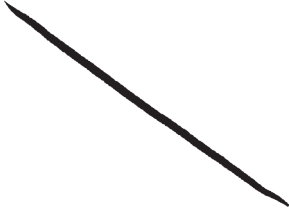


THE ADVENTUROUS RECEPTION OF GALATEA KAZANTZAKIS IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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Abstract: The article refers to the particularly hostile reception by the intellectual community of the time of two plays by Galatea Kazantzakis. The writer was an important female presence in Greek literature in the first half of the 20th century, a key representative of the leftist ideology and the first wife of the acclaimed author Nikos Kazantzakis. These plays, having been influenced by the pioneering European currents of the time, proposing new ways of thinking and writing and above all promoting the female presence and action, experienced a reaction unprecedented in the annals of the intellectual life of the time. The rich dialogue caused by their performance, and indeed by *While the Ship Sails* of the newly founded National Theatre (1932), illuminates in various ways the theatrical and more generally the artistic and intellectual reality of the time, enriching with valuable material the history of ideas in the interwar period.

Keywords: Galatea Kazantzakis, dramaturgy, Avant-garde, ideology, reception, interwar period, criticism, female presence, female writing, performance.

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Introduction

The interwar period, like all transitional periods, is characterized by convergences and apparent or even substantial contradictions in all fields. Intersections are more frequent and stronger than continuations, a phenomenon that creates strong conflicts and continuous rearrangements. Therefore, the possibilities of interpreting the phenomena are limited. While attempting to go in this direction, we must remember that the twenty years between 1920 and 1940 were post-war for the people of the time, and not – as for us – inter-war. We must also take into account that immediately after the war, another war – internal this time – the Asia Minor devastation, once again changed the post-war facts, adding a new dynamic factor to the national, political, social and cultural history. The strengthening of the Left¹, mainly in the first inter-war decade, will enrich significantly the ideological and aesthetic rearrangements.

Having its expressive organs in the daily and periodical press, it opposes all manifestations of urban art, consciously and explicitly putting ideology at the service of aesthetics. In this context, the interwar reflection developed particularly fruitfully, focusing on the timeless demands of Greekness and avant-garde. These now gain particular dynamics with various starting points, different faces or even masks. The theatre, by its nature, especially exposed to external influences,

1 In 1924 the Socialist Labor Party of Greece was renamed the Communist Party. For the history of the Left in this period, see Άγγ. Ελεφάντης (1979) *Η επαγγελία της αδύνατης επανάστασης, Κ.Κ.Ε και αστισμός στον Μεσοπόλεμο*, Αθήνα: Θεμέλιο.// [Translated: Elefántis, Áng. (1979) *The promise of the impossible revolution*].

receives a variety of stimuli from which it creates its identity. In this image, we often recognize nuclei of evolution, which end up in our time. Among the important pioneers of ideological and aesthetic ferments, in the field of theatrical practice, we can distinguish Sp. Melas, F. Politis, K. Koon, S. Karantinos, and in dramaturgy P. Horn, Ag. Terzakis, A. Lidorikis, Gal. Kazantzakis.



Galatea Kazantzakis (1881-1962)

Source: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/24692921.2021.1903286>

Galatea Kazantzakis

The last one, whose work and activity we analyze here², is of particular interest, as a unique case of a female presence with extremely daring, but also noteworthy interventions in the field of ideological and aesthetic pursuits. This offer, whether consciously or out of ignorance, was not evaluated by the intellectuals of the time. Her gender, her ideological position but also the heavy shadow of her husband, Nikos Kazantzakis, lead us to a partial interpretation, but not sufficient justification of the phenomenon.

² The author's personality as well as her theatrical activity have repeatedly occupied the undersigned in studies and articles; see the monograph: Β. Γεωργοπούλου (2011) *Γυναικείες διαδρομές. Η Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη και το θέατρο*, Αθήνα: Αιγόκερως.



Nikos Kazantzakis' wife from 1911 to 1926.

