



*Bucolic,*  
Theophilos

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## The Author as Reader: the case of Margarita Karapanou

The publication of the journal and notes that Margarita Karapanou kept during her adolescence revealed an early and acute reader. Beyond her lineage, it is the range and speed of consumption of books (as well as other writers' journals) that determined her literary destiny. What is striking, however, is her reading preferences: steering clear of Greek literature, which she blames for political polarisation, she almost exclusively focuses on foreign writers, mainly English and French-speaking ones – and she always reads them from the original. Such is proved to be also her own “literary citizenship” when she attempts her creative take-off with her first literary book. *Kassandra and the wolf* is namely her own rebirth by means of writing. It is also her proper portrait of the artist in early childhood. I will examine the ways in which she attempts to “correct” her own biography through her own readings. I will elaborate on three dimensions: a) re-writing her childhood, which was proven to be equally fascinating and traumatic, using as a projection screen of her own experiences *The Turn of the Screw* by H. James, a novel haunting her entire work, b) the theory about writing and reading that she develops through another child, daughter of another famous writer in *Kassandra* and c) the way she is led to choose the career of a creative fiction writer over the one of a literary critic or academic.

What persists throughout her life is a constant interweaving of reality and fiction, a tendency to see her life more clearly when reading. This constant sense of unfulfillment, leads to a propensity to flee, to travel;

in brief, what her other great love, Flaubert, attributed in an unrivalled way to Madame Bovary and what forms the overwhelming “bovarism” evident in Karapanou and probably in each real reader and writer.

If we take as a point of departure her last published book while she was still alive, *Mum*, a clear statement, comprising all the above, stands already there as a *résumé* of her life and work:

Σαρτρ, Μποβουάρ, Κνουτ Χάμσουν, Χένρυ Μίλλερ, και τόσοι άλλοι! Πέφτω με τα μούτρα στο διάβασμα. Μου τρέχουν τα σάλια, κλαίω, γελάω, από το πρωί μέχρι βαθιά τη νύχτα. (...) Το χαρτί μυρίζει σαν ξεχασμένη χαρά. Θέλω κι εγώ να πληγώσω το χαρτί, να του βγάλω αίμα. Τη νύχτα διαβάζω με τον φακό. Οι λέξεις πηδάνε χαρούμενες. Το διάβασμα μου έσωσε τη ζωή. Ακόμη και τώρα είναι ο πυρήνας της ύπαρξής μου.

[Sartre, Beauvoir, Knut Hamsun, Henry Miller and so many more! I dive deep into reading. I drool, I cry, I laugh, from morning till deep in the night. (...) Paper smells like forgotten joy. I, too, want to hurt the paper, make it bleed. At night I read with a torch. Words jump happily. Reading has saved my life. Even now, it is the core of my existence].

(Karapanou 2004: 127)

She goes on to say:

Δεν ξέρω πως έγινα συγγραφέας. Ίσως η βαθιά δυστυχία να με ώθησε. Μια μέρα, άρχιζα το πρώτο μου μυθιστόρημα. Έκλαιγα από χαρά, τα δάχτυλα μουτζουρώνανε τις σελίδες. Μητέρα, κι εσύ έκλαψες από χαρά. Τα γραμμένα χαρτιά επιτέλους μας χώριζαν. Εκείνη τη νύχτα δεν είχα εφιάλτες, με κατέκλυσε μια γλυκιά γαλήνη. Είχα γεννηθεί... (p. 128)

[I don't know how I became a writer. Maybe it was deep unhappiness that drove me. One day, I was starting my first novel. I was crying from joy, the tears were smudging the pages. Mother, you too cried with joy. The written pieces of paper were finally separating us. That night I had no nightmares, I was overcome by a sweet serenity. I was born...]

This second birth through writing, this painful yet redemptive secession from the mother, was nevertheless the narration of the chronicle of all that preceded learning to read and write. This is so because Karapanou's first book, *Kassandra and the Wolf*, that bears the dedication “To my mother, Margarita Liberaki”, begins with the chapter “First Day” and ends with “First Day of

