

# The Transformations of Greek Working-Class Fiction from the Interwar Period to the Present

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## Abstract

Surveying a large corpus of Modern Greek fiction from the interwar years to the decade of the financial crisis (2010-2020) we set out to delineate the national inflection of ‘working-class fiction’ along the axes of theme and style as well as *answerability*, i.e. the engagement with working-class interests in distinct periods (interwar years, WWII and postwar, *Metapolitefsi* and beyond). Characterized by quantitative and aesthetic variability, the Greek version of the genre is shown to engage actively with topical contextual issues as well as with changing imperatives of authorial commitment and the shifting composition of the working class.

## Keywords

Working-class fiction, answerability, social responsibility, proletarian literature

Focusing on Greek literary production from the interwar years to the first decades of the twenty-first century, in the present article we will draw upon, delimit, and outline the national inflection of ‘working-class literature’.<sup>1</sup> This particular term differs from other similar appellations which have occasionally been employed in the Greek context to describe politically-committed or socially-sensitive literature, although various degrees of overlapping may be traced in different eras: for instance, ‘socialist [κοινωνιστική] literature’<sup>2</sup> does not refer exclusively to the working-class; rather, it targets social inequality and economic discrepancies in general. Equally non-restrictive from a thematic point of view are other terms, such as ‘Left literature’, whereas the term ‘proletarian literature’, a historically specific, dominant form of working-class literature, has been invoked with

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<sup>1</sup> Although definitely not exhaustive, the following list is indicative of the term’s relevance in an international frame and within an extensive time span: Clarke, B. & Hubble, N. (Eds.). (2018). *Working-Class Writing. Theory and Practice*. Palgrave-Macmillan; Coles, N. & Lauter, P. (Eds.).(2017). *A History of American Working-Class Literature*. Cambridge University Press; Tocarczyk, M. (Ed.).(2012). *Critical Approaches to American Working-Class Literature*. Routledge; Goodridge, J. & Keegan, B (Eds.).(2017). *A History of British Working-Class Literature*. Cambridge University Press; Pierse, M. (Ed.).(2017). *A History of Irish Working-Class Writing*. Cambridge University Press; Lennon, J. & Nilsson, M. (Eds.).(2017). *Working-Class Literature(s): Historical and International Perspectives*. Stockholm University Press; T. Woodin, T. (2018). *Working-Class Writing and Publishing in the Late Twentieth Century*. Manchester University Press; Perera, S. (2014). *Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization*. Columbia University Press.

<sup>2</sup> We employ the term ‘socialist’ as the English-language equivalent of the term ‘κοινωνιστικός’, taking into account that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the latter was used as a Greek translation of the French or Italian terms for ‘socialism’. See Kalantzopoulou, M. (2016). Politiki filosofia kai sygchroni politiki istoria. Ta mythistorimata ton adelfon Soutson metaksi diafotismou kai romantismou. In *Zitimata neoellinikis filologias. Metrika, yfologika, kritika, metafrastika, Proceedings of the 14th International Conference, 27-30 March 2014* (pp. 171-190). [[https://www.lit.auth.gr/sites/default/files/mneme\\_ks.\\_a.\\_kokole\\_praktika.pdf](https://www.lit.auth.gr/sites/default/files/mneme_ks._a._kokole_praktika.pdf)].

regards to a certain period. Besides, and unlike working-class literature, all the above terms are usually invested with a clear-cut ideological content, occasionally even arising from a strict communist party-allegiance. By adopting the wider term ‘working-class literature’, we hope to bring to the fore and discuss a larger corpus of works that converge on *taking working-class life as their focus and promoting its interests, written by authors who either reproduce their lived experience or act as witnesses for others*.

It is equally important to note that, countering reductive definitions which delimit the semantic scope of the term ‘working-class’ to industrial workers, we posit that, according to a scientific, rigorous system of categorization in advanced capitalist societies, including Greece, it consists of employees in large and smaller-scale industries, as well as in the lower strata of civil servants (Economakis & Milios, 2019). As such, it comprises both blue-collar and the lowest ranks of white-collar labor, a fusion suggesting a commonality of experience, which transcends the manual-intellectual labor divide. Depending on different historical periods, working-class life may be a more or less permanent stage in one’s career life, in upward or downward trajectories of social mobility. This is especially so since the late 1980s, when various processes took hold in Greece, such as the advent of the globalized organization of capital, the implementation of flexible forms of employment and the decline of union representation, leading to the apparition of precarious and mobile forms of wage labor.<sup>3</sup>

As far as the understanding and discussion of working-class interests is concerned, we resort to the notion of ‘answerability’,<sup>4</sup> which refers to the interlacing of life and art in terms of moral responsibility and may be used to encode a class-conscious artistic outlook pertaining to a wide range of ideological orientations. In this regard, in order to be included in the genre, literary texts need to preserve their materialist bases, that is to include social references and a critical stance towards class antagonisms, which are often obfuscated and channeled to other, horizontal and unifying identifications, such as national and religious identity. Therefore, working-class literature, regulated by a call for answerability, can be viewed as a ‘literary/social/critical practice that is informed by a consciousness of the social and historical importance of class antagonisms’ (Syson, 1993, p. 89).

More specifically, answerability from the part of the author consists in giving voice to and ensuring conditions of visibility for, working-class subjects in ways which deviate from hegemonic paradigms. In terms of linguistic composition, answerability in working-class texts consists in ensuring that the various, class-bound linguistic registers co-exist in egalitarian terms within the text. In literary texts written by working-class authors, answerability consists in a specific kind of social responsibility, which allows workers to converse by means of various types of discourse, about common experiences, while also allowing the authors to express multiple working-class communities

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Dalakoglou, D. (2013). The Crisis before ‘The Crisis’: Violence and Urban Neoliberalization in Athens 1. *Social Justice* 39 (1), 24–42; Maniatis, Th. (2015). The Fiscal Crisis in Greece: Whose Fault?. In Mavroudeas, St. (Ed.) *Greek Capitalism in Crisis. Marxist Analyses* (pp. 33-50). Routledge; Kallianiotis, I. N. (2013). Privatization in Greece and Its Negative Effects on the Nation’s Social Welfare (Expropriation of the National Wealth). *Journal of Business and Economic Studies*, (Spring, 2013), 19(1), 1-23.

<sup>4</sup> The term was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his early works, and especially in his essay ‘Art and Answerability’ (1919), in order to describe artists’ intention to observe critically, and respond to, the social reality of their time. See Holquist, M. & Liapunov, V. (Eds.).(1990). *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. (pp. 1-3). University of Texas Press. As has already been remarked, answerability bears close affinity to Lévinas’ concept of ‘responsibility’ and to Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘alignment’. See Zandy, J. (2004). *Hands: Physical Labour, Class, and Cultural Work*. (p. 86). Rutgers University Press, NJ. & Nealon, J. T. (1998). *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (pp. 31-52). Duke University Press Books.

through their authorial voice. In terms of reader's response, whether working-class or not, answerability acts as an invitation to join a working-class community of readers who also identify with the working-class characters or, respectively, to realize their class distance, which deters such identification.<sup>5</sup>

Our synthetic approach to the genre of working-class fiction takes into consideration similar research approaches in other national literatures, as well as theoretical discussions in Greece.<sup>6</sup> It adopts a fluid, empiricist approach,<sup>7</sup> that acknowledges the lack of a widely accepted definition for working-class literature<sup>8</sup> as well as its crossing paths with other genres, touching on related subjects and employing a variety of styles. Although class is foregrounded as an analytic category and unifying prism of textual construction, it is considered in conjunction with other aspects of social identification, such as ethnicity and gender. Under the scope of this genre, we aim to detect similar yet evolving ways of organizing, representing, and interpreting reality over a long period of time, varying socio-historical conditions and different understandings of class-related identities.

