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Vizyenos Adapted: Georgios Vizyenos in Contemporary Greek Cinema, Literature and Theatre

Erato Bassea

(University of Oxford, St Cross College)

Introduction

This paper focuses on *To Mόνον της Ζωής του Ταξείδιον* (*The Only Journey of His Life*) (2001), Lakis Papastathis's film adaptation of the homonymous short story written by Georgios M. Vizyenos. I will attempt to contextualize my reading of this film with references to other areas where Vizyenos has been used in contemporary Greece, namely Michel Fais's novel *Ελληνική Αϋπνία* (*Greek Insomnia*) (2004) and its stage adaptation by Rula Paterake (2007). My aim will be to assess how much the myths surrounding Vizyenos's life influence contemporary works, and to further ask why this happens.

Owing much to discussions about the role of imaginatively engineered processes in nation building (Anderson 1983) current debates in Modern Greek Studies are centred on the construction of the Greek literary canon formation (Lambropoulos 1988, Jusdanis 1987, 1991). At the periphery of contemporary cultures Greece has always employed ethnocentric policies towards literature in order to construct a national identity (Tziouvas 2003). Literary scholars and critics were considered important in circulating national canonical literature with clear political meaning. In this framework, film adaptations of Greek literature, interwoven in a dialogue with the national cultural narrative, sometimes supporting it sometimes subverting it, form a fertile field where the understanding of the articulation and circulation of literature in Greece can be explored.

As I will try to illustrate, Vizyenos constitutes a relevant case in point, and this paper aims to show how the work of contemporary Greek artists acts as a conduit for the artistic formulation of founding literary myths. Critics were always interested in Vizyenos's personal life Vizyenos because it 'rivals the lives of his heroes in tragic nature' (Peratzaki 1999: 9)¹. A very popular view is that his hospitalization in Dromokaition Clinic was the consequence of his intelligence or his critics's savage and unfair criticism of his work.

The examination of the cultural myth of an author and its role in the context of modern sociocultural anxieties would be severely limited if it were approached in the light

¹ 'Είναι που και η ζωή η ίδια του συγγραφέα συναγωνίζεται σε τραγικότητα τα πεπρωμένα τους [ie. των ηρώων των διηγημάτων του]'.

of the so-called 'fidelity' discourse. Fidelity analysis is based on the discussion revolving around the extent to which adaptations are faithful to the literary source they purport to adapt.² Theoretical investigations in Reception Theory (Gadamer 1975, Martindale 1993) and Cultural Studies Theories depart from the above line of thought and explore the historical framework of adaptations's policies of production, exhibition and distribution, as well as their reception both by critics and audience. In this framework the relationship between literature and adaptations is seen as complicated in its intellectual practices and indicative of intricate interconnections between history, literature, power and culture. As these approaches go beyond dualities such as written/ filmed or original/ secondary text, they offer a political and cultural understanding of adaptations in the Greek context that can be very useful.

Lakis Papastathis Reading Vizyenos: Reading as Sewing

In the last few years Greece has witnessed an amazingly growing interest in film adaptations. Initiatives from national organisations, for example, from the National Book Centre and the Greek Film Centre, include masterclasses and workshops, retrospectives and awards for the best script based on a novel, indicating that adaptations are being promoted. Moreover, the massive migration wave of ethnic, mainly Balkan, minorities to Greece followed by discussions about identity politics brought again issues of cultural connections and Greek distinctiveness to the fore. This is the context in which Lakis Papastathis decided to adapt *The Only Journey of his Life* on the big screen.

Papastathis's well-known interest in literature goes back to 1960s when he took part in the so-called *New Greek Cinema* movement (*NGC*).³ *NGC* directors' self-conscious need to make a rupture with the long-prevailing genres and styles in Greek cinema made them form a new aesthetic paradigm with a clear educational aim (Soldatos 2002, Kechagias et al.).⁴ Their lack of public support, the monopoly of low-art films and the sociopolitical instability in Greece were among the reasons they returned to the past. They adopted a hellenocentric approach to the past, depicted in their subject matter and cinematography, in order to find the 'real', the 'authentic' and the 'everlasting'. Paradoxically enough, they were not completely cut off from Europe since they had acquired European filmic education, aiming at making films which would go beyond the borders of Greece. Indeed the so much needed nationally distinct cinema from inward-looking film-makers did not rely on distinctions such as local/foreign or Greek/ Western-European, a fact that explains to a large extent the affiliations of this movement with belated modernism in Greek literature.

