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«μια ατέλειωτη αρμαθιά αντικλείδια /
για ν' ανοίξουμε την πόρτα της Ποίησης»:

**A FEMINIST CULTURAL CRITIQUE OF THE UNIT DEDICATED TO
G. PAVLOPOULOS IN THE SCHOOLBOOK KNL III**

ABSTRACT. In Greece, the State holds the monopoly on the production of textbooks, and only one textbook is prescribed for each class. This paper provides a feminist cultural critique of the didactic unit of the contemporary literature schoolbook *Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας. Τεύχος Γ' (1945–2000)* (Texts of Modern Greek Literature. Volume III (1945–2000)), in which the poet Giorgis Pavlopoulos is presented. Through a close reading of the poem *Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης* (The statue and the artisan) and the paratext that goes with it, the paper aims not only to demonstrate that the aforementioned didactic unit reproduces rape culture, but also to provide an analysis of a literary representation of rape in the Modern Greek framework.

KEYWORDS: Pavlopoulos. Rape culture. Παυλόπουλος. *Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης*. KNL III.

Ήμαστε υπνωτισμένοι από την εκκλησία, τη λογοτεχνία, τα σχολεία. Θαυμάζαμε συγγραφείς που δεν είχαν τίποτα καλό να πουν για τη γυναίκα. Ακόμα και τα κορίτσια μάθαιναν να τους θαυμάζουν. Μόνο η γυναίκα-μητέρα γλίτωνε από το μίσος. Μα αυτό δεν ήταν παρά ένα άλλοθι. Αφού αγαπούμε τη μητέρα μας, δεν μπορούμε να μισούμε τις γυναίκες, μα καμιά γυναίκα δεν ήταν σαν τη μητέρα μας.

Τα τείχη υψώνονταν γύρω μας, έτσι όπως το έλεγε ο Καβάφης. Ούτε τους χτίστες ακούγαμε, ούτε τα τείχη βλέπαμε. Γίναμε μισογύνηδες, υιοθετήσαμε την αντρική γλώσσα της περιφρόνησης και της υπεροψίας απέναντι στο άλλο φύλο. Λίγο πολύ γίναμε όλοι βιαστές. Και οι περισσότεροι θα παραμέναμε τέτοιοι σε όλη μας τη ζωή.

Θοδωρής Καλλιφατίδης, *Τα περασμένα δεν είναι όνειρο*

Introduction

In Greece, the State holds the monopoly on the production of textbooks. Only one textbook is prescribed for each school subject at each academic level across the whole country, and it is distributed free of charge both in paper and electronic form by the Institute of Pedagogical Policy, which is the public body responsible. For a long time, until 2004, Greek law foresaw that the authors and organisations appointed to write and produce the textbooks could be either selected on the basis of open competition or directly designated by the Institute of Pedagogical Policy (previously called the Pedagogical Institute). However, they were usually directly designated. After the early 2000s, the production of textbooks started to be more widely appointed on a competitive basis, but the State monopoly remained in place (Kapsalis and Charalambous, 2008, *passim*).

The system had been established in 1937, during Metaxas' dictatorship, in order to enable the State to exercise direct control on the content of schoolbooks and to allow them to adapt them to its political stance. Specifically, the schoolbooks were seen as the ideal tool to encourage anti-socialist sentiment in the Greek citizenry, while at the same time disseminating the nationalist principles of the regime across the whole country. This ideological control on education grew stronger during the following years; although the monopoly

policy was criticized and openly opposed by various public bodies and experts in the field of education, it was only after the end of the Cold War that a political force, that is the right-wing party Nea Dimokratia, foresaw the abolition of this monopoly in its manifesto. Yet the Party's initial purpose of opening up the production of textbooks to the free market was deemed incompatible with the principle of free education, and it was soon replaced by a policy allowing a plurality of textbooks to be used. According to this new alternative, agreed by the Left wing as well, the number of books available for each subject and academic level would increase, while leaving the monopoly intact; this way, each school (or teacher) could choose the most suitable book amongst a given range. This idea turned out to be unworkable for practical and, overall, economical reasons, and it was never implemented by any of the government forces in power during the following decades, while the monopoly remained in force. Furthermore, although many textbooks had been purged of their most openly propagandistic contents, they continued, for historical reasons, to be viewed as a tool of not only scientific education but also civic training (Kapsalis and Charalambous, 2008, *passim*).

