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DEATH AND THE REAL IN KARKAVITSAS' *ΛΟΓΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΠΛΩΡΗΣ*

Λόγια της Πλώρης by A. Karkavitsas was first published in 1899, a collection of twenty nautical stories, ill accommodated to the genre of realism which was gaining ground at the time.¹ Most stories deal with death, ranging from cold-blooded murder (Πειράγματα) and attempted infanticide (Γέρακας) to suicide (Βιοπαλαιστής). Other stories include mysterious brief appearances of magical objects or mythical beings (Φρεγάτες, Η Γοργόνα), the disappearance of friends and relatives (Η Καπετάνισσα, Τελώνια), near-death experiences (Η Δικαιοσύνη της Θάλασσας), as well as vivid accounts of encounters with the natural elements and shipwreck (Ναύαγια, Κακοσημαδιά). There is always something unexpected about the incidents described, as they do not 'occur' in the regular sense of the word but rather break out and traumatise. Eyewitness and victim alike are never adequately prepared for their impact. Yet these incidents are swiftly committed to oblivion, always contained within the sailor community and are never punished by established law. Thus they resemble vivid nightmares rather than real-life events. Very often, a considerable lapse of time separates the event from its narration, making the latter the confession of an old sailor, an overdue explanation or the revelation of a secret, a cautionary tale or a pleasurable horror story for the company of men on a stormy night.

What are we to make of these stories today? Are we to dismiss *Logia tis Ploris* as a collection of folkloric material or are we to seek its new meaning in the excesses of its horrors?² If culture – and its products – is an attempt to represent and contain

¹ The language of the book is demotiki, mostly colloquial, with outbursts of lyricism. The narrator is neither objective nor disinterested. He speaks in the first person and, in the majority of cases, participates as an eyewitness or a protagonist. Although the experiences he describes are brutal and hallucinatory, he never attempts to explain or criticise them.

² Despite the richness of its materials, *Logia tis Ploris* is often remembered for its systematic collection of folkloric elements and for little else. This is not totally unjustified. Some stories like *Θείον Όραμα* and *Η Γοργόνα*, are, indeed, excessively folkloric, faithful repetitions of old tales with no innovations, and very few are completely free from any such interference. Moreover, the book appears to have been overshadowed by Karkavitsas' more popular realistic novels, *Η Λυγερή* and *Ο Ζητιάνος*. Despite the typical combination of brutal reality with an idealisation of rural-sea life, it is problematic to classify *Logia tis Ploris* under *folkloric realism* (Beaton 1999) or *études moeurs* (Vitti 1991) because of the abundance of magical elements, the involvement of the narrator in the action and the absence of direct social criticism. These elements seem to have marginalized the collection even more than its folkloric material. In recent years, there has been revived interest in Karkavitsas, together with new publications of his most representative works, but little has been said about this book. Inevitably, however, Karkavitsas is hovering in and out of oblivion. In 1991 Mastrodimitris claims that the author is still read and enjoyed (Mastrodimitris 1991: 100) while in 1986 Stergiopoulos admits that despite the virtues of his work, Karkavitsas appears dated (παλιωμένος, Stergiopoulos 1986: 133).

death, make it comprehensible and diffuse some of its power³ what are we to make of the relentless, incomprehensible eruption of death and the distortion of reality in this collection?

Another question arises. Death and the disruption of reality form a substantial part of the character of the sailor community, an idiosyncratic male world that is kept together by their symbolic banishment from organised society. Yet these men are not outcasts in the conventional sense of the word. As the narrator in *Η Θάλασσα* explains, they choose the sea instead of dry land and in doing so succumb to compulsion rather than reason. They are aware of the hardships of the sailor's life and yet they eagerly accept death and loss as the price of their enjoyment. And although they can be kind and humane and often display the solidarity of family members to each other, they appear to thrive on contradiction, loss of control and the unleashing of instinct. Thus the controversial coincidence of death and enjoyment, the inconsistent behaviour and the transgression of conventional laws, appear to constitute the core of their identity and indeed their fulfilment.⁴

How are we to understand the portrayal of the sailor community? What constitutes their 'difference' and where does it come from? Can we go beyond the obvious conclusion that the evil of the sailor community represents the evil immanent in human nature, and is it possible to extract a subtler form of social criticism from their portrayal as an isolated, idiosyncratic class with its own rules and pleasures?

We will address these issues by discussing *Logia tis Ploris* from a psychoanalytic perspective, using Freud's notion of the death instinct and Lacan's Real, the order which encompasses death, loss and the distortions of reality in a single framework.⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed account of either the death instinct or the Real; we will start by sketching their theoretical underpinnings, allowing text and theory to illustrate one another in the subsequent discussion of particular stories. In discussing those stories, we will focus on how Karkavitsas fleshes out the border of life and death and how he represents experiences that exceed both the control of the conscious ego and the powers of representation. The aim of the present reading of *Logia tis Ploris* is twofold. On the one hand it attempts to show that the book could

³ See Goodwin & Bronfen 1993: 4

⁴ I will not be referring to the social habits of sailors in real life nor to anthropological evidence about their identity and their interaction with other groups. My discussion will be entirely focuses on the fictional representation of the sailor community in Karkavitsas' work.

⁵ The term Real is different from the noun 'real' in its common meaning. In order to avoid confusion I will be using the capital letter for the former throughout the text.

today be interesting to a readership much wider than the Greek speaking audience. On the other hand, it proposes that the collective portrayal of the sailor community be interpreted not only with reference to the laws internal to itself but also with reference to the established and commonly held laws that regulate all communities on dry land. This juxtaposition, it will be argued, allows us to read *Logia tis Ploris* as a symbolic gesture in which deadly evil is pinpointed and marginalised, allowing the prospect or, indeed, the mirage of a better world to emerge with this act.

Freud considered the death instinct to be antagonistic, first, to the instinct for the preservation of life and, later, to the sexual instinct.⁶ Starting from the basic thesis that life is a detour of death in the sense that the living organism's main concern is to reduce tension to a minimum and ultimately return to a state of no excitation, Freud then notes that the death instinct is not allowed to pursue its course and can only achieve part of its purposes through a fusion with the life instinct or with the sexual instinct. Thus Thanatos finds its way into Eros⁷ and life makes itself available to death. Examples of the manifestation of the death instinct include phenomena of masochism, that is, aggressivity turned inwards, cases of compulsion to repeat old traumatic experiences despite being unpleasurable, and the impression of being pursued 'by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'demonic' power'.⁸ In 'The Ego and the Id' Freud discusses the diversion of the death instinct outwards in the form of sadism or in the form of 'an instinct of destruction directed against the external world' and also exemplifies the de-fusion of Eros and Thanatos with cases of the reversal of love into hate⁹ and neurotic acts of revenge directed against the wrong people. He also suggests that the death instinct can take over the super-ego, transforming the latter from a critical-moral faculty to 'a pure culture of the death instinct' that persecutes the ego relentlessly.¹⁰

⁶ See Freud 1984: 326. On Freud's determination to maintain the life-death dualism in his work and the philosophical antecedents of the concept, see Dollimore 1998: 180-197. For a comprehensive account of the death instinct in Freud's work, see Laplanche & Pontalis 1988: 97-103

⁷ The pair Eros and Thanatos are used by Freud as cover terms for the life preservative / sexual instinct and the death instinct respectively; see Laplanche & Pontalis 1988: 153 & 447

⁸ See Freud 1984: 292

⁹ See Freud 1894: 381, 383 & 386

¹⁰ See Freud 1894: 394.