After a closer look at the interviews Papastathis gave after the release of *The Only Journey of his Life* the reader would observe that, apart from details about the production, the director often referred to his status as an auteur. Even if contemporary viewers had not heard of him before they would then learn that with *NGC*, history, literature and Greek

² An illustrative example of this might be Peter Bien's contribution to the special issue of *JMGS* on Greek cinema. His account on the two film adaptations of Kazantzakis's novels does not comply with the call of the editor of the volume for papers which could 'serve as a springboard from future debates and [...] stimulate further research on Greek film in the English language in the next century'. Constantinidis 2000: 1.

³ Papastathis worked as assistant director in 1968-1971 and contributed to the publication of the journal *Σύγχρονος Κινηματογράφος* [*Contemporary Cinema*, 1969].

⁴ In those years, cinema equalled the highly mainstream movies of comedies, populist melodramas, musicals, war and mountain films. See Mitropoulou 1980: 274, Constantinidis 2000: 7, Soldatos 2002:13.

everyday life was rediscovered by directors to become a matter of self-knowledge and moral order.

[Η γενιά του Νέου Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου] [...] έκανε τη στροφή στην ιστορία, στην λογοτεχνία, στην καθημερινή ζωή [...] [Τότε] έγινε στροφή στην ιστορία, που ήταν ένα είδος αυτογνωσίας, με πρωτοστάτη τον Θόδωρο Αγγελόπουλο, τον πιο πλήρη, τον πιο σημαντικό, ως προς τη γραφή, σκηνοθέτη αυτής της γενιάς [...] Ήταν υπόθεση διαφορετικής ηθικής τάξης, όχι υπόθεση επαγγελματισμού (Papastathis in Georgakopoulou 2002- my emphasis).

The above statement was made by Papastathis, who elsewhere explained that he was interested in prose fiction and poetry because they depict ‘Greek life, Greek landscape, language, action, human behaviour’ (Fais 2002: 8).⁵ In his discussion about Greekness, discourses of continuity, patrilineage and ethnic descent came strategically into play. He stated, for instance, that he felt as if he was the ethnic descendant of ‘Papadiamantis, Vizyenos, Cavafy, Seferis and Elytis’ (Georgakopoulou 2002: 68).⁶ On a personal level, he subtly yet indirectly made a connection between Vizyenos who narrated stories of his childhood, with the days of his own (that is, the director’s) adolescence when his first encounter with literature took place.⁷ What is more, it is obvious that he is consciously aware of Vizyenos’s place in Greek literature and the discussions about the author’s work in criticism, a fact that made the interviewer Vena Georgakopoulou ‘feel as if I were a student in a literature class’ (Georgakopoulou 2002: 18).⁸

Papastathis’s strong feeling of living on the fringe of mainstream film industry fuelled a hellenocentric approach or what Katsounaki called ‘hellenocentric, literary passion’ (Katsounaki 2001). His status as a peripheral, intellectual director determined his purpose when adapting *The Only Journey of his Life*. Quoting Panagiotis Moullas’s belief that the story is about a ‘study of death’ (Moullas 1980) Papastathis defined the role of his mission as drugging Vizyenos out of the past and his marginal place where his contemporaries had placed him (Georgakopoulou 2002: 20). According to his own words, his inspired duty towards the author and his work was to make a comment on writing itself. Nearly ten years before the shooting of this film took place, he defined the role of the adaptor. He stated that

Θα υποβαθμίζαμε τραγικά τη λογοτεχνία αν πιστεύαμε ότι το μόνο που μπορεί να μας δώσει είναι κάποια τρανταχτά θέματα για κινηματογραφική εκμετάλλευση ή σηριαλοποίηση. Αλλού βρίσκεται η ουσία: πίσω από τη δράση, στην ίδια τη γραφή (Papastathis 1990: 523).