School”, where the former narrates the birth of the young heroine and the latter her first day of school, when she starts learning to read and write by syllabizing. At that point, the letters, this bizarre combination of illegible signs and vocal patterns, which represent objects, concepts and feelings lock into words. Words cut into syllables – “it hurts when I cut words in half”, says the child with tears in her eyes– even though this interrupted speech, this difficult rise of the inner language to the surface or the order of Logos, is something that she already knows from her own stutter when speaking in front of important people, and what will later turn into her unique mark on writing with the fragmented style, the few phrases that are left alone at the beginning of the blank page, the sharp episodes and the frequent dots that adjoin in a whole, like leaves of plucked days and read passages that bind into a book. The young Kassandra of the first book might not yet know how to read, but her house is frequented by promising poets, she speaks English as she is raised by an English governess, French as she visits her mother in Paris where she consorts with the offspring of other artists and is looked after by known philosophers during children's parties. The entire network of dark atavistic conflicts within which Karapanou will realize her own difficult creative take-off is already here with its dazzling but constant duplicity. The childhood, equally golden and nightmarish, bountiful and at the same time emotionally depriving, as the child is raised by a whole group of servants and educators but not by her mother and father<sup>1</sup>, overprotected and at the same time insidiously promiscuous, since among the serving staff and the parents' intellectual friends lurk molesters, already foreshadows a work, not only the first book but all those that will follow, where nothing is as it seems and opposites will coexist or appear equivalent naturally. More than her descent (she is the daughter of not only Liberaki, but of a failed poet, as she calls her father, and the great granddaughter of the publisher Fexis) it is this perpetual ambiguity that prepared her literary destiny, in its dual – again – sense: as the formation of a reading criterion, *and* as a writing ideal that will always tend towards ambiguity. It is not accidental that her first book, even though it is written in Greek, is first published in English, and is acclaimed by great figures of the international realm like J. Updike, J. Charyn and R. Chandler, while the second, *The Sleepwalker*, wins the award for best foreign novel in France, and the third will dare to bear as its title a complete foreign language expression, *Rien ne va plus*.

Maybe all this external enthusiastic reception was but an old rendez-vous: in her own country Karapanou will be loved by the public, yet the critics<sup>2</sup>, or her esteemed colleagues will never show the same enthusiasm as their counterparts from abroad, whereas the academic critique only recently has begun to delve into her work with increasing interest (Prinzinger 1997, Iakovidou 2008, Voulgari 2008, Nazou 2011).

At the age of 13 she transcribes in her journal a whole passage from a Greek book she had just read – it was *Θύματα ειρήνης* (*Peace's victims*, 1957) in order to show or remind herself of what she *doesn't* like in literature, i.e. descriptive literalism, especially regarding a love scene. A teenager is already a mature reader, capable of putting aside anything that may be related with teenage awakenings (she is in love again with a boy at that time and she admits that the specific love scene excites her, but this doesn't affect her barometer as a reader). A few days or pages before she had devoured *Les faux monnayeurs* by Gide which astounded her. It is rare that one of her recorded days or experiences doesn't include a reading or a film, almost exclusively foreign, French or English, that the young girl always reads in the original. As it was shown by the publication of Karapanou's journal (which in a dramatic or significant coincidence took place shortly before her death) she was an early and acute reader.

The journals that came out as a volume entitled *Η ζωή είναι αγρίως απίθανη* (*Life is wildly improbable*) cover the twenty-year period from 1959 to 1979 (we cannot know if they are the exhaustive publication of all the notebooks and notes that she kept in a chest, which were ordered by someone in the publishing house)<sup>3</sup>. They start as a teenage journal and end up more as a writer's working notebooks, a kind of "helix", as she noted "because it spirals constantly around itself" (Karapanou 2008: 422). In this sense the amount of readings that parade within them – their range and quantity cannot but be impressive, especially if associated with each age – create a continuous spiralling movement around her already weaved work. Books in which she searched her identity as a girl and then as a woman (*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* by Simone de Beauvoir or *An unfinished woman* by Lillian Hellman); books that offered a view to her recurrent obsessions, both psychic and auctorial (*Les Eaux Profondes* by Patricia Highsmith, which she finds "very constructive"); books in which she found "real human beings" or literary heroes in whom she recognized real friends (*Les Mandarins*

by Simone de Beauvoir or Roger Martin du Gard's *Les Thibaults*); real relationships on the other hand that are fatal or abortive but which she already dreams of transforming into narratives like the ones they resemble (her lover reminds her of the protagonist of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the volcano* and she hopes to convey such an aura to her upcoming book, the *Sleepwalker*); journals, correspondence and novels that cured her writing crises, providing lessons of literary style (like the ones by André Gide or Emily Brontë to whom she returns regularly, especially if she is not pleased with her own literary experimentations); psychoanalytical interpretations of art (*De l'art à la mort* by Michel de M'Uzan) and even mental testimonies that differ from her own, even from those to which she refers in her journals, like those by Violette Leduc, constitute a whole galaxy, her own intimate resort.