In Lacan, by contrast, the pair Eros-Thanatos is abandoned. The death drive is now defined in relation to loss and representation and is more or less seen as a remainder of the process of symbolisation. Thus its origins are sought in the Real,¹¹ the general order of the unsymbolised, and its effects are felt in the other two orders, the Symbolic, the domain of discrete ordered relationships defined by language and representation, and the Imaginary, which centres around the ego and its relation to external objects.

Lacan claims that the entry into the Symbolic order, which coincides with the entry to language at infancy, is structured upon an experience of loss, to be understood as the end of that fusion with others (typically the mother) which dominated the prelinguistic era. Ragland describes the transition in the following manner:

'the first objects an infant sees, hears or touches are presentations introjected as primary symbols. But for symbols or things to become language – to be verbally represented – they must disappear as omnipotent objects. The disappearance gives rise to loss in so far as the mother says no to ongoing satiation. The infant grasps that the symbol or image leaves an empty place in its wake, thus making absence the condition for meaning or language to signify something'.¹²

The effect of loss is also known in its bodily equivalent as the loss of *jouissance*, the primary intense bodily enjoyment of undifferentiated unity which is now subdued to the representational restrictions of the new system.¹³ The object or objects in the definition above are not available to memory or retrievable in any manner but are only known 'because their loss ensures that other things, both objectal and experiential, stand in as semblances for their would be a priori existence'.¹⁴ In that way, the loss that engenders the speaking subject generates *desire*, an ongoing search for the metaphoric replacement of the lost object, which is by definition both futile and perpetual. This elusive object, which supports desire and is only known through its effects, is known as the *object a*.

The Lacanian view of loss and the separation of the Real from the Symbolic entails a rather disturbing view of life. Entry into the Symbolic order is a permanent alienation

¹¹ Fink 1995: 25 defines the Real as 'that which has not been symbolised, remains to be symbolised, or even resists symbolisation and may exist alongside or in spite of the speaker's linguistic capabilities as unspoken and unconceptualised.'

¹² Ragland 1993: 8

¹³ Ragland 1995:182. I will be subsequently using the term 'jouissance' to refer to excessive enjoyment of the real kind rather than simple intense pleasure.

¹⁴ Ragland 1993: 81

of the primordial 'being' into representation and human activities are seen as attempts to veil the void at the centre of its existence:

'seeing, talking, thinking, reading, writing, feeling and perceiving are all organised in networks of meaning and affect around a hole or void that pierces through the weave of introjected representations. The palpable existence of a hole in the centre of being and meaning pushes individuals to keep filling this hole, lest they be confronted with any one of its many anxiety faces'.¹⁵

However, what is more disturbing than the void in the middle, is the return of the Real itself, which exposes the vulnerability of the Symbolic order and its inability to completely eradicate the effects of jouissance:

'We know that individuals ceaselessly take in the world around them piecemeal, while unconsciously striving to maintain the illusion that inconsistencies or discontinuities play little role in their daily lives'.¹⁶

The concept of loss and the void at the centre of life appears to echo Freud's death instinct and the tendency to return to a state of non-excitation, but the effects of the Real are better understood in Lacan through his re-working of the concept of trauma. If language allows us to represent our experiences in words and deal with them in a symbolic fashion without allowing those that are unpleasant to turn into sources of pain, the Real as trauma is that which has been experienced as painful but has eluded linguistic representation. Although the original traumatic scene may be buried in the unconscious, a compulsion to repeat painful old experiences without recalling their prototype indicates the existence of a blockage.¹⁷ Thus the trauma can be considered as a dead body in representation or as the presence of death in language, an absence or 'an impossibility that never ceases not writing itself'.¹⁸

The entire order of the Real can be described in a manner very similar to trauma, especially if one recalls that its very essence, the loss, is also traumatic. Thus Fink defines the Real as 'a side effect of language [that] can generally be understood as a residue of signification, that which must necessarily be left outside the signifying chain in order for something to be included inside'.¹⁹ Ragland, on the other hand,

¹⁵ Ragland 1993: 81-82

¹⁶ Ragland 1993: 81-82

¹⁷ As Laplanche & Pontalis (1988: 78) note: 'the subject deliberately places himself in [a] distressing situation' even when 'he has the strong impression that [the distressing situation] is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment.'

¹⁸ Ragland 1993: 86

¹⁹ Fink 1995: 27

chooses a slightly different perspective when she observes that 'an encounter with the Real will always be an encounter with the death drive, the more than us in us that is at that moment irreducible to meaning or satisfaction'²⁰ and draws attention to the effects of the Real by stressing its proximity to both language and conventional reality:

'Discourse is bordered by the Real that appears in bits and pieces, as the unexpected or the uncanny. And the Real destroys the linearity language imposes on us, showing us that neither meanings nor images are fixed in any innate syntax or grammar, nor in any simplistic binarism. The Real is anamorphosis that shows things as other than they seem to be, as living inconsistencies... Any smashing of the egotistical familiarities by which we protect the symptoms we love more than ourselves destroys the 'narcissistic fictions' we live by'.²¹

Below, we will trace the return of death and the Real in Karkavitsas' stories of the unexpected and the uncanny and in reality disturbances, starting with the return of the object a in adventures inspired by folktales.