### Surveying the genre

The starting point of our research is the interwar years, since they mark a heightened sense of class consciousness for the working class in Greece,<sup>9</sup> along with an upsurge of publication of working-class literary texts. Textual precursors can be identified in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the form of single working-class works, which however are not accompanied by noteworthy theoretical discussions and are therefore not conducive to a generic clustering, or genres sensitive to social inequalities, such as the Greek version of the 'mysteries novel'.<sup>10</sup> Spanning the period 1919-2020, we surveyed the totality of published Greek prose fiction, while our archival research included

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<sup>5</sup> In formulating the above, we draw upon Hitchcock (2000) and Zandy (2004). See Hitchcock, P. (2000). They Must Be Represented? Problems in Theories of Working-Class Representation. *PMLA*, Special Topic: Rereading Class (Jan. 2000), 115(1), 20-32; Zandy, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The issue of the authors' class origin arises among Greek critics exclusively within the context of 'proletarian literature' discussions during the interwar years. Despite the fact that most articles published in the Communist party-controlled journal *Neoi Protoporoi*, by critics such as S. Tetenes, S. Tsakiris, M. Glafyros & Th. Kornaros, give prominence to the proletarian standing of individual authors, in others greater emphasis is posed on the 'psychological configuration of the artist' – their mind frame and lived experience of working-class life – rather than on class positioning. It is further argued that to the extent that the 'proletarian-artist' of both bourgeois and proletarian origin transcend the intellectual force of the 'masses', their differentiation becomes de facto redundant. See Alafouzou, A. (1932). Provlimata tis proletariakis logotechnias. *O Kyklos*, 25-33. Besides, social mobility, prevalent in 20<sup>th</sup> century Greece, renders the authors' class demarcation difficult and temporary.

<sup>7</sup> Also see Nilsson, M. & Lennon, J. (2016). Defining Working-Class Literature(s): A Comparative Approach Between U.S. Working-Class Studies and Swedish Literary History'. *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, (April 2016), 8(2), 39-61.

<sup>8</sup> See Christopher, R. & Whitson, C. (1999). Towards a theory of working-class literature. *NEA Higher Education Journal* (Spring 1999), 71-81; Lauter, P. (2005). Under construction: working-class poetry. In Linkon, S. & Russo, J. (Eds.). (2005). *New Working-Class Studies* (pp. 63-77). Cornell University Press; Zandy, *Hands*.

<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that since the establishment of the Modern Greek state the advent of the Greek capitalist formation presents many particularities with respect to West European countries, to the point of being considered in terms of '(semi-)peripheral underdevelopment', the rapid embedment of capitalist productive structures in the last decades of the 19th century and especially during the interwar years, despite the initial relative reluctance from the part of the peasantry to join the ranks of the urban proletariat and the tenacity of the micro-regionalist mind-frame, led to the formation of a robust working-class with distinctive gradations. See Seferiadis, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> For a brief account of the apposite literary production from 1907 to 1920 see Y. Kordatos, G. (1972). 'Η επίδραση του εργατικού κινήματος στη νεοελληνική διανόηση'. In *Ιστορία του ελληνικού εργατικού κινήματος*, (7<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 322-338). Boukoumanis.

Greek-language literary journals that were more likely to have published relevant material.<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that in discussing a national version of working-class fiction, we have excluded transnational (migrant or exilic) works.

Regarding the quantitative variation of the genre, we note that, as expected, the production of working-class literature is particularly prolific during the interwar years, which saw the consolidation of working-class consciousness in Greece. The WWII and postwar production is more limited, most probably reflecting the defeat of the Left in the Civil War (1946-1949) and the political and social processes triggered thereof. The wider period that ensued the fall of the military junta in 1974, namely *Metapolitefsi*, including the years of the economic crisis in Greece, which witnessed the lifting of censorship on ideological grounds and more or less abrupt reshufflings of class relations, sees an expected resurgence of the genre. The number of working-class texts written specifically by working-class writers, although high in the interwar years, has been rather meagre ever since and, from 1974 to the present, focused on autobiographical discourse in general (testimonies, interviews, chronicles).<sup>12</sup> It must be noted that there have been specific attempts to boost this kind of production: the journal *Protoporoi* aimed to promote writers with a working-class provenance through the reservation of a special column for working-class writing as well as feedback on the work submitted,<sup>13</sup> the journal *Neoi Anthropoi* dedicated a special section of its fifth volume to ‘proletarian poetry’, whereas literary contests were also organized in the postwar years (by *Organismos Ergatikis Estias*).<sup>14</sup> As far as specific genres are concerned, the prevalence of short stories, although expected in the context of a national literature lacking a long tradition of novel-writing, may also be traced back to authors who are bound by material needs not readily met by the activity of writing. It may also be argued that the relatively low production of novels compared to short stories collections attests to the difficulties encountered in articulating a grand narrative for the working class in Greece. Finally, we should note that, allowing for notable yet isolated cases,<sup>15</sup> the gender dimension of working-class heroes has been systematically downplayed, except for the cases of sexual exploitation, typically associated with women. Female working-class characters are either under-represented, compared to their male counterpart, or constructed in accordance with the dominant gendered division of labor. This may be attributed to the assumption that injustice and exploitation are a common working-class experience irrespective of gender, as well as to the domination of male writers in this genre.

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<sup>11</sup> The following 23 journals were examined: *O Noumas* (1903-1931), *Neoi Vomoi* (1924), *Logotechniki Epitheorisi* (1927), *Nea Epitheorisi* (1928-1934), *Neoi Anthropoi* (1930), *Protoporoi* (1930-1932), *Neoi Protoporoi* (1931-1936), *Lytromos* (1933), *Epitheorisi Technis* (1954-1967), *Nea Poreia* (1955-2009), *Diagonios* (1958-1993), *Kritiki* (1959-1961), *Tram* (1971-1979), *I sinecheia* (1973), *Grammata kai Technes* (1982-1999), *Parafyada* (1985-1990), *To tram-ena ochima* (1987-1996), *Elefthera Grammata* (1945-1951), *I leksi* (1981-present), *Nea Estia* (1927-present), *Eksopolis* (1994-2011), *Diavazo* (1976-2006), *Planodion* (1986-2012).

<sup>12</sup> Let us note that, initially, works by working-class writers were not judged and classified on a fiction/non-fiction basis. For instance, in the call issued by the Greek Workers’ Hearth Organization and addressed to working-class writers, literary works are simply termed ‘texts’.

<sup>13</sup> This target was implemented through the reservation of a special column for working-class writing as well as feedback on the work submitted. This practice lasted probably until 1934 (Dounia, 1996, p. 151-153; 155-159).