"Whoever keeps a diary is a potential writer", she will stress later on in an article dedicated to two of her favourite authors, Gustave Flaubert and Henry James, to whom she never ceases to return, from the beginning and till the end of her life and work. Both of their journal testimonies were not pages of the episodes of a lifetime but rather pages of a work that is yet to be written, or, as Karapanou phrases it much more visually, they resembled "the negative of a film that has not yet reached the stage of processing" (Karapanou 1986: 1125). It would be a futile effort, though, to attempt to discover among the variety of her readings the possible negatives of her own upcoming work. She is clear when she prompts herself in her journal: "I must reread *Under the Volcano* and *Wuthering Heights*. Not to copy, but to smell a little passion. It must be something extremely violent, I have it in me, I must bring it out", she notes as she is already pregnant with the *Sleepwalker* (2008: 324).

If a joy or a love is not something one can return to, or relive exactly as it was, and if violence persists even in the most hypothetically benign relationships, "literature, oddly, makes us taste life more correctly, more fairly. It is this dimension that crystallizes a fleeting motion and conveys it to us wholly, eternally" (1986: 1127). Literature as a form of justice, and especially as a perpetual, imaginary restoration of the disorder and randomness of life with the proper ethics and aesthetics; perhaps there isn't a more concise description of what Karapanou seeks both as a writer and a reader. Though she is supposedly referring here to her beloved Flaubert and James, she is in fact speaking more than ever about herself. Every comment (of a writer

about another writer) is always/already “both for the self and the Other”, it would be almost redundant to repeat it (Clément 1999: 7-24, Ricoeur 1990), as well as the fact that a writer becomes first and foremost the type of reader he or she once was. If it is true that one is not born a woman but becomes one, as Beauvoir said (whose work Karapanou read in completion), then it is even more true that one is not born a writer, but becomes one. And even if the first process is something whose indelible traces of childhood, all that one is subject to since presumably he or she cannot control it, one struggles to rearrange throughout a lifetime the second, the *devenir écrivain*, one can claim it on his or her own terms. One can impose his or her own justice, be born anew and remain there, even if he or she has physically left. The second birth through writing that Karapanou attempted amidst her personal chaos, this creative ejection into her chosen realm, bears her own geography, or better yet her own literary citizenship. If the range and speed of the consumption of books mentioned in her journals bears nothing unnatural for a real writers’ digest, there is nevertheless something rather awry. Karapanou seems to prefer clearly the French-written and English-written literature, while she stands in a “slight angle” towards the Greek-written literature, which she accuses of its political polarization, as well as its “absence of ambiguity” which, according to her, is one of the characteristics of top-level literature (2008: 336). Could this mean that she is less familiar with Modern Greek Literature and thus underestimates it or vice versa? When the writer was asked if she had read *Δύσκολες νύχτες* (*Difficult nights*) by Melpo Axioti, as the book presents similarities with her *Kassandra*, she responded vaguely that she must have read it in the past (Faubion 1996: 221). But, *Kassandra* is somewhat different to Axioti’s young heroine, who is also raised in a rich home but without a mother and in a constant distancing from many aspects of the world that surrounds her, as she is also different to the little girl that is raised in the bourgeois Parisian home of *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée*, who already presents anxiety crisis as a denial of the rules that she needs to begin to respect, and who will later become Simone de Beauvoir. And this because within the golden shell that encompasses her, young *Kassandra* moves half as an angel half as a devil in her own house of horrors, a dimension that is totally absent in the two narratives above. Karapanou, like another Alice, walked through the mirror and showed her

own mirror-house to the readers and at the same time she sent a letter to her mother just like the one young *Kassandra* dictates to her grandmother:

VERSE  
 «Αγαπημένη μου μαμά, πότε θα γυρίσεις; Θέλω να σε σκοτώσω.  
 Σου στέλνω πολλά φαντάσματα  
 Δύο μαγικά  
 Κι ένα λουλούδι

Κασσάνδρα»

(Karapanou 2001a: 75)

“My Dear Mother, when are you coming back? I want to kill you.  
 I am sending you a bunch of Ghosts  
 2 magic piggiepig  
 And 1 flower

Kassandra”

Karapanou 1975b: 36)