Lost objects:

Folktales have provided Karkavitsas with unique objects of desire that are transformed by him into extended narratives of encounters with them or quests for their acquisition. One such object is the elixir of life (το αθάνατο νερό) in *Οι Φρεγάτες*, which is discovered accidentally by a sailor in a remote cove on a remote island. The elixir springs from the rock and looks like ordinary water but offers immortality, physical strength and beauty. It transforms the sailor who washed his face in it, from *κουφάρι* (corpse) to *περιστέρι* (dove).²² Upon seeing the extraordinary transformation, the crews of the frigates scramble to the cave but their haste deteriorates into deadly aggression and they kill each other before ever arriving at their purpose. In the meantime, the elixir vanishes in order to avoid blood pollution.²³

Another object of desire, *το γιούσουρι*, proves equally elusive. A young sailor is told of the existence of a magical tree at the bottom of the sea in the gulf of Volos and makes it the purpose of his life to bring it to the surface. Although the tree itself is

²⁰ Ragland 1993: 84

²¹ Ragland, 1993: 86-87

²² Karkavitsas 1994:38

²³ Karkavitsas 1994:39

practically useless, he anticipates the fame and admiration the feat will gain him.²⁴ In a trip to the gulf of Volos, he manages to uproot the tree and tie it behind the barge in order to drag it to the nearest port. Upon arrival, he discovers that the rope had snapped and the tree had returned to the bottom of the sea.

Both events are Real in their totality, that is, bizarre encounters which are incompatible with reality and must be repressed and forgotten rather than assimilated into it. The objects involved are avatars of the *object a* which has the power to annul desire once and for all and to close the gap of loss – one could imagine what would happen, for instance, if mankind possessed the elixir of life. In that sense, these objects are dangerous for reality as we know it because they threaten to disrupt it completely. The void created by their fleeting (re)emergence is veiled by the desire to commemorate their appearance and disappearance, and language, which is unable to reproduce them in their concreteness, re-presents their elusive existence by attempting their verbal reconstruction.²⁵

Both Karkavitsas' stories and their folk original dramatise the unsatisfiable yearning for the timeless potent object that is lost in the transition to symbolic reality. It is worth noting, however, that human weakness and deadly aggression, which are responsible for its loss, safeguard something more precious than the acquisition of the object itself: the preservation of desire. To be human is to desire and to desire is to be subject to loss rather than total satisfaction. As Žižek observes concerning anxiety in encounters with the Real 'it is not the lack of the object that gives rise to anxiety but, on the contrary, the danger of our getting too close to the object and thus losing the lack itself. Anxiety is brought on by the disappearance of desire'.²⁶

Thus, from a psychoanalytic perspective, what is more significant than the lost opportunity and the apparent moral of the stories, is the representation of the conflict between the elusive object which is ultimately an object of death – bringing death and obsession rather than life – through the reversal of the conventional opposition of

²⁴ Karkavitsas 1994:211

²⁵ Another two stories, *Η Γοργόνα* and *Ο Εκδικητής*, deal with the resurfacing of mythical-traumatic objects. In the former, Alexander's sisters seeks reassurance from a sailor that her brother is still alive; in the latter, the altarpiece of Ayia Sophia resurfaces and submerges in the waters of Bosphorus bringing back the memory of the fall of Constantinople. I have chosen not to deal with these overtly patriotic pieces and their nostalgia for national glory, but on the whole they can be accommodated in the general scheme of the return of the trauma-real which remains unassimilated by national consciousness.

²⁶ Žižek 1991: 8

good and evil. Paradoxical though it is, it is death, in the sacrifice of the few, which guarantees the preservation of life and desire as we know it.

The traumatic event:

Nowhere is the eruption of the Real more spectacular, deadly and traumatic than in *Πειράγματα*. The brutal murder of the sailor Anestis by the colleague known as Kefallonitis, may have originated in the latter's losing his temper over repeated teasing by the victim but the event itself occurs without provocation and interrupts a scene of merriment and sexual excitation. What makes it even more abhorrent, is the fact that it occurs on Easter Sunday. The narrator describes the scene in the following way, starting with the sailors' flirting from aboard the ship with a group of Russian women swimming around it:

Είμαστε όλοι κρεμασμένοι στην κουπαστή. Το μάτι μας γαρίδα! Έβλεπες μέσα στο θαμπό νερό τα κορμιά τους κίτρινα σαν ελεφαντοκόκαλο ν' αργοκινούνται και σ' έπιανε ανατριχίλα και πείσμα. Πείσμα και ζήλεια. Μας άπλωναν τα χέρια, τους δίναμε την ψυχή. Οι ραντίδες που έπεφταν απάνω μας, λεγάμε πως ήταν κάτι από το κορμί τους και στις σφίγγαμε στον κόρφο, τις φέρναμε στα χείλη με αχορταγιά. Τους ρίχναμε πορτοκάλια, τους πετούσαμε μεταξομάντηλα. Και κείνες οι θεότρελες τσαλαβουτούσαν εδώ και κει, άρπαζαν τα χαρίσματα, έπιαναν την καρίνα, αρπάζονταν στα σχοινιά ν' ανέβουν απάνω τάχα και φώναζαν ολογέλαστες:

- Για βας λιουμπλιού!...για βας λιουμπλιού!...

- Ναι, σ' αγαπώ! Κι εγώ σ' αγαπώ! τους φώναζε ξετρελαμένος ο Ανέστης.²⁷

Then suddenly:

Ο άθεος Κεφαλλονίτης έκανε το λογο του. Καθώς έσκυφτε στη κουπαστή ο Ανέστης, μια του έδωκε με τον μπαλτά και χώρισε το κεφάλι από το κορμί. Τόση δύναμη έβαλε, που έμεινε καρφωμένος μια πιθαμή ο μπαλτάς στη σανίδα. (ibid)

The next moment, the Kefallonitis dives into the sea and disappears forever.

Absolute horror lurks behind absolute pleasure. The reason why the Kefallonitis chose the particular moment to decapitate Anestis will remain forever obscure. No one will ever know whether Anestis was the source of his frustration or the incidental victim of its outburst.²⁸ More significant, however, is Karkavitsas' substitution of death for the culmination of the sexual climax. This act opens up the delightfully obscene space in which sexual enjoyment, the little death in Bataille's terms,²⁹ loss of

²⁷ Karkavitsas 1994:159

²⁸ As we pointed out in the introduction, Freud suggest that aggression turned outwards may be directed towards innocent victims and have its source in masochism. One could argue that more frustrating than Anestis' teasing was for Kefallonitis his own inability to rise to the occasion and match his colleague's verbal skills.

²⁹ In Goodwin & Ragland 1993: 11

control and the shattering of the ego boundaries in the blissful fusion with the other, gives way to death, the 'more than' of the sexual jouissance, the ultimate bliss and shattering of the ego's boundaries as well as the ultimate de-fusion of Eros and Thanatos.