⁵ ‘Η ελληνική ζωή, το ελληνικό τοπίο, ο λόγος, η δράση, οι ανθρώπινες συμπεριφορές πάλλονται από τις πνευματικές επενδύσεις της ποίησης και της πεζογραφίας’, in Fais ‘Den mporeis na xefugeis apo te zow kanontas kenematographo’ *Vivliotheke* 28/06/2002. Papastathis’s involvement with Greekness can be also manifested, apart from his three full-length films to his recently published short stories *He Nuchterida Petaxe* and *He Heseche kai Alla Diigemata*.

⁶ ‘Νοιώθαμε παιδιά του Παπαδιαμάντη, του Βιζυηνού, του Καβάφη, του Σεφέρη, του Ελύτη’, *ibid.* 48.

⁷ Papastathis goes back in his childhood in Mytelene when ‘Εργαζόμουν σε ένα σφαιριστήριο τις ώρες που δεν είχα σχολείο, μοίραζα μάρκες και έφτιαχνα καφέδες. Σύχναζαν εκεί λογοτέχνες, μορφωμένοι άνθρωποι, οι οποίοι με μύησαν στη λογοτεχνία’. See Papastathis in *Eikones*.

⁸ See also Georgakopoulou’s article in *Eleftherotypia* e online 13 May 2000.

In other words, Papastathis was interested neither in adapting a literary text freely, just because he has an affinity with it, nor in creating a secondary film based on the literary text using cinematic tools (Zannas 1990: 199). Papastathis wanted to go beyond this dilemma. His aim, he says, is not the 'literary work' but the text in its textuality (cf. Barthes From Work to Text). He decided to turn the book to cinematic image aiming at the revival of the story as well as of the book and of its *graphie*.

Let us now turn to the film and see how all the above come into play. Had it not been for the addition of a frame-narrative, the film would have been a rather dull adaptation. Not only did Papastathis retain the main story of little Giorgis, his experience as an apprentice tailor and his trip back to his hometown to see his grandfather before he dies, but he deployed the same narrative tools as the author while fitting them to the demands of the cinematic medium. When casting the parts, the director gave the role of both grandfather and Vizyenos to the same actor (Helias Logothetis) and the role of the little kid to a girl (Frangiski Moustaki) indicating the shift of identities and (in the latter case, cross-dressing) experiences between grandfather and kid. In so doing, he seems to have taken on board to some extent Michalis Chrysanthopoulos's critique that

by identifying the 'I' of the discourse with the 'I' of the character or the narration Greek criticism has not only projected a certain image of the author, but also excluded the possibility of the author's being inscribed not in the narration but in the other characters (Chrysanthopoulos in Beaton 1985:12).

Editing literally follows the rhythm of the book, while the imposing photography blends tale and fantasy with narration, pictorialism with folklore. Let us see now how and why Papastathis, contrary to his statements, is faithful, apart from the adapted story as briefly discussed above, to the myths surrounding the name and place of Vizyenos in Greek letters.

Where Papastathis might have had the chance to escape fidelity was exactly in the first level narrative of the film. The adapted short story functions as a second level narrative in the film for in the opening scenes we see Vizyenos's last moments before his admittance to Dromokaition mental clinic. Notwithstanding the scenes about his passion for the adolescent Bettina and his consignment to the asylum the film is certainly not about the human side of the writer. If the opposite is the case it is due to the following images of the author recollecting or reading his short story from the journal *Estia* in the premises of the clinic. I argue that the moment Papastathis places Vizyenos in the asylum the director's playful reconstruction of the figure of the author begins.