“I want to write a ghost story where ghosts are more real than people”, H. James writes in his *Notes*, and this is exactly what the reader of Karapanou senses when focusing on her characters in order to discern physical figures. “The whole novel *The Turn of the Screw* is incorporated in this exquisite phrase of the *Carnets*”, remarks Karapanou about the above desire of James to make ghosts more real than humans (Karapanou 1986: 1126), which will also be her own way to talk about people who were essential in her childhood. *The Turn of the Screw* will not only be the textual screen for the identification of her own ghosts, but also for their projection, creating thus a palimpsest that could remind us of fan fiction, with James’ heroes going on with their lives as avatars in the life of Karapanou a century later. In case it was a novel and not real life – although the writers, living to a great extent through reading, end up living between reality and fiction or even feeling like living in the latter rather than in the former. This will lead to *Kassandra and the wolf*, which will be attempted by Karapanou with a view to rewrite her childhood. The first dedication ‘To my mother, Margarita Liberaki, with love’ (as if the title or the name was not enough, but the reader should be informed of the relation of the novice writer with the established one), will be followed by a concise first chapter that will be in sharp contrast

with the 'love' expressed in the dedication ("I was born at dusk, hour of the wolf, July, under the sign of Cancer. When they brought me to her, she turned her face to the wall", Karapanou 1975b: 3) but not with the twilight zone in which ghosts or visions make their appearance. Ghosts haunt the nanny of Flora and Miles, the two children-heroes in the *Turn of the Screw* which she manages to decode with the assistance of the housekeeper: it is the nanny's predecessor, Miss Jessel and the servant Peter Quint, who had an affair with the children's tolerance and complicity. "Who corrupts whom remains a mystery, it is the adults who corrupt the children or the other way round", as it is put forward by the young psycho who is proved to be a literature teacher and the heroine's lover in a later testimonial book by Karapanou on mental disease, entitled *Yes* (Karapanou 1999: 47), referring again to James' novel which he, too, finds fascinating (as if the ideal lover is the one who shares with us the same madness, literature, and even the same readings, which he has fathomed with the perceptiveness of a specialised scholar). Besides, in *Kassandra and the Wolf*, Peter is also the name of the housekeeper of Kassandra's grandmother, who often looks after the little girl in the grandmother's absence. Already in the second chapter, entitled "The Wolf", he teaches the girl to read and write seated on his knees and reading with her "the book with the pictures", rendering her thus both a reading subject and his erotic object. Karapanou gives Vassilis, the real servant in her grandmother's bourgeois mansion where she grew up, the name of the hero in James' novel, so that she can talk since the very first lines of her first novel about her traumatic abuse experience with Vassilis – which she will manage to confess many years later in *Μήπως; (Maybe?)*, the dialogic book that resulted from her discussions with F. Tsalikoglou (Karapanou-Tsalikoglou 2006: 166). Is the divulgence of a trauma on paper better protected when covered under the paper of another text? Maybe in this way mental ghosts are better identified as real ones, since their attempt to see the light is enhanced. What is more, it is not by chance that Karapanou gives her heroine the name Kassandra: it is not just someone who foresees misfortune, but also the one who discloses truths the others may not see or refuse to admit.<sup>4</sup> Such are the difficult truths of literature. And the writer who brings them to the fore takes the place of an impertinent child who, disrespectful to his parents, does exactly what he was told not to do, risking thus being told off in a fierce way, as Georges Bataille points out in *Literature*

*and the evil*.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, they transmit to the reader some of the vertigo, the quiver, the dual nature of evil, which is often disguised as good (just as presented through the books of our childhood, in the form of the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, for instance), disturbing their own beliefs, their own sense of security, their own complacency in reassuring categorizations. Such appears to have been James' main objective upon writing this novel:

Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself – and that already is a charming job – and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite successfully with all the necessary particulars. Make him think about the evil, make him think about it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.

(James 1908: Xxi-Xxii, Prinzinger 1997: 104)

Karapanou as a reader took in all the scope of this evil and as a writer she directly dramatized it, highlighting thus the disguised misfortunes of her own biography - «*Dramatize, dramatize!*» as remarkably James prompted himself and the other authors to do. In the chapter "Saint Sebastian" of *Kassandra*, consisting of a bizarre masked ball, the little girl claims and makes the adults give her the missing half of the homonymous painting, depicting the evil ones throwing arrows (p.56); literature as a means of doing emotional justice or as "the finally regained childhood", as Bataille would put it (Bataille 1957). In the same chapter, which narrates one of the little girl's dreams in which the men are dressed as women, Peter is dressed as a nanny (his transvestism makes allusion to H. James' Peter Quint who in the nanny's visions – appearing at dusk – wears someone else's clothes and acts as an actor. Another common trait is that he is also red-haired like Karapanou's Peter); the dream conveys the fantasy picture or function of the servant for her: she sees him as a woman, the closest person to her, namely as a mother (Karapanou 2001a: 167, 171). This gender and role intermingling is elaborated in the chapter "The Lesson", where Peter persistently demands, in an almost extortionate crosstalk, that the little girl should acknowledge and adopt a gender other than the one she feels as her own. At the end of the chapter, due to the pressure exerted by the servant by way of a game, the girl is forced to consent to belonging to the male gender, dropping the knife she was holding – with which she was peeling a banana. Phallic symbols,