On the visual level, the moment *it* happens constitutes a trauma, something that does not fit in the particular scene and does not obey reason. The brutal spectacle represents death as that which exceeds the ego's defences, catches the spectator unawares and simultaneously exposes the ego's lack of control over the powers of the instinct. The separation of the head from the body lends substance to typical images of the fragmented body which Lacan finds in dreams associated with the analysis of the most archaic aggressive traits in human character.³⁰ From a slightly different perspective, it could also be said that the separation of the head from the body problematises identity as it makes the reader consider whether a headless body is easily identifiable as 'the person'.³¹

On the level of meaning, the Real mocks both the literal and the metaphorical preservation of life implied in the sexual act and the celebration of Christ's resurrection respectively. For the narrator, repetition compulsion commemorates the eruption of the Real. Although the incident is forgotten and the culprit vanishes, he who witnesses the event has to live with the trauma. He is the recipient of the spectacle and tries to cope with it by repeating the story to others in an always-failed attempt to master it completely. During that repetition, the narrative becomes a source of guilty pleasure for him and his audience that innocently evokes but never admits its affinity to the primal scene.

The eruption of the Real always calls for the Symbolic law that puts an end to its re-appearance. This draws our attention to the fact that the sailor community appears to contain death and violence without necessarily punishing it. A question emerges at this point: is their behaviour compatible with the laws of society, or does their proximity to death affect their attitudes and values? At this point, it is the reader as final recipient of this representation of death that has to re-call the Law and perhaps enact the suspended sentence.

Fate as repetition compulsion:

³⁰ Lacan 1992: 11-12

³¹ For a discussion of the equation head=name=identity; body=nobody see Janes 1993: 250.

In other stories, the Real is not the abhorrent encounter discussed above but *a second encounter* with fate, during which the sailor re-enacts his own past while having the impression that he is in a new situation beyond his immediate control. In *Κακότυχος*, repetition compulsion makes the sailor the agent of his own destruction. Everyone, including himself, considers Captain Drakospilos unlucky:

Εκείνος τα έβλεπε κι αναστέναζε κατάκαρδα. Δεν παραπονιόταν όμως, γιατί γνώριζε το δίκιο τους. Εκείνο που τον απέλπριζε ήταν η τύχη του. Με κείνη πάλευε στον ύπνο και στον ζύπνιο του. Πίστεψε πως κάτι κακό γεννήθηκε με τη γέννησή του.³²

The story tells of his last voyage and his failure to escape his bad name. Nothing supernatural is involved in his downfall. He simply collapses under the scrutiny of the public eye – the town follows the progress of his journey obsessively – and the obligation to return the vessel safely to its owner. Thus the experienced captain succumbs to his fears (δείλιασε) and makes inexcusable mistakes in preparing the ship for an imminent storm. Because of his errors of judgement, the vessel crashes on the rocks.

The narrative highlights the power of fate by juxtaposing bad judgment as the cause of failure, to the captain's blind determination to uphold his reputation. Karkavitsas illustrates how the captain's predicament, which appears to be a new situation beyond his immediate control, only serves the purposes of his compulsion.³³ In that he concurs with Freud who considers repetition compulsion to be an expression of the death instinct and fate an expression of its persecuting forces.

In the final part of the story, the overwhelming victory of the death instinct turns into a noble sacrifice. The captain announces his decision to die of exposure on the rocks rather than return home and wreck more lives with his bad luck.³⁴ The voluntary assumption of the role of the scapegoat exemplifies the tragic moment at which man or woman passes over to the side of death by finally succumbing with the 'bad luck' or any other signifier of the 'unrepresentable' that describes him or her for society. There can be something heroic in the masochistic misrecognition-sacrifice of this kind, especially when it is carried out in the name of society and with the purpose of

³² Karkavitsas 1994:131

³³ See n 6 above, for a definition of compulsion to repeat as a new predicament.

³⁴ Karkavitsas 1994:140

eliminating the evil that one is. Altruism and heroism make a noble cause out of the domination of the death instinct.³⁵

Turning against oneself appears all the more sinister in *Βιοπαλαιστής*, another story of suicide. A young sailor who spent the best part of his life working hard to support his mother and sisters after the father abandoned them, ends his life when he is finally free from all family responsibilities. Confining in a friend a few days before his suicide he says:

Όρεξη δεν έχω να ζήσω πια. Δεν ξέρω γιατί, μα δεν έχω. Γνωρίζεις πώς δούλεψα από τα μικρά μου χρόνια. Όσο είχα μπρος μου κείνα τα κορίτσια, ήθελα να ζήσω και να δουλέψω...μόλις διάβασα πως έγινε και της Ρούσσας ο γάμος, λύθηκαν τα ήπατά μου...κάτι ανάλαφρο και ζεστό ένιωσα να φεύγει από την καρδιά μου κι έπεσα αναισθητός. Από τότε δεν έχω πια όρεξη για δουλειά, ούτε για ζωή.³⁶

Having lost the sisters, the object of his desire, the young sailor is exposed to the (Real) void of objectless yearning. The loss of responsibility for the sisters deprives him of the role of the father through which he had a place in the Symbolic order. As both object and symbolic role collapse, the futility of life is unveiled. Just like captain *Drakospilos*, the young sailor lives between two deaths, the symbolic death caused by the erasure of both role and desire and the concrete event of the termination of his life. Lacan observes that without desire 'life is concerned solely with dying'³⁷ and the two stories furnish the statement with a striking examples.

When the eye errs:

In other stories the Real returns with the overpowering of the ego. This experience is built around the seduction of the senses and can be described as apocalyptic. It is often accompanied by an unleashing of aggression so violent that can hardly be contained within conventional reality.

In *Γέρακας* the blurring of vision turns obsessive love into deadly aggression and overturns reality altogether. Such is the love of Captain Valmas for his barge and his son that he calls both of them Beauty (English in the original):

³⁵ In a comic version of the deadly compulsion, another captain loses his vessel while chasing the sign (omen) of bad luck, instead of trying to avoid the obvious mistakes that lead to it. In *Κακοσημαδιά*, captain Kremidas and his crew become obsessed with trying to evade an owl that flies around the ship. They neglect the basic rules of safe navigation and soon run aground. Only then do they realise that they have caused their own ruin.