For all these reasons, the study of Greek schoolbooks can be considered to be of critical political interest. This essay deals with the textbook *Κείμενα*

Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας. Τεύχος Γ' (1945–2000) (Texts of Modern Greek Literature. Volume III (1945–2000)), henceforth called *KNL III*, that is the literary textbook currently in use in the third grade of the general high school, focussing especially on the didactic unit dedicated to the poet Giorgis Pavlopoulos.

The textbook *KNL III* was first published in 2008, and was intended to complement the interpretation and explanation of the educators in the teaching of contemporary literature. Some of the units of the book include questions and considerations concerning gender issues arising in the literary text, but this is not the case with the unit regarding Pavlopoulos.

Giorgis Pavlopoulos, Τα αντικλείδια (The master keys), and Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης (The statue and the artisan)

Giorgis Pavlopoulos (Pyrgos Ilias, 1924–2008) spent most of his life in his hometown of Pyrgos, where he actively contributed to the local cultural scene, while at the same time his poetry was appreciated nationwide. After his first literary efforts, which resulted in a number of publications in local journals, Pavlopoulos devoted himself to the translation into Greek of English poetry (T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound amongst others) and to a few collaborations with his friend, the poet Takis Sinopoulos; his own poetic production only fully began in

1971, when his first collection *Το κατώγι* (The basement) was published, followed by *Το σακί* (The bag, 1980), *Τα αντικλείδια* (The master keys, 1988), *Τριαντατρία χαϊκού* (Thirty-three Haikus, 1990), *Λίγος άμμος* (A little sand, 1997), *Ποιήματα 1943–1997* (Poems 1943–1997, 2001) and *Πού είναι τα πουλιά;* (Where are the birds?, 2004). Admirers of his poetry include Giorgos Seferis, who defined Pavlopoulos' verses as «αποτελεσματική χωρίς ψιμύθια» («effective without embellishments», Argyriou, 2007, 174).

The simplicity observed by Seferis was also noticed by many other critics, who often compared Pavlopoulos' work to Sinopoulos' (Tsaknias, 1983; Argyriou, 2007, 170–177) and described his style as stark, melancholic and thoughtful (Boukalas, 2004; Tsaknias, 1983). One of the distinctive features of his poetry is its allegorical or symbolical character, expressed through the depiction of mythological scenes where characters and objects, as well as abstract images, take on a double meaning and conceal an allegory of existence and the world (Chatzivasileiou, 1994, 22). This inclination, which first emerged in *Το σακί*, was primarily developed by the poet in *Τα αντικλείδια*, the collection of poems which is regarded as his most mature work and his highest literary accomplishment (Chatzivasileiou, 1994, 26; Pieris, 2002). In this collection, Pavlopoulos represents with great narrative ability the images produced by his

lively imagination (Lazaris, 2014, 33), creating a dreamlike and fabled atmosphere, free from chronological conventions and dominated by mythical or historical characters, whose stories symbolize a wider meaning and constitute allegorical visions of secret and undeciphered situations (Ziras, 2002, 23).

In *Τα αντικλείδια*, allegory is often intertwined with eroticism and poetics, which are also themes distinctive of Pavlopoulos' style. These three motifs come together to form an 'erotic mythology' (Skiathas, 1995, 11), where the body's sensual experience takes center stage with a language that is simple and straightforward (Boukalas, 2004) but that is nonetheless able to introduce a second level of interpretation (Ziras, 2002, 23) concerning the functioning of poetic art. This instance gives rise to what Dimitris Angelatos defined as the dream-poetry-poet triangle, dominated by the thematic couple of *eros* and *thanatos*: the roles of the poet and poetry, the subject and the object, the hunter and the prey penetrate each other's spaces and swap positions (Angelatos, 1994a, 13).

The poem chosen to represent Giorgis Pavlopoulos in *KNL III, Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης*, perfectly portrays the collection's peculiar thematic interweaving:

Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης

Στην Ισμήνη και στον Στέλιο Τριάντη

Σαν έκλεινε το μουσείο
αργά τη νύχτα η Δηιδάμεια
κατέβαινε από το αέτωμα.
Κουρασμένη από τους τουρίστες
έκανε το ζεστό λουτρό της και μετά
ώρα πολλή μπροστά στον καθρέφτη
χτένιζε τα χρυσά μαλλιά της.
Η ομορφιά της ήταν για πάντα
σταματημένη μες στο χρόνο.