identifications, the gender construction, are in such a way weaved on the dense parodic canvas of the text, leaving aside “weak specifications” just like James would do, that Karapanou herself seems to have had to go through a long, painful analysis process in order to grasp their obscure, yet particularly eloquent content. Most probably, the closer a writer gets to the focus of their exposition to a familiar audience, the more they are facilitated in decoding their own work: this becomes obvious through the pages of the diary kept by Karapanou shortly before her book was published in Greek. The book had already been published in English (1974) and French, but it was some time before its imminent publication in Greek (1976), while the writer was submitted in frequent psychoanalytical sessions, when in a dialogue between Ego and Superego in her diary, she admitted:

- «Το μάθημα» είναι το σκότωμα της μητέρας, δεν είναι; Αυτό το βιβλίο, την Κασσάνδρα, πώς τόλμησες να το γράφεις; Σου ξέφυγε, έλα όμως που τώρα πρέπει να το εκδώσεις. Ο αληθινός σου εαυτός είναι άσχημος και πρόστυχος και μολυσμένος. Γι' αυτό είμαι από πάνω να προσέχω μη σου ξεφύγει τίποτα. Θα λες μόνον αυτό που θέλω εγώ, γιατί είσαι κακό κορίτσι.
- Δεν είμαι και τόσο κακό κορίτσι.
- Είσαι γιατί σκέφτεσαι φοβερά πράγματα για τη μαμά σου και γι' αυτό θα τιμωρηθείς. Η τιμωρία είναι πως δεν θα ζήσεις, δεν έχεις δικαίωμα, δεν σ' αγαπάει κανείς.
- Θέλω να ζήσω. Να μην έχω από πάνω μου αυτόν το φοβερό δικαστή.
- Τον έχεις, διότι αν δεν τον είχες αυτό που θα 'θελες θα ήταν φοβερό.
- Τι;
- Να σκοτώσεις τους άντρες όλους, να μένεις με τη μαμά σου, αλλά τη μισείς και τη φοβάσαι, είναι φοβερή, θα σε φάει.
- Είδες; Τσακωνόμαστε. Γι' αυτό έχω κατάθλιψη. Η μαμά είναι ο άντρας μου. Τους άντρες τους θέλω για γυναίκες (..) ή μάλλον αυτή είναι η γυναίκα κι εγώ ο άντρας της, και οι άντρες που θέλω είναι σαν γυναίκες. (p. 312-314)

[- “The Lesson” is the mother’s killing, isn’t it? How did you dare write this book, *Kassandra*? It was a mistake, right, but now it’s time to publish it. Your real self is ugly and grotesque and dirty. That’s why I’m here to see that you don’t disclose anything. You will be saying what I want you to, because you are a bad girl.

- I’m not such a bad girl.

- You are, because you think terrible things about your mum, that’s why you will be punished. The punishment is that you will not live,

you have no right to do so, nobody will love you.

- I want to live. To get rid of this terrible judge.

- You have the judge because otherwise what you wanted would be horrible.

- What?

- To kill all men, to stay with your mum, but you hate her and are scared of her, she is terrible, she’s gonna eat you.

- You see? We are fighting. That’s why I have depression. Instead of allowing me to let out my fears, you’re strangling them. Mum is my man. I want men for women, or to put it better, she’s the woman and I’m her man and the men I want are like women.]

By means of James’ text, Karapanou draws her own cryptogram of gender inscription or rather its *amphoterism*, as well as the overall unbearable distress of her personal life. Besides, the reader gets access here to the whole range of sexually ambiguous characters in her work: the decadent artists in the *Sleepwalker*, who fail to complete their work, plunged in alcoholism and their homosexual or pederastic tendencies (“The one I want has to be really strong to get between me and mum, so that I won’t want her. That’s why I love the losers, I’m not scared of the weak ones”, p. 314-5), the heroine’s homosexual husband who finally kills himself and her man-like friend in *Rien ne va plus*, the definitely inseparable couple of mother and daughter in *Mum* (2004, written three years after M. Liberaki’s death) where the mother still domineers the life – or the imagery – of her daughter even after her death. Despite the disclosure of the events presented later in *Kassandra* – the fact that mother and daughter have the same name is a first sign of an implied incestuous relation as declared by herself (p. 323) – and despite the fact that the analysis she underwent brought to light a big part of this material, Karapanou consciously blocked the process that rendered many other writers of her theoretical background thorough and exhaustive critics of their own work: “I am starting to understand”, she writes down in her diary. “I can’t deny my *other* self, the one that wrote the book. It’s a wild, terribly wild self, it’s going to eat me. I can now see that this self, too, is me (..) A horrible depression. Maybe I shouldn’t read *Kassandra* with a psychoanalytical eye. I have never dared do it. (AND I SHOULDN’T).” (p. 319-320). This direction to herself does not constitute evasion due to the terror involved, it is rather a decision not to sabotage her creative flow,