³⁶ Karkavitsas 1994:76-77

³⁷ Lacan 1988: 233

Παιδί μου – Μπιούτι μου, τρυφερονηθύριζε. Τόσο τα είχε σφιχτά στην αγάπη του, που δεν ήξερε καλά καλά ποιο ήταν το παιδί και ποιο το ξύλο του.³⁸

One day, when the son, Yorgis, is in charge of the vessel and Captain Valmas sleeps in his cabin, a storm breaks out. Yorgis decides to deal with it without waking his father and tries to steer the vessel towards a port he rather envisages than sees:

Κάποια ελπίδα μέσα του ανάτειλε, στο νου του κάποιο ήσυχο λιμάνι ζωγραφίστηκε. Στην άγρια πέτρα απάνω η ψυχή του μάντεψε αγκαλιά καλόγνωμη.³⁹

Valmas suddenly awakes and becomes aware of the dire situation. He, too, envisages rather than sees the tragic end approaching fast:

Ο Βαλμάς όμως δεν ήθελε να το πιστέψει....και το Μπιούτι ακράτητο φεύγει, σα να το κράζει ποθητό φάντασμα. Δυο-τρεις οργιές ακόμη και θα κουτρήσει στο μάρμαρο. Τον καπετάν Βαλμά φριχτή τον δέρνει υποψία. Το παιδί του θέλει να παίξει με τη στερνή του ώρα! Τραγικό βλέπει μπροστά του όραμα, ξύλα, μαδέρια το τρεχαντήρι...Δεν κρατήθηκε περισσότερο. Έσυρε από τη ζώνη το στιλέτο και χύθηκε απάνω στη αγάπη του...άρπαξε τον Γιώργη απ'τα μαλλιά, πίσω γύρισε το κεφάλι του και το στιλέτο άστραψε στο φως της ημέρας.⁴⁰

On a first level, Valmas' act may simply represent the father's desire to punish the disobedient son, but the paranoid vision and the fear that Yorgis wants to 'mock him in his last hour' certainly suggests that something more than mere paternal authority is at stake. In psychoanalytic terms, Valmas' aggression has its source inside his own psyche and in the inherent discrepancy between the Imaginary and the Real; between, that is, the organised ego and the portion of the instinct that is left outside its boundaries during its formation.⁴¹ Boothby explains what is Real-horrible for the 'self' in images of death and refuse:

'I becomes a subject capable of dealing with objects only by virtue of having constituted a domain of the abject. Thus 'refuse and corpse show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live'. But what threatens to emerge from the Real is ultimately a part of oneself, one's own refuse, one's own corpse'.⁴²

In the case of *Γέρακας*, we could therefore say that just as the fusion-in-beauty of the child and the ship is about to give way to the opposite, a fusion of distorted materials

³⁸ Karkavitsas 1994:163

³⁹ Karkavitsas 1994:165

⁴⁰ Karkavitsas 1994:165-6

⁴¹ The separation of the Real from the Imaginary is very similar to the separation of the Real from the Symbolic. Part of the instinct is excluded either from the organised ego or from language. The return of the real in the sphere of the imaginary-organised ego constitutes phenomena of aggressivity. For a complete discussion of aggressivity and the relationship of the imaginary and the real see Boothby 1991:47-70.

⁴² Boothby 1991: 65

and the flesh of the other, Valmas' act ensures that he does not see what is more horrible than the loss of beauty and the beloved other: the formlessness that evokes the aggressive annihilation of himself.⁴³

From a slightly different perspective, the sudden dissolution of the love relationship exemplifies the destruction of the egotistical familiarities that Ragland⁴⁴ always associates with the return of the Real. In Lacan, love, a form of relationship between the ego and the object, is always imaginary, dependent upon the image the ego projects and receives in making the other its ideal. In that sense, Valmas may believe that he loves his son and the barge more than himself, but through them he loves his own narcissistic-imaginary perfection which veils the inconsistencies of his own private history. What is lost at the crucial moment, it is veil to his own inconsistency. When the death instinct (Real) returns with the paranoid distortion of the familiar images (Imaginary), the reduced symbolic, which is represented here by the a-social vacuum of Valmas' secluded world,⁴⁵ cannot cope with its impact. Karkavitsas places the incident at the junction of all three orders: as the symbolic human bond (father:son) collapses, the trauma (Real) installs itself in the place previously occupied by the mirage of love (Imaginary). Valmas never totally recovers from the experience and is virtually annihilated under the pressure of the experience.⁴⁶

The real experience of death:

In *Η Δικαιοσύνη της Θάλασσας* Karkavitsas explores the hazy space between life and death, the relativity of identity and the importance of language, which, as we saw in

⁴³ For a similar point on the eruption of the formless real, 'Dream of the burning child' in Ragland 1993: 96-101.

⁴⁴ See Ragland's comment (Ragland 1993: 86-87) in the introduction.

⁴⁵ Valmas lives isolated aboard the ship with the child. There is no mother or other female figure near them and no one knows how he acquired the child and the ship.

⁴⁶ In *Οι Σφουγγαράδες*, the outburst of aggression results in fratricide. Petros Rafalias kills his brother underwater while thinking he attacks the rival sponge-diver who ventures into his territory. The scene is described by Karkavitsas as a step-by-step mirroring of each other's moves. Here aggression is triggered by the encounter with the double, the mirror image of the self, but the interplay of sadism-masochism can be applied as in the case of *Γέρακας*.

A similar traumatic revelation destroys the world of Captain Palumbas in *Η Καπετάνισσα*. The old bachelor's eye is caught by the spectacle of his young future wife. His life is instantly transformed: 'μια πάντα [veil] σηκώθηκε από τα μάτια του, είδε αλλιώς τη ζωή'. It is, however, when another veil is lifted – the fog that envelops the wife and her lover on board Palumba's vessel – that the old captain is disillusioned. The narrative constitutes the first encounter as a scene which will only receive its meaning retroactively and in accordance with the rules of the trauma. Here Karkavitsas allows the signifying chain to be inhabited by a delay which shows that meaning is determined backwards. Reality is shown to be reversible, subject to revision and vulnerable to the powers of the trauma. In *Τελώνια*, the disillusionment concerns the transformation of a friend into a sea-demon.

the introduction, both constructs meaning by necessarily leaving something outside signification and by evoking it in the signifying chain.⁴⁷ The story resembles a half-conscious dream in which the brutal abandonment of a crew in danger, their miraculous escape by boarding another vessel, their struggle for survival and their resignation in the face of death before their final rescue are held together by the repetition of the phrase *στην άλλη ζωή*, which takes on different meanings and lends coherence to the disjointed first person narrative.