<sup>14</sup> The award-winning short stories were published in a collective volume. According to the ‘Foreword’, the contest was first held in 1947. Two more rounds followed. See *Workers’ short stories awarded in Greek Workers’ Hearth Organization’s literary contests* (1953).

<sup>15</sup> Galateia Kazantzaki constitutes the most prominent case in point. See the novella *Gynaikes* (1933) and the novel *Andres* (1935). Gender relations are also explored in Petros Pikros’s novel *Toubeki* (1996)[1927] and in Dimitris Sotiriou short story titled ‘I korniza’. Dimitriou, S. (2018[1987]). *I korniza. Ntialith’ im Christaki* (pp. 33-39). Patakis.

Before we proceed, we should note that the periodization of the literary category proposed merely puts forth majoritarian or dominant aesthetic and ideological tendencies in each period, and that any strict temporal delimitation could not be sustained, as many individual authors reproduce older aesthetic approaches and thematic choices in successive periods. Although, understandably, a thorough analysis of the works included in the genre would exceed the scope of this article, we do ponder on specific working-class texts, which encapsulate more patently the specificities of the corpus in each period.

### **The interwar period: Social critique and proletarian guidance**

During the interwar period, several crucial processes are taking place: the formation of the working class is completed (Seferiadis, 1995) and, consequently, the labor movement is consolidated, while the social dialogue on labor is intensified, as is the influence of the socialist worldview on the intellectual elite (Liakos, 1993). At the same time, there is a quantitative explosion of publications in magazines with an explicit socialist/communist orientation or related content.<sup>16</sup> Although there appears no coherent and unquestionable definition of the genre in the theoretical and critical texts of this period, it is generally thought that ‘proletarian literature’, that is the interwar version of the genre, is articulated in parallel with the labor movement, taps into emotions and, by means of its revolutionary content, aspires to play a guiding role for the masses. The invocation of an intellectual avant-garde and its substantial and active social responsibility may explain the fact that certain authors repeatedly contribute with their works to the genre during this period (eg P. Pikros, N. Katiforis, K. Paroritis, D. Voutyras, P. Afthoniatis, etc.).<sup>17</sup> As for the aesthetic standards of the genre, although symbolism is also present, it is mostly the principles of realism that prevail, as the faithful depiction of reality and the simple style give immediacy to social complaints and support the intended didactic function of the works.<sup>18</sup>

The dominant trend in the working-class literature of the time (1920s) is the focus on deviant or marginalized groups (petty criminals, pimps, convicts, homeless people, drug addicts, prostitutes, unemployed, terminally ill). By highlighting aspects of the urban underbelly, these literary works aim to stigmatize the social pathogenesis of the bourgeois society which condemns the lower classes to a hopeless living, without necessarily proposing the terms for a collective way out or expressing the certainty for a revolutionary change. For instance, in the novel *O Kokkinos tragos* [The Red Goat], a group of ideologically like-minded people meets at the homonym bar, to discuss social issues. One of the habitués argues: ‘But it is not the people’s fault. If one is by birth completely blind, they will go wherever directed to go. They will even throw stones at their benefactor. But this

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<sup>16</sup> *O Noumas* (1903-1931), *Neoi Vomoi* (1924), *Logotechniki Epitheorisi* (1927), *Nea Epitheorisi* (1928-1934), *Protoporoi* (1930-1932), *Neoi Anthropoi* (1930), *Neoi Protoporoi* (1931-1936), *Lytromos* (1933).

<sup>17</sup> Pikros, P. (1927). *Toubeki*. Ekdotikos oikos N. Theofanidi & S. Lampadaridi; Katiforis, K. (1930). *I piatsa*. Mavridis; Paroritis, K. (1924). *O kokkinos tragos*. Vasileiou. D. Voutyras, D. (1921). *Zoi arrostemeni & alla diigimata*. Eleftheroudakis; P. Afthoniatis, (1929). *Prosfyges*. Agon.

<sup>18</sup> The opinion of M. Spieros who insists on the function of symbols, as they are utilized in the context of surrealist and expressionist writing, is fringe. See Spieros, M. (1932). Provlimata proletariakis technis. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 9, (August 1932), 312-315 [=N. Calas, N. (1982). Provlimata proletariakis technis. In A. Argyriou, A. (Ed.). *Keimena poiitiki kai aisthitikis*, (99-109), Athens. Gavriilidis-Plethron]. Similarly, although she highlights a ‘preference for realism’, Alafouzou does not reject symbolism, although she perceives it as an inaccessible form for the proletarian culture of the time. See A. Alafouzou, A. (1933). Provlimata tis proletariakis logotechnias. *O Kyklos*, 1 (March 1933), 25-33. Besides, ‘proletarian literature’ is repeatedly contrasted with ‘modern art’, which is considered bourgeois. See the discussion between Thrassos Kastanakis and Kostas Paroritis in *Noumas* (1931). On the other side, objections were raised by the bourgeois literary critique on the aesthetics of these texts, as it was widely considered that they did not promote aesthetic renewal. See for example A. Thrylos, A. (1925, January 11). Σα θα γίνουμε άνθρωποι. *Dimokratia*.

doesn't matter at all. What matters is that everyone should do their duty' (p. 207).<sup>19</sup> These works narrate quotidian aspects of the lumpenproletariat, a tendency which has been described with the terms 'alitografia' [writing on vagrants] and 'bleak literature' [logotechnia tou zofou] by Panagiotis Moullas (1933, p. 50-51). Particularly characteristic of this trend are the interwar works of Petros Pikros, and specifically the trilogy *Chamena Kormia*, in which, Pikros casts a bold and unbiased eye on the lumpen proletariat, reflecting the social vicissitudes of the interwar years. It is crucial to note that, as, Alexandros Argyriou comments, 'their [the heroes' of this trilogy] psychology is not petty bourgeois' (2001, p. 49). In a similar way, Christina Dounia argues that the sexuality of Pikros' heroes, animalistic and innate, goes against the hypocrisy of bourgeois ethics (2009, p.12). This clarification is necessary if one takes into account the diachronically ambiguous stance of the Greek Left towards the standards and dynamics of the lumpenproletariat. In overall, in terms of normative morality, two directions are discernible: one the one hand, one should not underestimate the intention to transcend bourgeois ethics and counter the dominant patriarchal discourse, especially in the literary production of the 1920s. Such is the case, for instance, in Petros Pikros's *Toubeki*, in which the narrator ironically underscores the power relations underpinning the marital institution and the limitations imposed on female sexuality (1996, p. 73). On the other, the model of heroes who embrace the widely-held principles of morality and heteronormativity is also found in 'proletarian literature', although it is presented as a frustrated and/or impossible condition within the bourgeois order (see, for example, the novel *I piatsa*).