Source:

<https://www.historical-museum.gr/webapps/kazantzakis-pages/en/life/letters-galatea-intro.php>

The Wounded Birds

Among the pioneering dramaturgical contributions of the interwar period are two plays by Galatea Kazantzakis, which occupied the critical community a lot: *The Wounded Birds* and *While the Ship Sails*. *The Wounded Birds* was staged by one of the short-lived, but important interwar avant-garde troupes, the “Art Theatre” of Sp. Mela, in 1925 (Georgopoulou, 2008, pp. 130-150).

The play by Galatea Kazantzakis was the only original Greek play presented by the troupe, as well as the only play signed by a woman. According to K. Bastias, its author was “one of the most important Greek writers” (Bastias, 12.8.1925). Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we could not find the text of the much-discussed play, which would have solved several questions regarding the controversial issue of its reception.³ According to Sp. Mela (Melas, 1960, pp. 202-209), the theme of the play refers to *Les Ratés*, by the pioneering French playwright

³ I came to this conclusion after researching the accessible sources. Specifically, in the magazines that the author wrote for, in the manuscripts of ELIAS and the theatre library. The play does not exist in the file of the author's sister, Elli Alexiou, according to the information provided by the file manager Ms. Eugenia Zikou to Kostas Nitsos (on 23/10/1997). The author planned to publish it together with some other works, which are referenced as “to be published”, but in the end their publication didn't happen. Unfortunately, I could not even find the program of the performance in the archives of the Theatre Museum and ELIAS. The information about the play comes from newspaper reviews, which fortunately were quite informative, and from some letters to newspapers by the author herself.

Lenormand⁴ – whose reception is of particular interest in the Greek interwar scene⁵ – and to its general climate in Chekhov⁶. The play concerns the authors's contemporary Greek life and mainly the intellectuals of the time⁷.

The author had repeatedly expressed her opposition to the theatre of her time, which “only gave either slavish imitations of French art, or ethnographic depictions of conventional modern Greek life” (Kazantzakis, 9.8.1925). As she argues, with *Wounded Birds*, she tried on the one hand to escape from the “manganopigado” of ethnography, and on the other, starting from Greek reality, to showcase the tragedy of human fate, making a contrast between dream and reality. These visions of the author, remarkable as well as ambitious, aimed to move beyond ethnography – a concern shared by a significant part of the progressive intellectuals of the time, especially those on the Left – and to reduce her heroes to timeless symbols – a hallmark of all great dramatists. However, these aspirations seem to have gone unnoticed by the critics of the time, who rejected the play outright. According to Sp. Melas, the performance “was a theatrical feast” in the negative sense of the term (Melas, 1960, p. 205). The great faults that the critics attributed to the play were the lack of action and dramatic conflicts, their replacement by unrestrained philological and philosophical chatter, as well as the lack of a connective tissue, that would unite the different stories of the fourteen heroes of the play. The spirit of the relevant criticism is revealed by the proposal of the columnist of the *Athenaiki* newspaper, that the director of the theatre be punished together with the writer, “as the first person responsible for yesterday's theatrical filth” (“The corsair”, 11.8.1925).

4 Henri-René Lenormand wrote plays that emphasized man's submission to his fate and the decline of society and culture. Among his works, quite well known is *Les Ratés* (*The Fails*), a play in 14 pictures, first performed in Paris in 1920. *The Fails* are Parisian actors who, disappointed by the public, tour the French provinces hoping for better luck, which unfortunately they never meet. The play impressed because of its realism and frequent scene changes [Grimon – C. Musil, (χχ) 1832].

5 In the same period, the “Art Theatre” presented *Time is a Dream* by the same author, while *Simun* was presented by “Elefthera Skeni” in 1929, with the author attending the performance. But also the collaboration troupe of the two protagonists Kiveli and Kotopouli presented *Medea* in 1932.

6 The author refers to the relationship of her play with Chekhov, while also giving interesting information about its plot: “*The Wounded Birds* reminds me of Chekhov, as Mr. Spyros Melas also said. Because they, like the heroes of the great Russian writer, live with the nostalgia of a better life. Each person, of the fourteen who exist in the drama, has their story, which is a sad drama.... I tried to present as vividly as possible the drama of the people of spirit and Art, who, for one reason or another, did not see their ideals fulfilled (Melas, 1960, pp. 203- 204).