Τότε τον έβλεπε πάλι εκεί
σε κάποια σκοτεινή γωνιά να την παραμονεύει.
Ερχόταν πίσω της αθόρυβα
της άρπαζε τη μέση και το στήθος
και μαγκώνοντας τα λαγόνια της
με το ένα του πόδι
έμπηγε τη δυνατή του φτέρνα
στο πλάι του εξαίσιου μηρού της.

Καθόλου δεν την ξάφνιαζε
κάθε φορά που της ριχνόταν.
Αλλωστε το περίμενε, το είχε συνηθίσει πια.
Αντιστεκόταν τάχα σπρώχνοντας
με τον αγκώνα το φιλήδονο κεφάλι του
και καθώς χανόταν όλη
μες στην αρπάγη του κορμιού του
τον ένιωθε να μεταμορφώνεται
σιγά σιγά σε κένταυρο.

Τώρα η αλογίσια οπλή του
την πόναγε κάπου εκεί
γλυκά στο κόκαλο
και τον ονειρευότανε παραδομένη
ανάμεσα στο φόβο της και τη λαγνεία του
να τη λαξεύει ακόμη (Pavlopoulos, 1988).

The Statue and the Artisan. After the closing time of the museum / late at night, Deidamia / would step down from the pediment. / Tired from the tourists / she would take a warm bath, and then / for a long time, in front of the mirror / she would comb her golden hair. / Her beauty was forever / frozen in time. // Then she would see him there again / lurking in some dark corner / He would get to her from behind without noise / would grab her back and bosom / and blocking her hips / with one of his legs / he would stick his strong heel / on the side of her extraordinary thigh. // It wouldn't surprise her at all / every time he jumped on her. / After all she was expecting it, she was used to it by now. / She would fake resistance by pushing / with her elbow his libidinous head / and as she lost her whole self / in the grasp of his body / she would feel him turning / into a centaur little by little. // Now his horse-hoof / hurt her somewhere there / at the bone, sweetly / and she dreamt of him, abandoned / between her fear and his lust / carving her again.¹

The poem describes a scene repeating itself every night after the closing time of a museum: a statue, namely Deidamia, steps down from the pediment where she is allocated, and starts grooming herself. Immediately after this, she notices a man observing her from a dark corner; he reaches her and grabs her from behind. Once caught in his grip, Deidamia realizes that the man is becoming a centaur; she feels his body pressing against her, and dreams about the man carving her.

¹ This and all other translations from Greek included in this essay are mine. The translations of Pavlopoulos' verses don't have any aesthetical pretenses whatsoever, and merely aim to clearly reword their content into English for functional purposes.

The composition encompasses several fundamental aspects of Pavlopoulos' poetry: the dreamlike, magic atmosphere, where the statues of a museum come to life; the mythological allusion to Deidamia and the centaur; the central relevance of the body and the senses, that can be found in the detailed description of the centaur's grasp; and finally the allegorical discourse about poetics, in which the character of the artisan represents the Poet and the whole narration symbolizes the process of poetic creation, where the artistic work itself is hunted down and finally grasped, while at the same time it dreams about being created, producing a dynamic of mutual interfusion and a switching of role between the poet and the poem, the creator and the creation (Angelatos, 1994a, 16).

The unit dedicated to Pavlopoulos in KNL III

The poem and its paratext. The poem *To άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης* was appointed by the authors of *KNL III* as an example of Pavlopoulos' work. The didactic unit presenting Pavlopoulos is composed of the poem, accompanied by a *Comment*, five *Questions*, the poet's brief biography, and his photographic portrait. The poem is presented to the reader without any introduction; the *Comment* which immediately follows it provides an interpretation of the verses,

as well as an explanation of the myth that inspired the work; the *Questions* then aim to induce the reader to elaborate on the general atmosphere of the poem, as well as on some specific textual elements. They mirror the interpretation guidelines provided by the teacher's book in Georgiadou and Kroupi-Kolona (2008, 178–182), a tool which is intended to assist the educator in the teaching process by providing them with additional bibliographic material and interpretive keys. Lastly, the biography offers occasional essential information regarding the author's career and the titles of his books.