Gradually, from the early 1930s onwards, when socialist realism had been established worldwide, Greek working-class literature shifts its focus from the social margin and its inability to protest to more dynamic ways of class consciousness and rallying. As such, novels or short stories published during this time deal mainly with the vindication of the once docile worker, who then gets enraged with his oppressor (employer, supervisor, loan shark) and acts violently against him.<sup>20</sup> They also deal with the promotion of labor unions, trade unions and political action, which arise as the only way to improve working-class life.<sup>21</sup> Class consciousness, syndicalism and political action seem to contribute greatly to the advancement of the heroes, even when the latter are experiencing difficulties in their work or family life.<sup>22</sup>

As such, it becomes clear that alignment with working-class interests, which is also a demand explicitly expressed by the ideologically committed literary reviews and essays of the time, is carried out mostly in terms of clear, unambiguous sympathy, be that expressed with humanitarian intent (especially during the 1920s) or in Marxist terms (mainly from 1930 onwards). Characters are constructed according to Manichaean, dualistic models of absolute good and evil. More specifically, the workers are presented as positive heroes, imbued with honesty and militant spirit. Sometimes they appear as victims, as they end up being downtrodden, if not crushed, by the oppressive laws of historical and socio-economic causality and the everyday conditions of work. Accordingly, at the

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<sup>19</sup> The quote derives from the following edition: Paroritis, K. (2007)[1924]. *O kokkinos tragos*. Alexandria Publ. In Greek: 'Μα δε φταίει ο λαός. Άμα κανείς είναι από γεννησιμιού του θεόστραβος, όπου τον σπρώξεις, θα πάει. Θα πετροβολήσει ως και τον ευεργέτη του. Μα αυτό δεν έχει καμιά σημασία. Το σπουδαίο είναι ο καθένας να κάνει το χρέος του'.

<sup>20</sup> Karpos, A. (1934). O Garbis. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 2, 63-67; Kontos, N. (1934). Ena leipsano... *Neoi Protoporoi*, 8, 296-298; Kontos, N. (1935). O kaimenos o pappous mou. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 7-8, 178-179.

<sup>21</sup> Kontos, K. (1934). Nitriko. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 6, 216-217; Kornaros, Th. (1932). I proti mera sto ergostasio. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 11- 12, 411-412 & 441-442; Varypatis, V. (1934). Gia enan kambo choris agkathia. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 7, 249-251; Vergas, A. (1932). O afxendis. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 5, 162-166; P. Vlassi, P. (1932). Eleftheros. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 10, 346-348.

<sup>22</sup> M. Karkanidou, M. (1931-32). Ta Christougenna tis Lenios. *Protoporoi*, 11-12, 448-449; A. Krikanis, A. (1931). Dialysi oikogeneias. *Protoporoi*, 9, 378-379; Sfyris, S. (1933). Anergoi. *Neoi Protoporoi*, 5, 122-124.

level of reception, the standards of answerability gradually shift from the will to provoking moral outrage through denunciation to the need for educating and mobilizing the masses. More complex manifestations of answerability relate to the understatement of individual distinctiveness for the sake of collective representation, as is the case in Vasilis Daskalakis's autobiographical work, *Oi Xerizomenoi* (1930). In this novel, the hero deliberately remains anonymous, in order to remain representative, incarnating a specific social type. At the same time, the working-class voice echoes strongly in these works. As Christina Dounia argues, the use of free indirect speech allows the heroes in Pikros' novel *Τουμπεκί* to undermine the narrator (1996, p. 12).<sup>23</sup>

## WWII and Postwar: Commitment in political and aesthetic transition

As expected, during the 1940s, a decade which saw the German Occupation, the Liberation, and the Civil War, literary production is devoted primarily to the outcome of national adventures. Even so, however, the art praising resistance to Nazism, imbued with a significant social background, is inspired by, and expresses, the militancy and collective action of the lower strata (Papandreou, 2000, p. 11). In other cases, the class origin of the resistant fighters is accentuated, whereas class and national interests are barely distinguishable: for instance, in the short story 'Ta potamia' [The Rivers],<sup>24</sup> set in a small Greek village during the German Occupation, a military troop assists some farmers while they tend to the crops. A resistant fighter reveals to an old farmer that he used to work as a factory worker and muses: 'We were everywhere [both in the factories and the fields] slaves...' (p. 7).<sup>25</sup> He then tries to explicate in simplistic terms the socialist ideals, before being assassinated by the Germans. At the same time, the question of the authorial social commitment is raised with greater urgency, although not necessarily in class, but in more general, social or agonistic terms.<sup>26</sup> The gradual effacement of the term 'proletarian' and its replacement by the concept of the 'social' reflects the gradual identification of the 'working class' with the 'people' in left-wing discourse (Karpozilos, 2009). This shift widens the semantic range of the term 'working class', thus opening up new thematic fields of inquiry for the related literary production. Regarding style, in the context of the inflexible, Communist party-led political commitment, socialist realism remains the preferred aesthetic current.

Relevant literary developments from the 1950s onwards include the weakening of the debate about proletarian art, while the principles of socialist realism are gradually questioned by left-wing intellectuals.<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon is undoubtedly connected with the post-Civil War frustration of the Left and the undermining of the revolutionary certainties; it also pertains to purely artistic

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<sup>23</sup> This is particularly evident in the passage reconstructing the main character's, Arapis [Nigger], past, which follows his memories, although articulated as a third-person narration. His recurring motto, drawn from the criminal jargon, 'τουμπεκί και μην ανθί', could be loosely translated as 'zip up and keep it low'.

<sup>24</sup> Patatzis, S. (1945). Ta potamia. *Elefthera Grammata*, 45, 7 & 12.

<sup>25</sup> 'Παντού σκλάβοι είμασταν εμείς...'

<sup>26</sup> For example, there are references to 'social art', which 'highlights the struggle against the interests of a small group of exploiters, presenting images of the lives of workers and peasants' (Stefanidis, 1943, p. 5-7). The Communist party literary principles are evident in a series of interventions, in which special emphasis is placed on the 'popular' [laikos] dimension of the cultural products, i.e. on their linguistic and semantic accessibility (Moschos, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted, however, that this was not a unanimously accepted trend among left-wing critics, as the leading representatives of the latter remained committed to the principles of Soviet artistic orthodoxy (Chatzivasileiou, 2011, p. 100-102).

parameters, such as the demand for creative freedom and complexity of character construction.<sup>28</sup> Thus, this period sees a growing body of working class fiction which adopt principles and techniques of neorealism (Frangouli, 2018). Besides, social responsibility is no longer considered as a concern and duty exclusive to the politically committed art. Towards the end of the period, left-leaning writers and writers who were previously considered ‘bourgeois’ participate in a relevant key discussion;<sup>29</sup> its main topic is the objective representation of the modern Greek reality, regardless of aesthetic specifications. From this point of view, their convergence of views on experimentation with modernist styles is very interesting. In the interwar years, experimental writing was advised against for the politically committed, on the grounds that it would be inaccessible to workers; in this discussion, the same directive applies more widely to socially responsible writing, on the grounds of a need to record social reality in all its dire aspects and thus facilitate social progress. At the same time, there appear efforts to strengthen the production of working-class literature by its working-class writers, with the inauguration of a relevant competition by the Organismos Ergatikis Estias [Greek Worker’s Hearth Organisation].<sup>30</sup>

The plot of the majority of the works published during this period is situated in the post-war present, while also reflecting, to varying degrees, on the recent national history. This focus on the past marks a renewed interest for more complex historical schemas, based on the succession of periods, spurred by innate contradictions and conflicts.<sup>31</sup> It also reveals the undermining of certainties about the future, as well as a weakening of the teleological view, although the pattern of causality is preserved, thus delimiting the power of human intervention and the intrusion of chance. When the plot is not situated in the post-war present, as is the case in the novel *Galaria no 7* (1961), working-class literature concerns the period of the German Occupation, when the political situation of the time interacts with the daily working routine of the heroes (German blockades, black market, National Liberation Army,<sup>32</sup> etc.), the post-occupation and pre-civil war years,<sup>33</sup> but also earlier times, such as the interwar period (in the novels *Kapnismenos Ouranos* and *Astoi kai ergates*).<sup>34</sup> As the human factor is inserted within a broader, undetermined historical pattern, the future prospect also comes into view. For instance, there appear works demonstrating the adverse effects for the working class caused by the renegotiation of the national-international equilibrium in terms of financial capital and investment (*Galaria no7*), as well as by the emerging de-industrialisation (*Anthropoi kai spitia*), developments that will be consolidated in later decades.

