing a role in bed. Never really liked it either but I pretended to out of courtesy and, besides, it paid.”⁷⁴ If Raraou’s pretense sex was a performance act or even a lie, it was also, once more, an act of surviving against all odds, of coping, of overcoming trauma: “if my mother became a sinner by performing that act, I will never in my life perform that act”;⁷⁵ “And so it was that never once did the desire to touch a man’s body overcome her.”⁷⁶ Raraou speaks with a great deal of hatred or contempt for men: “Talk about lustful! But when’s the last time I met a man who wasn’t?”⁷⁷

68 *The Daughter*, 193.

69 This certificate («ΒΕΒΑΙΩΣΙΣ ΨΥΧΙΑΤΡΟΥ») of Raraou («εγγεγραμμένη εις το Σωματεῖον Κομπάρσων») delivers the diagnosis that reads in the original Greek «ιεράς εξομολογητικής μανίας», literally: a “sacred confessional madness.” *Mother of the Dog*, 229.

70 *The Daughter*, 213; *Mother of the Dog*, 253.

71 Ada Katsiki-Gkivalou, «Ματιές στην πεζογραφία του Παύλου Μάτεσι» [“A Look at the Prose Writing of Pavlos Matesis”], *Themata Logotechnias* 25 (Jan. - April 2004): 82.

72 *The Daughter*, 194; *Mother of the Dog*, 230.

73 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999).

74 *The Daughter*, 191-192. In the original Greek: «ηθοποιία, και στο κρεβάτι εγώ ρόλο εκτελούσα. Δεν το φχαριστιόμουν το κρεβάτι, παράστανα ότι μου άρεσε έτσι από ευγένεια, και από συμφέρον» (*Mother of the Dog*, 227).

75 *The Daughter*, 163. In the original Greek: «εφ’ όσον απ’ την πράξη αυτή η μητέρα μου κατέβηκε στους αμαρτωλούς, εγώ δεν θα την πραγματοποιήσω ποτέ μου αυτή την πράξη» (*Mother of the Dog*, 193).

76 *The Daughter*, 164. In the original Greek: «Κι έτσι ποτέ δεν την κυρίεψε επιθυμία να αγγίξει σώμα αντρός» (*Mother of the Dog*, 193).

77 *The Daughter*, 189. In the original Greek: «Πολύ λάγνος. Αλλά σάμπως βρέθηκε στον δρόμο μου ποτέ άντρας που να μην είναι λάγνος;» (*Mother of the Dog*, 224). See also: “all men are destined to lust after me, because there’s no other ticket for me to get ahead as an actress.” (*The Daughter*, 163). In the original Greek: «Όλοι οι άντρες είναι απαραίτητο να με ποθούν, . . . διότι μόνο έτσι θα μου δοθεί το πασαπόρτι να διαπρέψω ως θεατρίνα» (*Mother of the Dog*, 192-193).

Like all of Raraou's acts of pretense, the sex act, too, contains elements of her prostituting herself, of being easy while disparaging, nonetheless. The actress talks about sex as if it were just another annoying prerequisite as she sleeps her way to the "top." Her mentions of other women assert as much: "Madame Rita was the most respectable whore in Rampartville. A real star she was, I copied a lot of her tricks later on in my acting career."⁷⁸

Raraou's career of lifelong pretense and dissociated memory turned out to be more effective than her acting career, which was marred by nervous breakdowns. The reader learns:

Τον αέρα που είχε στη σκηνή της τον παραδέχτηκαν πάντα οι συνάδερφοι και οι θιασάρχες, ασχέτως αν στο τέλος, όταν έπαθαν βλάβη τα νεύρα της, δεν την έπαιρναν πλέον στη δουλειά επειδή είχε γίνει μπελαλού, άσε που είχε πάθει κρίση δύο φορές σε ώρα παραστάσεως, σε τουρνέ μάλιστα...

From fellow actors to stage directors, everybody admitted she had a kind of presence, even if she always seemed to end up in a nervous collapse which meant she wouldn't be hired for the next season. Plus she had a reputation for being trouble, not to mention her two fits on stage, on tour. . .⁷⁹

For these mental crises, which lay bare her repressed sensibilities, Raraou saves her last dissimulating explanation, which draws on her acquired petit-bourgeois status: "It was sort of aristocratic, nerves, none of those tumours and gynaecological things any woman can come down with. The kind of illness that made her feel like a big city girl."⁸⁰ Raraou has done what she could to negate or stave off the impact of memory and postmemory, but she has thereby reified its very effects. Also, this postmemory cannot justify its "post-": the notion of postmemory falls short before the novel's space of fraught encounters between first and second-generation trauma, interior and exterior pain. The very close identification between mother and daughter, marginal individuals and missed generations, undercuts every "post-" and, rather, concentrates the gendered dimensions of memory. Thus, from a literary and postmodernist point of view, Matesis's novel acknowledges a form of gendered memory that is not past, not "post-," but that continues to feed off and fuel transmitted traumatic memory.