The combination of the poem itself and the description of its source of inspiration which is provided in the *Comment* generates a matter of crucial feminist interest. The identity of the protagonists, the statue Deidamia and the centaur, reveals an intertextual reference: the poem is set at nighttime in the Olympia Archaeological museum, and the characters involved are actual statues of the western pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, which portray the mythical battle between the Lapiths and Centaurs during the wedding of Hippodamia (or Deidamia) and Peirithoös; the detailed description of the clasping of the two bodies appearing in the second stanza of the poem («Then she would see him there again / lurking in some dark corner / He would get to her from behind without noise / would grab her back and bosom / and blocking

her hips / with one of his legs / he would stick his strong heel / on the side of her extraordinary thigh.»), is hence nothing other than the description of the moment when the centaur, Eurytion, ravishes Deidamia. The inclusion of a rape representation in a literary secondary school textbook is a matter deserving of investigation in itself; in this specific case, however, the circumstance is made even more interesting by the fact that no other representation of sexual activity can be found in the whole textbook (nor in the literary textbook for the second class, which is the one that was used immediately before this one).

The presence of a rape representation in the poem is confirmed by the scholar Giannis Dallas in his essay *Δυο διαφορετικές ποιητικές σε σύγκλιση θεματική* (Two different poetics in thematic convergence, Dallas, 2002), where he declares that the poet Sinopoulos, a close friend of Pavlopoulos, personally told him that, before starting to write his own poetry, Pavlopoulos used to share with him some thematic cues, so that they could become a source of inspiration for Sinopoulos' works. After Pavlopoulos started writing his own verses, he sometimes reused the same themes which he had offered to Sinopoulos in the past, developing them according to his own poetics. For this reason, some of Pavlopoulos' and Sinopoulos' works share the same source of inspiration, but elaborate it with different poetic modes. One of these peculiar pairs of poems is

the one formed by Sinopoulos' *Κάθε πρωί* (Every morning) and Pavlopoulos' *Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης*, both of which are engendered by the same visit of the two friends to the Olympia Archaeological museum:

Κοινή πηγή των δυο ποιημάτων, μια παράσταση του δυτικού αετώματος της Ολυμπίας από τη μάχη των Κένταυρων και των Λαπιθών. Είναι η σκηνή εκείνη στην οποία ένας Κένταυρος, από τους καλεσμένους στη γαμήλια τελετή του βασιλιά των Λαπιθών Περίθου, αφού μέθυσε ρίχτηκε να βιάσει τη μνηστή του βασιλιά, τη Δηιδάμεια (η Ιπποδάμεια). Θέμα λοιπόν των δυο ποιημάτων είναι αυτή η σκηνή του βιασμού, ο έρωτας. Χωρίς τα μυθολογικά, ή τα συμβολικά – τα τελετουργικά ή ανθρωπολογικά του – συμφραζόμενα (όπως, π.χ., είναι η ανατροπή και μάλιστα η βεβήλωση μιας τελετής και η αρπαγή ή η θυσία ενός προσώπου: του πολύτιμου αντικειμένου, κατά Προπ, του άρχοντα) (Dallas, 2002, 16).

(The common source of the two poems, [is] a representation of the western pediment of Olympia, of the battle between the Centaurs and Lapiths. It is that scene, where one of the Centaurs who had been invited to the wedding gets drunk and jumps on the fiancé of the king, Deidamia (or Hippodamia), to rape her. The subject of the two poems is therefore this rape scene, the erotic love. Without its mythical or symbolical—ritual or anthropological—context (as is, for instance, the overthrowing and even the desecration of a ritual and the abduction or the sacrifice of a person: of the lord's precious object, according to Propp)).

According to Dallas, the poem isolates the sexual assault of Deidamia from its context of origin, clearing it of its political implications. The reference to the temple of Zeus at Olympia is repeated in the didactic unit of *KNL III*, but the myth which lies behind the poem and the political implications of the story

resume the center of attention in the detailed description entailed in the

Comment section:

Πρόκειται για λεπτομέρεια του δυτικού αετώματος του ναού του Διός στην Ολυμπία, που εκτίθεται στο εκεί αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο. Το αέτωμα αυτό παριστάνει τη μάχη μεταξύ Λαπιθών και Κενταύρων. Σύμφωνα με τη μυθολογία οι Λαπίθες ήταν λαός της Θεσσαλίας που κατοικούσε κοντά στο Πήλιο. Οι Κένταυροι ήταν τερατόμορφα όντα με σώμα ανθρώπου ως τη μέση και αλόγου κάτω από τη μέση. Όταν λέει ο μύθος, παντρευόταν ο βασιλιάς των Λαπιθών Πειρίθους με τη νύμφη Δηιδάμεια, κάλεσε στο γάμο του το Θησέα, καθώς και τους γείτονές του Κενταύρους. Στο γαμήλιο συμπόσιο ο βασιλιάς των Κενταύρων Ευρυπίων μέθυσσε και επιτέθηκε ερωτικά κατά της Δηιδάμειας. Ακολούθησε μάχη και οι Λαπίθες καταδίωξαν τους Κενταύρους. Η λεπτομέρεια στην οποία αναφέρεται το ποίημα παριστάνει τον Κένταυρο Ευρυπίωνα να αγκαλιάζει βίβια τη νύμφη Δηιδάμεια. Ολη η παράσταση της μάχης θεωρείται ότι εκφράζει την πάλη του πνεύματος με τα ζωώδη πάθη (Grigoriadis *et al.*, 2008, 51).

(It is a detail of the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, which is exhibited in the Olympia museum. The pediment represents the battle between Lapiths and Centaurs. According to mythology, the Lapiths were a tribe from Thessaly, living close to Mount Pelion. The Centaurs were monstrous creatures, man above the waist, and horse below the waist. The myth says that when the king of the Lapiths, Peirithoös, married the nymph Deidamia, he invited Theseus and his neighbors, the Centaurs, to his wedding. During the wedding banquet, Eurytion, the king of the Centaurs, got drunk and sexually assaulted Deidamia. A battle followed, and the Lapiths chased the Centaurs away. The poem refers to the detail representing the Centaur Eurytion embracing with violence the nymph Deidamia. The whole representation of the battle is believed to express the struggle between spirit and bestial passion.)

A Feminist Reading of the Unit

The Subject and the Object. Once the reader is made aware of the mythological allusion encompassed in the poem, its first hermeneutical level—that is not the allegory of poetical creation, but the story of the statue Deidamia and the centaur—is enriched with new perspectives, which are particularly relevant from a gendered point of view. Firstly, although the original pediment shows both the nymph Deidamia and the centaur, in the poem only Deidamia switches from a state of inanimate object (a statue) to that of an animated being («After the closing time of the museum / late at night, Deidamia / would step down from the pediment.»). The other protagonist undergoes a completely different process: he is active from the first moment («Then she would see him there again / lurking in some dark corner»), and is specifically caught in the moment of performing an action—lurking on a woman in the shadows—that not only immediately reminds one of sexual assault, but also of a certain type of relationship between a man and a woman (the jealous or possessive man spying on his partner) and establishes from that moment a power dynamic, in which the male protagonist is seeking to impose control on the female character. At the high point of the assault, however, he also undergoes a metamorphosis: he is transformed into a half-human, half-animal creature («she would feel him

turning / into a centaur little by little»). The female protagonist is therefore not only a passive subject, but the passive subject par excellence: an inanimate object. Under the gaze of her creator she achieves the human status, only to be grasped by him a little after: the composition hence reproduces the conceptual couple of man-subject, woman-object which is so common in the western cultural production (and which is fused with the corresponding couple of the man-artist, woman-muse within the production of art).

The fact that the female protagonist is presented as an inanimate object and assaulted right afterwards represents a literary reproduction of the process of objectification which precedes every sexual assault. As John Stoltenberg points out, «the depersonalization that begins in sexual objectification is what makes violence possible; for once you have made a person out to be a thing, you can do anything to it you want» (Stoltenberg, 2000, 48).

Furthermore, the female subject is reduced to mere utility for the male: Deidamia exists (literally, comes to life) for the purpose of being assaulted, and this process is deemed as fatally inevitable, as is made clear by its perpetual repetition night after night, over and over again. The idea of the existence of the female subject who has a merely functional and repetitive role of passive reception of the male action, is furtherly underlined by the overlapping of the act

of carving and the act of assaulting that takes place in the last verses («and she dreamt of him, abandoned / between her fear and his lust / carving her again»), which suggests to the reader that artistic creation originates out of violence, and that the coming-into-being of the female protagonist is inextricably interwoven with her own aggression.