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<sup>28</sup>Articles published mainly in *Epitheorisi Technis* and *Nea Poreia* magazines played a key role in the revision of the aesthetic standards of socially responsible literature. See Anagnostakis, M. (1957). Provlimata tou sosialistikou realismou. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 29, 440-444; Nissiotis, V. (1957). Thesseis kai antithesseis tou sosialistikou realismou. *Nea Poreia*, 195-198. For the outlook of the literary magazines of the period on aesthetics and ideology see Apostolidou, V. (2003). *Logotechnia kai Istoria sti metapolemiki aristera. I paremvasi toy Dimitri Chatzi 1947-1981*. Athens, Polis, 121-185.

<sup>29</sup> See Argyriou, A. et al. (1973). I neoelliniki pragmatikotita kai i pezografia mas. *I Synecheia*, 4, 172-179.

<sup>30</sup> Founded in 1931 and disestablished in 2012, the Greek Worker’s Hearth Organisation was a public entity implementing social policy programs to support the working class, while also reinforcing the trade union movement.

<sup>31</sup> As Zissis Skaros (1999, p. 9) asserts in the second book of his trilogy entitled *Oi rizes tou potamou*: ‘We cannot understand what the course will be tomorrow, if we do not first seek to find out where they[the forces] came from and what are the forces involved in this fierce battle’. Let us note his point, mentioned above, that the past events predetermine ‘in a way’ (and therefore not unambiguously or to an absolute degree) the future.

<sup>32</sup> Chatzis, D. (1960). Ena tragoudi stin Athina. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 62, 115-122; Chatzis, D. (1966). Ena thyma tis Katochis. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 139-140, 23-36.

<sup>33</sup> Fragkias, A. (1955). *Anthropoi kai spitia*. Kedros.

<sup>34</sup> See Kotzias, K. (2000)[1957]. *Kapnismenos Ouranos*. Sygchroni epochi and Skaros, *Astoi kai ergates*.

Unemployment and the psychological condition it imposes emerge as recurrent patterns in working class fiction during the postwar period, characterized by stunted democracy, uneven reconstruction, mass internal migration and political persecution. Unemployment is a common theme in working-class literature, although it does not concern solely the working-class. What differentiates the latter, however, is the ideological inculcation of the characters and the maintenance of a sense of solidarity and class fellowship. For example, in the novel *Kapnismenos ouranos* (Kotzias, 1957), one of the main characters is a bankrupt petty bourgeois shopkeeper, who resorts to immoral methods in order to survive, an attitude diametrically opposed to the unemployed worker, in the novel *Anthropoi kai spitia* (Frangias, 1955), who supports other members of his working-class community. A similar attitude is promoted through the shift of mentality of the eponymous tanner in the short story 'Sioulas o tambakos'.<sup>35</sup> All-pervasive distress, lack of optimism, a sense of entrapment and lack of guarantees for a prosperous future are evident even in cases in which heroism or other positive characteristics of the working class protagonists are indeed represented. Even immigration, as a way out and means of escape, a choice, in any case, negatively marked, proves doubtful as to its fruition, accentuating the thwarting of the prospect of social mobility.<sup>36</sup> Other works accentuate restriction, by showing a clearer geographical demarcation (Piraeus), figuring –already obsolete by then–naturalistic descriptions.<sup>37</sup> The dominant 'structure of feeling',<sup>38</sup> namely insecurity, alternates with doubt, fear and anger, while the heroes do not necessarily exhibit heroic characteristics.

In the postwar period, the answerability governing working-class fiction is located, first and foremost, in the fact that it identifies itself as such, i.e. as literature that recognizes and reveals social stratification, both synchronically and diachronically, with the intention of demonstrating the continuing plight of the working class. Working-class texts of the time, unlike popular melodramatic cultural texts (mostly films) that flourished during the same period, avoid eliminating, or canceling class antagonisms by invoking *deus ex machina* resolutions for social contrasts (an unexpected heritage or the disclosure of one's nobler descent) or reconciliation by romantic coupling. This is not a self-evident option at a time when the dominant ideology is trying to conflate working-class interests with the national threat from the Communist bloc (Tsoukalas, 2005, p. 34-37), whereas, on an international basis, the concept of the 'wealthy worker' who improves his standards of living and ends up adopting bourgeois ideals and ambitions, is dominant.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, and although the aesthetic terms of socialist realism continue shaping the genre to no small degree, the demand for a broader conception of the 'political' is evident in the exploration of interpersonal relations and the human character, in a way that reflects the existential dimension. For example, Dimitris Raftopoulos (1957, p. 275-6) regards the novels *Anthropoi kai spitia* and *Kapnismenos ouranos* as 'progressive literature', since their heroes bear the characteristics of their class origin, while also maintaining their personality, their 'autonomous world'. Similarly, in his anthology of novelists who appeared in the period 1945-1965, Apostolos Sachinis (1965, p. 14) talks about 'narrative prose dealing with man's agony and the historical turbulences, which expresses the ethical dilemmas and the ethical challenges of man [...] and is seeking the ideals of freedom, peace

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<sup>35</sup> See Chatzis, D. (1963). *Sioulas o tambakos. To telos tis mikris mas polis*. Themelio.

<sup>36</sup> See Valtinos, Th. (1972[1964]). *Synaksari Andrea Kordopati*. Kedros.

<sup>37</sup> See Levantas, Ch. (1960). *Istories tou Porto Leone*. Difros; Politarchis, G. M. (1961). *Anthropoi kai limania*. To elliniko vivlio.

<sup>38</sup> In the interpretive process, the 'structure of feeling' is a 'cultural hypothesis' about how the experienced values of people in a given social context are constructed into a single, but sometimes contradictory social structure, a process revealed through analysis of contemporary literary discourse (Williams, 1977, p. 132).

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Lipset, S. M. & Bendix, R. (1959). *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*. University of California Press; Zweig, F. (1961). *The Worker in an Affluent Society*. Heinemann.

and social justice· a prose [...] which is trying to match the humanistic or the social element with the ‘ethical’ or the ‘superficial’’. Indeed, he includes Kostas Kotzias in the cluster of writers who produce this kind of literature, which brings a new sensitivity to Modern Greek literature, although he characterizes his works as ‘socialist’ or ‘standardized’. Thus, while the basic themes remain identical, other partial motifs, related to the domain of feelings and experience, are explored, thus highlighting the complexity of working-class characters. For example, immigration remains a staple element of plot construction, although the focus is now posited on the interpersonal relations of the immigrant, whereas the maturation of the heroes, either smooth and gradual, or violent and abrupt,<sup>40</sup> is also greatly emphasized in coming-of-age narratives.