not to interfere with it. She decides to go out to the abyss in the light of her new writing, with a new book: “Because what is writing? A constant effort to shed light on the horrifying ghosts who live down there. To shed light just for one moment on the faces, to acknowledge and be acknowledged, a twofold display of power.” (p. 324). Original fiction is the most crucial way to get on with one’s dialogue with their parents. Besides, a writer can go on reading, metabolizing the work of others, instead of being the reader of their own work, since “It is not us that read books, the books read us” (Bon-nemis 2009: 6). We can therefore read ourselves through them.

This however is not necessarily the usual attitude of the children of famous writers: they may choose an intellectual career not in order to make studies on the parent’s work<sup>6</sup> or to make the truth speak in an academic voice, namely straight from the horse’s (child) mouth, but in order to discredit the parent, by dedicating for example studies to the work of their most hated opponent. And this attitude or option is uniquely dramatised in *Kassandra*, as it seems to have been a reality in Karapanou’s direct environment too, while she stayed in Paris with her mother. Thus, writing as a travestied autobiography is also recognized by France, in a chapter that bears this name in *Kassandra*. “France”, who is not the actual country, but a friend of the young heroine and daughter of the writer of *Hippopotamus*, (as she is explicitly delineated in the novel) up ongoing to the opening night of one of her father’s plays, suspiciously asks her mother whether what the heroes just said on the scene wasn’t exactly what her father had said to her mother the night before. “Sure enough, it was Mother and *me* hanging from the roof of the stage, and we had wings on too, and Father was down below, in a mousetrap” (Karapanou 1975: 43) she says to Kassandra with her mouth open and her mother hastens to explain sinisterly that her father represented them as angels because those who live go to Heaven, whilst those who write go to Hell.

Marie-France, Ionesco’s daughter, was truly a friend of young Margarita. Yet by keeping only her second name in *Kassandra*, she alludes metonymically to the experiences and acquaintances of the writer’s childhood in France, reflecting all elements that constitute Karapanou’s personal *bildung*. What is more, “France” offers a whole theory about reading and writing. Reading as a nurturing diet and writing as its immediate, overflowing, disintegrating, profane metabolism, are depicted with grotesque clarity

both in the title of Ionesco’s play that his daughter and wife are attending (which is cryptically called *Rabies and Diarrhea*) and in the way the wife is taking care of her husband’s diet (she prevents him from eating anything that could remind him of alcohol, like vinegar or even lemon!). “When he is writing, my dear Kassandra”, she says to the hostess “I cut a few pages from the Bible and boil them for him with a sprig of celery” (Karapanou 1975b: 44). Thus little Kassandra also cuts, the day after, a few pages from the Bible («The offering of Isaac» in particular, a blatant parody of the misfortune of being a writer’s child), she cooks them with onions:

«Η θυσία του Ισαάκ» πέφτει όλη μέσα στον καμινέ, πάω να σκάσω απ’τη χαρά μου. Βγαίνω από το μπάνιο, ο ποπός μου στον αέρα, ανεβαίνω στο τραπέζι και κοιτώντας τη μαμά φωνάζω: «Μαμά, μαμά, κοίτα! Έκανα μια εντριβή!»

(Karapanou 2001a: 82)

*The offering of Isaac* pours into the lavatory bowl; I am beside myself with joy. I rush out of the toilet, my bottom bare, and climb on the table, and, looking at Mother, I yell:

“Mother, Mother, I’ve just made a dissertation!”

(Karapanou 1975b: 44)

What «εντριβή» means (a notion unfortunately lost in Germanacos’ translation, despite his highly creative rendering of a passage heavy in connotations) little Kassandra has just learned from the somewhat older France, who, some years later wants to make a thesis on Strindberg (the writer whom her father detested):

Να, παίρνεις ένα βιβλίο και το τρίβεις πάνω σου ώσπου να ξεβάψει και να πέσουν οι λέξεις χάμω. Μετά τις μαζεύεις και τις φτιάχνεις όπως θες εσύ.