Inscribing Rape, Erasing Rape. Although the scene described in the poem is reenacted night after night, mirroring the immutability of the thousand-years-old sculpture, («Her beauty was forever/frozen in time;» «every time he jumped on her.»), its chronological stillness is only apparent, for there is in fact an element over which time produces an effect, and that is Deidamia's feelings. The verses describing her emotions reveal that Deidamia is not upset by the assault anymore, but on the contrary she awaits it, having grown accustomed to it («After all she was expecting it, she was used to it by now»). This process of gradual adaptation produces such an effect on her disposition, that «She would fake resistance,» and ends up accepting as pleasure the feeling of pain that is caused by the body of the perpetrator («Now his horse-hoof / hurt her somewhere there / at the bone, sweetly»), while wishing to re-experience the

feeling of dread which is occasioned by his desire («and she dreamt of him, abandoned / between her fear and his lust / carving her again»).

Reading sexual violence as a means of seduction, that is ultimately able to exercise a fascination on the person assaulted and eliminate their resistance, constitutes an expression of the perpetrator's fantasies about the sexuality of the person assaulted. In this case, it reproduces only the point of view of the male protagonist, while censoring the female gaze. On the quality of Pavlopoulos' poetical gaze, Michalis Pieris declared:

στην ποιητική όραση του Παυλόπουλου, η ομορφιά είναι αυτή που κατοικεί μέσα στο ανδρικό βλέμμα. Είναι η ομορφιά που υπάρχει ενόσο θα υπάρχει το ανδρικό βλέμμα (γιατί και αυτό μπορεί κάποτε να χαθεί). βλέμμα που αφαιρεί από την όμορφη γυναίκα κάθε επείσακτο στοιχείο, ενδυματολογικό ή άλλο, για να τη μετατρέπει σε νεράιδα, λυγερή, ή απλώς πρόσωπο του ονείρου Στον Παυλόπουλο η ιδεατά όμορφη γυναίκα είναι το κάλλιστο δώρο του Θεού, δια του οποίου μετέχει ο άνδρας στο θαύμα της ομορφιάς και της δημιουργίας (Pieris, 2002, 26).

(In Pavlopoulos' poetical vision, beauty lies in the masculine gaze. It is the beauty that will exist as long as the masculine gaze exists (because even this could disappear, someday); the gaze removing from the beautiful woman any external element, be it the clothing or other, in order to turn her into a fairy, a beautiful maiden, or even just the character of a dream In Pavlopoulos, the ideally beautiful woman is God's best gift, by means of which the man can partake to the miracle of beauty and creation).

By emphasizing the distinctive masculinity of Pavlopoulos' poetic gaze, Pieris indirectly confirms not only the absence of the female point of view, but

also the depersonalization of the female protagonist, whose identity loses its human nature and is gradually objectified into a means to accessing artistic creation.

This process of erasing the female gaze in the reconstruction of the rape results in the erasure of rape as such in the very moment of its narration. If Deidamia welcomes the aggression, then she is inherently consenting to intercourse with the centaur, and the sexual assault is no longer an unwanted act. In this sense, the reader of the unit—the adolescent student of the general high school—is hereby presented with a literary reflection of the rape myth, according to which victims of sexual violence secretly wish to be assaulted (Bourke, 2007, 55–94).²

Yet Deidamia's silent consent to assault is not the only element in the composition suggesting a vision of sexual violence where the culpability of the perpetrator is reduced, and in the end erased. The very metamorphosis which is

² Rape myths are widespread commonplaces related to rape, whose ultimate goal is to blame the victim and exonerate the perpetrator, or simply to deny the possibility of rape itself. The concept of *rape myth* had already been elaborated by Susan Brownmiller in her renowned 1975 essay *Against our will* (Brownmiller, 1975, 394), and it was picked back up and furthered by the scholar Joanna Bourke, who affirmed that “In the context of rape, the myths ... are responsible for converting historical and geographical specificities into flaccid catchphrases that seem clear and self-evident, yet are profoundly damaging for people who suffer sexual abuse. Rape myths situate sexual torture in the realm of moral edification. They enable individuals (such as perpetrators) to place their actions in a framework that is recognizable by others (such as potential victims) while withdrawing legitimacy from people (actual victims, for instance) who wish to contest them.” (Bourke, 2007, 25–27)

undergone by the male protagonist, turning from man into mythical creature in the culmination of the assault, evokes two different cultural topoi in mutual contradiction³: the centaur combines both a human and an animal nature, and hence his act of aggression can be related to a vision of male sexuality as animal-like and uncontrollable, while on the other hand it positions sexual assault in the realm of mythology and monstrosity. In the first case, sexual violence is considered natural, and therefore inevitable and justified; in the second, it is pictured as not belonging to human reality, and therefore only a monster could be held responsible for it.⁴