7 And even in very specific persons. According to Sp. Melas: “Kazantzakis drew her material from her circle of scholars, poets and actors, who frequented Dexameni at the time, without flattering those who inspired her in any way” (Melas, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 202-203). The author also admits this fact: “The heroes in this work are all taken from Greek, modern life and everyone can recognize them and give them their familiar names.” (Kazantzakis, 9.8.1925).

The criticisms of F. Politis (12.8.1925) and P. Kalogerikos (12.8.1925) were added to the overall rejection of the performance. The main innovative elements of the play, such as its modular cinematic structure and the existence of hints, which allowed its heroes to be identified with well-known figures of the intellectual life, were not only evaluated by the critics but also turned against the author. In particular, they had the effect of creating negative comments at the expense of her personal life.

A much more sober treatment of the play's weaknesses is attempted by the playwright Pantelis Horn, in his publication from the newspaper *Eleftheron Vima*. This text appears in the context of a more general criticism, which he exercises on the sloppiness and unbridled subjectivism of Greek criticism (Horn, 15.8.1925). He recognizes Mrs. Kazantzakis' originality in the conception of the subject. Regarding her relationship with Chekhov, he considers it "imitation but not slavish, because it presents types of our own taken from our lives, characters quite well designed around a central idea that does not deviate from it even for a moment" (Horn, *ibid*). This last statement about the play's central axis, coming in stark contrast to the general view of criticism, is of particular interest, since it is formulated by a successful playwright. Horn then makes interesting observations about the persons of the play, and with the look of the experienced dramatist, notes the lack of liveliness and naturalness of the characters. He also notices the uneven lighting between the main and secondary figures, which helps to reduce the interest in the play. But the main factor that in his opinion significantly reduces the dramatic effect, is the absence of plot in the play, a fact that could be overcome with a more poetic rendering. Horn particularly praises the dialogue, and emphasizes that the play should be judged positively by critics as an effort that, while not entirely successful, nevertheless paves the way for future ventures. This last conclusion of the columnist is in complete agreement with the opinion that the author herself expressed about her work on the eve of the performance that indicates, if nothing else, a genuine self-critical attitude on her part, an attitude that emphasizes even more the irrational passion of her critics: "If I succeeded, I don't know. I dare to set an example for those, better than me, who can go further. This drama is also purely a wounded bird, which moved wanting a lot and accomplishing as little as it could" (Kazantzakis, *ibid*, 9.8.1925). The reception of the play shows, among other things, the critics' indifference to the author's intentions and signals a lack of empathy and constructive engagement among Greek critics. In contrast, an exemplary approach is taken by P. Horn in his aforementioned critique.



Galatea Kazantzakis

Source:

<https://www.searchculture.gr/aggregator/persons/-1896500687?language=en>

While the Ship Sails. The text

Equally adventurous, but also particularly interesting is the reception of the play *While the Ship Sails*, because – among others – the play was staged by the National Theatre. In the play, Kazantzakis attempts to render social protest, a familiar theme in her dramaturgy, using avant-garde European stage forms and contemporary aesthetic currents, more powerfully than in her previous attempts. The special character of the play is supported by the dramatic space (a traveling ship), the stage directions, its structure in separate images, as well as the Shakespearean motto that precedes the play, and which refers us to the idea of the theatre of the world.⁸

The play – a drama in three acts and ten scenes⁹ – as characterized by the author – presents several peculiarities and creates several problems in understanding and interpretation, which certainly cannot be moved to a realistic level. The detailed stage directions give us the atmosphere of the play from the beginning and shed enough light on the author's purposes: "When the curtain raises we see

8 "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Shakespeare (G. Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 9).

9 From the program of the performance, in 1932, we conclude that, in the 1959 collective volume of *Avlaia* published edition, the author must have made some changes. Of course, these are probably also due to directorial intervention.

a setting meant to resemble a port. This port will be depicted as expressionistically as possible” (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 11).