Dromokaition is a place which exists and does not exist, almost a non-topos, where the writer becomes figure living on the fringe of society. After some initial scenes where Vizyenos wanders around aimlessly among other psychopaths in corridors, bearing a cap which differentiates him from the others, in the rest of the film he is still, sitting in isolation from the rest. As far as cinematography is concerned, the asylum becomes almost an ideal – idealised even- space: mise-en-scene implies that everything is clean-cut or politically correct, and the light of the sun beaming inside the author's room creates such a dramatic tension that the viewers cannot do but identify themselves with the author. In terms of its emotional impact the film is successful with no doubt.

Only with his death can the author leave his confined, peripheral space. But even then he is still alive. When in the last scene the author has just died, his life, Papastathis seems to imply, would have been lost forever had it not been for 'his books [...] his manuscripts' which a nurse places with care in a suitcase. This suitcase, essential in the film as several close-ups indicate, stands as a metaphor for literature. The author, through his work, will be

literally handed in, circulated by the new generations. Only through his written work can the author leave his confinement and make the main ‘journey’ of his life.

Papastathis was not interested in making any reassumption about or interpretation of the novel per se but, contrary to his own words about his focus on the writing, he focused on the author. He did not engage himself with the human aspect of the writer but rather with the idealised image of him by using any means the camera could offer. On a deeper level, he commented on the power of cinema per se to construct identities.

By narrating both the short story and the myths circulating by Vizyenos’s life the camera renders the film not so much an adaptation of a literary text but rather a comment on the power of the act of cinematic narration in constructing identities.

With *The Only Journey of his Life* Papastathis talked about Vizyenos not from a peripheral position. The adaptation was financed by Greek, Turkish and European production companies and was highly celebrated in the prestigious 42nd Thessaloniki Film Festival, where it won eight awards, among which Grand Prix for Best Feature Film, Best Cinematography and Best Film/ Dwards Audience Award.⁹ The subject-matter of the film and its production privileged the film over other, more daring and distinctive, films which took part in the Festival, namely *Dekapentavgoustos* and *Pes sten Morphini pos Akoma tin Psachno*. Except for national, the film got international acclaim in festivals throughout the world.¹⁰

How was the film received by critics? Maria Katsounaki traced the ‘Greek soul, honesty, original passion’ in the film (Katsounaki 2001), which later Vena Georgakopoulou praised as being ‘not only very good [...] [but also] intellectual’ (Georgakopoulou 2001). Stratos Kersanidis mentioned the ‘moral justification of New Greek Cinema’ (Kersanidis 2005) and Mare Theodosopoulou went as far as to claim that ‘it has already become a myth’ (Theodosopoulou 2003).¹¹ In other words, it was believed to have raised the spectrum of ‘quality’ cinema. Interestingly, the same view about inspiration and fidelity in the film have the speakers in the conference on Papastathis work in 2001.¹² Although it was not the most successful movie in 2001, it stands high in the ranks of popular films in 2001. If in Thessaloniki Film Festival the film attracted the attention of the critics, Greek audience went for comedies, namely *To Kláma Bγήκε από τον Παράδεισο* [*To Klama Vgike apo ton Paradeiso*], *Στάκαμαν* [*Stakaman*] and *Ο Καλύτερός μου Φίλος* [*Ο Καλύτερός μου Φίλος*], or even the avant-garde film adaptation *Πες στην Μορφίνη πως Ακόμα την Ψάχνω* [*Pes sten Morphini pos Akoma ten Psachno*], which was provokingly neglected in the festival (Rouvas 2002). Moreover, critics placed the movie in the genre of period piece (ταινία εποχής) or historical (ιστορική) (Rouvas 2002: 532) and thus indicated that the story of and about Vizyenos bears the burden of history and memory.

It is obvious, as I have tried to show, that Papastathis, just like the grandfather in the original short story, tried to piece together different fragments surrounding Vizyenos and

⁹ The rest awards were Best Cinematography, Best Set Design, Best Music, Best Sound, Best Make-Up and Best Costume Designer.

¹⁰ It was screened in the 26th Contemporary World Cinema (Toronto, 2001), *Sofia?* International Film Festival 2002 (Best Cinematography), in Medfilm Rome Film Festival (2003, Best Film) and in the international film festivals in Hong Kong, D’Amour Mons (Belgium), Chicago, Istanbul, Cleveland, Singapore. See Rouvas 2002: 532-533. It was submitted for the 78th Academy Awards in the category Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film.