Conclusion

Matesis's novel constitutes a fictional representation of trauma. The author narrates and dramatizes trauma through fiction, through a first-person, autodiegetic process of remembering that shifts to the third-person narration of a psychiatrist or other close observer.⁸¹ Part of Raraou's complex but fragile psyche, however, refuses to recall and much prefers to create further fictions: the heroine resorts to

78 *The Daughter*, 131. In the original Greek: «Η κυρία Ρίτα ήταν η πλέον σεβαστή πουτάνα των Επάλλξεων. Πολύ βεντέττα, από κείνην αντέγραψα εγώ μερικά κολπάκια μετέπειτα στην καριέρα μου ως ηθοποιός» (*Mother of the Dog*, 155).

79 *Mother of the Dog*, 198-199; *The Daughter*, 168.

80 *The Daughter*, 169. In the original Greek: «ήταν ασθένεια αριστοκρατική, νεύρα, όχι όγκοι και γυναικολογικά που μπορούν να τύχουνε στην καθημία. Η ασθένειά της την έκανε πιο πρωτεουσσιάνα» (*Mother of the Dog*, 199).

81 For the longer sections of pages, see *The Daughter*, 157-186 and 137-139; or, in the original Greek text, *Mother of the Dog*, 185-220 and 162-164, respectively.

hypokritike (υποκριτική), “true” acting (from her limited perspective), to maintain and legitimate a stance of hypocrisy, *hypokrisia* (υποκρισία), in which she has made herself entirely at home. Thus Matesis’s novel produces an alternative narrativity that intertwines with a subversive kind of performativity. The author pushes at the borderlines between genres and realities, and he interrogates the notions of representation, narrative, and performance. He questions the realms of the politically and socially conscious without advertising his techniques or even his results. His anti-heroine Raraou, whose stage role of “punching bag” suggests *the* metaphor for her entire life, is a staunch survivor, but at what mental cost? Behind the metaphor still hides a character that, despite the many confessions, wants to remain elusive and indeterminate. This characterization of the main character and her trauma conditions the character of the narrative, which is permeated by techniques of dramatization as well. Characterization, theatricalization, narrative, and performance join forces to deliver a wry to satirical subversion of the nationalist master narrative, to question how destructive war experiences could ever be absorbed into the history of subsequent generations, or into the domain of the “post-,” if the latter even exists for suffering female victims.

Taking up as much agency as she can, Raraou enacts herself as a person through theatrical display and pseudo-rhetorical confession. Her characterization is a product of her performance, but it is also performance itself. Genuine actions and performed acts blur, as in Raraou’s purported sex acts. Only the realm of Raraou as daughter remains free from the trappings of performance—for its deliberate absence of pretense. It is the realm of the actress’ single most successful performance—if only we can believe the first-person narrator of Matesis’s persuasive novel. The layers of Raraou’s performing cover hypocrisy, begging, having sex, remaining the recipient of blatant patronage, “prostituting oneself” in mediocre gigs, and much more. But then the reader learns that the protagonist actually never made it in the artists’ world, that she was always an extra at best, and that she has suffered—and again repressed—nervous breakdowns. Matesis proves to be a master at creating elusive levels of confession, credibility, and fiction. He shifts narrations and time frames with ease, taking his reader through decades of a Modern Greek history of pretension. Asimina has withdrawn into speechlessness to exorcise the past, but Raraou has turned to confessional modes of performing. These modalities of coping co-exist, but Raraou’s psychology of self-preservation still dictates the mood and language of the novel. Pretense becomes the vehicle, the sustained metonymy, of a social, economic, and political critique, to tell the story of—a series of repeated confessions of—performance *manqué*, of the actress and the nation alike. Personal history becomes national performance, deflating pride in the latter. Matesis suggests potential analogies between the past and the present, such as socio-economic inequities and class divides. He delivers a stinging cultural critique of the sociopolitical oppression sustained in contemporary Greece. He also (re)constructs a national “survivor” identity that remains impervious to nationalist rhetoric, religious conventions, or moral taboos. He thus provides alternative perspectives on the past and also frameworks for understanding the present.

Matesis’s subversive but essentially postmodernist conception of literature and culture, which embeds thinking and writing (about) the historical novel of the 1990s, transforms national performance into intimate personal history, and vice versa. It turns any geographical space or setting into a private stage, including the space of sexual intimacy. Given its openness to memory and postmemory, this history written “from below” may add the colorations and accretions of a psychological and sensory history to (the nuances of) a political and factual history. Because Raraou’s identification with her mother is nearly complete, her postmemory is still vivid and devastating memory. Thus her (book-

length) testimony animates the modes in which the memories and postmemories of loss, separation, and susceptibility have intertwined with the transnational spheres of “established” Greek history, real and imagined alike.

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