Trying to illuminate the meaning of the play, the author notes: “As the passengers of the ship pass by, they will be illuminated by powerful spotlights, with such a color that the people will look like the dead” (idem). Also, all the faces will be made up in a “granguilosque” manner, as will be the whole atmosphere of the play.” Later, this attempt of the author to emphasize, with a dose of exaggeration – which far exceeds the realistic limits – the pathology of the situations, and to project the horror, becomes evident. In this context, it is obvious that the heroes of the play lose their individual characteristics and transform into figures capable of being a symbol (while not expressing too much vocally). This intention of the author is realized in the presentation of the characters, not with specific names, but with their temporary or permanent qualities. For example, they are referred to as the “sick”, “Mr. X”, the “entrepreneur”, the “second entrepreneur”, the “lady in love”, the “psychic”, the “crazy” etc. These characterizations give them a deliberate vagueness and a general character, which indicate the attempt to render more general situations. This element was also pointed out by the critics of the time and attributed a lack of vitality to the faces: “Mrs. Kazantzakis did not give life to any face, everything appears and disappears like lifeless shadows” (Thrylos, 1977, p. 418).

A stench of physical and moral death is constantly emerging. This stench of death emanates from the deck, which has been turned into a death camp, and from all seats, where the conversations of the passengers constantly revolve around the worthlessness of life and the inevitability of death. This state of terror is intensified even more by the news that leprosy is spreading among the passengers. The plot of the play comes second and also attempts to express this horror and impending destruction. What mainly characterizes the parts of the play and increases this pathological atmosphere is the complete lack of ideals and values, which deprives them of any reason for existence. In their general state of misery, some voices of protest arise. These represented either by the “man on the couch”, who envisions social equality and refers to author’s ideology, or by the amateur actress, who grounds her balance in her interest for theatre: “*The amateur actress*: The gentleman is sick because he has no purpose in his life... He who has an ideal is never sick. I’m not, because I want to be a great actress. I will enroll in Drama School” (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 27). But apart from politics and art, there is consolation in people’s daily lives when they are able to maintain and express their feelings. On the contrary, religion is unable to alleviate human suffering, since it postpones everything to the afterlife, as the monk argues, disappointing the leper who hopes to be cured: “*Monk (crawling and unconscious)*: Not here, not here in the

wordly life... in the eternal... where there is no pain or groaning... Down here, how do you dare to go?" (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 16).¹⁰

The morbidity peaks in the presentation of the relationship of the two sexes, its complete perversion, which will become the cause of the final destruction of the ship. The erotic pathology will culminate in the relationship between the stoker of the ship, Hercules, and the "captain's daughter". Hercules' love represents the primitive, and perhaps the most genuine, instinctual manifestation of this emotion, as a desire for exclusive dominance and possession of the loved object, while the love of the "captain's daughter" expresses, on the contrary, its most hypocritical manifestation, aiming at the satisfaction of female companionship and vanity. This love, already burdened with the curse of death, – Hercules has killed his betrothed – is fated to spread destruction.

It is clear that Galatea uses the symbolism of the ship to express her views on society and human life, which are characterized by an excess of morbidity, as we have already identified. This projection of the pathological element, characteristic of naturalism, is projected by the Russian classics and especially by Maxim Gorky in his play *The Lower Depths*. Reference is made to this work both by the passengers of the third seat with their biological and physical deterioration, but also by the passengers of the other seats with their moral morbidity. The events in Gorky's play take place in an asylum, where various rejects and outcasts from society have been gathered. It is typical that there is also the "failed businessman", the "actor", and above all, the "ideologist", Luka, who envisions social change. Travel literature, too, with its tempting proposal of escaping to the vast sea, perhaps contributed to the inspiration of Galatea, who, however, is careful to eliminate the magic of travel from the beginning, constantly presenting the idea of death, which in the end also acquires a realistic basis. These constant preconceptions that we have already identified, reduce the interest in the development of the play. In some parts, the emphasis on social pathology deprives the play of its dramatic power and reaches the limits of cheap melodrama:

The Couch Woman: In a little while I will not see him anymore... I will never see him again (*Papsi*). Last night he accompanied me to the port. We sat in a small cafe and waited for the steamer... He was cool and cared about me. Was he asking me? Are you cold Teresa? Are you well dressed? He was touching my back. I was silent... I couldn't say a word...

10 Galatea, despite all her progressive ideas, believed in God, but to whom she gave a completely human dimension in an attempt to unite Christianity with the socialist vision of changing society. She expresses these views in the short story: "The Repentance of Jesus", (Kazantzakis, G., 1936).