¹¹ ‘Ελληνική ψυχή, εντιμότητα, γνήσιο πάθος’, ‘Η ηθική δικαίωση του Νέου Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου’. ‘Η ελληνική παρουσία στο 42ο Φεστιβάλ Θεσσαλονίκης δεν είναι απλώς πολύ καλή. Ήταν και υψηλής πνευματικότητας’, [ο κινηματογραφικός Βιζυηνός του Λ. Παπαστάθη] έγινε ήδη μύθος’.

¹² As later published in Tomai- Konstantopoulou (2001).

various readings of Vizyenos's short story. It is interesting that, in order to direct this adaptation, Papastathis was supported by state-fund industry as well as well-structured politics to promote abroad this film, and, through it, local cinema production and the image of Greece. In my view, it was exactly Vizyenos's life that made Papastathis suture together different fragments about Vizyenos and his work into a larger narration in Greekness and Greek cinematography in 21st century.

With Michel Fais and his book *Greek Insomnia*, the mythical embroidery is being unsewed as a proof that Vizyenos's myth does not remain fixed, yet still retains its status.

Michel Fais's *Greek Insomnia*: From Sewing (ραφή) to Writing (συγγραφή)

The next case study I am going to turn to is *Greek Insomnia* [*Ελληνική Αϋπνία*] where Michel Fais, departing from an approach which idealises and marks Vizyenos out of his contemporaries, is interested as much in his own autobiography as in a biography of Vizyenos. Fragments of glossaries, archive material from Dromokaition Clinic and letters written by the author and addressed to Vizyenos, blend together in a single whole. The presence of Vizyenos can be traced in the glossaries with words of his works as well as in quotations from his works in the letters. Moreover, original archive material from Dromokaition clinic describing diseases and therapies testifies to crude realism, while letters represent Fais's main contribution in the fictitious aspect of the book. However, Vizyenos is omnipresent in the whole book since his life and his work, together with interpretations of it by critics of his time all emerge from the hybridic writing.

Vizyenos is omnipresent, but always absent, I would add. Fais follows postmodern literary trends, especially in their awareness of the function of the form in constructing meaning. In their work, postmodernists offer multiple alternatives which invite the reader to take an active part not in the construction of reality, but in the construction of his or her own version of it (Tziouvas 1987). *Greek Insomnia*, in the form of a postmodern hybrid, dismantles Vizyenos's life which has been for so long contaminated with myths and inconsistent assumptions made by his critics affecting the reading public. For Fais, his aim is

να ακρωτηριάζω ή να ράβω στοιχεία που έχω λαθρακούσει, που έχω δει με κλειστά μάτια, που μου ψυθιρίζουν οι αράδες που δεν αξιώθηκα να σύρω (Fais 2003: 106).

Fais's technique is sewing different patches so that the outcome is a patchwork, or, using a word of Vizyenos, a *ψηφωτό* (quoted in Fais 2004: 178). In so doing the writer takes the figure of Vizyenos out of its mythological mist while challenging on the same time a single biography. There is *a* biography out of many others and every reader is invited to make up his or her own version, according to his or her own will. With *Greek Insomnia*, what remains in the end is a figure of Vizyenos deconstructed, dismantled, dissected, purified from long prevailing discourses, broken into tiny parts, only to be rearranged in different pieces, quotations and assumptions. Vassilis Lambropoulos would certainly add that with Vizyenos

neither the sources nor their contemporary amalgamation seem to belong to or form an organized whole, a linear narrative, or an organic tradition.[...] [O]riginals lose their quality of origin and become nomadic: they circulate but cannot function as a *topos*, a commonplace, a shared site of ancestry, feeling and reference (Lambropoulos 2002: 192).