(Karapanou 2001a: 80)

“Well, you see, you take a book and go to the middle of a desert or something and then you bury it in the sand for a long time and then you dig it up again and you find that all the words have got mixed up like the sand and then you put them all back in place only this time you put them back anyway you want.”

(Karapanou 1975b: 43)

Whatever lurks unseen in language seems here to have been trimmed through the child’s language and revealed its real nature. The Greek word

“writing”, which involves “touching” (γροφή/αφή), becomes clearer to the point of rendering metaphorical expressions such as “this book has profoundly touched me” actually literal.

And then the so-called thesis (ενδιατριβή), the time-consuming dwelling in the text of the other, until its words fall down and become one’s own property. However, little Cassandra already knows, thanks to her granny, that the theses destroy femininity: “I want to become a policeman and wear a uniform and a gun. You know something, though, you are going to spoil your frocks with all these dissertations and diggings and things” (1975b: p. 43), she says to France, and this constitutes a double strike. She attacks both the bourgeois morality that her granny wanted to impose on her *and* those who think they can continue the dialogue with their family not through the production of their own original work but by commenting on the work of others, finally talking like ventriloquists. The refusal of a potential career as a literary critic, a researcher or a university professor/academic seems to have been a rather early, conscious and brave choice for Karapanou. She remained a frantic, almost bulimic reader whose few but pervasive articles fathom spectacularly certain literary issues or writers, in the same way that her own, richly imaginative literary creation does.

Those processes, which Didier Anzieu calls “permanent attachment of the ego” (*prothèse permanente du moi*), leave their traces on the supporting and constructive work of her creation-to-be in her diaries. According to Anzieu (1981: 75-76) who regards them as a transformative remain of early sensory stimulations of the infantile stage, which somewhat perpetuate indefinitely the remote mother’s care into one’s inner self, can produce three types of writers: a) the theoretical or intellectual one (like Henry James’ brother, William, American philosopher who conceived the notion of the stream of consciousness), b) the writer who is overwhelmed by intellectual images (thus a predominantly imaginative/fictional writer like H. James himself, who was thought to be “the idiot of the family” because he was constantly making up stories which he narrated), and c) the writer who combines both those types, like Jean Paul Sartre, who was both an intellectual and a writer and whose work was also passionately read by Karapanou –especially his study on Flaubert (*L’Idiot de la Famille*), which seems to have haunted her, as she admits (and wonders about) in *Mum!* (Karapanou 2004: 129). However, the perpetual escape, the feeling of dissatisfaction

“my whole life is no more than infinite, desperate expectation” she writes in her 16<sup>th</sup> year of age in her diary, p.219) and, along with those, the constant longing, the unattainable goal of the completion of creation, experienced by the artists gathered on the island of *The Sleepwalker* and also the escape to the dream and the conflict with reality (“Is this my eternal damnation? To be in constant conflict with reality, a reality always so different from my dreams?” she keeps wondering in her 21<sup>st</sup> year of age, p. 262), imagining of oneself as a hero of a novel (little Cassandra imagines that on a nearby island another granny lives, who has kept the books of her childhood and reads to her the *Turning of the Screw* by H. James and Cassandra almost immediately grasps the parallels between, on the one hand, the nanny of the novel, the servant, their perverse relationship with the two kids and on the other hand her own experience), the concept of literature and reading as better than life/reality (in *Rien ne va plus*, the protagonist and her –homosexual– husband have sex and after that they read Proust’s *Le temps retrouvé*, which ends with the phrase “the only life, the only truly experienced life is literature”), all those that Flaubert depicted on Madame Bovary seem to constitute the unbearable bovarism of Karapanou. Maybe, more or less, of every writer –and of every genuine reader. Most probably because it sums up “ways of reading, ways of being” (Macé 2011). Or, according to Barthes in 1978, in one of his phrases that were meant for the work of other theoreticians and writers or even intended to be a frontispiece of their books: «Nous sommes tous des Bovary, des Bovary qui nous laissons mener par des modèles, des phrases et des images comme par des leurres». Emma was to him the character whose life « au sens le plus brûlant, le plus dévastateur, est formée, façonnée (télé-guidée) par la Phrase ». Even « à même le leurre, la Phrase littéraire est initiatrice : elle conduit, elle enseigne, d’abord le Désir (le Désir, ça s’apprend) », but also, he adds, « la Nuance » (Barthes 2003 : 150). It is not accidental that, just before Karapanou wonders in her last book why Flaubert keeps on haunting her, the same images, the same phantoms return:

Μοναξιά... Μετρώ τις ώρες.. Η μαμά και ο Μάριο κοιμούνται..  
Μέσα στο δωμάτιο ταξιδεύω. Διαβάζω το Gustave Flaubert,  
écrivain. Οι φράσεις του Φλωμπέρ.. Σαν τους χτύπους της καρδιάς  
μου. Ο Μάριο, μέσα στον ύπνο του, θα έχει ρίξει το χέρι πάνω  
στους ώμους της μαμάς, κάτι θα της ψιθυρίζει.. Δεν έχω κανέναν,  
μόνο τον Φλωμπέρ.

(Karapanou 2004: 125)



[Loneliness...I'm counting the hours.. Mario and mum are sleeping.. In the room I travel. I read Gustave Flaubert, écrivain. Flaubert's phrases.. Like my heart's beating. Mario, in his sleep, must have put his hand on mum's shoulders, he must be whispering something to her. I have no one, no one but Flaubert.]

## Notes

- 1 "I was born a bourgeois, but I prefer *duality*. I had never before reached anxiety so close. It is, after all, an experience. Doubt: a reined crisis", Karapanou will write down in her diary at the age of 21 (Karapanou 2008: 236, underlining is hers. The translation, unless otherwise mentioned, is ours.)
- 2 In her diary she quotes the lines taken from *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*: "When the critics disagree, the artist agrees with himself" (2008: 150).
- 3 According to copy editor Vassilis Kimoulis (*Copy editor's note*, p. 421-2) in the years 1963, 1965-1966 and 1971-1974 the writer did not keep a diary and what ever else saw the light was published free of interventions (on his part—we are not sure, however, if the writer herself is included). At the age of 21, however, Karapanou writes (30-11-1967, p. 235): "When I was ten and I was attending the boarding school of Cours de la Terrasse in St-Germain-en-Laye, I still kept a diary. I still wanted, if possible, to see clearly. I wrote down everything day by day, I did not omit a word"; there is no trace of this diary in *Life is wildly improbable*.
- 4 The name, already in the title, bears the quality of its multiple uses in various areas, from philosophy (where it is first applied by Gaston Bachelard as «Kassandra complex»(1969) in *Le rationalisme appliqué*. Paris : PUF) to psychology, where it is first applied by Melanie Klein to declare the moral conscience of man (whose main function is to warn, often awakening in the others the refusal to believe what they know as true, in the form of defence against the stress and guilt that torment them, see Klein, Melanie (1975). *Envy and Gratitude and other works 1946-1963*, New York: Tavistock) and is further specified by Laurie Layton Schapira to denote the dysfunctional relationships with what she calls «the Apollo archetype», which refers to any individual's or cultural pattern bound by order, reason, truth and clarity. Following Schapira, "What the Cassandra woman sees is something dark and painful that may not be apparent on the surface of things or that objective facts do not corroborate (...). In her frightened, egoless state, the Cassandra woman may blurt out what she sees, perhaps with the unconscious hope that others (especially authority figures) might be able to make some sense of it. But to them her words sound meaningless and blown out of all proportion" (Schapira, L. L. 1988: 65) – just like a child's speech. If these name resonances are combined with the other half of the title, the wolf, their content is further illuminated. One of the latent notions behind this animal is according to the Liddell-Scott dictionary manifested in the expression Λύκων δέειν which means I remain speechless upon seeing a pederast (wolf). This etymology is also mentioned by Prinzing (p. 104). It is note worthy that in the book the speech problem, the stuttering, is a constant feature in little Kassandra.
- 5 Bataille seems to have been a particularly educational source for Karapanou. She refers to him as the source of her inspiration for a theatrical play she prepares on the issue of incest and madness (p. 392-3. We are not aware of traces of this work in what she left behind) but also as a constant influence of which she tries to get rid of as a writer ("I gradually leave behind the influence of Bataille, Carrol, Genet. I enter other 'influence' realms (...) Lautréamont, however, persists", p. 411.)
- 6 Karapanou will only write one penetrating article about Liberaki's work (1984, «Ο μύθος, το θέατρο και ο φόνος» ("Myth, theater and murder") *H Λέξη* 31: 8-13). However, her opinion

of her mother's literary caliber is the following: "What comes after. All books talk about it, without talking directly about it. And here lies the main problem: whether you speak about a slice of bread or about God, this apparition always lies behind your writing. Cavafy had it, that's what made him great. Rita didn't and she never will. *All great people have it*" (p. 331).

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