### **Metapolitefsi: (Corpo)reality and multi-nodal alterity**

During the military junta (1967-1974) and the first years of the *Metapolitefsi*, political engagement remains an active demand and it usually takes the form of testimony of recent events or that of historical vindication of the past.<sup>41</sup> This kind of literary response to the socio-political developments of the time sets the framework for the literature of the working class: the working-class subject is usually shown in a positive light as s/he interacts, remaining part of a class-based collectivity, with the historical forces and economic conditions of different eras (*To diplo vivlio, Dekemvriani nychna*).<sup>42</sup> However, and as the literary focus gradually shifts from the public sphere to the private space (Kotzia, 2020, p. 124; Kotzia & Chatzivassileiou, 2003, p. 188-189), often enough, particularly in the work of younger authors first appearing in the 1970s (such as A. Sourounis, D. Nollas, D. Charitopoulos) and the 1980s (S. Dimitriou), the protagonists do not conform to the ideal of the moral worker set by socialist realism and rarely display class consciousness. They are in close contact with the social margin or belong thereof, in a semi-revival of interwar ‘alitografia’, although this time their social standing is rarely framed in either traumatic or accusatory terms. Nevertheless, they do retain, albeit sometimes unwittingly, a certain degree of collective consciousness in an era characterized by the rise of individualistic values and the corrosion of formerly powerful political and cultural identities. Such is the case in Charitopoulos’s short story ‘Ta takimia kai i ekdikisi’, in which a ‘rotters’ club’ is formed in a café by the port, comprising a motley of semi-thug types, who gradually grow fonder of each other. Although financial hardship eats away solidarity, they decide to avenge a buddy’s arrest, by violating the corrupted policeman and the intermediary who snitched on him. In Sotiris Dimitriou’s short story ‘I korniza’, a forty-year old woman, abused by her father and then abused and abandoned by her cruel and unloving husband, finds employment in a factory and gradually gets involved in the trade union, in which she is sheltered from patriarchy and gradually achieves her self-emancipation.<sup>43</sup> In any case, social climbing, which turns working-class

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<sup>40</sup> See Loulis, V. (1955). Koimisou, mi fovasai Leni... *Epitheorisi Technis*, 4 (Easter 1955), 272-282; Papagianni, K. (1964). To eikosachiliaro tou aderfou. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 11-112 (March-April 1964), 319-322; Matzouranis, G. (1963). Numero 753. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 101 (May 1963), 425-429. See also Loulis, V. (1957). Ta parasima. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 25 (January 1957), 32-40; B. Ntintas, B. (1956). O Grigoris. *Nea Poreia*, 1 & 11-12 (January-February 1956), 444-446; Ntallis, M. (1958). Oi elpides pou pethainoyn ki anastainountai. *Epitheorisi Technis*, 45 (September 1958), 182-186; F. Prassinis, F. (1960). Ta prota grammata. *Nea Estia*, 783 (February 1960), 250-254.

<sup>41</sup> In a discussion conducted in 1973, Tsirkas expresses the view that a ‘responsible’ author must act as an ‘accountant of souls’, while also arguing about the ‘social function’ of literature. Concurrently, Ioannou states that his role remains social and that he relates his personal experiences in a manner that they ‘connect to the common, elementary questions of humanity’. See Tsirkas, S. et al. (1973). An Interview with Three Contemporary Greek Writers: Stratis Tsirkas, Thanassis Valtinos, George Ioannou. *boundary 2*, 1(2), A Special Issue on Contemporary Greek Writing (1973), 266-314.

<sup>42</sup> Chatzis, D. (1977[1976]). *To diplo vivlio*. Kastaniotis; Kaliotsos, P. (1978). *Dekemvriani nychna*. Kedros.

<sup>43</sup> See Charitopoulos, D. (2013[1976]). Ta takimia kai i ekdikisi. *Daneikia gravata* (35-54) Topos; Dimitriou, I korniza.

experiences into a more or less distant memory, is a persistent literary motif of the time<sup>44</sup>, but it is not destined for everyone, nor is it entirely unproblematic.

The restriction of the working-class subjects in the social margin often goes hand in hand with an unbridled sexuality as a means of these subjects' self-determination; this often results in a severe undermining or a complete overturn of the value of rationality as a foundation of self-conscious subjects or even purposeful behaviour. In the late 1970s and especially after the 1980s, raw instinct is closely linked to work, either taking it over completely (as in the book *Ta kamakia*, 1978),<sup>45</sup> or through a stark antithesis, in the context of which pleasure and self-realization are promoted by sexual robustness and undermined by manual labor (as in Sourounis's works). One may detect a double emancipation here, both from the objectification linked to wage labor and from social conservatism, in the aftermath of May 1968. One may also discern, in this devaluation of the notion of work,<sup>46</sup> the repercussions of the transformation of the dominant mode of production towards a service-based economy, which, contrary to predictions and aspirations, does not seem to improve the living conditions of the working class.<sup>47</sup>

In its most accentuated form, this tendency pushes realism to its limits, as is the case with the first two works of Sotiris Dimitriou.<sup>48</sup> In these works, a disturbing naturalism is employed to depict nightmarish stories or raw instinct across the lower social strata (street cleaners, prostitutes, drug addicts etc.)<sup>49</sup> Within Dimitriou's amoral and bleak universe, the working-class characters seem to lie beyond good and evil, or at the very least to renegotiate the boundaries between the two, occupying an in-between position between wilful subject and object of instinctual and social coercion. As Alexis Ziras also notes (1997, p. 200), Dimitriou's characters 'are baptized in goodness precisely through their apprenticeship in 'evil''. As such, they represent the figure of the 'abject', which on the one hand signifies the precarity underpinning the seemingly unshakable dynamism of the *Metapolitefsi*. On the other, it ominously alludes to the transformation of the cry for personal and social freedom during the 1960s and 1970s into individualistic hedonism during the late 1980s.

In terms of representation, the answerability of these texts is to be found in the importance accorded to the body,<sup>50</sup> which secures the characters' individuality in flesh and bone, captures their entire existence, and dissolves the idealistic fixation to the notion of the working class as a faceless vehicle of History. It also involves pushing the reader's defamiliarization to its limits, with a view to challenging bourgeois ethics as well as provoking the realization of class distance between the fictional characters and the reader.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Bacolas, N. (1989). Afto to aimai einai...*Parafyada*, 5, 32-42 [Now in Bacolas, N. (2000). *To taksidi pou pligonei kai alla diigimata*. Kedros].

<sup>45</sup> This is the most characteristic expression of this tendency, as Vassilis Vassilikos' characters earn a living by offering sexual services to tourists.

<sup>46</sup> Aside from Sourounis's works and *To Diplo vivlio*, already mentioned, similar views are to be found in Charitopoulos, D. (2000[1989]). *Ti nychta pou efyge o Boukovi*. Exantas and particularly in the short stories 'Kata leksi' and 'Ti tha gino'.