What Fais and Vizyenos have in common is their marginality, expressed in geographical terms. Fais considers himself as ‘ένας μονήρης Βαλκάνιος - δηλαδή μεταβυζαντινός- χαμένος σε κεντροευρωπαϊκές βιβλιοθήκες’ (58). Born in Thrace from a Christian mother and a Jewish father, Fais lived in Komotini most of his time, in the in-between of two religions and two places. At face value, *Greek Insomnia* is about the biography of Vizyenos. On a closer look, however, it is an autobiography of the writer through his symbiotic relation with another writer, as visualised in the front cover of the book. It is not coincidental that in his previous book *Honey and the Cinders of God* [*Το Μέλι και η Στάχτη του Θεού*] (2002) Fais constructed the life of recluse Jewish painter Julio Kaimi, born in Corfu, again in the form of pastiche. As he argues, by writing

[...] προσπαθώ να δώσω απάντηση στο που βρίσκομαι [...] Φωτίζω αυτό που με ενδιαφέρει μέσω της βιογραφίας του άλλου. Θέτεις, με άλλα λόγια, έναν καθρέφτη και βλέπεις το πρόσωπό σου μέσω του άλλου (Fais in Pimblis 2005).

Vizyenos, for Fais, is minor because he writes ‘λοξά μυθιστορήματα μιας εκπατρισμένης γραφής μέσα στον ίδιο της τον τόπο, μέσα στην ίδια της τη γλώσσα’ (174), talking from a minoritarian viewpoint and departing from both the Orthodoxy of Papadiamandis and the Europeanism of Roidis.¹³ From the instability of Vizyenos’s life Fais deals with the instability of his critics vis-à-vis his place in the Greek literary canon throughout the years. Vizyenos is a case in point as critics, or *μυιοχάφτηδες* (52),

προσπαθούν να σας κόψουν και να σας ράψουν στο όνομα κάποιου εθνικού στόχου. Εξ ου και στα χρόνια σας η λαογραφία και η ηθογραφία (σαν να λέμε σήμερα η μετανεωτερικότητα) γεννοβολούσαν σαν κουνέλες Δροσίνηδες και Κονδυλάκηδες. Εσείς όμως, ένα προσφυγάκι της λευκής σελίδας, τη μόνη λαογραφία και τη μόνη ηθογραφία που επιθυμούσατε να εκφράσετε ήταν τα ταραγμένα ενύπνια της παιδικής σας ηλικίας- τους λαμπαδιασμένους μάρτυρες της αδάμαστης αϋπνίας σας.

Following Fais’s line of thought, literature, critique, Greek identity and national narrative are all fluid and complex constructed by a sewing practice. The book went out of print within two months after its first publication and has been reprinted three more times since. As for the critics who commented on *Greek Insomnia* they praised it because, among other things, it deals with a ‘Greek’ and national subject¹⁴ and has a ‘political meaning’.¹⁵ *Greek Insomnia* seems to be part of Fais’s general project on Vizyenos since he has published other works on him, included Vizyenos’s grave photograph in a photo-album,

¹³ See ‘*Η παραφροσύνη σας είναι η απάντησή σας αφενός στην πίστη του Παπαδιαμάντη και αφετέρου στην ειρωνεία του Ροΐδη. Το νόσημα του μυελού είναι η πρώτη παράκαμψη που επιχειρείτε τόσο σε σχέση με την κάτωθεν ορθοδοξία, όσο και με τον άνωθεν εξευρωπαϊσμό που διαμελίζουν τον τόπο. Η γενική παράλυσις των φρενών μετά κινητικής αταξίας είναι το ισχυρότερο επιχείρημα μιας μειονοτικής λογοτεχνίας που φιλοδοξεί να παραμείνει μειονοτική*’ (60- italics in the original).

¹⁴ ‘*Το θέμα είναι εξόχως ελληνικό, δηλαδή πανανθρώπινο*’, in Exarchoroulou 2004.