The story starts with the crew of the Sotiras sailing away from captain Bismanis' sinking ship:

Μωρέ αδέρφια πνιγόμαστε! Που μας αφήνετε; Σωτηρία!... Αδέρφια πνιγόμαστε!... Σωτηρία! Και μέσα απ' το ρέκασμα του κύματος και το ανεμοφύσημα, ακούστηκε χαρόσταλο ανάμπαιγμα η φωνή:

- Στην άλλη ζωή!... στην άλλη ζωή!⁴⁸

Certain death is followed by unexpected salvation:

Στη φωνή μου πήδησαν κι άλλοι στο μπάρκο κι ο καπετάνιος στερνός. Απάνω στην ώρα. Πέντε λεφτά αργότερα όλοι θα πηγαίναμε στο φούντο... Άξαφνα, εκεί που τρομπάριζα, ακούω το ναύκληρο κάτι να σφυρίζει στ' αυτί του καπετάνιου. Αυτιάζομαι, οι ναύτες του καραβιού έλειπαν όλοι! Ακόμα έμαθα πως το μπάρκο ήταν ιταλικό. Οι ναύτες πήδηξαν βέβαια στο καράβι μας, όπως εμείς στο δικό τους και μαζί τους ρούφηξε η θάλασσα. Έλειπε βέβαια η βάρκα και μπορεί σε κείνη να ζήτησαν τη σωτηρία τους. Κοίταξα γύρω τίποτα. Τους συγχώρεσα και τους ξέχασα.⁴⁹

The exchange of lives and places occurs in heavy fog. The crew's new life begins in an unmarked chaos, represented by the loss of difference between opposites such as night and day, sea and sky, daylight and greyness. This chaos is both disgusting (*σιχαμένη μέρα*) and life-sustaining, comparable to the biblical chaos that preceded the creation of the world.⁵⁰ In psychoanalytic terms the fog - chaos is the primordial undifferentiated Real, the pre-symbolic vacuum that suspends the certainties of identity and the old hierarchical relations and allows life to re-start as an 'alli zoi'. Yet, in its domain, the new life is not a *genesis* of difference and concreteness, or a separation of the elements, of the Symbolic and the Real or of the 'I' from the 'other'. It is a genesis in a state of fusion with the other and in suspension of difference. In its vacuum, living is just the *jouissance* of being alive minus the attributes of a concrete symbolic reality and identity.

⁴⁷ See Fink's description of the Real as remnant of signification in my introduction above.

⁴⁸ Karkavitsas 1994:49

⁴⁹ Karkavitsas 1994:59

⁵⁰ Karkavitsas 1994: 46, 49

In this disorientating Real, 'stin alli zoi' acquires yet another meaning as the exhausted narrator abandons the effort to stay alive and hovers between life and death in a state of un-consciousness. A hallucination inhabits the space between life and death and brings back another piece of Real, a spectacular repressed in which images of fragmentation of the body coincide with a lack of recognition by the symbolic community:

‘Αξαφνα, λέει, τα θεριά της θάλασσας...τριγύριζαν λαίμαργα το κουφάρι μου και πιάνανε διαβολεμένον κανγά με τα όρνια του ουρανού για τα κοψίδια μου. Εγώ τα κοιτούσα και γελούσα σκαστά και τρανταχτά γέλια, βλέποντας να λαχταρούν τ’ αρρωστημένα κρέατά μου. Κι έπειτα, λέει, το κεφάλι μου αργοκυλώντας, πάντα μαύρο και παρόμοιο με ρουμοβάρελο, βρέθηκε στο λιμάνι της Ύδρας... ήρθε κι άραξε στην ακρογιαλιά και βγήκαν οι νιές περδικοστήθες... ήρθαν και τα λεβεντόπαιδα με τα τσόχινα βρακιά και τα πλατιά ζωνάρια, με κοίταζαν κι έλεγαν με απορία: Τίνος είναι τούτο το κεφάλι; Εγώ τους άκουγα και στεναχωριόμουν που δεν με γνώριζαν, κι ήθελα να φωνάξω: -Δικό μου είναι, του Καληώρα, του βλάμη σας, δεν με γνωρίζετε;⁵¹

In the hallucinatory dream, the crowd mocks the head, kicks it around and buries it in the sand, while repeating 'stin alli zoi', the coda of his failed attempt to leave his mark on the community.

Η Δικαιοσύνη της Θάλασσας is remarkable for two reasons. On the one hand, it is a re-working or indeed reply to the myth of creation and the original 'in the beginning was the Word'. The dominance of the Real and the continuous change of perspectives illustrates how language can include and exclude, repress and reveal. 'Stin alli zoi' is indeed the original word around which meaning is developed but instead of revealing the greatness of its creator it uncovers the wretchedness of the subject of the traumatic near-death experience and of repressed social inadequacy.

On the other hand, the missed encounter with death, the pulsating otherness, the crossing of borders and the substitution of solid reality by hallucination undermine conventional notions of identity and make the sailor an effect of the signifying movement and, by extension, elusive and indescribable. The sailor is neither himself nor the other, neither dead or alive, neither the stable product of symbolic communities nor the alienated other of permanent mirror identifications. He *circulates* – as opposed to 'dwells' – in the three orders in the same way the phrase 'stin alli zoi' lends itself to the meaning of each one of them without any contradiction.

⁵¹ Karkavitsas 1994:56

Repeating the Other's desire:

H Θάλασσα sheds light on the nature of the irresistible attraction of the sea and speaks of the enjoyments that run counter to the horrors that fill other stories. It also deals with the father-son relationship and the authority that establishes the symbolic Law and the guarantee of orderliness in the Symbolic order.

In Lacan, the father, as symbolic bearer of the Law, separates the child from the mother, banishes *jouissance* and forms the Other, that is, the unconscious and its repressed contents, language and the Symbolic order in general. Psychoanalysis refers to this function as the Paternal metaphor, or the Name of the Father and attributes great importance to the fact that it 'knots' together the Real, the Imaginary and the symbolic. In more practical terms, the paternal metaphor more or less guarantees the existence of a source of truth and authority for the subject, an ultimate Other who knows all about the subject and the order of the universe. The father of the Paternal Metaphor is a dead father, indifferent, that is, to desires as well as an abandoned object on the part of the child, properly outgrown and symbolically re-presented.⁵²

In *H Θάλασσα* we come across a different father, what Žizek calls the double of the Name of the Father,⁵³ one who is alive to desire, enjoys outside the Law, and cannot guarantee the order of the world because he is the first perpetrator.

When the narrator tries to account for the irresistible attraction of the sea, he traces it back to the early representations of the sea in the father's speech. The desire to become a sailor is first of all grounded in the paternal verbal prohibition, which heightens the desire for the forbidden pleasure.

Ο πατέρας μου – μύρο το κύμα που τον τύλιξε – δεν είχε σκοπό να με κάνει ναυτικό.
Μακριά, έλεγε, παιδί μου, απ' τ' άτιμο στοιχειό!⁵⁴

Yet, he and other sailors who compulsively succumb to what is verbally presented as forbidden contradict the paternal prohibition:

Μα όλα τα έριχναν στη θάλασσα. Παράβγαιναν ποιός θα χτίσει μεγαλύτερο καράβι, ποιός θα πρωτογίνει καπετάνιος. Κι εγώ που άκουγα συχνά τα λόγια τους και τα έβλεπα τόσο ασύμφωνα με τα έργα τους δε μπορούσα να λύσω το μυστήριο. Κάτι, έλεγα, θεϊκό ερχόταν κι έσερνε όλες εκείνες τις ψυχές και τις γκρέμιζε άβουλες στα πέλαγα, όπως ο τρελοβοριάς τα στερολιθαρα. Αλλά το ίδιο με έσπρωχνε κι εμένα εκεί.⁵⁵

⁵² 'Outgrown' and 're-presented' refer to the dissolution of the Oedipus complex which turns the father from an early figure of ambivalence (of love and hatred) to a most significant identification of the child.