I couldn't find... A little more time and we will part forever... (*cries*). (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 17)

Critics took advantage of these weaknesses and rejected the play.

The performance and the “festival” of reception

While the Ship Sails by Galatea Kazantzakis was staged for the first and only time by the National Theatre in its second year of activity (1932-1933), as part of the promotion of modern Greek drama. It's the first multi-act Modern Greek play¹¹ staged at the National Theatre. The central female role was played by Katerina Andreadis, while the male role was played by Avlonitis. Important actors of the older and younger generations also participated, such as Sappho Alkaïou, Ludovikos Louis, N. Rozan, N. Paraskevas, G. Glinos, N. Dendramis, Il. Destounis, M. Katrakis, Al. Minotis, Vaso Manolidou et al. Despite the universal request and the constant appeals of intellectuals for staging a recent Greek play on the national stage, Galatea's work was considered completely inappropriate by the critics, who reacted violently. The peculiarity of the play caused many discussions, among others because the author was a woman and belonged to the intellectual Left. A clear example of the confusion in the criticism was that the bourgeois rejected it because of its leftist ideology (Barlas, 6.11.1932), while the leftist intellectuals rejected it because of its reactivity (Unsigned, 1932, pp. 453-454). Representing the bourgeois criticism, T. Barlas writes characteristically: “The writer belonging ideologically to the comrades of Moscow applied on the stage of the national theatre the new techniques found by communism to express the collective vision” (Barlas, *ibid*). From an aesthetic point of view, the play was also rejected by both sides, who considered the choice of F. Politis to be completely unsuccessful, and attributed it to a desire to showcase the technical capabilities of the national stage, driven by the spectacle required by the direction of the play, (Podas, 3.11.1932, Barlas, 6.11.1932, “The theatrical”, 3.11.1932).

T. Barlas even quite maliciously asserted: “Politis competes with Make-dos and without success” (Barlas, 6.11.1932). On the contrary, the criticism of P. Haris completely disapproves of the play, but praises it as an opportunity to demonstrate the directing and scenographic skills of the staff of the state theatre (Haris, 1932, 1448).

In the same sense, Thrylos, although having judged the play negatively by condemning the inexhaustible borrowings from the Russian avant-garde and

11 The first one-act Modern Greek play was *The Divine Dream* by G. Xenopoulos, which was staged at the opening performance of the national stage together with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

American dramaturgy, supported the direction of the play and praised the initiative of the national stage to present a Greek play, condemning the negative position of the criticism:

“However, Greek criticism, which is unfortunately often practiced in many newspapers by people without any qualifications and any system, always offers surprises. The day after the premiere of *While the Ship Sails*, the same people who had almost asked for the closure of the National Theatre because it was not fulfilling its strictly national purpose, erupted with libels, not only against the play and the author, but also against the Theatre that presented a wretched and stupid contraption!” (Thrilos, 1927, p. 414)

Here it is worth adding the praise of the president of the Italian writers, Dr. Davanzati, who, being in Athens, attended the project. Expressing his admiration for the atmosphere, the acting and directing discipline, as well as the unity of the performance, he attributes this success to the directing intervention of F. Politis, which he places at the opposite end of the vendetta-driven approach, which he identified as a dominant element in *Maria Stewart*’s performance, which was presented in the same period by the two protagonists Kyveli and Kotopoulos (Bastias, 10.11.1932).

An attempt at interpretation

The predominance of the sea element in Kazantzakis’ play referred to the dramaturgy of the American playwright Eugene O’Neill and part of the criticism aptly identified the play’s obvious relationship with the American playwright’s *The Hairy Ape* (1922). An anonymous critic, in fact, supports his point of view by giving us detailed information about the reception and stage course of the play: it was published in 1929, performed in Paris by Pitoeff in the same year and published in French in Europe in 1930 (Th.N.T., 3.11.1932). These elements justify the relationship between the two plays, taking into account the French education of Kazantzakis and the date of writing of her play. However, not a single critic proceeded to find the most organic relationship that connects the two plays, which classifies them in the aesthetic current of expressionism. *The Hairy Ape* represents O’Neill’s expressionist phase. The expressionistic elements of both plays are their separation into self-contained images, the personification of primitive individual instinct in the face of a stoker¹², the type of fatal woman who brings disaster, the

12 Yank in O’Neill and Hercules (the choice of the name is not accidental) in G. Kazantzakis. These two persons have common characteristics, such as their dislike for women, their physical strength which is

destructive intervention of love but also its decisive role in the development of the play¹³, the projection of the class element¹⁴, the presentation of the persons not by name but by their qualities.