¹⁵ ‘*Το να διαλέγεις ως πρότυπο τον Βιζυηνό και όχι τον Παπαδιαμάντη ούτε τον Ροΐδη, έχει μια σημασία πολιτική που σπάνια την διδασκόμαστα στο σχολείο*’, in Chartoulari 2004.

exhibited a painting at an exhibition of works about Vizyenos and edited a book with short stories written by authors inspired by Vizyenos.¹⁶

Roula Pateraki's Dramatic Theatre Reading Fais's Greek Insomnia: The Performance of Nudity

When Roula Pateraki decided to adapt *Greek Insomnia* on stage in winter 2006-7, she kept some of the 'marginal' aspects that Vizyenos, in Fais's view, had. The dramatization of the book in theatre, under the same title, was staged between December, 18 2006 and January 20 2007 in Embros Theatre, an old printing-house turned into a theatre, in Psyrri district in Athens. The performance was the outcome of Pateraki's collaboration with Fais, something which is clearly mentioned in the programme and visualised on the front cover of programme notes., where, apart from the title ('*Michel Fais's Hellenike Aupnia*') it is Vizyenos's grave photograph as supposedly taken by Fais.¹⁷ It should also be added that this was not the first time that Fais's novels were adapted on stage.¹⁸

There were three actors on stage on the same time, each of whom stood in a different place and represented a different narrative voice of the novel. The voice of the author-meticulous researcher was performed by Tassia Sofianidou who was behind a bench, reading the archive material from Dromokaition while smoking, video recording and listening to music. On the other side of the stage, there was Aglaia Pappa who was reading letters addressed to Vizyenos. The two actresses occasionally removed the two portraits of Roidis and Papadiamandis hanging against the walls indicating the presence of other authors on stage. If the two actresses, who performed the two aspects of Fais were in a delirium of creativity, reading and throwing away pieces of paper, Vizyenos (Konstantinos Avarikiotis) was in a delirium. The actor was clearly set apart from the rest due to his place in the centre of the stage. Moreover, his performance was the most unconventional of all the three. The audience could follow his life from the early days, when his coquettish figure with a fancy costume, top hat and cane stood for his financial support by his sponsors, up to his latest days in the asylum. What followed a zeimbekiko song danced magnificently by Avarikiotis¹⁹ was the most powerful moment that would not shock the audience if the performance was not about Vizyenos. Avarikiotis took off his clothes and started masturbating on scene. Pateraki, with this realistic physical enactment, saw Vizyenos in all his lurid truth in Dromokaition hospital.

¹⁶ Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός. *Βιβλιογραφική Πρόταση*. Athens: EKEBI (1996), *Υστερο Βλέμμα*, Athens: Patakis (1996), Art Exhibition *Georgios M. Vizyenos* in Choros Technes 24 in 2006, *Hotel- Ένοικοι της Γραφής. Με τον Γ. Μ. Βιζυηνό, Αλλά και Χωρίς Αυτόν*. Athens: Patakis 2006, respectively.

¹⁷ The programme includes photographs of Dromokaitio asylum taken by Fais.

¹⁸ *Αυτοβιογραφία Ενός Βιβλίου*, directed by Thodoris Gones, was staged in Komotini and Patras in 2005 only for two performances respectively; *Τα Αντρόγωνα*, adaptation of part of *Aegyptius Monachus*, directed by Pandelis Choursoglou, in Metaxourgeio Theatre in Greece only for a limited number of performances; *Η Πόλη στα Γόνατα*, directed by Thodoros Anastasopoulos in 20-30 May 2006, in Amore-Exostes Theatre in Athens. It has to be underlined that all these plays were staged only for a couple of days. In cinema, he has written the script for *Delivery* (2004), directed by Nikos Panagiotopoulos, based on Fais's *Η Πόλη στα Γόνατα* [*The City on its Knees*, 2002], the book-album from Fais's photographic exhibition. By the time these lines are written, he is co-writing the script for Theo Angelopoulos's next film.

¹⁹ Nikos Xydakis's music of *Greek Insomnia* included original music from Thrace, music composed by Sopin, Strauss and Beethoven, rembetika and Theodorakis's music. See the programme of the performance.