<sup>47</sup> In the short story 'Daneikia gravata' from the book of the same title, the protagonist attempts, and fails, to earn a living as a door-to-door salesman.

<sup>48</sup> Dimitriou, *Ntialith' im Christaki* and *Ena paidi ap' ti Saloniki* (2019[1989]).

<sup>49</sup> The extreme social margin also concerns M. Fais, in his collection of short stories *Apo to idio potiri* (Kastaniotis 1999), especially the short stories 'Vzzt, vzzt', 'Ktl.' and 'Embodismeni zoi'.

<sup>50</sup> In the short story 'Velonia ti velonia' (Maro Douka, *Kare fix*, 1976) emphasis is also placed on the body of the working subject, although this is tarnished by fundamental disabilities (amputation).

<sup>51</sup> See also Petsa, V. (2021). I 'logotechnia tis ergatikis taksis' sta prota chronia tis Metapolitefsis: aisthitikes taseis kai ideologikoi prosanatolismoi. In Dimitrakakis, I & Natsina, A. (Eds.). *Metapolitefsi 1974-1981: Logotechnia kai*

If migration from Greece is a dominant theme of the literature of the working class that reflects the rapidly shifting socio-historical context of the 1970s and 1980s, the association of the working class with (im)migration is further elaborated around the 1990s, when another figure gradually takes hold in Greek working-class literature, namely, that of the economic immigrant belonging to a different ethnic group, striving for their financial survival.<sup>52</sup> Such literary works are included in the genre when they target not primarily racial discrimination, but aspects of class inequality, which are normally aggravated by implicit or explicit xenophobia and racism, or, in other words, when they lay bare the material underpinning of racism.<sup>53</sup> Greek economic immigrants in the West provide the recurring characters for authors who have themselves lived through this experience, as is the case for Antonis Sourounis (*Oi sympaiktes*, 1977; *Meronychta Fragkfourtis*, 1982; *Gas o Gangster*, 2000; *Ta tybana tis koilias kai tou poleμου*, 1983; *Oi protoi pethainoun teleftaioi*, 1985), Dimitris Nollas (*To tryfero derma*, 1982; *Oneirevomai tous filous mas*, 1990; *O palaios echthros*, 2004; *Ston topo*, 2012) and Dimitris Chatzis' late works (*To diplo vivlio*, 1976).<sup>54</sup> The protagonists of these works, living through a transitional period, represent the new, post-industrial proletariat which has no connection to the object of their occupation and has lost all faith in future prospects as well as the nostalgic connection with their home country. This 'non-class' is no longer bound by the transcendental, messianic vision of collective revolution, and, resorting to individual action, abandons the logic of incessant productive accumulation (Gorz, 1982). Notwithstanding their experiential basis, and although realism continues to constitute the preferential mode of expression, partial stylistic and formal experimentation is also present in these works. In contrast, fiction featuring immigrants to Greece (see footnote 52), providing a literary reworking of a real and pressing social issue (namely, the mode of integration of various ethnically and religiously diverse communities, mostly from a working-class positionality, in the Greek society), seem to resort to an almost testimonial form of realism.

### 2010s: Veracity and deprived commonality

Echoing a similar, yet accentuated, sense of urgency, the turn towards a form of 'stripped-down' realism, devoid of lyricism or linguistic complexity, and thus bordering on documentary literature, constitutes a key trend in working-class literature during the last crisis-stricken decade, which witnesses the untethered consolidation of austerity policies and the orientation of the dominant mode of production in a neoliberal direction, processes already gradually underway from the late 1980s

*politismiki istoria* (pp. 129-146). Ekdoseis tis filosofikis scholis tou Panepistimiou Kritis. Similarly, Dimosthenis Kourtovik (2021, p. 169) underlines Dimitriou's intention to exploit the 'shock' caused by his powerful themes.

<sup>52</sup> See Nollas, D. (2009). *Navagion Plasmata*. Kastaniotis and Nollas, D. (2010). *Foteini Magiki*. Kastaniotis; Valtinos, Th. (2015). *Epeigousa anagki eleou*. Estia, especially the short story 'Veneta Slaveva Stoilkova'; the edited volumes *Ksenos, o allos mou eaftos* (Patakis 1999) & *Eimaste oloi metanastes* (Patakis 2007); Makris, F. (1990). Meres Iouliou. *Parafyada*, 6, 106-107; Dassiou, O. (1987). Adioristos viologos. *Parafyada*, 3, 149-151; Kotsias, T. (1993). I trapoula. *Grammata kai technes*, 69, (October-December 1993), 26-27; Kotsias, K. (2001). To perasma tis Charavgis. *Eksopolis*, 15-16 (Spring-Summer 2001), 29-44; Nollas, D. (1997). Ena chameno deltio taftotitas. *Diavazo*, 376 (July-August 1997), 97-100; Dimitriou, S. (1993[1992]). Sto chioni. (a short story first published in the journal *Epochi* in 1992 and subsequently incorporated in the novel *N' akouo kala t' onoma sou*. Patakis; Chryssanthopoulou, Ch. (2011). Zoi me omicron. Papyrus. Besides, the common circumstance of class degradation emerges as a recurrent element of works featuring migration to, and from, Greece. See Kotsias, T. (2004). *Treis genies Amerikanoi*. Kedros.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, in Dimitris Nollas' 'Ena chameno deltio taftotitas' the protagonist finds manual labor along with other immigrant workers. In the end of the story, the employer notifies him that work is cancelled for the next day, as the Immigration Office will effectuate controls. He and his female interlocutor deduce that the employer himself alerted the state services, in order to have the employees arrested and avoid paying them.

<sup>54</sup> A special mention should be made to *Pikres* by Vasso Lone Kalamara, Greek immigrant to Australia, published privately in Greek in 1976 and later republished as a bilingual edition in Australia (1983).

onwards. This trend is effectuated by means of various authorial strategies: first, by the transformation of writers into hubs, channeling working-class first-person accounts, resorting to varying degrees of invention.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, with the truthful and meticulous recounting of technicalities related to working-class professions, all the more so when such recounting is effectuated with the use of specialized jargon. Viewed under the prism of answerability, the latter promotes either a sense of unfamiliarity and incomprehension in terms of reader response, and hence of class distance, or a sense of belonging to a common linguistic-professional community.<sup>56</sup> Thirdly, through the linguistically unpretentious documentation and the veracious description of reality. This choice possibly arises as a direct (if only, at times, hasty and hence sloppy, in trying to be direct) response to the demand for registering the social repercussions of the financial crisis, thus manifesting a renewed sense of literary social responsibility.<sup>57</sup> Socially-sensitive observation constitutes a crisis-specific version of answerability as does the re-appearance of points of collectivity and the demand (the need, to be precise) for intimacy and camaraderie.<sup>58</sup> Despite not being formulated in succinct class terms in many cases, and although frequently articulated in specific geographic terms (i.e. the bounds of a neighborhood or suburb), this companionship is nevertheless devoid of nostalgia with regards to communitarian forms of living and to anachronistic structures of political coalition.<sup>59</sup> This tendency is mainly manifest in Christos Oikonomou's work (in his short stories collection *Kati tha ginei, tha deis* and in his short story titled 'Emeis tha zestainomaste me somba' included in *To apotipoma tis krisis*). For instance, the protagonist in the short story 'Ela Elli taise to gourounaki' [Come on Elli feed the small pig], gasps: 'I don't get it [...] If the poor treat the poor in such a way, then imagine how the rich should treat us' (p. 20).<sup>60</sup> The protagonist in the short story 'Plakat me skoupoksylo' [Placard with a Broomstick] purports to protest for a colleague's death by a work-related accident, but since words fail him, he stands by the spot where the accident occurred, holding a blank placard, waiting in vain for someone to approach him. Such non-partisan solidarity is also evident in Christos Chartomatsidis's, novel *Einai kapou allou I giorti* (2011) and in Dimitris Nollas's recently published short stories ('Tzamaroun ta spourgitia', 'Ena koulouri sta dyo', 'Ta logia tou aera', 'Moro stin aiora'). In the latter, an immigrant street artist turned builder, who dreams of retrieving his music career, and a Greek internal migrant, who intended to open a café but now hardly makes ends meet, decide to nurse an abandoned baby.