It is worth noting that the modernity of the play was detected by some of the critics, but without specifying this reference. In fact, the “theatrical” of *Vradini* (2.11.1932) and Kokkinakis of *Akropolis* rank the play among the best of recent years. Kokkinakis even compares it with the most innovative plays of European dramaturgy, arguing that *While the Ship Sails*, apart from its artless ending, is not inferior to *Maya* presented by “Elefthera Skeni” and to *The Sick Youth*, presented by Kyveli’s troupe. He also acknowledges that the advanced socialist views of the author are presented in a technical manner, to which he attributes the attack of the criticism (“Red”, 10.11.1932). Sofia Mavroidi Papadakis, bolder than her male colleagues in defending a female artist, and with shared ideological concerns, argues militantly that the play, modern and innovative, was not evaluated by the critics, because we always see the modern outside of Greece. The play – she continues – has a premise, vitality, psychological conflicts, a warm and human atmosphere. It is “symbolic, emotive, inspiring”(Papadakis, 1933, p. 111). Despite her good mood, Papadakis is unable to define the axes of modernity, which would be the most stable basis for the defense of the play. To conclude, it is worth adding the opinion of the always perceptive Gr. Xenopoulos. As a judge of the Stathatio’s Competition in 1931 (Petrakou-Mousmoutis, 1931, p. 163), he claims that *While the Ship Sails* was the best submitted play. He adds: if he did not insist on giving Kazantzakis the first prize, it was because the play was “too daring and too modern” (Xenopoulos, 1931, pp. 319-320). In her interview with K. Bastias, Galatea expresses the reasonable question about this really contradictory statement by Xenopoulos and her general dissatisfaction with the rejection of her play by the competition jury, as well as her disappointment with the general theatrical situation of the time (Bastias, 1999, p. 123).

manifested both in their strange appearance and demeanor, and their destructive tendency to drink. But, in O’Neill’s play, Yank presents complete characteristics and his reduction to a symbol is given more successfully: “Beyond me nothing, I am the end, I am the beginning. A start and the world moves. Yes that’s me. The new that kills the old. I am what makes iron steel.” (O’Neill, *The Hairy Ape*, p. 25)

13 Yank’s meeting in the boiler room with Mildred, a pale rich girl dressed in white (an element that reminds us of the “captain’s daughter”) and the lightning love that automatically developed between them, is the strongest element connecting the two plays.

14 We read in O’Neill’s play (Scene I): “Long: All men is born free and ekal. That’s in the bleedin’ Bible, maties. But what d’they care for the Bible—them lazy, bloated swine what travels first cabin? Them’s the ones. They dragged us down ‘til we’re on’y wage slaves in the bowels of a bloody ship, sweatin’, burnin’ up, eatin’ coal dust! Hit’s them’s ter blame—the damned capitalist class!” (Available at: <https://www.sparknotes.com/drama/hairyape/full-text/scene-i/> Accessed at: 12 November 2024)/(O’Neill, *ibid.* p. 8). Similar discussions take place, in the play of Galatea Kazantzakis. However, in O’Neill play, this element is particularly intense and perfectly harmonized with the plot, contrary to its external inclusion in Galatea’s play.