Pateraki remained as close to the original novel, but she shifted her attention from the autobiography of Fais to the biography of Vizyenos. She wanted to present him in a realistic way, having fully grasped the author's forces that propelled him to a top place in Greek literature. In an interview she characteristically stated that

Εμείς οι Έλληνες είμαστε πάντα λίγο κομπλεξικοί, λέμε συνέχεια “α, δεν έχουμε μεγάλους συγγραφείς, δεν έχουμε έναν Μπαλζάκ, έναν Τζόις, έναν Προυστ”, αλλά εγώ δεν ξέρω αν οι ξένοι έχουν έναν Ροΐδη, έναν Παπαδιαμάντη, έναν Βιζυηνό. [...] τέτοιες δουλειές στην Ελλάδα [...] έχουν σχέση με την ελληνικότητά μας και με την εθνική μας κουλτούρα. Οι θεατές θα αναγνωρίσουν κάτι από την “πατρίδα των γραμμάτων” και την “πατρίδα της γλώσσας” τους, που είναι πολύ σημαντική (Pateraki in Birbili 2006).

Pateraki is interested in adaptations because they involve the transformation of the written, enclosed yet theatrical text to its realisation in the form of a performance (Pateraki in Birbili 2006 and in the programme of the performance). In the case of *Greek Insomnia*, by staging a performance instead of a conventional play, the director retained the original language of the book and its intense and monotonous feeling, as caused by the palimpsestuous form to the book (Pateraki in Birbili 2006 and Cleftoyianni 2006). Notwithstanding her purpose not to treat Vizyenos as a myth she still held the view that it was Vizyenos and the language which he used, linked to Greekness and Greek national culture, that made her adapt *Greek Insomnia*. This time, with her project about Vizyenos, she managed to attain financial support by the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation. The programme, which included reviews about Fais's *Greek Insomnia* and advertisements of Fais's novels and Papakostas's publication of Vizyenos's letters, was printed with the assistance of Patakis, the publishing-house which put out *Greek Insomnia*.

Concluding Remarks

So why did a contemporary film director, author and stage director adapt Vizyenos then? It seems that the distanced relation between Vizyenos and his adaptators allowed them to draw upon different prevailing myths surrounding him. Their touchstone was Vizyenos's peripheral place in 19th-century Greece. Papastathis worked from the centre and transformed Vizyenos into a hero who has stood in history and still holds a special place in Greek Letters. If the film consolidated the mythical image of Vizyenos, Fais's *Greek Insomnia* was less about the generally circulated myth of Vizyenos and more about the function and role of minor literatures in modern world. Last, by directing Fais's book, Pateraki used nudity to present Vizyenos in an unconventional way. The adaptations of and about Vizyenos discussed go beyond binary oppositions such as centre/periphery, national/international, rupture/continuity and biography/ autobiography.

In my paper I did not seek to provide a full-fledged analysis of the formation of the figure of Vizyenos in the latest years in Greece. In that case, I should have equally referred to adaptations for Greek television²⁰ as well as Demos Avdeliodis's famous performances with Anna Kokkinou in *Morphes apo to Ergo tou Vizyenu* (2000) and Lydia Koniordou in *To Monon tes Zoes tou Taxidion* (2007). Although I did not seek to provide an exhaustive

²⁰ In the first one, directed by Vaggelis Serdaris, Giorgos Kimoulis plays the role of Vizyenos (ERT) while in the second one, entitled *Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός* and directed by Christophoros Christophes, Andonis Theodorakopoulos plays the role of the writer (ERT).

analysis of how Vizyenos has been adapted, it did intend to show some of the connotations and discourses involved when adapting literary texts for the big screen or for stage. In addition, it was an attempt to show how the relationship between literary texts and adaptations is complex, intricate and interwoven in institutional discourses and practices. There is no doubt that this is not a simple task. In reality, it is controversial especially when power and influence have been accrued to the writer of the original text. Adaptations either accept the fixed views concerning the writers and recognize a coherent and stable order or shake off their authority of the writers and their texts questioning the national rhetoric about them. In my mind, adaptations are cultural narratives. Investigating the dynamics inscribed in these texts is as much daring as it is fascinating.

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