Erasing Rape with Allegory. In the didactic unit no mention is openly made of the allegorical meaning of the poem—so much is confirmed by the critics (Angelatos, 1994b) and by the poet himself (Pavlopoulos, 2008). However, the allegory is explicitly referred to in the teacher’s book, which proposes to the educator «Να σχολιαστεί η μυθική διάσταση του ποιήματος και να συνδεθεί με

³ Rape myths are usually in contradiction with one another (Bourke, 2007, 25).

⁴ The metamorphosis of a man into an animal is a returning motif in Pavlopoulos’ poetry, and particularly in the collection *Τα αντικλείδια*. The poet Titos Patrikios noticed it, and observed that «Η μεταμόρφωση του ανθρώπου σε ζώο είναι μια έξοδος από τη θεσμοθετημένη, την ελεγχόμενη ζωή της οργανωμένης κοινωνίας προς τη διάχυτη και ανεξέλεγκτη ελευθερία της φύσης.» (“The metamorphosis of a man into an animal is an exit from the institutionalized, controlled life of the organized society towards the pervasive and uncontrolled freedom of nature,” Patrikios, 1995, 6).

την αλληγορία του ποιήματος» («To comment on the mythical dimension of the poem and link it to its allegory»). On the same page it can also be read: «Με δεδομένο ότι έχουμε να κάνουμε με ένα ποίημα ‘ποιητικής,’ να σχολιαστούν τα στάδια ποιητικής διεργασίας που αλληγορικά παρουσιάζονται στο ποίημα: από τη σύλληψη της ιδέας ως την υλοποίησή της» («Given that we have to do with a poem about ‘poetics’, comment on the stages of poetic elaboration that are allegorically represented in the poem: from the conception of the idea to its realization», Georgiadou and Kroupi-Kolona, 2008, 182).

By definition, an allegorical narration entails more than one meaning besides the literal one. As long as the reader does not recognize the allegory, the literal reading plays a central role in the interpretation of the text, but when the allegory is recognized, the reader’s attention shifts to the narrative’s additional meanings, and the literal sense becomes a mere means that is used by the author to express the significance conveyed by the allegory. In the case of the interpretation of *Το άγαλμα και ο τεχνίτης*, the allegory transforms the text from a rape representation into a «poem about poetics», depriving Deidamia’s story of the power of realism that would link the story to actual rape, as occurring outside of the literary world. Since the didactic unit does not offer a gender perspective, insisting on the allegorical dimension of the text ends up

normalizing the idea of sexual violence as a part of artistic creation, and constructing the protagonist not as a real character, but as a generic female figure, who is deprived of her human identity as well as of her materiality and corporeity.⁵

Erasing Rape with Metaphor. As I have mentioned above, the *Comment* positions the story-line back in its original context, from which the poet had previously isolated it. In this paragraph, the student can find the description of the myth of Deidamia's assault by Eurytion during the celebration of her

⁵ The collection of essays edited by Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (1991), *Rape and Representation*, offers a broad overview of analysis of classic literary texts where the topos of rape can be found, and explores the way in which cultural texts can contribute to the construction and enhancement of social behaviors which perpetuate rape culture. In their brilliant introductory essay, the editors underline that: "The act of rereading rape involves more than listening to silences; it requires restoring rape to the literal, to the body: restoring, that is, the violence—the physical, sexual violation. The insistence on taking rape literally often necessitates a conscious critical act of reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where it has been deflected, either by the text itself or by the critics: where it has been turned into a metaphor or a symbol or represented rhetorically as titillation, persuasion, ravishment, seduction, or desire (poetic, narrative, courtly, military). Here, the recurrent motif of disfiguration becomes significant: disfiguration both in its rhetorical and physical senses (and ways in which the first hides the second), as both textual and corporeal deformation or mutilation. In reading the violence back into texts, then, the essays in this collection reclaim the physical, material bodies of women from their status as "figures" and reveal the ways in which violence marks the female subject both physically and psychologically" (Higgins and Silver, 1991, 4).