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<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Perivolaris, P. (2020). *Istories Metanaston*. Polis; Grigoriadis, Th. (2013). O ksenos pou efyge. In Boura, E. & Chartoulari, M. (Eds.). *To apotyoma tis krisis* (59-74). Metaichmio and Spanou, E. (2019). *Aparatiritoi*. Polis. In Grigoriadis's short story, the author presents a short, fictitious or not, afterword, stating that the protagonist himself gave him the permission to 'rewrite' his story.

<sup>56</sup> See Peroulis, K. (2015). *Aftomata*. Antipodes.

<sup>57</sup> The editors of the collection *To apotyoma tis krisis* [=The Imprint of the Crisis] affirm that the short stories included in the volume 'function as a magnifying glass and as testimonies' (2013, p. 9). It should be noted, though, that the thematization of the financial crisis may derive from more self-interested, opportunistic motives (Kourtovik, 2021, p. 327).

<sup>58</sup> It has indeed been attested that literary works which appeared after the onset of the financial crisis, both in Greece and on an international level, mark a renewed interest in collective formations. See Chatzivassileiou, V. (2018). *Atomo kai koinonia sti neoteriki elliniki pezografia: 1974-2017*. Polis, pp. 807-853; Kotzia, E. (2020). *Elliniki pezografia, 1974-2010. To metro kai ta stathma*. Polis, pp. 361, 11, 165, 333, 361; Chatzivassileiou, V., Sainis, A. & E. Papargyriou, E. (2020, February 9<sup>th</sup>). *Pezografia tis krisis i krisimi pezografia? (2010-2020)*, *I Efimerida ton Syndachton*.

<sup>59</sup> This tendency is mainly manifest in Christos Oikonomou's work (in his short stories collection *Kati tha ginei, tha deis*, and in his short story titled 'Emeis tha zestainomaste me somba' included in *To apotyoma tis krisis*), in Christos Chartomatsidis's, novel *Einai kapou allou I giorti* (2011), but also in Dimitris Nollas's recently published short stories ('Tzamaroun ta spourgitia', 'Ena koulouri sta dyo', 'Ta logia tou aera', 'Moro stin aiora').

<sup>60</sup> 'Δεν το καταλαβαίνω [...] Άμα κάνουμε οι φτωχοί στους φτωχούς τέτοια πράματα τότε οι πλούσιοι τι πρέπει να μας κάνουν'.

In relation to the thematic focus of working class works during the last decade,<sup>61</sup> the renewed interest in registering the affective repercussions and the practical inconveniences caused by unemployment should be noted.<sup>62</sup> Inner-life and social hardships as a prominent literary motif related to unemployment echo similar postwar literary preoccupations of the genre, although in this case, as unemployment is combined with downward social mobility, it defines a shared condition of precarity and vulnerability for social strata and ethnic communities which used to be segregated in terms of class positioning, thus reflecting the convergence and interweaving of their interests. In this respect, the erosion of middle-class economic robustness constitutes an inversion of the motif of upward social mobility which emerged during the period of *Metapolitefsi*. As such, fear, a sense of restricted horizons, shame, disillusionment, reduced self-respect and the inability to forge or preserve interpersonal relations constitute partial aspects of the dominant structure of feeling related to the lack, or flexibilization,<sup>63</sup> of employment and subsequent proletarianization. If, towards the end of the previous period, immigration to Greece constituted a thematic area for working-class literature to draw upon and designate in bleak terms, during the years of crisis we note a convergence of emotional states, encapsulated in helplessness towards financial precarity. For instance, in Eleni Giannakaki's short story 'Agiou Nikolaou kai Karaiskaki Gonia' [St. Nicholas & Karaiskaki Str.],<sup>64</sup> the narrator imparts the thoughts of the main character, a pensioner who used to be an employee at a fabric store, and now, after the pension cuts, struggles to make ends meet: '[...] They [the protagonist and his spouse] will have to be tossed here and there like gypsies. Or, rather, just like those Kurds and Afghans, who gathered here to hit the big time. Even they, born and bred here, will end up just like them, if things go on like this' (p. 37).<sup>65</sup>

To sum up, we note that this proposed history of Greek working-class literature defines a fluid and malleable genre, articulated along the axis of class, while also traversing ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Encompassing canonical literary works, but also more fringe publications, and presenting varying degrees and types of commitment to working-class interests, this textual category keeps pace with the mutations of the socio-economic field and the transformation of class composition, incorporating synchronic aspects of diachronic phenomena or special circumstances (i.e. migration and immigration, dominant mode of production, financial crisis) from a class perspective.

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<sup>61</sup> Even a cursory survey of the theoretical discourses articulated thus far leads to the conclusion that 'literature of the crisis' as a literary category does not enjoy unanimous acceptance as such. From our part, we refer to literature published during the period of crisis, since the dominant thematic and stylistic trends do not seem to vary to a considerably degree with respect to earlier years. Besides, in what concerns specifically working-class literature, we hold that continuities outweigh ruptures.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Oikonomou, *Kati tha ginei, tha deis* (2010); Vlachos, P. (2016). *To blues tis anergias*. Kedros; Magriplis, D., (2016). *Ta kanapedakia tis anergias*. Kritiki; Kitsopoulou, L., 'Eche geia kaimene Kostas', in *To apotipoma tis krisis*, pp. 113-119.

<sup>63</sup> Other national literatures, such as the French and Italian ones, have already begun processing the condition of precarity, which leads to the apparition of new social categories (such as the intellectual precariat), problematizing the long-standing pairing of manual work with working class and of intellectual work with middle class.

<sup>64</sup> Eleni Giannakaki, 'Agiou Nikolaou kai Karaiskaki Gonia', in *To apotipoma tis krisis*, pp. 33-43.

<sup>65</sup> '[...] θα πρέπει να τους πετάνε από δω κι από κει σαν τους γύφτους. Ή μάλλον σαν αυτούς τους Κούρδους και τους Αφγανούς που μαζευτήκαν εδώ να βρούνε την τύχη τους. Κάπως έτσι θα καταλήξουν κι αυτοί, γέννημα θρέμμα, όπως πάει'.

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