⁵³ Žizek 1992: 158

⁵⁴ Karkavitsas 1994:17

⁵⁵ Karkavitsas 1994:17-8

The father transgresses the Law he wishes to impose upon the son. He is not 'dead', an exemplary absolute master of his desire that could convincingly carry out his symbolic function, but enjoys beyond the set boundaries and brandishes his *jouissance* as the ideal deterrent. That there is something deadly about this behaviour is suggested by the narrator's comparison of the attraction to the sea to the dragging of souls down to Hades and to by interpretation of the compulsion as 'mysterious' and 'divine'.

As soon as the son succumbs to the call of the sea despite the father's prohibition he starts living in violation of the paternal word and in agreement with His desire, as the embodiment, that is, of the very contradiction that is the source of his confusion. In other words, the young sailor enters the field of desire as a compromise formation between the two contradictory positions, becoming the symptom of the paternal disorder.

But even if the dis-obedience can be easily dismissed with reference to the received wisdom of 'like father like son', it is the second encounter of the pair that confers the final deadly meaning on it and sets the price for abiding by the law of *jouissance*. The second encounter occurs at a foreign port, after the son has gained some experience of the dangers and excitements of the sea. If the Law was to be re-asserted, such an encounter would provoke the father's wrath or, alternatively, it would ignite the son's desire to humiliate the father and test his (im)potence, a move sustained by a contradictory desire to denounce his imposture and, at the same time, 'to see him undergo successfully the ordeal and thus belie [the son's] doubt'.⁵⁶

No such confrontation occurs in Η Θάλασσα. No symbolic words are exchanged. The father remains silent and is reduced to a compassionate observing gaze which is perceived by the narrator as his death warrant.

'Όσο ένιωθα απάνω του το βλέμμα μου, ησυχία δεν έβρισκα. Έτρεχα βιαστικός, από τη μια άκρη στη άλλη... Εκείνος κατάλαβε πως τα είχα σαστισμένα και δεν σηκώθηκε από τη θέση του, μόνο με ακολουθούσε με βλέμμα παραπονιάρικο σα να μ' έβλεπε στο νεκροκρέβατο.⁵⁷

Under the gaze of the father/Other, the young man gets the first intimation of the punishment *not* coming from the impotent father, yet assumed to be materialising there and taking the shape not of a prospective threat but of an accomplished fact, a death that has almost already taken place. In the absence of symbolic words, the gap

⁵⁶ Zizek 1992: 158

⁵⁷ Karkavitsas 1994:23

of the dysfunctional Paternal Metaphor is filled by a disturbing image which translates a predominantly imaginary gaze into a statement of excessive authority, equivalent to the excess it is meant to deal with. It is as if the void of paternal power is introjected in the place of his Name, as the encounter with the uncanny image of death re-replaces the symbolic Law with the other law, which, instead of blocking *jouissance*, allows it to emerge as the real source of desire.

Thus, 'as if I was in my deathbed' reverberates with the consequences of dedicating oneself to the father/Other's transgressive desire. It means that 'I' am dead to my desire because I dedicate myself to the Other's. When I see myself from his point of view, I see nothing (myself as dead), because I am misrepresented and eclipsed (dead). By the same token, I am also dead to symbolic society, the other facet of the Other, because I do not live by its rules. And when I see myself from their point of view, again, I am unrepresented and eclipsed.

Later in the story, the middle-aged narrator admits his compulsive attraction to the after a short period of living on dry land. Breaking the symbolic pacts that tie him to the dry land – marriage, job, secure income and responsibilities – he returns to the only element which can accommodate the reversal of life and death that ensues from the mis-alliance to the symbolic name:

- Εσύ, Γιάννη, την έδεσες την παρούμα σου. Ούδ' άνεμο ούδε θάλασσα φοβάσαι πια. Άραξες. Που θα πει: πάει, πέθανες, δε ζεις στον κόσμο!⁵⁸

The reversal of the meaning of the words *dead*, *alive* and *world* in the above phrase encapsulates the basic reversal-renunciation of all meanings and values that the sailor accedes to in order to enter the nautical domain.

Beyond good and evil:

Reading *Logia tis Ploris*, or any cultural product of another time and place, it is rather difficult to avoid thinking about its appeal to modern readership. Today, as literary and artistic fragmentations of identity and reality go hand in hand with critical practices that challenge authoritarian power, be that the ego in psychoanalysis or the centralised state in politics, *Logia tis Ploris*, appears uncannily modern. The hallucinatory dissolution of identity, death and loss, the radical reworking of family bonds and relationships of love and authority, the blurring of vision and the pursuit of

⁵⁸ Karkavitsas 1994:31

elusive objects are all experiences of an 'I' that encounters its failures whenever it thinks it confirms its certainties. The appeal of *Logia tis Ploris* resides in the fact that the failure inherent in human nature is to be enjoyed rather than bemoaned, an attitude further reinforced by two conspicuous absences: of any didactic intention on the part of the author and of the most obvious features and objectives of Realism. We could therefore say that as an observer of human nature, Karkavitsas appears contemporary in his approaches because he is inherently psychoanalytic in his methods. He deconstructs the sailor by challenging, first of all, the reliability of the senses and the stability of social roles. Thus, when vision is challenged by the return of the Real, social roles prove unable to cope with the strain. This can be read in reverse as a social comment: vision is challenged because roles are already under strain and cannot bear the unresolved tension between the aggressive tendencies of the ego and the obligation to love one's neighbour, brother or offspring. The subversion of the authority of the ego is further accomplished by the fragmentation of identity. Karkavitsas' sailor circulates between the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. He takes another man's place and subsequently loses it, or renounces his obligations to family when he succumbs to his compulsions. He is neither dead nor alive, neither himself nor the other, neither rich nor poor, neither in heaven nor in hell,⁵⁹ neither part of the community to which he was born nor of the male world to which he is attached. He is elusive to himself as much as to the others, a pure effect of the dialectic process of signification. In that sense he is the product of the moment, which, depending on the occasion, makes him appear good or evil. Karkavitsas completes the subversion of the ego by challenging the omniscience of the speaking 'I'. Traditionally, the objective narrator stands in the place of the omniscient big Other, the one who is supposed to know⁶⁰ and guarantee the ultimate truth of the narrative. There is little room for a controlling consciousness in *Logia tis Ploris* and even when the story is told confidently in retrospect, it is mostly an attempt to understand and come to terms with an old trauma rather than an attempt to

⁵⁹ In *O Κάτω Κόσμος* the dead sailor is ousted from both heaven and hell for sexual misdemeanour. He ends up pitching his tent between the two and spending eternity in unavowed limbo. This, in my view, is the purest expression of his mis-placement.