wedding with Peirithoös, and this enables them to acquire a more complete view of the story. The student can therefore realize that, according to mythology, the aggression takes place during a social gathering of political relevance, and that it causes the outbreak of a conflict. The student is thus introduced to the political dimension of sexual aggression and its repercussions, and to the connection between rape and war. In this framework, the aggression follows the scheme which is called by Gayle Rubin (1975) the sex/gender system, according to which the role played by women in the social economy is that of an object of trade between men: the violence is therefore depicted as being perpetrated by a king, Eurytion, not against Deidamia herself but against another king, Peirithoös. Deidamia is not only a material good belonging to a man, but also a symbol of the entire population of the Lapiths, of whom that man is king. Assaulting her not only means transforming her body in the battlefield so that the community to whom she belongs can be injured and humiliated (Guenivet, 2001, 28), but also using rape as a war weapon (Bourke, 2007, 408).

Any interpretation of sexual violence on women as an act of humiliation and as an attack upon the (male) enemy, of the kind which is presented in the *Comment*, produces an automatic erasure of the woman and of her trauma. This erasure is emphasized in the closing sentence («The whole representation of the

battle is believed to express the struggle between spirit and bestial passion»), that attributes to Eurytion's act a merely symbolical value, while disregarding Deidamia and focusing exclusively on the groups of men confronting each other.

Conclusions

The concept of rape has fundamental consequences in the construction of gender identity. In their book *Rereading Rape*, Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver point out:

Rape and the threat of rape are a major force in the subjugation of women. In "rape cultures" The danger, the frequency, and the acceptance of sexual violence all contribute to shaping behavior and identity, in women and men alike. Literary and artistic representations [of rape] contribute to the social positioning of women and men, and shape the cognitive system that makes rape thinkable (Higgins and Silver, 1991, 3).

The didactic unit of the textbook *KNL III* dedicated to Pavlopoulos introduces the student to the delicate subject of sexual violence and its literary representation without providing them with any consideration related to the phenomenon of rape, whether under a gender perspective or under any other kind of academic perspective. The idea that the literary representation of a rape does not fall amongst the range of texts which are worthy of being discussed

under a gendered perspective can also be related to a conception of rape as pertaining to the sphere of erotic love, and not to one of power, as feminist studies have long theorized and as is widely accepted by gender studies and the social sciences. The same point of view can be found in Dallas' previously quoted essay, in which rape and erotic love are mentioned side by side as if they were synonyms («The subject of the two poems is therefore this rape scene, the erotic love»). According to this vision, sexual violence would be an expression of libido and sexual desire, and not an act of power and control. The fact that the organization of the didactic unit dedicated to Pavlopoulos mirrors this point of view is confirmed by the guidelines contained in the teacher's book. Here, the section which discusses Pavlopoulos lacks any allusion to sexual aggression, and insists that the teacher should give prominence to the theme of love: «να αναδειχθούν τα βασικά γνωρίσματα της ποίησης του Γιώργη Παυλόπουλου: η αφηγηματική δεξιοτεχνία, η χρήση του μύθου, η απροσποίητη αλληγορική και ρωμαλέα του γλώσσα, η θεματική του έρωτα, το ονειρικό στοιχείο κ.τ.λ.» («highlight the basic characteristics of Giorgis Pavlopoulos' poetry: his narrative ability, the use of the myth, his authentic and robust allegorical language, the theme of love, the dream-related element etc.») and «να κατανοήσουν οι μαθητές την ερωτική σχέση που συνδέει τον καλλιτέχνη με το δημιούργημά

του» («let the students understand the love relationship between the artist and his creation», Georgiadou and Kroupi-Kolona, 2008, 181–182).

Without an adequate support in reading the text from a gendered perspective, the student is left alone with the point of view expressed by the text itself, and with a series of topoi that repeatedly inscribe sexual violence into the text while at the same time erasing it. Without an interpretative grid that is able to demystify the literary representation of violence by highlighting its normalizing and naturalizing traits, the literary schoolbook becomes the institutional framework of a rhetoric of rape where insidious cultural rape myths are free to deploy their effects.

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