Other highly positive comments about the play are recorded in the general evaluation of the theatrical movement of 1932 by D.A. Kapetanaki in *Nea Zoi*, an Athenian magazine with a Greek-centric orientation. The critic characterizes *While the Ship Sails* as “a play of great value” and considers the level of criticism against Mrs. Kazantzakis’ play to be completely absurd and unreasonable. Continuing, he evaluates it as “one of the best works that graced the cult of true art in Greece”. Noting then its particularity and that “the features of the concept of drama are absent”, however, he identifies a “fragile, heartbreaking and desperate music, rising subtly but clearly through each scene of the drama”. The play expresses the sobs and heartbreak of the artist’s worldview, that life has no meaning. This confession – always according to the critic – “is worth saying, as long as it is sincere, as long as it was made with genuine effort and passion” (Kapetanalis, 1933, p. 73). This view completely agrees with the belief of the author, who in her article in newspaper *Proia* gives “certain explanations for the play”, trying to protect it from the attacks of the critics. In this interesting text, Galatea argues that a work of art does not necessarily have a specific position, nor is “the creator obliged to reveal their purposes”. Then, seeking to illuminate the thread of the play, she invokes the Shakespearean motto she puts forward, regarding the relationship of life with theatre and therefore its futility and comments

“as a feeling pervading the drama there is this sense of the tragic and pessimistic meaning of life. This is the atmosphere of the play, the gloomy spirit that wanders between the heroes in their reasonings and their actions: all hopes are in vain, life is pointless, senseless and chaotic, [while] death, raw and brutish, appears as the only constant and eternal reality.” (Kazantzakis, 8.11.1932)

Then Galatea separates the modern drama from the traditional one, by claiming that her play is “preeminently modernist in all its forms and content”. Documenting her point of view, Galatea invokes the lack of communication and meaningful dialogue between the characters in the play: “For this reason, often each of the characters in the drama does not respond directly to their interlocutor, but as if they rendered their internal meditations out loud, like monologues” (Kazantzakis, *ibid*). This last observation of Galatea brings us close to the theatre of the absurd, where the lack of contact between the persons is a main characteristic.

Both the play and the author’s ideological and aesthetic positions are very far from her leftist ideology, which is surprising, as we are aware of Galatea’s political involvement until that point, even as editor-in-chief of the leftist publication *New Pioneers*. Because of the play, she clashed with the

official party line, which through the above-mentioned journal publicly accused her of reactionary and anti-revolutionary behavior, characterizing as “nonsense” the clarifications about the play that the author herself published, as we have seen, in *Proia* (Unsigned, 1933, p. 454). Due to this dispute, the author is removed from the journal for a while. *Rizospastis* criticizes the play even more harshly, publishing a pamphlet against the author and the play, which is signed by P. Theta, a worker-stoker (Thetas, 6.11.1932). The complete distortion of the meaning and the aggression against the hero-protagonist stoker, whose image seems to personally affect his fellow article writer, is accompanied by insulting comments about the author who made “a criminal falsification of the heroic proletariat” (Thetas, *ibid*). And the hysteria continues: “many sympathetic workers of the district of Agia Zoni”, in a letter to *Rizospastis*, express their indignation against the play, demand the cessation of the performances, applaud Theta’s criticism and ask for “weapons to fight it”.

Conclusions

This play, together with Palamas’s *Triseugeni*, met the most adventurous reception. On the occasion of their performances, basic issues of ideology, aesthetics and the relationship between them were raised. The study of its reception constitutes a reliable indicator of the history of ideas of the interwar period. The main topics of the critical dialogue were: the role of art and especially theatre for bourgeois and leftist intellectuals, the relationship between content and form, the responsibility of the creator, the position and evaluation of the woman-writer, the choices of the national scene.

The critical evaluation of Galatea Kazantzakis’ two original plays, proves once again the stereotypes and the impermissible ignorance of criticism. The plays themselves, the imperfections they present, nevertheless hold an important place in the history of theatre as attempts to combine the Greek reality of the time with European aesthetic currents, either of the previous twenty years, such as naturalism and symbolism, or more modern ones, such as expressionism. In particular, *While the Ship Sails* constitutes an important contribution to Greek dramaturgy, not only because it’s the only expressionist drama of the interwar period but also because we have very few examples of the effect of this aesthetic trend in the entire Greek theatre, even in later years (Pouchner, 1988, pp. 399-401). Having the impression that the work was wronged by the direction of F. Politis, a fanatical defender of the omnipotence of text, and fully believing that an inspired abstract direction, which would mainly highlight its symbolic and expository elements, would mean a real restoration of the play, we appeal to young directors. We assure them that the challenge is worthwhile, serving as proof, among

other things, of how modern directorial approaches contribute to the exploitation of the past.¹⁵

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