⁶⁰ In Lacan the 'subject who is supposed to know' (Lacan 1991:230-243) is the analyst and by extension any Other to whom the analysand or the speaking subject erroneously attributes full knowledge about himself and his own history. The statement implies that any such truth or knowledge is only an illusion, although culturally figures or authority 'that are supposed to know' often support the idea of a sovereign and omnipotent Other.

judge or explain. Karkavitsas' 'I' does not speak the illusory ego of certainties but the awareness of its helplessness and ignorance.

Beyond the level of the ego, the portrayal of the sailor as branded by lack and desire illustrates Lacanian subjectivity with remarkable accuracy. By undermining consciousness as the seat of power, Karkavitsas allows us a glimpse of the internal divisions, traumas, aberrant desires and the *jouissance* that form the core of subjectivity. Karkavitsas' subject, like any subject in its essence, is neither good nor bad, neither a master nor a slave, neither content nor discontent with others. It is simply the subject that takes pleasure in its divisions. This is why the sailor appears romantically indifferent to social dis-order and the reader is often left with the impression that the book celebrates the pure enjoyment of the moment even in the middle of the most abhorrent circumstances.

Although the sailor approximates the psychoanalytic subject, other characteristics of the group reveal a certain pathology of this isolated, male universe. In real life, the pursuit of happiness veils the essential lack of being, and desire keeps death at bay. Karkavitsas' sailors do not completely conform to this pattern. On the one hand, they are often portrayed as neither desiring nor pursuing new objects that would bring happiness but as reliving old losses. On the other hand, they live in close proximity to death and although they are not entirely given over to the destructive instinct, they often succumb to it without any resistance.

Another and perhaps more radical insight into the nature of the sailor's desire concerns the 're-version' of the paternal metaphor. Karkavitsas presents us with a way of building one's desire against the letter of the Law, by pathologically attaching oneself to the contradiction that threatens to disrupt it. Thus his sailor is prone to experiencing the Real because he is already structurally affected by its excessive presence. This idiosyncratic structuring, alternative to the expected, 'healthy' and predictable way of entering the symbolic, amounts to a piece of radical criticism of human affairs. Without perhaps intending to do so, by corroding the father-son relationship, Karkavitas exposes the soft underbelly of the patriarchal order, the 'other side' which dispels the myth of the sovereign Other that is supposed to guarantee the stability of symbolic institutions and the preservation of order. It would therefore be reasonable to say that as an instance of social criticism, the book exposes the truth of the fact that unity and normalcy are to be found only in social lies and

principles to be maintained at high cost.⁶¹ *Logia tis Ploris* is a series of disruptive myths and dystopias that appear to confirm the point.

However, the book can be read in the opposite way: to the extent that the sailor is subject to the constant visitations of the Real, he is a surplus to organised society. To the extent that he is isolated in the sea and accepts his peculiar fate eagerly, he is the one who contains the Real, blocks it and ensures that dry land society can function free of its visitations. In many ways, the sailor community is a collective scapegoat which keeps the evil Real away from the other communities. The sailor is the *Kakotychos* of the organised society, a victim of fate which takes it upon himself to perform this peculiarly pleasurable sacrifice.

This exclusion of the sailor-bearer of the Real from the organised society indicates that the latter cannot operate without relying on the Symbolic Law. Although one could contemplate the *jouissance* of being a sailor, the idea that the lawlessness of the Real-sea could prevail does not constitute a universally appealing option. Therefore in comparison to the sailor world, conventional society emerges as orderly, humanised, viable and ultimately improvable. Karkavitsas may not speak of ways of improving society but by delimiting the traumatic Real to the world of the sea and by keeping it 'out there' he creates a positive fantasy, of a society which, by default, appears hopeful and positive.⁶²

The interplay of this wishful fantasy with the weakness of the established paternal Other and the constant eruption of the darker forces of human nature, is, in my view, the other reason why the book today deserves a second look. It is redundant to say, at this point, that in psychoanalytic terms, the collection is invaluable. It is perhaps more meaningful to conclude this paper with two observations concerning the book's omission from the discussions of literary works that exemplify the ideological developments of the late 19th and early 20th century.⁶³

The first observation concerns Karkavitsas' debt to folklore, a suspiciously heavy debt which often impells the reader to question the author's originality. Ragland notes

⁶¹ Ragland 1993

⁶² Historically, this kind of group scapegoating out of which societies construct a positive self-portrait has sometimes taken extreme forms, the most extreme being that of the scapegoating of the Jewish community in pre-Second World War times (Žižek 1994: 124-9). I am in no way implying that the case of the Greek sailor is in any way comparable in degree and ferocity to that, but the principle and making of the radical Other ultimately remains the same and so does, one would have to admit, the tendency of societies to repeat the gesture in various forms.

⁶³ See Gounelas 1984 and Vitti 1991. Although both of them make multiple references to Karkavitsas and his later work, there is practically no mention of the particular book.

that ‘contemporary western cultures always seek institutions that can name and tame what other cultures and the ancient past named and domesticated as gods and devils, namely, the Real’.⁶⁴ Adapting her suggestion to literature, we could consider *Logia tis Ploris* as the bridge between old and the new representations of the Real but with emphasis on personal experience and on the subtlety of inner states which, in my view, folklore cannot capture. If some stories from *Logia tis Ploris* seem to add nothing new to literature, there are certainly those that, as I hope to have shown, are the work of a singular author who only uses the older material in order to make an entirely different point.

The second observation concerns the book as ideological criticism. Žižek notes that there are two procedures of ideological criticism. The former performs a ‘symptomal reading’ of the ideological text and seeks to demonstrate how a given ideological field is a result of a montage of heterogeneous elements (floating signifiers) that come together under a unifying principle.⁶⁵ The second ‘aims at extracting the kernel of enjoyment’ (ibid) which both sustains and subverts a social fantasy that is best suited for the understanding of these works and their ideological performance. Given that almost all readings of ideology in Greek literature that concern Karkavitsa’s era (studies on *ἠθογραφία* for short) attempt to construct a unified account of the progressive forces at the specific time, it is not surprising that some works, like *Logia tis PLoris*, unavoidably appear irrelevant and unfit for consideration. In the present reading we used the second perspective in showing how the book can today be approached in their idiosyncratic uniqueness.

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⁶⁴ Ragland 1993: 98

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